

POOR MEDIA, RICH DEMOCRACY: HOW ECONOMICS AND TECHNOLOGY
AFFECT CONSTRUCTION OF NEWS PROCESSES

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PATRICK FERRUCCI

Dr. Tim Vos, Dissertation Supervisor

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

POOR MEDIA, RICH DEMOCRACY: HOW ECONOMICS
AND TECHNOLOGY AFFECT
CONSTRUCTION OF NEWS PROCESSES

presented by Patrick Ferrucci

a candidate for the degree of doctor of philosophy

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance

Professor Tim Vos

Professor Stephanie Craft

Professor Charles Davis

Professor Earnest Perry

Professor Victoria Johnson

DEDICATION

To my parents, Paul and Diane Ferrucci, who have always supported me in everything ... whether it was writing news, covering bands “nobody knows or cares about” or spending an eternity in school. I could not have asked for better folks and I’m eternally lucky and grateful for them.

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Patrick Ferrucci

Dr. Tim Vos, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

The journalism industry currently resides in a state of perpetual change, with technology and economics affecting both how journalists produce news and what news looks like when consumed. This ethnography examines the news construction processes at a digitally native news nonprofit. Gatekeeping theory, Edgar Schein's theory of culture and John McManus' market theory for news production guide this investigation of how influences affect news coverage on five levels: the individual, the communication routines, the organizational, the social institution and the social system. Through more than 360 hours of observation over a 10-week period and 18 long form, in-depth interviews with professional journalists at the *St. Louis Beacon*, this study found that in the absence of a traditional newsroom, new routines develop; leadership impacts the culture of a news organization more than a traditional one; a weak market orientation significantly affects news construction processes; and the *Beacon* engages in a new type of public journalism. These findings suggest that organizational-level influences are increasingly becoming more powerful than any other level of influence on news construction.

I. INTRODUCTION

The journalism industry currently faces a time of change, with broad economic and technological transformations affecting both how news is produced and what it looks like when consumed (Lowrey & Gade, 2011). These changes have made scholarly arguments concerning the definition of a journalist become more contested and relevant than ever before (Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White, 2009; J. Rosen, 1999). The uninviting financial realities ensnaring traditional legacy media organizations and the technological developments allowing for more journalistic competition have contributed to the numerous new market models for news production that consistently appear online (Bruns, 2005; Kaye & Quinn, 2010).

As the news industry continues to change, more work that examines how news is produced is vitally needed (Singer, 2008). Beam (1998) argued that regardless of market model, all news organizations are, to an extent, market driven. Even a nonprofit newsroom needs readers and some form of capital to exist; so while that type of newsroom may be weakly market oriented, it is still market oriented. The extent to which an organization is market oriented affects content (Beam, 2003). Beam and others conducted research identifying content differences due to market orientation, however scholars have not yet formulated how market orientation alters construction of news processes.

Deuze (2008) contended that media producers are currently experiencing the greatest changes to their field since the days of the penny press' introduction. He echoed the argument that two types of factors are currently causing this state of flux: economic

and technological. However, he wrote, it is impossible to separate the two since they go hand in hand. This dissertation examines both types of factors through the observation of a digital newsroom that utilizes a relatively new market model that is weakly market oriented.

Singer (2008) posited mass communication researchers need to utilize ethnography to study digital newsrooms because a digital newsroom, while similar in numerous ways, is fundamentally different from a traditional print or broadcast newsroom. Digital newsrooms do not simply employ more technology and force journalists to adapt to changing tools; they profoundly affect the newsgathering routines and news dissemination process (Kaye & Quinn, 2010; Paterson & Domingo, 2008). The news people read online is different from the news people read in print or view on television (Hollifield, 2011). For example, Boczkowski (2005) conducted ethnographies of three digital newsrooms connected to print counterparts and found that even when the same journalists produced stories for multiple media, routines varied and content differed.

The theoretical perspective most useful for examining how news is produced in a digital newsroom is gatekeeping theory, which explains the process by which a single piece of information gets chosen, transformed, and morphed into the digestible messages that reach people every moment of every day (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Changes in news organizations brought about by technology and economics have transformed the gatekeeping process (Singer, 2008). Economic shifts have resulted in fewer journalism workers in newsrooms, and thus the amount of layers a story passes through has been reduced in the vast majority of instances (Lowrey & Gade, 2011). This means there are

fewer gates for a story to pass through before it reaches an audience, and thus there are fewer gatekeepers (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Gatekeeping theory describes construction of news processes and examines the influences on journalists that shape how news is produced (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Recent work incorporates the hierarchical influences on news coverage developed by Shoemaker and Reese (1996). Shoemaker and Vos (2009) proposed studying gatekeeping on five levels of analysis: the individual, the routines, the organizational, the social institution, and the social system. Technology has become one of those influences, and it can be an influence on multiple levels (Singer, 2011). The journalism industry has long incorporated new technologies into communication routines (Dooley, 2007), but the digital age has resulted in the biggest changes to the field in almost a century (e.g., Deuze, 2008; Dooley, 2007; Kaye & Quinn, 2010; Paterson & Domingo, 2008). Shoemaker and Vos (2009) argued in favor of studying gatekeeping theory across different mediums. Studies of gatekeeping in digital newsrooms can help scholars and professionals identify how issues of technology and economics shape the news construction process (Singer, 2008).

Before a researcher can ascertain and study a news outlet's construction of news processes, they must understand the organization's culture. Schein (2006) argued that understanding the culture of any organization requires time spent in the field. This study, utilizing Schein's theory of culture, provides an organizational analysis of the culture of a news organization; understanding the culture allows for understanding of construction of news processes.

Puijk (2008) argued that to truly understand construction of news processes, ethnography is the best method. He wrote that changes have resulted in "new production

modes, changes in organization structures and ways of thinking about readers and viewers” (p. 29). A study of online newsroom culture is the finest manner to answer questions involving all those levels (Paterson & Domingo, 2008). Ethnography is the study of culture. The method originated in the field of anthropology and researchers employed it to study different cultures of people, usually from foreign lands (Bird, 2009). Researchers must immerse themselves in that culture and get as close as possible to understanding the language used. The language is not necessarily foreign to the researcher, but each culture has its own language. Over time, ethnography became popular in more fields including communication. Singer (2008) argued that we could not truly understand a news organization without ethnography. She wrote that to understand the organization’s culture is to understand the organization. Spradley (1979) stated that ethnography is the art of describing a culture. He posited that a researcher must learn the observed culture’s language because that is how people transfer shared knowledge.

The primary goal of this dissertation is to understand how technology and economics affect news processes. Scholars (e.g., Gitlin, 1978; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; Singer, 2008) have called for more ethnographic work into the production of news process. This research will assist us in understanding how these economic and technological changes manifest themselves into news content. Lowrey and Gade (2011) identified the many possible ways changes in media organizations can and are affecting the news, and Kaye and Quinn (2010) discussed the many different types of news organizations possible in the digital age. This dissertation focuses on one such category of news organization, a type that has emerged in numerous cities around the country.

