Websites vs. Mobile Apps: A Content Analysis of Tampa Bay's News

by

Brittany Danielle Padley

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Journalism & Media Studies
College of Arts & Sciences
University of South Florida St. Petersburg

Major Professor: Antone Silvia, Ph. D.
Monica Ancu, Ph. D.
Casey Frechette, Ph. D.

Date of Approval:
March 28, 2012

Keywords:
Mobile Devices, iPad, Multimedia, Interactive Tools, Story

Dedication

This piece of work is dedicated in full to my parents, Daniel L. Padley and Roxana L. Padley and my grandparents, Forrest E. Padley and Norma Jean Padley. I will never be able to fully express the inspiration each one of you is for me. Nor can I tell you how much your love, prayers and unwavering belief in me has meant to me in my young life so far. I love you more than you will ever know, more than I have the courage to say out loud. Thank you for giving me life, love, the smarts to know better and the ever-present Padley wit. I am the woman I am because of you.

To Dr. Tony Silvia, thank you for your time and dedication. It means so much to me to know that there are professors like you who are so attentive to students, treating us as equals and willing to go beyond what is needed. You do not just teach, you truly educate.

To Dr. Monica Ancu, your class was the inspiration for this research. Thank you for flipping the switch in my personal beliefs and guiding me through this digital world I tried so diligently to avoid.

Dr. Casey Frechette, I said it before and I'll say it again, thank you for allowing me to bulldoze you into becoming a part of this process. I can honestly say without you I could not have completed this work. Your knowledge of all things digital surprises me every time we speak.

To the rest of the faculty and staff in the department of journalism and media studies at USFSP, thank you for your insights and for pushing me to become the journalist I want to be. Coming to this university was the best decision I have yet to make for myself and each of you played a role in that.

I would also like to specifically thank Dr. Bob Dardenne. I would not have been a student of this brilliant program were it not for you. For that, I will spend the rest of my life being grateful.

Lastly, I would like to thank Casey A. Peterson. You have been the best classmate, roommate and friend anyone could ask for. Thank you for all your help, from technical things to school and life related things. Thank you, most importantly, for the countless laughs. Laughter is the greatest gift one can give another and it is Christmas morning every day with you across the hall.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Abstract

Due to changing technology news organizations now offer multiple platforms through which consumers can get their news. However, does having more outlets mean we are getting better news, or at the least, more news? A content analysis of 3,910 news stories from two news organizations local to the Tampa Bay area: WTSP 10 News and WFTS ABC Action News examined the content provided through each organization's website homepage and compared this content to that published by the same organization's news app. Stories were collected from each organization's website and app in a 10 day time period. Results indicated that content provided on news apps is the same as the content provided on the news websites because media organizations have yet to take advantage of the technology the app platform has to offer.

Chapter 1

Introduction

As times change and technology improves, the online world and mobile devices begin to have a stronger grip on society. This grip stems from our natural desire to feel connected with people and information and developing mobile technology allows us to connect in ways we were never able to before. These technological changes have also had an impact on the news industry and there is now a demand for having access to news in places other than the morning paper. However, just because more consumers are demanding alternative news formats does not mean they are demanding less news. With more outlets and more accessibility, people expect to have information at their fingertips at any moment they want it. This means these new formats need to be as readily available and polished as ever.

News websites were developed as an additional outlet for those who were looking for alternative methods of news gathering, as well as for those people who were looking to get their news cheap or even for free. Today, as many news sites are available for little or no charge, a wide range of local, national and international information is made available. Not only do local television viewers have access, but so do viewers anywhere with Internet access. This accessibility is increasingly available in the new

technology of mobiles devices as the adoption of smart phones and tablets increase and eventually drive demand for content.

Mobile device users can access their news through two methods: (1) their browser, just as they would on their computer or (2) through a downloadable application, commonly referred to as an app. The concept of news apps and apps in and of themselves are a relatively breakthrough technology. This is due to the novelty of the smartphone and the tablet. Apple, the innovator behind the smart phone and tablet revolution, released the first iPhone in 2007 and the first iPad tablet in 2010. As 2012 begins, we can see news organizations (as well as many other kinds of organizations: retailers, gaming organizations, local governments, medical organizations, etc., etc.) scrambling to get their apps working if they have not done so already. In terms of news apps specifically, each individual app provides unique local information as well as national and international information pertinent to the public interest that is likely available on most if not all of the apps.

Little research has been done on the differences between the content available on news apps and the content available on news websites. This thesis will explore how and why this information is being presented on these two different platforms, all the while reflecting on the quality of information being provided and draw conclusions on web versus app approaches and values. Quality, for the purposes of this research, will be defined in the literature review. An analysis of the content of each will be done and compared to that of the information being offered by the other platform. There are many similarities between the content offered on news apps and the content offered on news

websites but there are also differences, especially in the realm of personalization. This is what draws people to purchase, use and interact with their mobile devices.

Specifically, in terms of the iPad, a study by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism in collaboration with *The Economist* (2011) stated, 11% of adults in the United States use a tablet and 53% of those utilize this device to get their news. Spending a substantial amount of quality time with the news on these devices is the most popular activity generating the most use, as users were on their news apps two and a half times longer than any other type of app (Localytics, 2011).

The newness of the iPad technology is intriguing and the amount of time people spend with it and the activities they do on it – in terms of news consumption – needs to be researched so news organizations can better develop stories, high quality stories, and strategies for presentation of the these stories. As research regarding news in these forms is so modest, this thesis aims to provide simple yet valuable insight relating to news content as it is presented on websites and apps to ensure news quality will never be sacrificed for technology, no matter how breakthrough it is.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Quality Journalism

Before we can interpret the information presented to us on the website and app technologies we must lay a foundation to understand the context. First, what does the news industry define as quality news and how does that definition shape the presentation of the news itself? The question of news quality over quantity is a discussion among journalism professionals and academics alike. It can be argued the concept of quality changes over time, in the ebb and flow of societal acceptances, adaptations and developments of technology. It is hard to define because the idea of quality is different for every person, however many scholars and professionals have tried

Gary Pruitt, CEO, president and chairman of the board of McClatchy Company, which owns 30 newspapers in 29 markets, believes quality is "a commitment to a relevant news product that informs readers so they can participate in society as citizens. Our newspapers encompass all of life… serve a mass audience and must be interesting and relevant to all potential readers, to inform them so they can lead better lives…" (as cited in Dunlap, 2011). Experienced news people were asked what makes for quality and a number of words and phrases surfaced: "integrity, fairness, balance, accuracy, comprehensiveness, diligence in discovery, authority, breadth of coverage, variety of

content, reflection of the entire home community, vivid writing, attractive makeup, packaging or appearance, and easy navigability" (Bogart, 2004). There are many ideas here, some relevant to the trends and issues that will be discussed in this research, for example: variety of content, easy navigability, accuracy, balance, fairness and comprehensiveness. Others though, for the purposes of this research's focus which is content, can be ruled out like attractive makeup and appearance. New concepts about quality in the digital age, such as credibility, utility and content relevancy, need to be introduced to this list as well because quality journalism can change depending on the platform a consumer is using.

