

GIVING IN TO GOSSIP:
AN ANALYSIS OF AMERICAN NEWS WEB SITES DURING THE FIRST DECADE
OF THE 21st CENTURY
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Abstract

The central contention of this thesis is that an increase in *image*-focused or *pseudo-event*-focused hyperlinked-headlines is occurring on online news sites. This central contention contains at least three implications. First, holding that the newspaper is the epitome of traditional journalism, a crisis in the news industry is underway. The crisis began as a result of newspapers' financial challenges posed by electronic media, but the growth of online news sites has accelerated and worsened conditions. Second, as a result of this dire financial situation, news outlets, collectively, are shifting focus from traditional journalism's concept of *news* to a 1830s-era Penny Press sensationalism style, marked by human-interest pieces, entertainment fluff and celebrity gossip. Third, news is shifting away from the ironic reporting method and theory of *detached observer* to a more personally connected style of narrative storytelling, which, together with the aforementioned implications, signifies a cyclical cycle and consequential return to the colonial roots of the American press and its definition of *news*.

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Chapter I:

The Evolving Crisis in the American News System

So far we have no adequate general history of what Americans have thought of as “news,” nor on the general history of communications of image making, although we do have valuable scholarly works on a few traditionally classifiable items like newspapers and magazines (Boorstin, 1961, p. 266).

Americans rely on news organizations to provide timely, fair and accurate updates about the world around them. Recent research (The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2008) shows the Internet’s growing stake of the news consumer audience, yet before the Internet existed news only through what we now call *traditional media outlets*. Among those outlets are newspapers, magazines, radio newscasts, and nightly television newscasts. Even within these news outlets sits a noticeable evolution of news dissemination. Electronic mass media, including television and radio, were preceded by the printing press. Since the colonial days of printer-run presses disseminating months-delayed information from England, people across this land have looked to newsmen as the guardians of public discourse and accessible knowledge. Newspapers have been a vehicle of information, what we now call news, in America since the 18th century (Weisberger, 1961, p. 3). To best understand the evolution of news, one must trace its evolution through mass media to the origins of the newspaper.

Due to technological evolution and an increased focus on business measures (Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009), the American news dissemination system is in peril. A suspected shift in user-*driven* content is causing

Internet news sites to focus on the most popular, not the most important. In this chapter, a brief overview of the development of news in the United States is provided. The overview provides a convenient way of highlighting the technological changes that have affected news, but it also provides a vehicle for noting transformations in the nature of news itself. Following this historical summary, the unique functions of newspapers as news outlets during the Internet age are isolated and described, a functional analysis emphasizing some the tensions between newspaper and Internet conceptions of news. The last part of the chapter focuses on the emergence of the image and pseudo-events as factors affecting the meaning of *news*, as well as some of the transformations in the nature of *news* that have occurred during this period. These lines of argument provide a foundation for explicitly identifying the major thesis developed in this analysis. The conclusion of this chapter provides an overview of the objectives of each of the remaining chapters in this study.

Technological Evolution and the News

The dominance of broadcast journalism is not intentionally disregarded in this research, yet in evaluating the history of the concept of news it is most logical to examine the newspaper as an institution. In regard to the written word, newspapers and magazines are the predecessors of online news Web sites. Furthermore, newspapers predate magazines by a number of decades. Thus, in the next several sections of this chapter, the concept of *news* is traced as it has evolved over time, with special attention given to its role in the modern American newspaper. Within this process, a specific transformation in the meaning of *news* itself is noted. As a concept *news* has functioned as a dynamic term, a term that reflects the changing notions of “what is” and “what should be known” in the

United States. While the historical evolution of news dissemination is important, this thesis ultimately tracks the transformation of the nature of news itself.

Thus, in the next several sections of this chapter, the concept of *news* is traced as it has evolved over time, with special attention given to its role in the modern American newspaper, but this historical treatment is also designed to highlight specific transformations in the meaning of *news* itself. As a concept *news* has functioned as a dynamic term, a term that reflects the changing notions of “what is” and “what should be known” in the United States. Hence, while the historical development of news its various forms is instructive, the ways in which the nature of news itself has changed is equally important here, for this thesis ultimately traces a major transformation in the nature of news itself.

Newspapers as Colonial Newsletters

Benjamin Harris' *Publick Occurrences Both Forreign and Domestick* was introduced to Boston residents on September 25, 1690. Within the document were notes of an epidemic, a suicide, two fires, the mutilation of two Indians by an English captain in the course of battle with the French in Canada, and the prospects of King William against the Irish rebels. “There is no record of any Bostonian complaint that such a chronicle of smallpox, self-destruction, torture and bloodshed was too sensational, or too trivial, for the reading public (Weisberger, 1961, p. 1).” Harris would only print that one edition, as the governor of Massachusetts and his council would end the venture, citing printed “reflections of a very high nature” with no official license. Weisberger comments, “They suppressed the venture, and journalism in the English colonies had to await the test of the market place for another fourteen years.”

Therefore, the newspaper came to the colonies only in the 18th century (Weisberger, 1961, p. 3). It would be April 1704 before another journalistic entrepreneur would attempt to penetrate the Boston market place. That publication would become now as the *Boston News-Letter*. The *News-Letter*, a new world model of the 1665-established *London Gazette*, was first inked by Boston postmaster John Campbell using only Campbell's pen. The royal government had laid the foundations for an inter-colonial postal system in the 17th century (Weisberger, 1961, p. 4). Campbell, a book seller at the time, "knew its purpose was to speed the interchange of commercial and legal tidings among the settlements." His handwritten newsletters were sent to select individuals with digests of information obtained from letters, documents, orders and pamphlets and occasional English gazettes which he read. Given Harris and Campbell's efforts, they are the parents of the journalism known in the United States today. Weisberger (1961, p. 3) has summarized their collective effect on the evolution of the American press:

Speaking in the very broadest of terms, it might be said that Benjamin Harris founded one prototype of the American newspaper – racy, aggressive, and independent. Campbell gave birth to another – solid, careful, and slightly bent under a sense of official responsibility. The conflicts and compromises between these two styles in journalism fill a good portion of the annals of the press in the United States.

When distribution demand grew too large to handle, Campbell turned to printer Bartholomew Green to print the *News-Letter* for him. This brought the newspaper into the existence of a public service (Weisberger, 1961, pp. 4-5). There were only about 50

presses in all the colonies in 1775, and nearly all were on the seaboard. Boorstin (1965, p. 124) writes, “By 1783, not one important inland town lacked its own press. Like the musket, the newspaper became a weapon and a tool, to conquer the forest and to build new communities.” Weisberger (1961) notes that these journals became an example not only of the growing free press in the New World, but also brilliant examples of easier social interchange, widened interests, ripened commerce and, ultimately, urbanism in the colonies. The presses were not only covering examples of success and development, they exemplified it. “Already the newspaper was both actor and narrator in the drama of history, playing a sometimes confusing double role (Weisberger, 1961, p. 4).” This double role signifies the first paradox for journalists who in modern times claim the title of *detached observer*. How does one report on an occurrence without changing it? This is one of the first *news* transformations explored in this and subsequent chapters.

The *detached observer* is, at best, a trend of journalistic reporting. As the journalists lived, worked and contributed to their community in colonial times, the contradiction lay within the concept of a *detached participant*, which the journalists were attempting to be, not in fact a true *observer* as the phrase would hope to indicate. Little has changed since the colonial days in this respect: Journalists still live and participate in the same communities they report in. The crux of the *detached observer* argument lay within a journalist’s continued quest for *objectivity*. News is considered wholesome only if it is accurate and fair. The two values are interwoven: An effort to escape fairness results in a loss of accuracy, and a distortion or misrepresentation of the facts is inherently unfair to one side in a conflict-focused story. These values are summarized by *objectivity*, or the unfiltered, neutral view of a situation or happening. The transformation

involving *detached observant* reporting is not so much about the transformation *to* objectivity, but more so the push away from it in this new century. This shift is most evident as a result of competition and growth in the mass media market through a growing newspaper market in the 19th century and the rise of radio and television in the 20th century. As the *detached observer* model of reporting grows, the continued development of the *news* concept evolves, too.

Newspapers as News in the 19th and 20th Centuries

Newspapers were largely used as tool of persuasion by political parties until the early 19th century (Chesebro & Holmes, 2010). Around the 1830s newspapers began shifting from a focus on politically aligned small subscriber bases to a business model that transformed newspapers into a mass medium by 1970. Clearly it was not an overnight transition, and within that time not only did the business model of the newspaper evolve, so too did the very concept of *news*.

As technologies evolved, so too have communication methods, and thus dissemination processes. As recently as 20 years ago, the concept of a mass realm of on-demand *news* seemed impossible, or at best limited to cable channels with linear story organization or hours-old newsprint. Even if one selected to watch the channel or read the paper, one only had a finite selection of content to select from. A consumer was either limited by broadcast's time constraints and lack of background. And what the broadcast journalist could update, a print journalist could not. The print product had and continues to lack the ability to "refresh," as some Internet users would say today. The Internet, and perhaps more importantly the widespread broadband access to it, has facilitated a new era of news consumption, and consequently a more finicky news consumer. Newspapers,

individually and as an institution, have suffered the most. “Since World War II, the decline in newspaper circulation, readership, advertising income and credibility has continued” (Chesebro & Holmes, 2010). More recently, the Pew Center for the People and the Press (2006a) said 40% of people got the news with some regularity from newspapers in 2006, down from 58% in 1993. A second Pew report (2006b), reported only 34% of Americans were reading newspapers daily. A more recent Pew study (2009) found only 27% of Generation Y, people born in 1977 or later, read a newspaper the previous day. These statistics are indicative of another notable shift in the nature of *news*. News outlets are no longer focused solely on disseminating fact, rather the focus lay on attracting an audience to consume those facts. While newspapers and traditional media remain a destination for news consumers, it is clear that older generations are the leading demographic in their use. As younger generations take the place of the older generations, news outlets must shift focus and tactics to gain and hold an audience through whatever medium is most popular. The 2008 presidential election became an example of outlets exhibiting such tactical behavior.

Newspapers as News Outlets in an Internet Age

Understandably, an identifiable shift of news consumption from traditional media to new media has occurred. The campaign season leading into the 2008 Presidential Election brought greater focus to this transition to online news consumption. During the election, the Internet emerged as the leading source for campaign developments (The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2008). The growth is evident when comparing traffic to previous elections. Stelter (2009, p. BU1) states: “Traffic grew gradually for CNN.com. On Election Day in 2000, CNN.com recorded 100 million page

views, a monumental number at the time. On the same day last year [Election Day 2008], the site had 282 million page views, also setting a record.”

Pew Research Center for the People & the Press (2008, p. 1) showed the Internet surpassing newspapers as a leading source for national and international news among Americans:

Currently, 40% say they get most of their news about national and international issues from the internet, up from just 24% in September 2007. For the first time in a Pew survey, more people say they rely mostly on the internet for news than cite newspapers (35%). Television continues to be cited most frequently as a main source for national and international news, at 70%.

Tensions between Television and Internet News

The rivalry between television and Internet news consumption intensifies when examining youth habits. The same Pew study said nearly six-in-ten Americans under the age of 30 consume most of their news online. An equal number of respondents, 59%, said the same for television, down from 68% in September 2007.

Prominent newspapers, despite struggling to keep print editions relevant in media-saturated environment as their small cousins see buyer-less auctions and millions in cost-cutting efforts, are gaining ground online. “The number of total visits to the top 10 newspaper sites increased 27 percent year-over-year, growing from 199.6 million in December 2007 to 252.7 million in December 2008 (Nielsen, 2008).” In regard to unique visitors, the study showed a “16 percent year-over-year increase in unique visitors to the top 10 newspaper Web sites, growing from 34.6 million unique visitors in December 2007 to 40.1 million in December 2008.”

These changes suggest a shift of attention for news media consumers from traditional media to online media. A recent Pew study (2009) said 14% of Americans said they read a newspaper online yesterday, up from 9% in 2006. This may not include readership via aggregators, such as Yahoo! or Google News. For the same time period, newspaper print edition readership dropped from 38% to 30%. Pew has researched where people got news “yesterday” since the early 1990s. In that time, Pew reports the number of people getting news from television, radio or newspapers - traditional media - has declined. Online readership, as previously stated, has grown in the last two years (The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2009).

And so the paradox becomes explicit; traditional media, particularly newspapers, have defined *news* for the masses since their inception. As the second half of the 20th century ticked forward, radio and television broadcasts redefined *news* again. Strong ratings brought in advertising dollars, but ratings required grasping and maintaining consumers’ attention. Born was the term, “If it bleeds, it leads,” relating to the gory crime stories leading the top of local television newscasts. These stories attract the interest of the reader, more so than an average “good news story.

With the onset of the Internet, *news* has again incurred a change in definition. Traditional media defines news as a narrow set of current events, with foreign events, disasters and accidents receiving the most attention, a 2007 study by the Project for Excellence in Journalism said (Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2007). The same study classifies Internet news sites as having a “widely diverse set of information and amusing events.” Newspapers never competed for ratings, only circulation. Yet Internet sites, even those owned and operated by “traditional media”

companies, compete for Web traffic in order to obtain Web hits and subsequent advertising dollars. This forces news organizations to blur the line between what's important and what's popular. In a time where user-generated gatekeeping and reporting is encouraged by traditional media (CNN's iReport, for instance), online news sites must again alter their definition of what *news* is. Arguably, this is resulting – or has resulted - in a shift from the traditional definition of *news*.

Previous scholars have defined their own justification for what *news* is. Carey (2002, p. 78) argued the modern era of journalism stretches from the 1890s to the 1970s. In a compilation volume regarding journalism in a post-9/11 America, Carey (2002, p. 85) provided background as to how evolving media has helped evolve *news* and the competition involved in being the organization to disseminate it:

Traditional news media, such as newspapers and magazines, redefined themselves as part of the “information industry” in order to find a niche in which they might survive in the new order. As firms grew larger, news in the traditional sense became a smaller and increasingly insignificant part of total corporate enterprise. ... Excess capacity create more intense competition for audiences, particularly as the Internet and World Wide Web absorbed major portions of leisure time from individuals, and newspaper readership and viewing of network news precipitously declined.

While news organizations aim to report objectively, their methods for presenting this reporting is anything but objective. News dissemination is a business, and audience figures - whether in Web traffic, viewership, readership or distribution – are what the money-focused executives are concerned with at the end of the day. Thus the concern in

dwindling audience attention as new media forms, i.e. the Internet, continue to distract and steal audience attention.

The Internet is an ever-written book continuing to grow with living documents every second. So presents the second challenge to news organizations operating on the Internet after getting audience attention: keeping audience attention.

A stagnant Web site provides no new information to return readers, and so news organizations must be active in their publishing cycle. The days of a morning paper and an evening paper are no longer relevant or convenient to consumers' lives. Inconvenient are the waits for a 6 p.m. or 11 p.m. newscast. A BlackBerry conversation en route to an evening appointment trumps the 5:30 p.m. drive-time radio report. News consumption is now the consumer's choice, at the consumer's will. The Web – and the broadband access to its vast collection of knowledge – facilitates this demand for 24/7 news.

This concept, while foreign to some newspaper organizations until now, is both the highlight and downfall for cable news networks, however. The ability to present video and audio from anywhere in the world as it happens is a miraculous feat of technology, but it's also the Achilles heel of broadcast news. Producers must fill the odd days and long hours when no legitimate news is developing. Born was the practice of dramatizing otherwise irrelevant situations. Carey illustrates this practice, and how it soon conquered newspapers, too:

Cable news networks, cursed with small, marginal audiences, were particularly vulnerable to puffing up minor scandals and celebrity outcroppings into major media events. To meet this competition traditional media became awash in the thrilling, marvelous, breathtaking, and trivial. Journalists adopted the language of

nomads, irony, ever more often as they gave in to the cosmopolitan desire to transcend the very society they were describing (Carey, 2002, p. 68).

