

Newspapers and Their Online Editions: Factors that Influence Successful Integration

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Abstract

As newspapers continue in the evolutionary process of optimally utilizing new information technologies to meet the myriad challenges of the day, they are struggling with issues of clarifying and routinizing the innovative technology as amplified by Rogers¹ in his exploration of the innovation process organizations undergo. This research offers new insights and recommendations about applied actions that can facilitate the transformation. A survey of 63 major U.S. newspaper editors quantifies which operational procedures are predictive of greater levels of integration between the traditional print product and its Internet operation, and which influence management's belief that this integration has met its objectives. If print/online integration is the goal, the presence of one central news desk that handles stories regardless of medium and distribution platform, and online staff participation in the newspaper's planning meetings are among the keys.

Introduction

From the earliest days of the World Wide Web in 1994 through 2004, more than 1,500 North American daily newspapers launched Internet sites,² developing models that included Web sites that were independent, free-standing operations in which news was a relatively minor component. Some Web sites did little more than mirror the content of the traditional newspaper; while others were fully integrated into the news operations with intraday Web updates and enhanced content.³

As early as 1995, pioneering industry analysts struggled with new media's relationship with the core product a question that stemmed from the belief that the online edition was just a little twig off the mighty oak of the print product.⁴ Among their concerns were competition for resources, the culture

clash between new media and the traditional newsroom, standards and integrity in new media, and re-engineering the newsroom.⁵

The degree to which print and online operations should be integrated continued to be a focus of industry discussions throughout the late 1990s and into the new century. The growing impact of the Web on national news reporting and the continuing pressure online technologies brought to bear on newsroom operations forced more newspapers to consider how to best integrate their print newspaper and online products.⁶ Indeed, it was becoming increasingly apparent that the success of the typically smaller online operations was necessarily dependent on tapping the talents and newsgathering resources of the vastly larger print newsroom.⁷ After some experimenting, newspapers that had established stand-alone new media divisions began reversing course and looking to integrate their online products with the core product, a process said to be as painful, yet beneficial, as an organ transplant.⁸

Painful as it may be, Camp said newspapers must exploit the "sweet point" of integration between the online and newspaper operations if they are to be successful in attracting future readers and advertisers.⁹

This paper reports the results of a proscriptive analysis of the factors influencing the level of integration between the major metropolitan newspapers in the United States and their online functions. Based on a telephone survey of major metropolitan news executives, the paper identifies the operational and production practices and policies that are associated with variable levels of integration and the relative level of news executives' satisfaction that integration has met management goals. Thus, newspaper executives who seek to leverage their print and online functions through greater levels of integration can better institute operational and production practices and policies that meet their goals, and avoid often costly and resource-consuming practices and policies that likely will not affect levels of integration.

Literature Review

The belief that newspapers and their online counterparts benefit from integration is not universally shared. Zeeck cited differences in culture, technology and organization as factors suggesting that "what's good for the newsroom goose may be deadly for the online gander" and concluded that integration benefits newspapers that are operating from a purely defensive stance.¹⁰ Gilbert and Borrell harkened to Christensen's theory of disruptive technologies, which examined the threat that new methods pose to mature business, and suggested that online sites that are independent from the newspaper are more likely to be innovative, with higher traffic and more revenue categories.¹¹

Other new media analysts have argued otherwise, with Singer, for example, concluding that newspapers should seek to more fully integrate their interactive service with the newsroom¹² because the journalist's crucial functions need to be carried out in the online environment and the need for journalistic involvement in that environment increases daily.¹³ In their work on managing emerging technologies, Day and Schoemaker found that "one of the biggest mistakes" companies make when establishing an innovative venture is paying inadequate attention to the connections between it and the existing parent operation.¹⁴ Clark¹⁵ and Zollman¹⁶ argued that integration offers synergies that lead to journalistic, marketing and financial advantages, and Goodman took it a step further: Given that print advertising rates are based on continually declining circulation and Internet readership is steadily increasing, integration between the news and online products "is something that has to happen ASAP to ensure survival."¹⁷

