

Sense of community, political participation, and civic engagement: An examination of the relationships between local daily newspapers, news websites, and their communities.

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Abstract

Newspapers have been shown to have positive correlations with their readers' sense of community, political participation, and civic engagement. Using McMillan and Chavis' Sense of Community Theory and its accompanying SCI-2 as well as questions on demographics and media use, political participation, and civic engagement, this thesis conducts a survey study of two community newspaper readerships in differing locations within the continental United States. This study aims to discover and develop further understanding of the social, political, and community-building effects of community dailies and their mirrored-content news websites. First, it examines media consumption preferences and measure the sense of community (SOC) felt by readers of print-edition newspapers and their mirrored-content websites. Second, it examines the differences in SOC felt by print and website readers. Third, it examines the influence of SOC and print-news website-reading on political participation, and fourth, it examines the influence of SOC and print newspaper-website reading on civic engagement, both with the intent of discovering how SOC might mediate this relationship. This thesis will provide contextual information and build a case for the relevance of community dailies in an ever-increasingly fast-paced, technocentric society. Findings include a significant relationship between SOC and both print and online readers, and the question of whether readers of both print and online community news feel a stronger SOC than either on its own is answered. Further findings include newspaper website-reading shares a significant relationship with both political participation and civic engagement, and print does not. Implications and limitations are discussed.

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## Dedication

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## I. Introduction

The world of news is changing in the United States. The means through which news is reaching consumers is in a state of flux. With the rapidity of the advancement and commercial availability of computer and mobile technology over the last decade, the speed that news is being recorded and reported is regularly increasing. The newspaper, the traditional news medium that has been a staple of tables, desks, and nightstands across the country for centuries, is experiencing a crisis. The newspaper, however, is no stranger to crisis – it has faced, and survived, the advent of the radio, the television, and the 24-hour news network. But with the rise and spread of the Internet as a commercially viable, available, and accessible means of transmitting news nearly on demand into the homes and hands of consumers in the United States, the newspaper is facing perhaps its greatest crisis in its long history. The newspaper is no longer the dominant purveyor of news and information at the metropolitan, regional, or national level. It is, however, still a valuable source of local news and information at the community level. The community newspaper still serves its traditional functions of surveillance of surroundings, societal correlation, and the transmission of sociocultural heritage (Lasswell, 1948). It also serves as a valuable local and community resource with a focus on geographically localized content, and has the potential to stimulate civic engagement and facilitate community participation among its readers (Jeffres & Kumar, 2014). Finally, it provides coverage of local news, provides commentary and context for local issues, facilitates transparency for local government officials, and regularly serves as watchdog at the local level in ways larger news organizations do not (Jeffres & Kumar, 2014; Stone et al., 1997).

The newspaper industry is split into daily and weekly publications, at the national, metro, and community coverage and distribution levels. Research has demonstrated the daily newspaper increases its readers' sense of community, that daily newspaper readers are more likely to be

informed about the goings-on of their community, more likely to participate in their community (Talo et al., 2014), are more likely to be politically active (McLeod et al., 1999; Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001), and are more likely to be civically engaged (Jeffres et al., 2007; Yamamoto, 2011). However, much of the studies conducted on daily newspapers and their readers in the United States examine the largest, most visible newspapers with the highest circulation rates (Hargrove, Miller & Stempel, 2011), often to the exclusion of the local daily newspaper servicing small, geographically limited communities. In order to help add to the knowledge of small daily newspapers, this thesis' focus will center on daily newspaper publications at the community coverage and distribution level.

One theoretical lens useful in examining communities is Sense of Community Theory, a psychological theory that quantifies community members' feelings of membership, influence, fulfillment of needs, and emotional connection. The theory has been utilized in prior research to measure a wide variety of types of communities over the last three decades, including newspaper readerships (Mersey, 2009). It has also been used to look at users of community-supporting websites, including news sites. This research adds a piece to the growing wealth of knowledge surrounding Sense of Community Theory, which was put forth by McMillan and Chavis (1986) and has been tested and refined over the last 30 years (Boyd & Nowell, 2014; Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; McCann, 2002; McMillan, 1996; McMillan, 2010; Nowell & Boyd, 2010; Nowell & Boyd, 2011; Talo et al., 2014; Tartaglia, 2006). This thesis examines readerships of two small community daily newspapers in distinctly different geographic locations in the continental United States that feature both traditional print newspaper products as well as digital products (websites) used to publish content that mirror and/or augment the printed news products. This thesis presents the process and findings based on the collection of empirical data to first verify the sense of community felt by traditional print-copy daily newspaper readers as

put forth in the following literature review, then measure how often the readerships utilize and engage with the newspapers' websites to read news content. It will then present the measured difference between the sense of community felt between readers of the traditional print-edition newspapers and readers of the newspapers' website content, then present findings regarding the relationships between community newspaper websites and their readers' sense of community. Building on that, this thesis will then examine the relationships between the different mediums and their readers, and determine whether the sense of community felt by those readers serves as a mediator for community civic engagement and political participation, which have long been staples of community newspaper readerships. Using a data collection survey tool with measures based on a revised and validated Sense of Community Index, the SCI-2, and previous research ventures into the realm of measuring community-oriented civic engagement and political participation, this study aims to cast a light into an underrepresented area of academic and journalistic research - the small community daily. On top of the aforementioned knowledge contribution, what makes this study unique is its population sample. With permission and assistance from the publishers and editors of the two community daily newspapers under examination, this research collected data directly from home delivery and digital newspaper subscribers, making its findings more real-world relevant and generalizable to similar populations of readerships. To ensure a representative sample, the data collection tool was deployed through physical delivery and electronic mail in order to give readers with different reading and mail delivery preferences the opportunity to participate.

Capitalizing on this population, this study will ascertain and report how these readers access and consume local news content through their local newspapers, how they perceive and feel a sense of community in the context of those newspapers and their physical and digital products. It will also, using data collected on political participation and civic engagement,

explore relationships between media usage, participation and engagement, and sense of community.

To understand the significance of community daily newspapers to their communities it is important to provide context – a brief history of newspapers, daily newspapers, and the challenges to its institution presented by technological advancements, such as the radio, the television, the Internet and mobile technology. The following literature review will provide historical background and context for the daily newspaper, will briefly discuss the perception of obsolescence that accompanied each technological advancement that altered the way consumers receive news, and discuss its current status as a news medium. The review will then discuss the relevance of the local daily newspaper to its community, provide an explanation of Sense of Community Theory and its accompanying Sense of Community Index-2, and demonstrate its viability as a lens through which to examine community daily newspapers and their readers. First and foremost, this paper will explore the history and cultural significance of the daily newspaper, its evolution into the daily community newspaper, and the technological challenges the daily community newspaper as a relevant news medium continues to face.

## II. Review of Literature

### A Brief History of the Daily Newspaper

Historical contexts help us appreciate the origins of a medium, help us see continuities and patterns between past and present, and help us appreciate the significance of a medium in its current form (Perloff, 2010).

Communicating information on present and upcoming events, sharing commentary on said events and discussing their impacts and implications on society, has been a staple of our species since the beginnings of human communication and social and symbolic interaction.

Communicating timely political, economic, religious, civic, and social news and other information at the geographically local, regional, national, and international levels in publicly disseminated written form dates back to 59 B.C.E. and the Roman Empire, where official notices and government announcements were etched in metal or stone and posted under the moniker Acta Diurna, or “daily acts” (Gross, 1998; Stephens, 1988). Sixteen hundred years later the periodical claiming the title of “World’s First Printed Newspaper” was published: The German-language “Relation aller Fürnemmen und gedenckwürdigen Historien.” The Relation was recognized as such in 2005 by the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, with its weekly editions published by Johann Carolus in Strasbourg beginning in 1605 (Weber, 2006), two years before the settling of Jamestown in the New World. Since, the printed newspaper has played a significant, if not dominant role as a primary and secondary source of news, commentary, and information for many of the world’s literates for over four centuries. While weekly and monthly newspapers played a significant role in the American colonies many years prior, the first daily newspaper printed in the United States – the Pennsylvania Evening Post and Daily Advertiser published by Benjamin Towne – began daily publication May 30, 1783 (Brigham, 1947, p. 932; Mott, 1941, p. 115). For the next hundred years the daily newspaper

flourished unrivaled, and until the dawn of the radio and the television it served as the dominant medium through which news and information was transmitted to residents of small communities and large cities alike around the country. With the arrival of the radio and television to challenge for the daily newspaper's throne came the regular claims of obsolescence and predictions of its eminent demise.

### *The Alleged Death of the Newspaper?*

“The report of my death was an exaggeration.” – Mark Twain, New York Journal, June 2, 1897

Much like the oft-misquoted Twain axiom, the reports of the death of the newspaper was, and has been over the last hundred years, an exaggeration. As demonstrated in the previous section, the newspaper evolved and enjoyed unchecked dominance over the business of news and information dissemination for nearly three centuries. The daily newspaper enjoyed the same for 100 years until the invention and development of the radio as an affordable household appliance. The commencement of commercial radio broadcasting arose as a legitimate vehicle for news in the United States and competition to the newspaper following the Treaty of Versailles and the resolution of World War I (Erickson, 2014, p. 1; Keith, 2010, Ch. 5; Slotten, 2000; Slotten, 2006). The television followed suit with its development in the late 1920s and into the 1930s. Much like the radio, with the television's commercial development and household viability came its encroachment into the daily newspaper's territory. Recurring televised news began with the inception of Lowell Thomas' radio news show being broadcast simultaneously over radio and television airwaves in 1939 (Conway, 2006; Conway, 2007; Crocker, 1942; Finkelstein, 2010). With the rise of radio and successive proliferation of the television as a conduit for news into the homes of American consumers came the speculation that the daily newspaper press, that hulking, mechanical mass of metal, paper and ink, would slowly grind to a

halt. Alongside each technological advance through which to transmit news, information, and entertainment, and alongside each paradigm of commercial news broadcasting came the inevitable conjectured obsolescence of the newspaper and its accompanying death toll.

The comparatively recent evolution of the Internet as an instant news and information distribution resource has presented daily newspaper publishers and editors, particularly those that pulled heavily from regional and national news to fill news holes, arguably their biggest challenge – an adapt-or-die ultimatum, and with it a reiteration of the death toll. Yet as of 2015, nearly a hundred years after Harris decried newspapers as obsolete and doomed to extinction (Harris, 1923), the newspaper is still a significant, valuable, and arguably vital medium with 1,331 active daily publications in the United States alone (McNeil, 2015). To put this number into perspective, according to daily newspaper circulation information collected by nonprofit organization Newspaper Association of America (McNeill, 2015), in 1940 there existed 1,878 daily newspapers in the United States. As of 2014 that number had declined to the aforementioned 1,331. Of those, 447 had a daily circulation of over 30,000; 367 had a circulation between 30,000 and 10,000; 307 had a circulation between 10,000 and 5,000; 118 had a circulation between 5,000 and 3,500; and 92 had a circulation below 3,500 (McNeill, 2015). In other words over the last 74 years the country has seen 547 daily newspapers fold, the majority of which had metro-level circulation statistics of over 10,000. As will be demonstrated in this review, most of the data collected and research performed have focused attention on newspapers at the metro level, at the upper echelon of circulation, leaving a dearth of information at the small community newspaper level.

In summation, reported newspaper readership across the United States, particularly in metropolitan areas, has been in steep decline since the 1960s (Lee & Wei, 2008). The following literature will demonstrate the daily newspaper's battle with, and adoption of, the ubiquitous

Internet, its ability to spread news content around the globe, and its relevance to news at the local and community level.

### *The Rise of Digital Competition and Its Adoption into the Fold*

Although they have faced and fended off technological challengers in the past, the Internet and its elements of timeliness, interactivity, adaptability and personalization, and ease-of-access across stationary and mobile devices has had a significant impact on the daily newspaper. Pavlik (2000) pointed out the Internet affects newspaper journalism in four ways, including the way journalists do their job, the nature of news content, the structure of the newsroom, and the nature of the relationships between newspapers and their readers, advertisers, and competitors. Over the last decade daily newspapers of all sizes began to embrace the Internet, developing websites and posting content that mirrored their print products (Boczkowski, 2004; McCleneghan, 2005), and soliciting and displaying advertisements in much the same fashion as well. Another digital avenue adopted by daily newspapers is social media (Hansen et al., 2011; Hong, 2012), using its various platforms to post headlines that link to its website, and using its interactivity to engage with its readers.

Hansen et al. (2011) argue the traditional journalism skillset – research, writing, photographing, and reporting – are still critical to daily newspapers, despite the digital adoption. The application of that skillset to newspaper websites and social media, however, is just as critical. Over the last 10 years the daily newspapers with the largest number of subscribers in the country, The New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, The Denver Post, Washington Post, and the Chicago Tribune, as well as the popular USA TODAY and business newspaper publication The Wall Street Journal, at first visibly struggled to adapt to the website and social media shift in news consumption (AP, 2013). Each now has regularly updated and professionally maintained

websites that largely mirror the content of their print products, as well as downloadable mobile applications for tablet computers and smartphones. Each has professionally maintained and updated Facebook and Twitter social media sites, with headlines and images that link to news stories and drive traffic to their websites. The New York Times, Washington Post, The Denver Post, and The Wall Street Journal have each developed websites that mirror their print products in terms of design and layout, in order to capitalize on the familiarity with the print newspaper format and iconic masthead recognition. It is important to point out both the mobile applications and website content are only free to an extent and cannot be freely accessed beyond a certain point, requiring subscriptions much like their print products. The New York Times mobile app, as an example, cuts off access to content each month after a reader accesses a certain number of articles. Its website also offers free content to an extent – after 10 articles have been accessed per month by a computer the content then moves behind a paywall that requires a digital subscription (NewYorkTimes.com Subscription Information, 2015). The push to link social media to newspaper websites and at the same time limit free rein for nonsubscribers is one more publishers are making (Lambert, 2011) as newspaper organizations of all sizes discover the best way to monetize their digital news products. While smaller community newspapers do not have the resources of the New York Times, they do employ similar digital designs and strategies, such as mirrored content and a subscription paywall. These similarities are relevant, particularly the mirrored content and mirrored website structure, when considering sense of community. If content and layout of the local daily newspapers under examination in this study are similar, consumers of both may report feeling a similar sense of community. If not, further study into the differences in the print and digital medium in context of the community daily newspaper may be warranted.

## **Community newspapers**

Much has been written on the big city newspapers' push to stay alive (Garden, 2010) and technologically relevant (Gilligan, 2011; Graybeal, 2011; Gunaratne, 2011) in a postmodern technocentric society. As well, the significance of the relationship between newspapers and their communities and the effects of community newspaper readership has been the subject of scholarly study for some time (Gross, 2005; Harris, 1923; Mersey, 2009; Mersey, 2009a; Mersey, 2010; Stamm, 1983; Stamm, 1985; Stephens, 1988; Yamamoto, 2011). However, as is argued in this thesis, an area of scholarly study that lacks in this context is a focus on the small community daily operating outside densely populated metros, many of which service geographically rural coverage areas with total populations around or below 30,000 (McNeill, 2015), and generate and distribute local, community-centric content via print newspaper as well as through the Internet via website. These non-metro small community dailies represent the potential to further understand the relationship between the newspapers themselves and their readerships in geographic areas not dominated by large, prominent news organizations. Lasswell states mass communication must be "efficient to the degree that rational judgments are facilitated" (1948, p. 46). With the proliferation of each new technological medium through which news and information was transmitted to the public in increasingly faster, more efficient ways than the print newspaper allows, it becomes necessary for the community daily newsroom to discover and emphasize the positive and perhaps unique effects its product has on its readers. Identifying and exploring the relationship between daily community newspapers' print and website products and sense of community has the potential to assist community newspaper publishers in the context of the decision regarding the placement of editorial emphasis on producing localized community news content.