A second goal of this work is to further gatekeeping theory by identifying influences on journalists on numerous levels of analysis. Gatekeeping has been explored primarily through studies of traditional news organizations (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009), but as news production continues to move online, so must research in this area.

Finally, technology has allowed news production to become a much more interactive process (Lowrey & Gade, 2011), and gatekeeping theory should better identify and incorporate the role of the audience as an influence on journalists and a growing factor in the news construction process. In the late 1980s through the late 1990s, traditional news organizations experimented with a type of journalism called public journalism (Glasser, 1999; Merritt, 1998; J. Rosen, 1996). Glasser (1999) and J. Rosen (1999) conceptualized public journalism as a practice focused on engagement that altered journalistic routines by compelling journalists to become activists on behalf of democracy and self governance. This occurred through involving the community, or audience, in news decisions and agenda setting. Since the beginning of the 21st century, newsrooms have by and large stopped practicing public journalism and scholars have studied this demise through successes and failures (Coleman & Thorson, 2002; McChesney, Newman, & Scott, 2005; Nip, 2008; Schudson, 1999). However, easier and more widespread access to the internet has made it simpler for organizations to accomplish many of the goals of public journalism (Merritt, 1998). The last decade has seen the birth of multiple web-only news organizations that have taken the principles of public journalism and adapted them to a new, nonprofit business model (Bass, 2006). The routines enacted to accomplish the principles of public journalism affect construction of

news processes. This dissertation explores how these routines—and specifically the audience’s role in these routines—influence journalists.

Thus, this dissertation focuses on the current state of the journalism industry, and how changes affect construction of news processes. Economic and technological changes fundamentally alter the consumption of news (e.g., Klinenberg, 2005; McChesney & Nichols, 2010; Russell, 2007); this dissertation’s case study employs ethnography to better understand changes to news production.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

To understand how economic and technological factors affect construction of news processes, numerous concepts must be unpacked. This review of the literature begins by outlining and discussing the relevant literature pertaining to four concepts central to this dissertation: newsroom culture, market orientation, technology and public journalism. Following those sections, this review outlines the dissertation's theoretical foundation to highlight how it can further gatekeeping theory. This can only be accomplished the concepts included in this dissertation are defined and understood.

News is constructed by journalists, which means changes to these processes affect content (Reese & Ballinger, 2001; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). This dissertation explores these processes; therefore it is vitally important to understand the various potential influences on journalists through the lens of gatekeeping theory.

A. Newsroom Culture

Organizations. Weeks and Galunic (2003) wrote that the goal of all organizations revolves around memes, which are units that carry cultural symbols, ideas and practices. Weeks and Galunic argued that organizations preserve, replicate and distribute cultural meanings. Morgan (2006) asserted that organizations rely on a series or set of rules and norms that provide members with a formal structure. Leaders transfer these implicit and explicit rules from other organizations, but, over time, each organization will acquire its own set of practices (Schein, 2006). The main reason organizations develop this structure is to maximize its ability for economic gain (Argyris, 2004).

The commercialization of the press in the United States began during the middle part of the 19th century (Baldasty, 1992). Private citizens and families began purchasing newspapers as for-profit enterprises throughout this moment in time. This began a shift away from political party-owned news organizations and toward the type of market models still prevalent today (Baldasty, 1992). Before this period, the main goal of a news organization revolved around spreading a particular ideology; this shift resulted in a strong focus toward profit (Bagdikian, 2004). Many owners of news organizations began treating newspapers as primarily a business (Baldasty, 1992).

News organizations focused equally on producing news and generating profits through advertising and circulation (Baker, 1994). In these early days of the commercial press, a distinct line evolved between the newsgathering and financial sides of the organization. For example, the work of the people in advertising became completely separate from the work of reporters and editors (Schudson, 2003). As time went on, a struggle between the business and editorial sides of newspapers arose, as ownership and management attempted to influence editorial independence. Baldasty wrote that “circulation managers defined a successful newspapers as one with high circulation and prompt delivery, and they saw the editor as a major obstacle to those goals” (p. 82). In the early-to-mid portion of the 20th century, news organizations began explicitly discussing the “wall of separation” between the newsgathering and financial sides of the organization; it became routine to disconnect these parts of the organization to minimize influence (McManus, 1994).

This does not mean the wall eviscerates influence; in fact, studies have found that the wall is becoming more and more porous (Pompilio, 2009). An economic downturn

over the last two decades forced news organizations to adopt new strategies to sell more product and attract more readers and viewers (Kaye & Quinn, 2010). Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, and Wilhoit (2007) found that journalists believe economics continue softening the wall of separation. And a recent survey found journalists now view business pressures as the principal threat to journalism (Journalism, 2008).

Organizational culture. Schein (2006) defined organizational culture as a configuration of shared basic assumptions

learned by a group as it solved problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (p. 17).

Leadership plays a large role in shaping organizational culture. Leaders provide the vision and communicate these ideas through conversations, resource allocation, apportionment of power, and instatement of organizational structures and processes (Schein, 2006). A detached or disengaged leader can severely and negatively affect an organization's culture (Kets De Vries, 2001).

Leadership at news organizations shifted considerably in the last three decades (Bagdikian, 2004; McManus, 1994). Throughout the bulk of the 20th century, news organization owners consisted of wealthy people or families living in the organization's area. Recently, since the mid 1980s however, news organization ownership began consolidating (Bagdikian, 2004). Corporations now own and control the vast majority of organizations.

Some of these corporations specialize in just media, but some purchased news organizations as a means to add more value to stock prices (Klinenberg, 2007). Bagdikian

(2004) found that only five corporations control more than three-quarters of the media consumed in the United States.

Klinenberg (2005) argued that this ownership shift significantly changed newsroom culture and how news organizations conduct business. Ownership not only affects the financial side of a news organization, but also the newsgathering side, further making the wall of separation porous (Beam, 2002). When a corporation wishes to purchase a news organization, it utilizes four strategies: buy from families and then go public with the news, thus raising capital; bring in new corporate managers to streamline production; make investments in digital communications; and establish as much synergy with other business ventures to cut costs (Klinenberg, 2005). Ownership affects leadership and that can have a profound effect on newsroom culture; however, ownership also dictates the market orientation of a news organization, which affects the routines, makeup and overall mission of a newsroom.

Theory of culture. Schein (2006), when defining and outlining his theory of culture, argued that elements shape an organization's culture on three distinct levels: artifactual, the espoused values, and the basic underlying assumptions. He wrote that to understand the culture of an organization and the way that one operates, a researcher must understand cultural influences from all three levels. He defines culture as a combination of the values, visions, norms, behaviors, symbols and systems that the organizational members share and proselytize. These cultural elements provide the least pliable characteristics of an organization, and members share and spread them implicitly and explicitly.