The management of innovation in the media industry has been a key area of study at least partly because the myriad effects of new technologies on the industry are important to a wide range of stakeholders including media management and practitioners, investors, policymakers and media consumers.¹⁸ Rogers,¹⁹ whose seminal research on diffusions of innovations has been the theoretical underpinning of countless studies in a number of disciplines, identified five stages in the innovation process organizations undergo: agenda-setting, matching, redefining/restructuring, clarifying and routinizing. Drawing upon that research and applying it to media companies and new technology, Lawson-Borders developed the following rubric: the first stage "agenda-setting" was when media companies recognized the implications of the Internet and the growth of the personal computer; the second stage "matching" was the resultant creation of online divisions to exploit the potential of the Internet; the third stage "redefining/restructuring" was the 2001 dot.com "bust" when media organizations retrenched and reduced online resources; and the fourth stage "clarifying" was the increasing focus on "convergence," when journalists started being trained to deliver news via multiple distribution technologies. It is the fifth stage "routinizing" that is of particular interest here; the stage during which the innovation becomes an ongoing part of the organization's activities. That fifth stage, Lawson-Borders maintains, is "still unfolding for media organizations as they deliberate over strategies and best practices to propel the organizations into the future."²⁰

Little academic research has been conducted to determine the specific operational and procedural "best practices" that would facilitate the routinization of the innovation "Internet-based communication" into the larger existing news gathering and delivery organization. However, Lawson-Borders's in-depth interviews and participation-observation at three corporate media groups yielded seven elements of convergence, defined as the blending of technological capabilities for computer-driven distribution, that she says serve individually or in aggregate as a form of best practices to be used as strategy by media organizations. They are: communication as an imperative, organizational commitment, the promotion of cooperation among various staff, cultural change, new approaches to competition, the ability to meet the needs of the new media customer, and revised employee compensation.²¹

Indeed, anecdotal industry evidence complements Lawson-Borders's observations. Northrup maintains that creation of a central desk to manage cross-media news flow is essential because co-locating news

managers who traditionally sit in their own territories will breach organizational barriers and serve as a constant, visible reminder to the news staff that culture and past practices have changed.²² In a similar vein, he and others maintain that Web staff should attend and actively participate in news budget and planning meetings before the reporting process actually begins to both enhance communication and cooperation between staffs and ensure that asking the question “How can we use the Web to enhance our storytelling?” becomes the journalistic norm.²³

Northrup further maintains that video and audio components should be added to the online site because simply duplicating the static print product online undervalues the online effort and its potential benefits to the newspaper. Storytelling could be enhanced and content for the online service could be created through cooperation: Traditional newspaper reporters can digitally record interviews and news conferences, for example, and gather supporting documents and materials that are referenced and cross-promoted in articles published in the newspaper.²⁴

Singer, in her seminal study of traditional journalists’ perspectives toward interactive media, and others have advocated positioning online staffers in or near the newsroom as a component that would encourage integration as workers support one another and work together rather than duplicating and competing,²⁵ and Singer further suggested having respected newsroom journalists report in an interactive format for the online service.²⁶ Additionally, Singer’s survey of 213 online and print editors uncovered online staffers who perceived a lack of respect, attention and “buy-in” from their newspaper counterparts, leading her to conclude that perceptions of unequal status between print and online workers demands immediate management attention.²⁷ Furthermore, Brill argues that research examining how journalists perceive themselves, particularly online news workers, is critical to our understanding of the profession itself.²⁸

Barriers to integration stemming from perceptions of unequal status may stem from marked differences in the culture and traditions of print and online news workers. For example, in one of the first national surveys of print and online journalists, Cassidy found that online journalists do not hold all of the “traditional” values in as high regard as print journalists, and there may be differences in the concept of newsworthiness between the two groups.²⁹ But while tradition and culture may account for some of the perceptions of unequal status, another issue may stymie attempts at integration: The belief on the part of some industry observers that the quality of journalism will deteriorate as traditional news workers are asked to produce multiple versions of their stories for news executives struggling to maintain profits,³⁰ a viewpoint called into question by Singer’s assertion that “journalists are normalizing” the Internet as a way to further traditional roles and goals.³¹

