

EXPLORING COMMUNITY NEWSPAPERS AND BRAND BUILDING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to establish the purpose of community newspapers and how this communication platform can be explored within a brand building and digital paradigm.

To do this, research into community news, media convergence, digitisation, brand purpose was conducted. This was done with the aim to gain insights that prompted a deeper look into the research topic via a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews and a focus group.

The use of three core questions guided the research process, with the ultimate goal to establish the purpose of community newspapers; how this should be communicated in a digital age; and whether print and digital communication platforms are competitors or companions.

The research title, *Exploring Community Newspapers and Brand Building in the Digital Age*, therefore links to the interest in the communications industry and furthermore to how a newspaper brand can communicate with its audience in the age of multiplatform delivery.

Findings show that despite the shift from print to digital, newsrooms are finding the need to balance both communication platforms. This linked to the insight that the increase of citizen journalists created an opportunity for news brands to bring traffic to their websites by including the public in the reporting of news. News platforms needed to understand the importance of brand building and brand purpose to ensure the longevity of both its print and digital news forums.

Keywords: newspapers; digital age; communication; print; digital; brand purpose; brand building; media convergence; digitisation; community news; journalism; brand communication.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This research explored the field of community news in relation to digitisation and brand building. How community newspapers have remained an active news source in the age of digital media and an interest in the field of media and communication formed a basis for the study. Within this chapter, an introduction to the research title, problem statement, research objectives and research questions are discussed to provide context for the following chapters.

1.1 Research Title and Problem

In connection to the Honours qualification in Strategic Brand Communication, an analysis of the purpose of community news as well as building brands in the digital age was conducted. This was in order to delve into the topic: *Exploring Community Newspapers and Brand Building in the Digital Age*.

Considering the fast pace of the communication field, the research problem revolves around the increase of digital news consumption. Here, with technology evolving, readers have experienced a shift from the reliance on print media for information to other methods of obtaining news. Other sources for news such as television, radio, social media and the internet have become a threat to the readership of print media. Newspapers have had to therefore adapt to the changes in technology and methods of obtaining news (Siapera, 2012).

The loss of readership for printed news also poses a dilemma for the print industry (Siapera, 2012). Newsrooms that still rely on printed news have had to reassess the purpose and strategy of their brand in order to adapt the goals of the company and comply with the changes in the industry.

Caxton & CTP Publishers and Printers (Caxton), for example, remains a company which produces a constant turnover of printed community newspapers (Caxton, 2014). The turnover of newspapers in the thriving digital news industry poses an

avenue for research as despite the general decline in readership of printed news, community newspapers are proving to remain a source of news.

With this said, relevant theories such as brand purpose, brand building, media convergence and digitisation were discussed in relation to the research topic and questions. This was with the aim to find possible answers to the research problem and furthermore understand the relationship between community news and branding.

1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

The following objectives form a basis for this study in order to guide and answer the research questions:

1. To understand the challenges for community newspapers to build and communicate their brand in a digital age.
2. To explore the purpose for community newspapers.
3. To understand the purpose and relevance of the varied communication channels such as traditional or new media platforms.

Based on the aforementioned objectives, the following research questions have been established to aid in exploring the research title and research problem:

1. What is the purpose of community newspapers and how should this be communicated in a digital age?
2. How can community newspapers increase readership in a digital age?
3. Are other media seen as a competitor or companion to print news?

1.3 Research Assumption

The community news industry has to balance their brand in terms of online and offline presence. The communication strategy will have to adopt multiplatform communication strategies in order to survive among competitors as well as to involve consumers in the interactive nature of online news. Alongside this, community newspapers have to become a companion to the digital platforms. Community news will still have a purpose however its medium of communication may have to eventually adjust to fit the evolving methods of communication.

1.4 Delimitation/Demarcation of Study

The various media which are experiencing a shift from print to digital, proves it to be necessary to limit research to a specific form of print media: community newspapers. Due to the time and resource constraints, this was further limited to community newspapers (tabloid newspapers produced by Caxton), digital managers belonging to the said company's group and news readers of a Pietermaritzburg based community newspaper, *Public Eye*.

With this said, there are possible research avenues which are not be explored due to the aforementioned limitations: quantitative research into the general public's opinion on the relevancy of print media; the reliance of advertisers on free community newspapers have on advertising and branding through social media.

1.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principals "include(s) matters such as honesty, respect for human rights and avoiding plagiarism" (Bryman, Bell *et al*, 2014, p.377).

With this said, the qualitative nature in which research has been conducted, required interviewing individuals, namely digital managers and community members. In order

to interview the aforementioned people, consent was given to record the conversation. As Bryman *et al* (2014, p.125) states, “prospective research participants should be given as much information as they need to make an informed decision about whether or not to participate.”