When joining an organization, members undertake a conscious and subconscious group learning process that slowly but effectively indoctrinates them to the organization's culture; when a new member fails to embrace culture, they typically leave the organization willingly or unwillingly (Gabriel, 1999). When an organization begins, leadership extensively shapes culture; leaders remain the largest influence on organizational culture (Schein, 2006). To understand organizational culture, a researcher must understand leadership (Kets De Vries, 2001). When a researcher embeds inside an organization and studies the culture and the leadership within at all three levels, the researcher can understand the organization's culture. Therefore:

RQ1: What is the organizational culture of the news organization studied?

RQ2: How does leadership contribute to the organizational culture of the organization studied?

RQ3: How does ownership structure contribute to the organizational culture of the organization studied?

B. Market Orientation

Beam (1998) wrote that all news organizations are market oriented. To be market oriented, he wrote, is to focus on potential customers' wants and that

the successful market-oriented firm identifies a potential market opportunity, selects a group of customers that it wants to serve and develops a strategy for efficiently meeting the wants and needs of those customers. The central business assumption is that long-run success depends on a strong, organization-wide focus on customer wants and needs (Beam, 1998, p. 2).

Even an organization not dependent on profit still needs to attract something to earn the capital necessary to produce content, or enough news consumers to make it worthwhile to continue. Strongly market-oriented newsrooms concern themselves more with profit; the main goal is to generate as much income as possible (Beam, 2001). Weakly market-

oriented newsrooms focus strongly on providing a service while also keeping the interest of its intended audience. A strongly market-oriented newsroom considers news a product, while a weakly market-oriented one looks at news as a service (Barnouw, 1997).

As news organizations moved from the early 20th century to the last two decades of that century, a shift toward stronger market orientations accelerated (Bagdikian, 2004; Barnouw, 1997; McManus, 1994). This turn occurred primarily because of a change from family ownership of news organizations to corporate ownership (Bagdikian, 2004; McChesney, 1999). Advertising became more vital as market orientation became stronger. A typical news organization generates the vast majority of its profits through advertising (Schudson, 2003). Baker (1994) noted that need for advertising makes journalism function under a dual-product model. Only consumers purchase a traditional product, such as a toaster; however, journalism must sell itself to consumers and advertisers. When a news organization is dependent on advertising and strongly market oriented, it is easier to affect content. Baker (1994) posited that the essentialness of advertising manifests itself in content through the news organization's favorable treatment of advertisers' products, ideas and subsidiaries; the goal of a creating content that induces a buying mood to incline readers or viewers to react favorably to advertisements; a reduction in partisanship and controversial elements in order to avoid offending advertisers' potential customers; and a focus on middle- to higher-income audiences whose purchasing power advertisers seek. The power of advertising reveals itself in the deterioration of the "wall" between the editorial and advertising departments of a newsroom (Beam, 1998). Beam (1998) found that the more strongly market oriented

a news organization was, the more often members of the editorial staff strategized with advertising and circulation departments on how to generate content.

Market theory for news production. In his book *Market-Driven Journalism*, McManus (1994) presents a theory combining classic elements of market theory with fundamental characteristics of how news organizations produce news. This theory says that “rational news departments should compete with each other to offer the least expensive mix of content that protects the interests of sponsors and investors while garnering the largest audience of advertisers will pay to reach” (p.85).

Traditional market theory posits that when markets work correctly, they possess certain characteristics. Main and Baird (1981) stated that in a market economy, consumers decide quality and value; producers will respond to consumers’ needs and desires; a market will self correct if not fulfilling those needs; consumers possess a freedom of choice; the market allocates society’s resources efficiently; and producers possess a motivation to succeed and innovate.

In the United States, corporations own and control the vast majority of news organizations and outlets (Bagdikian, 2004). The corporations adhere to market philosophies in most circumstances (Barnouw, 1997). McManus (1994) argued that commercial news organizations in the United States trade within four markets concurrently: the market for audience, in which firms compete for readers and viewers; the stock market, because most firms trade stock of their corporations and desire higher valuations; the advertising market, as most firms compete for advertising revenue; and a market for sources, as the firms compete for information to disseminate from sources. According to market theory, if these four markets operate efficiently and consistently,

news outlets should produce high-quality and immensely interesting news products because of success in the market for audience; successful news outlets should increase stock prices through the stock market and then make their product even stronger; entice numerous advertisers lured through large consumer numbers and a quality product; and a large amount of sources providing information because they desire the most thorough dissemination of their information (McManus, 1992, 1994; Meyer, 1987). However, news organizations and news consumers would agree this desired outcome so far eludes both parties (Gans, 2004).

The market theory for news productions introduced by McManus (1994) acknowledges the inherent tension between traditional market theory and the predetermined goal of journalism, which, he argued, allows for market failure for news organizations and news consumers. McChesney (2004) and other scholars posit that this tension alleviates when newsworthy and information of interest to the public aligns. However, often, information only satisfies one of those conditions. And therefore, McManus (1994) argued that serving the market can conflict with the serving the public. The stronger a news outlet's market orientation, the more it adheres to the market, while weaker market-oriented newsroom's prioritize serving the public.

Market orientation's effects on content. In a series of interviews, Pompilio (2009) found that newspaper journalists believe that, because of a shift toward news as a product, the wall between editorial and advertising has become porous. The author looked at how newspapers across the country now print more and more advertorial content. She found that some journalists abandoned ethical principles in order to assist the organization in earning higher profits. In another example of how market orientation

can affect content, Cleary and Adams-Bloom (2009) performed a content analysis of news programming during three network morning news shows. The scholars compared what they found with what the normative theories of the media believe should be found. It was concluded that more than one-fifth of all news was dedicated to promotional stories (89% of which was favorable), with more than 50% of those stories were about products produced by the network's parent company or advertisers. Farhi (2010) interviewed editors at a handful of news websites and at *The Washington Post* about how the emphasis on attracting more readers has affected content. He found that technology has allowed news organizations to better track and discover what readers want for news.

Cohen (2002) took Farhi's research question one step further and examined whether the McManus (1994) prediction that technology would help spread market-driven journalism is true. The researcher identified the tenets of market-driven journalism and then explored their existence in new organizations (newspapers, television and online) with web content. She finds "conflicts in commercial and journalist values pose a problem" (p. 542). Cohen concluded that "these market-driven conflicts undermine established norms of professional journalism" (p. 544). McManus (1994) found that newsrooms perceive technology adoption as a point of competition. For example, if a competitor installed a new system for tracking and predicting weather, a newsroom would see this and update its own technology. This results in organizations focusing on its perceived competition closely, placing a larger importance on exclusivity and insisting its competition does not provide unique coverage (McManus, 1994; Schultz, 2004). A weakly market-oriented news organization should concern itself far less with what its competition does.