Despite the concerns of traditional journalists that utilizing the online service for news stories that break off-cycle will “cannibalize the bread-and-butter print product”³² and give the competitive advantage to other news organizations, Northrup argues that the newspaper is decreasingly a medium of first awareness and increasingly the medium of greater awareness. He concluded that utilizing the online service for breaking news and following with contextual newspaper reportage “which suggests

some level of integration between the two ♦ capitalizes on its relative strengths of each.³³

Boczkowski's examination of three online newsrooms concluded that variations in organizational structures ♦ whether the print and online newsrooms were integrated or autonomous ♦ were among the factors that shaped the adoption of new technologies in online newspapers.³⁴ Still, he points out, most old-media and new-media scholarship neglects to examine production dynamics, despite the fact they are ♦ critical to understanding the alternative forms that new-media products may acquire.³⁵

This study quantifies the influences of various operational practices and policies in an attempt to systematically determine which practices and policies influence that integration. The study also identifies factors that influence levels of newspaper executives' satisfaction that integration has met management objectives ♦ another question that has been the subject of little research attention. A better understanding of the mechanisms of adaptation by news organizations may help shed light on the broader evolutionary influences innovative technologies have on our understanding of the newspaper industry and where it is heading.

Hypotheses

Given assertions that at least some level of integration between the traditional newspaper and the online service may provide beneficial synergies in content development, advertising sales and marketing opportunities, it is important to determine which operational and procedural practices and policies are predictive of integration. Since online editions of newspapers have established a decade-long history, it is further useful to determine the degree to which newspaper executives are satisfied that integration has met management objectives and the operational procedures and policies associated with that satisfaction.

Drawing on elements of convergence postulated by Lawson-Borders, other research, and the professional press, four broad areas that appear predictive of a level of integration emerge: organizational and management issues, communication and attitudinal issues, physical proximity and equipment-sharing issues, and workflow and content issues.

Specifically, organizational and management issues include whether the online site has a partnership with a news organization other than the newspaper, whether the newspaper has a formal policy for promoting content online, the level of top management commitment to integration, and the degree to which top management believes integration will reach new readers or ♦ conversely ♦ contribute to a deterioration in the quality of traditional journalism.

Communication and attitudinal issues include the perceptions of status between the online staff and the newspaper staff, the frequency in which online staff attends news planning and news budget meetings, and the level of online staff participation in both daily news planning meetings and special-projects planning meetings, such as elections.

The physical proximity and equipment-sharing issues include whether there is a ♦converged♦ news desk ♦ that is, one central area that handles stories regardless of medium and distribution platform.

Workflow and content issues include the extent to which the newspaper uses the online service to break news, the extent to which online staff generates material for exclusive online use, and the extent to which print staff generates copy or material for exclusive online use (e.g. audio clips).

In addition, previous research suggests that newspaper circulation is associated with the development of new resources, with larger circulation newspapers spearheading the adoption of computer-related technology and its use in the newsroom.³⁶

Thus, the following hypotheses are suggested for the present study:

H1: Respondents from newspapers with larger circulations will report greater levels of integration between the traditional print newspaper and its online counterpart.

H2: The presence of specific organizational and management factors (e.g. cross-media partnerships and promotion policies for online content) will increase both the perception of integration and management belief that integration has met its objectives.

H3: Specific communication and attitudinal factors (e.g. the inclusion of online staff in both daily and special-projects news planning meetings) will increase both the perception of integration and management belief that integration has met its objectives.

H4: Physical proximity and equipment-sharing will increase both the perception of integration and management belief that integration has met its objectives.

H5: Specific workflow and content practices (e.g. utilization of newspaper staff for the production of content exclusively for online use) will increase both the perception of integration and management belief that integration has met its objectives.

Method

A telephone survey conducted in September of 2003 established a baseline measurement of current levels of integration between print newspapers and online services in major metropolitan U.S. newsrooms. The survey contained forced-choice questions about the four categories of operational and procedural issues thought to be associated with integration. The structure of the questions determined whether a scale of either four or five intervals was logically required. In addition, Likert-type scale questions intended to examine whether respondents thought integration of print and online operations would reach new readers and conversely whether it would have a deleterious effect on the quality of traditional journalism.