The tendency to “puff up” seemingly trivial occurrences into large or notable news stories is the groundwork for this research. This concept previously applies to organizations within their home medium of operation. The Internet created a level field for all organizations to publish with no barrier to see CNN content over New York Times content other than four extra keystrokes between CNN.com and NYTimes.com. Will news organizations focus their front page content per the “puffed up” tendency dictated a by 24/7 news cycle? To the author’s knowledge, no previous research has adequately explored this concept.

Image and Psuedo-Events

Research on the effects of *image-based-* or *pseudo-events* on the *news* definition in the 21st century is mostly nonexistent. Volumes on the definition of *image* are not, however. This study uses the conflicting models of image from both Boorstin (1961) and Boulding (Boulding, 1956). With Boorstin and Boulding as guides, this research divides the world of news into *events* and *pseudo-events*. The latter exists as a further interpretation of Carey’s “puffed up” example of *news*. These are image-focused occurrences, such as celebrity breakups, sensationalized stories and human-interest pieces about average people with no ties to important events.

The central contention of this thesis is that an increase in *image-focused* or *pseudo-event-focused* hyperlinked-headlines is occurring on online news sites. This central contention contains at least three implications. First, holding that the newspaper is the epitome of traditional journalism, a crisis in the news industry is underway. The crisis

began as a result of newspapers' financial challenges posed by electronic media, but the growth of online news sites has accelerated and worsened conditions. Second, as a result of this dire financial situation, news outlets, collectively, are shifting focus from traditional journalism's concept of *news* to a 1830s-era Penny Press sensationalism style, marked by human-interest pieces, entertainment fluff and celebrity gossip. Thirdly, news is shifting away from the ironic reporting method and theory of "detached observer" to a more personally connected style of narrative storytelling, which, together with the aforementioned implications, signifies a circle back to the colonial roots of the American press and journalism.

A Summary and Preview of the Balance of this Study

This thesis aims to answer questions as they relate to the crisis in the news industry. Is there a shift in how the concept of *news* is treated across multiple platforms? As a result of an increased use of new media, are newspapers alerting their definition of *news* itself to stay competitive? Furthermore, are new media outlets such as online news sites leading the way in the *news* definition alteration? This research examines the history of image-driven news dissemination, the arguments against it, how it is shaping the face of today's Internet news sites and what, if anything should be done moving forward. Chapter two, the literature review, provides a background on analytical Internet research as it applies to news and Web sites, and the lack of focus given to this particular realm of study. This provides justification for this research. Chapter three discusses the methods used in this research and exemplifies their use in answering the research question posed. It also provides examples and operational definitions for *news* as it relates to this research, specifically in the form of events or pseudo-events. The fourth

chapter presents a comprehensive review of the results of this research, including an analysis of tone and content of NYTimes.com and CNN.com's front page headlines. The final chapter discusses further questions raised by this research analysis, as well as the limitations and factors affecting it.

Chapter II:

Literature Review of Related Topics

While newspapers and magazines have been the focus of research for nearly 100 years, the technology known as the Internet, and the subsequent online news sites on it, are barely 20 years old. Consequently, adequate and in-depth research in the field remains largely unearthed and even unexplored. Only since the start of the 21st century have researchers begun to explore the realm of online news sites, starting with newspaper sites and slowly branching outward. Still, the existence of online news site research is mostly limited to demographic and behavioral understanding of the consumers, whereas this thesis intends to focus on the news judgment of the editors and publishers powering the sites the consumers visit. A minimal amount of online news site content analysis studies exist in a published form. Because of the rapid growth of the Internet, and the growing broadband access to it, a study of online news site front page content is beneficial. Previously presented research in chapter one of this work, and research method and research findings reported in chapters 3 and 4 respectively, suggest the transformation and shift from consumers' reliance on traditional media to a growing acceptance of new media news dissemination, including articles and headlines published on the Internet. With this in mind, this chapter presents a review of previously presented and noted research on newspapers and magazines – otherwise known as print media – using an overview of mass media research (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003) as a guide.

Overall, based upon a review of the available published literature both in academic journals and by online research associations, I hope to suggest in this chapter that there is, indeed, a crisis in the news industry today, that this crisis exists in many

ways predominantly as a financial crisis for traditional print industries, but that a far more profound crisis also exists in the content of what is identified as news, a concept that is argued in this thesis to be transforming from a focus on issues and current events to image analyses and what Boorstin (1961) has identified as pseudo-events. Within this context, this chapter first examines a brief transition in the nature of mass media research, followed by an examination of readership research, circulation research, newspaper management research, findings about typography and makeup, readability, and online news publication findings. At a minimum, this survey suggests that a content analysis of hyperlinks in online news publications has yet to be completed. However, more substantively, transformations in the nature of online news has yet to be identified and documented.

An Overview in the Changing Role of Mass Media Research

Magazines and newspapers were one of the first subjects of mass media research, a focus initially raised by colleges and universities (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003, p. 306). Early print research is said to be largely qualitative, published first in *Journalism Quarterly* in 1928. The volume and its subsequent editions focused on law, history, comparisons to foreign publications and ethical situations. It was not long before quantitative research followed in *Journalism Quarterly*. The first reader interest survey, based on the Midwest town of Madison, Wisconsin, was published in *Quarterly* in June 1930 by Ralph Nafziger. Nafziger's study became the prototype for hundreds of future studies (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003, p. 306).

Print media quantitative research methods continued to spread, and the research gradually grew more empirical. The number of quantitative research articles published in *Journalism Quarterly* grew fivefold in the 15 years from 1941-1956. The growing accessibility to basic data, development of better tools and increasing support for institutional research factored into this trend (Schramm, 1957). The growth of television and radio in the 1950s and 1960s led to an increase in consumer audience competition for newspapers and magazines. This competition spurred the growth of private-sector research from organizations including the Bureau of Advertising of the American Newspaper Publishers Association, its 1970s News Research Center and the Magazine Publishers Association (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003, p. 307).

As electronic media competition grew fierce, circulation and readership began a gradual decline. A news research center was established at Syracuse University as part of the 1976 Newspaper Readership Project, intended to combat the loss of audience. The center collected and analyzed more than 300 private and published studies of newspaper reading habits. As the 6-year long project came to an end, editors collectively accepted research “as a necessary tool of the trade” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003, p. 307). As the 20th century grew to a close, more organizations would form or join forces, including the American Society for Newspaper Editors, the International Newspaper Marketing Association, the American Newspaper Publishers Association and others. Wimmer & Dominick also noted the growth of in-house research departments for newspapers with larger (100,000 or more) circulation numbers. Current research explores nearly every facet of print medium publishing, including advertising, marketing, circulation, readership and news-editorial (content). Yet, online research in these realms seems

mostly limited to a focus on variables out of editorial control (i.e., user demographics) and aesthetic principles over content quality.

Wimmer & Dominick relate print media research techniques to most other forms of research. Research organizations commonly use content analysis, experiments, focus groups and surveys to study newspapers and magazines, specifically for advertiser-supported publications. There are six basic types of print media research: readership, circulation, newspaper management, typography and makeup, readability, and online (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003, p. 308). These methods are discussed in brief below. The first five types collect data that is irrelevant to this thesis. And as discussed, the sixth type, online research, is new and evolving; current research deals largely with understanding and evaluation the online news site as a concept, not as individual content.

Readership Research

While the evaluations of the consumer and his/her consumption preferences were popular just before and just after World War II, these readership studies did not focus on the exact nature of news as readers understood it nor did these research reports note or identify any shift in the nature of news itself. For example, the George Gallup organization pioneered this methodology; largely revolving around a personal interview where respondents identified newspaper articles they had read (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003, p. 308). The 1960s and 1970s brought a greater need for these studies as circulation in metropolitan areas began to decline. Within readership research are five subtypes of studies, including reader profiles, item-selection studies, reader-nonreader studies, uses and gratifications studies and editor-reader comparisons.

Reader profiles gather information on the personal demographics for readers of a particular publication. This information may include political views, salary, age, education level and, depending on the publication, buying history for a particular realm of products or services. Lifestyle segmentation research is similar to reader profiles, but with a strong focus on grouping and labeling collections of individuals with like attitudes or activities.

Item-selection studies allow researchers to understand who reads specific sections or part of a print publication. These studies are commonly measured using aided recall, in which an interviewer with a copy of the publication questions the respondent to see what stories are remembered. A second type of item-selection analysis is a tracking study, where a respondent marks parts of an article with a colored pencil in order to show what was read and in what order.

Reader-nonreader studies aim to understand differences between consumers who regularly read a publication and consumers who do not. Response focuses vary from understanding demographic backgrounds (i.e., less education and lower income readers are less likely to be readers) to motivation factors (i.e., not wanting to read depressing news, too little time, etc ...). These studies often show the divide between younger readers and older readers.

Uses and gratifications studies focus on the motivation to read a print publication and the desired and acquired rewards resulting from reading it. These studies may reveal the number of readers consuming a product because it kills time verses the number of readers consuming because it keeps them up to date.

Editor-reader comparisons are the final type of readership research. Editor-reader studies compare the responses of editors and staff to the audience/consumers. One example includes both sets of respondents listing positive attributes of a high-quality newspaper. A 1989 study showed little congruence between the two groups. Similar studies involving article focus and staffing, enterprise reporting goals also showed a difference in editor-reader opinions.

Circulation Research

There are two forms of circulation research commonly seen, but neither has explored what *news* is or how it might have changed over time. The first form focuses analysis on geographic or demographic data, and in turn a select group of readers. Another trend looks at the climate of a given market, including market structure variables. These variables include other broadcast media competition, market size and other factors outside the control of the editor and publisher.

The second form of circulation research uses the individual as a unit of analysis. One such study examined the motivations behind canceling home delivery of a newspaper. A 1974 study showed cancelation reasons often related more to irregular or damaged delivery of the product than it did with the content of the product. A 2000 study then concluded carrier age was not a factor in missed or late deliveries. Billing procedures and payment motivations are also studied within this area. Overall, both types of circulation research examine variables unrelated to a publication's content.

Newspaper management research

Though newspaper management has seen drastic changes in recent years, the research involving management situations has not explored the concept of *news* or how it

has evolved in regard to this study. In the last twenty years, newspaper competition has intensified, ownership has consolidated and the trade has become more labor-intensive. As organizational hierarchies increased in complexity and employees became harder to please, these changes have called for the growth of newspaper management research. These studies, relatively new in their techniques and development, examine job satisfaction, organizational goals, and the effects of chain or group ownership on both.

Typography and makeup research

The modern press and advent of computer pagination has greatly transformed the look of the newspaper page, but studies involving such aesthetic details have not involved the evolving concept of *news* as it relates to this thesis. Typography and page makeup studies focus on aesthetic aspects of the news-editorial operations. This research includes the effects of news design elements on readership, reader preferences, and comprehension. Experimental methodology is most common in this type of research. Users will be shown a test stimuli, such as a mock front page, and asked to rate it on a series of measures, including readability, information value, general preference and recall of textual material. Among past findings: unusually shaped pictures irritate readers, readers do not like type in italics and large illustrations attract more readers than small illustrations. This area of design-focused research has recently extended to the Internet.

Readability research

Understanding and comprehension are important factors for an audience consuming a news product, yet readability research has not covered the changing systems of *news*. Citing Dale & Chall (1948), Wimmer & Dominick (2003, p. 319) define readability as “the sum total of all the elements and their interactions that affect the

success of a piece of printed material. Success is measured by the extent to which readers understand the piece, are able to read it at an optimal speed, and find it interesting.” Math formulas varying in complexity, including the Flesch reading ease formula, the Fog Index and the SMOG Grading index, have been created to objectively determine readability. Another method, the Cloze procedure, does not require a measure of word or syllable counts. The Cloze procedure requires a researcher to choose between 250-300 words, deletes every fifth word starting with a random point and then replace that word with a blank. The researcher then gives the revised passed to a subject and asks the subject to fill in the blanks. Readability is determined upon the percentage of correct word replacements from the subject. This type of research is not heavily used in print media research (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003, p. 320), though previous studies have provided worthwhile analysis.

Online research

The depth of online news site research remains yet to be fully explored as it relates to the development of the *news* concept. Many studies around the turn of the century relate to what types of newspapers have Web sites, how they make a profit and how their online versions differs from print editions. Wimmer & Dominick review some of the more pertinent studies of the time in their volume: A 1999 study found that almost all types of papers had online versions, with the intent of gaining readers and profit (Peng, Tham, & Hao, 1999). Readers often go online and to the print edition for local newspapers, but national paper online readers rarely pick up the print edition (Chyi, 1999). Readers of the New York Times online version recall less information and read fewer national and international stories (Tewksbury D. &., 2000).

Moreover, an additional type of online research examines the time spent with online news verses print media. Multiple studies have examined this concept with mixed results (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003, p. 321). Most research in this area currently examines some demographic data, such as age or access to the Internet, with use of online or print media.

The uses and gratifications model of research has also been used to examine consumer motives for online news consumption over a traditional print media product. Papacharissi (2000) found five main motivational factors for using the Internet: interpersonal utility, passing time, convenience, information seeking, and entertainment. Lee (2001) found that college students generally cited convenience and entertainment as more important factors for online news newspaper consumption.

Finally, the design and makeup of online newspaper site was largely explored during the turn of the century. Research in this area includes analysis of Web page design for *USA Today*, *The New York Times* and *the Washington Post* (Li, 1998), concluding that publishes gave more priority to text than graphics. Lowrey (1999) published results of large-scale interviews with web creative directors, all in agreement that print design features can be migrated to the web. An experiment by Sundar (2000) studies the effect of multimedia presentations on online news sites. The presentations were shown to inhibit content retention and also led to more negative opinions of the site.

Despite the depth of knowledge on print publications provided by traditional research, information on newspaper Web site content and online news site content remains largely absent. The research covered by Wimmer & Dominick review volume focuses primarily on consumer behavior and attitudes, or general site design and layout.

No studies examine specific assets of a site, such as main page headlines, photographs or videos.

A Review and Summary of More Recent Research

While the most relevant information comes from the online research methods mentioned above, none of the six methods mentioned by Wimmer & Dominick are ideally suitable for the purpose of this particular study. Nonetheless, it is useful to know what methods have been previously used in this general area, which in turn gives understanding to why their relevance is not ideal. Whereas Wimmer & Dominick's overview is not complete, it is therefore necessary to explore more current research, particularly as it relates to journalism and electronic media in the past 20 years.

A review of article titles and abstracts from the *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* from 1990 to 2009 found no content relating to the content analysis of online news site front pages, specifically as it relates to hyperlinked headlines. While some articles, explored in this thesis during Chapter 3, discussed experiments with subjects being required to click on hyperlinked headlines, their results and subsequent analysis of their studies focused on the human subject behavior, not the content of the headline.

Recent Analysis Points to Crisis in Mass Media News

In all, it is appropriate to note that there appears to be, without question, a crisis in media news. A survey of recent Pew reports provides credibility for such a conclusion. Three reports specifically warrant our attention here. First, a Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism *State of the News Media* (2009) survey says traditional news media systems are collapsing. This collapse is a result of a consumer shift toward Internet news. Second,

audiences are highly critical of news organizations, according to a Pew Research Center for the People & the Press (2007) survey. Third, when Internet users make judgments about news on the Internet, those judgments differ dramatically from traditional news organizations, per an earlier Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism (2007) study.

Conclusion

Current research focuses primarily on the behaviors of the consumer, not the content selection by the editor. The research that does exist in regard to content analysis of news is primarily based on traditional media, not Web sites. An analysis of the content of existing Web sites remains to be completed, and such an analysis is the objective of chapters 3 through 5 of this study. While media research has long strived to draw a line between *news* and *not-news* in traditional media realms, this research examines the ever-evolving word of online news sites over time.

Chapter III:

Methodology

A Web site can be a living document, constant evolving and changing at the will of the publisher. Through a content analysis of modern news sites, this study seeks to answer question: Using headlines as representation of content, has the content of online news sites shifted from an issue (e.g., content/ideology/ideational/current event) to a pseudo-event or image-related orientation during the first decade of this millennium?