Beam (2003) found that the more strongly market oriented a newspaper, the more frivolous news it produced, the less news about government it published and the more it focused on photos, info-graphics and a generally more pleasing visual style. Klinenberg (2005) noted that corporations have specific strategies when purchasing news organizations. All of these strategies involve the hiring or relocation of a corporate manager whose job it is to study the new property and decide how to streamline production and cut costs as much as possible. Strongly market-oriented newsrooms will feature as few journalists as possible (McChesney, 2004). This cutting of staff and the focus on stories that consumers want results in news that does not strengthen a democracy (Gans, 2004). McChesney (2004) identified profit motive as a reason United States citizens are not receiving the type of news necessary to sustain a thriving democracy. A weakly market-oriented news organization should therefore concern itself less with what its audience wants and more with what it needs (McManus, 1994). This distinction is important. A strongly market-oriented newsroom will explicitly make content decisions based on what it believes its intended audience wants to read (McManus, 1994). However, a newsroom that is more weakly market oriented will make content decisions based on what it believes will make for better journalism, not what will sell more (McChesney, 2004). This dissertation focuses on the constructions of news processes at a weakly market-oriented news organization where, theoretically, what the audience desires and the concerns of advertising should be less influential on journalists.

News and corporations. Bagdikian (2004) and Klinenberg (2007) found that when corporations take over news organizations, news becomes just another product that companies sell to consumers. Over time, corporate ownership of news organizations has

consolidated. Bagdikian (2004) argued that five conglomerate corporations own more than 80% of the news people consume. This concentration of ownership results in citizens only receiving the news that strongly market-oriented organizations tend to produce; the less diversity of news available, the less informed a citizenry can remain (Bagdikian, 2004). Hallin and Mancini (2004) argued that the United States produces very little content diversity due to this concentration of ownership. In a study that examined the cause of a newsroom's market orientation, Beam (2002) found that market orientation was entirely an organizational consideration. McManus (1994), in a study of broadcast news, found that market orientation was an organizational decision. Therefore:

RQ4: How does market orientation affect the construction of news processes in a weakly market-oriented digital newsroom?

RQ5: How do journalists in a digital newsroom perceive the influence of market orientation on construction of news processes?

RQ6: How does a weakly market-oriented newsroom conceive its competition?

C. Technology

The internet is the primary catalyst for technological change in the journalism industry (Singer, 2011). The proliferation of the internet in homes and, specifically, in newsrooms has shifted how journalists do their jobs and people consume information. Boczkowski (2005) argued that news organizations have spent the last two decades adapting to the rapid changes in technology, which have, in turn, affected construction of news processes. Because of this adaptation process, journalists have found that “proficiency with computer technology nonetheless has become central to the ability to do their jobs” (Singer, 2011, p. 216).

History. The newspaper industry took its first significant step toward embracing the digital world more than three decades ago in 1980 (Kaye & Quinn, 2010). Knight Ridder, then the second-largest media company in the United States, began a project called “Viewtron,” which examined ways the company could send news to subscribers through electronic means. The company shut the program down after spending \$50 million because it became unviable commercially. The industry continued to explore ways to embrace new technology over the last three decades. Significantly, in 1994, the *San Jose Mercury News* became the first large-circulation newspaper to launch a daily electronic version (Kaye & Quinn, 2010). In the late 1990s through the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, newsroom convergence became the buzzword in the journalism industry (Dailey, Demo, & Spillman, 2005). Converged newsrooms took on different forms in different newsrooms, but all involved combining technologies from previously discrete media such as print or broadcast (Singer, 2011). *The Tampa Tribune* became the most extensively publicized example of a converged newsroom when owner Media General spent more than \$40 million combining the company’s print newspaper and NBC affiliate (Colon, 2000). This combined print and broadcast newsroom became a symbol to news organizations around the United States as the future of news (Kaye & Quinn, 2010). Yet, while the industry as a whole, including trade magazines, discussed convergence as an ongoing transformation, the changes in Tampa did not become prevalent. Specific newsrooms adapted at their own pace, customarily determined by ownership (Lawson-Borders, 2003; Singer, 2004). In recent years, the adoption of technology has led to “backpack journalists” or “MoJos,” both terms to describe journalists working in the field while carrying on their bodies all the tools necessary to

file multimedia stories away from the newsroom (Lowrey & Latta, 2008; Singer, 2011). Another change in the industry due to technological development comes in the form of blogs (Kaye & Quinn, 2010). Aside from online spaces that allow citizens a place to publish thoughts online, blogs have become part of journalistic routines (Lowrey & Mackay, 2008). These journalism blogs, or “j-blogs,” have become spaces for reporters to publish shorter stories or pieces of information that did not make it into main stories (Singer, 2011). These changes ushered in the era of digital journalism (Boczkowski, 2005).

Technology in the newsroom today. Bosch (2010) defined digital journalism as news produced by news workers using digital tools such as publishing software and social networking sites. Digital journalism, she argued, is news produced for a digital environment. Technology has become a mainstay and necessity in newsrooms today (Paterson & Domingo, 2008). Singer (2011) defined technology associated with digital journalism as anything computer-based that has affected journalistic practices and routines. For example, technological developments include everything from email, laptops, tablets, cellphones and digital voice recorders, to blogs, self-publishing tools and inexpensive digital video recorders. Each of these advents and other similar tools have allowed journalists to perform their functions “simultaneously easier and harder” (Singer, 2011, p. 218). Not only has technology and, in particular, the shift toward digital journalism, changed the way journalists do their jobs, but it has also allowed the audience to become an integral part of the news construction process (Singer, 2011). Perigoe (2009) wrote a history of the evolution of digital news and concluded that the effects have been mainly negative. These consequences include a dearth of investigative

journalism, a blitzkrieg of less “pure news” such as blogs or social-media driven snippets, and a larger amount of inaccuracies published. Perogoe (2009) concluded that while the evolution of digital news has contributed to these deleterious effects, economic changes have contributed equally.

Lowrey and Gade (2011) wrote the role of digital technologies has, over decades, changed in journalism. Klinenberg (2005) described how technology has become prevalent in journalism over the last decade. Klinenberg, similar to McManus (1994), found that over the last two decades media ownership consolidated. Klinenberg focused his work on how this consolidation has included technology. The study found that when media companies look to expand, four things happen. First, the company buys a news organization from a family; it then brings in a new corporate manager to streamline production and cut costs and employees; it then makes investments in digital technologies; and finally attempts to use that technology to cut more costs across the organizations it owns. Klinenberg discovered journalists do not believe advances in technology change work routines. However, Klinenberg argued the changes completely alter the production of news process.