Twenty journalists associated with newspapers that had online editions and thought to be knowledgeable about operations and procedures participated in a pre-test and were given the opportunity to comment on the veracity of the four broad areas of questions thought to be indicative of integration. None of these journalists was part of the survey group. E-mail messages introducing the project and requesting an interview appointment then were sent to the top editors of 79 U.S. newspapers, which were a combination of the national daily newspapers and the major metropolitan newspapers as listed on Newslink.³⁷ The major metropolitan newspapers were the dominant local or regional general circulation news publications for the 50 largest metropolitan areas in the country, as determined by the U.S. Census Bureau. They were selected because of the broad scope of their reach to large population bases, their presumed roles as industry leaders and the likelihood that they would have resources dedicated to online ventures reasoning confirmed by Greer and Mensing when they found that larger newspapers are more like to have the resources required for technically sophisticated, well-functioning Web sites.³⁸ This list of newspapers represents a comprehensive census of major newspapers organizations in the United States. Top editors (e.g. editors, executive editors and deputy managing editors) were chosen for their over-arching knowledge of operations and management commitment to integration. The editors of newspapers, as opposed to Web sites, were chosen because the traditional newspaper typically leads the online service in both policy establishment and content production.

When necessary, follow-up e-mail messages requesting participation were sent and up to six follow-up telephone calls were made. A total of 63 editors participated³⁹ for a response rate of 79.7 percent. The average length of the telephone call was 15 minutes.

The responses of the 63 newspapers included in this study represent a rare glimpse into the aggregate thinking of editors at the top newspapers in the United States. From a sampling perspective, though, it also presents a dilemma for data analysis using inferential statistics. Because not all of the 79 newspapers included in our operational definition of major U.S. newspapers participated in the survey, our group of participating newspapers cannot accurately be viewed as a census, even with an 80 percent response rate. On the other hand, since we attempted to include all of these top newspapers in the survey data, no probability sampling techniques were used to select participants in the survey, thus making the use of inferential statistics complicated. In statistical jargon, this survey is an example of a model-based sample of a finite population.⁴⁰ Such samples, with a known and limited population have been shown to be statistically robust and appropriate for parametric models when the cases sampled from the population are similar to the population. The issue here, as with most sampling issues, is

whether or not our sample of major newspapers is representative of the population of major newspapers we wish make inferences about. In nonprobability samples of people, researchers often compare demographics of the participants with demographics of non-participants from the same population.⁴¹



To test the representativeness of the sample (i.e., whether our respondents were systematically different from our non-respondents), we compared the circulations and regions of the newspapers in our sample compared with the other major newspapers that did not participate. Average circulation between these two groups was not different ($t = 1.15, p > .25$). For region, we classified the newspapers into the five major geographical regions of the United States (Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Southwest, and West). The proportion of newspapers per region was not different between the major newspapers that participated in the survey and those that did not (contingency coefficient = $0.27, p > .20$).

Dependent measures

The two dependent variables were the perceived current level of newsroom integration and the perception of the extent to which efforts at integration had met the objectives the newspapers had hoped to accomplish. The survey question to measure the level of newsroom integration was "To what degree would you say the online product is currently integrated with the traditional news operation?" and was measured on a 4-point scale (anchored by "not at all" and "fully integrated"). The survey question for the perception of objectives met was "In your opinion, to what extent has integration met the objectives you had hoped to accomplish?" and was also measured on a 4-point scale (anchored by "it has met no objectives" and "it has been completely successful"). The two variables were moderately correlated ($r = .54$).

Independent measures

The independent variables were constructed to represent the five blocks of the integration model outlined earlier. The first block, newspaper circulation, was considered as an exogenous variable similar to demographics that would precede and potentially influence organizational and staff communication patterns. Circulation figures for newspapers included in the sample were obtained from the 2003 *Editor and Publisher International Year Book*.