Copyright protection and issues pertaining to the use of sources and information are accurately accredited. The CSIR Research Ethics Principals (in Bryman *et al*, 2014, p.129), it is stated that it is imperative to “give proper acknowledgement or credit of all contributions to research.”

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Current literature in the field of branding as well as the community news, print and digital media formed a basis of knowledge to understand the current trends in the news industry as well as theories that aid in primary research. This literature review explores current discussions and theories that formed insight into core aspects of the research topic; community news, brand purpose and building brands in a digital age. Within the last section, media convergence and digitisation is explored with the aim to understand reasoning behind the need for digital brand building.

2.1 Community Newspapers

Community news is defined as a form of communication that strives to cover issues and stories that are relevant to a specific community or area (Saving Community Journalism, 2015). This definition encourages a sound understanding of the identity of the newspaper as well as its readers.

Berger (2005) argues that journalism in South Africa has changed over time due to the transition from the apartheid regime to a democracy. With this said, a new form of news reporting had to be developed in order to connect with the South African target market. Newspapers should ideally have watchdog, empowerment and representative roles which are specifically important where freedom of speech is encouraged in the democratic country of South Africa.

Fourie (2007) discusses the history of the press in South Africa describing the 1980's to the mid 1990's as the re-emergence of alternative press. Publications in South Africa grew during this period due to the need to communicate national news about the struggle. In 2003, the rise of tabloid newspapers targeting low-income earners made its impact on South Africa. Daily newspapers grew fast, leading to an over-saturated market. Newspapers were said to begin to lose advertisers due to the lack of understanding with regards to the newspaper market.

South African readers however proved to drift toward newspapers which conveyed news in mother-tongue languages, specifically isiZulu. It has been found that with technology remaining out of reach for many South African's, users of public transport still find newspapers to be their primary news source (PwC, 2015). Furthermore, this reinforces the reasoning for readers to purchase tabloid newspapers that link to specific geographical areas that they resonate with (PwC, 2015).

In South Africa, reaching rural areas poses a challenge for the increase in digital news platforms (PwC, 2015). The use of newspapers meets the need for credible news. High-profile stories such as the Oscar Pistorious Trial and the death of Nelson Mandela found to contribute to a spike in newspaper sales (PwC, 2015). Community newspapers used a personal and relatable angle to report such stories which made this a news source of choice.

With this said, community newspapers have been found to increase in circulation especially in the vernacular titles such as *Isolezwe* and tabloid newspapers like the *Daily Sun* (Carpenter-Frank, 2015). It has been noted that as long as people seek information that is relevant to them, community newspapers serve a purpose (Carpenter-Frank, 2015).

2.2 Brand Purpose

Brand purpose is described by Neumeier (2013) as the primary reason for a brand's existence which is said to never change. Within brand purpose, literature shows that ultimately, all the elements of a successful brand links to its identity. Pather (2005) describes that an essential aspect of a successful newspaper is understanding the product. How the newspaper is positioned is of importance in order to gain and keep readers. With this said, for community newspapers to maintain its readership and relevance, the brand's purpose is essential to maintain what it stands for, especially where a change of medium (from print to digital) may occur.



THE STRATEGIC PYRAMID

Figure 1: The Strategic Pyramid (Neumeier, 2013)

The above pyramid (Fig. 1) illustrates the importance of a strong brand purpose. Brand purpose is the highest on the hierarchy in terms of drivers of a brand. Neumeier (2013) describes the brand purpose to be constant despite changes that may occur in a business’s goals, missions and visions. Community newspapers need to establish their purpose in order to grow and stay relevant among the competitors.

Neumeier (2003) further unpacks brand purpose by asking three vital questions in a “focus test”: 1) Who are you?; 2) What do you do?; 3) Why does it matter?. These questions are linked to brand focus and ultimately, its purpose. If the purpose of a brand is clear, the overall identity of a brand is considered to be sound. Neumeier (2003) further explains that a brand with a strong purpose becomes a charismatic brand (which will further be discussed under building brands) that people believe

there is no substitute for. With this said, the “focus test” questions were weaved into focus group discussions to establish the purpose of a brand and community news in particular.

Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009) use a strategic brand analysis to gain insight into the overall identity of a brand and business. This analysis looks at the customer, the competitor and the self. This would be essential to establish if community newspapers have a purpose and furthermore how this medium fares in the industry. The self analysis in particular helps to “uncover not only the brand’s heritage and current image but also the strengths, limitations, strategies, and values of the organisation that is creating the brand” (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2009, p. 41). With this said, predominantly the self analysis would aid in assessing the brand purpose or its reason to exist. Existing brand image, brand heritage, strengths, strategies and organisation values all fall under this analysis.