How technology changes construction of news processes. Numerous studies examined how construction of news processes changed through the adoption of digital tools. Cawley (2008), through ethnography, studied an Irish newsroom, comparing its print operation with its online operation. He found that the online journalists had more roles; for example, this manifested itself in digital journalists acting as both reporters and editors and thus eliminated one level of gatekeeping. Overall, Cawley posited that the nuances in the separate newsrooms were quite different, and that this resulted in different

types of stories and distinctive news construction processes. A study of three online departments of major United States newspapers found that all three utilized more technology and the results included very different content than their print counterparts (Boczkowski, 2005). The study found that when organizations introduce digital technologies to the newsroom, new institutionalized routines develop and more content becomes user-generated. Cohen (2002) and Schultz (2007) both found that digital technologies have created a larger emphasis on being first. Since news spreads online much quicker and allows people to consume news from more outlets, the goal of publishing information quickly and breaking stories has become a more central and expressed goal. Beam, Weaver, and Brownlee (2009) conducted a survey of journalists to understand how industry change has affected journalists. The research showed that change driven partly through technology had resulted in an alteration of how journalists perform their jobs.

Bruns (2005) studied how technology has changed construction of news processes. His analysis introduced the concept of gatewatching, an alternative to gatekeeping. His argument is that before digital newsrooms, control was in the hands of journalists and gatekeeping primarily focused on control of output. For example, Shoemaker (1991) posited that gatekeeping concerned what events became news, thus gatekeepers controlled the output of construction of news processes. While technology has affected construction of news processes, studies have yet to show how it directly impacts news selection (Paterson & Domingo, 2008). The emergence of digital journalism has resulted in news organizations employing fewer journalists, which has created fewer layers of gatekeepers (Lowery & Gade, 2011).

This dissertation examines a news organization that embraces technology and only publishes online. Its main competition in covering its city is a large, corporate-owned print daily. Because the completely digital newsroom does not factor a print newspaper into its decisions, news routines can be decidedly different (Paterson & Domingo, 2008). The vast majority of previous literature published concerning the effects of technology on journalism focuses on traditional legacy media, not the numerous different market models consistently emerging (Hindman, 2011). This dissertation examines a market model becoming popular across the country, one that is nonprofit and utilizes grant funding and community donations to carry out its journalistic mission. However, due to its limited funds relative to legacy media, the construction of news processes will more than likely vary from those studied in previous examinations of digital journalism linked to traditional newsrooms. Therefore:

RQ7: How does construction of news processes incorporate technology?

RQ8: How do journalists discuss technology in a weakly market-oriented digital newsroom?

RQ9: How does technology allow non-journalists some control in output?

D. Public Journalism

History. Public journalism was a movement that began in the 1980s as a means to cultivate civic life and be a catalyst for public discourse; its main concern was the health of American democracy (Merritt, 1998; J. Rosen, 1996). At first, the techniques of public journalism were used only for special projects (J. Rosen, 1994), but, over time, many of these techniques became commonplace (Glasser, 1999).

A review of literature (e.g., Blazier & Lemert, 2000; Charity, 1995; Corrigan, 1999; Glasser, 1999; Glasser & Craft, 1996; Lee, 2001; McChesney et al., 2005; Merritt,

1998; Nip, 2008; J. Rosen, 1994, 1996, 1999; Schudson, 1999) suggests that there are four undisputed tenets of public journalists. Public journalism should engage the community through an open dialogue; let ordinary people have power to help set news agendas; make the news more digestible and easy to understand; and report on issues in a way that galvanizes, not frustrates the community. Rosen (1994) and Merritt (1998), the established originators of public journalism, posited that public journalism should primarily aim to engage. Rosen (1999) argued that to engage, journalists should not construct news to simply inform, but also to assist people in putting the knowledge gained into action. Journalists need “to frame things from citizens’ perspective and help with the problem solving, not the blaming” (p. 148).

Engagement. McManus (1994) identified the audience as a key component of a strong market orientation. For market-driven journalism to succeed, journalists must understand the wants and interests of their audience. Gans (1979) conducted his landmark ethnography of television and magazine newsrooms prior to the commencement of the media’s shift toward a more market-driven focus. He found that journalists in the newsrooms observed did not hold even a functional understanding of their audiences. News workers in these audiences discussed an “invented audience” to justify decisions concerning news coverage. These reporters and editors also relied on leadership for insight into audience. Despite this lack of knowledge, journalists working in organizations with strong or weak market orientations aim to understand their audiences; this allows them the knowledge necessary to craft news the audience wants or needs.

The public journalism movement, however, moved the field beyond simply conceptualizing audience; it involved the audience in the newsgathering and reporting

process (Rosenberry & St. John, 2010). Older and more traditional forms of communicating with the audience no longer sufficed as a citizen-engaged press obligated deep citizen involvement. “Traditional letters-to-the-editor, generally carrying no obligation from a journalist to interact with the letter writer, would no longer be sufficient” (Marchionni, 2013, p. 133).

Newsrooms across the country began engaging audiences through town-hall-style meetings designed around fostering discussion and debate concerning community issues (Nichols, Friedland, Rojas, Cho, & Shah, 2006). The results of these experiments varied. While more people became part of the news conversation, the goal of public journalism, researchers consider actual effects on content minimal or nonexistent (Nip, 2008).

Rosenberry and St. John (2010) posit that the proliferation of the internet allows journalists the ability to converse with its audience in an easier fashion. Technology also allows journalists the ability to better understand its audience—it can provide reams of data about readers and viewers. This data lets news workers understand many different characteristics about audience behavior, preferences and how people interact with stories (Napoli, 2011). This type of technology also allows readers to further discussion and engagement through sharing content over social media. The vast majority of newsrooms across the United States utilize technology to help understand their audience (McKenzie, Lowrey, Hays, Chung, & Woo, 2011). Rosenberry and St. John (2010) theorize that through established public journalism techniques and this new easier connection to the audience, journalists can now better engage audiences than ever.

Usage. Parisi (1997) examined how daily newspapers conducting public journalism projects constructed news. He found the papers utilized less “dominant

ideology and fundamental journalistic narrative assumptions” (p. 681). However, he also found that when the newspapers completed the projects, journalists returned to using traditional ideologies and narratives. McGregor, Fountaine, and Comrie (2000) used content analyses to examine the differences between traditional and public journalism coverage of a 1996 election in New Zealand. The scholars compared the conventional coverage of all 1993 electoral coverage with all the coverage from 1996, and then compared conventional coverage to public journalism coverage from 1996. The researchers found distinct differences when comparing 1996 New Zealand election coverage. The conventional papers employed typical horse-race coverage, while reporters employing public journalism focused stories on people, narratives, and how issues affected citizens.

While public journalism fell out of favor in newsrooms across the country by the end of the 20th century (McChesney et al., 2005; Nip, 2008; Schudson, 1999), the influx of technology has allowed many of its tenets to survive (Merritt, 1998). Bass (2006) and Kaye and Quinn (2010) argued that many digital journalism organizations have taken principles of public journalism and incorporated them into construction of news processes. Public journalism projects fundamentally altered how news organizations constructed news primarily by changing journalistic routines. Decisions concerning the implementation of public journalism happened at an organizational level (Rosen, 1994); the ensuing changes in content occurred through the use of different types of sources and utilizing the public in different ways. While control of news content was still focused with journalists, the public had more input (J. Rosen, 1996).