This chapter reviews the methodology and procedure for the research presented within this study. This review provides a brief introduction to quantitative research, noting its strength as a research method and its use in the context of the topic of this study. This introduction provides a context of a description of content analysis as a research procedure which establishes the foundation for an operational definition of the major elements of the construct employed in this study for classifying Web site content. Information on the database used in this study is also reviewed and explained. Finally, a brief description of the study's reliability is discussed. The conclusion of this chapter provides an overview of the research methodology as well a preview of the analysis and results. With this chapter overview in mind, we can initially consider the primary method used in this analysis.

Quantitative Research Methods

Similar to other analysis, mass media research can be qualitative or quantitative. This study relies on quantitative questioning to answer the question guiding this study. Contrary to the flexible or opened-ended questioning style of qualitative research,

quantitative research uses questioning that is static or standardized (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003, p. 47). In quantitative methodology, research often focuses on the function of a specific variable as well as how frequently the variable dominates and controls social meanings. Numbers are generally used to communicate how often a variable is present. As Wimmer & Dominick noted (2003, p. 47), there are certain advantages to using quantitative research methods as opposed to qualitative research methods. For instance, the use of numbers in analyzing data allows for greater precision in reporting results. As an example, might recognize the existence of a variable and provide an approximate indication of its meaning and important to a specific group, quantitative data could indicate exact increases and decreases in that variable's presence. Moreover, quantitative research allows a researcher to generalize results from a given sample to an overall population. Wimmer & Dominick (2003, p. 47) discuss two primary differences between qualitative and quantitative research. First, qualitative research frequently employs extremely small samples; indeed, a sample of one has been used as the base for a generalization in a qualitative study. Second, and an immediate result of small sample sizes, it is frequently difficult to generalize to an entire population from the sample used within a qualitative analysis.

Examples of quantitative research data collection methods include telephone surveys, mail surveys and Internet surveys. These methods query an individual or group of individuals with a specific, standardized set of questions. In this particular study, however, human beings are not the direct object of analysis. Rather this study provides a content analysis of the manifest ideas expressed on specific Web sites.

Content analysis

Content analysis involves the systematic reading of a body of texts, images and symbols from a sometimes differing perspective from the original intent of the author or his intended purpose for the audience. Krippendorff (2004, p. 18) has defined content analysis as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use.” “Text,” in this context, serves as a metaphor for more than written material. The parenthetical use of “meaningful matter” assists this metaphor, in implying the use of art, images, maps, sounds, signs, numerical records, and more.

The content analysis method dates to 18th-century Sweden (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 4). A debate between the Swedish state church and scholars erupted after the publishing of *Songs of Zion*, a 90-hymn collection from an unknown author or authors. Incidentally, a content analysis was completed to examine the meaning and context of “religious” symbols used in the hymns, when some argued *Songs of Zion* undermined authority and aided a dissenting group. Scholars argued the symbols differed in use from what was being assumed. It would take a comparison to a German study of a religious sect to end the debate, which worked in the scholar’s favor. Those methods and processes used in the *Songs of Zion* analysis remain part of the content analysis framework today.

Krippendorff (2004, pp. 29-30) has offered a framework for content analysis with the following conceptual components. First, a body of text is needed to supply the data for a content analysis. “Data are the starting point of any empirical research” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 30). Generally content analyses begin by looking at data not intended to be analyzed for specific research questions. These data become the base of

the analysis, and the focus of the research. As such, a research question is needed with a result ideally answerable via the examining of the body of aforementioned text. “A research question is analogous to a set of hypotheses” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 31). Indeed, Krippendorff (2004, p. 33) has argued that research questions have four characteristics. They are believed to be answerable (abductively inferable) by examinations of a body of texts. They delineate a set of possible (hypothetical) answers among which analysts select. They concern currently inaccessible phenomena. Lastly, they allow for (in)validation – at least in principle – by acknowledging another way to observe or substantiate the occurrence of the inferred phenomena.

Once the specific data to be examined are identified, the researcher needs to identify the context for the analyses of these data. When a researcher specifies the context for analyzing data, the researcher begins to suggest the situational function that might be attributed to patterns of data discovered within a research project. In this sense, this context explains what the analyst is doing with the text. “In the course of a content analysis, the context embraces all the knowledge that the analyst applies to given texts” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 33). It is critical that this context be transparent to the analyst’s audience to prevent misunderstandings or seemingly invalid results.

Within the content analysis framework, there must also be an analytical construct operationalizing what is known about the data and the context in which these data must be analyzed. This exposes the network of correlations between the text or data in an analysis and the possible answers to the analyst’s questions.

Furthermore, the operational definition should include the conditions that could cause the above correlations to change. However, it is not always possible to attribute a

cause when a correlation is identified and isolated. Overall, the analyst must ensure the text is processed in reference to what is known about its use. Inferences are needed to provide an answer to the research question, serving as a basic accomplishment of the greater content analysis. Krippendorff (2004, p. 36) states there are three types of inferences. Deductive inferences are implied and logically conclusive. They take generalizations to narrow in on particulars. Inductive inferences are just the opposite, using particular examples of a sample to make a generalization. Krippendorff further argues these two inference types are not relevant to content analysis. A third type, abductive inference, is most applicable. Abductive inferences “proceed across logically distinct domains, from particulars of one kind to particulars of another kind” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 36). One example of abductive inference used by Krippendorff involves one inferring editorial biases from a comparison of editorial pages of different newspapers. An analyst will use abductive inference, including theory, statistical knowledge, experience and intuition, to answer a research question.

The final component of the content analysis framework includes validating evidence. Krippendorff (2004, p. 39) claims “Any content analysis should be validatable in principle.” It is said to be *in principle* because not all claims may be genuinely validated. This takes place when past or future happenings are involved, or in cases where direct observational evidence is impossible to gather.

Previous studies using content analysis are plentiful in the mass media field of research. Famed sociologist Max Weber was an advocate of using content analysis as a method for understanding mass media (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 4). The rise of journalism schools in the early 20th century, and consequently the schools’ push for ethical standards

and an understanding of the *newspaper* as a phenomenon, led to a need to scientifically understand the content within the print edition (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 5). The first quantitative newspaper analysis was published in 1893 under the title “Do newspapers now give the news?” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 5) Little is known about the author’s coding scheme, which analyzed newspaper columns (Downing, 2004, p. 394). The author concluded that New York newspapers had dropped coverage of religious, scientific, and literary matters in favor of gossip, sports, and scandals (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 5). A 1910 study (Mathews, 2009, p. 13) categorized a New York daily newspaper’s content in four categories: *Demoralizing*, *unwholesome*, *trivial*, and *worthwhile*. The categories were determined after grouping headings (i.e., *art*, *murder*, and *military*) classifying more than 10,000 items – all of which were *news* content, not opinion/editorial content.

These aforementioned studies relate solely to newspaper print editions, analyzing editions and front pages for specific categories of story types. This provides a base for this study, which takes a similar approach in content analysis not to print publications, but rather online news site front pages. The use of content analysis for the Internet remains a relatively unexplored realm, as Krippendorff (2004, p. 43) has written:

The exponentially growing Internet is an unimaginably large but for the most part unmined source of content analysis data. The availability of electronic texts is fast expanding to other kinds of materials, such as survey questions and responses, scientific findings, film scripts, transcripts of television news program, image archives, sound recordings, and graphical representations in Web pages, making content analysis an increasingly important research technique.

A Specific System for Categorization

News is a written account or materials reported in a newspaper, news periodical, or newscast. This study aims to distinguish between news reports grounded in specific events that have realistic effects on the world and those image-based (pseudo-events) that have little to no effect on people or things beyond their own exist. To do this, we must first define the difference between image and ideology – or more importantly, their roles in *news*.

Developing the Concept of Issue from Image and Pseudo-event

Images are necessary in society and culture, whether public or private. As Boulding (1956, p. 64) wrote, “the image not only makes society, society continually remakes the image.” He added:

We must not suppose, of course, that society has no influence on private, unshared images or that these unshared images have no influence on society.

Indeed, every public image begins in the mind of some single individual and only becomes public as it is transmitted and shared.

That transmission and sharing is facilitated quickly and widely via the mass media. In this respect, everything that is known or heard from somewhere else is an image.

Boulding (1956, p. 16) remarks “the development of images is part of the culture or the subculture in which they are developed, and it depends upon all the elements of that culture or subculture.” If this is true, we cannot theoretically escape image. Boulding’s definition of image relates to behavior, to places, people, and things existing in time and space. It is this aforementioned view of *image* that is henceforth abandoned in lieu of another perspective of image as it relates to *news*.

Not all events in the spotlight are actually *news*. Novelty and effect are two news characteristics upheld by conventional wisdom in journalism education. A story is published because of its human interest factor or novelty, but very rarely because it actually means something to a reader or listener. The stories that do mean something to a reader are said to have effect. Often the events in the spotlight are image-based, or fabricated circumstances at the focus of media because of their novelty, and little else. Fabrication is not used here in a malicious definition; rather under the definition that something is built or otherwise produced. This is not to say a news team stages a situation or story, but their decision to give it attention, thus making it *news*, is ultimately the moment of fabrication.

This fabrication of an image-based story can be alternatively described as a *pseudo-event*. In contrast to Boulding, Boorstin (1961, pp. 11-12) defined the pseudo-events as synthetic events and circumstances that lack the spontaneity of true *news*:

A pseudo-event, then, is a happening that possesses the following characteristics:

1. It is not spontaneous, but comes about because someone has planned, planted or incited it. Typically, it is not a train wreck or an earthquake, but an interview.
2. It is planted primarily (not always exclusively) for the immediate purpose of being reported or reproduced. Therefore, its occurrence is arranged for the convenience of the reporting or reproducing media. Its success is measured by how widely it is reported. Time relations in it are commonly fictitious or factitious; the announcement is given out in

advance “for future release” and written as if the event had occurred in the past. The question, “Is it real?” is less important than, “Is it newsworthy?”

3. Its relation to the underlying reality of the situation is ambiguous. Its interest arises largely from this very ambiguity. Concerning a pseudo-event this question, “What does it mean?” has a new dimension. While the news interest in a train wreck is in *what* happened and in the real consequences, the interest in an interview is always, in a sense, in *whether* it really happened and in what might have been the motives. Did the statement really mean what is said? Without some of this ambiguity a pseudo-event cannot be very interesting.

4. Usually it is intended to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. The hotel’s thirtieth-anniversary celebration, by saying that the hotel is a distinguished institution, actually makes it one.

Image, as pseudo-event, is the anti-news. Though a pseudo-event is a situation or occurrence, these instances are highlighted because of their prominence (celebrity sex lives) or their novelty (a chimp mauling a woman’s friend), not because they affect a greater mass of people. Boorstin (1961, p. 185) writes: “What the pseudo-event is in the world of fact, the image is in the world of value. The image is a pseudo-ideal.” He then elaborates on key characteristics of the image in six main points:

1. Image is synthetic
2. Image is believable
3. Image is passive
4. Image is vivid and concrete

5. Image is simplified
6. Image is ambiguous

All of these traits relate to the subjects of headlines one sees on an online news site.

Boorstin's (1961, p. 185) first point makes the strongest case for what is, in reality, not *news*: "An image is synthetic. It is planned: created especially to serve a purpose, to make a certain kind of impression." With regard to online news site headlines and the topics or subjects they represent, it is proposed in this thesis that most of these hyperlinked headlines are indeed *synthetic* events. Their relevance to a national audience is mere gossip. They are events either fabricated by the source, such as a link to a blog post from a CNN commentator, or they are events with wide novel appeal, but very narrow effect.

If we categorize things as image or not image, the "not image" is an ideal, or an issue. It is a legitimate circumstance worthy of coverage and attention. A fire at a local church is an issue, it is an event. For even if the fire's start was premeditated (arson), the consequences of the occurrence are very real. In contrast, a leading headline of three sisters attending the Academy Awards for a decade is a pseudo-event, an image. Their trips are planned. The story is created by the media, and is thus *synthetic*. A celebrity attending an award show is not true *news*, it is the novelty of their appearance that gives the media a reason to broadcast.

Indeed, there is reason to believe that the general concept of *news* is shifting from issues to image-based events. The Project for Excellence in Journalism (1998, p. 1) noted a shift in news outlet focus during a 20-year study of traditional media outlets: "There has been a shift toward lifestyle, celebrity, entertainment and celebrity crime/scandal in the

news and away from government and foreign affairs.” The PEJ survey serves as a more practical and less theoretical guide to coding headlines for this study.

Operational Definitions Used in the Study

In order to precisely determine the difference between issue and image, more specific and operational definitions of *events* or *issue* and *pseudo-events* or *image* are needed. The PEJ study (1998, p. 2) examined two areas: what the stories were about, and what theme was emphasized in the story. In regard to the theme, it was found that there is a shift toward what we define in this study as an image and pseudo-event emphasis away from the issue or event-based news, or what PEJ defines as *traditional news emphasis*:

The thematic emphasis of stories today has moved away from such concerns as the political process, war and peace, policy and from updating or analyzing in depth continuing events--what might be called traditional news emphasis. The emphasis on people, human interest and news you can use. There is also a new emphasis on scandal, the bizarre and fear about the future.

In regard to content, the PEJ study noted similar shifts. This was determined by having grouped topical categories into two areas, traditional or feature, with a tertiary list of ungrouped categories. *Traditional* content consisted of government, military, domestic affairs and foreign affairs. What the PEJ has labeled as *Feature* content or what I distinguish as *image* or *pseudo-events* included references to entertainment/comedy, lifestyle and celebrity crime. Additionally, this category of *feature* content or image and pseudo-events would also included PEJ's ungrouped areas including personal health, crime, business/commerce, science, religion, disaster-natural/manmade, and other.

A regrouping of the PEJ categories provides a base for the content analysis in this study. The PEJ grouping marked as *Traditional* is the base for the *Issue/event* category in this study. Similarly, PEJ's *Feature* category serves as the base for the *Image/pseudo-event* category in this study.

Issue-focused event: A spontaneous, unexpected occurrence, positive or negative, with an effect on the greater population, i.e. natural disasters or a large apartment fire. A legitimate news event can be a planned affair producing consequence or change, i.e. a presidential inauguration or the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. These are happenings that mean something in terms of influence or effect in the larger scope of history. These are crises and situations with real implications at home and abroad.

Image-focused pseudo-event: A synthetic happening or occurrence created to incite attention from the specific audience, i.e. a blog post from a news commentator. Pseudo-events also consist of occurrences associated with novelty or humor, but with little effect on the greater population, i.e. a potato chip in the form of a president. A pseudo-event also includes planned happenings or celebrity "news" with little effect on the greater population, i.e. a celebrity couple breakup or wedding. Boorstin (1961, p. 57) argues a celebrity "is a human pseudo-event." For clarification, while a president or government leader may be well known, he or she should be considered a public official before a celebrity. Using Pew (Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, 1998, p. 1) as a guide, pseudo-events involve "lifestyle, celebrity, entertainment and celebrity crime/scandal." In a large volume of American history, pseudo-events would likely be omitted.

Database

To analyze and compare every online news site is an undertaking beyond the scope of this individual's ability. To highlight only a handful of sites further requires a selective sample size, which could be based on anything from perceived popularity to Web traffic. This research conducts a content analysis using the hyperlinked headlines of two popular mainstream media online news sites. One represents the television news industry, as it is the online outreach of respected cable channel CNN. The second is the online leg of newspaper giant *The New York Times*.

These two sites are the digital identity of two of the largest and longest-running organizations within their original medium. Yet, their site metrics exemplify the gap in attention between print media and broadcast media. August 2008 Nielsen metrics (Newspaper Association of America, 2008) showed CNN's digital properties with a combined total of 38,821,000 unique visitors. NYTimes.com received 19,862,000 unique visitors. The data also showed a gap between CNN's digital properties and NYTimes.com in terms of sessions, or visits per person, with 8.3 and 4.5, respectively.