This would be applied to newsrooms that focus on community with the aim to effectively serve the people of a particular area. Each self analysis would therefore be different depending on how a specific newsroom aims to communicate to their community. Newsrooms need to therefore be able to answer to the purpose of community news and what differentiates it from other news publications. As Jenkins (2004) explains, the public are wanting to be more involved with what they read and due to the geographical specifications of community newspapers, readers find this form of media of relevance to them. It has been found that in the year 2015, community newspapers have increased in circulation, due to it serving the personal interests of communities (Carpenter-Frank, 2015). It can therefore be argued that there is a purpose for a brand that focuses predominantly on community news or vernacular news titles.

2.3 Digitisation and Media Convergence

A brand with purpose is able to develop and adapt to different communication strategies. In understanding why there is a need for building a brand across a digital platform, digitisation and media convergence have proven to be topics worth exploring in order to gain knowledge relevant to the communications industry.

Digitisation is described as the “conversion of analogue information in any form...to digital form...so that information can be processed, stored, and transmitted through digital circuits, equipment, and networks” (Business Dictionary, 2015).

Rossouw (2005) argues that the shift from print media to digital media has led to a dramatic fight to ‘break’ an exclusive story. The immediacy that social media and the internet offers, shows the evolving nature of news reporting as well as the threat digitisation is to the print industry. Newspapers need to keep up sound content in order to remain a news source of choice. It is also stated that extending the brand to other platforms is necessary in order to engage readers with the content (Rossouw, 2005). This therefore links to the media convergence theory.

Monoim (2005, p. 238) discusses the evolving nature of news stating that “new technology creates, and also destroys...But certain values and skills are always lost; generally values that older people cherish, younger people do not. Expect the next generation of digital media to be no different”. With this said, digitisation is considered to be rapidly taking over however the “tactile pleasure” (Monoim, 2005, p. 230) of printed news is still not achieved by technology. It is argued that as long as technology does not offer this, print media still has a purpose. The discussion on digitisation is taken further by proposing a digital platform or device that can offer something as close to printed paper as possible. Monoim (2005) states that Roger Fidler, who first proposed the idea of an electronic newspaper in 1981, believes the reason why an ideal electronic newspaper would be so similar to holding a newspaper in your hands, is due to the basis that the tactile nature of newspapers is liked by readers.

Convergence and digitisation have a common thread which is the rise of technology and its uses. Convergence is described by Siapera (2012, p. 132) as the “process which blurs the lines between media, even those point-to-point communicative media, such as the post and the telephone, as well as between mass media, such as television, radio and the press.” The issue of how community newspapers have adapted to remain relevant may be linked to this theory, due to a shift and restructuring of journalism (Siapera, 2012).

Print media is considered to be endangered due to digital convergence. The use of multiple platforms may be a reason as to why community newspapers are still being produced by publishers. The use of multiple platforms to convey a message is argued to be a method that may aid company growth and exposure (Siapera, 2012). The more rural areas which have limited access to digital media (PwC, 2015), are also a primary reason as to why multiple platform delivery may be necessary in South Africa.

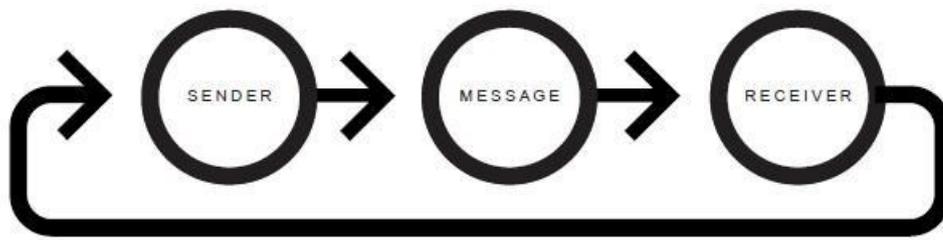
Jenkins (2004) discusses convergence in relation to culture and community involvement. The increasing desire for people to be a part of discussions and interact with media they choose to use has lent itself to the possible demise of newspaper readership. With this said, it can be argued that this may lead to a symbiotic relationship between print media and digital media (Doyle, 2013); allowing readers to participate through technology as well as providing solid information that may be considered to be more credible through printed newspapers. An arguable consensus of the continuation of traditional media alongside new technology and methods of communication is a possibility (Bolter and Grusin, 2000).

