

EDITORIAL PERSONALITY:  
FACTORS THAT MAKE EDITORIAL WRITERS SUCCESSFUL

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by

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FACTORS THAT MAKE EDITORIAL WRITERS SUCCESSFUL

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**ABSTRACT**

Hank Waters has written thousands of editorials for the *Columbia Daily Tribune*. His editorial voice and personality are synonymous with the Columbia, Mo newspaper, producing deep connections with the readers. By conducting interviews with 13 *Tribune* readers and integrating the Uses and Gratifications Theory and Aristotelian Persuasion, the researcher established that Waters' authorial persona is a positive trait. It works to counteract any negative feelings a reader might have about his arguments or stances on issues. His editorials produced relatively few strong persuasion opportunities. On the other hand, reader respect for his knowledge about Columbia, local focus and his fair and personable writing style aides in his ability to attract readers of varying beliefs and perspectives. All these factors demonstrate that personality driven editorials promote a high degree of respect and appreciation for an editor's work in community newspapers and promote a strong willingness to read their editorials with regularity.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Newspapers have long adopted the personality of their editors and publishers. William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer were famous for “yellow journalism” and taking hard editorial stances on issues. They were divisive and controversial figures who made a strong impression on readers. Hearst and Pulitzer were iconic men who pulled readers into the fold, which made their newspapers wildly successful. Hank Waters, publisher emeritus of the *Columbia Daily Tribune*, might not be well known outside of Columbia, Missouri but his impact on this community as an editorial writer has been felt for decades.

Waters has written thousands of editorials for the *Columbia Daily Tribune* since he took over as publisher for his father in 1966. Over the last 46 years, Waters has been able to craft an avid readership that looks for his opinions in each day’s newspaper. Hank Waters and the *Columbia Daily Tribune* have been synonymous for years. His impressive longevity as an editorial writer in Columbia reflects a tightknit relationship with his audience. Readers might disagree with his editorial arguments; nonetheless, they still come back for more. There are attributes of his personality and writing that connect on a deep level with a certain group of *Tribune* readers. Waters’ columns are filled with a first-person writing style that contrasts sharply with the more common first person plural usage in editorial board opinions across this country. This qualitative study attempts to

uncover the reasons why *Tribune* readers keep flocking to Waters' editorials. What do they gain from reading his opinions? How do they view him as a person? Do they accept his persuasive arguments? Thirteen *Tribune* readers were interviewed in an attempt to answer these questions and find out if there is a common pattern or theme within his popularity. At the end of the study, Hank Waters was also interviewed. It is important not only to understand what Waters' readers think of him but also what he thinks of his readers. That understanding influences how he writes and the arguments that he makes in his daily editorials.

Hank Waters has had a long and unique career as an editorial writer. Waters has shifted control of the daily operation of the newspaper to his wife, Vicki Russell, and his son, Andy Waters, but there has been no public comment on who will take over the editorial writing duties when Waters eventually retires. This study can inform further research on audience analysis and how editorial personality influences persuasion. This study could eventually expand into a broader examination of many editorial writers, dissecting each writer-reader relationship. Such a study could illuminate any potential grand themes or theories as to why some editorial writers are more successful than others.

Newspapers are in constant competition with online news sources for readers. The Internet is making it easier for readers to find the style and substance that fits their content desires. These findings suggest that newspaper editors can follow the path of bloggers who fill their writing with personality and first-person conversation to increase readership.

Three theoretical perspectives were used to analyze this qualitative study. The first — Uses and Gratifications — posits that people are motivated to consume media to satisfy a desire or need. Hank Waters' popularity suggests that readers consume his editorials to receive some benefit. One such benefit could be an affirmation of the readers' own beliefs.

The second perspective was the Persuasion Knowledge Model. The Persuasion Knowledge Model, or PKM, proposes that within the realm of persuasive communication there is a target and an agent. The agent controls and sends the message to the audience in an attempt to influence its acceptance of a piece of text. The target is the individual receiving the messages, which in this case is each reader of the editorial. Once the target has received the message, he or she takes part in a persuasion episode by dissecting the information. The PKM is a two-way process. Waters writes his editorials using his own perceived knowledge of his readership. And in return, the reader accepts or rejects his argument based on his or her knowledge of Waters.

The last theory is Aristotelian Persuasion. According to Aristotle, there are three ways of "securing persuasion." They are *pathos*, *logos* and *ethos*. For the purposes of this study, *ethos*, the character of the speaker, will be the focus. In his editorials, Waters' *ethos* connects achieves a sense of credibility with the audience. Waters must present a solid foundation of expertise or knowledge in order for his argument to hold any weight with his readership.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

Newspaper editorials have served a purpose of informing and persuading the public for generations. The editorial has grown from its beginning forms in 10<sup>th</sup> century England as newsletters to the public, to now, as fixtures in major daily newspapers across this country, either in print or online formats (Stonecipher, 1979). Each newspaper sets its own guidelines for editorials, from what they will look like on the page to how many days a week they will run. The theory and discussion of persuasion has long been synonymous with this form of writing. Much of early communication research on editorial writing has dealt with the persuasive function of media, especially as it pertains to editorials.

### **Newspaper Editorials**

As a general principle, journalism strives to be objective in reporting and covering the news of the day. One researcher argues that the American ideal of journalistic objectivity came about because of a need for “group solidarity” and to “pass on group culture to the next generation” (Meltzer, 2007, p. 84). A newspaper’s editorial page exists both as an extension of objectivity and an acknowledgment that including varying views on issues is one specific way to control bias and promote a stronger idea of objectivity. Historically, the editorial page is the only place in which pure opinion exists in newspapers (Meltzer, 2007).

According to Harry Stonecipher's book, *Editorial and Persuasive Writing*, editorials are considered journalistic essays that attempt to "inform or explain, to persuade or convince, or to stimulate insight in an entertaining or humorous manner" (Stonecipher, 1979, p. 40). Since the beginning of formal research in the areas of persuasion, researchers have examined the effect that political communication has had on readers (Stonecipher, 1979). Editorials are often filled with political commentary. The grandest goal of editorials is to persuade the audience in some manner. But as Stonecipher's definition illustrates, the goal is also to inform or explain and stimulate insight. The growing intricacy of current events requires effective editorial writers to explain more than pontificate (Babb, 1977).

Extensive research has been done to judge what if any effect editorials have on an audience, with editorial endorsements receiving much of the attention in this politically conscious climate. However, researchers have questioned the significant persuasive role of editorials, theorizing, "that press coverage generally fails to change a voter's position on a candidate" (Stonecipher, 1979, p. 28).

Generally, the editorial page is located in the "A" section of a newspaper, separating itself from the rest of a newspaper's content by identifying the newspaper's leadership (the publisher, editor-in-chief, managing editor, etc) at the top of the page (Meltzer, 2007). This physical separation of a newspaper's content dictates to the audience that these articles will be unique and offer an alternative function to the familiar news sections of the publication.

## **Editorial Personality**

The 19<sup>th</sup> century proved to be a very auspicious time for personality-driven newspapers and editorials. In 1835, *New York Herald* Publisher James Gordon Bennett declared that his newspaper would stress to “record the facts,” stripping the news of its “verbiage and coloring” (Babb, 1977, p. 2). However, this separation of news and opinion was not followed everywhere.

During this era, “yellow journalism” was king and editorial opinion made its way into the news pages. Intensely competitive, the journalism industry was dominated by iconic men with strong voices. Horace Greeley, Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst were great businessmen whose success was driven by their paper’s circulation. Their newspapers were clear extensions of their “strong, original personalities” (Babb, 1977). Kenneth Rystrom calls this the era of “personal journalism” (Rystrom, 1999, p. 7). Hank Waters might be well-known in Columbia and Missouri but nothing compares to this time in history when Bennett and Charles Dana ruled the editorial pages (Rystrom, 1999).

When a subscriber read an editorial in the *New York Tribune* in the mid-1800s, he or she knew more than likely it was the opinion of its famous editor, Horace Greeley (Rystrom, 1999). Greeley had an explosive writing style that “could send a screaming mob to New York’s city hall or provoke an ill-prepared Union Army into fighting the Battle of Bull Run” (Rystrom, 1999, pg. 7). Back then, there was no debate over signing editorials; readers knew quite clearly who was giving the argument. In that respect, Waters’ writing does connect well with 19<sup>th</sup> century “personal journalism” editorials. His

first-person address was a common tactic used by editorial writers of that era. “Personal journalism” began to die out in the 1870s, but it’s very clear that Hank Waters is still contributing to that form of editorial writing.

Of more regional interest, William Allen White, publisher of *The Emporia Gazette* (Kansas) exemplified the personal journalism writing style of the large newspapers. His editorial “What’s the Matter with Kansas” earned him great attention, as well as his editorials against the Klu Klux Klan (Reader, 2012). *The Emporia Gazette* (2012) recently wrote that “his plain-spoken, insightful, editorials struck a chord far beyond the boundaries of his native state ....”

Following the Civil War, however, the country began to see editorial boards sprout up across the country. Corporate editorial staffs were taking over, causing the substance and portrayal of editorials to drastically change (Rystrom, 1999).

Meltzer (2007) identifies an editorial board as a collection of individuals “appointed by the publisher, managing editor or present editorial board editor ...” (Meltzer, 2007, p. 85). The editorial board’s job is to “meet,” “craft and publish” its views on any number of topics that affect the audience in which the newspaper serves (Meltzer, 2007, p. 85). Former editor and publisher of *Editor and Publisher*, Robert Brown, once said that an editorial is “... the amalgam of thought pounded out in an editorial conference of several people” (Rystrom, 1999, p. 82). The editorial board serves as the official voice of that particular newspaper. And as Barbara Wallace Hughes, editor of the Fort Dodge (IA) Messenger points out: “Editorials aren’t signed because they are the institutional view of a newspaper’s editorial board” (Hughes, 2011). In essence, the

final editorial may not be the voice of a sole individual, but a harnessed opinion of more than one person; a written embodiment of the group's overall consensus.

Editorial boards inherently lack the personality of Hank Waters' editorials. Waters' editorials use the first-person writing style, which acts as a direct dialogue between himself and the reader. This collegial writing style is one of the ways in which his arguments are made clear and convincing.

The choice between using editorial boards or Waters' more informal editorials is a question that has been pondered before. Source anonymity is commonplace in journalism. Freedom of the press exists in large part because there is a continuous dialogue between the audience and content producers. That relationship, according to G.T. Marx, is one based on cultural expectations. He argues that the culture we live in dictates that the norm be identification. Our culture might have a similar need for identification when it comes to straight news stories, but when opinion is injected into newspapers, the need for identification becomes even more important. Names are a distinct way to connect us to the people around us, "a little detail in which big meanings may reside" (Marx, 1999, p.101).

The proliferation of blogging can be seen as an extension of personality driven editorials, like those written by Hank Waters. According to a study conducted by Mark Chignell and Jamy Lin (2010), research subjects were asked to write two styles of blogs — personal diaries and commentaries. Soon after, a group of individuals judged those blogs by the personality through the text.

Blog readers were significantly more attracted to blog writers with more

similar personalities — offering support that in a blog environment, ‘birds of a feather flock together.’ Emotion word use in the blog corpus correlated with writer’s personality, suggesting that online personality may be signaled by linguistic cues.

This research suggests that a reader looks to writers to affirm his or her personality through conspicuous consumption of content. The Internet is a relatively new portal for people to choose what kind of writing they enjoy and to read it for very specific reasons. Readers no longer have to wade through vast amounts of data and information to seek out the opinion that resonates with them the most. In that way, Hank Waters is very similar to a blog writer. He signs his editorials, and his personality is extremely evident in whatever he writes. This makes it easier for people to decide if they want to read him.

### **Related Theory and Concepts**

#### **Persuasion Knowledge Model**

The scholarship of persuasion has a rich and storied history, beginning as far back as the days of Aristotle (Chambliss & Garner, 1996). In their book, *Modern Rhetoric*, Brooks and Warren identified persuasive text as one of several text forms. “Persuasion is the art ... by which you get somebody to do what you want and make him, at the same time, think that this is what he had wanted to do all the time” (p.176). James Kinneavy assessed the difference between types of text as being whether the author (in this case the

editorial writer) focuses on self, reality, the text or the reader. (Kinneavy, 1969). In the Persuasion Knowledge Model, readers filter all the persuasion information through themselves, asserting their own knowledge and coping mechanisms to the process.

According to Friestad and Wright's model, Persuasion Knowledge has its roots in marketing and advertising, but its applications are broader. People learn about persuasion in many different ways, most often in situations involving their social interactions with "friends," "family" and "co-workers" (Friestad & Wright, 1994, p. 1). Over time, these interactions build up an intellectually complex method of gauging the intentions of advertisers, marketers, and in this case, editorial writers. This acquired knowledge is influenced and potentially changed every time a person comes in contact with a message intended to persuade. Reader acquired knowledge interprets the persuasion capabilities of editorials — a form of communication "written to provoke some form of reaction" (Babb, 1977, p. 67). The Persuasion Knowledge Model (or PKM) can be used to judge the reactions of the audience, based on the message, the sender and that specific interaction between message and receiver (Friestad & Wright, 1994).

Editorials have always separated themselves from the historical function of a newspaper as a producer of objective news. Taking that into consideration, editorials and other forms of communication similar to strategic communication have a related but not concretely similar function. Understanding the intent of a persuader is especially important in any interaction between subject, message and sender (Boush, Friestad & Wright, 2005). Adapting a particular situation to use the PKM is simple but requires a

solid understanding of all the distinct steps involved. The receiver of the message is identified in the PKM as the “target” (Friestad and Wright, 1994).

The “target” must be identified by the constructor of the message, such as the editorial writer or the editorial board of a newspaper. This person or group is identified as the “agent,” or the human cause of the interaction between message and receiver (Friestad and Wright, 1994).

Advertisers and marketers must have a notion of the intended idea or arguments they wish to support whenever they produce content that an audience will consume. In the PKM, this is identified as the “attempt,” or a target’s understanding of the agent’s particular behavior in presenting the information designed to influence someone’s “beliefs, attitudes, decisions, or actions” (Friestad and Wright, 1994, p. 2). This “strategic behavior” can be associated with the term “message,” but it can extend into how the target perceives the construction of the message, how it was delivered and its component parts (Friestad and Wright, 1994, p. 2).

Up until this point, consumers are yet to fully invest themselves in the content of the message, whether it is an advertisement or a newspaper editorial. This observed interaction designated by the PKM is called the “persuasion episode” (Friestad and Wright, 1994). When a person sits down to read a newspaper editorial, he or she is involved in this “persuasion episode.” The intended audience enters this stage with a clear understanding that they will be reading a form of communication that receives some of its perceived importance by the level of persuasion that it offers on important topics (Rystrom, 1999, p. 85).

In these episodes, consumers bring a different level of understanding and tactics that allow them to take that message and filter it through their response guidelines to achieve some goal or motivation (Friestad and Wright, 1994). This process is similar to a target's persuasion tactics meant to find a weakness in the agent's message. In the PKM, it is known as "persuasion coping behavior." It can be used to ward off any unwanted messages from "targets," but that is not the only function this step of the PKM serves. To a large degree, persuasion deals with control, and the more control an agent or message has over a person's cognitive functions, the more susceptible that person is to having his or her beliefs or attitudes changed (Friestad and Wright, 1994).