Despite its relatively youthful existence, CNN holds a larger stake in online dissemination than the *Times*. The statistics above show that users are returning to CNN.com almost twice as often as a user returns to NYTimes.com each month. Widespread broadband access may facilitate easier access to online video, unarguably a strength of the television medium-based CNN, but it is possible that CNN's headlines are more image-focused for the sake of the consumer. After all, a user would likely expect to see coverage of the "American Idol" finale – an event with little-to-no impact on

society's greater presence – on CNN.com than NYTimes.com. This study aims to show just that.

The use of CNN.com and NYTimes.com are both intentionally designed and automatic focus on events or understandings that go beyond immediate localities. Relativity is critical here. For example, a house fire in a city of 10,000 is big news to that local community and the news bureaus covering it. To a national audience, this is not relevant. To this end, the death of a supermodel is relevant to the industry and her family, but it is not of national importance. From henceforth, we assume CNN.com and NYTimes.com to be the mass disseminators of all critical events within our society.

Using Hyperlinked Headlines to Reflect News Content

Research involving hyperlinked headlines on online news sites is relatively nonexistent. Few studies have explored the nature of headline content; rather most analyze users' reactions to the headlines. One study has analyzed the overall content of mainstream media conversation and how it compares to user-generated sites.

In contrast to the more traditional selection of news content by traditional television news networks, Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism (2007) studied user-generated news sites like Digg, Del.icio.us, Riddit, in addition to news aggregator Yahoo News. These sites – Yahoo aside – allow for users to “tag” or promote/demote stories as they see fit. The result is a main page list of the most popular items as deemed by the users, not by traffic from the users or by editors. To this end, users are effectively playing their own editors as self-entitled trendsetters and critics. Yahoo's site aggregates content from mainstream news outlets, and displays user

rankings and popularity by page view on specific pages of its site. These user-focused pages are the examples used in the PEJ study.

PEJ continually analyzes 48 mainstream outlets as part of its News Coverage Index. A timely selection of that ongoing study served as the base for a comparative sample. 644 stories were coded from the user-generated sites and Yahoo News and compared to 1,395 stories from the News Coverage Index. Next it compared the user sites to each other. Finally, it compared Yahoo user-oriented pages to Yahoo's edited news pages, to other user sites and to each other.

In essence, this compared the news consumer against the news gatekeeper; novice citizens against professional staff. To the effect of cognitive process, the PEJ study analyzes the end result of decision-making by two independent groups of individuals. As the PEJ study notes, there is a large difference between the two groups of individuals and, consequently, their sites:

Indeed, these user-driven sites have entered the news business, or perhaps more accurately, they have entered the news *dissemination* business. Reporting is not a part of their charge. Instead, they turn to others for content and then they bestow users with the task of deciding what makes it on the page (2007, p. 2).

The PEJ study does not compare mainstream outlets against each other, only user-generated sites. The study is also limited in that it focuses on one date range during a singular year.

Another study of interest measured the human thought process as participants undertook the task of selecting online news stories from a list of hyperlinked headlines and photos. Wise and colleagues (2008) discussed the cognitive process involved when

users read and select hyperlinks on a news Web site. The research examines user behavior when posed with a limited number (5) of hyperlinks. Users were then given similar tasks but with a larger selection, using an extensive number (15) of hyperlinks.

Each hyperlink in the study was accompanied by picture. The text of the hyperlink, i.e. the “headline,” was written by an undergraduate news student based only on the picture. Another group of news students then fabricated a story to relate to the picture and its selected headline. Wise measured heart rate as a representative factor of cognitive effort. The higher the heart rate, the more likely it was for a higher rate of cognitive effort to be applied. The study’s hypothesis was proven. Using Lang’s Limited Capacity Model of Motivated Media Message Processing as a guide, the study predicted people would invest more cognitive effort into reading the stories if they selected it from a Web site with more hyperlinked photo/headline options (Wise & Bolls, 2008, p. 80). The results of the experiment supported the theory. The larger the array of stories to select from, the more cognitive effort used. Participants in the study were given an unrelated 30-minute distraction task after viewing and browsing and reading the selection of hyperlinked photos and headlines. Following the task, the participants took a quiz over the stories they elected to read. As with the previous hypothesis, higher rates of detail retention were shown when participants sampled from the larger array of headlines/photos (Wise & Bolls, 2008).

In regard to the nature of the content presented, Wise and colleagues (2008, p. 81) concluded:

It does appear that unpleasant photo/headline combinations contained on news Web sites act as cues capable of increasing the motivational relevance of

presented stories. This increase in motivation could have come from an increase in perceived threat due to the presence of more unpleasant stories.

In regard to what constitutes a threatening image, Wise (2008, p. 81) states early on that, “It is important to note that such negative, compelling images are often perceived as such because the image represents a potential threat and therefore would seem to fit the description of motivationally relevant content.” To this end, Shoemaker (1996) has argued humans biological imperative to survey environments for threats, consequently hardwiring humans to process unpleasant news.

The Wise study focuses on the cognitive processing of extensive and limited sets of hyperlinks, and the retention of details in the linked stories. It does not extensively analyze the content of the headlines. Furthermore, the content within the study is completely fabricated. The selection and placement of the headlines was part of a lab environment, not a real news operation or online news site. Wise’s study is most relevant to this research for its use of hyperlinked headlines as a factor for content analysis.

There is importance in understanding the habits of a news consumer, and the particular drive news organizations have to capture their attention. Some consumers set out with intent to find information, where others are merely looking for something to catch their attention. This said, it is explainable why news producers and publishers are more likely to put captivating content, however newsworthy, on their front page. They are attempting to capture the attention of an otherwise disinterested consumer.

Tewksbury and Hals (2008, pp. 257-258) further defined these two realms of news consumers: selectors and browsers.

One behavior pattern is characterized by a focus on specific content defined by individual interests and needs; audiences following this pattern confine the majority of their news exposure to specific topics and may be termed selectors. The other major pattern is characterized by use of news media to obtain information on a range of topics. These audiences may be less likely to read/watch deeply in any one area, sampling instead across news domains; they may be termed browsers.

Whereas selectors visit a site with the intent of reading on a group of particular topics or stories, browsers stroll through pages of a newspaper or online news site home pages waiting for something to capture their attention. Tewksbury and Hals (2008, p. 258) cite an unpublished study of their own, suggesting “that a substantial portion of the print and online news audience may browse the news.” To this end, it is understandably critical for news sites to gain and retain the attention of the consumer using the presentation on their front page.

Previous research has examined factors around online news consumption, but focus has remained on the end-user and consumer. Given an average week, we know that consumers – via user-generated Web sites - tend to highlight different topics than what mainstream media editors publish as their top stories. We know that an increase in headline selection provides for more cognitive resource dedication and ultimately story detail retention. There is also a correlation between cognitive effort and negative or threatening imagery. Additionally, we understand there to be two groups of news consumers: selectors and browsers, the latter of which may compose the greater mass of online and print consumers. Each of these discoveries applies to the consumer, not the

editor or the (professional) publisher. Little research exists in regard to the selection process of word and topic choice as it relates to online news presentation, specifically hyperlinked headlines on mainstream media Web sites. Research must be done to further evaluate the professional presentation of news on the Internet. As such, this study focuses on two news sites edited by news organization paid staffers, not end-users.

Selecting the Sample Sources

The first site, representative of the broadcast news industry, is Cable News Network (CNN), CNN.com. In regard to television consumption, the December 2008 Pew study said nearly a quarter – 23% - of Americans cited CNN as their main television news source. Stelter (2009, p. BU1) shows how CNN's brand dominance extends to the Internet: "Using page views as a metric, Nielsen ranked CNN.com as the No. 1 current events and global news Web site last year, with a monthly average of 1.7 billion — half a billion views more than its nearest competitor, MSNBC.com." CNN is the common man's source for news.

The second site, representative of the print newspaper industry, is the *New York Times* at NYTimes.com. Nielsen Online (Nielsen, 2008) data for December 2008 showed that NYTimes.com was the number one online newspaper destination for the month, with 18.2 million unique visitors. The second most-visited site, USAToday.com, had 6.8 million fewer visitors. The *Times*' journalistic standards have long been marked as the epitome of elite press in the United States. Arora and Lasswell (1969, p. 3) use this premise in a comparison of public language in India and the United States. "In every modern country there is a single newspaper, or a very small number of papers, which it is

taken for granted the national political elite will read or know about. The *New York Times* undoubtedly belongs to this select list ...”

Headlines for NYTimes.com are accessed using the *Times* premium site access to archives. To access CNN.com records, this study uses the Internet Archive, www.archive.org, to locate and display pages from previous years using a feature called the *WayBack Machine*. It serves to preserve publicly accessible Internet sites for research purpose and future generations.

The original idea for the Internet Archive Wayback Machine began in 1996, when the Internet Archive first began archiving the web ... The Internet Archive has relied on donations of web crawls, technology, and expertise from Alexa Internet and others. The Internet Archive Wayback Machine is owned and operated by the Internet Archive (Internet Archive, 2001).

WayBack Machine crawls, or searches, Internet Web pages and saves copies of the content to third-party servers for long-term storage. This content includes HTML, image files, CSS and other critical Web programming technologies. The results are nearly identical displays of what a given Web site address displayed at a given point in the past.

Systematic Sampling of Headlines

Just as a headline sits atop a news story in a print newspaper, an often-hyperlinked title or headline sits atop a story tease on a news Web site. Most sites, including the two used in this study, use hyperlinked images and/or text to link a user to the full text of a story. Thus, these hyperlinks are teases, human-written summaries of a larger narrative. Previous research (Wise & Bolls, 2008) used hyperlinked headlines as a

base for content analysis, justifying the headlines as proper summaries of the full text they represent.

Wise (2008, p. 69) has noted the hyperlinked headline as a key factor in an online news visitor's experience: "The ritual of scanning, choosing, and receiving hyperlinked content can be repeated multiple times during a person's visit to a Web site. This ritual and the underlying mental processes involved fundamentally shape the experience of receiving news online." The same research states that prominent news sites' "headline news" sections typically contain 10 to 12 hyperlinks. The Wise study examined groups of sets of 5 and 15 hyperlinked headlines.

Content analysis categories classify the headlines in this study. NYTimes.com classifies its content daily under a "Front Page" category. All headlines within that category are coded in this content analysis. For CNN.com, all hyperlinks/headlines in the first modular section of the site are coded. This represents the standard view of the Web site an average user would see before scrolling downward; in colloquial terms designers call this the view "above the fold." Design elements such as navigation bars, sidebars, rails and other tertiary site features are disregarded, in addition to obvious teaser elements such as "Tonight on CNN:". Nielsen (Nielsen, 2006) suggests Web users read in an F-like pattern when scanning a Web page. With the exception of special events (i.e., Sept. 11, 2001) the designs of the two sites in this study are easily divided into columns. While navigation placement and logos have changed in time, the concept of a central column of content has not. With Nielsen's F pattern as a base, this study uses headlines from the start of the upper-left corner of the main content column then to the right and back again in a zig-zag pattern. Ultimately, the first seven headlines of a page become the cognitive

choice of the user. For this research, the position of user is assumed by the author and researcher.

This study employs a systematic sample procedure to gather data from two popular news Web sites. Frey and his colleagues (1991, p. 132) defined a systematic sample as choosing “every n th subject from a complete list of a population after starting at a random point.” It should be noted that because systematic sampling employs a predetermined schedule, it does not employ random sampling in which every subject has an equal chance greater than zero to be in a sample of every draw (Frey, 1991, p. 132). Additionally, there are limitations with systematic sampling procedures. Systematic sampling is likely to contain more potential error, as a bias can occur at regular intervals (Frey, 1991, p. 132). This problem is also referred to as *periodicity*. Reinard (1998, p. 263) furthers this claim and the definition of systematic sampling by double-titling the method *periodic sampling*, “since it selects respondents according to a predetermined schedule other than a random sequence.” Reinard and Frey both concur that systematic sampling is not random sampling, and thus is subject to disadvantages as a result. As Reinard (1998, p. 263) states, “random sampling methods attempt to remove the human element from biasing the study.”¹

Selections from NYTimes.com were selected every three months from January 1, 2000 through Dec. 1, 2008, encompassing eight full years of data. This three month cycle ensures a reasonable sample size for this study, in addition to providing a sample from

¹ In contrast, Keyton (2001, p. 128) defines systematic sampling as a form of random or probability sampling. As Keyton later notes, this definition is subject to the nature of the sample: “However, not all sampling frames are randomized. Many sampling frames, like phone lists or employment rosters, are ordered in some repetitive cycle ... (p. 129)”

every season and calendar-year quarter. This cycle provides more samples from off-peak news times, specifically November elections.

Selections from CNN.com are taken at nearly the same ratio as the *Times*, although database factors, explored in the *Limitations* section of Chapter 5 of this thesis, prevent exact date replication of NYTimes.com selections. In cases where the same date as NYTimes.com could not be referenced, the next closest date prior to or following is used.

Reliability

It is critical to the validity of the survey that the content analysis key show reliability. Wimmer & Dominick (2003, p. 56) state, “A measure is reliable if it consistently gives the same answer.” Three graduate students were trained by the author and then completed the coding exercise, establishing reliability and validity of the content analysis categories. For this exercise, the reliability was determined to be 83%. To determine reliability for the visual selection of headlines from CNN.com, the graduate students were also trained to analyze the CNN.com Web page layout and circle the areas in which *top news headlines* would be located. For this exercise, the reliability was determined to be 100%. The precise nature of the reliability systems employed and its particular results are provided in Appendix A.

As a representation of the content analyzed and its subsequent classification, examples of both *pseudo-event/image-focused* hyperlinked headline text and *event/issue-based* hyperlinked headline text are provided as follows. For the *pseudo-event/image-focused* category: *Oldest New Mom Has Twins -- At Age 67* (1/1/07 CNN.com) was classified because the event has little to no effect on the general population. The event is

considered noteworthy because of the *novelty* of the human interest story involved; that a 67-year-old woman has had twins. Secondly, *The Conflict In Iraq: An Appreciation; From Father To Son, Last Words To Live By* (1/1/07 NYTimes.com) is classified as a pseudo-event because it appears to focus on an event that is symbolic only in emotional consideration. It, too, has little effect on the greater timeline of history. Finally, *California Avoids Rolling Blackouts, For Now* (6/1/01 CNN.com) is classified as a pseudo-event because it makes note of a situation that has not yet happened: another blackout. The fact that nothing happened is being made into *news*, which is a pseudo-event.

In contrast, event/issue-focused headlines are much easier to identify. For example, *Bangkok Blasts Kill 2; New Year's Events Canceled* (1/1/07 CNN.com) clearly reports a spontaneous situation with large implications, such as death and, to a lesser importance, canceled events. As another example, *A Region Inflamed: Combat; 46 Iraqis Die in Fierce Fight Between Rebels And G.I.'S* (12/1/03 NYTimes.com) relays fatality information as a result of a political conflict. As a final example, *Lockheed Wins Job of Building Next Spaceship* (9/1/06 NYTimes.com) is an event/issue-focused headline most simply because it presents new information about a notable business and a notable space program. At its root, the headline is relaying business/economic news. This story has meaning to a space program, employees at a major company and arguably the nation as a whole.

An example of *other* hyperlinked “headlines” on CNN.com include: *Video, Gallery, Full Story, Activate Your E-mail Alert*, and, among others, *Readers React*. These

types of hyperlinks were common on CNN.com's main story listing and often accompanied a more understandable, information-focused headline.

Chapter IV:

Results: The News Shifts

from Event to Image-Based

This chapter presents the relevant findings from the content analysis of CNN.com and NYTimes.com from 2000-2008. The research first begins with a review of the analysis of CNN.com pages accessed using the Internet Archive. The review includes a look at unique trends within the data. A brief discussion of the results as it pertains to this thesis is included. The second part of the chapter reviews the results from the content analysis of NYTimes.com accessed using the site's digital content archive. A review of data trends from the analysis follows. A discussion results from the NYTimes.com analysis is also included. The chapter closes with an overall review of the data and a look toward its relevancy as it relates to this thesis, as is further explained in chapter five.