A statement from Michael Zielenziger, as quoted by Mersey (2010, p. 517-518), points out that since the time of Thomas Jefferson, “not only did (newspapers) embody the first draft of a community’s history, but also by forging community where perhaps none had previously existed, they created identity, social capital, and a sense of belonging.”

As Yamamoto (2011) illustrates, the term “community newspapers” often encompass publications beyond the scope of the daily, including weeklies, bi-weeklies, and sometimes even monthlies. For the purpose of this thesis, “community newspapers” is operationalized by taking a definition from Gross’ dissertation (2005) and altering it to exclude the aforementioned weekly, bi-weekly, and monthly publications, and focus solely on dailies. Therefore, “community newspapers” for the purpose of this thesis are identified as being published daily, having a single-issue paid circulation of less than 20,000, are not published in large, urban areas in order to exclude urban-area niche or neighborhood publications, and service a coverage area with a population of 35,000 or less. The two newspapers under examination in this study fit well within that definition, as will be demonstrated later in this paper.

Jeffres et al. (2007) state that “newspapers are the most local of media” (p. 6), but that has not always been the case. Although newspapers have been around for centuries, the content focus centered on the publication of news at the national and international levels. Only in the 1870s, following the resolution of the American Civil War, did the conceptualization of local newspapers and journalists documenting local events and carrying on local and community-centric conversations become common practice, with the focus shifting to coverage and commentary on geographically localized content (Schudson, 2013). Presently, several community daily newspapers around the country are holding their own, even as their larger, more prominent and farther-reaching metropolitan counterparts are struggling to stay out of the budgetary red (Ghoshal, 2014; Kimball, 2009; Mann, 2007; McGhee, 2011; Reese, 2014). In a

telling quote from an interview with National Newspaper Association executive director Brian Steffens, conducted by Kimball, Steffens states:

Just about all of the research and news reports on the struggling newspaper industry have been based on what's happening at the top 100 major metropolitan newspapers, maybe the top 250. That doesn't tell the story of the remaining 1,200 daily newspapers ... in America (Kimball, March 16, 2009).

Although Steffens' newspaper numbers are generalizations, they are close to the numbers identified earlier in this paper, which may help tell that story.

As stated in the introduction of this paper, Lasswell (1948) identified three major roles of local media: surveillance of the environment, including collecting and distributing community-relevant information and revealing or disclosing opportunities as well as threats that either positively or negatively affect the community; the correlation or connectedness of community components, or the interpretation of community-relevant information; and the transmission of social inheritance, or the collection and passing along/passing down community culture, social norms and expectations, and community values. Adding to Lasswell, Wright (1960) contributes the role of the entertainer, or the inclusion of community-oriented communication primarily intended to amuse its audience. In addition to these functions, community newspapers also serve to produce a sense of local solidarity, often reporting or highlighting positive community aspects or featuring community members in stories that emphasize local values (Yamamoto, 2011). Each of these functions, regularly present in the community daily newspaper, carries the potential to contribute to the sense of community felt by its readers, and contribute to individuals' desire to actively participate in the activities, development, cultivation, and sustenance of said

community. The proposed research will examine these elements and their relationships to community daily newspapers using McMillan and Chavis' Sense of Community Theory. But before developing a perspective on McMillan and Chavis' theory, it is essential to take a moment and define the concept of "community" itself, a concept scholars have found difficult to define over the last hundred years.

## **Defining "Community"**

The word "community" has appeared several times in the introduction, and will appear many more times throughout this literature review. Although the word itself evokes images of groups of people in myriad contexts interacting on various levels, a precise definition has been difficult for social scientists across disciplines to nail down. Sociologist George Hillery (1955), sixty years ago in a literature review identified ninety-four definitions of the word and found among those definitions two consistent components that characterize community: geographic location and interest commonality. Stacey (1969) defines "community" as a geographically delineated social system. Chavis and Newbrough (1986) define "community" as a set of social relations bound together by a sense of community, with boundaries guided by location, and differing values and conceptualizations. A definition outside the communication, psychological or sociological disciplines is constructed of similar components: A qualitative study (MacQueen et al., 2001) identified commonality in interviews with 118 subjects that were questioned as to how they perceived the word. They defined community as a group of people with diverse characteristics, in a common geographic location, linked by social ties, which share common perspectives and engage in joint action. Lowrey et al. (2008) examined 108 scholarly articles published in peer-reviewed journals for direct or implied definitions of "community." As the previous studies state, Lowrey et al.'s findings suggest community is "a process of shared

symbolic meaning” (Lowrey et al., 2008, p. 275) within structured spaces. While these examples illustrate diversity in the meaning of the word “community,” the defining characteristics are not mutually exclusive. Each exhibits thematic elements of geographic or physical location, relational interaction not tied to a physical location but based on the quality of interaction, and common interest. The definition most relevant to this thesis shares these commonalities.

McMillan and Chavis, in their seminal work, define community as a group of people bound together by either a territorial or geographic location with high-quality interactions and mutual interests (1986). McMillan and Chavis focus on these interests, interactions, and boundaries, when defining the concept of “sense of community” as a theory, and its elements of membership, influence, needs fulfillment, and shared emotional connection. The following chapter will outline the theory, and discuss why it is an appropriate theoretical lens through which to examine community daily newspaper readerships.

### III. Sense of Community

#### Sense of Community Theory

Sense of Community Theory, or in its original vernacular Psychological Sense of Community Theory (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) is not a communication discipline theoretical construct, although it is applicable to the field (Mersey, 2009). It is, as its original name suggests, born out of social psychology as a means to study both geographic and interest-based communities (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Sarason, 1974). A sense of community, as described by Chavis and Wandersman (1990), is an overarching value, or “a phrase commonly used by citizens, politicians, and social scientists to characterize the relationship between the individual and the social structure” (p. 56). Sense of Community Theory is a widely applicable theory often utilized as a lens through which to examine various societal communities and shared values, symbols, and commonalities among its members. It is also used to discover patterns of meaning communal to various groups regardless of foundation, belief, ideology, or tie to a space or geographic place. It helps quantify seemingly intangible feelings and serves as a means to measure and compare one group to another. Its theoretical framework has been developed and expanded over the last 30 years to study and gain insight into everything from geographic rural communities and urban neighborhoods (McMillan et al., 1986; Mersey, 2009), corporate organizations (Boyd & Nowell, 2014), corporate cohesion among employees (Love, 2007; Pretty & McCarthy, 1991), science fiction fandom (Obst et al., 2002), youth sport parents (Legg et al., 2015), and sporting event volunteers (Kerwin et al., 2015). It has also been used to examine seasonal employee retention (McCole, 2015), elderly populations in high-rise and garden apartments in public housing (Zaff & Devlin, 1998), evangelical Christian college student bodies (Bohus et al., 2005), Singaporean National Library patrons (Lin & Luyt, 2014), and patrons of cultural festivals (Van Winkle & Woosnam, 2014), Egyptian revolutionaries (Carillo et al.,

2015), and Australian Aborigines (Bishop et al., 2006), to name a few. It has even made its way into the virtual world as a means to study SOC as felt by frequent users of virtual environments (Abfalter et al., 2012; Tonteri et al., 2011).

What follows is a brief history of the theory, its measurement index – the Sense of Community Index – its evolution over the past 30 years, and examples of a variety of researchers' adaptations and uses of the theory from the psychological, sociological, and communication perspectives.

The foundational groundwork for Sense of Community (SOC) was put forth by psychologist Seymour Sarason (1974), and conceptualized by McMillan two years later in an unpublished paper (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Sarason emphasized the significance of community to the self, stating that sense of community “is one of the major bases for self-definition (1974, p. 157). In an effort to develop Sarason’s assertion, Doolittle and MacDonald (1978) conducted face-to-face interviews with 155 randomly selected individuals in middle-class urban Milwaukee neighborhoods and identified six factors that respondents indicated construct a sense of community: supportive climate (informal interaction), family life cycle (size of immediate family, adults and children, residing in one household), safety (awareness of crime and physical hazards), informal interaction (social interaction with neighbors) neighborly integration (positive feelings for, and identification with, neighborhoods), and localism (involvement with local groups/organizations, local shopping habits). Essentially, the pair identified SOC measurement items such as the value placed by respondents on other community members’ opinions, the number of people known by each and the depth of interactions with those people, and overall feelings of safety and belonging. McMillan and Chavis refined and built on Doolittle and MacDonald’s findings, defining SOC as “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that

members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together (1986, p. 9)." Their definition and subsequent measures identify four factors that work together to create a measurable sense of community felt by its members: membership, influence, needs fulfillment, and emotional connection. Although the tools used to measure SOC have tapered over the years (Nowell & Boyd, 2010; Peterson et al., 2008), the preceding four factors are the primary factors that measure SOC to this day. Each of these factors requires its own set of measurements, and to answer the challenge of measuring such individualized concepts Chavis, Hogge, McMillan, and Wandersman (1986) tested and demonstrated the empirical validity of the 46-item sense of community profile. The SOC profile led to the creation of the now-oft-utilized Sense of Community Index (SCI), first published in the appendix of Perkins et al. (1990). The SCI has become the standard for measuring sense of community in myriad contexts (McMillan, 1996), but is inadequate in its measurement, as all its measures consisted of dichotomous true/false responses that limit variability. Several variations of the SCI exist as a result, as researchers over the past 30 years alter and adapt the index to suit their individual research needs. One of the most often used variations of the SCI is the Sense of Community Index II (SCI-2) a 24-item questionnaire that measures SOC with a Likert scale that takes response variability into account, allowing for responses that range from 0 (not at all) to 7 (completely), or from 0 to 5, and other variants measuring from zero along a continuum. A modified version of this scale that will be adapted and deployed for this thesis.

### *Sense of Community Index (SCI-2)*

Sense of Community Theory and its accompanying SCI-2, although easily adaptable to a multitude of contexts and widely used across multiple academic disciplines, is not without its critics. McMillan, who exited the academic world shortly after his 1986 studies were published

to pursue private interests, revisited the theory a decade after its inception and validation (McMillan, 1996). His largest concern is with other researchers' continuing efforts to validate a shorter, more parsimonious, yet validated, sense of community measurement tool. McMillan argues against this push, stating SOC cannot be accurately measured on any meaningful level without an exhaustive and lengthy measurement tool (McMillan, 1996; McMillan, 2011). Although he disagrees with shortening the scale (McMillan, 2011), McMillan worked in tandem with researchers (Peterson et al., 2008) to create and empirically support an 8-question "brief sense of community" scale. It was not the first attempt to create and validate a brief SOC scale: Long and Perkins (2003) adapt questions from McMillan and Chavis (1986), as well as Perkins et al. (1990), and both argue for a similar, trimmed down scale, referred to as "brief sense of community" index. Beyond the measurement tool, Nowell and Boyd (2010) argue that instead of focusing on "measuring the right things" regarding SOC, researchers should be focusing on "measuring things the right way," proposing the theory itself is strictly needs-based, and that a "values-based perspective," rooted in the idea that an individual's sense of social responsibility for a community may exist "independent of any expectation of needs-fulfillment (Nowell & Boyd, 2010, p. 829). McMillan disagrees with the pair, and in response argues Nowell and Boyd incorrectly place value on "responsibility" as sophisticated and open-minded, and devalue "needs" as unimaginative (McMillan, 2011). Nowell and Boyd counter with the proposition of Sense of Community Responsibility, adding and emphasizing elements of responsibility such as satisfaction, engagement, and leadership within communities, arguing the added elements predict a "higher order engagement requiring greater investment of time and resources (Nowell & Boyd, 2014, p. 229).

Altogether, SOC and SCI-2 are relevant to community daily newspapers on multiple fronts, including: First, McMillan and Chavis' theory has been used to look at the sense of

community felt by readers of traditional community newspapers, and has been used to study readers of local news in digital packages (Mersey, 2009). The SCI-2 is a validated and now-oft-used tool to measure sense of community, and will serve as the primary tool for measurement in this study.

#### IV. Research Questions and Hypotheses

Jeffres and Kumar (2014) surveyed 527 newspaper publishers and editors regarding the importance they place on press functions and roles within a community and identified three areas of emphasis. The first is the traditional community watchdog role, or to ensure governmental transparency, hold local officials and community leaders accountable, and highlight often contentious issues likely irrelevant to residents residing outside the newspaper's coverage area. Second is facilitator or stimulator of civic engagement, particularly in communities where civic leaders are perceived as unresponsive. Third: developing a sense of community through community coordination for its readership. Interestingly, Jeffres and Kumar (2014) found new technologies – websites, social media, Internet-connected mobile devices – are being employed to enhance the coordination aspect of sense of community development. The role that local and community news-oriented websites play in developing and maintaining relationships between local news organizations and the populations they serve is still being explored. As more and more local news organizations increase their web presence and place increasing importance on their mirrored-content news websites, it becomes increasingly important to investigate those relationships and the effects of that shift.

#### **Community Newspapers and Sense of Community**

Yamamoto (2011) suggests individuals with strong personal ties and deep relationships with other individuals within a community are more likely to be affected by newspaper readership. He argues that “community newspapers contribute to building cohesive geographic communities by integrating local residents into common values and interests in pursuit of community social goals” and that the “modern role of community newspapers lies in the realization of community well-being” (Yamamoto, 2011, p. 20). However, it is important to

point out that the presence of a community daily newspaper does not in itself create a sense of community among its readers. Whether that newspaper symbolically represents and reflects the values of its community, how it interacts and engages with its members, and in turn helps its members better interact and engage with its community (Mersey, 2009).

Davidson and Cotter (1997) found newspaper readers with a high sense of community place a high value on local news, and spend more time reading multiple sections of their local newspaper. Further, newspaper readers with a high sense of community identify with community-oriented shared values, feelings of belonging and connectedness, and maintain positive feelings toward reciprocal influence. Given that it has been shown that the more a person reads newspapers the stronger that person's sense of community, the following is hypothesized:

**H1: The more people read the print edition of the community daily newspaper, the stronger the sense of community will be felt.**

As discussed in the literature review, more and more newspapers are regularly uploading local news content that mirrors the print edition. Regular visitors to the newspaper's website, then, will read the same content as print edition readers. As such, the following is hypothesized:

**H2: The more people read the website content of the community daily newspaper, the stronger the sense of community will be felt.**

These two hypotheses are both relevant to members of the community itself and the publishers and editorial staff of the newspaper in that fostering and placing value on a sense of

community may as a result encourage community members to read the newspaper, further encouraging a focus of coverage on the community. This may also play a role in the value placed by members of the community on the newspaper's website and its content.

## **Community Newspaper Websites**

Community is no longer a geographically limited concept. The Internet has expanded the concept of community. For example, people regularly interact online via websites, text-based and video-based chat features, and comment features and message boards. As a result, a local community newspaper's audience includes its geographically limited readers but extends beyond its coverage and circulation areas through its website, allowing readers to access content and interact with editorial staff and other readers from anywhere with an Internet connection.