There is a tenuous relationship between a target and an agent, because so often each individual shifts between taking one of these positions. When a person attempts to persuade someone else to eat at a certain restaurant or see a particular movie, he or she is acting like an agent trying to influence a target (Friestad, Boush and Wright, 2005). It is because men and women shift between these two identities that they are well equipped to dissect messages, both from a theoretical and practical perspective. A person's coping behavior goals are extensive, but in certain persuasive episodes, he or she will select the overriding goal of "effectiveness in persuasion coping," which is broadly defined as "the goal of producing in oneself, as effectively as possible, whatever psychological activities or physical acts" that produce the highest levels of "self-control and competency" (Friestad and Wright, 1994, p. 5).

Each potential "persuasion episode" is unique. In some cases, the reader will put to use stored knowledge about agent beliefs, motives and influences continuously as he or

she is inundated with more and more messages. Furthermore, practicing persuasive coping tactics often happens specifically when a person comes across a certain topic that is influential or at the core of daily activity in one's own life (Friestad, et al, 2005). According to Campbell & Kirmani (2000), a significant portion of the cognitive response that occurs within the PKM is the ability for each person to make inferences, or a characterization of the person creating the message (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000).

Friestad and Wright (1994) did not assume that people primarily used their persuasion knowledge to "resist a persuasion attempt." In their opinion, the "overriding goal" is to "maintain control over the outcome(s) thereby achieve whatever mix of goals is salient to them" (p. 3).

In this respect, there is considerable back and forth interaction between the agent and target. The "agent" presents his or her case in a persuasive argument. Then, the "target" filters the argument through his or her cognitive processes, working out what he or she will accept as far the "mix of goals." The processes entail an examination of the "target" and the message sent. After some examination, the "target" sends back his or her own idea of what they will or won't accept as far as a persuasive argument.

The "agent," in this case Waters, learns what persuasive techniques the audience will accept, uses that knowledge and fashions a new argument or pitch to create persuasion.

The target and agent bounce ideas back and forth until they come up with suitable scenario in which both achieve the "mix of goals...salient to them." It's a

negotiation between two willing parties, where the persuasive argument leads to a joint knowledge about the intended goals of both parties, which slowly leads to a consensus of thought.

Waters and his readers participate in this joint dialogue, and ultimately, Waters decides what will be successful based on reader goals. The readers, on the other hand, can accept, reject or modify their willingness to be persuaded by choosing which argument is important to them, and what they can afford to give up in this interaction.

### **Audience Cultivation of Persuasive Techniques**

The implicit nature of persuasive techniques is a natural process for each person, requiring a level of “readiness” that affects the increase of “valid attitudes about an influence agent ...” (Friestad and Wright, 1994, p. 10). The capacity for cognitive abilities increases over time, as well as the ability of a person to judge persuasive tactics. The PKM never intended to establish a classification designating the periods in which people gain persuasive knowledge abilities. However, Boush, Friestad and Wright (2005) examined that very relationship, finding that from childhood to adulthood, a person develops two persuasion-related tasks that are extremely relevant: “coping effectively with other’s persuasion attempts and effectively executing his or her own persuasion attempts” (Boush et al, 2005, p. 226). These two related practices are vital to everyday life, because they are “key survival skills of human existence” (Boush et al, 2005, p. 231).

## Uses and Gratifications

In his 1943 article *A theory of human motivation*, Abraham Maslow wrote that “human motivations are the driving forces behind human behaviors” (Maslow, 1984). Maslow’s psychological research would soon spread to the scholarship of communication research. It wasn’t until 1973 that a group of researchers would find a theory suitable for testing the motivations of people for choosing the media they consumer.

Uses and Gratifications is a very popular theory that researchers have long been using to analyze an audience’s relationship with media and why they seek out certain media to satisfy needs or desires. In their famous research essay “Uses and Gratifications Research,” Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973) defined the theory as: “(1) the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones” (p. 510)

These researchers identified important elements of Uses and Gratifications theory. One of the most important elements of the theory is the idea that the audience is active; they are constantly searching for ways in which they can meet their needs (Katz, Blumler, Gurevitch, 1973). Newspaper readers are continuously looking for the story that satisfies some goal that they have. In this study, *Tribune* readers might read Hank Waters’ editorials to reach that goal. The media fight over the attention of these consumers. When a person selects an article or a television show they are telling the producers that there is

something about that product that they need and want to consume (Katz, Blumler, Gurevitch, 1973).

Another element dictates that the consumer is the most active in “linking need gratification and media choice” (Katz, Blumler, Gurevitch, p. 511, 1973). In the pursuit of selecting media to consume, consumers are propelled into a competition by media to gain the attention of the eyes and ears of the public. Consumers are also well aware of their interests and will identify and confront them when appropriate. The Uses and Gratifications theory suspends any “value judgments on the cultural significance” of the media consumed” (Katz, Blumler, Gurevitch, p. 511, 1973).

The reason for a consumer’s selection is extremely important and can be arrived at in various ways. Lasswell (1948) first postulated that media serve a number of functions for an individual. They are: “surveillance, correlation, entertainment, and cultural transmission (or socialization for a society)” (Lasswell, 1948; Katz, Blumler, Gurevitch, 1973, p. 512). Many researchers have attempted to modify Lasswell’s four gratification criteria. McQuail, Blumler and Brown (1972) put together a similar list of criteria that many researchers use to this day.

The criteria are: “diversion (including escape from the constraints of routine and the burdens of problems, and emotional release); personal relationships (social utility); personal identity (including personal reference, reality exploration, and value reinforcement); surveillance” (McQuail, Blumler and Brown, 1972; Katz, Blumler, Gurevitch, 1973, p. 513).

It can be speculated that one of the main goals *Tribune* readers have when they read Waters' editorials is to promote "personal identity" (value reinforcement). There is the potential for readers to be persuaded, but the more likely reason is that they find something appealing about his editorials or him as a person. They see themselves reflected in his opinions or arguments. Essentially, the beliefs of the readers are very similar to Waters.

Values can also be reinforced against Waters as well. Readers can choose to read his work for the dual purposes of entertainment and personal identification. In this regard, they read him for the sheer purpose of disagreeing with him and reveling in the moral outrage they feel justified in experiencing.

As Jiyeon So's 2012 study "Audience Motivation and Risk Perception" argues, it is unrealistic to assume that consumers of media will only use one type of motivation alone, or that the two most common or major audience motivations, surveillance and enjoyment, are the only reasons people consumer media (p. 123-124).

However, in two separate 1997 studies it was determined that surveillance motivation is the primary reason why audiences seek media and news media in particular (Slater, 1997; Vincent & Basil, 1997). In So's study of a consumer's risk perception, she concludes that surveillance needs are "closely related to the curiosity toward *others* and *what others are doing*" and "in other words, individuals choose to consume informative media in order to be aware of others and what is happening in the environment" (p. 124).

Since the majority of Waters' editorials focus on local issues, the idea of surveillance as a motivation is even more critical. Columbia residents are interested in

learning more about their community and what others are doing in it. Local city council issues, city ordinances and school board elections are an integral part of any town the size of Columbia and are a mainstay within Waters' writings.

It's uncertain how active *Tribune* readers are in understanding their motivations behind why they read Hank Waters. In his 1981 article "Uses and gratifications at the crossroads," Windahl argued that "the notion of activeness leads a picture of the audience as super-rational and very selective, a tendency which invites criticism" (p. 176). Readers of Waters' editorials might have a more simplistic view of why they read his work — maybe reading his work is simply a routine of theirs, given the important role that a local community newspaper plays in a town this size. However, given the breadth of gratification criteria that have established since the introduction of this theory, it would still be possible to highlight the foundation of this theory within the responses of this study's interview subjects.

### **Aristotelian Persuasion**

Aristotle founded the field of persuasion. His essay *Rhetoric* probed deeply into the art of persuasion and what elements constitute it. In his essay, he provided a detailed analysis of the three ways in which people "secure persuasion" (Cherry, 1988, p. 253). It was called *pistesis*. *Pathos*, *logos* and *ethos* constitute *pistesis*. *Pathos* requires the writer to arouse an emotional reaction from the audience. *Logos* deals with "principles of sound argumentation," and *ethos* (the most important element in this study) is concerned with the "character of the speaker" (Cherry, 1988, p. 253). *Pathos* and *logos* are important

factors when analyzing persuasion, but *ethos* directly connects with this study's examination of Hank Waters and his audience's experience with his editorials. *Ethos* is especially important in "deliberative rhetoric." (Cherry, 1988, p. 253). To achieve great *ethos*, an individual must portray himself or herself as having "good moral character," "practice wisdom" and "a concern for the audience in order to achieve credibility and thereby secure persuasion" (Cherry, 1988, p. 253).

In order for persuasion to occur, each *Tribune* reader should be able to see these elements in Waters' writing. They might not be entering into the process with the goal of being persuaded but in the event that they could be, *ethos* is an important factor.

In Ramage and Bean's book *Writing Arguments* (1998), *ethos* "can also be affected by the writer's reputation as it exists independently from the message--his or her expertise in the field, his or her previous record or integrity, and so forth" (p. 81-82). Waters' ability to persuade is not only the result of his writing but ancillary factors, such as his previous record on issues or his expertise.

Researcher Karen Black Lefevre identified a key characteristic of "ethos" that gives great weight to Aristototele's theory and Hank Waters' position within Columbia. She proposes that "ethos arises from the relationship between the individual and the community" and that relationship "cannot exist in isolation" (Lefevre, 1987, p. 45). Hank Waters has been a fixture in this community dating back to the 1960s, and in that time his work has been a sounding board for conversation in this community. A product of classical representations of *ethos*, Waters' editorials emphasize 'the conventional rather

than the idiosyncratic, the public rather than the private” (Halloran, 1982, p. 60). The fact that he signs his editorials makes this concept even more relevant.

It’s important to look beyond the historical connotations of *ethos* to further establish Hank Waters’ position within Columbia’s community and among the *Tribune*’s readership. *Ethos* does express individual “character” — a “rhetor’s reputation” — but since Waters has held his position as editorial writer for so many years, he is no longer just presenting his ideas and arguments for the public to digest; he is the message as well. James Baumlin pinpoints this perfectly as quoted in Michael J. Hyde’s 2004 book *The Ethos of Rhetoric*. “The rhetorical situation renders an element of the discourse itself, no longer simply its origin (and thus consciously standing outside the text) but rather a signifier standing *inside* an expanded text” (xvii).

Each individual argument still exists on its own terms and can be judged as such on a case-by-case basis, but all his editorials collectively stand within the larger signifier of Hank Waters — the person. The “discourse,” as Baumlin puts it, reflects his entire persona outside of writing editorials. *Ethos* is not merely a component of rhetoric, but intrinsic to it — “foundational to all else that be said about the art” (Hyde, 2004, xiv).

According to George Yoos’ essay “Rhetoric of Appeal and Rhetoric of Response,” rhetorical situations must contain one or both of these two elements: “(1) that an audience is open to altering their beliefs and/or commitments, and (2) that an audience should have some need to know what someone else has to say” (p. 108). Waters’ editorials do not exist solely for the benefit of persuading individuals to change their beliefs or thinking (though that is often the case). Nonetheless, that opportunity is still

afforded to the reader if or when her or she chooses to follow that path. Additionally, Yoos' second stipulation is even more applicable, regardless of if the reader respects Waters or is willing to be persuaded by him. Waters holds an authoritative position within this community based on his longstanding position at the *Tribune* and for his role as its sole editorialist.

Given his *ethos*, or character, Waters is in position to present *logos*, or strong argumentation, to his audience. That argument can work to persuade or inform the reader, but in communication studies these two terms are often lumped together for the purposes of discussion. However, they should not be so easily combined. For instance, Yoos argues that the act of informing can be both intentional (illocutionary) and an achievement (perlocutionary) (p. 110). "To persuade, on the other hand, is strictly a perlocutionary effect" (p. 110).

In the event that a reader is willing to be persuaded by an argument, or at least entertain the notion of widening his or her perspective, there are four senses of an argument: "(1). argument as controversy (2). argument as rhetorical appeal, (3). argument as the display or demonstration of strict entailments, that is the used of deductive logic, and (4). Argument as display of evidence to support interpolations, extrapolations, and generalization, that is, the use of inductive logic" (p. 110).

When a reader reads an editorial written by Waters, he or she can, but not always, be viewed within the prism of these senses. For example, an argument of controversy could be his stance on abortion or the death penalty. These are arguments that are often presented in black and white terms and with a good deal of impassioned dialogue.

Aristotle's *ethos* is a method of opening up the audience to an appeal, based on whatever of the four senses Waters chooses to use at a given moment. In addition to those senses, Waters, or any writer, can use *pathos*, or an emotional appeal, that hooks the audience into his writing. Ultimately, it is the audience that decides if it is successful. The appeal, or editorial argument, supposes that the community is full of "rational agents" and that the appeal "must be made to the audience as one rational being to another" (115). If a writer chooses to gauge a response from his audience, his or her ethos must fill a need in the audience's interest level in seeking answers from someone who should know or has something to say that requires explanation (p. 115).

## Chapter 3

### Research Methodology and Design

#### Research Questions and Background

The following research questions were investigated in this study:

RQ1: What motivates *Columbia Daily Tribune* readers to read Hank Waters' editorials?

RQ2: What Uses and Gratifications do readers attain from reading his editorials?

RQ3: How does the audience's opinion of Hank Waters as a person influence its willingness to come back and read his editorials each day?

Since he started as the *Columbia Daily Tribune's* publisher, Hank Waters has written thousands of editorials for the newspaper. His longevity and success as an editorial writer is well-known in Columbia and Missouri. Why do readers return to his editorials every day? What is it about him that they connect with on a personal level? Do they trust his opinion? When they read his arguments, do they see their opinions reflected in his? For those that read him, but disagree with his opinions, why do they continue to tolerate his views?

Waters cultivated his audience over years of writing. This study hoped to better understand how this audience was established and what characteristics make it unique.

#### Methodology

This study was conducted in two parts: first, a short questionnaire was administered to screen for potential subjects; and finally, an in-depth interview concluded the study.

**First method: Questionnaire**

The defined sample population for the study was the *Columbia Daily Tribune's* readership. This sampling group was selected purposively for its daily exposure to Hank Waters' editorials.

In this two-part methodology, the short questionnaire will act as a pre-test for the eventual in-depth interviews.

Advertisements were placed in the news section and the online edition of the *Columbia Daily Tribune* and multiple banner advertisements were purchased in *Columbia Heart Beat*, an alternative online newspaper. The advertisements asked for the participation of *Tribune* readers who read the newspaper's editorials. The advertisement ran for one week in the *Tribune's* newspaper and online and ran for two weeks on *Columbia Heart Beat's* website.

The questionnaires were administered through email correspondence. Men and women of all ages (at least 18) and backgrounds were asked to participate. The only requirement was that potential interview subjects be well versed in Hank Waters and his history as an editorial writer for the *Tribune*.