Content Analysis

This study employed a content analysis of the hyperlinked headlines on the front pages of *The New York Times*' NYTimes.com and cable-news outlet CNN's CNN.com every three months from 2000 through 2008. This analysis classified each headline as *pseudo-event/image-based*, *issues/event*, or, in the case of CNN.com, *other*.

In greater details, site screen shots and search archive listings were captured and analyzed within a two-week time span. Two categories were used for both sites, as defined in chapter four: *pseudo-event/image-based* and *issue-focused/event*. Coding for CNN.com involved a third category, *other*, to classify hyperlinks that were of undeterminable substance or were provided for feedback purposes. Such examples include, "Video," "Click to send us your comments and feedback," "Timeline" and more.

CNN.com data was accessed using the Internet Archive. The pages were printed to Adobe PDF format and later coded. NYTimes.com data was accessed using the Web site's premium access to search archives. The archive search results were printed to Adobe PDF format and later coded. This study employs the use of a systematic sample to gather data from the Web sites. Wherever possible, sites were queried for the same day. In some cases, i.e. a Sunday edition of the *New York Times* or an incomplete or missing record in the Internet Archive, this was not possible. The next closest date, prior or after, was selected and coded. These results are representative for the site based on the sampled data.

Table 1. An Example of Date Selection for the Content Analysis

2005	CNN.com	NYTimes.com
1-Jan	OK	OK
1-Mar	OK	OK
1-Jun	5-Jun	OK
1-Sep	OK	OK
1-Dec	OK	OK

Note: Between the two sites the only month in 2005 needing an alternate date selection was CNN.com's selection for June. In this instance, the next closest date – and the page analyzed – was June 5.

CNN.com Shows Rise in Pseudo-Event Headlines

As 21st century evolved during its first decade from 2000 to 2008, the average number of hyperlinked headlines on CNN.com rose. Looking only at 2001 to 2007, as CNN.com's data collection for 2000 and 2008 are incomplete due to archive retrieval failures, the remaining years show a large difference from the first part of the decade to the second. Excluding the partial years 2000 and 2008, the average hyperlink count for CNN.com for the first part of the decade (2001-2004) was 88.25 per yearly sample. The hyperlink headline count for CNN.com in the documented second part of the decade (2005-2007) was 101 per yearly sample.

The use of pseudo-event/image-based hyperlinked headlines increased on CNN.com through the documented part of the decade. From 2000 to 2003, the percentage of pseudo-event hyperlinks remained considerably constant between 26% and 29%. The percentage of pseudo-event hyperlinks noticeably decreased in 2003 as the pseudo-event hyperlinks accounted for 20% of the total hyperlinks coded, respectively. Comparably the years 2004 and 2005 showed a small increase in pseudo-event hyperlinks, with both years averaging around 25%. Yet, the year 2004 was a notable increase from 2003, perhaps due to the American presidential election and the Athens summer Olympics. The year 2005 also produced many large events, including the selection of a new Pope, Hurricane Katrina, and the first American space shuttle launch since the Columbia incident in 2003. The analysis of the year 2006 indicated a large increase in pseudo-event hyperlinks as nearly 41% of the coded hyperlinks were determined to be pseudo-events. This rise continued in 2007 with a 45% pseudo-event average. Though 2008 was only partially analyzed, its review shows a continuing increase with 56% pseudo-event hyperlinks of the total.

While 2008 is not fully reviewed, the increase is notable at the monthly level, as the January 2008 content analysis returned 60% pseudo-event headlines and March 2008 returned 52%. The previous year's results averaged 44%, with the first three coded months of 2007 averaging around 37% and the second three months averaging around 52%. It's a noticeable increase in pseudo-event hyperlinked headlines when compared to the first 8 analyzed months from 2000 to 2001, which averaged at 28%.

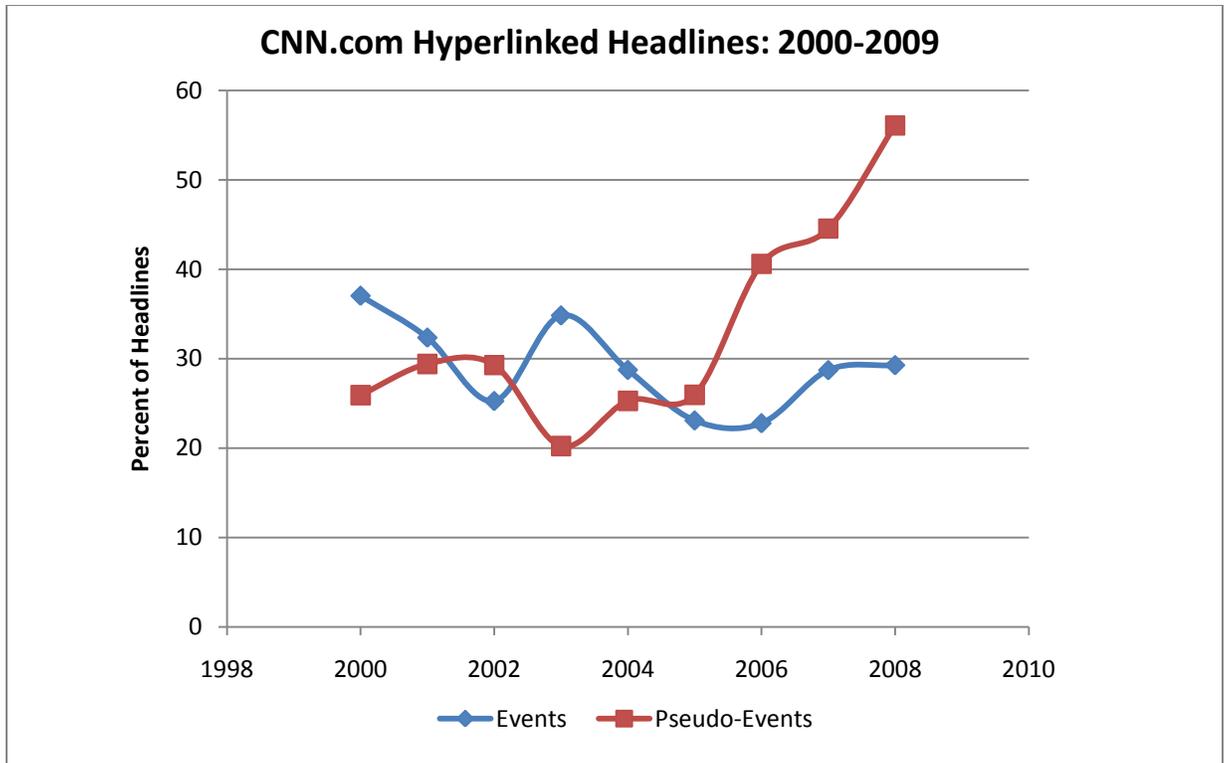


Figure 2. Content analysis results for CNN.com confirm a rise in pseudo-event headlines in the first decade of the 2000s. There were no statistically significant differences between years at the .05 level of statistical confidence for events on CNN.com. There were statistically significant differences between years at the .05 level of statistical confidence for pseudo-events on CNN.com (See Appendix D).

NYTimes.com Increases in Pseudo-Events While Decreasing Total Headlines

When viewed graphically, NYTimes.com shows an increase in pseudo-event/image-based front page category headlines from the year 2000 through the end of the year 2008. The percentage of pseudo-event headlines in 2000 was 25%. This percentage remained relatively the same in 2001 and 2002, sitting at around 21% both years. In 2003, the percentage of pseudo-event NYTimes.com front page categorized headlines rose to 31%. It was followed by a sharp drop in 2004 with around 13% of headlines coded as pseudo-events. This number has increased since 2004, reaching 30%

in 2006, 35% in 2007 and 34% in 2008. The years 2000 and 2008 were fully analyzed years for NYTimes.com.

The total number of NYTimes.com front page categorized headlines seems to decrease from 2000-2008. The total number of headlines from the sixth months queried in each year has declined since 2000. There were 36 total analyzed, front-page categorized NYTimes.com headlines in 2000. This number fell to 29 in 2008. The number has not remained above 35 since 2003, when it was at 36. This may be due to a shrinking paper size.

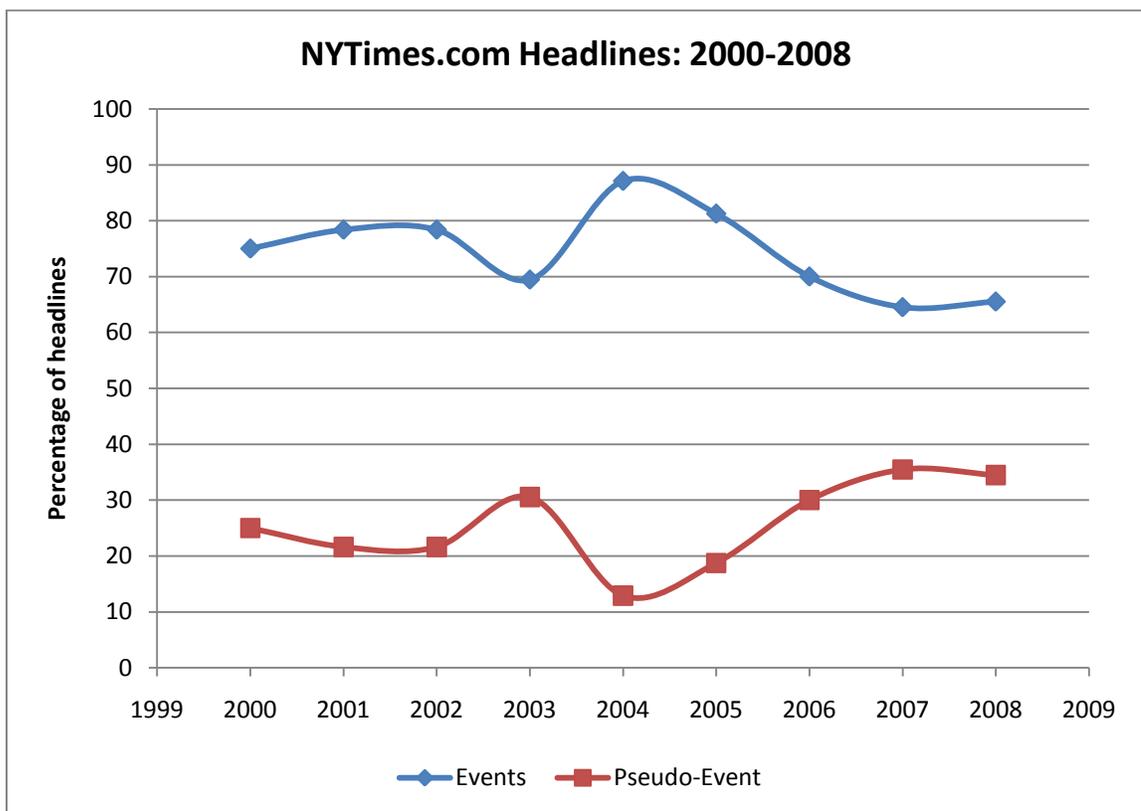


Figure 3. Content analysis results for NYTimes.com appear to show a rise in pseudo-event headlines during the first decade of the 2000s. There were some statistically significant differences between years at the .05 level of statistical confidence for events for NYTimes.com, though post-hoc tests were unable to show differences between individual groups. There were no statistically significant differences between years at the .05 level of statistical confidence for pseudo-events for NYTimes.com (See Appendix D).

Examining Similarities within Results from CNN.com and NYTimes.com

From the year 2000 through 2008, both CNN.com and NYTimes.com appear to show an increase in pseudo-event/image-based hyperlinked headlines. Across the time span, the increase for CNN.com is greater than that of NYTimes.com. Similarly, both sites showed a notable drop in pseudo-event headline usage at some point in the time span covered, although the exact year of the decrease differed from CNN.com to NYTimes.com.

For both CNN.com and NYTimes.com, deviances from the sites' general trends were noticed during the years 2003 and 2004. These deviances were inverse of the other site's changes. For instance, CNN.com's use of pseudo-event headlines dropped to around 20% in the year 2003, down from about 30% in the year 2002. In contrast, NYTimes.com's use of pseudo-events seems to rise to about 30% in the year 2003, up from 22% in the year 2002. During the year 2004, NYTimes.com pseudo-event headlines appear to drastically fall to 13%. CNN.com's use of pseudo-event hyperlinked headlines increased more subtly to 25%. Possible explanations for these changes include the start of the Iraq War in 2003, and the race leading up to the 2004 presidential election.

The shift to pseudo-event-focused content can be explained by the rise in news dissemination competition during the first decade of this century. Even in the year 2009, the Internet is challenging traditional news outlets in the way mass broadcast media challenged newspapers to evolve during the last half of the 1900s. Consumers have more options and methods to receive their information than ever before, giving today's media disseminators the daunting task of gaining and maintaining the finicky consumers'

attention in a media-saturated environment. With the Internet now serving as a leading source of information, it is logical that it would also become the most competitive environment for attracting consumer attention. In an age of hyper-local news focus, news organizations are forced to produce content that is at times seemingly more “relevant” to the consumer than important. In regard to this perceived relevancy, human interest writing and other image-focused “news” pieces are a mainstay of American journalism, and have been since the days of the Penny Press. To this end, the shift exemplified in this research may not be considered a trend so much as a return loop in a cyclical definition of how we define *news*. This concept provides the base for discussion in chapter five.

The shift from issues/events to pseudo-events might be explained in a host of ways in terms of societal shifts and adjustments. Within the immediate world of information technology, two major transformations are outstanding.

First, people have shifted in their orientations about what is "real" from a world of print to a visual world dominated by film and television. Instead of the abstractions offered by print (Ong, 1982), film and television offers immediate explanations in terms of specific events and people are cast and portrayed in unique environments in vivid color (Harrington, 1973). Pseudo-events are more consistent with the cognitive and emotional training and predisposition of the television era (Messaris & Humphreys, 2006).

Second, people have shifted from a predominantly logical orientation in which traditional problem-solving was argued to control human cognition to a more vividly emotional world. In *Affective Computing*, Picard (2000) has identified such a shift, and his analysis is underscored by Fishwick's (2006) argument for the existence of

"aesthetic computing." More generally, Chesebro and Holmes (2010, p. 363) argue that "emotions function as a significant, if not dominant, feature of digital communication systems." Beyond the nature of digital communication systems themselves, Chesebro and Holmes (2010, pp. 364-366) have also argued that the interactivity and convergent nature of these technologies blend, rather than reinforce, logical categories.

In all, the shift from issues/events to pseudo-events provides an opening for a host of societal analyses that could appropriately be the subject of future analyses. These transformations are potentially explainable shifts that have paralleled the shift from issues/events to pseudo-events. In all likelihood, it should also be noted that these shifts might gain power and additional social support if virtual realities such as the Internet community known as Second Life and avatars continue to grow in popularity (Castronova, 2005; Rheingold, 1991; and, Ryan, 2006).

Conclusion

These results appear to confirm a trend in the use of pseudo-event/image-based (hyperlinked) headlines on both CNN.com and NYTimes.com from the year 2000 through the year 2008. The amount of hyperlinked headlines also changed on both sites in that time span. For CNN.com, the average number of hyperlinked headlines increased from the first part of the decade (2001 to 2004) to the second part (2005-2007). The opposite was true for the *New York Times*' use of headlines, as the average number of headlines on NYTimes.com with "Front Page" categorization decreased from 2000 through 2008.

While the same general content analysis operational definitions were used, the sites are truly to be compared independently of one another. For the analysis of CNN.com

reviewed hyperlinked headlines, whereas the NYTimes.com study also reviewed hyperlinked headlines, but headlines that were more likely to be used in the print edition than a shorter, catchier online edition. Also to note is that the analysis focused on the headline or hyperlink text – the *teaser* to lure the audience. This is not to say the focus of *reporting* has shifted, although it is not to argue that it has not. The confirmation of this trend provides for larger implications as to journalism and news dissemination in the 21st century as a whole. These implications are the subject of chapter five. Limitations of this study are also reviewed in the upcoming chapter.