Community members that have relocated, deployed military, college students, travelling professionals, senior citizens that have retired in a different state to be closer to family, have the ability through a newspaper's website to stay in contact with the community, stay informed, and stay involved. A measure of the readers of that website's sense of community, then, is justified.

Community newspaper websites, particularly sites with interactive features such as post-story comment submission features, letter to the editor submission features, and clickable email byline links, contribute to subscriber satisfaction and, subsequently, return visits to the sites (Chung & Nah, 2009). However, research has demonstrated interactive features are not frequently used by casual readers (Chung, 2008). Engaged readers, or readers invested in the community the newspaper and its website serves, however, are more likely to utilize interactive features (Chung, 2008). The argument could be made, then, that newspaper readers that feel a strong sense of community are more likely, when accessing that newspaper's website, to make use of interactive features.

Although again, data on small community daily newspapers is largely absent, research has demonstrated visits to newspaper websites are exponentially increasing. According to Newspaper Association of America research and industry analysis vice president Jim Conaghan, newspaper websites - digital news products – reached a new high in August 2015 with a total 179.3 million unique visitors, a ten percent increase in unique visitors since August 2014. Further, 93 percent of men and 92 percent of women that went online in August 2015 went to newspaper websites and engaged with content. Finally, newspaper website traffic grew significantly among readers ages 18-24, 25-34, and 35-44, (Conaghan, 2015), audiences that community newspapers have traditionally had trouble engaging with over the last half-century. Although Conaghan's data does not differentiate between visitors to metropolitan newspapers' and community newspapers' sites, it does suggest a community newspaper's website is utilized enough by its readers to warrant examination of its effects on sense of community.

Mersey (2009) applied Sense of Community Theory and Sense of Community Index to study readers of Phoenix-area urban niche daily newspaper The Arizona Republic and its online counterpart, azcentral.com. Mersey found a strong correlation, as predicted by previous research, between sense of community and the community newspaper readership. She did not, however, find a strong correlation between sense of community and exclusive readers of azcentral.com, the community newspaper's online version. This study, then, hypothesizes:

### **H3: Print newspaper readers will have a higher sense of community than online readers.**

Further, when readers consume both print newspaper and news content online at that newspaper's website, is sense of community affected? One of the issues with community newspapers attracting new, return, and regular visitors to its digital products (website, social media) is establishing and maintaining a relationship of trust with its community, a relationship

already established with its print product. As Mersey argues, “the chief difficulty for journalists online is not content delivery but gaining and maintaining the public’s trust” (2010, p. 535).

Key differences between once-a-week readers of a print and online newspaper in a study conducted in Maricopa County, Arizona, which includes the city of Phoenix metropolitan area, exist in the manner in which the reader perceives the medium. Readers identified the print newspaper as far superior in quality and trustworthiness than the online newspaper based on a number of criteria, including the perception of print newspaper reporters and story accuracy, in-depth coverage, and the perception of feeling closer to one’s community (Mersey, 2009a). Interestingly, Mersey points out print newspaper readers felt the news was also delivered in a more timely fashion, counterintuitive to the immediacy typically associated with online publication (Mersey, 2010).

However, there are other features associated with online newspapers that may have an influence on a sense of community. Participation is a meaningful factor in feeling a sense of community. Readers that engage with the material and engage with each other through interactive features such as in a post-article comments section, may feel a stronger sense of community than lurkers, or those that read the articles, read the commentary, but do not interact. Further, Hargrove et al. (2011) suggest few heavy readers of the print edition newspaper are also heavy consumers of online editions. This variance in consumption of print and digital news formats may affect how sense of community is felt. In a content analysis and comparison of six major metropolitan newspapers and their mirrored online news products, Hoffman (2006) finds little difference between printed newspaper content and digital content. If content is largely similar between a newspaper’s physical and digital products, it is possible, then, effects on sense of community among readers of both may share similarity as well.

**RQ1: Do readers who spend more time reading both print newspaper and newspaper website content feel a stronger sense of community than those that only read print or only website content?**

### **The Role of Community Newspapers in Civic Life**

While certainly many variables play into an individual's placing value on local news and the local newspaper, research demonstrates that people with a strong sense of community pay more attention to local news, read the local newspaper more often, and spend more time reading when they do read the local newspaper (Stamm, 1985). Prior research has investigated links between reading newspapers and participating in community activities, donating money to local community groups and organizations, and attending community-oriented events and activities (Jeffres et al, 2007; Kebbel, 1985; Robertson, Vatrapu, & Medina, 2010). Stamm's cyclical model of the relationship between communities and their newspapers is based on links between an individual and its community, links based on place, process, or structure (1985). Mersey illustrates these links by stating "an individual may be tied to a place (community) through employment, a process through voting, or to a structure through political party membership" (2010, p. 524). These community links are not simple, and are likely a product of long-term action and experience within a community, and newspaper readership supports and often helps facilitate this action and experience. Mersey argues Stamm's point is simplified as "those who read their local newspaper are likely to be connected to their local community, and those who are connected to their local community are more likely to read their local newspaper" (Mersey, 2010, p. 525).

"Much of the evidence in the mass communication literature supports the view that participation in public affairs ... increases as self-exposure to newspaper information rises"

(Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1980, p. 71). This information is similar to the majority of information collected on newspapers however, as the authors point out, in that it is based on data collected predominantly from metropolitan newspapers. Studies conducted at the community level, however, are consistent with these findings. Yamamoto (2011) found in an analysis of survey data collected on the northwestern region of the United States that community newspaper reading promotes social cohesion and community engagement. Park (1929) found newspaper readership is related to community organization membership facilitating an individual's integration into community participation. Lowrey et al. (2008) suggest community news media, including daily community newspapers, facilitate meaning-making about community and help its readers understand community structure. That understanding leads to community participation, as demonstrated by Paek, Yoon, and Shah (2005), who find regular daily newspaper readers are more active and engaged with their communities than non-newspaper readers. Stamm (1985) suggests the likelihood of a "paradigm in which newspaper use both precedes and follows from community ties." For community dailies, this indicates its readers are more likely to be active and engaged with the community itself, and at the same time indicates engaged community citizens are more likely to read a community newspaper.

Prior research has demonstrated links between newspaper readership and civic engagement. It has also demonstrated newspapers play a significant role in readers' sense of community. Research has not, however, explored the links between these three variables. As a result, this research will propose the following:

**H4: There will be a direct relationship between print newspaper reading and civic engagement.**

**RQ2: Is the relationship between print newspaper reading and civic engagement mediated by sense of community?**



Figure 1: Relationship between variables

While literature is clear on the relationship between print newspaper reading and civic engagement, it is less clear on the relationship between online news reading and civic engagement. As literature shows content similarity between print edition newspapers and newspaper websites, a similar relationship may exist. This study will explore the relationship between newspaper website reading and civic engagement. Therefore, the following is proposed:

**H5: There will be a direct relationship between local newspaper website content reading and civic engagement.**

**RQ3: Is the relationship between local newspaper website content reading and civic engagement mediated by sense of community?**



Figure 2: Relationship between variables

## The Role of Community Newspapers in Political Life

A considerable amount of research has consistently demonstrated political participation and political knowledge is linked to local newspaper consumption. Community newspapers have direct effects on political participation and civic engagement (McLeod et al., 1999; Stamm, 1985; Viswanath et al., 1990). Additionally, Filla and Johnson (2010) found access to newspapers affect self-reported political participation. Further, a study of local municipalities in California (Fila & Johnson, 2010) found that availability of local daily newspapers with regular coverage of local government was linked to voter turnout. Lee and Wei (2008) found a positive correlation between newspaper readership and political knowledge. Local newspapers are a viable resource for discovering community values, including political values (Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001). Members of a community may turn to the local newspaper to reinforce their values, thus community members that consume local news media, including local daily newspapers, are more likely to participate in local political conversation and action that either hold or contrast community values (McLeod et al., 1999; Scheufele et al., 2002). Scheufele et al. (2002) find strong support for the connection between ties to a local community, consumption of that community's local newspaper content, and political knowledge and participation. . Given these prior findings, the following are proposed:

**H6: There will be a direct relationship between local print newspaper reading and political participation.**

**RQ4: Is the relationship between local print newspaper reading and political participation mediated by sense of community?**



*Figure 3: Relationship between variables*

While literature is clear on the relationship between newspaper reading and political participation, it is less clear on the relationship between online news reading and political participation. As literature shows content similarity between print edition newspapers and newspaper websites, a similar relationship may exist. This study will explore the relationship between local newspaper website content reading and political participation. Therefore, the following is proposed:

**H7: There will be a direct relationship between local newspaper website content reading and political participation.**

**RQ5: Is the relationship between local newspaper website content reading and political participation mediated by sense of community?**



Figure 4: Relationship between variables

## V. Populations under Study

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, most of the research on newspapers and the state of the newspaper industry in the United States is conducted on the largest, most visible newspapers with the highest circulation rates (Hargrove, Miller & Stempel, 2011). Consequently, most of the data on the state of newspapers is collected from large, metropolitan newspapers. Data on small-circulation community daily newspapers is lacking.

For this study, criteria for community daily newspapers were set up to exclude metro newspapers and community or niche newspapers within metro areas. The newspapers studied here publish a print edition at least six times per week, and distribute the print edition via multiple means, including carrier home delivery. Both have a regularly updated website that includes content which mirrors content contained in the print edition. Both are geographically removed from metropolitan areas, although the distance between the coverage area and nearest metro area varies. Both newspapers' host counties have total populations between 30,000 and 35,000, and have home delivery subscribers of 5,000 or less. Each home delivery subscription also comes with subscription access to the newspapers' website.

### **The Sheridan Press – Sheridan, Wyoming**

The Sheridan Press is a small, locally owned community daily newspaper, with its editorial and business base of operations as well as its printing press located in the City of Sheridan, the seat of Sheridan County, located in northern Wyoming, United States. The newspaper was first published in 1887 and is locally owned by Sheridan Newspapers, Inc. The Sheridan Press publishes six times a week, and publishes several local-oriented special sections throughout the year. It also produces four destination magazines with original content that

supports local involvement and tourism. Its website, which is updated daily, contains content that mirrors its print edition, and includes interactive post-article comments features.

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Sheridan County is spread over 2,527 sq. miles and has a population of 29,116 (U.S Census, 2010a). According to a staff reports article citing information from State of Wyoming Department of Administration and Information Economic Analysis Division (Staff Reports, April 1, 2015), the county population grew 0.7 percent from July 2013 to July 2014 to an estimated population of 30,032, an historic high. The City of Sheridan covers 10.95 sq. miles and has a total population of 17,444. The county has 7,680 households (U.S. Census, 2010), 2,800 of which are home-delivery subscribers of The Sheridan Press newspaper. More copies are distributed through point-of-sale retail establishments and newspaper vending machines.

The county's racial demographics are as follows: 94.9 percent white, 4.3 percent Hispanic or Latino, 1.8 percent two or more races, 1 percent Native American, 0.9 percent Asian, 0.9 percent other, 0.4 percent Black or African American, 0.1 percent Pacific Islander. The county's median age is 39.2 years. Twenty-two percent are under 18, 9.7 percent between 18-24, 25 percent between 25-44, 27.5 percent between 45-64, and 15.8 percent 65 or older. The gender demographics are 49.6 percent male, 50.4 percent female (U.S. Census, 2010).

Sheridan County has four public high schools, including Sheridan High School, Big Horn High School, Tongue River High School, and Arvada/Clearmont High School, and one post-high-school education center in Sheridan College.

## **The Southwest Times – Pulaski, Virginia**

The Southwest Times is a small community daily newspaper, with its editorial, business, and printing press operations located downtown in the Town of Pulaski, the seat of Pulaski County, in southwest Virginia, United States. The newspaper was first published in 1906, although it did not adopt the name The Southwest Times until 1914. The Southwest Times publishes its print edition six days a week, and publishes several local-oriented special sections throughout the year. Its website, which is updated daily, contains content that mirrors its print edition, and contains interactive features such as a weekly poll and post-article comments section. The Southwest Times has an average 5,000 home delivery subscribers. More copies are distributed through point-of-sale retail establishments and newspaper vending machines.

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Pulaski County is spread over 330 sq. miles. The Town of Pulaski is spread over 7.8 sq. miles. The county has a total population of 34,872 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b), and the Town of Pulaski has a total population of 9,086 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010c). Pulaski County's race, age, and gender demographics are as follows: The census reports the population as 89 percent white, 7.8 percent Black or African American, two or more races 2.1 percent, 1.9 percent Hispanic or Latino, 0.6 percent Asian, and 0.3 percent Native American; the median age is 41.8 years, 21.8 percent under 18 years old, 8 percent between 18-24 years old, 24.4 percent between 25-44 years old, 27.9 percent between 45-64 years old, and 17.9 percent 65 or older (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b).

The county is served by one high school, Pulaski County High School, and one post-high school education center, New River Community College.

## VI. Method

### **Data collection process**

Surveys have long been useful tools in social science research as a means to collect data. Surveys “rely on respondents being able to reasonably compare a given situation with a number of other situations, and then make a quantitative assessment” (Slater, 2004, p. 486). However, in the case of newspapers, relatively few people read both the print and online editions regularly, although regular readers of both exist (Hargrove et al., 2011). The ratio of print edition readers of community newspapers are higher than that of metro newspapers (Hargrove et al, 2011). Therefore, hard-copy surveys as well as online surveys were utilized to ensure that people who are less likely to use the internet were included in the study. A significant portion of print edition newspaper readers are over 55 years old, many of which do not regularly seek news online. This information is enough to justify the hard-copy survey cost and distribution (Hargrove et al., 2011).

In order to gain access to real-world community newspaper subscribers, the researcher contacted the publishers of both The Southwest Times and The Sheridan Press, and solicited their involvement in this study. Both newspapers’ publishers allowed the researcher access to their subscription lists on condition of subscriber anonymity as well as on condition that the researcher add general interest questions for each newspaper at the end of the survey and share the results of the study. Confidentiality and anonymity are important to newspaper publishers, editorial staff, and readers, and it was vital to let the publisher and reader know through the introductory letter that their personal information is/was never in the researcher’s possession, and that there is no way for the researcher to connect their responses to their names or addresses, email addresses, etc. In order to ensure this, both email and hard-copy survey tools were

delivered to the newspapers' publishers to be deployed through their company email address, and through their press assembly staff and home delivery drivers.

The first stage of deployment was a primer letter sent via email from the newspaper's publisher to all subscribers that have provided email addresses in order to log onto the newspaper's website, in order to alert those subscribers to the survey. A second email was sent two days later with an introductory letter, instructions for the completion of the Qualtrics survey, and a link to the survey itself. A follow-up email was sent to remind the subscribers to take the survey.