The questions in this screener asked how often each person read the *Columbia Daily Tribune*, its editorial page and Hank Waters' editorials. This information was the primary basis for selecting anyone for participation in the interviews, as well as any pre-questionnaire conversations that provided adequate knowledge of the subject's experience with his editorials.

## **Second Method: In-Depth Semi-Structured Interviews**

After speaking with the respondent and finding out that they do read Hank Waters' editorials on a regular basis, he or she was asked to complete an interview. When the person accepted the proposal, a mutual time was agreed upon for an in-depth interview to be conducted. If it was clear through brief communication and vetting that these subjects had the knowledge needed, the questionnaire was not necessary and any demographic information was attained during the interview process.

After completion of the interviews, Hank Waters was interviewed in order to get his thoughts and feelings on each subject's comments about him and his work.

Each interview included a list of demographic questions, such as name, gender, occupation, etc. Also included were a few more directed questions that helped to profile the reader, which provided better idea of the background of the person. These questions included political party affiliation and length of residence in Columbia.

The interviews took place at a time and place of the respondent's choosing, provided that they could allocate a sufficient amount of time to participate in the interview. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes to an hour, with a list of previously prepared questions ready to be asked (see appendix). Rigorous note taking took place to provide detailed accounts of the interviews. Furthermore, each individual interview was recorded to make sure statements missed during the course of note taking were recovered. The tapes will be kept for seven years and then destroyed for the privacy of the subjects. Before the interviews were conducted, I briefed the interviewees about my study, reminding them what sort of questions I would be asking. Informed consent was received

before the start of each interview. During the interviews, respondents were allowed the opportunity to quit and not finish for any reason. Subject anonymity was provided to enhance subject willingness to be honest and truthful, and to prevent any potential backlash due to public scrutiny

Subjects that completed the entire study with an interview received \$15 in compensation for their time and effort.

### **Method Analysis**

The questionnaire acted as a pre-test for the interview process. The questionnaire was used, because a survey would have required a control variable, and this study intended to uncover deeper answers in the area of editorial personality. As a stand-alone measure, a questionnaire did not provide accurate enough findings to justify this study.

As a result, the questionnaire was used to narrow down the field of potential interviewees for the final step in my methodology. This mixed-method format offered a suitable solution to finding respondents who have experience reading Hank Waters' editorials. The transferability of this study is high, because these methods would produce sufficient results in a similar study of editorial personality, given a situation with similar characteristics and sample population.

In this instance, in-depth interviews produced a firsthand account of an individual's experience with Hank Waters' editorials. The methods used in this study promote a high degree of accuracy and accountability. This study is acutely focused on individuals who have extensive experience reading Waters' editorials. Public notification

was provided for the entire population, allowing for the possibility for nearly all to contemplate participation. All that was required to be a part of this study was knowledge, time and cooperation.

Finding participants in research studies is always difficult. This study had its own disadvantages. It's unknown what percentage of *Columbia Daily Tribune* readers read the editorial page.

Once the data was collected, it was coded in a specific way that allowed for easy comparison and major theme construction. The first code word was "bias." From the interview, each participant was asked a question related to Waters' bias. His or her answer to that question allowed for analysis on the ways that bias influences readership.

The next set of data used the code word "personality." These answers reflected the respondent's opinions about Waters as a person. This offered important insights into how they viewed him, both inside and outside of his work as an editorial writer.

The third grouping used the code word "persuasion." These quotations reflected each respondent's opinion on how often they are persuaded by Waters' arguments. Some respondents answered that they are never persuaded by his editorials and that they simply read them for value reinforcement. Or, interview subjects provided interesting anecdotes about an editorial that Waters wrote that they felt caused some change of opinion or a reevaluation of their own ideas.

The fourth code word for the data was "credibility." "Credibility" can reflect the respondent's beliefs about Waters' expertise as an editorial writer. It's a general code

word that can be used to measure any additional opinions about Waters' character that are not reflected in the other descriptors.

The final code word(s) for the data set were "uses and gratifications." This code directly connects with the Uses and Gratifications theory by combining subject quotations that represented the reasons why he or she read Waters' work.

Once the interviews are coded, answers will be grouped together to acknowledge any common theme or characteristic that arises. For example, if a majority of respondents suggest that Waters is biased, that information will be collected and analyzed together.

When the reader interviews were completed, they were analyzed and compared to Waters' responses to similar questions. This allowed Waters to respond to each specific point raised during interviews and to understand how his readers viewed him, and in turn, how he viewed his role as an editorial writer.

## Chapter 4

### Findings

After advertising for the study in both the *Columbia Daily Tribune* and *Columbia Heart Beat*, 19 people responded by mail or email. They were then sent the questionnaire. Of those 19 people, 13 responded after completing the questionnaire with interest in completing the study with an interview. Twelve of the interviews were done in person, with one being conducted over the phone as requested by the subject.

Seven men and six women were interviewed. The average age of the participants was 63.

All 13 subjects interviewed graduated college with a bachelor's degree, with some seeking even higher education, such as master's degrees, doctorates and one medical degree.

The average time that each subject has lived in Columbia is 36.8 years. This includes the high/low outliers of 9 and 75 years, respectively. Without those two figures, the average is only slightly lower at 35.8 years.

Of the 13 interviewed, six self-identified as Democrats; three as Republicans; two as moderates; one as a Libertarian, and one, a Libertarian-leaning Democrat.

Seven of the 13 interview subjects responded in their questionnaires that they read Waters "Everyday." Four responded with answers of "Almost Everyday." Two responded with "A Few Days a Week."

**RQ1: What motivates *Columbia Daily Tribune* readers to read Hank Waters' editorials?**

- Subjects considered his knowledgeable editorials and sound argumentation as two key factors that attributed to their consistent readership of his work. With a few exceptions, his overall fairness and respect for both sides of an issue offered readers a nuanced view of Columbia daily life. Interview subjects deemed him very intelligent with warmth and compassion for the community, which were exhibited through his editorials.

**RQ2: What Uses and Gratifications do readers attain from reading his editorials?**

- Subjects appreciated his consistent writing on local issues of social and political importance. Using the Uses and Gratifications Theory criteria established by Lasswell (1948), readers consumed his work as “surveillance,” to better understand the important people and issues that are affecting them on a personal level. Furthermore, each reader, to varying degrees, established a “personal identity” through Waters’ daily editorials. They affirmed key characteristics about themselves, what they viewed as important issues and whether they were willing to be held up to persuasive tactics by an outside party.

**RQ3: How does the audience’s opinion of Hank Waters as a person influence its willingness to come back and read his editorials each day?**

- A majority of subjects had particular issues that they disagreed with Waters on. Nonetheless, their characterizations of his personality were very positive and appealing. They respected his knowledge about Columbia and they knew he understood the issues well. Words like “intelligent,” “well informed,” and the phrase “good person” were used to describe him. A majority of the subjects appreciated his first person, conversational writing style. While their understanding and day-to-day interaction with signed vs. unsigned editorials was limited for the most part, a number of participants appreciated his honesty and integrity because he signed his editorials, holding himself accountable to his readers. This research demonstrates the value of personality-driven editorials. Signed editorials establish a strong connection with readers and one that can promote a mutual understanding that evokes positive feelings, regardless of differing political or social views.

### **Bias**

*Is he fair? Does he give good weight to both sides of an argument?*

The majority of respondents said that Waters’ editorials are fair, and that he does a good job of giving the other side of any issue enough space and discussion within his editorials. Subject Five’s thoughts on Waters echoed many of the sentiments offered by the other interviewees. “I think he is very balanced. Some people think he is a right-winger and some people think he is a left-winger. You can’t get much better than that.”

Subject Two is one of the few interviewees to cite his evolution as a writer as a negative. His evolution, in her opinion, suggested a change of political affiliation from a Libertarian to a “dye in the wool, garden variety liberal” (see Table 1).

Furthermore, it was the majority opinion of those interviewed that Waters presents valid cases for the opposing viewpoint, especially in the case of local elections where there are multiple candidates and differing views.

For example, Subject Four said that she waits for his endorsements to learn about the candidates, using his work as “surveillance” for the world around her. This follows closely with the Uses and Gratifications Theory. However, she was the only person to say that his endorsements play a primary role in her selection process. The others merely acknowledged his ability to be fair or gave a more neutral opinion overall.

According to Subject Five, his endorsements were one of the more positive aspects of his work, commenting that “he’s done a much better job over the last five years...” “He doesn’t endorse all Democrats or all Republicans. I think he really tries to pick the best candidate for whatever office it is.” Since the *Tribune* is the only Columbia newspaper that endorses political candidates, it is important to note how well he offers opposing views in his work.

In another dissenting opinion, Subject 12 took a more critical view of his balanced approach, viewing his tendency to give both sides equal representation as indecisiveness. “If he doesn’t have a strong opinion, he doesn’t give much credence to the other side.”

## **BIAS**

*Is he fair? Does he give good weight to both sides of an argument?*

**Subject Two said:**

“I used to think of him as a Libertarian. I used to think he thought of himself as a Libertarian. Because you know, he was generally a fiscal conservative, but very liberal on social issues. Well, now, considering his endorsements, and everything, I think he has just morphed into a dye in the wool, garden-variety liberal.”

**Hank said:**

“I don’t know, I think it’s all right. I mean I have been involved with a lot of things that people disagree with. And sometimes there are claims of conflict of interest. And some newspaper editorial writers refuse to be engaged with the community at all, they have this sterile view that they would be conflicted and that their opinions would be discounted because of that. I don’t think that makes sense.”

Subject 13 gave an interesting anecdote about the time he ran for city council and participated in the vetting process with Waters. Initially, he said that Waters did not give his opinions much credence. However, after the subject confronted Waters about the lack of coverage, he quickly apologized and corrected the neglect in coverage.

This subject's opinion on Waters' political endorsement policy offers a good outlet to discuss his editorials. Waters said that in certain cases — specifically in the recent Fifth Ward city council race — he does not pick a side; instead, he offers more “exposition” and less persuasive speech. In his opinion, often all the candidates have a lot to offer and that picking between them is something that concerns only the Fifth Ward residents. Subject 12 called this “equivocating,” which is partially true.

For those that disagreed with him, they drew upon his political stances and ideology as a weakness in his argumentation. Subject Two said that his arguments against the GOP were weak, which is an understandable position given her political beliefs.

Nonetheless, many subjects gave Waters the benefit of the doubt or expressed general neutrality about his tendencies to be biased. In one such case, Subject 10 did not think the idea of Waters' perceived bias to be displeasing or a negative aspect to his writing. “I don't really think it's necessary for him to do that. He's not a reporter doing a news story. What he's doing is presenting his opinion, so of course it won't be balanced to one side or the other.”

The subject recognized that his editorials are indeed opinion-based and not news reporting, thus giving him the leeway to express any view free from any criticism about

his ability to be fair. This subject provided a level of understanding about the historical nature of editorials that aligns well with past precedent.

Thematically, the biggest contention with Waters is his relationship with Columbia's business community. Subject One was convinced that his wealth played a large role in his opinion of those less fortunate. Subject 11 also cited his tendency to support businesses that support him personally. And even though Subject Three did not agree that Waters "is pushing the Chamber of Commerce," he was still aware of the criticism.

When questioned about his connections to the business community, or any preferential treatment he might give, Waters disagreed with the opinion that he is too involved with the community, or that he wields too much influence. (See Table 1). Many of the subjects said Waters cares about the community, which is reflected in his responses to bias claims regarding certain city endeavors. He said he is "working for the benefit of the community." Waters said as long as he's open and honest about his community participation, there should be no conflict of interest. In many ways, this opinion is reflected every day by small daily and weekly newspapers where the editor or publisher is a big supporter or proponent of the community.

## **Credibility**

*How credible are Hank Waters' editorials? How credible is he as person?*

Interview responses concerning Waters' credibility were more in conflict than the subjects' opinions on his overall fairness as an editorial writer. Many of the respondents echoed the previous assertion that he gives more attention and positive reaction to the business community. Some of these opinions aligned with the respondents' own political beliefs or thoughts on the subject of capitalism.

The criticism did not only concern his business community involvement, either. For example, Subject One, a retired teacher, does not believe that he has credible views on education, because his knowledge about the current status of education is lacking: "I think he would be surprised if he spent time in a classroom," she said. It's clear that this woman's "topic knowledge" is high on education, given her past profession. As a result, she is less likely to agree with Waters when he discusses those topics, a common theme in PKM.

The most striking criticism was leveled by Subject 12, when he said that Waters is "a part of the good ole' boy establishment in Columbia," and that he looked out for those that represented business interests. Furthermore, Subject 11 said that his relationship with the business community "colors" his thoughts on the issues, eminent domain being one such issue.

Waters' opinion is very clear on the issue of his community involvement: he thinks it is a positive for the city of Columbia. However, this much resentment over his affiliation or support of local businesses is a big red flag. Subject Five said that Waters is a "manifestation" of the culture in Columbia, calling him "very credible." These

quotations are important because they back the perception that Waters supports the business community more than other groups within Columbia.

Subject Five's self-identified occupation is finance. He works in the business community routinely, but he thinks that Waters is a positive source of support for capitalism. His "topic knowledge" is perceived to be high on economics in this community.

The following comment by Subject Seven encapsulates the general feeling garnered after examining all the viewpoints within this collection: "He seems very credible to me. Because when he writes about an issue, I can tell he understands it well" (see Table 2).

To some of those interviewed, it might be a negative that he is so involved in the community, so invested in its affairs. However, that can be seen as a positive sign of his credibility. Subject Nine acknowledged how difficult a job that Waters has "in a town the size of Columbia, because he does know and rub shoulders with these people."

The words "knowledgeable" and "respected" was used quite often to describe Waters. His many years at the *Tribune* have allowed him to build up a substantial level of goodwill with his readers. His association with various clubs and groups within the city allows him the chance to become "knowledgeable."

## **Personality**

*How would you describe his personality, either through his writing or from any encounters you might have had with him?*

Generally speaking, this category provided the most uniformity of opinion. Those interviewed used words, like “analytical,” “intelligent,” and “tolerant” to describe Waters (see Table 3). The most interesting response came from Subject One, calling Waters a “benevolent dictator, because he does own the newspaper.”

It’s an interesting perspective to think of him as an informed and intelligent person, but also one who looks upon the community, and possibly more importantly, the newspaper with some grand authority, given that he has given up the day-to-day operations.

However, when asked about this very phrase, Waters disagreed with its overall implications. He does not believe there are only a few people in this community who decide the fate of the entire city. He called what he has “temporary power.”

Terms like “curmudgeon” and “folksy” were also used, giving him a more in-depth personality from the perspective of those who read him. Those terms were of endearment, and not particularly negative, given the context in which they were provided. Waters is in his 80s, of course, so they are understandable given his demographic information and the ages of most of the respondents.

Two interview subjects, Two and Eight, used more combative terms to describe his personality, calling it “forceful” and qualifying him as an “aggressive thinker,” respectively. The word “forceful” represented the subject’s opinion of Waters from his authorial position and face-to-face as well. Many of the subjects had met Waters in the past but could not remember what he looked like or his personality outside of his

## CREDIBILITY

*How credible are Hank Waters' editorials? How credible is he as person?*

Subject Seven said:

“He seems very credible to me. Because when he writes about an issue, I can tell he understands it well. He’s looked into it. He knows the community well. I feel like I’m taking the opinion of someone who’s been around Columbia for a while.”