Chapter V:
Discussion, Limitations, and
Recommendations for Future Study

The major idea developed in this thesis is that a crisis in the news industry exists and that the Internet is a variable in this crisis. As a result of this crisis, news organizations are using more pseudo-event headlines stories, perhaps reflective – for some - of a return to the 1830s-era attention-getting tactics of the Penny Press. The use of these headlines inherently creates a rise in human-interest pieces, entertainment fluff and celebrity gossip. As a result of this focus on consumer-awareness, news organizations are forced to make their content seem more relevant to their audiences. This creates pressure to produce more human interest stories, in turn engaging a more narrative and personal method of storytelling. With a stronger interest in more personal *news* stories, the *detached observer* reporting theory is left in a state of irrelevancy. Together these factors indicate a cyclical pattern in the definition of *news* itself, and the a return to the importance of consumer awareness similar to the colonial days of the Penny Press.

This chapter provides a discussion of the changing, or arguably cyclical, nature of defining *news*, as evidenced by the content analysis of hyperlinked headlines on CNN.com and NYTimes.com from the year 2000 through the year 2008. Suggestions as a result of this research are provided, including a discussion of the traditional journalism paradox and the theory of detached observer reporting, are reviewed in this chapter. An examination of human construction as reasoning for the shift to pseudo-events is also included. Following the discussion, a review of limitations for this content analysis is

provided. A review of the research as it relates to future studies and potential research questions close out the chapter.

An Historical Analogy: Examining the Penny Press as a Model for the Modern Definition of News

While popularizing newspapers during the period 1833-60, the Penny Press may also be the curse that forever changed the very concept of the *news* those papers printed. In regard to this thesis, it may also be an era of time and journalism that modern-day news outlets are mimicking. Though other mercantile dailies continued to thrive in the mid-19th century, the Penny Press became the catalyst for the changing ways of journalism, as Mott (1962, p. 215) explains:

Related to this great event in the history of journalism was the introduction of new facets of the news concept; and these developments when aided by the news speed in communication furnished by a rapidly advancing mechanical age, produced nothing less than a revolution in news.

While Boston and Philadelphia printers gave their efforts to producing penny dailies, Benjamin H. Day would be the first to fully succeed in America, and in the New York market no less. Day would first publish the *Sun* on September 3, 1833 (Mott, 1962, p. 222). It was a turning point in what Americans would henceforth define as *news*. Mott (1962, p. 222) details New York's newfound obsession:

The paper was neat, the type small, the news consistently stated. The fresh, even flippant, style of the *Sun*'s news items, and its emphasis on local, human-interest, and often sensational events caught the town's fancy; and that news treatment and

the one-cent price brought a circulation of 2,000 in two months and 5,000 in four months.

These qualities: local, sensational and human-interest-focused, are tenants of all that's popular in 2009. This signifies another shift in the American view of news. In examining 2000s-era blogs, news sites and traditional media, there is a clear return to the Penny Press-style of *news* reporting. One notable feature of the *Sun* remains popular even today: crime reports. Bennett (1962, p. 224) outlines the first use of "police-court blotter," or the two-line crime and arrest reports with no context of often embarrassing situations: "For the first time in American journalism, domestic tragicomedy was featured in the newspapers: it was 'as good as a play,' and readers were vastly amused." The roots of the report can be traced to the *London Morning Herald*, but it was the New York *Sun* and Chief Writer George W. Wisner who popularized it as a staple of American *news*. As the reports rose in popularity, so too did the *Sun*'s circulation. Yet another change in the *news* concept was brought forth: focusing on what's popular, not what's important. Mott (1962, p. 224) outlines the *Sun*'s format in the 1830s:

The *Sun* had an abundance of short, breezy items, with some theatrical notices, paragraphs about monstrosities and prodigies, and an emphasis on crime news.

Oh politics, there was little ... In short, the *Sun* broke sharply with the traditional American news concept, and began to print whatever was interesting and readable regardless of its wide significant or recognized importance.

While the *Sun* would eventually find itself in the midst of deceit because of Richard Adams Locke's fabricated moon series hoax, the public was largely more accepting of the paper than its fellow publications were. Fortunately for the *Sun*, it was the public who

bought the paper. The following year, the paper enlarged to twice its size, advertising took up to three-fourths its page space, and circulation grew to 30,000. Countless other Penny Presses would open and close during the 1830s. Mott (1962, p. 242) summarizes the penny's creed:

- (1) The great common people should have a realistic view of this contemporary scene, and this in spite of taboos; (2) abuses in churches, courts, banks, stockmarkets, etc., should be exposed; (3) the newspaper's first duty is to give its readers the news, and not to support a party or a mercantile class; and (4) local and human-interest news is important.

Abuses of the penny press were plentiful, centering mostly around bad taste, indecency, a heavy focus on crime and sex, and disreputable advertising. Regardless, the revolution has occurred. Mott (1962, p. 243) notes the transition from the delivery of "important" news to "respectable" people to the redefined vision of *news* to people "no longer quite 'respectable.'" He continues, "Since the newspaper man's definition of news is conditioned by what his public looks for, the great change in that public occasioned by the advent of cheap dailies inevitably caused a shift in the news concept." Within that shift from "important" news, there were key elements of change, Mott writes:

- (1) an increase of local or home-city news; (2) a much greater emphasis on sensational news, especially that of crime or sex; (3) the appearance of what was later called "human-interest" news – stories of persons who are interesting merely as human beings, and not for their connection with either significant or sensational news.

Day would spontaneously close the *Sun* in 1837 amid a heavy mind of issues (Mott, 1962, p. 226). The concept of *news*, however, was forever changed in America.

In continuing that modern-day news outlets are returning to the sensational, human-interest-focused, hyper-local days of the Penny Press, an important conclusion involving technology must be noted. In both the time leading up to the pennies, and the time leading up to the explosion of online news sites as we see today, a technological innovation has backed both. The Penny Press, and its affect on the concept of *news*, is tied to the Industrial Revolution in England and America. The machine, conceived by man, was both a sin and a blessing to him. For the machine replaced manpower, leaving many in the era without jobs. Their subsequent protests of the working class enabled the group a voice they had not yet known. Concurrently, a new wave of press technology would enable faster and more widespread dissemination of ideas (Mott, 1962, p. 215).

Growth and adoption of new technologies such as printing presses and wire services gave way to nationally distributed papers by the 1900s. At this point, 93 percent of all U.S. households subscribed to newspapers (Potter, 2008). Potter (2008, p. 375) continues: “Newspaper began to decline as the most important mass medium in the 1930s and 1940s as radio, then television, took away newspapers’ functions of providing information and entertainment.” So began the fight for newspapers to maintain their relevancy in audience’s lives.

Now, as the first decade of this new century comes to close, radio and television outlets are fighting to defend their relevancy to audiences as newspapers continue to struggle and even fall. These traditional media outlets now have a common battleground on the Internet, but they are not alone. The barrier to entry for publishing is weakened if

not absent on the Internet, presenting a rise of third-party “journalists” and bloggers in the late 1990s and throughout the first decade of the 2000s. Such bloggers create even more competition for traditional outlets with online entities, now leaving publishers the tasks of making not only their traditional outlet relevant, but their Internet outreach as well.

The ability to track Web metrics provides a conundrum for news site operators. Never before has a mode of mass media dissemination provided such instantaneous feedback and behavioral understanding as the Internet. The Internet news model is still largely advertising supported, a fact that places extreme importance on a consistent flow of site traffic to an online news sites. Publishers can choose to focus on a well-balanced assortment of *news*, with world, national and market-specific events and, in turn, watch their Web traffic decline. A decline in Web traffic means a loss of advertisers to competitors. A publisher, then, can place more popular feature-based, pseudo-event headlines and stories on the main page of a site, in turn pulling more Web traffic and more advertising dollars. As a result of this business model, *traditional journalism* is suffering.

There are major limits to the Penny Press and Internet analogy as it applies to pseudo-events. Some parallels cannot, in fact, be established with abundant confidence and certainty given what is drawn from this study. There are major differences between the cultures of the 1830s and this first decade of the new millennium, with specific regard to literacy, general technological advances and cultural transformations. As such, this thesis may serve as a guide to forecast the future of the definition of *news*. If one is to follow this guide, at some point in the next 20 to 30 years the definition of *news* will

begin to revert to a period of issue/event-focused journalism, away from the sensationalism some critics argue exists today. Yet the era of Google and semantic searches, what may soon become known as *Web 3.0*, may further alter the definition of *news* by allowing more people to carefully select what they do and do not want to consume in regard to current events. Moreover, this will allow consumers to selectively use and employ such information in their cognitive set. Such a transformation may disrupt the pattern of change proposed here.

The Paradox of Objective Journalistic Reporting

While acknowledging the shift from issue to image using research, and even anecdotal evidence, is easy, getting to the crux of the problem is more difficult. Are news organizations sacrificing traditional journalism and well-balanced news diets in an effort to get more traffic and more advertising money? Or, are today's news consumers driving outlets to produce more pseudo-event coverage and human-interest pieces? While both may be too intertwined to accurately determine who or what is the root of the issue, the consumption habits of the general public are difficult to alter en masse. Tewksbury (2003, p. 705) concluded "that online news readers do not select public affairs content as often as they select other news content." Tewksbury (2003, p. 703) found a comparable number of views for sports content as national, world, politics, opinion and editorial, and state and local news combined. In a discussion of market-driven journalism, Cohen (2002, p. 533) states the Internet makes more apparent the "tensions between traditional news values of print and broadcast journalism and market values." meaning that the Internet demands more audience awareness and attentiveness. With the instant metrics and high competition involved in Internet publishing, the once ethically insulated values

involved in determining what *news* is, or rather what is displayed or marketed as *news* on the front page of a site, suddenly become subject to minor marketing practices.

In regard to the human-interest aspect of feature and image-related news, it is suggested here that journalists and their news organizations are broadening reporting scopes from the arguably oxymoronic theory of *detached observer* news reporting. To best understand the nature of the reporting style, an understanding of its creation is in order. Carey (2002, pp. 79-80) puts the theory's roots – to bypass political parties and persuasion - in perspective:

Objectivity was a defensive measure, an attempt to secure, by quasi-scientific means, a method for recording the world independent of the political and social forces that were shaping it. In this rendition, a democratic press was the representative of the people, of people no longer represented by political parties and the state itself. It was the eyes and ears of a public that could not see and hear from themselves or indeed speak for themselves. It went where the public could not go, acquired information that the public could not amass on its own, tore away the veil of appearances that masked the play of power and privilege, set on a brightly lit stage that would otherwise be contained off stage, in the wings, of the First Amendment and exercised it in the name of a public that could no longer exercise it itself. The press became an independent profession and a collective institution: a true Fourth Estate that watched over the other lords of the realm in the name of those unequipped or unable to watch over it for themselves.

The ethical qualm between observing a story and becoming part of it would later intensify in the 20th century, as Mott (1962, p. 835) explains:

Debate on the question of “interpretive” or “objective” reporting was common among newspapermen throughout the 1950’s ... The consensus of thoughtful journalists was that the modern scene require much more from the reporter than bald facts. Reports from the fields of science, economics, and world politics especially called for explanation and careful elucidation in terms easily understood by the ordinary reader. Perhaps “objective” – a word borrowed from psychology but long used by editors and reporters – was an unfortunate term, indicating as it did an impossibly complete impersonality on the part of source, reporter and editor. “Interpretive,” on the other hand, might suggest too much freedom of comment, editorializing, “slanting” of the news. E.B. White (1956, p. 72), in a happy phrase, observed that “all writing slants the way a writer leans, an no man is born perpendicular, though many are born upright.”

In one respect, in the journalist’s effort to become completely objective he managed to bore his audience. In considering the journalistic *news* history presented in earlier chapters, there is a shift back to the times of “gossip”-laden newsletters with targeted political audiences and beliefs. Carey (2002, p. 81) elaborates on the evolution of reporting prior to the events of Sept. 11, 2001: “The shortcomings of modern journalism were many. As the old slogan has it, the watchdog may have as often been a lapdog. ... Despite those successes, modern journalism started to unravel in excess and to attractive public hostility in the last third of the twentieth century.” With public skepticism rising, no longer was strict objective reporting a money-making or audience-maintaining strategy. This means *news* and journalism again evolved.

Using Mott's reference, there must be some middle territory between the far ends of *objective* reporting and *interpretive* reporting. These styles, specifically *objective* reporting, demand the telling of a narrative from a third-person point of view. *Interpretive*, then, relays the *objective* fact but layers it with first-person analysis. In examining the gray area between *objective* and *interpretive* there becomes a hybrid blend of fact and first-person viewpoint, with emotion stemming beyond the sole analysis of the narrative. This area may be best classified as *participant-observer* reporting, where the reports come from a reporter who, by observing, is inherently participating as well. This provides all the fact of a "objective" news report but with the sometimes subtle, other times pronounced tie of human emotion via the first-person perspective. *News* appears to be headed in this direction, where journalists are expected to deliver fact and analysis while being immersed in the story. The journalist's very presence within the situation may, however minuscule, alter the situations itself. This decade's Iraq War serves as a prime example of participant-observer reporting, as *embedded journalists* were sent along with military battalions to observe and report on the conditions and situations of warfare. The journalist's presence becomes a part of the narrative, even if it's left untold. They are subject to unexpected crossfire, roadside bombs and weather conditions along with the troops. In some cases, troops may go out of their way to defend a journalist from harm – altering the storyline from the viewpoint of what otherwise would be a third-party observer. Ultimately, the reporters have put themselves in harm's way to present a story to an audience, and as such they are observing by participating. Other examples include coverage of Hurricane Katrina and the citizen journalism push during Sept. 11, 2001.

Limitations exist with the concept of *participant-observer* reporting and the downfall of “objective” reporting. Considering the human cognitive process involved in reporting and disseminating news, true unobstructed and unbiased “objective” reporting is – to some - inherently impossible. For some it is an ideal – an epitome of journalistic ethic and quality for all reporters, publishers and editors to strive to meet. That said, the very deviation from “objective” reporting is unfeasible provided its initial lack of existence. Its use is most simply representative of a strive for perfection, not perfection itself. In regard to the shift toward *participant-observer* reporting, it’s too soon to tell if the move toward emotional, first-person factual storytelling is the only path *news* and journalism will take. Indeed, the century is young and the events spotlighting *participant-observer* reporting are so far largely limited to major or catastrophic events. Whether this method of reporting trickles down to local news outlets, or remains a national and international media concept for coverage, remains to be seen.

Human Construction as a Cause in the Rise of Pseudo-Events

What *participant-observer reporting* and the concept of the gossip-laden Penny Press definition of *news* both reflect the rise in use of reliance on human emotion. Maslow’s (1987) Motivation Theory established a pyramid of needs that can be used to determine, in some ways, what a consumer views or defines as *relevant news*. Maslow states that one will not climb the pyramid of needs until the lowest levels are fulfilled, an understandable claim as the lower levels of the pyramid deal with personal health and safety, on top of which sit social, esteem and ultimately self-actualization needs. Taken more in-depth, the first level of fulfillment in Maslow’s pyramid includes psychological needs, such as air, water, food and essentials critical to life functions. The next pyramid

includes safety needs, such as housing or financial protection/reserves. The third level includes social needs, such as friendship and love. Maslow's pyramid's fourth level includes esteem needs, such as recognition, self-respect and attention. Once these four levels are fulfilled, Maslow argues a rare fifth level of self-actualization is reached, in which wisdom, truth, justice and meaning are motivators.