The second stage of deployment concerns the hard-copy surveys. The Southwest Times claims 5,000 home delivery subscribers, and 1,000 randomly selected hard-copy surveys covering one-fifth of those subscribers, were created and delivered in person to the Times' office in Pulaski, Virginia. The Sheridan Press claims 2,800 home delivery subscribers, and 560 hard-copy surveys covering one-fifth of those subscribers, equal in proportion to The Southwest Times survey distribution, were created and delivered via USPS to the Press' office in Sheridan, Wyoming. During a pre-decided press run, both newspapers' press operation staff attached one survey envelope to the front of every fifth newspaper that came off the assembly line slated for home delivery. This method of distribution was selected for four reasons: first, to randomize the sample; second, as previously stated, to ensure the confidentiality of the newspapers' subscriber information and ensure the anonymity of the respondents; third, so that the reader will associate the survey with the newspaper, something familiar to them to which they are more likely to respond; and fourth, to cut down on postage cost. Each survey letter consisted of an outer envelope with the following printed on its face:

Community Newspaper Readership Survey  
Aaron Atkins  
Virginia Tech  
Communication Department

The outer envelope contained an introductory letter and instructions, the survey itself, and a stamped and addressed envelope to return the survey to:

Attn: Aaron Atkins  
Virginia Tech  
Department of Communication  
181 Turner St NW (0311)  
Shanks Hall, Room 148  
Blacksburg, VA 24061

In order to guard against duplicate responses, printed in the instructional section of the physical copy was an item that instructed the participant to not take the physical survey if they had already filled out the electronic version, or vice versa. No incentive to fill out and return the survey or to fill out the online survey was offered or given.

## **Survey Instrument**

The survey for the readers of The Sheridan Press contained 34 questions, including the 24-item SCI-2 scale, an 8-item civic engagement matrix, a 4-item political efficacy scale, and an 8-item political activity scale. The survey for the readers of The Southwest Times contained 33 questions and mirrored The Sheridan Press survey save for the name of the newspaper, names of the locations, and the newspaper-specific general interest questions incorporated from the publishers as a condition of subscriber access at the end. Both iterations of the survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Questions collecting demographic information were included directly from the Qualtrics library and supplemented using questions taken from the U.S. Census (2010, 2010a). Questions collecting information on media use, political participation, and civic engagement were appropriated from studies focused on measuring the link between those variables and newspaper readership (Campbell & Kwak, 2010; Jeffres et al., 2007; Kebbel, 1985, Lee & Wei, 2008, McLeod & McDonald, 1985; Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991; Sotirovic & McLeod, 2002).

## **Cost**

While the online Qualtrics survey links emailed out by the papers' publishers to their subscribers did not require additional funding, the hard-copy mailers did. In order to capture a representative sample of each newspaper's subscribers, a hybrid email/mail survey was deployed. The justification: In order for the data to be representative of each newspaper's readers the researcher needed both traditional newspaper readers, newspaper website readers, and those that utilize both. An emailed survey alone may not have reached subscribers that only read the traditional newspaper. A mailed survey may not have grabbed the attention of heavy Internet users. A combination of the two, then, was more likely to generate a higher response rate than either would alone. In the case of both the SWT and TSP, there are subscribers that live in rural or remote geographic areas, some of which do not lend themselves to consistent Internet access. It was the goal of the researcher to have these readers represented in the data as well. It was intended to send a thousand mailer surveys to SWT subscribers – one fifth of the paper's reported 5,000 home delivery subscribers, and 560 mailer surveys to TSP subscribers – one fifth of the paper's reported 2,600 home delivery subscribers. A total 1,560 mailed surveys were deployed. In order to create and send the surveys, funding for printing supplies and postage was necessary. The supplies needed included printing supplies such as printer ink and paper, and

mailing supplies such as envelopes and shipping boxes. The total cost of these supplies came to approximately \$500. Return postage at \$.49 per stamp came to \$764 for a total cost of \$1,264.

## **Survey Distribution**

The Sheridan Press paper surveys were distributed with a copy of the newspaper on Monday, April 4. The Southwest Times paper surveys were similarly distributed on Tuesday, April 5. Regarding the online surveys, each home delivery subscriber had previously provided an email address to both newspapers when initiating or updating their accounts. The online editions of the letters and surveys went out to each home delivery subscriber at the email addresses provided, as sent by the newspapers' editors, again to maintain subscriber anonymity. The primer emails for the online surveys for both newspapers were sent out April 3; the email with the introductory letter, consent, and live link to the online survey for both newspapers was sent out April 5. The follow-up emails were sent out April 7. The online surveys remained open for 10 days and closed after it was clear no additional responses would be generated. Collection of the paper surveys remained open until April 22, after it was clear the bulk of the responses had returned. With the exception of 16 responses that arrived between April 25 and May 15 after data analysis had begun, no paper copy responses were excluded from the dataset.

## **Operationalization of Measures**

### ***Independent Variables***

In order to test **H3:** the print newspaper readers will have a higher sense of community than online newspaper readers, as well as answer **RQ1:** do readers who spend more time reading both print newspaper and newspaper website content feel a stronger sense of community than those that only read print or only website content, variables were constructed using participant

responses in the media use section of the survey. In order to construct the independent variables of print newspaper readership, online newspaper readership, and types of newspaper readers, media use and frequency questions were included in the survey for both print newspaper and newspaper website reading. In order to ascertain print newspaper readership, three questions were posed: (a) How many days per week do you read (name of newspaper) print edition newspaper? (b) How many times per week do you read (name of newspaper) print edition newspaper (c) How many hours (average) do you read (name of newspaper) per week? In order to ascertain online newspaper readership, three questions were posed: (a) How many days per week do you read (name of newspaper) website? (b) How many times per week do you access (name of newspaper) website? (c) How many hours (average) do you read (name of newspaper) website content per week? For each of the first two questions in each category, responses ranged from “never” to “multiple times per day” on a Likert-type scale. For each of the third question, responses ranged from “30 minutes or less” to “more than 5 hours” on a Likert-type scale. The third question for each reader type was dropped after it was determined “30 minutes or less”, although may be interpreted as zero, may also be interpreted as more than zero. The results for questions (a) and (b) for each reader type were summed into a single variable for either print or online readership.

Further, in order to create variables for mutually exclusive reader types, respondents that answered “never” on the media use questions regarding how many days or times per week the reader engaged with the print edition, were put into a “website-only” variable (n=14). Respondents that answered “never” on the media use questions regarding how many days or times per week the reader engaged with the online content, were put into a “print-only” variable (n=254). Respondents that indicated more than “never” regarding both print and online

engagement were put into a “both print and website” variable (n=53). Respondents that indicated “never” for both print and website engagement were put into a “non-reader” variable (n=3).

### ***Dependent Variables***

**Construction of Sense of Community Measures.** Questions measuring sense of community were integrated from the SCI-2 developed by Chavis et al (2008). The scale consisted of 24 questions, six for each of the following measures: needs fulfillment, membership, influence, and emotional connection. Reliability measures were conducted on each with the following results: needs fulfillment ( $\alpha=.85$ ), membership ( $\alpha=.83$ ), influence ( $\alpha=.87$ ), and emotional connection ( $\alpha=.88$ ), as illustrated in **Table 1**. Having found each to be a reliable measure, each of the six questions was condensed into a single measure by taking the sum of the items in each construct as set forth by Chavis et al (2008). Further, a reliability measure was conducted on the entirety of the SCI-2 ( $\alpha=.95$ ), and a second single variable for an overall sense of community was created using the sum of all measures. This variable was used for tests of mediation.

**Table 1: SCI-2 reliability (total scale N=406;  $\alpha=.95$ )****Membership  $\alpha=.83$** 

- I can trust people in the Sheridan community.  
 I can recognize most of the members of the Sheridan community.  
 Most Sheridan community members know me.  
 The Sheridan community has symbols and expressions of membership such as clothes, signs, art, architecture, logos, landmarks, and flags that people can recognize.  
 I put a lot of time and effort into being part of the Sheridan community.  
 Being a member of the Sheridan community is a part of my identity.

**Influence  $\alpha=.87$** 

- Fitting into the Sheridan community is important to me.  
 The Sheridan community can influence other communities.  
 I care about what other Sheridan community members think of me.  
 I have influence over what the Sheridan community is like.  
 If there is a problem in this community, members can get it solved.  
 The Sheridan community has good leaders.

**Needs fulfillment  $\alpha=.85$** 

- I get important needs of mine met because I am part of the Sheridan community.  
 Sheridan community members and I value the same things.  
 The Sheridan community has been successful in getting the needs of its community members met.  
 Being a member of the Sheridan community makes me feel good.  
 When I have a problem, I can talk about it with members of the Sheridan community.  
 People in the Sheridan community have similar needs, priorities, and goals.

**Emotional connection  $\alpha=.88$** 

- It is very important to me to be a part of the Sheridan community.  
 I am with other Sheridan community members a lot and enjoy being with them.  
 I expect to be a part of the Sheridan community for a long time.  
 Members of the Sheridan community have shared important events together, such as holidays, celebrations, or disasters.  
 I feel hopeful about the future of the Sheridan community.  
 Members of the Sheridan community care about each other.

Note: Each iteration of the survey reflected the name of its newspaper's town, city, or county. The measures here reflect measures for Sheridan, Wy. and The Sheridan Press.

**Political Participation Measures.** Measures for political participation that were deployed in the surveys was twofold. The first was a 4-item measure for local political efficacy adapted from an internal political efficacy scale from Niemi, Craig, and Mattei (1991). The measure consisted of a Likert-type scale containing four statements and responses ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" with no neutral. The second measured participation in political activities and

consisted of a frequency matrix containing six statements and responses ranging from “none” to “every week”. A reliability measure was conducted on the first with the following results: political participation/efficacy ( $n=384$ ;  $M=2.66$ ,  $SD=.9$ ,  $\alpha=.86$ ), as illustrated in **Table 2**. Having found it to be a reliable measure, each of the four questions was condensed into a single variable.

**Table 2: Internal Political Efficacy (n=384;  $\alpha=.86$ )**

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I consider myself to be well-qualified to participate in local politics.
I feel that I have a good understanding of the important political issues facing our community.
I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most other people.
I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people.

---

Second, a measure for political activities was constructed by combining political participation items into a six-item frequency matrix. It incorporated items from Sotirovic and McLeod (2002) such as (a) attending a city council meeting or public hearing, (b) circulating a petition, (c) contributing money to a political campaign, and (d) working with others in a group on local problems or issues. It also incorporated (e) working on behalf of a candidate or issue (Kebbel, 1985) and (f) writing a letter to the editor regarding a local issue (McLeod & MacDonald, 1985). A reliability measure was conducted for this matrix with the following results: political activities ( $n=333$ ;  $\alpha=.65$ ), as illustrated in **Table 3**. One item in the matrix, “voting in an election,” may have confused some respondents. The item was intended to represent participating in the political process by engaging in the act of voting. It was not intended to be limited to national or state elections. Several respondents on the paper survey marked “at least once in the past 3 months,” the lowest measure on the scale, then wrote in by hand “I vote in every election” or its equivalent. Others marked “every week” and wrote in a

similar statement. This confusion may contribute to the lower than ideal Cronbach's alpha for the measure. While the removal of the item increases the Cronbach's alpha to  $\alpha=.68$ , the act of voting is vital to the political process and was retained in the matrix as a result. The measures in **Table 3** were summed, and the measures in **Table 2** and **Table 3** were combined into a single Political Participation variable.

**Table 3: Frequency of political engagement activities (n=333;  $\alpha=.65$ )**

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Working on behalf of a social group or cause.
Attending a city council meeting or public hearing.
Circulating a petition for a candidate or issue.
Contacting a public official or a political party.
Voting in an election.
Writing a letter to the editor regarding a local issue.

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**Civic Engagement measures.** The final measure deployed in the survey consisted of eight statements in a frequency matrix with responses ranging from "none" to "every week", and measured civic engagement by indicating frequency of involvement in community activities, such as (a) doing volunteer work, (b) working on a community project, (c) contributing money to a group or cause, (d) going to a community or neighborhood meeting, (e) working on behalf of a social group or cause (Campbell & Kwak, 2010, p.541), (f) creating awareness for a community issue you care about, and (g) going to local sporting or cultural events (Jeffres et al, 2007). A reliability measure was conducted for the eight statements with the following results: civic engagement ( $n=356$ ;  $M=2.1$ ,  $SD=1.18$ ,  $\alpha=.85$ ). After deliberation and viewing a dominant null response from participants ( $n=386$ ; 81% answered "none"), the measurement item "Reporting a

local event to local news media” was removed. The removal did not affect the reliability of the civic engagement measure. A reliability measure following the removal of the item elicited the following results: civic engagement ( $n=360$ ;  $\alpha=.86$ ) as illustrated in **Table 4**. Having found it to be a reliable measure, the civic engagement frequency matrix was summed into a single variable.

**Table 4: Civic engagement ( $n=360$ ;  $\alpha=.86$ )**

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Doing volunteer work.

Working on a community project.

Contributing money to a social group or cause.

Going to a community or neighborhood meeting.

Working on behalf of a social group or cause.

Creating awareness for a community issue you care about.

Going to local sporting or cultural events.

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## VII. Results

Participants were subscribers of The Sheridan Press and The Southwest Times daily community newspapers, and participated by filling out and return-mailing the paper survey or by filling out the survey online. Electing to take the online survey or mail in the paper survey served as proof of participation consent. As previously mentioned, to guard against duplicate responses across delivery platforms, participants were instructed to take only one version of the survey.

Overall, 1,560 paper surveys were sent out: 1,000 to The Southwest Times home delivery subscribers, and 560 to The Sheridan Press home delivery subscribers. According to each newspaper's publisher, The Southwest times has 5,000 daily home delivery subscribers and The Sheridan Press has 2,800 daily home delivery subscribers. The number of paper surveys distributed represents 20% of each newspaper's reported home delivery subscribers. In addition, emailed links to the online surveys, which were identical to the paper surveys, were sent out to the full 5,000 of The Southwest Times home delivery subscribers, and emailed to the full 2,800 home delivery subscribers of The Sheridan Press.

A total of 406 participants took part in the study. 152 were males (37.4%) and 249 were females (61.3%). Five (1.2%) declined to answer. Out of The Sheridan Press participants, 28% (n=152) returned the paper survey and 1% (n=28) completed the online survey, although three responses were discarded after it was discovered each were blank beyond the first question. Combined, The Sheridan Press respondents account for 43.6% of the total responses used in this analysis (n=177 out of 406). Out of The Southwest Times participants, 22.6% (n=226) returned the paper survey and <1% (n= 3) completed the online survey. Combined, The Southwest Times respondents account for 56.4% of the total responses used in this analysis (n=229 out of 406). While when considering the paper surveys only the response rate is 24.2%, when factoring in the emailed links sent to a total 7,800 subscribers the total response rate is much lower – it drops to

5.2%. It is worth noting that since the respondents that returned the paper surveys also received the emailed links to the online surveys, the 5.2% online survey response rate may not be a precise measure or representation of how many respondents read the emailed letters and as a result chose to participate in the study.

Looking at the combined dataset (N=406), participants' ages (n=389) ranged from 23 to 95 ( $M=66.47$ ,  $SD=12.35$ ) with the majority of the participants (68.1%) between ages 54 to 78. In terms of ethnicity, 96.1% reported as Caucasian or White, .7% reported as African-American or Black, .5% reported as Hispanic or Latino, and 2.7% declined to answer.