Hank said:

“The main thing that editorials have to express is sincerity. People will forgive you for being stupid, as they know you are coming from a heartfelt place, that it’s from a sincere viewpoint.”

## PERSONALITY

*How would you describe his personality, either through his writing or from any encounters you might have had with him?*

**Subject 10 said:**

“He’s basically a nice man, a good man. Back years ago, he made an attempt at gardening column and give people some advice on gardening, but all of his plants died. And of course, he likes to have what he calls a “toddy” now and then. I think he has a good sense of humor, I think he is a pretty tolerant man. Friendly. And I think he is pretty broad-minded.”

**Hank said:**

“A little frisky may not be the right word, but entertaining. I mean that, I try to give both sides of an issue, instead of just proclaiming something and expecting everyone to...just delivered from the throne so to speak. One of the things that I learn, and all of us writers have to learn this, is to be concise, and know not to get to wordy. And that’s difficult to do, because every golden word is worth including. You know that. Sometimes you can find some ways to be efficient. Some times I think that can destroy personality, because you don’t have enough spare words that can give you flavor.”

columns. In the case of this study, his authorial personality is the one that was emphasized.

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The most striking criticism, by Subject 12, is that that style of “forceful” presence in his editorials is “fairly self-confident, maybe arrogant” and that his ”self-deprecating” style is “phony.”

Those words piggyback on the idea that he has a “forceful” personality — a personality that can often come off stronger to some more than others.

Besides these few critiques, his editorial personality could be considered one of his best assets, given the responses from those interviewed. Only Subject 12 had any

really negative criticism regarding his personality. Even Subject Three, who disagreed with him more than most, did not think of his personality in negative terms.

It's important to reiterate the importance of his signature at the end of his editorials. Signed editorials are personality-driven. They can be "forceful" as one subject said, but they also present a consistent and clear dialogue between Waters and his audience, because they know it is him who is writing the editorials. They associate positive words, such as "civic minded," "intelligent," and "thoughtful," to his work, and by approximation to his character. Those interviewed read him because they view him as a good person with good values — qualities they derive regardless of their inclination to be persuaded by him or agree with him.

Anonymity would not offer the solid connection that Waters said that he strives for in his editorials. It is safe to say that if the interview subjects did not like him as a person they would be less inclined to offer such positive adjectives for his character.

### **Persuasion**

*How often are you persuaded by his arguments? And if you are not, is your mind ever opened? Do you re-evaluate your beliefs after reading him?*

The best way to examine this collection is by citing the quote from Subject Three to represent what most of respondents go through when debating their position and Waters' own. "Yeah, persuaded is too strong of a word ... re-evaluate. That would be a better word," he said.

Waters said quite often in his interview that persuasion was important, even going so far as to say that "that's all there is to it." However, he would elaborate as time passed,

and would ultimately conclude that a “re-evaluation” of opinion is often the best possible result. It is a matter of separating intent versus result. Waters is a persuasive communicator, working in field that presents arguments for the best possible outcomes. In the Persuasion Knowledge Model, he is an “agent” and the audience is the “target,” but as has been discovered through this study, the results are not as black and white, where persuasion is the ultimate conclusion.

It became clear early on that the interview subjects did not so much change the way they feel about the issues, as much as they were pushed by Waters’ writing to be more open and accepting of others’ opinions. Subject Two said that she is only persuaded “10 percent” of the time, which speaks to her dissimilar political beliefs and the difficulty of having someone’s opinion changed completely.

It could have been hypothesized that a personality as respected by his peers as Hank Waters would have more people change their minds over his work. His *ethos* is quite strong, as is his *logos*, or ability to present a solid argument. The results reflect differently, though. Nonetheless, his positive reputation and consistency has still proved to be interesting enough for the readers to consume his work.

That being said, there were occasions where Waters persuaded his audience. In those circumstances, it might have simply been a result of years reading him, as Subject Three said.

“I probably have been over 25 years. But I don’t try to read it for that. I’ve told him this before, but I say I agree with him more than I think I should,” he said.

Or, in the case of Subject Seven, a change of heart over a particular issue or person, such as a political candidate or gun control.

It's usually an affirmation of what I believe, but I have to say on the issue of the gun control thing, I started out with the opinion that we should have very strict gun control laws. But after reading his column, I am even more convinced that it's more complicated than that.

This would be a prime example of a reader working Waters' editorials through his or her mind. In this instance, the subject's opinions are mostly affirmed when she reads his column. However, she does modify her opinion of gun control after some internal discussion. It is not a complete 180-degree opinion change. However, Waters would consider this to be a successful exchange between an editorial writer and a reader. Since the agreement level between Waters and the interview subjects was fairly high, Subject Seven's use of the word, "affirmation," is very important and suggests the need for Waters to persuade his audience is not always necessary.

Subject 12 was the only person to suggest that the act of persuasion does not happen often, or that he does not "know anyone who would admit to being influenced by editorials."

### **Uses and Gratifications**

*Why do you read Hank's editorials? What are you trying to gain from the experience?*

Of the 13 subjects interviewed, many read Hank Waters, and the *Columbia Daily Tribune*, because it was a part of their daily routine. In addition to that reason, many were like Subject Three, who reads him to “stay informed.”

Subject Six pointed out the very important fact that “he is local.”

Waters consistently produces editorials with significant local insight. It is clear that the subjects interviewed read him because he was a powerful voice within the community. Those who were not persuaded by his work or read him to affirm their beliefs chose to read his editorials because they were quite certain he would provide solid information that affected them.

It doesn't just have to be an informational opportunity, either. Subject Two enjoys the exercise because Waters writes well. “I appreciate good writing, and good articulation of ideas.” For Subject 11, it is for much the same reason. “He's able to express himself without being boring. So sometimes I get viewpoints that I agree with and some that I don't, but they are never boring. He backs them up by thoughts that I might not have thought of.”

Subject 13 reads Waters for much the same reason Two and 11 do. “Well, part of the reason why I read it is for entertainment purposes. It's enjoyable to read other people's opinions on things.”

Subject Four went so far as to say that she stays current on his editorials because she takes his opinion into account when voting — the only person to clearly identify that as a reason for consuming his work.

The *Columbia Tribune's* place as the largest (in terms of circulation), independent newspaper in Columbia motivates those interviewed to stay up-to-date on the various happenings.

Subjects Six, Seven, Eight and Nine all gave the impression that they read his work because they have a general sense of respect for his work and the service that he provides for the community.

“He feels a responsibility to say ‘Hey, I think we should do this, or I don’t think we should do this.’ He’s the watchdog on the community, if you trust the newspaper,” Subject Six said.

This idea of Waters as the “watchdog” for the community ties in perfectly with Lasswell’s (1948) research on the Uses and Gratifications Theory. This subject views Waters — the lone editorial writer in town — as one of the best defenses against the outside structures and people that control the people of Columbia. Furthermore, one of the other “uses” Lasswell discovered was “cultural transmission” (1948). This particular use is just as appropriate to Waters, his editorials and their application within Columbia. His musings each day represent the daily concerns of Columbia’s engaged citizenry. His specific concerns might not be of interest to every single person who reads his work, but his engagement within this community and his knowledge about it is reflected in his work.

## **Additional Findings**

Waters' editorials might be the "Tribune's View" in the newspaper but for all of the respondents, it is all Waters.

When asked whether she views his editorials as the official view of the newspaper, Subject Two was very clear that she didn't think that was the case. "I always think of that as Hank Waters' view and not necessarily the *Tribune*, even though he owns the *Tribune*."

Subject Three felt a similar way. He said he saw Waters' editorials as his own "personal view and not a consensus."

The signature on the bottom did leave some readers reassured or respectful of his decision to sign his editorials. Even before he reads it, Subject Nine appreciates the transparency and honesty. "Whether you have met him or not, it says HJW III at the end of his column ... But my view is that a signed editorial has far more credibility than an anonymous one."

Subject 12 called Waters "accountable" for signing the editorials and that it's a "good thing." He also acknowledged a fact, which although not represented in every subject interview, is still important. Waters has "been doing that for so long, that any editorial in that section of the newspaper they would assume it's from him."

Waters is the only writer of the editorials, and it seems those interviewed understand that fact very well.

In continuing with the theme of editorial page structure, a near majority of the respondents found that the *Tribune's* editorial page carries a good mixture of voices, both liberal and conservative.

Subject Six echoed a sentiment offered by many interviewed. "I think the editorial page should have both sides. I think a good newspaper to me presents all sides, all opinions on an issue or election. To me, I would find it very hard to read a newspaper if it wasn't balanced."

More specifically, many of the respondents identified a good mix of conservative voices, such as Charles Krauthammer, Bill O'Reilly and local columnist Bob Roper, within a page that often represents many liberal views, such as Waters and Leonard Pitts.

Many interview subjects cited Mona Charen as a columnist they vehemently disagree with and find to be the worst columnist running in the *Tribune*. It might be the simple fact that the politics of the subjects and Charen's views just do not meld well together.

However, many subjects were very open to reading differing viewpoints, even Subject Nine who disagreed with Mona Charen the most. She said that it's still important that newspaper present both sides on its editorial page, if they deem that a priority. "They balance it out. He doesn't have to. Bring us people so we know what other people would be thinking," she said.

## **Hank Waters' Interview**

Hank Waters has written editorials for the Columbia Tribune since May 24, 1966. Even after all these years at this job, it is evident that he is still engaged in the community as much as possible. “Well, of course I do a lot of reading. Read the papers. Magazines. Watch broadcast news. Whatever it takes to keep aware of what’s happening.”

He still interviews political candidates for public office, which requires him to stay up on the issues and people that are important to the community. However, he has noticed that some issues are “eternal” and are always present within a community.

Beyond the day-to-day interaction with people in the community and at the *Tribune*, Waters emphasized that to become an editorial writer — or any writer of any style — it “requires practice” and “the act of doing it” is the best way to learn.

It was very interesting to learn why Waters decided to sign his editorials after initially writing them in the third person. He decided to change the structure of his editorials for two reasons.

“It’s a lot easier writing. First person is a lot less cumbersome than having to mess with the royal we.” And, it provided a “better connection with the reader... pretty soon I discovered that people knew who to blame or credit anyway.” When Waters was told that many of the people interviewed respected his signed editorials, because it made him more accountable to them, at first he did not recognize the importance of that fact but soon after understood its relevance to the reader.

His first-person and concise writing style were positive attributes that many of his readers respected. He said that he tries to be “entertaining,” and that his concise writing style is one element that editorial writers should adopt.

However, he mentioned that the goal of being concise can “destroy personality” in writing and that “a lot of good writers include that sort of flavor.” Above all, though, Waters acknowledged that a writer’s “sincerity” and his or her supporting evidence are two very important elements when connecting with an audience.

People will forgive you for being stupid, as they know you are coming from a heartfelt place, that it’s from a sincere viewpoint. And also to give reasons... reasons why you think that. Trying to justify what you say. ‘Here it is, here is what I think, what do you say?’ That’s all an editorialist can do.

This statement connects very nicely with the readers’ opinion of Waters, even when it concerns topics they disagree with him about. They still respect his opinion and the presentation of his ideas in an honest and respectful manner.

When the topic of persuasion and the role it plays in his work arose, Waters said that persuading the audience has a direct link to his work, saying “that’s all there is to it.” However, when pressed even further on the topic, he said there are times when his editorials are simply exposition and that his goal is not to take a side. Subject 12 mentioned in his interview that he often finds that Waters “equivocates” on issues. Waters said the recent Fifth Ward election as a time when he did not endorse a candidate, instead choosing to cite the qualifications of each candidate and let the voters in that

Ward decide. In this respect, Waters does equivocate, but it's clear that he is aware that he does it and has his reasons.

When Waters was told that a consensus of the interview subjects only “re-evaluated” their positions and were less likely to be persuaded, he ultimately came to conclusion, that while persuasion is important, it is not the only goal of an editorial writer — and sometimes opening up the audience’s mind is all there is.

When you think about it, that’s all an editorial can do. Just put an idea out, people to chew on it, either to think about again or for the first time. There’s nothing more to it. Editorial writers who think that their goal or expectation should be to persuade people, to cause action, are barking up the wrong tree.

Waters’ opinion was not a simple “yes” or “no” answer when it comes to the importance of persuasion. It was a layered opinion — one that reflects the gray area that persuasion plays in the day-to-day interaction between writer and reader. He said that the act of persuasion is present and that it’s one of the goals of the writer. Nonetheless, it is clear from Waters’ opinion that his work is not successful if-and-only-if he persuades public.

Well, I’m going to explain both sides, but I’m not going to be fair. If I definitely favor one side or the other. I’ll be fair in explaining both sides of the issue, what the other faction’s argument is, and very quickly I’ll try to shut it down.

Waters clearly understands that his editorials are subjective. His sense of objectivity is geared toward presenting both sides of the argument, offering equal space, so he doesn’t give “short shrift” to someone with a clear and cogent opinion.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

#### **Persuasion Knowledge Model**

The Persuasion Knowledge Model was devised to understand the interaction between producers of persuasive communication and the receivers of that communication (Friestad & Wright, 1994).

A clear example of one PKM interaction is present between Waters and Subject Three. Subject Three's job requires him to learn about public policy within Columbia. He reads Waters out of professional necessity. Nonetheless, Subject Three understands Waters' persona and that "he cares about Columbia" and does not try to make waves in the community. He is using the "agent knowledge" he has learned over the course of time, constantly filtering through his mind what he has discovered about Waters. Subject Three is making judgments about Waters' personality that informs whether he will be open to persuasion. In that way, he represents a prime example of the PKM in action.

Another different, but important, example of the Persuasion Knowledge Model exists between Waters and Subject Two. Sometimes strong political beliefs can block persuasion, or negate the effects of PKM. For example, Subject Two self-identifies as a Republican. In her comments, she expressed the view that Waters is a Democrat. Due to this factor, she said that she's persuaded only "10 percent" of the time she reads Waters' work. During the interview, she expressed that her ability to be persuaded is unlikely. Despite this, she divorces her political beliefs from the situation and focuses on her

understanding of his writing style and personality, even if it won't change her mind about political issues. Subject Two was immune to the most overt method of persuasion, but can focus on the good presentation of his argument. It's a classic example of emphasizing form over content.

In his interview, Waters seemed to express the desire to provoke thought in a very even-keeled tone. He did not want to "hard sell" the reader (to borrow a term from sales). The PKM originates from marketers and advertisers who often aggressively address customers. Waters' first-person, personality-driven editorials are more conducive to a strong connection between the writer and reader, because the message is less overt.

In the PKM, people learn about persuasion most often in social interactions between "friends," "family" and "co-workers." In this study, Hank Waters' editorials offer socialization opportunities when readers discuss his work. As Subject Nine said, Waters' editorials were a "launching point for discussion." Subject Seven said that in the case of gun control, she will discuss the issue with her friends and family, and then evaluate its merits within Waters' opinion.