The area of new media is defined by Siapera (2012, p.5) as essentially any form of media, be it old or new, as long as it evolves. *Understanding New Media* (Siapera, 2012) deals with the evolving nature of media and methods of communication. Within this, the theory of convergence is explored. This addresses the question of how community newspapers can potentially adapt but remain true to its purpose.

2.4 Brand Building in the Digital Age

Considering digitisation and media convergence, Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009) introduce the web as an important component in building brands and furthermore explain that brands can be built through a variety of media. Digital media has been found to have multiple touch points, which can work in favour of any organisation should it be done properly (Interbrand, 2012). Keller (2008) reinforces the importance of brand building in the digital age due to the evolving media landscape. The use of multiple communication platforms does not only encourage brand equity but also links directly to the shift in the news industry from print to digital. With this said, Keller (2008) further states that the static nature of the print medium assumes consumers to be passive. The print news industry may therefore need to incorporate digital platforms to establish an ongoing dialogue with the community it serves.

Here, Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009) delve into the importance of having a solid identity behind the brand in order to build a brand throughout multiple communication platforms. This is because brands with an offline presence, like community newspapers, should view the web as an integral part of the brand in order to grow in the age of digital media. Due to the interactive nature of the digital sphere, Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009) stress that due to the vast reach of digital marketing, any impact, be it positive or negative, has a great impact as opposed to solely using traditional media. A quote from Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009, p. 233) describes brand building and the web: “the art of creating brand-building experiences on the Web therefore require new perspectives and skills, as well as a willingness to understand the unique properties of the Web – it is interactive and involving; it offers current, rich information; and it personalises the experience.” Community newspapers can arguably use the interactive nature of an online platform to encourage a circular communication process (Fig. 2) which includes feedback and interactivity.



THE NEW COMMUNICATION MODEL IS A DIALOGUE.

Figure 2: New Communication Model (Neumeier, 2003)

The above model (Fig. 2) illustrates the continuous cycle of communication which is essential for newsrooms to understand should they take on a multiplatform brand strategy. The interactive nature that the digital platform provides shows the potential complexities of building brands in the age of digital media.

Chan-Olmsted (2002) emphasises the importance of strategy for building a brand in the digital age. Market expansions and the like emerge as opportunities for businesses which are encouraged to embrace for innovation and remaining relevant. Chan-Olmsted (2002, p. 641) claims that “for an existing media firm to expand its business into other areas of services, it needs to first assess whether its current brand has acquired the value to fortify and benefit the new business line.” This statement shows the complexity of shifting communication platforms and thus newspapers that rely on advertising for income may find newsrooms reluctant to shift totally from print to digital. The author has therefore emphasised the importance for companies to be open to building their online brand. This is for businesses to stay competitive and relevant to the changing marketplace.

According to Doyle (2013), studies have been done to assess how the news industry can survive considering the shift in communication platforms. The article explores the effects on business should it consider multiplatform delivery. Linking to brand

purpose, it becomes apparent that the business's reason for existing should give rise to the need for survival in the advancing digital era. Here, Doyle (2013) stresses the importance of recognising the need for integration, convergence and shift toward building the online presence of a brand.

With this, issues have surfaced, namely change in employment and finances. Print has proven to remain relevant as it brings in revenue, particularly in 'free' newspapers like most community newspapers. Online news is generally expected to be free and this has brought about the need for income should there be an ultimate shift to building an online brand. News brands are then encouraged to build a customer base through free online subscriptions which can give an idea to potential online advertisers the amount of people 'investing' in the online product.

Editors, according to Doyle (2013), still stress that the digital and print aspects of the business are now run separately as complementary business. However, digital is first priority. The purpose of delivering news to the people is still at the core of any newsroom however, the importance of building a brand in a digitised age is imperative for the survival of the communication business.

To conclude, literature has shown that the news industry is rapidly changing as technology evolves. Community newspapers in particular may ultimately have to shift from a printed medium to a digital medium in the near future however it is important for a news brand to remain true to its identity and purpose in order to converge platforms of communication successfully. Neumeier's (2003) "focus test", will help in assessing whether a brand has a solid purpose and furthermore if consumers will resonate with it. With this said, brands in the communication industry, specifically news, need to adopt methods of brand building in the digital age. This would be primarily for the survival of a newsroom. The nature of the digital sphere encourages dialogue with the communities that newsrooms serve which in turn shows the necessity of building a brand with a strong purpose in the digital age.

Chapter 3: Research Design

To pursue delving into the research questions and objectives, a description of the research methods were discussed in order to begin to collect data. An empirical study has been done due to the qualitative nature of the research. The data collection consisted of both primary and secondary sources (Kumar, 2014).