In terms of education level, 17.9% reported a high school diploma or GED or less, 24.9% reported having some college education, 13.5% reported an associate's degree, 22.9% reported having earned a bachelor's degree, 14.8% reported having earned a master's degree, and 5.5% reported a doctorate or professional degree; .5% declined to answer. In terms of combined annual household income (n=357): 14.6% reported less than \$30,000, 40.6% reported between \$30,000 and \$69,999, 23.5% reported between \$70,000 and \$99,999, and 21.3% reported \$100,000 or more. In terms of the distance each of the participants lived from the town or city in which the newspaper was located (n=400): 33.7 % indicated they resided within the town or city, 52.2% indicated they resided 1-10 miles from the town or city, and 14.1% 11 miles or greater. The vast majority (84.8%) indicated living either within or up to 10 miles outside the town or city.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

In order to test **H1: the more people read the print edition of the community daily newspaper, the stronger the sense of community will be felt**, and **H2: the more people read the website content of the community daily newspaper, the stronger the sense of**

**community will be felt**, four separate linear regression models were run. Both hypotheses predicted a positive relationship between reading news content and sense of community. In the regression models, print and online readership served as the independent variables, and the four SOC elements of needs fulfillment, membership, feelings of influence, and shared emotional connection were the dependent variables. All four regression models were statistically significant as illustrated in **Tables 5, 6, 7, 8**. In the first model, illustrated in **Table 5**, 9% of the variance for needs fulfillment ( $M=15.16$ ,  $SD=3.64$ ) was predicted by readership of print news ( $M=12.77$ ,  $SD=32.27$ ) and readership of online news ( $M=4.05$ ,  $SD=2.96$ ).

**Table 5: Effect of Online and Print Readership on Needs Fulfillment**

	B	$\beta$
Print newspaper readership	.36	.32***
Online newspaper readership	.27	.22***

$$F(2, 362) = 18.07, r^2 = .09, p < .001$$

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

In the second model, illustrated in **Table 6**, 7% of the variance for membership was predicted by readership of print news ( $M=12.77$ ,  $SD=3.26$ ) and online news ( $M=4.06$ ,  $SD=2.96$ ). The regression demonstrated both print and online news reading as highly significant predictors of the membership element of sense of community.

**Table 6: Effect of Online and Print Readership on Membership**

	B	$\beta$
Print newspaper readership	.33	.28***
Online newspaper readership	.31	.23***

 $F(2, 362) = 14.83, r^2 = .07, p < .001$ Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ 

In the third model, illustrated in **Table 7**, 6% of the variance for feelings of influence was predicted by readership of print news ( $M=12.75, SD=3.27$ ) and online news ( $M=4.05, SD=2.96$ ). The regression demonstrated both print and online news reading as highly significant predictors of the influence element of sense of community. Of the four, influence, while still highly significant, predicted the least amount of variance. A potential explanation for this finding appears in the discussion chapter of this thesis.

**Table 7: Effects of Online and Print Readership on Influence**

	B	$\beta$
Print Newspaper Readership	.23	.20***
Online Newspaper Readership	.32	.26***

 $F(2, 361) = 11.75, r^2 = .06, p < .001$ Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ 

In the fourth and final model examining **H1** and **H2**, illustrated in **Table 8**, 9% of the variance for feelings of emotional connection to a community was predicted by readership of

print news ( $M=12.79$ ,  $SD=3.26$ ) and online news ( $M=4.05$ ,  $SD=2.95$ ). The regression demonstrated both print and online news reading as highly significant predictors of the emotional connection element of SOC. Of the four, emotional connection and needs fulfillment both explain 9% variance. This also is discussed in the next chapter.

**Table 8: Effects of Online and Print Readership on Emotional Connection**

	B	$\beta$
Print Newspaper Readership	.41	.32***
Online Newspaper Readership	.34	.24***
$F (2, 364) = 18.68$ , $r^2 = .09$ , $p < .001$		

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Each of the regression models for each one of the variables that make up SOC were highly significant for both print newspaper readership and online newspaper readership, indicating that the more a person reads either the print or online versions of the community daily newspaper, the stronger the feeling of sense of community that person will experience. Based on this analysis, it is clear both **H1** and **H2** are supported – community daily newspaper readership in both print and online formats is a significant predictor of SOC and its feelings of membership, needs fulfillment, influence, and emotional connection.

In order to test **H3: print newspaper readers will have a higher sense of community than online newspaper readers**, and in order to answer the study's first research question, **RQ1: Do readers who spend more time reading both print newspaper and newspaper website content feel a stronger sense of community than those that only read print or only**

**website content?** The non-readers, print-only readers, website-only readers, and both print and website reader variables that were constructed from the media use measures were analyzed using a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). The independent variables for the MANOVA were the reader types, and the dependent variables were the four elements of sense of community – membership, influence, needs fulfillment, and emotional connection. The results for both **H3** and **RQ1**, which are illustrated in **Table 9**, demonstrate the significance of the relationship between the SOC elements and readership types (Wilks'  $\Lambda = .93$ ,  $F(3, 320) = 1.84$ ,  $p < .05$ , partial  $r^2 = .02$ .).

**Table 9: Differences between print-only, online-only, and readers of both types of content**

Types of Readers				
	Non-	Online only	Print only	Print and online
	readers			
<i>Membership**</i>				
	<i>M</i>	12.00 <sub>a</sub>	14.29 <sub>a</sub>	13.30 <sub>a</sub>
	<i>SD</i>	3.0	4.25	3.48
<i>Influence*</i>	<i>M</i>	10.67 <sub>a</sub>	13.43 <sub>a</sub>	13.85 <sub>a</sub>
	<i>SD</i>	4.04	3.46	3.83
<i>Emotional*</i>	<i>M</i>	11.67 <sub>a</sub>	15.71 <sub>a</sub>	15.71 <sub>a</sub>
<i>Connection</i>				
	<i>SD</i>	4.51	3.63	4.16
				4.63

Wilks'  $\Lambda = .93$ ,  $F(3, 320) = 1.84$ ,  $p < .05$ , partial  $r^2 = .02$ .

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Means with no subscript in common differ at  $p < .05$  using Holm's sequential Bonferroni post hoc comparisons.

The results show the model was significant, although the SOC element of needs fulfillment was not significant on its own and was not included in the **Table 9** results. In the MANOVA model membership, influence and shared emotional connection changed depending on the readership type (e.g. online only, print only, etc) Pairwise comparisons of the variables showed that there were significant differences between each.

First, **H3** stated that print newspaper readers will have a higher SOC than online readers. The model did not show a significantly higher SOC for print readers over online readers, thus **H3** was not supported.

As previously stated, **Table 9** also represents the MANOVA model that served to answer **RQ1**. An examination of the reader types and elements of SOC yield the following results. In the membership variable there are significant differences between the online-only ( $M= 14.29$ ,  $SD= 3.0$ ) group and the print ( $M= 13.30$ ,  $SD= 3.48$ ) and online plus print group ( $M= 15.10$ ,  $SD= 3.45$ ), significant differences between print-only and both print and online. Specifically, the results show that readers who read both print and online content were more likely to feel stronger feelings of membership than those who only read either print or online news. Results were similar in the analysis of the shared emotional connection variable. Here there were significant differences again between readers who said they read both print and online ( $M=15.10$ ,  $SD=3.45$ ) and those who said their read print only ( $M=13.30$ ,  $SD=3.48$ ) or online only ( $M= 14.29$ ,  $SD= 3.0$ ). There also were significant statistical differences between groups in terms of influence, which is why the measure of influence is present in **Table 9**. However, given the size of the subsamples, pairwise comparisons were not weighted heavily enough or sensitive enough to identify those differences.

Essentially, together the results show that readers that who read both community news content in traditional print and mirrored-content website formats feel a stronger sense of

community, particularly regarding membership and emotional connection than those that read only the print edition. The differences between online-only readers and readers of both print and online are evident, but not strong enough to be called significant. A potential limitation is explored in the discussion chapter of this thesis. The answer to **RQ1**, then, is two-fold: first, yes, community daily newspaper readers that engage in content in both print and online formats feel a stronger sense of community than print-only and online-only readers, with a significant difference over print-only readers. A case is made in the discussion chapter, then, for the inclusion and importance of a community daily newspaper's website in augmenting the sense of community felt by readers of its traditional print edition.

## **Mediation Tests**

In order to answer hypotheses **H4, 5, 6**, and **RQ2, 3 and 4**, the researcher explored direct and indirect relationships between print and civic engagement as mediated by sense of community. In order to test these relationships, the researcher used Baron and Kenny's approach to mediation, discussed in Baron and Kenny (1986), Judd and Kenny (1981), and James and Brett (1984), which is based on four steps. Step 1 of the mediation uses linear regression to explore the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable. This linear regression also was used to test the hypotheses. Step 2 uses a linear regression to determine a significant relationship between the mediator variable and the dependent variable. Step 3 and step 4 include both the independent variable and the mediator in a multiple regression and tests the effects of these variables on the dependent variable. If the independent variable loses its significance in the model, then the mediator fully mediates the relationship. If the dependent variable remains significant, then the mediator only partially mediates the relationship.

The first mediation test looked at the relationship between newspaper readership, sense of community and civic engagement. In each of these tests, sense of community was comprised of the single 24-item SCI-2 measure consisting of all four sense of community items (membership, involvement,, emotional connection, needs fulfillment). To test **H4**: there will be a direct relationship between newspaper reading and civic engagement, a linear regression was run using print newspaper reading as the dependent variable and the civic engagement as the independent variable. Results are illustrated in **Table 10**.

**Table 10: Print newspaper reading and civic engagement**

	B	$\beta$
Civic engagement	-.03	-.016

$F(1, 394) = .1, r^2=.002, p = .75$

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

As **Table 10** demonstrates, a significant direct relationship between print newspaper reading and civic engagement was not found. Thus, **H4** is not supported. A possible explanation for this null finding is included in the discussion section of this thesis. Because **H4** was not supported and because it is the first step in mediation, the researcher did not explore **RQ2** which asked whether sense of community mediated the relationship between newspaper reading and civic engagement.

The next mediation test explored the relationship between newspaper website reading, sense of community, and civic engagement. In order to examine the relationship between online newspaper reading and civic engagement and test **H5**: there will be a direct relationship between local newspaper website content reading and civic engagement, a linear regression was run using

online newspaper reading as the dependent variable and the civic engagement sum as the independent variable. Results are illustrated in **Table 11**.

**Table 11: Online newspaper reading and civic engagement**

	B	$\beta$
Civic engagement	.39	.19***
$F(1, 369) = 13.66, r^2 = .033, p < .001$		

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Analysis of the data demonstrates a highly significant direct relationship, between online newspaper reading and civic engagement,  $F(1, 369) = 13.66, r^2 = .033, p < .001$ . Essentially, the more a person reads news content online the more likely he or she is to be civically active and engaged. **H5**, then, is supported.

To explore **RQ3: Is the relationship between local newspaper website content reading and civic engagement mediated by sense of community**, results from the second mediation test were reexamined. Results show a direct relationship between the independent variable (online newspaper readership) and the dependent variable (civic engagement) and a direct relationship between the mediator (sense of community) and the dependent variable (civic engagement),  $F(1, 395) = 82.06, r^2 = .17, p < .001$ .

**Table 11** demonstrated the final results where both the independent variable (online newspaper reading) and the mediator (sense of community) were employed in a multiple regression with the dependent variable civic engagement. Results for this model were significant, ( $F(1, 369) = 13.66, r^2 = .033, p < .001$ ). The multiple regression showed that the

mediating variable (sense of community) only partially mediated the relationship between online newspaper readership and civic engagement, as illustrated in **Table 12**. In other words, the tests show that there are some relationships between online newspaper reading and civic engagement that are partially explained by one's sense of community. The answer, then, to **RQ3**, is while a partial mediation exists, the relationship between local newspaper website content reading and civic engagement is not fully mediated by sense of community.

**Table 12: Effects of online newspaper readership and SOC on civic engagement**

	B	$\beta$
Online newspaper readership	.29	.14**
Sense of community	.16	.39***
$F(2, 367) = .42.42, r^2=.18, p<.001$		

Note: \* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$ , \*\*\* $p<.001$

Moving on, the next mediation test explored the relationship between print newspaper reading, sense of community, and political participation. In order to examine the relationship between print newspaper reading and political participation and to test **H6: There will be a direct relationship between print newspaper reading and political participation**, a linear regression was run using print newspaper reading as the independent variable and the political participation mean as the dependent variable. Results are illustrated in **Table 13**.

**Table 13: Print newspapers and political participation**

	B	$\beta$
Political participation	-.20	-.11*

 $F(1, 396) = 4.42, r^2 = .01, p < .05$ Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ 

Analysis of the data indicates a significant direct relationship between print newspaper reading and political participation ( $F(1, 396) = 4.42, r^2 = .01, p < .05$ ), although that relationship is negative. **H6**, then, is supported. In other words, the more a person reads the print edition of the newspaper the less likely they are to be engaged in local political activities. A possible explanation for this finding is included in the discussion chapter.

To explore **RQ4: Is the relationship between local print newspaper reading and political participation mediated by sense of community**, results from the previous mediation test were reexamined. Results showed a direct relationship between the independent variable (print newspaper readership) and the dependent variable (political participation) and a direct relationship between mediator (sense of community) and the dependent variable (political participation),  $F(1, 398) = 9.57, r^2 = .02, p < .01$ .

**Table 14** demonstrated the final results where both the independent variable (print newspaper reading) and the mediator (sense of community) were employed in a multiple regression with the dependent variable (political participation). Results for this model were significant,  $F(2, 393) = .1, r^2 = .90, p < .001$ . The multiple regression showed that the mediating variable (sense of community) only partially mediated the relationship between print newspaper readership and political participation. In other words, the tests showed that there are some relationships between print newspaper reading and civic engagement that are partially explained

by a reader's sense of community. The answer, then, to **RQ4**, is while a partial mediation exists, the relationship between reading the community daily newspaper and political participation is not fully mediated by sense of community.

**Table 14: Effects of print newspaper readership and SOC on political participation**

	B	$\beta$
Print newspaper readership	-.08	-.15**
Sense of community	.03	.31***
$F(2, 393) = .1, r^2=.10, p<.001$		

Note: \* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$ , \*\*\* $p<.001$

The final mediation test explored the relationship between newspaper website reading, sense of community, and political participation. In order to examine the relationship between newspaper website reading and political participation and test **H7: There will be a direct relationship between local newspaper website content reading and political participation**, a linear regression was run using online news reading as the independent variable and political participation as the dependent variable. Results show a significant relationship,  $F(1, 370) = 14.44, r^2= .04, p <.001$ , as illustrated in **Table 15**.

**Table 15: Online news reading and political participation**

	B	$\beta$
Political participation	.11	.19***
$F(1, 370) = 14.44, r^2= .04, p <.001$		

Note: \* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$ , \*\*\* $p<.001$

Analysis showed a highly significant direct relationship between reading local news website content and political participation ( $p < .001$ ). **H7**, then, was supported, essentially stating that the more readers engage with online news content, the more likely they are to be politically active. Potential explanations as to the significance of this finding and its implications are located in the discussion chapter.

To explore the final research question, **RQ5**, results from the preceding regression were reexamined. Results show a direct relationship between the independent variable (online news website reading) and the dependent variable (political participation). Further, the regression conducted to examine **H6** and **RQ4** demonstrated a significant relationship between the mediator (sense of community) and the dependent variable (political participation),  $F(2, 393) = .1$ ,  $r^2 = .90$ ,  $p < .001$ , used here as well.

**Table 16** illustrates the final results where both the independent variable (online newspaper reading) and the mediator (sense of community) were employed in a multiple regression with the dependent variable of political participation. Results for this model were significant,  $F(1, 394) = 18.68$ ,  $r^2 = .09$ ,  $p < .001$ . The multiple regression showed that the mediating variable (sense of community) only partially mediated the relationship between online newspaper readership and political participation. In other words, the tests show that there are some relationships between community daily news website reading and political participation that are partially explained by a reader's sense of community. The answer, then, to **RQ5**, is that while a partial mediation exists, the relationship between community daily newspaper website content reading and political participation is not fully mediated by sense of community.