Five organization-level variables (i.e., variables that reflect the organizational and leadership structure of the newspaper) comprised the second set of independent variables. These were: the belief that

integration would create new readers; partner relationships with other local news organizations; existence of a formal policy for promoting online content; leadership misgivings about diluting the traditional print journalism product; and, conversely, leadership commitment to integration. The new readers variable was measured on a five-point Likert-type scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree) in response to the statement "Integrating print and online operations will reach new readers." The partner relationships variable was an additive measure in response to the question "Does your online site have a partner relationship with a news organization other than the newspaper?" with prompts for broadcast television stations, radio stations, cable television stations, and other. The promotion policy variable was a yes/no question, "Is there an explicit policy regarding how the newspaper references or promotes content found online?" The diluting print journalism variable was measured on a five-point Likert-type scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree) in response to the statement "Integrating print and online operations will dilute traditional journalism." And the management commitment variable was measured on a five-point scale (anchored by not at all committed and completely committed) in response to the question, "How committed is top management in the traditional newsprint operation to integrating the print and online products?"

There were two staff attitude and status variables in the third block of independent variables. They were the level of perceived equality of status between print and online journalists and meeting participation roles of online staff. The status measure (perceived equal status) was re-coded from the following questions: "Do online staff think print journalists have less status, equal status or better status?" and "Do print journalists think online staff have less status, equal status or better status?" We created a variable to capture the respondents' combined level of perceived status between the two groups by reverse coding one variable and multiplying it by the second variable.

Meeting participation was an additive index formed from nine questions. The first question was "How frequently does online staff attend newspaper planning and budget meetings?" with the following values: rarely or never = 0; only for special projects = 1; weekly = 2; and daily = 3. Respondents who answered other than rarely or never (91 percent) were asked four follow-up questions (which were coded as no = 0 and yes = 1) for participation in two kinds of meetings (regular planning/budget meetings and meetings for special print projects, e.g., election coverage). The four yes/no questions dealt with whether online staff attended to learn what would be in the print newspaper, whether they answered questions about how the online site could contribute to news coverage, whether they made suggestions, and whether they jointly participated in planning news coverage.

One variable, presence of a converged news desk, functioned as the fourth block. This variable was a yes/no question, "Is there a multimedia or converged news desk, for example, one central area that handles stories regardless of medium and distribution platform?"

The last block, which focused on content and workflow procedures, consisted of three questions. These

were: ♦To what extent do online staff generate content specifically for the online product that will not be in the print newspaper?♦ ♦To what extent do print journalists generate copy or material for the online product that will not be in the print newspaper (e.g., audio clips)?♦ and ♦To what extent does the newspaper use online as the medium for breaking stories?♦ Each was measured on a five-point scale, anchored by ♦never♦ and ♦always.♦

Hierarchical regression models were used to test the hypothesized relationships.

Results

A summary of the descriptive data for variables used to test the hypotheses is shown in Table 1. The two dependent variables, the perceived level of current print and online newsroom integration and the perceived extent to which integration objectives had been met, both indicated slightly positive perceptions, with means of 2.76 and 2.51 respectively (both variables coded on a scale of 1 to 4). Additionally, two independent variables (circulation and new readers) exhibited moderate to substantial levels of skewness and kurtosis. Both square root and natural logarithm transformations were done and the descriptives were evaluated.⁴² For circulation, the n-log transformation resulted in a normal distribution and was subsequently used in the regression analyses. For new readers, the transformations did not improve the distribution, so the original variable was retained.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Sample (n = 63)

Variable	Mean	s.d.	Standard Error	Minimum Value	Maximum Value
Newsroom Integration Level	2.76	.67	.08	1	4
Perception of Objectives Met	2.51	.62	.08	1	4
Circulation	324,280	303,293	38,211	42,219	2,136,068
New Readers	4.63	.71	.09	1	5
Partners	1.02	.90	.11	0	4
Promotion Policy*	.37	.49	.06	0	1
Dilute Journalism	4.40	.79	.10	2	5
Management Commitment	4.11	.92	.12	1	5
Perceived Equal Status	2.20	1.26	.17	1	4
Meeting Participation	7.40	2.62	.33	0	9
Converged News Desk*	.24	.43	.05	0	1
Online Journ. Create Online Exclusive Content	3.44	1.00	.13	1	5
Print Journ. Create Online Exclusive Content	2.81	.91	.12	1	4

Online Used for Breaking Stories 3.59 1.07 .14 1 5

* = dummy variable coded as 0 = no, 1 = yes

Overall, the hierarchical regression models explained moderate to moderately high proportions of the variance in the dependent variables. Five blocks of variables were entered in each model, with a total of 13 independent variables overall. For the first dependent variable, perceived current level of print-online newsroom integration, the total R-squared was .61 (See Table 2). For the other dependent variable, the degree to which integration objectives were perceived to have been met, the total R-squared was .52 (See Table 3).