Gladney, Shapiro and Castaldo (2007) used multiple sources like online journalism awards competitions, e.g., the "Edgies" (Newspaper Association of America) and "EPpy Awards" (*Editor and Publisher*), award-winning news sites, comparisons of online news sites across newspapers, radio and television stations and trade press releases from dozens of articles related in some way to the quality of online news to compile a list of 38 criteria to determine quality of online news. These criteria included: credibility, utility, content relevancy, fact-opinion separation, good writing, immediacy, ease of use, exclusivity and simplicity (Gladney et al., 2007). However, because of the unique features offered by the web platform, eight distinct concepts were also noted: reach, bandwidth, customization, user choice/control, interactive reading, community dialogue, civic/public discourse and cutting edge (Gladney et al., 2007). The study concluded that, regardless of the medium, the criteria for the content itself, including credibility and utility, ranks as the highest importance to new consumers… "trustworthiness and accuracy, along with the provision of "informative, useful" content, are the two highest

values for online news people" (Gladney et al., 2007). In summary, for the purposes of this technologically focused research, quality journalism is defined as news of informative, useful content that is credible, balanced and easy to navigate.

Technology Adoption

The Internet

The next thing we must understand is the history of these technologies and how the rapidity of these changes has ultimately changed the pace of the news industry and news consumption. Journalism has been on the fast track of change and the introduction of the Internet is no exception. The second half of the 20th century was an amazing time for those connected to and interested in the production of the Internet. Computers, known in their simplest form to be a machine that carries out computations, had been around since the early 1900s, but the Internet began to take its shape in the 1960s when researchers began packet switching – exchanging groups of data over a shared network. In the 1980s, Internet protocol became standard and journalists began disseminating information through bulletin board systems. Later, in the mid-1990s, when commercial Internet service providers (ISPs) emerged and the Internet was gaining momentum, the Oklahoma City bombing happened. This event took place on April 19, 1995 and is regarded as a "tipping point" of online news (Allan, 2006). This was when users and developers realized the potential for news organizations websites to begin breaking news online. From this single incident, news organizations and individual users alike realized the use of this new tool and began posting a wide range of subjects in attempts to provide more information to others including maps of Oklahoma City, graphics about different types of bombs, eyewitness accounts of the scene and surrounding activities,

transcriptions of news reports on the incident, disaster relief information, listings of survivors and discussion forums and chat rooms to help those outside the area trying to contact their friends and family members who may have been involved (Allan, 2006).

During this same time, many news organizations were utilizing the Internet, although, many of their websites were simply digital versions of their printed newspapers (Dooley, 2007). As time progressed, editors and those with computer skills began to change the way these sites were viewed, adding more graphics, more content (since space was no longer an issue as it was in the print version) and links to other resources on the Internet. These changes slowly but surely brought us to the current period of the Internet revolution where social media, emails and instant messages, blogging and high definition video and graphics reign over all else. The WTSP and WFTS websites being discussed in this research are highly developed in all of the aforementioned new media areas.

Tablets: The iPad

Due to the recent development of mobile technology, the history of these devices is not as extensive as that of the Internet and news websites. But, that does not mean they are any less important to the development of the news gathering process. As stated earlier, the first smartphone was released in 2007 and the first tablet device in 2010, so this area is new but still rapidly growing. As of January 2012, 18% of Americans say they own a tablet device (for the purposes of this paper the research will be focused around tablets) (Olmstead, Sasseen, Mitchell & Rosenstiel, 2012). As this research was being conducted Apple CEO Tim Cook announced the release of the newest version of its iPad. The announcement was made on Wednesday, March 7, 2012 and the device was

available for in-store purchase Friday, March 16, 2012. Sales of this iPad reached three

million pieces plus the pre-order sales in three days (Apple, 2012). In a broadcast

conference call, Cook stated Apple has sold over 55 million iPads, since the release of the

first iPad back in late 2010 (as cited in FoxNews.com, 2012).

Cearley believes the "tablet is an interesting media consumption device because

it's bringing computing into new areas. Instead of sitting at a desktop, people who are

walking around or interacting in various ways now have a device they can carry around

with them" (as cited in Gartner, 2012). Willis discusses the importance of tablets,

specifically the iPad, to businesses, users and the field of information technology saying

"media tablets are important to businesses because they are important to users… [The

iPad] introduced a new design point for IT, a new design point for applications and it's

opened up a lot of new areas where computing was just impractical before…" (as cited in

Gartner, 2012).

News Apps

News apps are a recent technological product introduced in 2007 with the

smartphone. As organizations discovered the ability to formulate and manipulate

websites to gain more eyes, so, too, did they begin to utilize the iPad as yet another tool

to offer consumers. However, there are a few apps to be noted as the frontrunners during

the birth and infancy stages of this new outlet. Upon doing a search of the free news apps

available in the Apple App Store, the top 25 players have remained about the same for

2011 and 2012. In January 2011, top news apps included major news outlets: CNN, the

New York Times, *USA Today*, the *Wall Street Journal*, NPR, ABC News, CBS News, the

Washington Post and BBC News (Palser, 2011a). As of March 2012, CBS News has been bumped out of this top 25 category and replaced with others like Yahoo! News, Al Jazeera (both in English and Arabic languages), Fox News, AP Mobile and msnbc.com (Apple. 2012). Why do these for profit news organizations give their access away for free? The answer is simple: it is a "welcome mat for new and curious customers" (Palser, 2011a). Once they can get their users in the door, users are likely to return and continue using the app as a resource, thus making advertisers thirsty for placements.

Paid apps are a different story. They have consistently changed as the creation of new apps become available. The cost of these apps is genuinely minimal, anywhere from 99 cents to $4.99 and up. In January 2011, the top three paid apps were: (1) CBS' "60 Minutes," (2) the *New York Post* and (3) the *New York Daily News* (Palser, 2011a). As of March 2012, the number one news app in the Apple app store is 5-0 Radio Pro Police Scanner ($1.99). Among other things, it allows users to tap into police, firefighter, emergency medical, air traffic, railroad and music stations to get information about events happening local to the user. The number two paid app is called Instapaper ($4.99). It allows users to save web pages for later, offline reading. And finally the number three paid app is Stars and Stripes Military News ($0.99). This app provides breaking U.S. military news and other information to everyone regardless if you are active military personnel or those just interested in military proceedings.