**Table 16: Effects of online newspaper readership and SOC on political participation**

	B	$\beta$
Online newspaper readership	.09	.16**
Sense of community	.03	.24***

$$F(1, 394) = 18.68, r^2=.09, p<.001$$

Note: \* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$ , \*\*\* $p<.001$

## VIII. Discussion

Previous research on metro newspapers, niche publications, and community-oriented metro websites has brought into light the role that newspapers play in informing their readers, fostering a sense of community, and facilitating a reader's civic and political participation. This thesis brings into light the role of the community daily in this context. While an infinite set of variables affects how strongly a person feels about the community in which that person resides, it is clear through the findings of this study that among those variables is the community daily newspaper and its mirrored-content website. Here, a summary of findings is presented, as well as possible explanations of findings, and practical and theoretical implications are discussed. Limitations are presented, as well as areas of future research.

### **Summary of Findings**

In order to test **H1: the more people read the print edition of the community daily newspaper, the stronger the sense of community will be felt**, and **H2: the more people read the website content of the community daily newspaper, the stronger the sense of community will be felt**, four linear regressions were run that looked at the relationships between online and print newspaper reading and the four sense of community variables. The results showed that both community daily newspaper reading and reading the newspaper's online content were predictors of sense of community, and both hypotheses were supported. Essentially, these supported hypotheses state the more a person reads content on either medium, the stronger that person's feelings of membership, influence, needs fulfillment, and emotional connection concerning their communities. An argument may be made, then, that reading community daily newspapers and their mirrored-content websites are strong predictors of feelings of sense of community.

When examining the relationships presented in the linear regression models for both print and online, each of the four elements of SOC were significant. The strongest, however, were the elements of emotional connection and needs fulfillment, which accounted for 9% of the variance each. Data, then, supports the argument that people that frequently read community daily newspapers and news websites feel a stronger emotional connection to their community, and feel like their community is meeting their needs. Influence and membership also were significant, but membership was the least significant – it explained 6% of the variance. Membership is still meaningful, but just a little less so than the other three. A lot can account for this, and this possible explanation is speculation: perhaps the newspaper's role is less about creating a community standard for members of the community to rally around and more about creating a window through which to view the standard. It is also possible the content of local news stories may account for the heightened feelings of emotional connection and needs fulfillment – content analysis of newspaper and website-published materials was not a part of this study and is discussed as a limitation. Positive, negative, and neutral news and editorial content, reporter and editorial coverage of subjects or artifacts in which readers have personal investment, place value on, or deeply care about, may heighten the feelings of emotional connection, as well as stories that evoke feelings of pride in one's community, such as a report on a victory over an economic crisis, a report on a jobs-creating local business expanding its production, a feature on the positive resolution of a divisive community issue, or a story on the local high school football team's victory over an intense in-state rival. Regarding needs fulfillment, arguably the primary function of a community newspaper is to collect, interpret, and transmit information to the public it serves. Information transmission, and information reception, may serve to fulfill many different needs a reader finds valuable. An emphasis, then, of the successful filling of this role by

an editorial staff may serve to draw attention to, and increase, these perceptions from their readers.

Another interesting finding regarding sense of community as a theoretical concept is that it may not be unidirectional. Prior research tends to conceptualize sense of community as an independent variable. This study examined sense of community as a dependent variable. Prior literature (Davidson & Cotter, 1997) found that higher sense of community leads to higher newspaper reading. The results of this study shows it works the other way as well, that the more people read community daily newspapers the stronger the sense of community that is felt. An implication here is that the community daily may play a vital role in fostering or developing a sense of community in its readers that may or may not already be present. The practical significance of this finding for publishers and editorial staff is discussed later.

**H3: print newspaper readers will have a higher sense of community than online newspaper readers** was not supported. Data analysis showed equally significant sense of community among both reader types. This was not an expected finding, as previous research pointed to a stronger sense of community among traditional print readers. Further, the answer to **RQ1**, which asked whether readers of both print and online news feel a stronger sense of community than either medium alone, emphasizes the relevance of the community news website to its community and led to one of the more compelling findings in this study – the result of the MANOVA table which was used to test **H3** and answer **RQ1**. It was found that there exists a compounded effect of print and online that actually leads to an increase in SOC that is greater than print alone. The researcher began this study with the assumption that print findings would be strong and online findings would not have as strong of an influence, but the data supports the idea that both are equally meaningful on their own in contributing to SOC, civic engagement, and political participation, but the compounded effect of reading both has a more meaningful

effect. So to answer the research question: yes, community newspaper readers that consume a combination of both print and online news have a stronger sense of community than online-only and print-only readers, and that sense of community is particularly stronger than it is among print-only readers. There is a significant difference between readers of both and readers of either on their own, so those that spend more time engaging with the material through multiple mediums feel a greater sense of community. To break the finding down into its nuanced elements, there is a difference in print only readers and readers of both print and online ( $p<.01$ ) concerning membership. There is a small difference in influence between both print and web and print only that was approaching significance, but the data was not strong enough to call significant. There is a significant difference ( $p<.05$ ) between both print and web and print. Those that read both feel a stronger emotional connection to their community. The real differences are between print readers and readers of both content. Mersey (2009) did not find a strong relationship between sense of community and exclusively online readers. The analysis in this study does demonstrate a strong relationship between sense of community and online-only readers, as evidenced in the answer to **RQ1** and illustrated in **Table 9**. Community news websites have come a long way in development, emphasis, maintenance, and visibility in the six years since Mersey conducted her study. It is possible these advancements have helped shift the value placed on community news websites by their readers and may account for the shift in the sense of community felt by those readers. It is also worth noting that Mersey (2009) examined a niche community newspaper and news website with a specific niche audience inside metropolitan Phoenix, Az. The differences in that population and the rural populations in this study also may explain the difference in findings, which may imply a higher value placed on community news by populations more rural, more isolated, and less saturated with competing news content.

The implication here is that a community newspaper's website plays a much stronger role in fostering and maintaining a sense of community among its readers than previously suspected. Results of this study show that the website promotes a strong sense of community, possibly as strong as its print product. This finding was unanticipated. Further, results show that people who read both print and online news content actually have a stronger sense of community than either alone, particularly print, which is an additive effect and makes the argument that a community newspaper's website plays a vital role in fostering a sense of community, which makes a strong case for the importance of a community news organization's online presence in supporting community life. Perhaps the accessibility of the website, or the pairing of print and website content, or the supplementing of the print newspaper with the versatility of the website medium may account for this finding, and may warrant future research to discover the nuance of the finding. The results of this study also make the case for an editorial emphasis on making content that appears in the print edition available online, that keeping and maintaining an active mirrored-content community news website may be just as important as keeping and maintaining the ink-stained and well-oiled printing press. As demonstrated in the review of literature, a community daily plays a key role in constructing and maintaining a sense of community among its readers. Taking that knowledge a step further, the results of this study indicate the importance of a community daily's website and online content in helping construct and maintain, or at the very least supplement, a sense of community as well. That role may serve to increase the social value placed on the community daily by community residents, which in turn may serve to increase paying subscribers and single-copy purchasers. From a practical perspective, by placing an emphasis on fostering a sense of community with a strong, local, community-oriented daily newspaper and placing an equal, if not greater emphasis on a strong website that reflects and supplements the published print content, community daily publishers and editors may draw in

more subscribers and more paying readers that feel positively about their communities and their community dailies, which will in turn attract local advertisers and ultimately bring in more revenue for the newspaper.

Hypotheses 4 through 7 are tied to research questions 2 through 5, and will be discussed accordingly. Regarding **H4**, no significant relationship between print reading and civic engagement was found, which negated **RQ2**. Previous research indicated a relationship, so this null finding is interesting on its own (Mersey, 2010; Paek, Yoon, & Shah, 2005; Stamm, 1985).

Regarding **H6**, previous research also predicted a significant relationship between print newspaper readership and political participation (Filler & Johnson, 2010; Lee & Wei, 2008; McLeod et al, 1999). This relationship was significant but beta weights indicate that the relationship was the opposite of what was expected. In other words, the more participants read newspapers, the less they were involved politically. One reason, and this will require further research to accurately determine, may be found in the age of the respondents. The mean age of the respondents was 66 ( $M=66.47$ ,  $SD=12.35$ ), meaning the majority (68%) of the participants' ages ranged between 54 and 78 with a skew toward an elderly population of print readers that may not be as active in their communities as a skewed younger population may be. It is possible the measures for political efficacy and political activity were not reflective of the attitudes and behaviors of an older population. Many of the political activity questions were directed at actively participating in some kind of work – actively working on behalf of a candidate, circulating a petition, etc. Measures geared more toward smaller actions and behaviors and less toward behaviors that require long periods of physical activity may find differing results that may be more consistent with previous findings. For example, instead of asking if a reader has helped circulate a petition, ask if the reader has engaged in a political conversation with a friend,

or discussed a political issue with a community or family member, or ask them whether they seek out political news coverage at the local, state, or national level.

Hypotheses **H5** and **H7**, which stated community news website readers will have direct relationships to the variables of civic engagement and political participation, were significant and in the expected positive direction. Readers that engage with the website, then, are more civically and politically active than their print edition contemporaries, a finding that was not expected. Further research into community news websites and their readers may shed light on the efficacy of website readers over print readers. What this may indicate is that publishers and editors of community newspapers that do not place high value on, allocate sufficient resources to, or place emphasis on the importance of a mirrored-content website may be doing their news organizations and their readers a disservice. If one of the goals of the publishers is to increase community civic and political engagement, placing emphasis on the website may help achieve that goal. If increasing community engagement is not a goal the findings are still relevant, as they indicate a positive shift in the cultural as well as fiscal value of a community news website. Publishers may want to put careful and calculated thought into its design and content, as those that do not, or that simply do not put content online, may be missing out on subscriber revenue and the advertising revenue that comes with it.

Research questions **RQ4**, **RQ5**, and **RQ6** each asked about sense of community as a mediator of print or online newspaper reading and civic engagement and political participation. Each multiple linear regression model were significant, and each relationship was found to be at least partially mediated by sense of community, but no full mediation effect was found. In short, sense of community is in fact a mediating factor between readers of print and online newspapers and their civic and political activities, but it is not the only factor in the equation. Essentially, there is a significant relationship between reading community news content and both political

and civic activity, but the reason that people that read community news go out, for example, and attend a town council meeting or vote in a local election, or help build a home for a family, may not be predicted by sense of community alone, according to the data in this study. There may be other factors that mediate the relationship between community news readers and civic and political action. Yamamoto (2011) suggested individuals with strong personal ties and deep relationships with other individuals within a community are more likely to be affected by newspaper readership. For instance, a reader that focuses on negative news content may fear for the wellbeing of the community and decide to take action, or a reader may have a commitment to a child or grandchild's school or church group, and volunteer on the weekends, or a reader may have a church member run for public office and may elect to support that member's campaign. Prior experience with civic and political activity, a sense of civic duty, a sense of patriotism, a person's upbringing and political views, may all factor in as well. The findings in this study are evidence that community daily newspapers and their mirrored-content websites help their readers feel a significant sense of community – but this is a small part of a larger puzzle, and future research may further illuminate the pieces.

By testing longstanding hypotheses on feelings of sense of community and taking community daily newspaper research further than previously done, this thesis shed light on the role community dailies and their websites play in creating and maintaining a strong sense of community among their readers. It also demonstrated part of the value of the local, small-town daily newspaper to its readers. These findings provide myriad implications both practical and theoretical, provide a framework for future research possibilities in the realm of the small-town daily newspaper and its digital platforms.

## **Practical and theoretical implications**

Taking the mile-high perspective, this study asks the question, “does reading a community daily newspaper or its news website cause its reader to feel more strongly about their community?” And it answers, “yes.” Further, analysis of the data presented shows that within that sense of community, newspapers play a significant role in fulfilling needs and sustaining an emotional connection in their readers – in both the linear regression models examining print and online readerships, and needs fulfillment and emotional connection, 9% of the variance is explained.

Does this research definitively prove that if a person reads both print and online editions of their local community newspaper that person will have a stronger sense of community? It could mean that, and the data supports that, or it could mean that the person that frequents both print and online editions is such a news junkie and can’t get enough of it, the quantity of local news consumption leads to a stronger sense of community. Or it could mean a person has a strong commitment to a community for reasons having nothing to do with news consumption, which may serve as a precursor to local news-seeking behavior. Either way, what the data in this study does do is make a strong case for the inclusion of a regularly updated and prioritized community news website with content that mirrors the print edition of the newspaper. While print-only had a slight advantage in SOC over online-only, the small online-only sample size prevented that advantage from reaching significance. However, the significantly stronger SOC ( $p < .01$ ) felt by readers of both print and online editions over print-only readers makes the case for the inclusion of a regularly-maintained mirrored-content community news website. Online readers’ sense of community did not significantly differ from print readers, and online readers were found to be more civically and politically engaged within their communities. Something for community daily publishers and editors to consider, then, is how much emphasis to put into

creating and maintaining an active online presence, as the possibility that a strong web audience within a community daily newspaper's readership may serve to strengthen community ties, which may in turn, from a practical perspective, increase that newspaper's readership and, ultimately, positively affect its bottom line.

## **Limitations**

While the response rate for this study was positive ( $N=406$ ) and each newspaper that participated in this study was well represented (The Sheridan Press,  $n=177$ , The Southwest Times,  $n=229$ ), a larger population of readers that regularly engage with the newspapers' websites may affect the findings and enhance the generalizability of the results. This sample discrepancy between print readers and online readers in this study's participant sample is unsurprising, as it is consistent with Hargrove et al (2011) and the suggestion that heavy print readers are not likely to be web readers as well. When testing **H3: print newspaper readers will have a higher sense of community than online newspaper readers, and RQ1: Do readers who spend more time reading both print newspaper and newspaper website content feel a stronger sense of community than those that only read print or only website content?**, the sample size difference between print-only ( $n=254$ ) and online-only ( $n=14$ ) prevents drawing generalizable conclusions. The directions of means does suggest that there was a difference in SOC between print-only and online-only readers, but that difference was not statistically significant enough to support H3. A larger sample size of online-only readers may more clearly test H3. This may influence future research. The use and comparison of non-readers ( $n=3$ ) and online-only to readers that engage with both print and online ( $n=53$ ) may be affected or strengthened by a more proportionate sample and a more representative sample for readers of

both and non-readers living within the communities serviced by the newspapers participating in the study.

Another limitation to this study is that the content itself published in the print edition or published to the website of both newspapers in this study was not analyzed, which may point to a direction for future research into community newspapers and the strength of their effects on their readers. Although Hoffman (2006) found little difference between content published in the print edition of the newspaper and the newspaper's online content, a detailed analysis of the quantity and types of published content, as well as an assessment of the overall quality and strength of the community newspaper and its website may prove illuminating in this regard. Further, an analysis of opportunities for reader interactivity and community engagement on both print and digital platforms may shed light on the feelings of membership felt by readers that capitalize on such opportunities – perhaps those feelings are amplified by interactivity, perhaps not. While the focus of this research and this discussion is rooted exclusively in context of small community dailies, analysis and assessment of content, quality and strength of the print edition and website may prove equally illuminating at larger dailies and community weeklies, as well as in other media venues such as local radio and television news.