However, the occurrences of discussion are often within a group of people who do or do not agree with his opinions already. For example, Subject Six said "in my circle, people like him." Subject Eight mentioned a specific event — a dinner with friends — that highlighted his inner circle's willingness to be "open-minded" and willing to hear multiple viewpoints. He argued that others in Columbia are not so inclined to discuss opposing views. Waters' editorials might offer readers the chance to discuss his arguments, but any such discussion is viewed through the prism of each reader's

willingness to be persuaded. For example, Subject 12 said, “among the people I communicate with, he does not hold a lot of weight.”

It should come as no surprise that like-minded people associate with their own demographic. The interaction between readers and their friends and family either builds a wall of acceptance, and a greater chance of persuasion, or neutrality, possibly even disinterest. Over time, media consumers build up tolerances for the intentions of media producers.

Waters’ role as the “agent,” or the human cause of the interaction between message and receiver, is laid out very clearly for the audience, or “target” to see (Friestad and Wright, 1994). Since he signs his editorials, the targets are already primed and ready to take in a message from someone they know or can identify. Each “persuasion episode” begins with the prior knowledge that it is Hank Waters’ opinion, and not the opinion of the *Tribune* (Friestad and Wright, 1994).

Unsigned editorials offer an anonymous voice to an issue or topic open to discussion, and as multiple subjects pointed out, their respect level for Waters’ transparency is a notch in his favor. Friestad and Wright’s view of persuasion deals significantly with control, and the more control an agent has, the more susceptible a person is to being persuaded. It would be incorrect to suggest that unsigned editorials offer more control, because this study is narrowly focused on Waters’ signed editorials. However, in the case of those interviewed, the ability to be persuaded is influenced by that signature.

In furthering this study, it would be practical to examine signed and unsigned editorials in a compare-and-contrast fashion with responses from interview subjects. Waters' identity as the writer of the editorials is so well documented and discussed that persuasion is difficult. As G.T. Marx wrote, identification, or the act of naming something, "is a little detail in which big meanings may reside." In this study, those "big meanings" could mean the difference between a reader being persuaded by Waters' editorials or simply rejecting them outright, based on reader assumptions or knowledge. After analyzing the responses, it is clear that outright persuasion is difficult to accomplish. Many of the interviewees simply suggested an open-mindedness that allows for the potential to be there. It also must be noted that since a majority of the respondents read Waters' editorials to see "what he says" or to "stay informed," that also decreases the likelihood of persuasion.

Both the target and agent bring into a persuasion episode some already known facts about the opposing force — "topic knowledge," "persuasion knowledge" and "agent or target" knowledge (Friestad, et al, 2005). The audience reading the *Tribune's* editorials is already aware of the writer's identity, the perceived attempt at persuasion and any topic knowledge Waters brings with him into the episode. Subject Five's occupation is finance. According to his interview, he is a proponent of free market enterprise and capitalism. His understanding of that subject, along with his knowledge about Waters' background in that area, influences his perception of the persuasion attempt.

Two of the interviewed subjects, One and Six, were teachers. They took into their interactions with Waters' editorials a certain level of knowledge or understanding that

they knew he lacked. This led them to disagree with him more on education than they did on any other issue.

This finding fits well with our current understanding that when a person comes across a topic that is influential or at the core of his or her daily activities, practiced persuasion coping tactics come into the equation (Friestad, et al, 2005). Campbell and Kirmani (2000) found that a significant portion of the cognitive response in PKM scenarios is built on his or her ability to make inferences or characterize the agent.

Subject 11 said he had to dock a few points off of Waters' credibility because he felt that his editorials showed a bias toward the business community, and certain favorite issues, like REDI, eminent domain and the Neidermeyer building. Subject 12 went even further, characterizing Waters as part of the "good ole boy establishment." Subject One described Waters in terms of her own generation — someone the "old guard" views as "a friend amongst friends." These descriptions offer us a view of how Waters is perceived by those that were interviewed, many of which have been reading Waters for years and years, gaining detailed insights into his world view.

### **Uses and Gratifications Theory**

The Uses and Gratifications Theory proposes that readers use the media to support some need they have to fulfill. If subjects in this study were not primarily engaging in the prospect of being persuaded by Hank Waters, they must have been reading for some other reason. In prior research in Uses and Gratifications theory, Katz

Blumler and Gurevitch (1973) argued, “the audience was active,” specifically looking for information to satisfy their needs (p.510).

For example, the comments from the subjects seemed to suggest the idea of “surveillance” as a justification for consumer consumption of media. Subject Four said she does not have time to read up on all the candidates running for office. As a result, she waits until he endorses a candidate to make her decision. Furthermore, Subject Four called him “civic-minded” and “intelligent.” She seems to think he is very knowledgeable and well informed about the community. It would be difficult to get that sense from the writer if the editorials came from an editorial board. His personality drives her respect for his opinion, and because she is aware of his identity she can establish a one-to-one connection. An editorial board uses the royal “we” when crafting an argument. Waters’ editorials are an expression of his personality and identity.

A few of the readers interviewed did disagree with him. However, it’s easy to understand why they still come back. For example, Subject Six called him a “watchdog on the community...” Subject Six uses McQuail, Blumler and Brown’s criterion of “personal relationships,” establishing his editorials through the utility of uncovering or bringing important issues to light. Since Subject Six identifies Waters as a “watchdog” that suggests that she reads his arguments and views them to be salient and respectable. That persona she associates with him will be used to during each “persuasion episode” during the PKM process. As a consequence of that, she is more open to the possibilities of persuasion.

Since a majority of Waters' editorials concern local issues, it is an easy source for people to understand and see what one of the more powerful men in this city for the last 40 years has to say on the issues. In that respect, the motivation is very simple. Even though it is the opinion of one man, the respect that many of the respondents have for him is cause enough to engage in the back-and-forth between producer and consumer. "I respect Hank" was a common statement from those interviewed. That admiration might mean more to a reader than any conscious or unconscious reason they have to read him.

It is interesting to analyze the Persuasion Knowledge Model and the Uses and Gratifications theory together. In one sense, they are linked by the idea that readers are primed to look for content that satisfies some urge to feel or to elicit an emotion. When Waters takes a position on an issue or a candidate, readers are clearly met with an opportunity to be persuaded. He or she takes that message from Waters as the "sender" and develops a mechanism in which to understand his opinions, based on his or her own background. For example, Subject Three has never concerned himself with being persuaded by Waters' editorials. He reads his work to reinforce his own personal identity as a teacher of public policy.

Subject 12 is motivated less by reading persuasive communication as he is pushed by the routine of reading the *Tribune* for the last 35 years and how that constructs his identity as a person. Subject Two is motivated by "entertainment," appreciating the "good writing" and "articulation of ideas," even though her politics differ quite dramatically from Waters' views.

The Persuasion Knowledge Model, in some respects, is a nice theoretical companion to the Uses and Gratifications Theory. If a reader is quashing the opportunity to be persuaded, he or she looks for some other reason to read the content. The pursuit of affirming his or her beliefs is one of the next logical routes. Subject Seven likes the viewpoints of Waters and the *Tribune* as a whole, so by reading the newspaper's work on a daily basis, she is reading for value reinforcement.

The Persuasion Knowledge Model and the Uses and Gratifications Theory are not a perfect theoretical combo, though. Historically, PKM has dealt with advertising and marketing, industries where the act of persuading an audience is often as overt as possible. Its application to editorials and this study is still relevant, given that the model itself is a suitable blueprint for the relationship between Waters and the audience. However, the PKM is not interested in informing the public about issues of importance or a person of interest (a political candidate, for example), inasmuch as advertisers and marketers want to inform the consumers of their products in the hopes they will be persuaded enough to purchase a new car, TV or a piece of clothing.

Furthermore, information seeking is a key principle of the Uses and Gratifications Theory. Many of the subjects interviewed were interested in learning more about key local matters, such as taxes, eminent domain and political candidates. Waters was praised by a number of the interviewees for his ability to give good weight to both sides of an issue or candidate, offering a substantial and unbiased evaluation or critique of the motives of all involved.

### **Aristotelian Persuasion**

The “ethos” of Hank Waters might have more to do with why the people interviewed read him than any interest they have in persuasive communication. “The character of the speaker” is a crucial component of “ethos” and Aristotelian Persuasion. In order for Waters to build up some credibility within his audience, he must show “great wisdom” and “moral character.”

Hank Waters has been a fixture in this community for decades, espousing his beliefs on a multitude of topics. His confidence and intelligence could come off as arrogance or false bravado. However, for the majority of those interviewed, Waters’ name is synonymous with positive thoughts and feelings.

For example, Subject 10 called Waters a “good man,” while Subject Four called him “civic-minded” and “intelligent.” These expressions of positive characteristics are examples of Waters’ great wisdom. A majority of those interviewed had kind words to say about Waters, which suggests they are reading him because they agree with some of his personality traits. It would be more difficult to judge the temperament and character of an editorial produced by an editorial board. Many voices contribute to the conversation, but ultimately, only one person can write the editorial.

Another example comes from Subject 11. He calls Waters’ personality “relaxed” and “thoughtful.” Now, Subject 11, possibly without evening thinking about it, is making a judgment on his personality that can be understood in PKM as “persuasion coping behaviors.” He is making a determination about the legitimacy of Waters’ *ethos*, and as a result, framing his ability to be persuaded by the message. On the other hand, this does

not make it inevitable that Subject 11 will be persuaded; only that it opens the door up to that possibility.

The majority of interview subjects had positive comments about his Waters' personality, but that does not mean there weren't examples of times where people had strong critiques of him.

An example of one such case is the comments by Subject 12. In his comments, he called Waters "a fairly self-confident guy, maybe arrogant." These were by far the strongest negative comments directed toward Waters. Subject 12 also did not seem to be willing to commit to any times where he was persuaded by Waters' work. He read him for his local stances on issues but did not give much weight to their impact. Analyzing this scenario through PKM, Subject 12 is using his "topic knowledge" about Waters to block any such attempts at persuasion. He's making a judgment about Waters personality that will influence why he reads him and what he gains from the experience.

With these two different, but important, examples, it is possible to see that Waters' personality and character influences these readers more than they possibly understand. Their judgments might come easily to them, but that does not mean they influence PKM, Uses and Gratifications and Aristotelian Persuasion any less.

Interview subjects could disagree with him on certain issues in Columbia or an endorsement of political candidate, but they always came back to the idea that he was a decent man that "cares about Columbia," as Subject Three said. The notion of "community" and Waters' place within it is also a very important factor. Researcher Karen Black Lefevre said "ethos arises from the relationship between the individual and

the community.” If Waters “cares deeply about the community he lives,” as Subject Nine said, than that is another positive attribute that might cause some to read him more than they might already.

According to the views expressed in the interviews, Waters possesses good *logos*, or sound argumentation. According to Subject Four, he “does explain the pros and cons, and the rationale behind his opinions.” Furthermore, Subject Nine said that he respects his ability to balance opposing viewpoints on complicated issues,” while Subject 11 said that he “tries to take everything into consideration when is formulating his opinion.” In a majority of cases, interview subjects were never reductive about his writing, or dismissive about his capabilities to present his argument in a solid fashion.

If there was any weakness, or weak link to Waters’ writing, according to Aristotelian Persuasion, it was his ability to present solid *pathos*, or a general passion for his writing. Subject Six describes him as “thoughtful,” while Subject 11 said that he presents his arguments with a “bemused look on the world, and that he is not someone “who rants and raves. According to the interviewees, his arguments are solid presentations of his opinions; they are not antagonistic or combative. Considering his ethos and logos are quite strong attributes to his writing, a negligible amount of *pathos* is only a slight drawback as far as the interview subjects’ opinions are concerned.

### **Hank Waters Interview**

From the information gathered from Hank Waters’ interview, his position in the context of the Persuasion Knowledge Model becomes clearer. One of his ultimate goals

as an editorial writer is persuasion; it's inherent in the fabric of his role as the "agent." However, his strict adherence to that practical element of editorial writing is slim. He does not view his position as a "benevolent dictator" nor does he always feel the need to take a position. Waters agreed with the consensus of those interviewed that persuasion is less possible than a mere "re-evaluation" of ideas or an open mind to understand different perspectives. His role as the "agent" is more nuanced than the PKM's historical uses in marketing or public relations. Many of the interview subjects had a positive view of his work due to him signing his editorials. Waters decided to change from third person to first-person editorials for more practical reasons (i.e., easier to write, audience engagement). However, he was less aware of the fact that a few of the respondents called his work more credible because he signs them, adding another layer of respect and appreciation for his work. It was clear to him early on that, as he put it, "...people knew who to blame or credit anyway."

It's clear that both sides — the "target" and "agent" — are aware of Waters' identity as the editorial writer. However, it's important to acknowledge that Waters does not sign his editorials to add a sense of credibility to his work. His concerns are directed toward instilling a much more tight-knit relationship with the audience. Waters' decision to write in the first person establishes that objective even more. He wants to decrease the emotional distance between the reader and writer. If that results in a greater sense of respect for his craft on behalf of the reader, then that is a positive reaction but one that did not overtly concern Waters.

Waters has no illusions of control over his audience. His position of power is only as large or as present as the audience allows it to be. The men and women who participated in this study never felt like his position was extremely authoritative; he was simply another option to consider when reading about local politics or issues. As he mentioned, “some of the issues are eternal,” and that every time he writes about the new variation on the same issue, it’s just a simple insight into the world around him. Both Waters and the readers are participating in “surveillance,” highlighted by the Uses and Gratifications Theory.

Very few of the readers interviewed explicitly acknowledged reading him for the purposes of any ironic entertainment, or reading him because they disagree with him so much. Waters understands that people have the right to disagree with him, but he thinks his personal style of writing reduces the chances of “ad homonym” attacks.

His use of objective facts and strongly constructed arguments, as well as reader opinions, suggests that his *logos* is strong and one of his best assets. Waters expects his readers to question his arguments, which is why he tries to “justify” what he says in each editorial.

Reader perception of his *ethos*, or character, was a fairly strong attribute. Among those that disagree with him, they still felt he was a good person, a strong writer and a well-informed voice, with the obvious exception of Subject 12. Waters’ first person expositional style could account for the positive feelings toward him as an individual. He acknowledges that possibility when he discussed his decision to sign his editorials. His first person exposition style is predicated on privileging “sincerity” within his work.

Whether Waters knew that his style of writing would have an impact in the beginning is unclear. However, the men and women interviewed for this study overwhelmingly gave him positive reviews on his personality.

It's possible that the role of persuasion in this writer/reader relationship is interconnected in a very direct way. In the best possible scenario, Waters is attempting to persuade his audience to think how he thinks. But through his signed editorials, warm and inviting style, they view him as positive media source that does not overtly pound his fist and scream that he is right. The Persuasion Knowledge Model often exists as a representational model of overt or implicit persuasion in advertising and marketing. That model is still present in Waters' editorials, but given his openness, it's effect is slightly diluted in a more agreeable way for the audience. That leads readers to use his work for "surveillance" because they can see his intent and ambitions are less manipulative and aggressive.

As a result of both those factors, the readers in this study arrived at a substantially higher rate of respect for his personality and his role within their lives than a fairly anonymous editorial written by a newspaper's editorial board. That assertion is something that should and can be researched and studied in the future, but given the findings from this small study, the building blocks for such research has been started.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

#### Study Limitations

The qualitative nature of this study directed the goal of this research to report extensively on the reasons why Hank Waters' audience reads his editorials. Subjects were sought for their significant history with his work. Interview answers gave a more in-depth quality than a quantitative method, such as a broad survey or a larger questionnaire.