The *New York Times* was one of the first media organizations to create an app for users to access news on their mobile devices, outside their standard browser. Even though the iPhone was first released in 2007, Apple did not allow outside businesses to create a way for users to access any information they may have wanted to offer. But in

2008 when Apple released its software development kit (Block, 2008), the *NYT* was one

of the first to jump on board, followed by an app for the iPad upon its release in 2010

(Wauters, 2010). Additionally, it is important to mention Rupert Murdoch and his

contribution to the news app world. Murdoch and his News Corp., in conjunction with

Apple, created and released the very first iPad only newspaper or "iNewspaper" in late

2010/early 2011 (Helmore, 2010). This "iNewspaper" called *The Daily*, is available only

for mobile devices users. It cannot be seen on a computer browser, nor is it available for

print edition purchase. At a cost of only 99 cents per week, users have access to news

video and text, multimedia and social media with sharing tools to send stories to other

users. Over time, as creation of similar apps and tools have come into existence, some

users see *The Daily* as something less than breakthrough. That may be the case as

technology improves and time moves on, but organizations like the *New York Times* and

News Corp. were leaders in this field – leaders that helped pave the way for other news

organizations to do the same.

Why Study Online News and Apps?

Finally, we need to understand why it is important to look at these two similar,

but still very different, media. Aside from the general idea that studying news is

important, it is equally important to look at the information provided through these media

because people are spending more time gathering news through these media than

traditional media. The State of the News Media Report for 2011 found Americans are

spending 13 minutes a day with online news. This is three minutes longer than the time

spend with newspapers and this trend is predicted to grow as those in the 18 to 29 age

range reported the Internet as the number one platform of choice to get the news and those in the 30 to 49 age range reported it as their second choice, to television by only 15 percent (Pew Research, 2011). Seventy-seven percent of users who own tablets are spending 90 minutes a day on these devices and 53 percent of these users are using their tablets to get the news (Yang, 2011). The State of the News Media Report for 2012 reports that owners of digital devices are getting their news 70% from a desktop or laptop computer, 56% from a tablet and 51% from their smartphone (Olmstead, Sasseen, Mitchell & Rosenstiel, 2012).

Marshall MacLuhan believed not only that the message itself was important but the medium on which the message was being offered was equally important. He argued that print media have limitations because of their low levels of interactivity (Goodheart, 2000). The new media of the Internet and apps provide a high level of participation because they require the consumer to be directly involved with the media they are consuming. In fact, a consumer of these media must be active in almost all aspects of these media because they are voluntarily seeking it out to provide them with the information they want. Another theory relating to that of MacLuhan's explanation of the use of these new media to collect news is the concept of uses and gratifications. Users seek out these media to provide them with information instantly and to have the ability to double and triple check said information in the case of any discrepancies.

Interactivity has become an invaluable piece of the media organization's pie. Without it, the new online and mobile media would have no way to attract users and keep them coming back once they see the potential of these tools. The importance of interactivity of these media lies in the production of the new creation of a virtual space or

community and it gives users the ability "to participate in creation of modification of a medium" (Rubin, 2012) which users did not really have before the 1960s.

Finally, this research is important because very little other research that has been done to show the similarities and differences between these media and make judgments about the quality and value of the news provided by them. Other researchers say it is unnecessary to point out all the flaws, especially those of the tablet and app creators, because they "are evolving so quickly that today's flaws could be erased with tomorrow's update… [and] news organizations that are pioneering this space don't deserve to be judged for their early missteps because [they are] providing lessons for others" (Palser, 2011a). In a study about the socio-technical advantages of online news and how it is used compared to current news habits, Nguyen (2010) wrote "empirical knowledge is still limited about the influence of the attributes of online news on the way it is adopted, used and integrated into daily life."   People are embracing mobile use on an individual basis, but they are not at the point yet where they know what to expect in the enterprise of mobile content and consumption (Poole, 2011). So, speculation is pretty much all researchers and professionals have to predict the status and future of online and tablet news. "Technology is offering a glimpse of what the digital future could look like, but it's going to take a lot of trailblazing to get there" (Palser, 2011b).

Chapter 3

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the differences and similarities in approach and quantity between news stories published on news websites and news stories published through the apps ?

To answer this question, the following categories will be analyzed:

- Total number of daily stories on each platform (homepage)
- Story genre
- Story length
- Story format (text, photo, video, multimedia, etc.)

RQ2: Which platform (web or app) offers a higher multimedia experience and content?

To answer this question, the following categories will be analyzed:

- Number of photos, slideshows and/or video accompanying each story

RQ3: Which platform offers a more interactive experience to consumers?

To answer this question, the following categories will be analyzed:

- Absence or presence of social networking tools

- Absence or presence of user-contribution tools

- Absence or presence of user-personalization tools

RQ4: What, if any, are the technological limitations or advantages one platform has over the other?

Definition of Terms

For this research, the unit of analysis is the *story*.

Chapter 4

Methodology

To report on the content between the information provided on the news websites and the information provided on the news apps, an in-depth content analysis was conducted. The units of analyses are the stories and this analysis, which focused on the collective publication of news, evaluated the content of two local television news station's website and app homepages: WTSP 10 News and WFTS ABC Action News. These stations were chosen based on availability of apps and access to local media professionals. WFLA News Channel 8, the number one news station in the Tampa Bay metro market (DMA 14), according to Nielsen ratings data for February 2012 (Deggans, 2012), does not offer an app for mobile device users. The apps analyzed for this project were viewed only on an Apple iPad 2 because of researcher access, ease of reading the information on the screen because of the larger size and the rapidly growing sales of the device that make it the most popular tablet on the market (Apple, 2012).

The sample for this analysis was all the stories provided by the news organizations homepages, on both platforms, in a time span of ten days. The data was collected from Wednesday, March 7, 2012 through Friday, March 16, 2012. This was to ensure weekend coverage was analyzed as well as the standard weekly news. Stories were collected in the 6 pm hour everyday for logging, analysis and comparison to the

stories offered by the other platform and the other organization. This hour was chosen

for consistency purposes, time availability of the researcher and because while apps and

websites are updated regularly regardless of time, 6 pm is the prime-time hour for

television news viewing and the television news largely dictated those stories provided on

the app. The most recent and breaking news stories were made available during this hour

as the news app, if in use, would shut itself down to update a story or replace one if a new

or breaking story needed to take precedent.

Unlike a website, apps are limited in access to other stories and links to other

pages and advertisements. To address this issue, only the stories linked from the website

homepages were chosen to be analyzed because upon reviewing the content provided by

an app, the stories on the homepage are all that is made available to a user. Therefore,

viewing only the stories linked from the homepage on both media provide balance in the

data collection and ultimately in user access.