Table 2: Hierarchical Regression Equations Predicting Current Level of Print-Online Newsroom Integration

	Equation 1	Equation 2	Equation 3	Equation 4	Equation 5
Circulation ^a	.18	.01	.05	.05	.04
New Readers		.20*	.19*	.21*	.20*
Partners		.11	.13	.12	.12
Promotion Policy		.09	.01	-.04	-.01
Dilute Journalism		.12	.10	.08	.03
Management Commitment		.49***	.33**	.18	.20
Perceived Equal Status			.13	.16	.08
Meeting Participation			.26*	.33**	.30*
Converged News Desk				.29**	.28**
Online Journ. Create Online Exclusive Content					-.22*
Print Journ. Create Online Exclusive Content					.14
Online Used for Breaking Stories					-.02
R2	.03	.43***	.50***	.57***	.61***
R2 Change		.40***	.08*	.07**	.04

^anatural log transformation of original variable

Note: Cell entries are standardized regression coefficients. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. N=63

Table 3: Hierarchical Regression Equations Predicting Perception of Objectives Met

	Equation 1	Equation 2	Equation 3	Equation 4	Equation 5
Circulation ^a	.12	-.06	.00	.00	.01
New Readers		.29**	.29**	.30**	.28**
Partners		-.11	-.12	-.12	-.14
Promotion Policy		.34**	.27**	.24*	.21*
Dilute Journalism		.10	.10	.09	.08
Management Commitment		.48***	.34**	.26*	.25
Perceived Equal Status			.52*	.53*	.62*
Meeting Participation			.22*	.26*	.32*
Converged News Desk				.14	.16
Online Journ. Create Online Exclusive Content					.10
Print Journ. Create Online Exclusive Content					.02
Online Used for Breaking Stories					-.10
R2	.02	.43***	.50***	.51***	.52***
R2 Change		.41***	.07*	.02	.01

^anatural log transformation of original variable

Note: Cell entries are standardized regression coefficients. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. N=63

H1 predicted that newspaper circulation would be positively related to the measures of successful integration. This hypothesis was not supported. As the beta weights for circulation in Tables 2 and 3 indicate, circulation was not a significant predictor in any of the regression equations for newspapers' current level of integration or editors' perceptions that integration-related objectives had been met.

H2 considered organizational level variables, predicting that specific organizational tactics such as establishing formal cross-media partnerships and promotional policies, and perceptions about integration's possible effects on the organization would influence perceived levels of integration and management belief that integration achieved its objectives. This hypothesis was partially supported, with two of the five variables entered at this stage significantly predicting the current level of integration and three of the five variables significantly predicting perceptions that objectives had been met. The organizational level variables explained 40 percent of the variance in current level of integration, with the belief that integration will reach new readers ($\beta = .20$, $p < .05$) and perceived management commitment to integration ($\beta = .49$, $p < .001$) being significant predictor variables. For perceptions of objectives being met, the organizational level variables explained 41 percent of the variance. Reaching new readers ($\beta = .29$, $p < .01$) and management commitment ($\beta = .47$, $p < .001$) were again significant in this model. Additionally, respondents whose newspapers had a specific policy for promoting online content ($\beta = .34$, $p < .01$) were also more likely to believe that their newspapers were meeting their integration objectives.



H3 predicted that inter-staff attitudes and inclusion of online staff in editorial meetings would influence perceived levels of integration and management belief that integration achieved its objectives. The two independent variables in this stage of the model were perceptions of equal status between print and online staffs, and the degree of participation of online staff members in newspaper planning and budget meetings. Moderate support was found for this hypothesis. For perceived levels of integration, the block of variables was significant ($R^2=.08$, $p<.05$), but meeting participation was the only significant predictor ($\beta = .26$, $p<.05$). The perceptions of relative staff equality were not significant. For perceptions of objectives being met, both variables were significant predictors ($R^2=.07$, $p<.05$). Perceived equal status was positively associated with objectives met ($\beta = .52$, $p<.05$), and online staff participation in meetings was also positively associated ($\beta = .22$, $p<.05$).