In regard to news, once a person is healthy and shielded from the outside elements, his definition of news transforms from wanting to know tomorrow's weather to other factors that could harm him, such as a loss of health insurance or job. When the basic life needs of health, safety and self-sufficiency are met, one then begins to fulfill social needs of knowledge, such as what's happening to people around them – specifically friends, family and neighbors. This becomes a level of proximity, which is appropriately a *news characteristic* in journalism jargon. Indeed, an audience is not bothered by a *news* story if it does not in some way affect them, and for a story to affect an audience, the audiences' emotion must be altered or triggered to some degree. A gauge or definition of effect at the lowest levels of Maslow's needs pyramid - those dealing with one's basic life needs - can differ from the definition of effect once those basic needs are met. A tornado harmlessly touching down in a rural field is not news to a community unless damage is done to a house (shelter, as defined by Maslow's second level) or crops (food in Maslow's first level, income and job security in the second level). In this way, *news* is truly a matter of human construction. In regard to the definition of news, there are no scientific guidelines for what dictionaries say constitutes "previously unknown information" or "something of specified influence or effect" (news, 2009). The guidelines for *news values* and *news characteristics* are created by humans who have

taken upon themselves the right and power to inform the masses. *News* is subjective by nature, even before the reporting and writing begins. The mere selection and cognitive process involved in deciding what is topical provides for a reliance on human construction as a variable in the rise of pseudo-events.

Bias is a natural side effect of humans producing news. As indicated previously, bias defies all journalistic principles and ethic standards, yet the continually conscious effort for journalists to avoid bias shows that bias in fact continues to exist. In regard to this thesis and the rise of pseudo-events, the bias referenced here is subtle and often subconscious. A human cannot detach himself from his emotion, he can only attempt to mask and disregard it. This emotion plays a heavy role in the selection of news stories and ultimately their dissemination. This override via emotion is bias in a simple sense, as the decision to select and organize fact and quotes, if choosing to report in the first place, is a challenge of one's own belief system being held to a set of principles and standards.

The shift of what society classifies as identity is also suspect in cause of a rise in pseudo-event/image-based headlines and stories. Liu (2007) holds that the materials of social identity have changed from a focus on profession, social class, and church membership to an era where consumptive choices such as books, music, movies and other cultural materials now also contribute to identity. As an indication of this larger inclusion of identity formation, Liu's analysis of Social Network Profiles (SNP) on MySpace suggests that users complete the details of the profile with regard to taste statements that may or may not fully represent what they believe or like. Liu cites these profiles as *taste performances*, stating that certain socioeconomic and aesthetic factors influence these *theatrical personas*. This use of consumption as personal *image* can

partly explain the rise in *image-focused* headlines and stories. What we consume now helps define who we are. This gives reasoning to the lack of statistical rise in pseudo-events within the elite press of the *New York Times* and its NYTimes.com. Those reading the *Times* may desire to be informed via an American journalism staple, but they also know that reading the staple increases their *prestige*, *differentiation* and *authenticity* – three taste statements defined by Liu - *when* compared to their peers. The *Times*' common man counterpart, CNN and CNN.com, meanwhile, statistically increased its pseudo-event headline display, perhaps an indication of the common man's (and woman's) desire to know the *image-focused* details of their world, as they are now preoccupied with the *image-focused* details of their own lives compared to years prior.

There are limitations to the human construction cause of a rise in pseudo-events. One can argue that if consumption defines one's own identity, a person would be more inclined to read more issue-centric news, regardless of the source. The concept here is that a more well-read individual is a better educated individual. This theory is also limited, too, as reading does not necessarily promise retention or comprehension.

A Discussion of Limitations within this Research

This study is limited by multiple factors, some which were apparent at the outset of the study, and others that unfortunately were not. The study originally relied solely on the Internet Archive, a third-party non-profit organization, to provide data for both CNN.com and NYTimes.com. Naturally a third-party collecting the data can result in variations in what is received from what is desired. In this case, alterations to the original research plans were made as a result of database errors encountered at the Internet Archive during research. Research on NYTimes.com was limited to paid archives

because of corrupt and missing Internet Archive database entries from the year 2004 to the year 2008. There are a few conclusions as to the cause of this database corruption, including the NYTimes.com site's period as a pay-for-access provider. Copyright issues also appear connected, as a file placed on the NYTimes.com server instructed the Archive.org crawler or bot to not index NYTimes.com pages, thus incorrectly listing them in the archive.org database as active, or omitting them altogether. Secondly, the random nature of the archive.org spider limited data samples to time intervals at the server's choosing. As a result of this decisively incomplete data, the NYTimes.com paid archive was used as the database source for the site. To match the theoretical news judgment editors use when placing content on the front page of a site or newspaper, it was determined that the NYTimes.com *Front Page* category would be used as the specific replacement source of data.

The Internet Archive data for CNN.com was also incomplete for the years 2000 and 2008. The missing data in 2000 is inexplicable to the author, while the absent 2008 data is mostly understood. The Internet Archive posts data upwards of six months after capture, which could explain the final two months of 2008 being inaccessible. However, earlier months – those greater than six months from the date research was conducted – were also missing in 2008. As a result of both NYTimes.com and CNN.com Internet Archive database errors, pages from two different sites could not be compared using the exact same time and date.

While an attempt was made to define *news* through a discussion of image-focused pseudo-events and issue-focused events, the definition and coding of headlines were still completed by one researcher, the author. As this coding requires some level of critical

thinking, it is thus subjective. Involving multiple researchers on the project, and incorporating a third-party lead coding analyst could provide much benefit to the study.

Examining Concepts for Future Studies

This thesis examines the Internet news site using content analysis methods once quite popular with traditional media, such as newspapers. Researchers remain focused on the behavioral aspects of those viewing these Internet pages, and few research pieces seem focused on the behavior of those publishing the material. This is rooted in the obsession and novelty of such advanced and unprecedented consumer tracking technology that is inherent with Web browsing. Yet political bias, cognitive effort and dissemination methods remain largely unexplored in the *news* realm of research.

Though Internet news sites maintain archives of their articles, few, if any, maintain a collection of their front page displays and their evolution over time. Libraries maintain microfilm and now digital records of newspaper editions, yet no record exists like this for Web sites. The Internet Archive appears to be the only third-party organization maintaining a record of Web site front page displays, and as exemplified in this research that collection is far from perfect or complete. In addition to establishing this record of Web site display, further research can be done on the presentation and use of design elements within an online news site home page. As an example, this study examined a collection of hyperlinked headlines within a large section of a Web site, thus disregarding the visual order of hierarchy the headlines may have had. Anecdotally, the author noticed a large number of pseudo-event headlines toward to the bottom of CNN.com's "Latest News" column, as opposed to the top. This trend began when CNN.com switched to its modern design in 2003, featuring a main package story on the

left side of the page and a list of headlines on the right side of the page. What began in 2003 and 2004 as one or two pseudo-event headlines at the bottom of the headline list has grown to a spread of image-focused headlines within that list in more recent years.

Finally, the statistical difference between NYTimes.com and CNN.com is a potential indication of a growing gap between the political and economic elites and the everyday man. Higher educated people are more likely to believe that the information coming from the Internet is true (Rainie, 2005). This perhaps means that the less educated a person is, the less trustworthy he finds the Internet and the more entertainment value he sees in it. Given this reliance on entertainment, it can explain, in part, the increase of *image-based/pseudo-event* headlines on the “common man” site/news source CNN.com.

Conclusion

The launch of cable news networks in the late 20th century and the rise in online news site popularity during the start of the 21st century secured a place in society for the 24-hour news cycle. The novelty of these enterprises has faded, and the qualm with their operation is abundantly clear: There are infinite outlets to publish finite amounts of *new* information. Boorstin (1961, p. 9) notes this problem as it relates to newspapers, well before the advent of either the Internet or cable news hours:

This change in our attitude toward “news” is not merely a basic fact about the history of American newspapers. It is a symptom of a revolutionary change in our attitude toward what happens in the world, how much of it is new, and surprising, and important. ... Demanding more than the world can give us, we require that something be fabricated to make up for the world’s deficiency. This is only one example for our demand for illusions.

Boorstin (1961, p. 7) also cites the pseudo-event as a desensitizing factor in news consumer behavior and his perception of news media: “There was a time when the reader of an unexciting newspaper would remark, ‘How dull is the world today!’ Nowadays he says, ‘What a dull newspaper!’”

The *crisis* in American journalism is not a terminal fault. *News* is evolving with technology, or rather society’s reliance on technology. The apparent shift to *pseudo-event* and *image-based* headlines on CNN.com and NYTimes.com exemplifies the changing nature of society’s definition of *news*. There are many factors potentially responsible for this shift, including the growing influence of human construction and the failing business model of traditional journalism and a growing reliance on participant-observer reporting. Indeed, the bottom line here is that news organizations are more reliant and dependent on their audience than ever before, making news organization as beholden to their consumers as they were at one point their advertisers. As our consumption habits continue to shape our identity more than ever before, news organizations face a growing challenge with the goal not only to inform and, secondarily, entertain consumers, but also to appeal to the taste statements that form an individual’s social existence. At the very least, if *news* itself has not become *image-focused*, the process of disseminating it has.

Appendix A: Reliability Survey Results

As a measure of reliability, three graduate students enrolled in master's programs at a 19,000-enrollment Midwest university in the United States were refreshed on the definitions of image and issue, as they relates to issue-based events and image-based pseudo-events. The three students were then given 10 headlines selected and previously coded by the author, and asked to classify the headlines as either issue-based events or image-based pseudo-events. An equal number of headlines were used from both database sources: five headlines from NYTimes.com and five from CNN.com. Among the ten total headlines used, five were headlines classified by the author as issue-based events and five were classified as image-based pseudo-events. The following table shows reliability around 83%.

Correctly Marked	Incorrectly Marked	Percentage
10	0	100
7	3	70
8	2	80
		83.33

Figure 4. Reliability percentages for three trained graduate students analyzing headline examples from CNN.com and NYTimes.com.

Additionally, the three graduate students were trained to recognize the modular main news headline areas of CNN.com front pages, recognizing non-classifiable areas such as video teasers, television promotion headlines and entertainment or special section modules. These modular areas represent the sections of the CNN.com front pages from which headlines were pulled for this study. The three students were each given three CNN.com front page printouts to examine. The students were then asked to identify the

main modular areas from which headlines would be pulled. The pages were examples from actual pages coded for this study. Each page was previously classified by the author as having two modular areas for main news content headlines. The following table shows reliability of 100%.

Correctly Marked	Incorrectly Marked	Percentage
2	0	100
2	0	100
2	0	100
		100.00

Figure 5. Reliability percentages for three trained graduate students analyzing modular content areas with relevant headlines on CNN.com.

Appendix B: Table of Content Analysis Results for CNN.com

Year	Date	Actual							
2000		Actual date used	Events (n)	Events %	Pseudo (n)	Pseudo %	Other (n)	Other %	Total (n)
	1-Jan	n/a							
	1-Mar	n/a							
	1-Jun	n/a							
	1-Sep	27-Aug	5	71.42857	2	28.57143	0	0	7
	1-Dec	4-Dec	5	25	5	25	10	50	20
			10	37.03704	7	25.92593	10	37.03704	27
2001									
	1-Jan	n/a							0
	1-Mar	10-Apr	7	43.75	6	37.5	3	18.75	16
	1-Jun	ok	4	33.33333	3	25	5	41.66667	12
	1-Sep	23-Aug	3	21.42857	4	28.57143	7	50	14
	1-Dec	ok	8	30.76923	7	26.92308	11	42.30769	26
			22	32.35294	20	29.41176	26	38.23529	68
2002									
	1-Jan	8-Feb	6	31.57895	4	21.05263	9	47.36842	19
	1-Mar	27-Feb	3	14.28571	9	42.85714	9	42.85714	21
	1-Jun	2-Jun	7	33.33333	5	23.80952	9	42.85714	21
	1-Sep	ok	6	31.57895	5	26.31579	8	42.10526	19
	1-Dec	2-Dec	3	15.78947	6	31.57895	10	52.63158	19
			25	25.25253	29	29.29293	45	45.45455	99
2003									
	1-Jan	29-Jan	6	35.2941	2	11.76471	9	52.94118	17

				2					
	1-Mar	20-Mar	9	42.8571 4	4	19.04762	8	38.09524	21
	1-Jun	31-May	7	43.75	2	12.5	7	43.75	16
	1-Sep	12-Sep	4	21.0526 3	5	26.31579	10	52.63158	19
	1-Dec	ok	5	31.25	5	31.25	6	37.5	16
			31	34.8314 6	18	20.22472	40	44.94382	89
2004									
	1-Jan	2-Jan	5	33.3333 3	4	26.66667	6	40	15
	1-Mar	2-Mar	5	25	4	20	11	55	20
	1-Jun	2-Jun	6	33.3333 3	4	22.22222	8	44.44444	18
	1-Sep	ok	5	26.3157 9	4	21.05263	10	52.63158	19
	1-Dec	ok	4	26.6666 7	6	40	5	33.33333	15
			25	28.7356 3	22	25.28736	40	45.97701	87
2005									
	1-Jan	ok	3	14.2857 1	6	28.57143	12	57.14286	21
	1-Mar	ok	4	20	4	20	12	60	20
	1-Jun	2-Jun	5	25	5	25	10	50	20
	1-Sep	ok	10	38.4615 4	3	11.53846	13	50	26
	1-Dec	ok	2	11.7647 1	9	52.94118	6	35.29412	17
			24	23.0769 2	27	25.96154	53	50.96154	104
2006									
	1-Jan	ok	8	44.4444 4	5	27.77778	5	27.77778	18
	1-Mar	28-Feb	3	13.6363 6	12	54.54545	7	31.81818	22
	1-Jun	9-Jun	4	22.2222 2	4	22.22222	10	55.55556	18
	1-Sep	ok	3	12	11	44	11	44	25

	1-Dec	ok	5	27.7777 8	9	50	4	22.22222	18
			23	22.7722 8	41	40.59406	37	36.63366	101
2007									
	1-Jan	ok	6	26.0869 6	9	39.13043	8	34.78261	23
	1-Mar	ok	6	33.3333 3	7	38.88889	5	27.77778	18
	1-Jun	5-Jun	6	26.0869 6	8	34.78261	9	39.13043	23
	1-Sep	ok	5	27.7777 8	11	61.11111	2	11.11111	18
	1-Dec	ok	6	31.5789 5	10	52.63158	3	15.78947	19
			29	28.7128 7	45	44.55446	27	26.73267	101
2008									
	1-Jan	ok	6	30	12	60	2	10	20
	1-Mar	6-Mar	6	28.5714 3	11	52.38095	4	19.04762	21
	1-Jun	n/a							0
	1-Sep	n/a							0
	1-Dec	n/a							0
			12	29.2682 9	23	56.09756	6	14.63415	41

Appendix C: Table of Content Analysis Results for NYTimes.com

Year	Date	Actual	Events (n)	Events (%)	Pseudo (n)	Pseudo (%)	Total (n)
2000	1-Jan		5		0		5
	1-Mar		8		0		8
	1-Jun		5		3		8
	1-Sep		3		4		7
	1-Dec		6		2		8
			27	75	9	25	36
2001							
	1-Jan		5		1		6
	1-Mar		6		1		7
	1-Jun		7		1		8
	1-Sep		5		3		8
	1-Dec		6		2		8
			29	78.37838	8	21.62162	37
2002							
	1-Jan		6		1		7
	1-Mar		5		2		7
	1-Jun		6		1		7
	1-Sep	2-Sep	7		1		8
	1-Dec	2-Dec	5		3		8
			29	78.37838	8	21.62162	37
2003							
	1-Jan		4		2		6
	1-Mar		5		2		7
	1-Jun	2-Jun	7		1		8
	1-Sep		6		2		8
	1-Dec		3		4		7
			25	69.44444	11	30.55556	36
2004							
	1-Jan		6		0		6
	1-Mar		6		1		7
	1-Jun		5		1		6

	1-Sep		5		1		6
	1-Dec		5		1		6
			27	87.09677	4	12.90323	31
2005							
	1-Jan		7		1		8
	1-Mar		5		1		6
	1-Jun		5		1		6
	1-Sep		5		1		6
	1-Dec		4		2		6
			26	81.25	6	18.75	32
2006							
	1-Jan	2-Jan	5		1		6
	1-Mar		4		2		6
	1-Jun		4		2		6
	1-Sep		4		2		6
	1-Dec		4		2		6
			21	70	9	30	30
2007							
	1-Jan		4		2		6
	1-Mar		4		3		7
	1-Jun		5		1		6
	1-Sep		3		3		6
	1-Dec		4		2		6
			20	64.51613	11	35.48387	31
2008							
	1-Jan		4		2		6
	1-Mar		5		1		6
	1-Jun		4		2		6
	1-Sep		3		2		5
	1-Dec		3		3		6
			19	65.51724	10	34.48276	29

Appendix D: Statistical Significance of the Survey Results

The ANOVA results indicate some statistical significance for NYTimes.com event headlines from 2000 ($\mu=5.4$, $SD=1.82$) but post hoc turkey tests do not show any differences between individual groups, $F(8,36) = 2.62$, $p < .023$. When examining the turkey table, on average there were two additional event headlines in 2001 and 2002 than in 2008. This could be attributed to the *New York Times*' local coverage of the events of Sept. 11, 2001, but only one month of the five surveyed in 2001 is included in the 2001 average. The year 2001 was the first full year for Republican President George W. Bush, following the election in 2000 that displaced the Democrats from the executive branch. Coverage of this change of power, and also within Congress, is likely to have contributed to the increase in event headlines. The subsequent Iraq War and the events leading up to it are likely components of the more frequent display of issue/event headlines, especially in 2002.