Primary research can be described as the collection of first hand data (Kumar, 2014). Interviewing people is an example of this (Kumar, 2014). Secondary research was done by referring to and analysing current literature and statistics on the research topic. Here, academic journals, text-books, articles, academic literature (both online and print) were utilised. Secondary research is therefore described as “second-hand data” (Kumar, 2014, p. 172). Kumar (ibid), does however note that “none of the methods of data collection provides 100 percent accurate and reliable information.

3.1 Qualitative Research

To explore the research questions and carry out the research objectives, a qualitative method was used in order to collect primary research. As described by Boeije (2012, p.11), key elements in qualitative research are “1) looking for meaning, 2) using flexible methods enabling contact, and 3) providing qualitative findings.” In the research, these three key elements were important to address. The characteristics of qualitative research such as flexibility and freedom of structure (Kumar, 2014) was best applied to the research topic considering the need to delve into community news, its purpose and brand building.

3.2 Case Study

A case study method is most applicable to this study. Bryman *et al* (2014, p. 42) describes case study research as “an in-depth study of one or more individuals or phenomena in its existing context.” Due to the specific company that the research is limited to, the people interviewed were digital managers who fall under the Caxton umbrella. This method was therefore most applicable to the qualitative and specific nature of the study, therefore a random sample of people was not applicable (Kumar, 2014). Furthermore, a focus group of the *Public Eye* (community newspaper) readers was held in order to gain insight into how readers feel about what this platform delivers. This reinforced the necessity of a case study method. Overall the research method consists of a combination of interviews and a focus group in order to gain the most insight into possible answers to the research questions.

3.3 Interviews

Although a focus group was ideal due to the possible in depth discussions between professionals who come from both the digital and print news industries, the possibility of being able to gather the relevant people at the same time was an unreachable goal due to time constraints and location issues. For this reason, semi-structured interviews were conducted (Bryman *et al*, 2014). For this, interview questions were set prior to contacting the relevant people. Due to the semi-structured nature of the interview, it was essential to record the conversation using a recording device (possible with Skype and telephonic interview) in order to refer back to the discussion should any additional useful information arise.

With this said, consent was asked for before recording. The environment therefore played a vital role in the success of the interview and therefore a quiet environment where both parties were comfortable was ideal.

As mentioned, through a semi-structured interview process, two digital managers who fall under Caxton news were interviewed. Due to the increase of new media and

digitisation (Siapera, 2012), digital managers were able to provide insight into how newspapers and news content has been used or shaped to suit the digital sphere. This was done with the aim to gather information regarding the readership of online news and feedback from target audiences regarding published news. Despite a digital manager's field being in online media, it would also be of interest to assess how print media affects their field of specialisation.

3.4 Focus Group

A focus group is defined as an "interaction between multiple respondents through facilitated, structured or unstructured discussions" (Bryman and Bell *et al.*, 2014, p. 42). A focus group was held with five people from a specific community who read a specific community newspaper. It was important that these five people were of the ages 35 upwards due to the likelihood of this age group to have read a community newspaper due to its content. With this said, the *Public Eye* newspaper was used as a community news example for the focus group. Members of the discussion were all from the Pietermaritzburg, northern area, who receive the *Public Eye* community newspaper on a weekly basis.

Focus groups were ideal in this case because this type of research is described by Bryman and Bell (2014, p. 60) as more natural as "it emulates the way people discuss issues in real life." This was essential as community newspapers aim to gather issues experienced in communities and communicate it to the public. Due to the natural and discursive nature of the focus group, it was essential to record the conversation and guide it with prepared questions when the discussion drifted off topic.

Here, the environment of the focus group was also important. A space where people were happy to talk and were free from disruptions was necessary. To document the data, with the permission of the focus group participants, a recorder was used in

order to make sure that no vital information was missed. An additional person was present to help document the conversation.

Throughout the focus group session, it was important to keep a tab of key themes which arose based on the discussions had. Often, due to the semi-structured and discursive nature of the meeting, unforeseen themes and issues arose which was important for the findings of the study.

3.5 Data Analysis

For the case study, it was important to have transcribed information from both the interviews and focus group. This helped in the final stages of analysing the data gathered from the interviews and focus groups. The formation of a comprehensive database helped “facilitate the data analysis process (and) also enhance the reliability of (the) study” (Bryman and Bell *et al.*, 2014, p. 357).

A thematic analysis was used in working through the collected data. This method was suitable due to the ultimate search for themes emerging from the focus group discussion and interviews. The thematic analysis is a flexible method of analysis (Bryman & Bell *et al.*, 2014) which ultimately aids in assessing patterns found among the data collected.