H4 predicted that newspapers with converged news desks would be better integrated due to having both print and online staffers in physical proximity. This hypothesis was also partially supported. Respondents from newspapers with converged news desks felt their operations were better integrated than did respondents whose newspapers did not ($R^2=.07$, $p<.01$, $\beta = .29$, $p<.01$). The presence of a converged news desk was not, however, a significant predictor for perceptions that integration objectives had been met.⁴³



H5 predicted that copy flow and content level factors would also lead to perceptions of successful print-online integration. This hypothesis was not supported. The independent variables in this block were the extent to which online staff generated content exclusively for the online product, the extent to which print journalists created content specifically for the online product, and the extent to which the online product was used for breaking stories. For newspapers in which online staff generated their own content, respondents felt their current level of integration was lower ($\beta = -.22$, $p<.05$), but the block of variables overall was not significant ($R^2=.04$, $p=.17$). None of the three independent variables in this block were significant predictors of the perception of integration objectives being met.

Discussion

Factors that influence integration

Efforts to integrate the print and online products at the major metropolitan newspapers in the United States are well underway overall, although nearly one-third of the respondents reported being integrated to some degree or not at all. And according to the executives who participated in this survey, their efforts have been moderately successful.

Lawson-Borders concluded that her elements of convergence, individually or in aggregate, suggest a best practices strategy for operations seeking convergence. Drawing on several of the elements she identified communication, organizational commitment, cooperation among various staff, cultural change, and new approaches to competition⁴⁴ along with the observations of new media analysts, the research looked at five areas thought to have an impact on print-online integration: organizational and management issues, communication and attitudinal issues, physical proximity and equipment-sharing issues, workflow and content issues, and newspaper circulation.

Specifically, if newspaper management has integration as the goal, a key component is the presence of a converged news desk, defined for the newspaper executives as one central area that handles stories regardless of medium and distribution platform. Clearly, as Lawson-Borders's work and industry evidence has suggested, print and online editors working cooperatively shoulder-to-shoulder and engaged in communication and joint decision-making are predictive of greater levels of integration between the newspaper and its online counterpart. In addition, the presence of a converged news desk may send a continual visual signal to staff of both the newspaper and the online service that integration is a management goal. But the presence of a converged news desk does not influence the likelihood that news executives will report that integration has met management objectives for it. Despite their reported high levels of commitment to integration, it is possible that these respondents high-level print-side journalists still may view the converged news desk as a mechanism that siphons resources from the print mother ship to some degree.

Online staff members at early online newspaper operations often were relegated to the role of silent observer at news planning meetings, serving as information conduits between the newspaper and the online service. In some operations, online staff adopted somewhat more participatory roles as their presence became less foreign. This research supports the belief among Northrup and others⁴⁵ that online staff involvement and cooperation in the planning of news and feature stories before the reporting process actually begins is a key component that will lead to more integrated operations.

Peterson⁴⁶ notes that newspapers launched online services for a variety of reasons, including a belief

that they would attract new readers. Indeed, these results show that another key component that influences levels of integration is the news executives' belief that new readers will be attracted.

Industry observers including Northrup, Stevens and Fish⁴⁷ suggest that having print staff gather material for Web-only use and utilizing the online service for breaking news during the newspaper's off-cycle will positively affect levels of integration, but results here fail to support that belief. Editors at newspapers where online staff generate their own online content felt their levels of integration were even lower, suggesting somewhat of a two-staffs/two-operations approach.

Factors that influence management satisfaction that integration has met objectives

As with factors that influence perceived levels of integration, the presence of online staff during planning and news budget meetings was again found to be key. Managers at operations where online staff are active participants in meetings are more likely to report that integration has met their goals, which may have implications for news organizations that have made the decision not to incorporate the online staff into the news budget planning function.