For research questions one through three a comprehensive list of categories of

investigation was analyzed, including: story genre (politics, economy, health, technology,

sports, etc.), story length, story format (print, photo, video, audio, multimedia, etc.),

numbers of photos and/or video accompanying the story and presence or absence of

sharing tools and other user-related tools, etc. To collect this data an offline browser

utility software called HTTrack was used to download the news homepages. This

software allows users to make exact copies of the website as they are seen and build those

sites as files directly to a computer's library. Once the download is complete a user can

then open the mirrored HTML site in their chosen browser and view the website, even if

it has since changed. Since news sites change and update daily, hourly and even by the

minute this software allowed the data collected in the 6pm hour to remain fully intact and unaltered. Total sample size for stories collected from the websites was 2,030.

The HTTrack software could not be used to collect content from the iPad 2 because the app platforms are not HTML code. To collect this data, screen shots were taken of every article made available during the hour on each app. The total sample size for stories collect from the iPad apps was 1,880. The total sample size for both the websites and apps was 3,910.

In addition to the content analysis, an interview with a local media industry professional working in the Tampa Bay area was conducted to gather answers for research question four. This interview was conducted on Monday, March 27, 2012 with Regina McCombs, a multimedia and social and mobile journalism faculty member at The Poynter Institute, a non-profit school of journalism.

Because of the limited time to collect and analyze the data, a cap of 200 stories was analyzed for each platform per station. If, in one single day, stories on one platform were in an excess of 200, then 200 stories were chosen at random to collect and analyze. This was to ensure there were approximately the same numbers of stories collected each day from each media organization on each platform. If random sampling needed take place, the excess in stories was noted in the analysis – as this could have contributed to the organization's institutional guidelines.

Chapter 5

Findings

Differences and Similarities

RQ1: What are the differences and similarities in approach and quantity between news stories published on news websites and news stories published through the apps?

To answer this question, the following categories will be analyzed:

- *Total number of daily stories on each platform (homepage)*

- *Story genre*

- *Story length*

- *Story format (text, photo, video, multimedia, etc.)*

	Website	App	Total
WTSP	1,090	900	1,990
WFTS	940	980	1,920
Total	2,030	1,880	**Grand Total= 3,910**

Figure 1- Total Sample Size

The total sample size for this research was 3,910 stories (See *Fig. 1*). For WTSP's website there were 1,090 and for WFTS's website, 940, that totaled 2,030 web stories for the ten days. For WTSP's app there were 900 stories and for WFTS's app

980, that totaled 1,880 app stories for the ten days. The total number of stories offered by

WTSP reached 1,990 in the ten days and the total number of stories by WFTS reached

1,920 (See *Fig. 1*).

Total Numbers- Websites

This question was written to determine some specifics for news websites and

apps. This research found many similarities between the two media. Results showed

that, for the web, the total number of daily stories for each organization remained the

same everyday – with 109 total stories presented on the WTSP homepage (See *Fig. 2*)

and 94 stories available on the WFTS homepage (See *Fig. 3*). The sites have a clear

templated layout of the stories and simply cycle through news stories in the appropriate
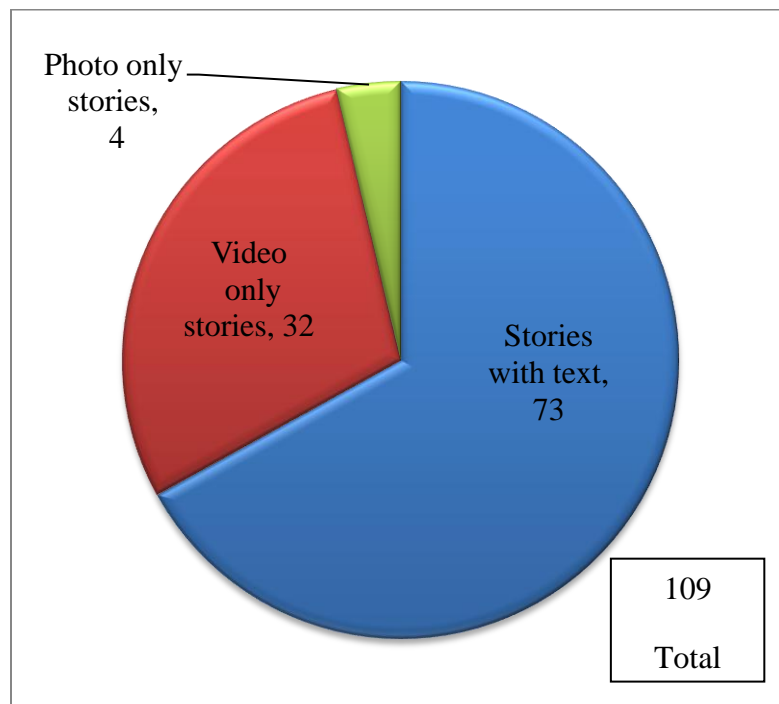
genre as time and breaking news dictates.