A survey directed toward a larger population of Waters' readers would have garnered a higher standard of generalizable results than was achieved by this study. It would have allowed for broad themes to be constructed based on a significant pool of subjects. However, as a representation of Waters' consistent readership, this study offers a more nuanced argument for Waters' influence on his readers than a potentially larger method.

By advertising in the *Columbia Tribune's* print and online editions, readers were given equal opportunity to participate in the survey. All that was required was picking up that day's newspaper or visiting Waters' editorials on the newspaper's website. This method relies on some luck, requiring potential subjects to consume either of those media products on a given day. Participants had to self-select themselves to be a part of this study. They had to feel comfortable enough with their knowledge and understanding of Waters to participate. As a result, participant characteristics are not generalizable.

However, it's that breadth of participant knowledge that gives this study credibility. Each individual was primed to speak about their interaction with Waters and his work. He or she was very open and provided great anecdotal evidence to support their claims.

In considering the efficacy of all the theories used, the Uses and Gratifications Theory is a logical theory to adopt. A larger survey or questionnaire might have achieved some of the same goals in establishing why people read Hank Waters and what they gain from the experience. However, a survey or questionnaire would not allow the opportunity for follow-up questions, probing for deeper responses to why the subjects read his endorsements, what local issues the focus and how his credibility and reputation influences how they view his work and what they hope to get out the process.

### **Implications**

As a qualitative study, the results of this research are suggestive rather than definitive. However, some strong conclusions are implied, based on a close examination of the implemented theories and the responses from the 13 readers.

For example, a majority of the 13 subjects interviewed were able to separate the persuasive function of Waters' editorials from his personality. Readers leveraged their persuasion with his unique personality. These results indicate the validity of PKM. The findings of this study suggest Waters' editorials are effective with people who are not entirely enamored with his politics or arguments.

His *ethos*, or character, shifts the reader's attention to his solid background in the community, his intelligence and kind persona. The readers' perceived understanding of his character makes them susceptible to persuasion, even though it is not one of the major factors that drive them to read his work.

The mostly effusive praise heaped on Waters' personality suggests that the people interviewed were willing to read even opinions with which they disagreed, because they found him to be a likable and respectable individual. This conforms with the PKM. The subjects gave more power to his voice and persona than his ability to persuade them.

Since the reader comments suggested that persuasion is not the main focus of their interaction with Waters, the next step in that process is what use they can gain from the experience. The readers consistently spoke of their need to read his work for surveillance of local issues, affirmation of beliefs and entertainment. As a local newspaper, the *Tribune* gives readers the ability to watch their city very closely and monitor for local issues. The readers interviewed were active participants in the process of choosing their content.

An assumption was made in the literature review that at least a few of the readers would read Waters for entertainment purposes, highlighted by their enjoyment of reading the work of someone they flatly disagree with for a variety of reasons. That did not turn out to be the case. There were men and women who held strong disagreements with Waters over his arguments and beliefs. This suggests readers held him in high esteem for his considerate and well-reasoned approach to editorial writing.

These readers have a lot of options when it comes to the opinions they decide to read. It is Waters' intelligence and personality that holds the reader's attention. His arguments were praised but whatever responses the subjects provided, the respect for his craft, persona and character always dominated the discussion.

Overall, this study suggests that readers place a low degree of importance on being persuaded by Waters, but they respond positively to personality-based editorials when the intelligence and character of the writer is present.

### **Implications for Editorial Writers and Newspapers**

Early in his career as an editorial writer, Waters learned that readers responded well to his work because he put a lot of himself into his writing. He wrote with sincerity and passion for the community. His intelligent discussion and analysis of the day's news became a trademark of his work. Soon, it was clear that this was Waters' editorial and his authorial persona became the element that stuck with his readers long after they had disagreed with him.

Editorial writers can learn from this study. Waters was praised for his strong, sincere personality. He injected his humor, wit and intelligence into each of his editorials. The *Tribune* readers appreciated the conversational and approachable tone of his work. Editorial writers just starting their careers can use their own personality to attract followers.

Writing in royal "we" or third person places an imaginary barrier between the writer and the audience. Waters has been successful because he discovered early on that

the readers enjoyed getting to know him on a personal level. Writers could experiment with different tones and authorial voices, in addition to experimenting with a first person perspective.

The research suggests that writers who do not now sign their editorials should try it, if for no other reason than to gauge audience reaction. Editorial writing has been in existence for many years but that does not mean that standard practices have to become stale or boring. Waters was willing to adapt to his audience's preferences, which has contributed to his long tenure.

This study's readers often commented on his stature in the community and his willingness to become involved with civic affairs. His active participation did rub some of this study's participants the wrong way, but his contributions also gave the impression that he cares for this community. In small towns — where newspapers often serve as the only news provider — this involvement becomes nearly unavoidable. As the fourth-largest city in Missouri, Columbia is by no means “small.” Nonetheless, Waters has vigorously participated in this city endeavors like it was a small town. Reader comments suggest Waters' dedication to Columbia has not hurt his ability to be a fair and respected writer, either.

A newspaper's editorial page serves as a sounding board for discussion of the day's news coverage. It is subjective coverage, but that does not mean it cannot be well informed or knowledgeable. Waters interviews political candidates for elected office, which is also a task that any new editorial writer should consider adopting. The readers in

this study enjoyed getting to know the candidates through the endorsement process, even though Waters' endorsement did not factor into voting decisions.

Waters recognized early what bloggers had been working toward for sometime now — personality-based content. As a whole, newspapers could benefit from a reexamination of current editorial page policies. Signed editorials could become the standard practice; even when editorial boards produce them. The third person or royal “we” writing style can be an option, not simply the norm. Regular columnists could gain experience as guest editorial writers in some newspapers. This might provide a different perspective for the audience — a new, invigorating voice in presenting a persuasive argument.

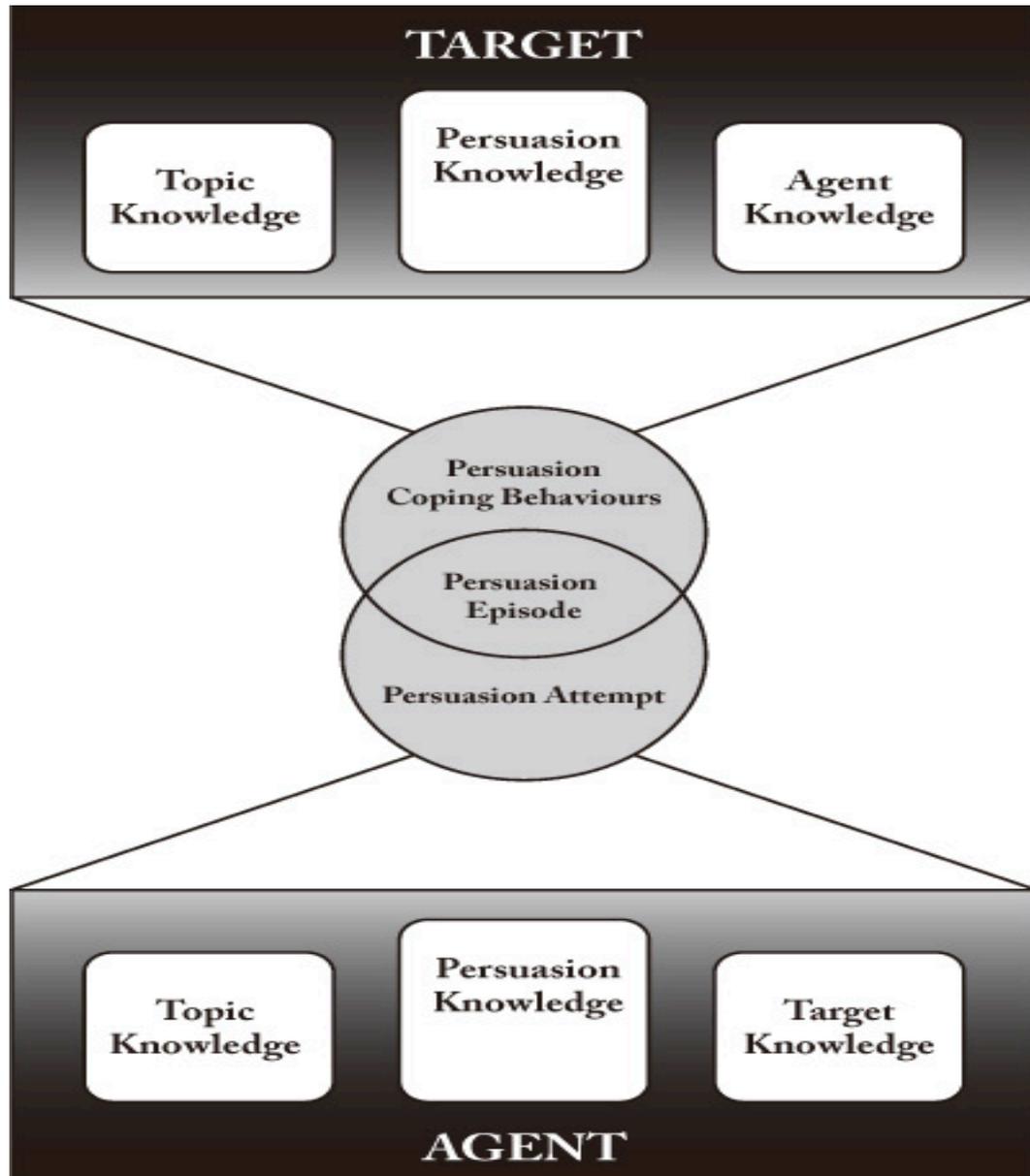
Waters has an intrinsic value in him that makes him worth studying. He's written thousands of editorials and been a staple of this community for decades. He carries a unique place in this city's history as a chronicler of its evolution and history.

Academically, this study could influence further research on the role of personality in mass communication, and how an emphasis on personality can increase the credibility and strength of audience engagement.

This research showed that personality plays a large role in the success or failure of an editorial writer. Also, signed editorials increase community contact and promote trust between a writer and reader. This research also showed that a writer's strong character and intelligence can withstand disagreements over arguments between a writer and reader.

## Appendix

### Persuasion Knowledge Model



(Source: Friestad, Marian, and Wright, Peter. "The Persuasion Knowledge Model: How People Cope with Persuasion Attempts.")

## Advertisement

Title: Hank's got an opinion, what's yours?

Hank Waters has written thousands of editorials for the *Columbia Daily Tribune*. How many of them have you read? Did you agree with them all? If you have extensive knowledge of his career and are an avid reader of his editorials, you are perfect for a news research study. Each person is required to complete a short questionnaire to assess his or her knowledge of Hank Waters and the *Tribune's* editorials. The questionnaire will require 5 to 10 minutes to complete. If your answers qualify you for further participation, an interview will be conducted. The interview will last one hour. Compensation is available. Everyone who completes the study will receive \$15.

If interested, please contact Michael Davis by mail at 5107 Clark Lane Apt. #102, Columbia, MO 65202. He can also be reached at 641-494-7891, or by email: [midavis61@gmail.com](mailto:midavis61@gmail.com).

## Questionnaire

The following responses will provide background information on you as a potential research participant and evaluate how well you know Hank Waters and his editorials. Thank you for your time. We appreciate your help.

**1. How many days a week do you read a newspaper?**

Everyday \_\_\_; almost everyday\_\_\_; a few days a week \_\_\_; once a week \_\_\_;  
Never \_\_\_\_

**2. How often do you read a newspaper's editorial?**

Everyday \_\_\_; almost everyday\_\_\_; a few days a week \_\_\_; once a week \_\_\_;  
Never \_\_\_\_

**3. How often do you read the *Columbia Daily Tribune*?**

Everyday \_\_\_; almost everyday\_\_\_; a few days a week \_\_\_; once a week \_\_\_;  
Never \_\_\_\_

**4. How often do you read Hank Waters' editorials?**

Everyday \_\_\_; almost everyday\_\_\_; a few days a week \_\_\_; once a week \_\_\_;  
Never \_\_\_\_

Thank you for completing this survey! If you wish to participate further in this study by being interviewed, please send your completed questionnaire to the email address, [midavis@gmail.com](mailto:midavis@gmail.com), or contact Michael Davis at 641-494-7891 for more information about the next step in this process.

### **In-Depth Semi-Structure Interview Questions**

1. Just out of curiosity, do you know the difference between a column and an editorial?
2. Why do you read Hank Waters' editorials?
3. From all your reading of Hank Waters' editorials, what kind of man do you think he is?
4. What do you think he looks like?
5. How would you describe his personality?
6. What is his reputation in Columbia?
7. How credible are his editorials?
8. How fair are his arguments?
9. How often are you persuaded by him?
10. Do you think he has ever changed people's opinions?
11. With what you know about editorials, should there be bias on the editorial page?
12. Can you remember the last time you disagreed with him? Can you remember the particular editorial?
13. You like to read editorials. Who would you compare him to as a writer?
14. Do you think his opinion ever washes over to the news columns?
15. If there was one thing about his writing that you would change, what would it be?
16. Age \_\_\_\_\_
17. Gender \_\_\_\_\_
18. Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

19. Education:

Please check the education level that applies to you.

Partial completion of high school \_\_\_\_

Finished high school \_\_\_\_

Some college \_\_\_\_

Finished college \_\_\_\_

Graduate School \_\_\_\_\_

20. How long have you lived in Columbia, MO? \_\_\_\_\_

21. What is your political affiliation? \_\_\_\_\_

## **In-Depth Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Hank Waters**

1. What's the key to being a good editorial writer?
2. What has been the key to your longevity as an editorial writer? Is it more than the fact that you are the publisher of the newspaper?
3. How would you describe your personality in your writing? How would you describe your writing style?
4. What do you think is your reputation among people in the community? Do you think anyone in the community, any group of people would consider you biased against them and for someone else?
5. In your opinion, how fair are you at giving weight to both sides of an issue?
6. How much credibility is added to your editorials because you sign them? What was the thinking behind doing that?
7. Is one of your roles as an editorial writer to persuade the reader by your argument? To inform?
8. Can you take me through the process you go through to endorse a candidate or ballot issue? How does that work out?
9. Are you still as active in the community as you once were? How do you stay updated on all the city's happenings, besides reading the Tribune?
10. How long do you think you'll go writing the Tribune's editorials? Has there been any discussion about who will take over for you when you are done?

## Bias Quotes

“He tries to I think. And as I say, if you don’t agree with him, then by golly. And if you do, then he really saw the light on this. He does have themes. He’s consistent with himself. “

— Subject 1

“Well, I suspect that since he has money, and because he lives in the county, he can’t help but know that, I think there is a certain amount of ... if poor people really work, they can pull themselves up by the bootstraps. There’s an unawareness that there are a group of people, especially in education, there are kids that are never going to read. They will get there learning some other ways. “

— Subject 1

“I know there are some people who cancelled subscriptions because they don’t agree. I do know there are certain people angry with him over certain stuff.”

— Subject 1

“I used to think of him as a Libertarian. I used to think he thought of himself as a Libertarian. Because you know, he was generally a fiscal conservative, but very liberal on social issues. Well, now, considering his endorsements, and everything, I think he has just morphed into a dye in the wool, garden-variety liberal.