Braun and Clarke (in Bryman and Bell *et al.*, 2014, p. 351) encourage six phases of thematic analysis. The themes are as follows: 1) familiarising yourself with data; 2) generating initial codes; 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining and naming themes; 6) producing the report. These six steps formed a framework for the analysis process of the data gathered. While going through the data it was important to constantly link data to the research objectives, questions and title in order to remain on track with what themes should be looked for.

Through analysing primary research in conjunction with themes explored in the literature review, a narrative approach to the data analysis was taken. With the aim

to connect and compare the themes discussed in the literature review, the primary research was sifted through in order to find answers to the research questions. Each section of the primary research was analysed separately (focus group findings and interview findings) and have thereafter been compared and synthesised with the secondary research. This is discussed further in Chapter 4 of this study.

3.6 Pilot Study

Based on the following questions, a pilot test was done to assess the flow of the final primary research that was done:

1. What is the purpose of community newspapers and how should this be communicated in a digital age?
2. How can community newspapers increase readership in a digital age?
3. Are other media seen as a competitor or companion to print news?

For the pilot study of the focus group, a group of four people aged 35 to 58 were asked the primary question of whether they think community newspapers served a purpose. It should be noted that these four people will not be part of the official focus group. Here, it became apparent that based on the responses given, the prepared questions were not necessary to be asked as it came up during the conversation on its own. With four people conversing, it was still difficult to document the conversation by hand and so it has been confirmed that both an additional scribe and a recorder will be needed when conducting the official focus group.

General conversation between a digital manager and a journalist formed the opportunity to run the core questions past them in order to assess if the questions were open ended enough. Due to the planned semi-structured nature of the interview, the three main questions opened up discussion which did not necessarily need further questioning. The need for pre-planned questions at hand proved to be

unnecessary at the time however for the official interview, such questions were kept at hand.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

This chapter delves into primary research which explores the research questions through qualitative means. A semi-structured interview was conducted along with a focus group.

4.1 Interview

As stipulated in the previous chapter, in order to gain a deeper insight into the digital sphere of communication within the community news industry, a semi-structured interview was conducted with two digital managers. Based on the research questions, the conversation with the digital managers was guided in order to gather information that was relevant to the study.

From the interview, discussions initially revolved around the shift in work ethic that is required from journalists due to multiplatform delivery of news. They found that the shift from print news to digital news requires speed and accuracy; therefore journalists “have to have their finger on the pulse of community relevant news at all times”. Reporting on what is of interest to a community required journalists to look into online communication platforms like social media.

When asked about the relevance of community newspapers versus digital media, it was confirmed that currently, print and digital are seen as companions. Digital news offers interactivity which is what keeps community members coming back to an online website as opposed to solely reading a printed newspaper. Due to a vast amount of South African’s being unable to access a reliable broadband service, printed news serves a purpose, specifically to an older generation. Both managers agreed that community news needs to be reported on both print and digital platforms, with one manager stating that:

The community news industry is also trying to broaden its readership and remain current in a competitive field. It's our duty as digital managers to make sure that news is delivered on the turn and that readers want to come to our websites first. Print isn't fast enough. See our online snippet first, then read the full story in the newspaper tomorrow.

It has been proven that the interactive nature of online news is what makes it the "go to" news source for majority of community news readers. A quote that stood out during the discussion was that "often the community members want to have their say about what is going on around them". Here, it was reinforced that the 'personal' nature of community news resonates with a specific group of people and therefore there is more interest in local news.

It was acknowledged that there has been an increase in digital news consumption and with platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, citizen journalists are on the rise. "Journalists are no longer the first ones to break the news," explained an interviewee. The challenge of maintaining a digital platform that is fresh and relevant creates immense pressure on journalists to provide news that is new to readers. With this said, it was established that journalists have to create a rapport with citizen journalists in order to gain raw footage and provide a compelling story for readers. Both digital managers agreed that to increase readership, community members must feel involved in the news.

Using video footage, quotes from community members, sound clips and photo galleries have become second nature to a reporter. When going out for a story the journalist must try and get [video footage, quotes, sound clips and photographs]. Often citizen journalists capture this before the journalist does and so journalists cannot work in isolation.

4.2 Focus Group

A focus group was conducted to gain insight into the purpose of community news from the perspective of those who read community newspapers. For this, five community members were asked to join a focus group which was conducted in an environment conducive to conversation and recording. The members of the focus group confirmed to read the same community newspaper.

The discussion was opened with a question linked to the purpose of community newspapers. From here it was established that members of the community rarely communicate 'face to face'.

We used to talk over the fence and that is how news travelled. Now community newspapers fill this role as we are all busy concentrating on our own responsibilities. I look forward to reading the *Public Eye*. Sometimes people I know are in the paper and I often relate to the problems brought up in the articles.