Public journalism conformed to a more idealistic view of the press (Glasser, 1999), but many scholars also simply labeled it as a marketing technique to increase circulation and improve the news organizations' reputation with its community (e.g., Blazier & Lemert, 2000; Carpenter, 2008; Haas & Steiner, 2006). In a four-year, longitudinal study of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Gade and Perry (2003) surveyed a newsroom in flux. The researchers began their examination when the *Post-Dispatch*, a newspaper with one of the better reputations for quality in the country, hired a new editor intent on incorporating public journalism into the newsroom. The researchers found that, over time, *Post-Dispatch* journalists found the implementation of public journalism as solely a marketing gimmick aimed to improve circulation and overall finances and not better the newspaper's quality.

However, without the robust financial dependencies that strongly market-oriented news organizations face, weakly market-oriented digital newsrooms are potentially able to accomplish the idealistic goals of public journalism without the need for as much financial profit and non-economic benefits such as reputation building (Carpenter, 2008). This dissertation examines how a nonprofit news organization can engage in many of the routines and attempt to accomplish many of the goals of public journalism, long after the pronounced death of the movement. This study will ascertain how and why the selected news organization accomplishes this and identify how this new version of public journalism differs. Therefore:

RQ10: How does the news organization employ the established tenets of public journalism?

RQ11: How does technology allow journalists to accomplish goals of public journalism in a digital newsroom?

E. Gatekeeping Theory

Gatekeeping theory argues that there are forces that constrain or facilitate the flow of information through the message construction process (Shoemaker, 1991). This is not a linear progression. After an event occurs, information about it is then chosen by a journalist and entered into media channels; then, as it passes through the gates and is affected by multiple levels of influence, a frame and a story is crafted (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). This information can pass through several gates, which are decision points that allow gatekeepers to choose which information passes through to another gate manned by a gatekeeper. The larger the newsroom, the more gates information must pass through before it becomes news (Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978).

Kurt Lewin introduced the concept of gatekeeping. However, Lewin's original model did not explain construction of news processes, but rather the channels food went through to move from gardens or stores to dining room tables. He explained a process that highlighted numerous gates this food must go through to make it to the table (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Lewin also identified two distinct channels it could take to arrive at its final destination: the buying and the gardening channel (Lewin, 1947). For Lewin, the gatekeeper was the "person or persons buying, transporting, and preparing the food items" (Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim, & Wrigley, 2001). While Lewin's research supports the notion that he had thought of applying gatekeeping to the media, the first academic to actually apply Lewin's theory to mass communication research was David Manning White (Singer, 2001). White was Lewin's research assistant at the University of Iowa.

Researchers study gatekeeping on five levels of analysis (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Shoemaker and Vos (2009) identify these levels as the individual, the communication routines, the organizational, the social institutional and social system. The individual level involves studying actual communication workers or journalists; the communication routines focuses on routines such as the beat system; the organizational level examines media ownership and other economic variables; the social institutional level looks at influence from outside organizations such as public relations firms or the government; and the social system level examines constructs such as culture. Gatekeeping studies have focused on one or more of these levels.

Individual level. Individuals who work as media members make decisions that affect construction of news processes. Many early gatekeeping studies examined this level. For example, in the seminal “Mr. Gates,” White (1950) examined how a wire editor chose or disregarded news items for publication in his paper’s pages. The study is lacking because White implies that Mr. Gates is making these decisions based completely on individual beliefs, that the decisions are “highly subjective” and “based on the ‘gatekeeper’s’ own set of experiences, attitudes and expectations” (White, 1950, p. 390). White does not account for the other levels of influence. However, there is a substantial amount of truth to the supposition that people’s individual traits affect news content or exert force on construction of news processes (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). For Mr. Gates, his background and values influenced his dislike of the Catholic Church, which led him to disregard most news about the religion. Similarly, scholars (e.g., Schudson, 2003) have argued that people come from very different backgrounds and will therefore have varying characteristics that might make them more prone toward certain types of stories.

Researchers replicated the Mr. Gates study. Snider (1967) discovered many of the same individual traits influencing news content when he studied the actual Mr. Gates again. Bleske (1991) studied how gender affected news construction. In his study of “Ms. Gates,” Bleske found that despite a differences in their newspapers’ respective circulation and newsroom size, Mr. and Ms. Gates gatekept their newspapers in virtually the same manner. The findings suggested “U.S. newspapers classify news in predictable ways” (Bleske, 1991, p. 97). Hirsch (1977) reanalyzed White’s original data. Hirsch categorized the stories the wire service sent to Mr. Gates and found that the stories used were categorically in proportion to the ones sent.

During news construction processes, journalists make decisions continuously, through all stages. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) wrote journalists consistently decide whether information belongs in one of two categories: “information we generally use and versus information we do not” (p. 37). Gandy (1982) found that journalists rarely if ever encounter information they consider distinctive; instead, the journalist will make a decision about the information’s newsworthiness based on a variety of factors including preexisting definitions of news.

While the previously discussed literature suggests that the power of the individual level of influence is waning at traditional media organizations, the continued adoption of digital journalism may be changing this supposition. First, as digital journalism spreads at both weakly and strongly market-oriented news organizations, it allows for organizations to hire fewer journalists. With fewer journalists, there are fewer layers of gatekeeping, which results in individual decisions becoming more powerful. Beam et al. (2009) found that journalists in the 21st century still believe their roles as newswriters closely

resemble those set forth in normative theory (e.g., Christians et al., 2009). This dissertation will examine how individual-level forces affect the construction of news processes in a digital newsroom.

Communication routines level. The routines level of analysis focuses on the practices of journalism professionals (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Many scholars consider it the most influential level and the one that exerts the most force on the media (e.g., Breed, 1955; Gans, 1979; Ryfe, 2009; Tuchman, 1978). Berger and Luckmann (1990) argued reality is socially constructed and that, over time, certain subjective truths become institutionalized. Socializing new members becomes easier the longer something has been institutionalized. Socialization happens when the gap between objective and subjective realities or truth becomes smaller. In the media, a longtime adherence to routines such as the beat system or norms such as objectivity resulted in institutionalization.

Gans (1979), Gieber (1964), and Tuchman (1978) both found that journalists rely on preexisting news values when determining news. Journalists adopted these news values as a means for categorization. Typically, news organizations hire journalists who then categorize information as news based on these news values, which come from a notion of what journalists and the audience believe is news. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) identify impact, timeliness, proximity, prominence and oddness as news values. Other studies such as Stempel (1962) and Galtung and Ruge (1965) found some organizations employ conflict, significance, positivity and negativity as news values. Although, in the digital age, Schultz (2007) found news values subtly shifting. His ethnography of a Danish newsroom unearthed what he considered the new news value of

exclusivity, along with traditional ones such as relevance, timeliness and sensationalism. He argued that the age of computers allows organizations the ability to change routines and incorporate fresh news values.