## **Future research**

An examination into the types of content – text and photos in print, and text, photos, and audio and video content online – may provide insight into why reading content affects sense of community. How much content is generated by the newspaper's reporters, freelancers, photographers, etc? How much content is pulled from the Associated Press wire or from other news sources? How much content is exclusively local to the communities the newspaper services? How much is regional or state news, or national or international news? How much

content is syndicated? Tonally, how much local content is positive? Negative? Neutral? What types of stories are given prominence – crime, sports, politics, government operations, community features? Answers to these questions regarding the content published in the newspapers that participated in this study, when paired with the study's results, may present a clearer picture as to the role of the content itself in fostering a sense of community.

A look deeper into the use of sense of community and its relationship with community daily newspapers may be warranted. Incorporating a larger number of newspapers into the study representative of even more geographic regions of the United States may provide clarity.

Also, a population of younger, more active readers may also provide clarity. When examining a younger population, it may be illuminating to include a measure inside media use for nostalgia. Perhaps younger readers are engaging with community newspapers, if they are, in fact, engaging with them, in a similar manner as older technologies such as vinyl record LPs.

Looking away from community dailies, expanding the study to other types of local community media such as talk radio stations, or public broadcasting newscasts. Further, a greater incorporation of social media to examine a potential link in SOC and the interactivity that comes with engaging in community newspaper content linked to social media sites may enhance the findings regarding online news readers.

## IX. Conclusion

Newspapers have enjoyed a rich and storied history over the last four centuries. As technology advances at ever-increasing speeds and metro newspapers stagger slipshod down the spiral staircase of the news media hierarchy, research investigating the continued viability of the little guy as a relevant medium, the community daily, may provide insight into its value as a community resource. Small, local dailies play an important role in the communities they serve. They inform their readers, they report news and the goings on of the town, city, or county, share stories and images, provide transparency between community leaders, elected officials, and the public, and provide a public platform for civic discussion. This study focused on community daily newspapers, through traditional ink-and-paper print editions and web-based mirrored-content digital editions, and their effects on their readers' sense of community. It also presented evidence that those readers' sense of community mediates important community functions such as political participation and civic engagement. In short, community dailies and their websites are strongly tied to their readers' sense of community, and that sense of community in turn partially mediates those readers' political and civic activities. While the "who", the "what", and the "where" of the story looking into both community newspapers and their mirrored-content websites are investigated and explained in this study, future research is needed to uncover and tie in the "how" and the "why".

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## XI. Tables

**Table 1: SCI-2 reliability (total scale N=406;  $\alpha=.95$ )**

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### **Membership $\alpha=.83$**

I can trust people in the Sheridan community.  
I can recognize most of the members of the Sheridan community.  
Most Sheridan community members know me.  
The Sheridan community has symbols and expressions of membership such as clothes, signs, art, architecture, logos, landmarks, and flags that people can recognize.  
I put a lot of time and effort into being part of the Sheridan community.  
Being a member of the Sheridan community is a part of my identity.

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### **Influence $\alpha=.87$**

Fitting into the Sheridan community is important to me.  
The Sheridan community can influence other communities.  
I care about what other Sheridan community members think of me.  
I have influence over what the Sheridan community is like.  
If there is a problem in this community, members can get it solved.  
The Sheridan community has good leaders.

---

### **Needs fulfillment $\alpha=.85$**

I get important needs of mine met because I am part of the Sheridan community.  
Sheridan community members and I value the same things.  
The Sheridan community has been successful in getting the needs of its community members met.  
Being a member of the Sheridan community makes me feel good.  
When I have a problem, I can talk about it with members of the Sheridan community.  
People in the Sheridan community have similar needs, priorities, and goals.

---

### **Emotional connection $\alpha=.88$**

It is very important to me to be a part of the Sheridan community.  
I am with other Sheridan community members a lot and enjoy being with them.  
I expect to be a part of the Sheridan community for a long time.  
Members of the Sheridan community have shared important events together, such as holidays, celebrations, or disasters.  
I feel hopeful about the future of the Sheridan community.  
Members of the Sheridan community care about each other.

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Note: Each iteration of the survey reflected the name of its newspaper's town, city, or county. The measures here reflect measures for Sheridan, WY. and The Sheridan Press.

**Table 2: Internal Political Efficacy (n=384;  $\alpha=.86$ )**

I consider myself to be well-qualified to participate in local politics.
I feel that I have a good understanding of the important political issues facing our community.
I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most other people.
I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people.

**Table 3: Frequency of political engagement activities (n=333;  $\alpha=.65$ )**

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Working on behalf of a social group or cause.
Attending a city council meeting or public hearing.
Circulating a petition for a candidate or issue.
Contacting a public official or a political party.
Voting in an election.
Writing a letter to the editor regarding a local issue.

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**Table 4: Civic engagement (n=360;  $\alpha=.86$ )**

---

Doing volunteer work.
Working on a community project.
Contributing money to a social group or cause.
Going to a community or neighborhood meeting.
Working on behalf of a social group or cause.
Creating awareness for a community issue you care about.
Going to local sporting or cultural events.

---

**Table 5: Effect of Online and Print Readership on Needs Fulfillment**

	B	$\beta$
Print newspaper readership	.36	.32***
Online newspaper readership	.27	.22***

$F(2, 362) = 18.07, r^2 = .09, p < .001$

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Table 6: Effect of Online and Print Readership on Membership**

	B	$\beta$
Print newspaper readership	.33	.28***
Online newspaper readership	.31	.23***

$$F(2, 362) = 14.83, r^2 = .07, p < .001$$

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Table 7: Effects of Online and Print Readership on Influence**

	B	$\beta$
Print Newspaper Readership	.23	.20***
Online Newspaper Readership	.32	.26***

$$F(2, 361) = 11.75, r^2 = .06, p < .001$$

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Table 8: Effects of Online and Print Readership on Emotional Connection**

	B	$\beta$
Print Newspaper Readership	.41	.32***
Online Newspaper Readership	.34	.24***

$F (2, 364) = 18.68, r^2 = .09, p < .001$

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Table 9: Differences Among Newspaper Readers**

		Types of Readers		
		Non- readers	Online only	Print only
<i>Membership</i> **	<i>M</i>	12.00 <sub>a</sub>	14.29 <sub>a</sub>	13.30 <sub>a</sub>
	<i>SD</i>	3.0	4.25	3.48
<i>Influence</i> *	<i>M</i>	10.67 <sub>a</sub>	13.43 <sub>a</sub>	13.85 <sub>a</sub>
	<i>SD</i>	4.04	3.46	3.83
<i>Emotional</i> *	<i>M</i>	11.67 <sub>a</sub>	15.71 <sub>a</sub>	15.71 <sub>a</sub>
<i>Connection</i>				
	<i>SD</i>	4.51	3.63	4.16

Wilks'  $\Lambda = .93$ ,  $F(3, 320) = 1.84$ ,  $p < .05$ , partial  $r^2 = .02$ .

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Means with no subscript in common differ at  $p < .05$  using Holm's sequential Bonferroni post hoc comparisons.

**Table 10: Print newspaper reading and civic engagement**

	B	$\beta$
Civic engagement	-.03	-.016
$F(1, 394) = .1, r^2 = .002, p = .75$		
Note: * $p < .05$ , ** $p < .01$ , *** $p < .001$		

**Table 11: Online newspaper reading and civic engagement**

	B	$\beta$
Civic engagement	.39	.19***
$F(1, 369) = 13.66, r^2 = .033, p <.001$		

Note: \* $p <.05$ , \*\* $p <.01$ , \*\*\* $p <.001$

**Table 12: Effects of online newspaper readership and SOC on civic engagement**

	B	$\beta$
Online newspaper readership	.29	.14**
Sense of community	.16	.39***

$F(2, 367) = .42.42, r^2=.18, p<.001$

Note: \* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$ , \*\*\* $p<.001$

**Table 13: Print newspapers and political participation**

	B	$\beta$
Political participation	-.20	-.11*

$F(1, 396) = 4.42, r^2 = .01, p < .05$

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Table 14: Effects of print newspaper readership and SOC on political participation**

	B	$\beta$
Print newspaper readership	-.08	-.15**
Sense of community	.03	.31***

$F(2, 393) = .1, r^2=.90, p<.001$

Note: \* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$ , \*\*\* $p<.001$

**Table 15: Online news reading and political participation**

	B	$\beta$
Political participation	.11	.19***

$$F(1, 370) = 14.44, r^2 = .04, p < .001$$

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Table 16: Effects of online newspaper readership and SOC on political participation**

	B	$\beta$
Online newspaper readership	.09	.16**
Sense of community	.03	.24***

$F(1, 394) = 18.68, r^2=.09, p<.001$

Note: \* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$ , \*\*\* $p<.001$

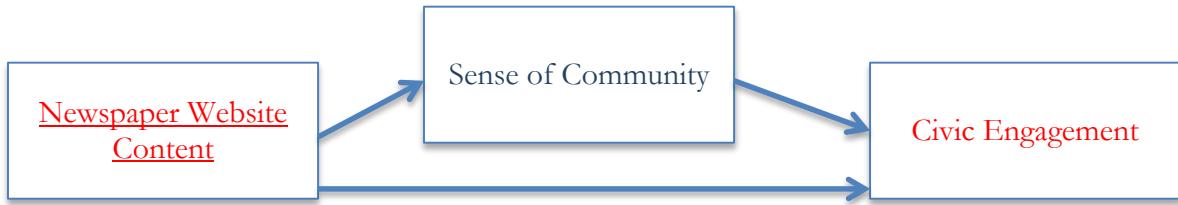
## XII. Figures

**Figure 1.**



*Figure 1: Relationship between variables*

**Figure 2.**



*Figure 2: Relationship between variables*

**Figure 3.**



*Figure 3: Relationship between variables*

**Figure 4.**



*Figure 4: Relationship between variables*

### XIII. Appendix A: Research Questions and Hypotheses

H1: The more people read the print edition of the community daily newspaper, the stronger the sense of community will be felt.

H2: The more people read the website content of the community daily newspaper, the stronger the sense of community will be felt.

H3: Print-only readers will have a higher sense of community than online readers.

RQ1: Do readers who spend more time reading both print newspaper and newspaper website content feel a stronger sense of community than those that only read print or only website content?

H4: There will be a direct relationship between print newspaper reading and civic engagement.

RQ2: Is the relationship between print newspaper reading and civic engagement mediated by sense of community?

H5: There will be a direct relationship between local newspaper website content reading and civic engagement.

RQ3: Is the relationship between local newspaper website content reading and civic engagement mediated by sense of community?

H6: There will be a direct relationship between local print newspaper reading and political participation.

RQ4: Is the relationship between local print newspaper reading and political participation mediated by sense of community?

H7: There will be a direct relationship between local newspaper website content reading and political participation.

RQ5: Is the relationship between local newspaper website content reading and political participation mediated by sense of community?

#### XIV. Appendix B: The Sheridan Press Questionnaire

Dear Sheridan Press subscriber,

My name is Aaron Atkins – I am a former resident of the City of Sheridan and former local sports editor, and am conducting research on communities and community media use with permission and support from The Sheridan Press. I am currently enrolled in the Graduate School at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia, specifically enrolled in the Communication Department, and am in the process of writing my Master's Thesis. As a part of my thesis, I invite you to participate in a newspaper-oriented research study by completing the enclosed questionnaire.

The purpose of this research is to determine relationships between community daily newspaper readers and their attitudes toward their community. The enclosed questionnaire has been designed to collect information on local media usage, attitudes toward your community, and attitudes toward your community newspaper. Your input and participation will not only advance our understanding of community news media – it will also help inform The Sheridan Press about your interests in local news coverage as a reader.

Your participation in this research project is completely voluntary and appreciated. You may decline altogether, or leave blank any questions you don't wish to answer. There are no known risks to participation beyond those encountered in everyday life. For the purpose of this study, we are only able to consider participants aged 18 years or older.

Please allow me to assure you that your responses are anonymous – at no point in this process have I been, or will I ever be, in possession of your personal or contact information. Additionally, your responses, even without personal information, will remain confidential.

Data from this research will be kept under lock and key and reported only as a collective combined total. No one other than the researchers will be in possession of any individual answers.

If you agree and give consent to participate in this project, please answer the questions on the questionnaire as best you can. It should take approximately 20 -30 minutes to complete. **Please place the completed survey in the enclosed, pre-stamped and addressed return envelope, and put it in the mail as soon as possible.**

If you prefer to take this survey online you may do so at: <https://goo.gl/4V6Tt2>

If you have any questions about this project, contact me at [daa1815@vt.edu](mailto:daa1815@vt.edu) or at (540) 231-8333.

Information on the rights of human subjects in research is available through Virginia Tech's Institutional Review Board at <http://www.irb.vt.edu>. Should you have any questions or concerns about the study's conduct or your rights as a research subject, you may contact the VT IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore at [moored@vt.edu](mailto:moored@vt.edu) or [\(540\) 231-4991](tel:(540)231-4991).

Thank you for your assistance in this important research.

Sincerely,  
Aaron Atkins  
Communication Department  
Virginia Tech

First, we'd like to ask you some basic information.

What is your age? (Example: 25)

What is your gender?

Male

Female

What is your ethnicity?

Black or African-American	Caucasian or white	Hispanic or Latino	Native American or American Indian	Asian or Pacific Islander	Multi-racial	Other	Prefer not to say
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Less than High School	High School / GED	Some College	2-year College Degree	4-year College Degree	Master's Degree	Doctoral Degree	Professional Degree (JD, MD)
<input type="radio"/>							

What is your combined annual household income?

Less than  
30,000    30,000 – 39,999    40,000 – 49,999    50,000 – 59,999    60,000 – 69,999    70,000 – 79,999    80,000 – 89,999    90,000 – 99,999    100,000 or more

<input type="radio"/>									
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How far (in miles) do you live from the City of Sheridan?

Within the city	1-5 miles outside the city	6-10 miles outside the city	11-20 miles outside the city	21-40 miles outside the city	41-50 miles outside the city	Over 50 miles outside the city
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Now, we'd like to ask you about how you feel about news.

How interested are you in local news?



How interested are you in state or regional news?



How interested are you in national news?



What is your primary source of local news?



Do you have an online subscription with any of the following newspapers? Please select all that apply:



How long have you been a subscriber of The Sheridan Press?



## We'd like to ask you about your reading habits with The Sheridan Press print edition newspaper.

How many days per week do you read The Sheridan Press **print edition** newspaper?

0      1      2      3      4      5      6      7

How many times per week do you read The Sheridan Press **print edition** newspaper?

Never      Once a week      2-3 times per week      4-6 times per week      Once per day      Multiple times per day

How many hours (average) do you read The Sheridan Press **print edition** newspaper per week?

30 minutes or less      31 minutes to 1 hour      1-2 hours      2-3 hours      3-4 hours      4-5 hours      More than 5 hours

## Next we'd like to ask you about your reading habits with The Sheridan Press' website.

How many days per week do you read The Sheridan Press' **website**?

0      1      2      3      4      5      6      7

How many times per week do you access The Sheridan Press' **website**?

Never      Once a week      2-3 times per week      4-6 times per week      Once per day      Multiple times per day

How many hours (average) do you read The Sheridan Press' **website content** per week?