— Subject 2

“I guess on the whole, he is pretty fair. Even though I find myself disagreeing him with more and more, there’s just some stances that he takes now that I just think they are just weak arguments. When he argues that the state legislature is controlled by extremists GOP, right wing, um, I don’t like that...”

— Subject 2

“I have never gone back and analyzed whether he is consistent over some issue, zoning or something like that. I read it, then I think about the issues. The idea of it, I can process. It doesn’t influence me as much as I like to process it. He’s just an alternative point of view for me. “

— Subject 3

“I don’t know of his connections to the business community. I just don’t see that coming through in his writing ... I am aware of the criticism about him ... I don’t think he is pushing the Chamber of Commerce.

— Subject 3

“He usually does explain the pros and cons, and the rationale behind his opinions. And the last paragraph, he’ll repeat it and make the statement again. I always wait to see who he’ll endorse. I really don’t have time to study up.”

— Subject 4

“Yeah, I do. I think he is very balanced. Some people think he is right-winger and some people think he is a left-winger. You can’t get much better than that. He’s kind of his own guy, and he just thinks through. He is not dogmatic, except in a very, commitment to democracy and open process. He’s dogmatic about open-government. He’s dogmatic about all voices being a part of the conversation.”

— Subject 5

People love to say that Hank is “out-there.” It’s funny to listen to some, and you know I’m talking about more of the inside players. The people that are fairly involved in the community, typically more of the conservative people will roll their eyes. “Oh my God he’s for drugs.” There’s always people that will act like he’s the lightweight.

— Subject 5

“I think when he writes editorials about candidates, he does a really good job. He’ll say candidate #1 has these qualities, candidate #2 has these qualities and candidate #3 has these qualities. But when it comes down to what the city council, state legislature, senate office, this person because of x, y, z is more qualified.

He doesn’t endorse all democrats or all republicans. I think he really tries to pick the best candidate for whatever office it is. And he’s done a much better job over the last five years weighing the attributes of the candidates. “

“We’re not all black and white, and we’re not all gray. And as you learn more and experience, and as you live, you can change you opinion. And I think some people have a hard time with that.”

— Subject 6

“I really like his viewpoints, and the viewpoints of the Tribune itself. I think he writes about things in-depth, he doesn’t just scratch the surface. And he tries to present both sides of argument, while still allowing his opinion to come out in the end. So readers get to see both sides of the issue and then see what he personally thinks.

The columns I’ve read of him recently are very fair; He lets the complexity of the issue show. I think he’s pretty objective. He doesn’t seem to be totally biased toward one side or the other. “

— Subject 7

“I think if we are talking about Hank, I think he is writing a column; he should be able to write a column based on his own opinion. I think he picks that up another level because he realizes he has a certain responsibility to be on the straight and narrow as far as his facts are concerned.

So he is not a fire-breathing rabble-rouser that spouts lies and mistruths. I think he does a good job of maintaining that credibility. “

— Subject 8

“I think he is very fair, that’s just my opinion. He will clearly take a side, but then he will acknowledge the formentation of the opinion of the other side, telling what agrees with and what he disagrees with. He defends his stand, but he acknowledges that the other side has validity. It’s very rare that its 100 percent good vs. evil.

Hank argues in the ones I’ve read that yeah, I can understand why some people wouldn’t want that trail in that path, but it does serve the greater good. And yeah he does what any deep thinking editorialist should do, he balances out the views of others and then forms his objective opinion.”

— Subject 9

“I don’t really know. I don’t really think it’s necessary for him to do that. He’s not a reporter doing a news story. What he’s doing is presenting his opinion, so of course it won’t be balanced to one side or the other.

He’s a consistent supporter of abortion rights. And every now and then he has to remind people that it’s legal and that they stop griping and moaning about. “

— Subject 10

“I still think he gives good weight. He still presents both sides. And he presents both sides fairly. I think he may give weight to one side or other based on a little personal, financial relationship. He doesn’t short both sides. “

— Subject 11

“If he doesn’t have a strong opinion, he gives both sides weight. If he doesn’t have a strong opinion, he doesn’t give much credence to the other side. He tends to minimize at times belittle them, pass them off, dismiss them with a few words. I have seen him do that. There may be times when he doesn’t do that and he gives the alternative some thought. “

— Subject 12

Again, comparatively speaking, to a lot talking heads on TV, he’s more fair than them. A mean less fair than someone writing an objective paper in academia. That’s not what an editorial is. He’s more fair than most, but still he’s making his points. Occasionally, he’ll explore the opposing views.

— Subject 13

### **Credibility Quotes**

“That’s an interesting question too, because I suspect if you agree with him, then great. And of course, we’ve always laughed when he endorses a candidate, they’ll be two candidates and he’ll get all this nice stuff said about the one he’s not going to endorse, but then he tears into the one that he’s going to endorse, and he’ll tell all the bad stuff about them. So we always say, you’re lucky if Hank doesn’t endorse you, because he’ll say nice things about you if he’s not going to endorse you.”

— Subject 1

“One thing women say to me he is reluctant to endorse a woman. If there is a man and a women running, he’ll always find a reason to endorse a man. That isn’t always true.”

— Subject 1

“Well, like I said in the case you agree with him, you agree with him. I think on education he is off the mark. I think he would be surprised if he spent time in a

classroom. I think there is an unreality perception of guys of Hanks' vintage and my vintage."

— Subject 1

"I think by and large they are good. For instance, yesterday he recapped his reasons for voting for Obama and not for Romney, very weak, Very weak. He didn't like, he said that he didn't particularly like one, but I think the GOP is dominated by extremists, so I am for the Democrats. Well, that's a pretty weak argument. I mean, maybe he needs to go back to supporting a libertarian candidate if that's what he is going to do. But on the whole I think he is credible."

— Subject 2

"I think he's analytical. I think he cares about Columbia. So, tries to write about important issues. I don't think he tries to be a gadfly, as much as he tries to say... he's not trying to stir the pot."

— Subject 3

"He's had a lot of different life experiences. He's more about the issues. You can tell he's more about the issues. He's respected; he's credible. He's been at the Tribune forever. "

— Subject 4

"Very credible. A uniquely well-informed voice."

"I think he is the referee in the sense in what is one of the better places of democracy, which is the city of Columbia. I think a lot of it reflects him. He's been doing it for so long. I think he is somewhat a manifestation of our culture here and has helped shape it. "

— Subject 5

"He does what good writers do, he backs stuff up with facts. He just doesn't spout off. Sometimes he does, you know, it's hard not to."

— Subject 6

“He seems very credible to me. Because when he writes about an issue, I can tell he understands it well. He’s looked into it. He knows the community well. I feel like I’m taking the opinion of someone who’s been around Columbia for a while. “

— Subject 7

If you compare him to other editors in other similar size newspapers, I think they are a lot more opinionated. He is a lot more fair. For example, Miller the owner of the Washington Missourian. He just tells it, this is the way I feel, and screw you if you don’t like that. Hanks’ not like that. And I think that’s very commendable of him.”

— Subject 8

“He’s a really smart man that cares deeply about this community that he lives in. He thinks deeply about complex issues. Hank’s editorials are extremely thought out, and no I don’t agree with 100 percent of the time, but I agree with more than I don’t.”

— Subject 9

“And I think it would be hard to be the primary editorial writer in a town the size of Columbia because he does know and rub shoulders with these people. And he will make comments that are somewhat derogatory to bankers and then he will sit down and have lunch with them. And he’s got to be able to defend his viewpoint without offending these people and he can do that because he’s very intelligent.”

— Subject 9

“I would say so. I think people respect him. He’s done a lot for the town.”

— Subject 10

“When he writes about something, he usually comes across as knowledgeable. He throws things up that I may not have know, even though I may have thought I was knowledgeable. He researches, or has in other aspects of his life come to know things about an issue. I have to take a few points off for credibility because he is involved with the community and he has relationships that affect his judgment.

What I am thinking of, the business community and eminent domain, I think it colors his approach to it because he as certain friends that have certain goals about it.”

— Subject 11

“I know that Hank Waters is part of the good ole boy establishment in Columbia. A lot of his issues that he covers involving local issues involving development and the

business community and the chamber commerce, I find myself disagreeing him, and if I don't know much about the issue, I don't lend much credence to what he says because I know he has particular agenda and political position in the community.

To me he is a little more credible when he discusses issues don't directly relate to the business community, or when he talks about state or national issues. “

— Subject 12

I would say he is. Like you've said he's an older guy. But he's still sharp. Well written. He's consistent, or jumping across the board. Like one year he says he's in favor of government subsidized projects, and then the next year he's coming out against government subsidized projects. I think over his time, over 70 plus, his opinion has evolved with time and stays relevant, but I think he's stayed consistent. His consistency makes him credible.

— Subject 13

### **Personality Quotes**

“As far as his personality goes, he's always been an independent thinker.”

— Subject 1

“Well, if he doesn't know you, or interested in what you are doing, he is very aloof. He's always been very nice to be around, if you make an appointment and take your time to meet him. “

— Subject 1

“In a kind of way he's like a benevolent dictator, because he does own the paper.

— Subject 1

“I think he probably has a forceful personality. And now, I think he is over 80. I would say he is a curmudgeonly.”

— Subject 2

I think it's analytical. I think he cares about Columbia. So, tries to write about important issues.

— Subject 3

“Civic minded, politically minded, intelligent.”

— Subject 4

“I would describe him as a good-natured pragmatist, who is generally rooted in free enterprise.”

— Subject 5

“I can’t say what his personality is, because it is colored, because my partner knows him personally. And they do some trips and go places together. He appears to me as thoughtful. He wants to make you think. I think he is pretty middle-of-the-road politically. He has gotten more liberal over the years. Yeah, because a long time ago I disagreed with him a lot, on issues as well as people he endorsed. I think he’s very fair. “

— Subject 6

“I think he is an intelligent person. Well-spoken, because he writes well. He’s well balanced. Mentally balanced person, not given to extreme viewpoints. I think he would be a folksy kind of guy. Easy to talk to. “

— Subject 7

“He has an advertising background, I would judge him as an outgoing ... rather aggressive thinker who would probably would accidentally intimidate people sometime.

I have been around him sometimes and there were other people in the room that would shy away from him because he is not afraid of voicing his opinion. And sad to say there are a lot of people around today for one reason or another they don’t know how to express themselves. “

— Subject 8

“I think he is very intelligent. I think he cares deeply about the community he lives in and the quality of life. I think he’s got an insatiable curiosity, which is a wonderful thing to have. I think he is an ethical man. I think he’s a good man when it comes to what people call common sense. Balancing opposing viewpoints on complicated issues and trying to determine the middle path that is best for all constituents while still taking into account that some people’s opposition has validity too.”

— Subject 9

“He’s basically a nice man, a good man. Back years ago, he made an attempt at gardening column and give people some advice on gardening, but all of his plants died. And of course, he likes to have what he calls a “totty” now and then. I think he has a good sense of humor, I think he is a pretty tolerant man. Friendly. And I think he is pretty broad-minded. “

— Subject 10

“He is relaxed. He is not someone who rants and raves. He sits back and takes a bemused look on the world. But thoughtful. And tries to take everything into consideration when he is formulating an opinion.”

— Subject 11

“He comes across to me as fairly self-confident guy, maybe arrogant. He’s usually fairly sure of himself. And has definite opinions about some issues, even when he seems to superficially equivocate on both sides, it’s pretty clear what side of the issue he is on.

He has a self-deprecating style that I feel is kind of phony. It doesn’t ring true. Now, I am influenced by some extent by some friends who do know him and have a lot more contact with him than I ever have. And what they say about him is that he is a very self-confident person who is smart, but isn’t really reflective.

— Subject 12

### **Persuasion Quotes**

“Well, like I said in the case you agree with him, you agree with him. I think on education he is off the mark. I think he would be surprised if he spent time in a classroom. I think there is an unreality perception of guys of Hanks’ vintage and my vintage.”

— Subject 1

“Maybe 10 percent of the time, I’m persuaded. Well, sometimes I will agree with him up front. But to actually change my mind, because of reading a statistic in his editorial? Not very much, no.

— Subject 2

“I probably have been over 25 years. But I don’t try to read it for that. I’ve told him this before, but I say I agree with more than I think it should. So, I guess I do find

him thoughtful enough to keep my interest. But I don't try to agree with him or disagree with him. He's just a constant source of information."

— Subject 3

"Yeah, persuaded is too strong of a word ... Re-evaluate. That would be a better word. To re-evaluate. To rethink my position. I thinking over 25 years I'm sure he has calmed me down. "

— Subject 3

"I always give serious thought to what he says. I really value his opinion."

"Well, he has an interesting approach to endorsements. Not issues, but political candidates. He'll tend to endorse an incumbent based on whether they have been a faithful. And even if he doesn't agree with them, policy wise or philosophy, if they haven't done something to disqualify themselves from service, if they haven't been extreme, if they have been collaborative, if they have been rational, or diligent in their duties, he believes that if they run again they should be elected again if they haven't done something egregious to warrant being removed.

And so, that approach probably has caused me to support some people for re-election that I might not have otherwise supported. It's an interesting approach, particularly when you talk about the council and the mayor, where until recently they didn't get paid. "

— Subject 5

"I don't think that happens very often. Perhaps I read to see if he can turn my opinion."

Well, I want to read it to see what he has to say. A lot of times I disagree with him and a lot of times I agree with him. And maybe this will move into another question. When I first moved to Columbia in 1977, I didn't agree with him at all on a lot of things. But more and more over the last few years, I think Hank and I are growing older together."

— Subject 6

It's usually an affirmation of what I believe, but I have to say on the issue of gun control thing, I started out with the opinion that we should have very strict gun control laws. But after reading his column, I am even more convinced that it's more complicated than that. We have to maintain American's freedom, and that there are some rights under the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment. But I don't think they are as clear-cut as the NRA would have us believe. "

— Subject 7

“First of all, going back I respect what the man says, and while I don’t always agree, there are times when he opens my eyes to things that I wasn’t aware of because he’s done his homework.”

“And so, because I understand and respect his ability to remain fair and on an even-keel about things, I’ll go in with an open-mind. And sometimes he’ll change my mind or open my mind as it were to a sub-fact that I wasn’t aware of. “

— Subject 8

It can happen. I couldn’t give you any sort of qualitative answer. That has happened to be sure. Sometimes I go in reading his work with one idea and then after reading his in-depth, multi-detailed paragraph explanation and modify my opinion. Maybe he didn’t change it, but it became more open-minded and flexible.

And sometimes there has been an outright change of opinion where I thought one thing and read his thoughtful editorial citing some valid sources, and thought ‘Wow, I didn’t think about that?’ So, yeah, it can happen. And he would be the one who could do it, because I think he is credible.

— Subject 9

“I think most of the time I agree with him. I guess I must be pretty much Libertarian. He hasn’t made me very angry.”

— Subject 10

If I’m on the fence, there are certain times I have been persuaded by his views. Sometimes his endorsements of candidates, I don’t know if I change my mind, but I certainly open my mind. I can’t say for certain that I have changed my mind on who I was going to vote for, and if I have it’s not always a race I was eligible to vote for.