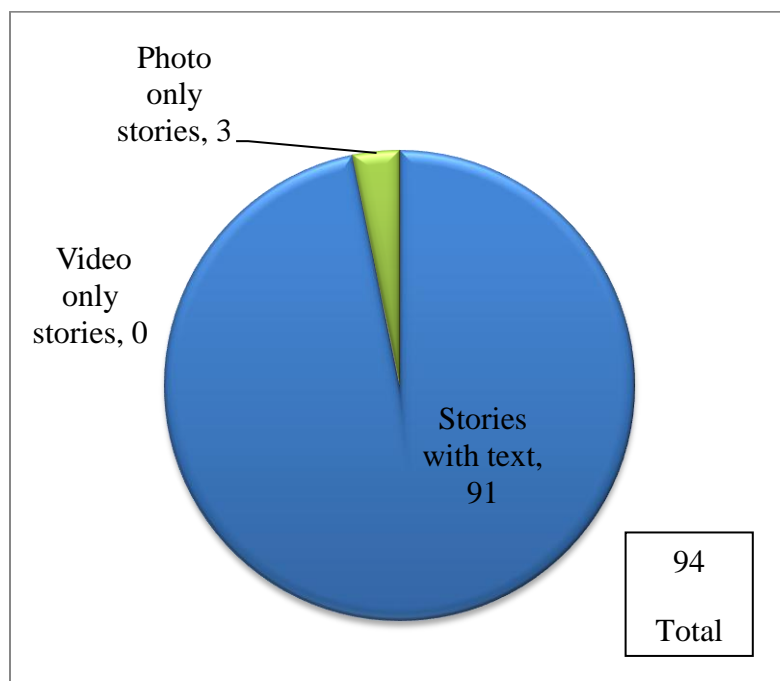
Figure 2- WTSP Website Daily Count

Figure 3- WFTS Website Daily Count

Total Numbers- Apps

The news apps also have a templated layout. WTSP offered the same number of stories every day, totaling 90. This was organized by nine genres of stories with ten stories in each genre. WFTS's app had a different number every day, ranging from 94 on Thursday, March 8, 2012 and Monday, March 12, 2012 to 102 on Wednesday, March 14, 2012 (See *Fig. 4*). Watching how the stories appeared and moved throughout the app, it
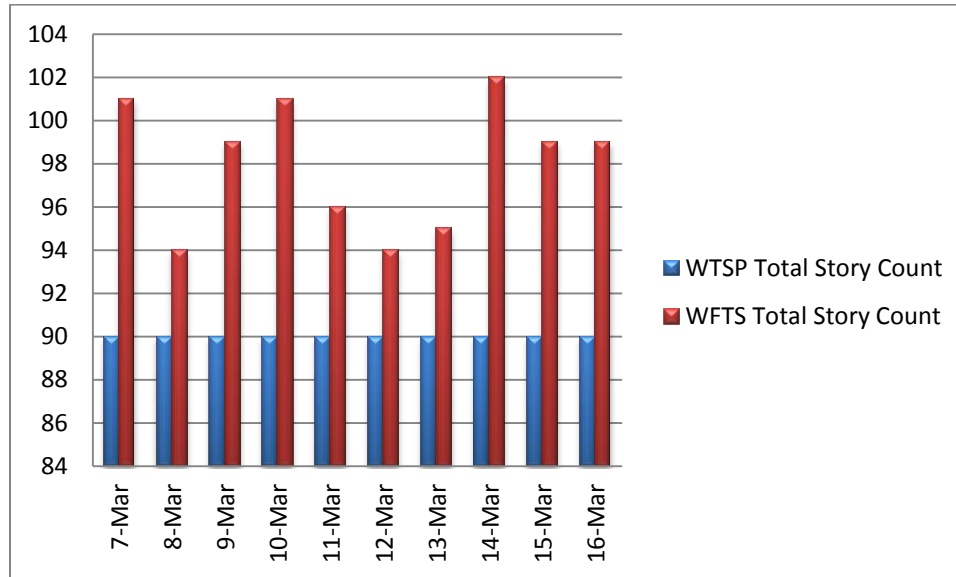
Figure 4- News Apps

appears they varied because of the number of new breaking news stories which took

precedent over other stories and the relevance of cultural, social and local stories that

remained on the app despite the days changing.

Story Genres- Websites

Story genre also did not change from day to day on an organization's website or

app. The WTSP website offers 11 different genres (or sections) for users to target

specific stories: 'top news' (10%), 'local news' (10%), '10 News on TV' (10%),

'investigators' (10%), 'national' (10%), 'entertainment news' (10%), 'Florida news'

(10%), 'political Florida' (10%), 'weird' (10%), 'check it out' (5.5%) and 'slideshows'

(3.67%). The WFTS website offers 13 genres: 'latest stories' (31.91%), 'featured stories'

(10.63%), 'political headlines' (10.63%), a top stories section (7.45%) (this genre is not

specifically as the others, but it provides breaking news stories and the most up-to-date

stories offered by the organization as the time stamps on the stories change when the

story is updated by the organization), 'consumer' (5.32%), 'entertainment' (5.32%),

'health' (5.32%), 'lifestyle' (5.32%), 'spotlight' (5.32%), ' i-team' (3.19%), 'photo

galleries' (3.19%), 'science & technology' (3.19%) and 'water cooler' (3.19%). All of

these genres from both organizations offer a 'see more' kind of link where users can

access more stories similar to those featured under the genre header, but those stories are

not linked directly from the homepage of the website.

Story Genres- Apps

The genres on the apps are less extensive than those provided on the internet site.

WTSP offered ten genres for news consumption: 'weird' (11.11%), 'top stories'

(11.11%), 'local' (11.11%), 'US/world' (11.11%), 'weather headlines' (11.11%) (aside

from the weather forecast and radar, this genre provided stories regarding local weather

conditions and national weather stories, particularly if severe weather hit one area and

caused harm to a family or local community or any damage), four local sports genres:

'Lightning' (11.11%), 'Bucs' (11.11%), 'Rays' (11.11%) and 'high school' (11.11%) and

finally, 'videos' (0%). WFTS offered eight genres of news[1]: a videos section (18.87%),

'money' (13.02%), 'sports' (12.92%), 'state' (12.17%), 'watercooler' (11.42%), a top

news section (11.32%) (this, like their website, is not labeled but provides the most recent

and breaking news stories), 'health' (10.57%) and 'entertainment' (9.72%). The array of

story genres on both media offered a user access to hard news and feature stories like

human interest stories, as well as different kinds of story focuses including local, nation

and international news. The apps are more limiting in access, however. They do not

---

[1]   All percentages for the eight WFTS app genres were calculated by averaging the number of stories
available in each genre over the ten day time period. This was because story count was different everyday
for the WFTS app genres; whereas they were the same for all other platforms.

offer a 'see more' kind of link to read more stories which is available on both organizations' websites.

All of the stories varied in length, especially if a story offered other multimedia like video. Word count ranged anywhere from a small paragraph or two of approximately 80 words to an over 1,200 word count feature story. A limited word count was not an issue because, opposite to print media, space is unlimited on a website. Word count was not an issue on the apps either because the user has the ability to scroll through a lengthy story with his or her finger just as he would if he were using his mouse on the website. Something important to be noted was that all the stories provided on the news apps were also available on the website and these stories mirrored exactly that which was available on the web, from word count to video and photo access.

In terms of story format, every story in the data collected offered some form of media beyond text. Photos, videos and links to outside sources or related news sites and organizations (if the story was provided by an outside source, like CNN or AP) were made available on all stories. Both the WTSP and WFTS websites had sections dedicated to photos. The WTSP website had sections inside each of the aforementioned genres of news dedicated to videos. Both of the news apps had sections dedicated to videos.

Multimedia Experiences

RQ2: Which platform (web or app) offers a higher multimedia experience and

content?

To answer this question, the following categories will be analyzed:

- *Number of photos, slideshows and/or video accompanying each story*

Total Numbers- Web Photos/Slideshows

Every story analyzed had some form of photos, slideshow or video. Both

websites provided separate sections for photos or slideshows, with no text. WTSP called

this the 'slideshows' section, offering four different photo stories and a link to 'see more'

(See *Fig. 2*). WFTS called this the 'photo galleries' section offering three photo stories

(See *Fig. 3*). There was no link for more photo galleries offered by WFTS, although you

could access more in the archives of the website. The types of photos offered by both

organizations varied from photos taken at the scene (if it was a crime story or similar type

of local story and the information was gathered on location), photos of a product or

person (depending on the main character or topic of the article), company or brand logos

(many of these for sports teams and consumer stories) and finally stock photography of

an image relevant to the story or, at the very least, the new organization's logo if nothing

else was applicable. All images credited whoever took the photo or credited the

organization to which it originally belonged.