There was a general consensus that community newspapers provide a sense of familiarity that national newspapers do not offer. As seen in the above quote, people relate to what is published in a community newspaper and therefore it is seen as a "weekly recap of the happenings in the area". With this said, weekly news, as much as it is a needed "recap" it was often found to be "old news" once it was received in the following week's newspaper.

Printed news was seen as more credible and in-depth but communities have been organising their own Facebook groups to engage with news faster. One particular focus group member pointed out that she had given a journalist a "tip off" for a story and this made her more interested in visiting the online platform to see the comments. This led to confirmation that community members want to also voice their opinions but often there is a concern about voicing this using their names. It appeared that anonymity is preferred when it comes to community involvement. Community members also said that they enjoy reading stories online if they are short

and have videos. Otherwise, printed news is easy to flip through without any clutter (online pop ups and adverts).

When guiding the conversation back to community newspaper's purpose, a general consensus was that the advertisement inserts are useful. These adverts link directly to what is available in the shops within the community. Digital news is purely for news but print was seen to have multiple purposes, such as it being recyclable/reusable and having adverts that are relevant to the area.

I often flip through a newspaper for a number of reasons. There are useful inserts in the paper too. We know what is 'on special' and it is very convenient to have something like that at hand in my busy schedule. I don't have time to shop around, I know I can flip through the *Public Eye* and find out what's in the shops. The digital platforms don't offer this.

Community members said that despite the conflict between print and digital, they found both platforms to be useful. Digital offered interactivity and print offered credibility and useful advertisements. It was clear that the communities that feel involved in the communication process show more interest in the online news platforms and thus they felt that there was a relationship built with the news brand and the consumer.

4.3 Analysis

In order to understand and answer the research questions, through an analysis of the findings, the three facets of research (secondary and primary) have been explored. The themes present in current literature were found to be reinforced through primary research however key findings from the focus group and interview have provided great insight into community news and its connection to brand building in the digital sphere. In this section, all the research has been analysed against the research questions. This is in order to show the correlation between the research findings and the research questions that shaped the entire study.

1. What is the purpose of community newspapers and how should this be communicated in a digital age?

Insight 1:

The lack of face to face communication between neighbours makes community newspapers and other platforms needed.

Focus group findings reinforced the purpose for community newspapers. Readers found the content relatable and in this case, a pleased reader links to a newsroom that understands what its purpose to deliver community orientated news. A product that understands what its consumers need is considered to be the start of a successful brand as pointed out by Neumeier (2013). Digital managers added that journalists need to understand that news reporting is no longer done in isolation. This reinforces the idea that the community wants to be more involved in delivering news.

In secondary research, Doyle (2013) pointed out that businesses have to accept the integration of communication platforms and this was acknowledged by the digital managers. The fast pace that news travels has brought about a need for differentiation among news platforms and community orientated news offers this. Focus group members acknowledged the personal and relatable nature of community news and this being reported on both digital platforms and printed platforms is appreciated.

2. How can community newspapers increase readership in a digital age?

Insight 2:

Citizen journalism is on the rise, making online platforms for sharing news a trend.

Based on secondary and primary research, it has become evident that a brand may need to build a rapport with citizen journalists in order to build a successful online news platform that has interested readers. The focus group proved that communities are making their own online forums because they feel the need to share local news.

Digital managers also reinforced that journalists are often relying on citizen journalists for raw footage for online posts. From analysing the secondary and primary research, it has become evident that the more involved the reader, the more likely they are to show interest in visiting a website or opening a newspaper.

3. Are other media seen as a competitor or companion to print news?

Insight 3:

Despite the obvious shift from print to digital, those in the community news business see print and digital as companions.

Findings from the interview with two digital managers reinforced a point by Siapera (2012) that states that media convergence is necessary for newsrooms to remain a news platform of choice. Focus group findings also added to this with the insight that readers find both platforms useful, however digital forums should incorporate citizen journalists as a part of their news output.

Media houses that are having to shift from print to digital should consider the benefits of both platforms and consider their communication strategies carefully before making a total shift from one medium to another. Research has shown that brands can develop well if both spheres are properly managed and the benefits of each platform are understood.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Recommendations

Due to the specified research limitations, there are avenues of research that were not explored. Based on these limitations, should further research be done into this topic, more insight into the digital arena of news production through a community orientated lens would prove another avenue for research.

Based on the findings of this research paper, it would be recommended that newsrooms take a balanced approach to producing specific community orientated news. Community members see value in what news brands are offering across both print and digital platforms. Citizens want to become a part of the news process and therefore the purpose of a community news forum should always be at the core of news across any platform.