Breed (1955) observed a newsroom and noted that journalistic routines were so embedded in the culture, that journalists all performed their jobs in roughly the same way without thinking twice about it. Tuchman (1978) observed a concept she called “the newsnet,” which described how journalists “cast their nets” and found news. She found that journalists’ beats tied them to centralizing organizations, i.e., government (City Hall, courthouse) or large corporations. They would gather news from these organizations and use the same types of sources consistently.

Herman and Chomsky (2002) posited journalism’s profit motive led to the institutionalization of a reliance on official or expert sources. These routines became institutionalized enough to become part of journalists’ identities. For example, when Ryfe (2009) conducted a study of a newsroom with new leadership who altered traditional routines, the journalists observed did not know how to perform their jobs. At the mid-size daily newspaper, Ryfe (2009) found that when new leadership attempted to eliminate the established beat system with, for example, the court reporter no longer able to be at the courtroom, some news workers revolted by quitting. Gans (1980) observed that even when journalists perceived they employed agency, they mostly fell back on some specific institutionalized role due to the deep institutionalization of norms. Market orientation and the adoption of technology have changed how journalists do their jobs (Lowery & Gade, 2011).

Beam (2003) found how market orientation affects content, and changes in content results from a change in routine (e.g., Ryfe, 2009). Researchers have not examined how these routines change. Technology has resulted in numerous changes to the news industry (e.g., Lowery & Gade, 2011) and has affected the gatekeeping process (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Examining how routines are different in a digital newsroom is a vital addition to the literature (Singer, 2008).

A journalist works within a context that affects communication routines. While the vast majority of news organizations employ very similar routines (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996), the organizational context does matter. All organizations develop routines as a way to efficiently complete work, each utilize slightly different communication routines for a variety of reasons.

Organizational level. The organization level exerts force on construction of news processes. Beam (2003), in an analysis of the content produced by media organizations (newspapers specifically), found that more strongly oriented papers produced more feature news, more sports and more arts and entertainment. Strongly market-oriented papers also used more infographics, photos and other eye-grabbing techniques such as charts. Beam hypothesized that the more market-oriented papers would also provide less investigative news, but his findings did not support this. Ryfe (2009) most closely examined the routines level, but the organization hired the new editor to make the sweeping changes. And, most importantly, the editor would not have been able to make the changes without approval from bosses. Craft and Wanta (2004) found that editorial leadership can affect newsroom staffing. Their study showed that newsrooms led by men or women differed in makeup. Gans (1980) noted that culture is top-down. Therefore,

people from outside the newsroom primarily dictated the culture of the organizations he examined. He also noted that top-level editors were most susceptible to influence from the organization.

The organizational level also influences the size of an organization. The amount of employees working for a news outlet can affect construction of news processes (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009). Also, the organization level, specifically leadership and/or ownership, can set the direction of a news outlet (McChesney & Nichols, 2010). For example, Baisnée and Marchetti (2006) found that leadership consistently and implicitly—not explicitly—shaped news policies and how a European broadcast station decided on the newsworthiness of potential stories.

McManus (1994) argued that an organization's decision to be more market-driven affects content. It means more fluff news and a completely different conceptualization of both news and the audience. This results in a shift in how the newsroom views the public and its audience: Journalists in market-driven newsrooms no longer gather an audience to inform it, but rather to sell to it. In these cases, news is no longer a service, but a product. McManus argued that, much of the time, the organizational level is the most powerful influence on content, yet he acknowledged an argument that the extra-media level exerts even more force.

An organization is “a dynamic system of organizational members, influenced by external stakeholders, who communicate within and across organizational structures in a purposeful and ordered way to achieve a superordinate goal” (Keyton, 2005, p. 10). A superordinate goal is something so time consuming and so complex that no one person can achieve it on his or her own (Keyton, 2005). For a news organization, the

superordinate goal is to deliver a news product that accomplishes certain goals. These goals are dependent on the organization's market orientation (Beam, 1998).

Over time, organization members are socialized—consciously or unconsciously—into acting according to the organization's philosophies (Berger & Luckmann, 1990; Gabriel, 1999). Socialization is the process for teaching new members of a group, and it is what Gabriel (1999) described as the connection between the individual and an organization. Organizational level decisions dictate much of these organizational philosophies, including market orientation (McManus, 1994).

Previous studies have examined the influence organizational level market orientation can have on content. McChesney and Nichols (2010) argued that journalism's shift toward a very strong market orientation results in stories chosen to entice readers, which leads to material featuring more salacious content. To gain more readers or viewers, journalists rely on the same news values, yet will focus on details that are less newsworthy and more eye-catching (Barnouw, 1997). If the organizational level decides market orientation and the role of technology in a newsroom, then the makeup of this level exerts strong influence on newswriters. This dissertation examines a weakly market-orientated newsroom led by a journalist. In traditional legacy news organizations, executives outside the newsroom primarily make organizational-level decisions (McManus, 1994). With newsroom leaders determining these decisions, the expectation is that the news organization's construction of news processes will be different.

Social institutional level. The social institutional level of analysis, as noted by Shoemaker and Vos (2009) and Shoemaker and Reese (1996), consists of organizations and industries that exert influence on journalists, but are not actually part of a specific

journalism organization. These organizations or industries consist of, for example, advertisers, interest groups, government, markets, the audience, other media, public-relations firms or, as McManus (1994) noted, investors and stockholders. Because of how embedded news routines are, organizations such as interest groups can take advantage of news routines and disseminate their message more easily. For example, objectivity is an institutionalized norm in journalism (e.g., Schudson, 1978). Objectivity implores most reporters to get all sides of a story. This is a way that interest groups can form and exert force on the media. Feldstein (2010) detailed the manner in which the Nixon administration exploited journalistic routines to affect coverage and attain exposure for particular viewpoints. Advertisers also have significant influence on the press (e.g., Schudson, 2003; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Baker (1994) summarized numerous ways advertisers can influence the press, one being that advertisers want to sell their products and therefore only want to reach a certain audience. So newspapers, for example, do not aim to reach the most readers, but the right readers (Schudson, 2003). However, organizations can influence news construction processes positively, also. Gandy (1982) found that these “information subsidies” help the media by providing formatted and styled newsworthy information to journalists, who can then use their limited resources in other manners.