Total Numbers- Web Videos

The video content of the news organizations' websites and apps was less cut and dry. WTSP offered sections of their website (within the different genres) that are dedicated to video; there was no text that followed. In addition to those text stories which offered a video to go along, there was a daily offering of 32 additional video-only stories (See *Fig. 2*). WFTS's website offered videos within many text stories, but no stories dedicated solely to video.

Total Numbers- App Videos

The WTSP and WFTS apps had sections dedicated to video stories. During the ten days of data collection (and even after the data collection), the video section of the WTSP app failed to function properly and provided no videos. The video section is set up to be available for users, but due to technical issues or because no video content had been loaded, none were made available for this analysis. If the videos were available, it can be estimated that ten would have been provided because this was the number of stories made available within each of the nine genres of news provided on the app. WFTS's video section did work and provided 20 video stories every day. This is in addition to the videos scattered within the stories in each genre of news that accompanied the text story. The videos themselves ranged from just under five minutes down to 20 seconds, with the average video being just under two minutes. Additionally, most of the videos were recordings of the story as it was presented on the newscast where it was originally offered to viewers. This reiterates the importance of television news to these

website and app media because most, if not all, of the news on these two media originates from television broadcasts.

While both news organizations' websites offer a variety of multimedia, WTSP is the frontrunner. The total number of stories provided, in all formats listed in *RQ2*, and emphasis on media besides text earn them this designation. The organization that best utilizes multimedia on the app is WFTS. This is because of the number of stories provided, regardless of media type, and the functioning video section. While this research focuses more on the content of the stories rather than the display and design, it can also be noted that the WFTS app is more user-friendly in that there is less tapping to access each story and more interactive media to keep the users attention. The layout of the stories is also more user-friendly on the WFTS app. Most articles can be read on a single page, whereas on the WTSP app users most scroll through the article a number of times in order to read all the available information.

Interactive Options

RQ3: Which platform offers a more interactive experience to consumers?

To answer this question, the following categories will be analyzed:

- *Absence or presence of social networking tools*

- *Absence or presence of user-contribution tools*

- *Absence or presence of user-personalization tools*

Social Networking Tools

Beginning with the WTSP website, all stories on the site offered nine different tools to share the story via social networking. These tools included recommending the story on Facebook, tweeting it on Twitter, publically recommending it on Google and sharing on six other websites, namely: Delicious, Digg, Reddit, Newsvine, Buzz Up! and Fark. The WFTS site offered 96 social networking and interactivity tools with every story. Some of these tools include: Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Digg, StumbleUpon, Reddit, Delicious, Tumblr, Blogger, BuddyMarks, Corkboard, Current, Formspring, Google, Instapaper, WordPress, Xanga, Squidoo, MySpace and TypePad. Both websites allowed a user to email stories, as well. Compared to the websites, apps allowed significantly less sharing via social networking sites. As part of the upper tool bars on all the print stories, both organizations offered buttons for sharing via Facebook, Twitter and email. The WTSP app also allowed users to share via text message.

User-Contribution Tools

When it came to the presence of user-contribution tools, both platforms had a unique feature to offer. The websites offered a contact page where users could access the station's address, phone numbers and send an email to the station regarding whatever is on their minds, but the websites also provided a comments sections on each story for users to express their opinions regarding the story, open a dialogue with other users about that topic and occasionally share alternative information with other users who read the article. Some organizations, like WTSP, have connected their websites directly to Facebook and allow users to comment via Facebook Comments. Users can opt for these

27

comments to remain only on the news website or appear on both the site and the WTSP

Facebook page.

User-contribution tools for both organizations' apps offered options to email the

news organization directly, just like on the web. They also offered users the ability to

submit news to the organization directly. WTSP had this option located under a 'submit

news' tab and WFTS offered a 'you report' button in the top right corner of the app

homepage. If an app user happens to be in a location where breaking news is happening

he or she can upload photos, videos and text (if they have the time to write out some

content) from their mobile device.

User-Personalization Tools

User-personalization tools were at minimal for both news organizations on both

platforms. As previously discussed, the homepages provided on the websites and apps

are templated in their formatting. With the exception of the WFTS app, there were the

same numbers of stories within every section on all platforms. This setup is dictated by

the software and coding these organizations are using to produce their sites and apps.

This leaves little room for user-personalization, especially if a user wanted to move

around certain sections or increase or decrease the number of stories provided in a certain

section.

One tool offered by both organizations on both platforms is text size alteration.

Users could increase or decrease the size of the print used in print stories. The same type

of tool was made available for videos. Additionally, users could make the video full

screen or the standard size as offered by the platform. The WFTS app did offer one

unique feature: device alerts. Users could opt to receive pop-up alerts on the home screen of the iPad regardless if the app or iPad is in use. Any time a story is updated or added, users could get a notification informing them.

One tool offered through the WTSP app was connection with the device's calendar. This perk resulted from a combined effort of the organization and the software for the iPad, but it is still a tool that can be utilized for personalization. If, inside the text of the story, there was a date or time, the iPad recognized that as a link to the device's calendar and, if the link is tapped, could be saved into the calendar as an event, appointment, reminder or alarm. For example, on Friday, March 9, 2012 an article on the WTSP app read, "A postal worker discovered the children, ages 11 and 5, at the bus in Splendora about 10 a.m. Wednesday, officials said." The phrase '10 a.m. Wednesday' appears as a blue link, like you would see a URL link in an email, and when tapped, could create an event or show in the calendar of the device.

Based on access to social media, unlimited access to content (which keeps users on the site) and the ability to contribute via comment sections, it can be determined the web platform ultimately offered a more interactive experience to consumers. The two platforms offered a few of the same options like emailing and connections with Facebook and Twitter. The apps also offered a citizen reporting option and connections directly with the device's calendar that the websites do not, but because of their lack of connection with many other social media options, lack of comment contribution, fewer interactive tools like links to other stories and websites, the web still had more to offer.

Technological Limitations & Advantages

> *RQ4: What, if any, are the technological limitations or advantages one platform*
>
> *has over the other?*

Each platform offered technological advantages and limitations. One advantage of utilizing a website instead of an app to offer the news, is the website's open nature. That is, the software used to maintain news sites allows editors and developers to manipulate its content without modifying the site's original structure. Thus, being on top of breaking news, adding or deleting stories or adding multimedia can be quick and easy on the web platform. This is the opposite for app platforms. Since they are so new and news organizations, particularly local news organizations like those seen in this study, are just getting their apps formulated and functioning they do not have an open platform. In fact, many platforms use a template format to create their apps (McCombs, personal communication, March 27, 2012). This template platform is exactly what it sounds like, a layout predetermined by an outside software company. The organization simply picks the layout it would like to use and drops the stories in to place as time permits and story cycle dictates.