30 minutes or less      31 minutes to 1 hour      1-2 hours      2-3 hours      3-4 hours      4-5 hours      More than 5 hours

## Now we'd like to ask you questions about how you feel about your community.

How important is it to you to feel a sense of community with other Sheridan community members?

Prefer not to be a part  
of this community      Not important      Somewhat important      Important      Very important

Part 1: How well do each of the following statements represent how you feel about the Sheridan community?

	Not at all	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely
I get important needs met because I am a part of the Sheridan community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sheridan community members and I value the same things.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Sheridan community has been successful in getting the needs of its members met.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being a member of the Sheridan community makes me feel good.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I have a problem, I can talk about it with members of the Sheridan community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People in the Sheridan community have similar needs, priorities, and goals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can trust people in the Sheridan community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can recognize most of the members of the Sheridan community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most Sheridan community members know me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sheridan has symbols and expressions of membership, such as clothes, signs, art, architecture, logos, landmarks, and flags that people can recognize.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I put a lot of time and effort into being part of the Sheridan community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being a member of the Sheridan community is a part of my identity.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fitting into this community is important to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Sheridan community can influence other communities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I care about what other Sheridan community members think of me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have influence over what the Sheridan community is like.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If there is a problem in the Sheridan community, Members can get it solved.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Sheridan community has good leaders.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Part 2: How well do each of the following statements represent how you feel about the Sheridan community?

	Not at all	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely
It is very important to me to be a part of the Sheridan community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am with other Sheridan community members a lot and enjoy being with them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I expect to be a part of the Sheridan community for a long time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Members of the Sheridan community have shared important events together, such as holidays, celebrations, or disasters.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel hopeful about the future of Sheridan.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Members of the Sheridan community care about each other.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

---

## We'd like to ask you about your political views.

How would you describe your political views?

Very Conservative	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal	Very Liberal
<input type="radio"/>				

Do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I consider myself to be well-qualified to participate in local politics.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that I have a good understanding of the important political issues facing our community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most other people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate your frequency of involvement in political activities below:

	None	At least once in the past 3 months	Once a month	A couple of times per month	every week
Working on behalf of a social group or cause.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attending a city council meeting or public hearing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Circulating a petition for a candidate or issue.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Contacting a public official or a political party.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Voting in an election.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Writing a letter to the editor regarding a local issue.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

---

## We'd like to ask you about your civic activities.

Please indicate your frequency of involvement in volunteer and community activities in the categories below:

	None	At least once in the past 3 months	Once a month	A couple times per month	Every week
Doing volunteer work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working on a community project.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Contributing money to a social group or cause.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Going to a community or neighborhood meeting.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working on behalf of a social group or cause.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Creating awareness for a community issue you care about.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reporting a local event to local news media.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Going to local sporting or cultural events.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Finally, we'd like to ask you about how you feel about The Sheridan Press itself.

Do you believe The Sheridan Press newspaper reflects the values of the Sheridan community?

Definitely not	Probably not	Might or might not	Probably yes	Definitely yes
<input type="radio"/>				

What do you feel is missing from The Sheridan Press' coverage of Sheridan County?

Do you follow The Sheridan Press on social media sites?

Yes	No
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If so, on which social media platforms do you follow The Sheridan Press? Check all that apply (if not, skip the next two questions):

Facebook	Twitter	YouTube
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How often do you interact with The Sheridan Press on social media (likes, shares, comments)?

Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Always
<input type="radio"/>				

Do you see [TheSheridanPress.com](http://TheSheridanPress.com) website as a community resource?

Definitely not	Probably not	Might or might not	Probably yes	Definitely yes
<input type="radio"/>				

Do you believe The Sheridan Press reflects the values of the Sheridan community?

Definitely not	Probably not	Might or might not	Probably yes	Definitely yes
<input type="radio"/>				

How often do you view videos on The Sheridan Press' website?

Never	1-2 times per month	Once a week	2-3 times per week	Daily
<input type="radio"/>				

If The Sheridan Press provided opportunities to do the following, how interested are you in doing each?

	Not interested	Somewhat interested	Very interested
Discuss local issues by writing Letters to the Editor.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Discuss local issues in an online forum with other community members.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Meet with other community members to solve community problems.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Connect with other community members online to solve community problems.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Collaborate with reporters on local news stories.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Are you interested in participating in a Sheridan Press-sponsored event held exclusively for subscribers?

	Not interested	Somewhat interested	Very interested
Tour of The Sheridan Press facility	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Meet the Staff event	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social event or party for subscribers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Media Q&A panel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Do you agree or disagree with statements below regarding The Sheridan Press?

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
The Sheridan Press is engaged in local activities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Sheridan Press covers local stories that I can't get anywhere else.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can get news about Sheridan County that I can't get anywhere else.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Sheridan Press stories can change local discussion within the community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Stories about Sheridan and Sheridan County influence local public policy decisions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

You have completed the questionnaire. Please place the questionnaire inside the pre-stamped and addressed return envelope provided and place the envelope in the mail. Thank you – your participation in this important research is appreciated.

## XV. Appendix C: The Southwest Times Questionnaire

Dear Southwest Times subscriber,

My name is Aaron Atkins – I am a former resident of Pulaski County and a graduate of Pulaski County High School, and am conducting social science research on communities and community media use with permission and support from The Southwest Times. I am currently enrolled in the Graduate School at Virginia Tech, specifically enrolled in the Communication Department, and am in the process of writing my Master's Thesis. As a part of my thesis, I invite you to participate in a newspaper-oriented research study by completing the enclosed questionnaire.

The purpose of this research is to determine relationships between community daily newspaper readers and their attitudes toward their community. The enclosed questionnaire has been designed to collect information on local media usage, attitudes toward your community, and attitudes toward your community newspaper. Your input and participation will not only advance our understanding of community news media – it will also help inform The Southwest Times about your interests in local news coverage as a reader.

Your participation in this research project is completely voluntary and appreciated. You may decline altogether, or leave blank any questions you don't wish to answer. There are no known risks to participation beyond those encountered in everyday life. For the purpose of this study, we are only able to consider participants aged 18 years or older.

Please allow me to assure you that your responses are completely anonymous – at no point in this process have I been, or will I ever be, in possession of your personal or contact information. Additionally, your responses, even without personal information, will remain confidential.

Data from this research will be kept under lock and key and reported only as a collective combined total. No one other than the researchers will be in possession of any individual answers.

If you agree and give consent to participate in this project, please answer the questions on the questionnaire as best you can. It should take approximately 20 -30 minutes to complete. **Please place the completed survey in the enclosed, pre-stamped and addressed return envelope, and put it in the mail as soon as possible.**

If you prefer to take this survey online you may do so at: <https://goo.gl/xaF7vK>

If you have any questions about this project, contact me at [daa1815@vt.edu](mailto:daa1815@vt.edu) or at (540) 231-8333.

Information on the rights of human subjects in research is available through Virginia Tech's Institutional Review Board at <http://www.irb.vt.edu>. Should you have any questions or concerns about the study's conduct or your rights as a research subject, you may contact the VT IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore at [moored@vt.edu](mailto:moored@vt.edu) or (540) 231-4991.

Thank you for your assistance in this important research.

Sincerely,  
Aaron Atkins  
Communication Department  
Virginia Tech

## First, we'd like to ask you some basic information.

What is your age? (example: 25)

What is your gender?

Male   
Female

What is your ethnicity?

Black or African-American  Caucasian or white  Hispanic or Latino  Native American or American Indian  Asian or Pacific Islander  Multi-racial  Other  Prefer not to say

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Less than High School  High School / GED  Some College  2-year College Degree  4-year College Degree  Masters Degree  Doctoral Degree  Professional Degree (JD, MD)

What is your combined annual household income?

Less than  
30,000  30,000 – 39,999  40,000 – 49,999  50,000 – 59,999  60,000 – 69,999  70,000 – 79,999  80,000 – 89,999  90,000 – 99,999  100,000 or more

How far (in miles) do you live from the Town of Pulaski?

Within the town  1-5 miles outside the town  6-10 miles outside the town  11-20 miles outside the town  21-40 miles outside the town  41-50 miles outside the town  Over 50 miles outside the town

## Now, we'd like to ask you about how you feel about news.

How interested are you in local news?



How interested are you in state or regional news?



How interested are you in national news?



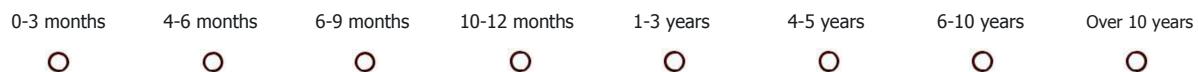
What is your primary source of local news?



Do you have an online subscription with any of the following newspapers? Please select all that apply:



How long have you been a subscriber of The Southwest Times?



We'd like to ask you about your reading habits with The Southwest Times print edition newspaper.

How many days per week do you read The Southwest Times **print edition** newspaper?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<input type="radio"/>							

How many times per week do you read The Southwest Times **print edition** newspaper?

Never	Once a week	2-3 times per week	4-6 times per week	Once per day	Multiple times per day
<input type="radio"/>					

How many hours (average) do you read The Southwest Times **print edition** newspaper per week?

30 minutes or less	31 minutes to 1 hour	1-2 hours	2-3 hours	3-4 hours	4-5 hours	More than 5 hours
<input type="radio"/>						

Next we'd like to ask you about your reading habits with The Southwest Times' website.

How many days per week do you read The Southwest Times' **website**?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<input type="radio"/>							

How many times per week do you access The Southwest Times' **website**?

Never	Once a week	2-3 times per week	4-6 times per week	Once per day	Multiple times per day
<input type="radio"/>					

How many hours (average) do you read The Southwest Times' **website content** per week?

30 minutes or less	31 minutes to 1 hour	1-2 hours	2-3 hours	3-4 hours	4-5 hours	More than 5 hours
<input type="radio"/>						

Now we'd like to ask you questions about how you feel about your community.

How important is it to you to feel a sense of community with other Pulaski County community members?

Prefer not to be a part of this community	Not important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Part 1: How well do each of the following statements represent how you feel about the Pulaski community?

	Not at all	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely
I get important needs met because I am a part of the Pulaski community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pulaski community members and I value the same things.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Pulaski community has been successful in getting the needs of its members met.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being a member of the Pulaski community makes me feel good.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I have a problem, I can talk about it with members of the Pulaski community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People in the Pulaski community have similar needs, priorities, and goals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can trust people in the Pulaski community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can recognize most of the members of the Pulaski community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most Pulaski community members know me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pulaski has symbols and expressions of membership, such as clothes, signs, art, architecture, logos, landmarks, and flags that people can recognize.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I put a lot of time and effort into being part of the Pulaski community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being a member of the Pulaski community is a part of my identity.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fitting into this community is important to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Pulaski community can influence other communities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I care about what other Pulaski community members think of me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have influence over what the Pulaski community is like.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If there is a problem in the Pulaski community, Members can get it solved.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Pulaski community has good leaders.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Part 2: How well do each of the following statements represent how you feel about the Pulaski community?

	Not at all	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely
It is very important to me to be a part of the Pulaski community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am with other Pulaski community members a lot and enjoy being with them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I expect to be a part of the Pulaski community for a long time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Members of the Pulaski community have shared important events together, such as holidays, celebrations, or disasters.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel hopeful about the future of Pulaski.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Members of the Pulaski community care about each other.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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## We'd like to ask you about your political views.

How would you describe your political views?

Very Conservative	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal	Very Liberal
<input type="radio"/>				

Do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I consider myself to be well-qualified to participate in local politics.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that I have a good understanding of the important political issues facing our community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most other people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate your frequency of involvement in political activities below:

	None	At least once in the past 3 months	Once a month	A couple of times per month	every week
Working on behalf of a social group or cause.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attending a city council meeting or public hearing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Circulating a petition for a candidate or issue.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Contacting a public official or a political party.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Voting in an election.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Writing a letter to the editor regarding a local issue.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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## We'd like to ask you about your civic activities.

Please indicate your frequency of involvement in volunteer and community activities in the categories below:

	None	At least once in the past 3 months	Once a month	A couple times per month	Every week
Doing volunteer work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working on a community project.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Contributing money to a social group or cause.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Going to a community or neighborhood meeting.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working on behalf of a social group or cause.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Creating awareness for a community issue you care about.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reporting a local event to local news media.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Going to local sporting or cultural events.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Finally, we'd like to ask you about how you feel about The Southwest Times.

What do you feel is missing from The Southwest Times' coverage of Pulaski County?

Do you follow The Southwest Times on social media sites such as Facebook?

Yes  No

Do you see The Southwest Times' website as a community resource?

Definitely not  Probably not  Might or might not  Probably yes  Definitely yes

Do you believe The Southwest Times reflects the values of the Pulaski community?

Definitely not  Probably not  Might or might not  Probably yes  Definitely yes

How often do you read each of the weekly theme pages of The Southwest Times newspaper?

	Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly	Always
Agriculture	<input type="radio"/>				
Health	<input type="radio"/>				
Outdoors	<input type="radio"/>				
Education	<input type="radio"/>				
Entertainment	<input type="radio"/>				
Community	<input type="radio"/>				

How often do you or anyone in your household read or complete the following Southwest Times features:

	Never	Not often	Sometimes	Regularly	Always
Crossword puzzle	<input type="radio"/>				
Sudoku	<input type="radio"/>				
Daily horoscope	<input type="radio"/>				
Lloyd Mathews column	<input type="radio"/>				
Advice columns	<input type="radio"/>				

Which sections of The Southwest Times do you read most often? Check all that apply.

Local news	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sports	<input type="checkbox"/>	Opinion page	<input type="checkbox"/>	Markets page	<input type="checkbox"/>	Classifieds	<input type="checkbox"/>	Obituaries	<input type="checkbox"/>	Comics	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Do you agree or disagree with statements below regarding The Southwest Times?

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
The Southwest Times is engaged in local activities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Southwest Times covers local stories that I can't get anywhere else.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can get news about the New River Valley that I can't get anywhere else.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Southwest Times stories can change local discussion within the community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Stories about Pulaski and Pulaski County influence local public policy decisions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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You have completed the questionnaire. Please place the questionnaire inside the pre-stamped and addressed return envelope provided and place the envelope in the mail. Thank you – your participation in this important research is appreciated.

## XVI. Appendix D: IRB Approval Letter



**Office of Research Compliance**  
Institutional Review Board  
North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech  
300 Turner Street NW  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959  
email [irb@vt.edu](mailto:irb@vt.edu)  
website <http://www.irb.vt.edu>

### MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** March 22, 2016  
**TO:** Mike Horning, Daniel Aaron Atkins  
**FROM:** Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires January 29, 2021)  
**PROTOCOL TITLE:** Community daily newspapers and Sense of Community  
**IRB NUMBER:** 16-276

Effective March 22, 2016, the Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

### PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: **Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 2**  
Protocol Approval Date: **March 22, 2016**  
Protocol Expiration Date: **N/A**  
Continuing Review Due Date\*: **N/A**

\*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

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VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY  
An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution

**FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:**

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

IRB Number 16-276  
Institutional Review Board

page 2 of 2

Virginia Tech

Date*	OSP Number	Sponsor	Grant Comparison Conducted?

\* Date this proposal number was compared, assessed as not requiring comparison, or comparison information was revised.

If this IRB protocol is to cover any other grant proposals, please contact the IRB office ([irbadmin@vt.edu](mailto:irbadmin@vt.edu)) immediately.