The evolving nature of communications should also not be seen as a threat to different platforms but rather as opportunities to reach more members of the community. The relationship between print and digital should be cemented by the publishers brand identity and more specifically its brand purpose. Those in the news business should employ brand building methods that will not only strengthen their brand as a whole but also strengthen the brand in a manner that involves the personal approach that community news offers.

5.2 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore community newspapers in relation to the digital age. With this said, the research objectives and questions framed the study in order to gain insight into the research topic: *Exploring Community Newspapers and Brand Building in the Digital Age*.

Based on the research conducted, the following insights were established:

Insight 1:

The lack of face to face communication between neighbours makes community newspapers and other platforms needed.

Insight 2:

Citizen journalism is on the rise, making online platforms for sharing news a trend.

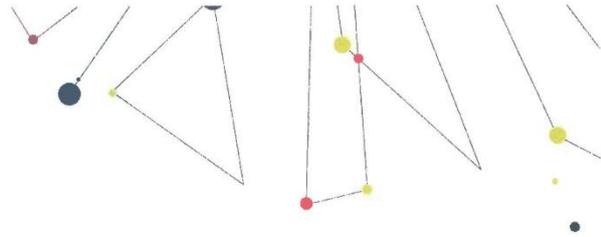
Insight 3:

Despite the obvious shift from print to digital, those in the community news business see print and digital as companions.

These insights answered the research questions and furthermore reached the objectives set for this study. Based on the research findings, it has been shown that there is a strong link between community newspapers and the digital age. Through research, the current state of communication within the news industry revolves around finding a medium between print and digital platforms. The brand that takes ownership of community news needs to be established in its print form in order to confidently deliver on its promise to deliver news to the community it serves.

It has been proven that community news needs a presence within the digital age. The public want to share their opinions and the specific nature of community news provides an ideal platform for this. Digital managers acknowledge the purpose of print but aim to gain a larger audience through online platforms. The essence of community may however be challenged on the vast platform that digitisation provides; however here, citizen journalists may be essential in order to keep up with the fast pace of the digital age. Through the use of citizen journalists, a positive rapport between the news brand and its readers may grow due to reader involvement. There is a need for the community to be informed about its surroundings and this is the essence of community news.

Appendix A



1/06/2015

Whom it may concern

Christine Nobin is a student studying at the Vega School of Brand Leadership (**Durban Campus**) towards the qualification Honours in Strategic Brand Communication (HSBC). As a major part of this course, students are required to produce a Research Report consisting of primary and secondary research.

As a 2014 Caxton Editorial Cadet and current student of Brand Leadership I aim to understand the community news industry in relation to the digital age, brand purpose and strategic brand communication. My interest in media and communication links to my research objectives to specifically use Caxton community news as my case study as it is an organisation that is a forerunner in the industry. This is with the goal to explore Caxton's philosophy on community news and the strategy behind its communication processes.

My research topic is:

Exploring the Purpose of Community Newspapers in the Age of Digital Media: A Case Study on Caxton & CTP Publishers and Printers.

These research projects undergo considerable scrutiny by individual supervisors and as such, are also approved on an ethical standards level. Please do not hesitate to call the Campus Head of Academics for further elucidation on the process and details, or alternatively my supervisor Naretha Pretorius.

Kindest Regards

Mary Robinson
Academic Co-Navigator
Durban Campus

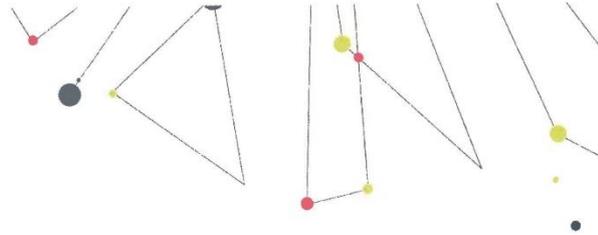
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INDEMNITY FORM

I hereby indemnify that I understand the purpose of the research and that I agree to participate in the research process of Christine Nobin's Honours thesis: *Exploring the Purpose of Community Newspapers in the Age of Digital Media: A Case Study on Caxton & CTP Publishers and Printers.*

I also understand that I can remain anonymous and that my identity will be protected if I request it.

I give permission for the interview to be recorded either digitally or with notes. Any client information that is confidential and discussed during the interview process will be kept anonymous if it is to be used in the thesis report.

Participant: _____

Signature: _____

Johannesburg: 011 521 4600 | Durban: 031 569 1415 | Cape Town: 021 461 8089 | Pretoria: 012 343 3669

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