One more technological advantage a website has over the app platform is simply: time. According to McCombs (personal communication, March 27, 2012), software developers and news organizations alike have had time to study and develop the web as a useful tool in the news dissemination process. This is due to the over 20 years of research and experimentation history offered by the web. Apps, on the other hand, are still too early in the developmental stage for organizations and users to find them fully

functioning and ultimately, 100% useful and innovative. In terms of the development of the apps, we are following in the "typical progression of development of new media, but [right now] it is still too early to see" (McCombs, personal communication, March 27, 2012) all the advantages an app platform may have or even could. Aside from the portability and convenience of mobile devices and the apps on them, McCombs believes we are still one to two years away from seeing distinct differentiation between the website and app content. This is because providers are "still developing the language of the app. Do we tap here? Or swipe here?" (McCombs, personal communication, March 27, 2012). And why? For these answers, we will have to wait a few more years.

Limitations of the Study

As with any research, there were limitations to this study. The first limitation of the study was the number of days in the data set. Due to time constraints, the data was collected in ten days instead of the research standard two week period. While the research provided does not indicate there would be any unusual changes to the data, the additional numerical data relevant to research questions one, two and three could possibly have offered a change. Additionally, a breaking news story could have occurred in those additional days of research and could also have contributed to the data set.

This study focused on the content of the news provided rather than the design of the media or the criteria of the news organizations to choosing stories. Analyzing the design of the website and app could have offered insight on the type of content being used on these media. Perhaps users who get their news via the website or their mobile

device favor the easy layout of these technologies or the use of extensive multimedia rather than purely text as we get in the daily paper. As this research was more focused on the content itself, it is difficult to say how the design of these media played a role in the data.

The lack of understanding the basic criteria of the news organizations in choosing stories is another limitation. Also because of time constraints, the research could not include any information offered by the local professionals in charge of these media. If they could have provided a basic outline of how they choose the stories they put on these media (perhaps they use a certain word count or they are simply following orders from the editors above them or those who own the company) that could have provided supplementary data to the research.

One more specific limitation to the research was WTSP's malfunctioning videos tab on their mobile device app. It was estimated there would have likely been ten videos offered under this tab; however, the length of the videos or types of stories they chose to cover in video form could have said more about their organization's choices in providing the news. WFTS's videos ranged from 20 seconds to just under five minutes with the average being just under two minutes. WTSP's videos could have been the same. If so, the research could have concluded there might be a standard time for putting news videos on apps. Perhaps the lengths of WTSP's videos were significantly shorter. That may have offered insight that users of these devices are not willing to watch a video on their screen for longer than X amount of time. Without the videos from WTSP, information regarding this topic is limited.

A final limitation of this research was the difficulty in finding software to fulfill the needs of the research. The HTTrack software was helpful in saving the data provided each day by the news organization websites, but upon opening the files it could be seen there were some problems in the software commands separating stories from the organizations homepages from the archives. Because of this difficulty, not every piece of information translated from the live site to the copied site. This was generally not a problem for the content of the stories as all of the print and photography was still intact, but a few of the videos did not translate over to the copied versions of the site. Luckily, it could still be observed a video was there; it just could not be watched in full. Also, some of the design aspects of the live site did not translate over to the copied version. This was not an issue for this research but if other research was being done about the design, color, font, layout choice, etc. this software would need to be tweaked before data was collected.

Another software limitation included the software being used for word count. There were many difficulties in obtaining accurate word counts of every story available (possibly due to the high numbers). Again, it was not an issue for this particular research as the stories were exact replicas on both the website and the app, but if they were different (and it can be argued a few years later the stories on provided on each platform will be different) alternative software will need to be utilized to obtain this data. This alternative software will have to begin by allowing the user to pull specific stories and story locations of only those they need to work with and no more.

Chapter 6

Conclusions

According to this research's definition of quality: content that is informative, useful, credible, balanced and easy to navigate, it can be concluded that the content offered on these platforms partially meets those standards. Each homepage on each platform offered approximately 100 news stories daily in a variety of genres – this is a lot of information made available to users. The content genres also provide a balance for users who want hard, breaking news immediately and those who simply want to browse the web for interesting stories from local subjects to international issues. Nevertheless, the genres on the apps do not match those of the genres offered on the websites. The apps are limited in content offerings which decreases the amount of information made available to users. These two platforms are easy to navigate and all the genres are listed on the homepage, all photos can be seen from the homepage and small icons denoting a video option allow users to click once and watch video stories. Users can trust that what they are reading, watching and looking at, regardless of the screen, is accurate and fair, and if a piece of news was not original content, that credit is given where credit is due.

The most striking thing about this research is that despite the new and exciting platform that is the mobile news app, nothing about the story or the dissemination of the story changed from the website to the app. Every story made available on the WTSP and

WFTS app was available on the website. They were replicas down to word count, photos and videos. This is a little redundant as McCombs says many times users are interacting with their devices at the same time (McCombs, personal communication, March 27, 2012). If a user has the website up and their app open, they are not getting new content – just repeated information on a different screen. There is not much value in that. News organizations need to take advantage of this new technology and adapt their app platform to provide better tools to users. One suggestion to improve their apps as we see them now is to simply make the stories shorter. Provide detailed headlines and bullet points of fact, rather than the information written out in narrative form. This will benefit the user in two ways: (1) it will be even faster than it is now. Users can get the most important information and move on, which is really all they want. (2) It will provide more physical space on the app for organizations to offer more stories and give users access to more information.

Right now, the greatest value of these platforms comes from their interactivity tools. These platforms are beginning to give users access to interaction in ways we have never seen before. Sharing tools allow users to send stories to friends and family on Facebook, Twitter, blogs, via email and text, and countless other places on the Internet. On the web, users can comment on news stories, which could ultimately help in spreading the news or provide alternative information to the organization and other users. Users can also contribute directly to the news gathering process by emailing story suggestions. Those with mobile devices can take these contributions one step further by using their device to send photos and video of interesting things or breaking news. The WTSP app even allows users to save date and time information in their device, to create

an event or make a note on their personal calendar. This feature may not offer real world

applicability most of the time, as many dates and times will simply be details of the story,

but if a story happens to be about a local event, for example, this tool would be beneficial

to the user.

As of 2012, the organizations' websites still offer more value to news consumers.

They are not as limiting in their story options and they do offer more news to users than

apps do. Nevertheless, as time progresses, apps are slowly beginning to show their

strengths. They win for convenience and portability purposes. If someone needs to see a

story right away they know they can go straight to their device without having to worry

about powering up their computer and hoping their service provider is operating at

anything other than a snail's pace. Apps are also, for the time being, less messy. Unlike

a website, their homepage is not filled with advertisements and banners. For the apps

that provide video content, this is an ideal implement because it appeals to those users

who simply want quick, less demanding access to multimedia, rather than spending time

reading an article.