— Subject 11

“Well, I don’t really know. I don’t know anybody who admits to being influenced by his editorials. He is the publisher and editor of the major newspaper in town, so his decisions whether he makes them or not, or whether other editors to, make a big difference about what is covered and what is reported. I don’t have a good sense of a represented sample of people.”

— Subject 12

“Well, sometimes I do and sometimes I don’t. Like let’s say, when he writes about the election. If they did it, fine. If they didn’t do it, fine. I don’t have too much of an opinion either way.”

“Well, I guess. We have, I have a different opinion on government’s role in stimulating the economy because I am active in the business community. I think he believes the government should help regulate and keep it moving. Whereas, I believe in a more free market approach. So when I read his approach, I just go ‘well, it’s too bad that he thinks like that’ (laughs). It doesn’t fired me by any means. We’re both pro-business, but we go about it in different ways.”

— Subject 13

### **Uses and Gratifications Quotes**

“I appreciate good writing, and good articulation of ideas.”

— Subject 2

“To stay informed with what’s going on in Columbia. Just to get to get a different view. Part of it is I teach public policy, so part of it is to understand local government. I try to pay attention to what it going on the community. I have never gone back and analyzed whether he is consistent over some issue, zoning or something like that. I read it, then I think about the issues.

— Subject 3

“He usually does explain the pros and cons, and the rationale behind his opinions. And the last paragraph, he’ll repeat it and make the statement again. I always wait to see who he’ll endorse. I really don’t have time to study up.”

— Subject 4

“I study his stuff and try to appreciate his point of view, because I respect him and his point of view. I totally agree with him on his point of view on the Republican Party. I totally agree with him on the nature of the Tea Party. So we have a real fundamental agreement about the dynamics at work in that regard. Locally, he tends to support most creative initiatives, which I tend to do.”

— Subject 5

“I read Hank Waters, and I also read The NY Times and The Washington Post. I read him because he is local. He often has opinions on local issues or people that are running for office. Just a variety of things. And I think when you are in a community this size, it’s important to know what your local publisher has to say. He reflects not only his point of view and the newspaper’s view as well.

And in a way, the community at large. He feels a responsibility to say ‘Hey, I think we should do this, or I don’t think we should do this.’ He’s the watchdog on the community, if you trust the newspaper.”

— Subject 6

“I really like his viewpoints, and the viewpoints of the Tribune itself. I think he writes about things in-depth, he doesn’t just scratch the surface. And he tries to present both sides of argument, while still allowing his opinion to come out in the end.”

— Subject 7

“I respect Hank, I respect how he goes about writing, what he is going to write. And how he forms his opinions. And I say it like that because I don’t always agree with him.”

“Because he grew up here just like I did, I look forward to seeing or reading what he feels about issues that I know about.”

— Subject 8

“I read the Tribune everyday, although some days if it has to do with a complex tax issue here locally doesn’t always hold my interest. I read his editorial 4 or 5 times a day, along with other editorials, like in USA Today.

— Subject 9

“To find out what he thinks about things. The whole thing leading up to the elections, it was just amazing, you never knew what he was going to say. But he’s consistently Libertarian.”

— Subject 10

“I read the paper and I read it fairly thoroughly. I read his editorials specifically because he’s not what you would call standard. He often has views that are different from several other views that are being presented.

You know, he writes well. He’s able to express himself without being boring. So sometimes I get viewpoints that I agree with and some that I don’t, but they are never boring. He backs them up by thoughts that I might not have thought of.”

— Subject 11

“I want to do it to see what his position is on certain issues.

“I have had subscription to the Tribune for the last 35 years and I usually read him everyday, but like I said I don’t always read them all the way through.”

— Subject 12

Well, part of the reason why I read it is for entertainment purposes. It’s enjoyable to read other people opinions on things. And I guess for me to be moved it has to be something I’m knowledgeable about and have formed an educated opinion about. Usually with Hank’s stuff, it’s a topic that is very fresh, something I haven’t really suck my teeth into, so I’ll tuck it away, a side that I have heard. It’s more informative for me than persuasive. I respect his opinion.

— Subject 13

## **Interview with Hank Waters**

### **When did you start writing?**

May 24, 1966

I've written about 360 a year. There have been fewer than 10 times during that period that someone else has written the editorials. And if you do the math, I think it's an excess of 16,000. So I think I have the record for volume, but I refuse to enter the debate about quality.

When I go out on vacation I write ahead of time. And sometimes I'll be gone a month, so I write enough editorials that I hope will sound topical at the time.

### **It's got to keep you invigorated to interview all these candidates?**

Well, of course I do a lot of reading. Read the papers. Magazine. Watch some broadcast news. Whatever it takes to keep aware of what's happening. And of course, I even pay attention to outliers like Rush Limbaugh it happens to come on the radio at a time... I do all my writing in the morning at home mostly for the next day. So I write and come down to the office and that usually occurs when Rush Limbaugh is on... so I can listen to him and that kind of gives me an insight into that netherworld. That

### **Do you think you do as much as you can? Are there times where you think you could do more?**

I do as much as I can. And it just soaks in and some of the issues are eternal. It's just a new event that gives us a chance to revisits certain issues. And some last for a while, like the Grindstone subdivision, Providence Road. Of course, the election always provides some insight.

### **So the Neidermeyer decision just came down that they are going to prevent the building from being demolished. What do you think about that?**

That gives insight. And it's more that just what should happen to the building; it's what policies the city should develop or can develop to control the use of property by private owners. We should sit down and decide what we want downtown to be.

**The reason why I am interested in what you do is because as an undergrad at the University of Iowa I was an editorial writer and columnist at the student newspaper. I can't imagine writing as much as you do. I probably wrote three times a week — two editorials and a column. But I did take other classes, so there were other obligations.**

It gets to be sort of like... I guess you could call it a habit. I can do it pretty quickly, and I don't mean frivolously. It gets easier if you kind of get the knack for it. Writing really requires practice, that's the way you learn writing, whatever kind your doing. Whether it's for content or style, you should at least develop a style or get better at it as time passes. Writing is the best education vehicle we have, schools don't do enough of it.

**So you would say like any other writing profession, practice is a good for an editorial writer?**

If you want to become an editorial writer, you should start by writing a letter to your sister to try to convince her of something or explain something to her. It's just the act of doing it, learning how to do. It's exposition rather than narration, you're not telling a full story, you're not writing a novel. While were are at it, one of the things I do that not every else does it first person. Signed editorials.

**That was actually one of questions. Why?**

Well, two reasons: 1. It's a lot easier writing. First person is a lot less cumbersome than having to mess with the royal "we." Plus, I think it's particularly, in a town this size, a better connection with the reader. And from particular the beginning when I started of writing in the third person, but pretty soon discovered that people knew who to blame or credit it anyhow. And it was a little more stilted I thought. The first person, signing it works fine.

**Actually, a few of the people I interviewed mentioned that they respected you more for doing that.**

The editorial board?

**Like you said they figured out pretty quickly that it was you, even that fact that you sign your editorials that it could be in a difference scenario, as an editorial board like you mentioned. A few of them found them to be more credible that you do that.**

I hadn't thought about that aspect of it so much as the familiarity or interaction. But I can see how that can be one of the advantages.

**One of the questions I asked the readers was to describe your personality through your writing. Many called you intelligent, well informed. If you had to characterize your personality through your writing, what would it be?**

A little frisky may not be the right word, but entertaining. I mean that, I try to give both sides of an issue, instead of just proclaiming something and expecting everyone to...just delivered from the throne so to speak. One of the things that I learn, and all of us writers have to learn this, is to be concise, and know not to get to wordy. And that's difficult to

do, because every golden word is worth including. You know that. Sometimes you can find some ways to be efficient. Some time I think that can destroy personality, because you don't have enough spare words that can give you flavor. A lot of good writers include that sort of flavor. The main thing that editorials have to express is sincerity. People will forgive you for being stupid, as they know you are coming from a heartfelt place, that it's from a sincere viewpoint. And also to give reasons, it's not ...

### **Evidence?**

Reasons why you think that. Trying to justify what you say. 'Here it is, here is what I think, what do you say?' That's all an editorialist can do. As I say this quite often to groups, and maybe I said this to you group, if everyone just paid attention to what I write and do what I suggest everyday, the society and the world would be just fine. Somehow editorial writers don't seem to get that prerogative.

### **So would you say that what of your many obligations as an editorial writer is persuasion?**

That's all there is to it.

### **Is that your ultimate goal?**

Well, persuasion. And sometimes its just exposition. For some editorials you don't really have a conclusion, here are something's you have to understand about this issue. Or ways to think about this issue. Or sometimes, like recently, in the Fifth Ward race, I didn't endorse a candidate. Here's where they are coming from, here's what I think there attributes are, but this is a decision that the people living in the Fifth Ward are going to have to make. They're different, but from this vantage point I just decided that all would viable, all would be decent council people. And so what do you think Fifth Ward? And when I think some are truly more qualified than others I will pick one. And again it's my opinion and everybody knows it. People know they have the right to disagree. And I hope that one thing that comes across is that people can disagree without making me mad. I think that style tends to reduce the ad homonym personal attack nature to me. If they think I'm fair about something, they'll usually be fair back.

### **So when you are picking a candidate, persuasion is important. You want to persuade them to vote for this person.**

I try to describe why the person would be the best choice, and of course, persuasion is the best choice. A lot of newspapers don't endorse candidates for public office. It's kind of a treacherous thing. If you have eight people, if you have several people in a race, and you are bound to pick only one, you automatically made seven enemies and one friend. People get upset, and the worst thing I have found is not that I don't pick Bill, and pick Joe, it's if I give them sort shrift. And there are some candidates who I don't interview,

because they are so idiotic, and they say, “he didn’t interview that person’ to me. That’s an argument for talking with them.

**What do you think your reputation in community is?**

I don’t know, I think it’s all right. I mean I have been involved with a lot of things that people disagree with. And sometimes there are claims of conflict of interest. And some newspaper editorial writers refuse to be engaged with the community at all, they have this sterile view that they would be conflicted and that their opinions would be discounted because of that. I don’t think that makes sense. It depends on how you come across, and on some of these issues if you have some sincere reason to work on this. A good example recently is that I’m on the board of the state historical society. We suggested that the city condemn some property for our use. And that got into some issues of eminent domain. And one of the criticisms was he was on the board, and they said that I would benefit from this facility. And I just sat back and said that’s crap. I’m working for the benefit of the community. So yes I’m on the board, so what? As long as you’re operating from an honest position, and if you’re doing something wrong, then you deserve to be caught off base. If you’re not, to be running the bases is OK. How’s that for a nice little metaphor.

**I like that. So you mentioned the idea of eminent domain, do you think that, one of the criticisms that people had was that you were more on the side of business in the community than any other agency or structure within it. How would you respond to that?**

Well, it depends on what’s happening. There was time when I was criticized more for being a flaming liberal than anything, and that was during the days during the equal housing opportunities.

**Someone actually mentioned that.**

And that was before there was any law that required that people couldn’t discriminate people on the basis of their race. And I was very much in support of that, and the city council, I really urged this very strongly. And they finally passed a law outlawing housing discrimination, but that they required a public vote in support of this decision. Then we had this very heated election, and we ended up with 45 percent of people approving it. Within a year after that, the only other city had a law like that was Flint, Michigan. And then soon after the Supreme Court ruled that they could not discriminate. Fair housing was an entitlement people should have. I think all that to do over this issue was how readily this community accepted that. That’s just an example, of how evolution changes. Over time the laws both locally and nationally, became, I wouldn’t say liberal, but recognized civil rights more and more obviously. The issues I used to be criticized for being too liberal are not gone. For example, I came out against affirmative action, because I felt like it was reverse discrimination, it didn’t make any sense. So then I get criticized, by the socialist, left wing groups, liberals.

**I'm glad you brought up the housing. One of the people I interviewed mentioned that you evolved quicker than the community did.**

Really?

**Most of the people I interviewed came from your generation and that was part out of necessity, so that I could get the thoughts of people who have lived here a while and have experience with your work.**

**A few of them said that they agree with your evolution on certain issues and some do not.**

**You mentioned earlier that one of the good traits of an editorial writer is giving could weight to both sides. Do you think you are good at that? Are you fair?**

Well, I'm going to explain both sides, but I'm not going to be fair. If I definitely favor one side or the other. I'll be fair in explaining both sides of the issue, what the other faction's argument is, and very quickly I'll try to shut it down.

**This is your opinion.**

Or sometimes there are faulty facts that involved, they believe that such and such will happen, and that's just not borne out by the facts, and I'll explain that too.

On another hand, it could be just some bad policy that we shouldn't do that because it harms certain people or society. That's just more subjective. In the end, it's subjective, but it should based on as much rationality as can be brought to the situation. It's not fun, to be it in simplistic way, if it's not subjective. It has more verve and flavor. You want people to react to it. People want something to disagree with as well as agree with. And if I get the best reaction, 'I didn't think about that.'

**I'd say, yeah, a few more people are more willing to be persuaded by you, but I guess the best term I can use to describe their opinions after reading your work afterward, is a re-evaluation, or an opening of their mind.**

I assume they end up disagreeing.

**Yes, but they are willing to take that ride with you.**

When you think about it, that's all an editorial can do. Just put an idea out, people to chew on it, either to think about again or for the first time. There's nothing more to it. Editorial writers who think that their goal or expectation should be to persuade people, to cause action, are barking up the wrong tree.

**You don't mind it when it happens though?**

I don't mind it when it happens. Sometimes it does. But some are not overtly aware of it; candidate endorsements might have that effect on them. 'I don't know about this candidate, I want to know what you think about him.' If you do know them, in particular this happened in the last election. How many people do you think I persuaded in the last election? Because people have more fixed opinion about it, they are more aware about it.

**One of the people I spoke to, described you as the "benevolent dictator."**

[Hank laughs]

A dictatorship would be nice. You know there was a project the j-school used to do that they would try to find out what the power structure was. Who are the people that can get together and decide things? Make the city decisions. One of the best reporters the j-school had, and she worked for the Post-Dispatch, her name was Virginia Young. She wanted to do the project again, so they let her. And what she found was that there was no such thing. People have positions of temporary influence, the mayor, the city manager. Modern Columbia, we used to have that back then certain people had some leverage that you had to check with them before you did something. We don't have that anymore. You just don't have that overt system of control. You've seen that with the EZZ thing.

**How long do you think you'll be writing editorials?**

I'm going to for 42,000 [Hank laughs]. Seriously, doing what I am is a good way to stay alive. When you get older, if you don't use your mind for something that requires, what is it called, those synapses? And it doesn't have to be this. I know other people do crossword puzzles, instead of just sitting in front of the television. And there are good things on television, I don't mean that. So for that reason I'll just do it for as long as I can. I think I'll know, when it's becoming too hard. Maybe one of these days I'll quit.

**After you stop, who will take over?**

There are some people here. My wife, Vicki, she used to be a publisher in Fulton, she wrote the editorials over there. But what she is doing here now, I don't think she'll want to do that. She is publisher here now, she handles all the business here now. Jim Robertson. My son Andy would be interested. He was an AP reporter in his earlier life. Maybe we will have a few people do it. That would be the editorial board, which we haven't had here.

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