NYTimes.com Events: Descriptives			
YEAR	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
2000	5	5.4	1.81659
2001	5	5.8	0.83666
2002	5	5.8	0.83666
2003	5	5	1.581139
2004	5	5.4	0.547723
2005	5	5.2	1.095445
2006	5	4.2	0.447214
2007	5	4	0.707107
2008	5	3.8	0.83666
Total	45	4.955556	1.205208

NYTimes.com Events: ANOVA					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.

Between Groups	23.51111	8	2.938889	2.618812	0.022729
Within Groups	40.4	36	1.122222		
Total	63.91111	44			

NYTimes.com Events: Multiple Comparisons						
Turkey HSD						
Year(I)	Year(J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
2000	2001	-0.4	0.669992	0.999519	-2.60902	1.809023
	2002	-0.4	0.669992	0.999519	-2.60902	1.809023
	2003	0.4	0.669992	0.999519	-1.80902	2.609023
	2004	0	0.669992	1	-2.20902	2.209023
	2005	0.2	0.669992	0.999998	-2.00902	2.409023
	2006	1.2	0.669992	0.68737	-1.00902	3.409023
	2007	1.4	0.669992	0.495643	-0.80902	3.609023
	2008	1.6	0.669992	0.320749	-0.60902	3.809023
2001	2000	0.4	0.669992	0.999519	-1.80902	2.609023
	2002	0	0.669992	1	-2.20902	2.209023
	2003	0.8	0.669992	0.952648	-1.40902	3.009023
	2004	0.4	0.669992	0.999519	-1.80902	2.609023
	2005	0.6	0.669992	0.991846	-1.60902	2.809023
	2006	1.6	0.669992	0.320749	-0.60902	3.809023
	2007	1.8	0.669992	0.188533	-0.40902	4.009023
	2008	2	0.669992	0.10209	-0.20902	4.209023
2002	2000	0.4	0.669992	0.999519	-1.80902	2.609023
	2001	0	0.669992	1	-2.20902	2.209023
	2003	0.8	0.669992	0.952648	-1.40902	3.009023
	2004	0.4	0.669992	0.999519	-1.80902	2.609023
	2005	0.6	0.669992	0.991846	-1.60902	2.809023
	2006	1.6	0.669992	0.320749	-0.60902	3.809023
	2007	1.8	0.669992	0.188533	-0.40902	4.009023
	2008	2	0.669992	0.10209	-0.20902	4.209023
2003	2000	-0.4	0.669992	0.999519	-2.60902	1.809023
	2001	-0.8	0.669992	0.952648	-3.00902	1.409023
	2002	-0.8	0.669992	0.952648	-3.00902	1.409023
	2004	-0.4	0.669992	0.999519	-2.60902	1.809023
	2005	-0.2	0.669992	0.999998	-2.40902	2.009023

2004	2006	0.8	0.669992	0.952648	-1.40902	3.009023
	2007	1	0.669992	0.851612	-1.20902	3.209023
	2008	1.2	0.669992	0.68737	-1.00902	3.409023
	2000	0	0.669992	1	-2.20902	2.209023
	2001	-0.4	0.669992	0.999519	-2.60902	1.809023
	2002	-0.4	0.669992	0.999519	-2.60902	1.809023
	2003	0.4	0.669992	0.999519	-1.80902	2.609023
	2005	0.2	0.669992	0.999998	-2.00902	2.409023
2005	2006	1.2	0.669992	0.68737	-1.00902	3.409023
	2007	1.4	0.669992	0.495643	-0.80902	3.609023
	2008	1.6	0.669992	0.320749	-0.60902	3.809023
	2000	-0.2	0.669992	0.999998	-2.40902	2.009023
	2001	-0.6	0.669992	0.991846	-2.80902	1.609023
	2002	-0.6	0.669992	0.991846	-2.80902	1.609023
	2003	0.2	0.669992	0.999998	-2.00902	2.409023
	2004	-0.2	0.669992	0.999998	-2.40902	2.009023
2006	2006	1	0.669992	0.851612	-1.20902	3.209023
	2007	1.2	0.669992	0.68737	-1.00902	3.409023
	2008	1.4	0.669992	0.495643	-0.80902	3.609023
	2000	-1.2	0.669992	0.68737	-3.40902	1.009023
	2001	-1.6	0.669992	0.320749	-3.80902	0.609023
	2002	-1.6	0.669992	0.320749	-3.80902	0.609023
	2003	-0.8	0.669992	0.952648	-3.00902	1.409023
	2004	-1.2	0.669992	0.68737	-3.40902	1.009023
2007	2005	-1	0.669992	0.851612	-3.20902	1.209023
	2007	0.2	0.669992	0.999998	-2.00902	2.409023
	2008	0.4	0.669992	0.999519	-1.80902	2.609023
	2000	-1.4	0.669992	0.495643	-3.60902	0.809023
	2001	-1.8	0.669992	0.188533	-4.00902	0.409023
	2002	-1.8	0.669992	0.188533	-4.00902	0.409023
	2003	-1	0.669992	0.851612	-3.20902	1.209023
	2004	-1.4	0.669992	0.495643	-3.60902	0.809023
2008	2005	-1.2	0.669992	0.68737	-3.40902	1.009023
	2006	-0.2	0.669992	0.999998	-2.40902	2.009023
	2008	0.2	0.669992	0.999998	-2.00902	2.409023
	2000	-1.6	0.669992	0.320749	-3.80902	0.609023
	2001	-2	0.669992	0.10209	-4.20902	0.209023
	2002	-2	0.669992	0.10209	-4.20902	0.209023
	2003	-1.2	0.669992	0.68737	-3.40902	1.009023
	2004	-1.6	0.669992	0.320749	-3.80902	0.609023
2005	-1.4	0.669992	0.495643	-3.60902	0.809023	

2006	-0.4	0.669992	0.999519	-2.60902	1.809023
2007	-0.2	0.669992	0.999998	-2.40902	2.009023

The ANOVA results indicate no statistical significance for NYTimes.com pseudo- event headlines from 2000 ($\mu_1=1.8$, $SD=1.79$), 2001 ($\mu_2=1.6$, $SD=.89$), as post hoc turkey tests do not show any differences between individual groups, $F(8,36)=1.22$, $p < .317$.

Year	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
2000	5	1.8	1.788854
2001	5	1.6	0.894427
2002	5	1.6	0.894427
2003	5	2.2	1.095445
2004	5	0.8	0.447214
2005	5	1.2	0.447214
2006	5	1.8	0.447214
2007	5	2.2	0.83666
2008	5	2	0.707107
Total	45	1.688889	0.949216

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	8.444444	8	1.055556	1.217949	0.316659
Within Groups	31.2	36	0.866667		
Total	39.64444	44			

The ANOVA results indicate no statistical significance for CNN.com event headlines from 2000 ($\mu_1=5$, $SD=0$), 2001 ($\mu_2=5.5$, $SD=2.38$), as post hoc scheffe tests do not show any differences between individual groups, $F(8,29)=0.39$, $p < .918$.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
2000	2	5	0

2001	4	5.5	2.38048
2002	5	5	1.870829
2003	5	6.2	1.923538
2004	5	5	0.707107
2005	5	4.8	3.114482
2006	5	4.6	2.073644
2007	5	5.8	0.447214
2008	2	6	0
Total	38	5.289474	1.769225

CNN.com Events: ANOVA					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	11.21579	8	1.401974	0.388693	0.917783
Within Groups	104.6	29	3.606897		
Total	115.8158	37			

The ANOVA results indicate strong statistical significance for CNN.com pseudo-event headlines from 2000 ($\mu_1=3.5$, $SD=2.12$), 2001 ($\mu_2=5$, $SD=1.83$), as post hoc bonferroni tests show differences between individual groups, $F(8,29) = 5.53$, $p < .000$. There is statistically significant difference between 2000 and 2008, $p = .021$. There is statistically significant difference between 2000 and 2008, $p = .021$.

Given more competition for consumers on the Internet, this confirms CNN.com's increased use of pseudo-event headlines on its main page during the first part of this millennium. As the developing crisis in news continues, CNN.com is resorting to more human-interest-related content to pull consumers to its site continuously.

CNN Pseudo-events: Descriptives			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
2000	2	3.5	2.12132
2001	4	5	1.82574
2002	5	5.8	1.923538
2003	5	3.6	1.516575

2004	5	4.4	0.894427
2005	5	5.4	2.302173
2006	5	8.2	3.563706
2007	5	9	1.581139
2008	2	11.5	0.707107
Total	38	6.105263	2.911204

CNN Pseudo-events: ANOVA					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	189.3789	8	23.67237	5.527365	0.000275
Within Groups	124.2	29	4.282759		
Total	313.5789	37			

CNN Pseudo-events: Multiple Comparisons								
Dependent Variable: CNN.com Pseudo-events								
	(I) year	(J) year	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval		
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
Bonferroni	2000	2001	-1.5	1.792225	1	-7.83619	4.836194	
		2002	-2.3	1.731453	1	-8.42134	3.821345	
		2003	-0.1	1.731453	1	-6.22134	6.021345	
		2004	-0.9	1.731453	1	-7.02134	5.221345	
		2005	-1.9	1.731453	1	-8.02134	4.221345	
		2006	-4.7	1.731453	0.398157	-10.8213	1.421345	
		2007	-5.5	1.731453	0.126838	-11.6213	0.621345	
		2008	-8	2.069483	0.020714	-15.3164	-0.68359	
	2001	2000	1.5	1.792225	1	-4.83619	7.836194	
		2002	-0.8	1.388251	1	-5.70799	4.107995	
		2003	1.4	1.388251	1	-3.50799	6.307995	
		2004	0.6	1.388251	1	-4.30799	5.507995	

	2005	-0.4	1.38825	1	-5.30799	4.50799
			1			5
	2006	-3.2	1.38825	1	-8.10799	1.70799
			1			5
	2007	-4	1.38825	0.26559	-8.90799	0.90799
			1	2		5
	2008	-6.5	1.79222	0.03926	-12.8362	-
			5	1		0.16381
2002	2000	2.3	1.73145	1	-3.82134	8.42134
			3			5
	2001	0.8	1.38825	1	-4.10799	5.70799
			1			5
	2003	2.2	1.30885	1	-2.4273	6.82730
			6			2
	2004	1.4	1.30885	1	-3.2273	6.02730
			6			2
	2005	0.4	1.30885	1	-4.2273	5.02730
			6			2
	2006	-2.4	1.30885	1	-7.0273	2.22730
			6			2
	2007	-3.2	1.30885	0.74882	-7.8273	1.42730
			6	8		2
	2008	-5.7	1.73145	0.09432	-11.8213	0.42134
			3	8		5
2003	2000	0.1	1.73145	1	-6.02134	6.22134
			3			5
	2001	-1.4	1.38825	1	-6.30799	3.50799
			1			5
	2002	-2.2	1.30885	1	-6.8273	2.42730
			6			2
	2004	-0.8	1.30885	1	-5.4273	3.82730
			6			2
	2005	-1.8	1.30885	1	-6.4273	2.82730
			6			2
	2006	-4.6	1.30885	0.05282	-9.2273	0.02730
			6	4		2
	2007	-5.4	1.30885	0.01022	-10.0273	-0.7727
			6	6		
	2008	-7.9	1.73145	0.00307	-14.0213	-
			3	4		1.77866
2004	2000	0.9	1.73145	1	-5.22134	7.02134
			3			5
	2001	-0.6	1.38825	1	-5.50799	4.30799
			1			5
	2002	-1.4	1.30885	1	-6.0273	3.22730
			6			2
	2003	0.8	1.30885	1	-3.8273	5.42730
			6			2
	2005	-1	1.30885	1	-5.6273	3.62730
			6			2
	2006	-3.8	1.30885	0.25161	-8.4273	0.82730
			6	5		2
	2007	-4.6	1.30885	0.05282	-9.2273	0.02730
			6	4		2

	2008	-7.1	1.73145	0.01095	-13.2213	-
			3	2		0.97866
2005	2000	1.9	1.73145	1	-4.22134	8.02134
			3			5
	2001	0.4	1.38825	1	-4.50799	5.30799
			1			5
	2002	-0.4	1.30885	1	-5.0273	4.22730
			6			2
	2003	1.8	1.30885	1	-2.8273	6.42730
			6			2
	2004	1	1.30885	1	-3.6273	5.62730
			6			2
	2006	-2.8	1.30885	1	-7.4273	1.82730
			6			2
	2007	-3.6	1.30885	0.36515	-8.2273	1.02730
			6			2
	2008	-6.1	1.73145	0.05165	-12.2213	0.02134
			3	1		5
2006	2000	4.7	1.73145	0.39815	-1.42134	10.8213
			3	7		4
	2001	3.2	1.38825	1	-1.70799	8.10799
			1			5
	2002	2.4	1.30885	1	-2.2273	7.02730
			6			2
	2003	4.6	1.30885	0.05282	-0.0273	9.22730
			6	4		2
	2004	3.8	1.30885	0.25161	-0.8273	8.42730
			6	5		2
	2005	2.8	1.30885	1	-1.8273	7.42730
			6			2
	2007	-0.8	1.30885	1	-5.4273	3.82730
			6			2
	2008	-3.3	1.73145	1	-9.42134	2.82134
			3			5
7	2000	5.5	1.73145	0.12683	-0.62134	11.6213
			3	8		4
	2001	4	1.38825	0.26559	-0.90799	8.90799
			1	2		5
	2002	3.2	1.30885	0.74882	-1.4273	7.82730
			6	8		2
	2003	5.4	1.30885	0.01022	0.772698	10.0273
			6	6		
	2004	4.6	1.30885	0.05282	-0.0273	9.22730
			6	4		2
	2005	3.6	1.30885	0.36515	-1.0273	8.22730
			6			2
	2006	0.8	1.30885	1	-3.8273	5.42730
			6			2
	2008	-2.5	1.73145	1	-8.62134	3.62134
			3			5
2008	2000	8	2.06948	0.02071	0.683594	15.3164
			3	4		1
	2001	6.5	1.79222	0.03926	0.163806	12.8361
			5	1		9

2002	5.7	1.73145 3	0.09432 8	-0.42134	11.8213 4
2003	7.9	1.73145 3	0.00307 4	1.778655	14.0213 4
2004	7.1	1.73145 3	0.01095 2	0.978655	13.2213 4
2005	6.1	1.73145 3	0.05165 1	-0.02134	12.2213 4
2006	3.3	1.73145 3	1	-2.82134	9.42134 5
2007	2.5	1.73145 3	1	-3.62134	8.62134 5

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

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