Because of the inherent cultural differences between traditional newspaper staff and online staff, industry analysts have suggested that online workers struggle for respect from their newsroom counterparts. Indeed, Singer⁴⁸ identified lack of respect, attention and buy-in from the print staff. The perception of the relative equality of status between the print and online staffs was not a significant predictor of levels of integration, but it was positively associated with managers' reports that objectives have been met, suggesting that policies and practices aimed at equalizing perceived levels of status between the two groups would be desirable.

As with factors that influence perceived levels of integration, managers who believed that integration would reach new readers were more likely to report being satisfied that objectives were being met. Despite industry-wide uncertainty about how integration will affect the future financial picture of the news operations, these managers clearly are concerned with reversing the circulation declines of the past 35 years.

Utilizing the newspaper to promote content available online was one of the earliest and least expensive joint newspaper-online interactions and, indeed, having formal policies for cross-promoting content influenced the managers' level of satisfaction that integration was meeting objectives.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, managers who reported a high level of commitment to integration were more likely to be satisfied with its outcome. This finding coupled with Gilbert and Borrell's assertion that

the lessons of disruptive technologies should not be ignored⁴⁹ clearly suggests that further research is necessary to objectively quantify the degree to which integration actually has met the multiplicity of goals newspaper executives hope to achieve. Moreover, additional research that measured audience and advertiser perceptions about the integrated experience would add a complementary component to the integration discussion.

As was the case with levels of integration, having print staff gather material for Web-only use, having online staff generate their own online content and utilizing the online service for breaking news during the newspaper's off-cycle failed to predict management beliefs that integration had met its objectives.

One of the key strengths of this study a high participation rate among a select group of U.S. newspaper executives also produced some limitations. Chiefly among the limitations is that the sample size is relatively small for a survey ($n = 63$). Statistically speaking, the study is somewhat underpowered. It also resulted in a high variable-to-case ratio. Regression diagnostic tests indicated that multicollinearity among the independent variables was not a problem. But the low statistical power is a limitation we could not address with this sample. As such, we cannot say with confidence that the nonsignificant predictors in our regression models did not have any impact on the dependent variables. Rather, we can only say that we did not have enough evidence to conclude that they did.

Garrison and Martin⁵⁰ have used a circulation of 50,000 as the dividing point in defining small and large newspapers. Because the definition of major metropolitan involves market size rather than relying solely on circulation size the newspapers studied ranged from a circulation of 42,219 to a circulation of 2,136,068. Although past research suggests that larger newspapers are technological leaders, the fact that the circulation hypothesis was not supported here may be due to the fact that these newspapers collectively were quite large, despite the broad circulation range. The mean circulation was 324,280, with a median circulation of 242,391.

Finally, some traditional journalists and industry analysts have cautioned that integration may have a deleterious effect, suggesting that cost-conscious executives will require newspaper journalists to spend newsgathering and reporting time providing content for the online product and thus diluting the quality of traditional journalism. Results of this study show that few news executives believe integration will have a diluting effect and the issue was not significant in any way, adding support to Singer's finding that a normalization process is underway among traditional news workers.⁵¹

Initiation and implementation are the two broad activities Rogers⁵² asserts explain the diffusion of innovations process within organizations. Newspapers clearly are experiencing the implementation process with its substages of clarifying the relationship between the Web service and the print newspaper and routinizing the Web operation as an ongoing element within the news organization. New media analysts suggest myriad reasons why newspapers should pursue the synergies of print/online integration, with Goodman and Camp suggesting that newspapers need to

exploit the benefits of integration if they are to successfully woo future advertisers and readers and ensure their survival.⁵³ Indeed, Boczkowski argues that, paradoxically, the attempts by American dailies to reproduce print into their nonprint forays have resulted in a kind of news product that bears connections to its print predecessor (while differing) qualitatively from it in its material infrastructure, editorial practices, and production routines.⁵⁴ But the competitive newspaper industry too often operates its newsrooms without the benefit of quantitative data on the practices, policies and procedures that could lead to the successful routinization of an innovation. If print/online integration is the goal, this research quantifies the operational practices that influence both levels of integration and the degree to which managers report being satisfied that integration has met their objectives.

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