The importance to the news industry of the development of technologies like

mobile devices, particularly smartphones, comes in to play here as they can provide, at

the tap of a finger, audio and visual recording all in one device – something that once

took a team of people, thousands of dollars of equipment and hours of time. I believe if

news organizations, especially local, sincerely invested the money and man power into

educating themselves about these apps, through hiring tech experts or through continual

education of those already in position, and creating the apps in-house they will be able to

offer tools more specific to the community's needs.

Suggestions for Future Research

This research could be expanded by increasing the time period of analysis. The standard is two weeks, but an extensive research period, say one year, could provide great insight on how news organizations present their news and how the organization adapts to technological changes. As changes are happening so rapidly in the technology industry there would no doubt be breakthroughs in an organization's ability to expand. Similar to this idea, if research could take place inside the news room alongside professionals, data regarding how and why the news is going where it is could provide invaluable information about the organization's internal structure and goals.

One more suggestion for future research includes learning the needs of the mobile news consumer. Users of mobile devices have web browsers and can access all the information provided on a news site from their device. So, if they took the time to download an app, they must be expecting an alternative experience or an added benefit in doing so. Otherwise, why offer the app at all? As noted, the WTSP app allows users to connect to their personal calendar on their mobile device, something the web cannot do. If news apps included more tools, such as this one, to consumers they would get a lot more traffic with their apps. Sonderman (2011) suggests developing news apps that see a reader's problem then act to solve it. He believes organizations should not just build an app of news stories but consider the audience. They should ask questions about user needs, what they want to accomplish, if there are obstacles in their way, if an app could provide them help and if there is an app out there that already exists for their needs (Sonderman, 2011). Once these considerations have been made "you're ready to consider what tools and features your app can offer to solve [his or] her problem. And

37

those solutions probably have little or nothing to do with repackaging news articles"
(Sonderman, 2011). I agree with Sonderman that news organizations need to make apps
more like tools. This is the only way users are going to download the app and keep going
back to it time after time; otherwise they are just going to be space filler on the screen.
One idea is to stream live newscast from the app. During the early morning, noon time,
6pm and 11pm hours, the app, if the user so desires, could act as a television for those
who are unable to make it in front of an actual television. Users could access the text and
multimedia stories as they normally would, but if they so desire could tap a 'streaming
live' tab and watch the news as it is being presented to those in the community. This
would be beneficial to those users who are out of town and want to know what is going
on their community while they are away. They would not need to worry about being out
of the loop because they can tune in to their local news no matter where they are
compliments of their mobile device. With this idea it becomes a dual purpose app and a
tool people would find useful and very likely pay for.

If, through their websites and mobile apps, news organizations can find ways to
continue consistent interaction with the community, providing tools rather than simply
throwing information at them, they will then be able to keep up with the changing pace of
today – keeping users content, and more importantly, informed.

References

Allan, S. (2006). *Online news*. New York, NY: Open University Press.

AP. (2012, March 09). Kids, ages 5, 11, found living in abandoned bus in texas. *10 News*.

Apple. (2012, March 19). *New ipad tops three million*. Retrieved from http://www.apple.com/pr/library/2012/03/19New-iPad-Tops-Three-Million.html

Block, R. (2008, March 06). *Live from apple's iphone sdk press conference*. Retrieved from http://www.engadget.com/2008/03/06/live-from-apples-iphone-press-conference/

Bogart, Leo. (2004). Reflections on content quality in newspapers. *Newspaper Research Journal*. (25)1.

Deggans, E. (2012, March 05). Game on: February sweeps ratings show new fight between wtvt- ch. 13 and wfla-ch. 8 for top spot. Retrieved from http://www.tampabay.com/blogs/media/content/game-february-sweeps-ratings-shownew-fight-between-wtvt-ch-13-and-wfla-ch-8-top-spot

Dooley, P. (2007). *The technology of journalism*. Evanston, IL: Nortwestern University Press.

Dunlap, K. (2011, March 03). *Gary pruitt: Balancing the interests of shareholders and stakeholders*. Retrieved from http://www.poynter.org/uncategorized/74560/gary-pruitt-balancing-the-interests-of-shareholders-and-stakeholders/

FoxNews.com. (2012, March 19). *Tablets to outsell computers in 3 years, apple ceo says*. Retrieved from http://www.foxnews.com/scitech/2012/03/19/tablets-to-outsell-computers-in-3-years-apple-ceo-says/

Gartner. (Producer). (2012). *Ipad and beyond: The media tablet in business*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from http://www.gartner.com/it/products/newsroom/index.jsp

Gladney, G., Shapiro, I. & Castaldo, J. (2007). Online Editors Rate Web News Quality Criteria. *Newspaper Research Journal*. 28(1).

Goodheart, E. (2000). Marshall McLuhan Revisited. *Partisan Review*.

Helmore, E. (2010, November 20). *Rupert murdoch creates 'inewspaper' - with the help of steve jobs*. Retrieved from http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2010/nov/21/ipad-newspaper-steve-jobs-rupert-murdoch

Localytics. (2011, August 23). Games, news apps top ipad user engagement categories. Retrieved from http://www.localytics.com/blog/2011/games-news-apps-top-ipad-user-engagement-categories/

McCombs, R. (2012, March 27). Interview by B.D. Padley [Personal Communication], St. Petersburg.

Nguyen, A. (2010). Harnessing the potential of online news: Suggestions from a study on the relationship between online news advantages and its post - adoption consequences. *Journalism*, *11*(2), 223-241.

Olmstead, K., Sasseen, J., Mitchell, A., & Rosenstiel, T. (2012, March). *Digital: By the numbers*. Retrieved from http://stateofthemedia.org/2012/digital-news-gains-audience-but-loses-more-ground-in-chase-for-revenue/digital-by-the-numbers/

Palser, B. (2011a). The ins and outs of ipad apps. *American Journalism Review*, *33*(1), 46-51.

Palser, B. (2011b). Will the ipad save print?. *American Journalism Review*, *33*(3), 54.

Pew Research Center. (2011, October 25). *The tablet revolution*. Retrieved from http://www.journalism.org/analysis_report/tablet?src=prc-headline

Poole, K. (2011). App adaptation: Enterprise moving slowly on mobile. *EContent*, 10-12.

Rubin, C. (2012). *Interactive*. Retrieved from http://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/interactive/

Sonderman, J. (2011, September 21). News organizations should build apps that solve problems, not just republish content. Retrieved from http://www.poynter.org/latest-news/media-lab/mobile-media/146410/news-organizations-should-build-apps-that-solve-problems-not-just-republish-content/

Wauters, R. (2010, April 02). *The new york times launches free ipad app (for real now), paid app on the way*. Retrieved from http://techcrunch.com/2010/04/02/the-new-york-times-launches-free-ipad-app-for-real-now-paid-app-on-the-way/

Yang, N. (2012, January). The tablet market. *Editor & Publisher*, 34-39.