The government can influence construction of news processes in various organizations. Different countries pass different speech, libel and press laws that can severely affect news content (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Various government officials communicate with the press in different manners, which affect the ease with which a media organization can report and disseminate information. The government also creates

and enforces tax codes and laws, which can seriously influence how nonprofit organizations function. In the United States, nonprofits receive the luxury of forgoing most taxes. Nee (2013) found that nonprofit news organizations function at almost the behest of government. If the United States Congress changed any law allowing nonprofit news organizations tax benefits, most of these organizations would no longer exist (Nee, forthcoming). In the same way government can tangentially influence news, so can markets. News organizations, both for-profit and nonprofit, rely on funds for operation. News organizations find it more difficult soliciting advertising revenue in a down market (Baker, 1994). For nonprofits relying on grants and donations for operation, a poor economy can affect donors' monetary liquidity and the ability of grant-writing organizations to fund sizable grants (Nee, forthcoming).

Developments in technology, such as the proliferation of email and journalists' adoption of cellphones, have allowed extra-media forces to more easily influence content (Dreier & Martin, 2010). It provides outside organizations more direct access to newswriters. When organizations provide more access to advertisers, public-relations firms and interest groups, this affects newswriters, which in turn affects content (Herman & Chomsky, 2003). The more strongly market-oriented a news organization is, the more it places a need on advertising (e.g., Baker, 1994; Beam, 1998). This dissertation examines a completely digital newsroom with a weak market orientation. Because it is more reliant on technology, it should be more vulnerable to extra-media influences. However, its market orientation makes it less vulnerable. This dissertation studies this difference and makes conclusions concerning whether technology or market orientation make a news organization more susceptible to extra-media influence.

Social system level. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) wrote that his level of influence comes from the culture or the social system the news media exists in. For example, Herman and Chomsky (2003) call one of their five filters the “anti-communism” filter, although recently Chomsky has said that once the Cold War ended we can call it the “War on Terror” filter. Basically, the scholars’ argument is that cultures, in this case primarily the American culture, have certain presuppositions and characteristics, so there is an adherence to the status quo. A news story that is, say, anti-capitalism, would be framed in a way makes anything negative about capitalism negative. Hallin and Mancini (2004) argued that the way a media system develops and the culture that surrounds it is one way to classify the system, so therefore this level is influential on content.

News organizations are extensively influenced by news from the Western Hemisphere, primarily the United States (Allan, 2009; Hallin & Mancini, 2004). News traditionally travels from “the West to the rest” (Allan, 2009, p. xi). Schudson (2003) argued that the Digital Age changed almost everything we know about journalism, and that an examination of this new ecology is needed. He identified six changes that occurred in the West, but affected how journalists produce news in all area of the world. The proliferation of digital tools has blurred the line between journalist and news consumer; the difference between media such as an online news organization, a newspaper, a magazine or Twitter has become almost indistinguishable; the difference in old and new media almost does not exist anymore; the difference between professional and amateur journalists has become blurred; the differences between market models is more difficult to ascertain; and in strongly market-oriented newsrooms, the wall between news and business departments has become less clear. All of these changes have affected

the ecology of news and “given rise to a new set of journalistic principles and practices” (Schudson, 2003, p. 207). For these reasons, it remains very important to study how specific newsrooms draw these lines.

Hindman, Littlefield, Preston, and Newman (1999) examined how a community structures itself, both politically and ethnically, can influence coverage of ethnic minorities. They found that the more ethnically diverse a community is, the more likely editors will find stories concerning those ethnicities important. Overall, the study shows that the makeup of a direct community, not just a continent, or nation or even state can significantly impact coverage choices.

This dissertation will identify forces and influences at all levels of analysis affecting journalists in a weakly market-oriented digital newsroom. Through this process, it will be possible to understand how economic and technological changes in the industry are affecting content. Therefore:

RQ12: What influences the construction of news processes in the organization studied?

III. METHOD

This dissertation specifically focuses on how market orientation and digital technologies affect construction of news processes. Lowrey and Gade (2011) argued that these are the two factors currently changing the journalism industry. Not only does this study concern how both of these factors change how journalists do their job, but also how they are integrated into everyday, traditional routines and how they affect gatekeeping decisions. Finally, this study examines how both technology and market orientation affect how journalists incorporate everyday people into construction of news processes. This study accomplishes this by observing the culture of a weakly market-oriented digitally native newsroom.

A. Ethnography

Ethnography is the study of culture. Anthropologists created the method as a manner to study different cultures (Bird, 2009). Over time, more academic fields including communication have utilized ethnography. Singer (2008) argued that we could not truly understand a news organization without ethnography. She wrote that to understand the organization's culture is to understand the organization. Spradley (1979) posited that ethnography is the art of describing a culture, and we must first understand how the culture operates before we can begin to ask questions. Gitlin (1978) wrote that over time media effects has become the dominant paradigm in mass communication studies. However, while that paradigm examines what effects messages have on people, scholars need to be more concerned with why messages look the way do. Gitlin argued that media effects research simplifies processes that are very complicated, and a

paradigm informed by media sociology and utilizing ethnography can better understand these processes. Benson (2004) echoed Gitlin's argument by imploring media scholars to conduct more studies treating the media as the dependent variable. What this request means is that Benson believes different news organizations create different content due to a variety of reasons such as funding source, audience demographics and ownership. Scholars need to understand how those variables affect content (Benson, 2004). Lowery and Gade (2011) wrote that technology and market orientation go hand in hand in a newsroom, that people make these decisions on the organizational level. Paterson (2008) posited that researchers could best understand technological and economic changes through ethnography because any change "is embedded in an adoption process where social subjects make conscious or unconscious decisions that an observer can trace" (p.1).

Deuze (2008) said that the most important tenet of understanding news is comprehending how a newsroom operates. He argued that the culture of a newsroom is vitally important, and that the culture of online newsrooms is very different from their traditional counterparts. Bird (2009) reiterated that belief and wrote that ethnography could best illustrate the differences between "old and new" journalism. Singer (2008) argued that online newsrooms and traditional ones differ in numerous ways and researchers utilizing ethnography could best understand all levels of influence on construction of news processes.

Researchers can conduct an ethnography utilizing either grounded theory or traditional theory (Spradley, 1979). When researchers utilize grounded theory, they commonly begin research without specific questions to answer and aim to understand culture first and then relay this back to readers. A researcher employing traditional theory

will embark on ethnography aspiring to answer questions that will further and build theory. In this study, culture, gatekeeping theory and market theory will inform ethnography as to better understand construction of news processes.

Van Maanen (1988) wrote that understanding is the goal of ethnography; the purpose manifests itself in the ability to communicate the subjects' culture to readers. In the case of a news organization, an ethnography concerns understanding how and why it works the way it does (Paterson & Domingo, 2008). To perform ethnography, the researcher can utilize multiple methods (Van Maanen, 1988). This dissertation utilizes both observation and long-form, in-depth interviews.

Observation. Before a researcher can ask informed questions of the people studied, the researcher must fully understand what he or she observed (Spradley, 1979). The three keys to any in-depth qualitative study are describing, understanding and explaining (Hamels, et al., 1993). Spradley (1979) argued that the goal of observation is to grasp the observed's point of view and to realize his vision of the world. For this study, the researcher observed a weakly market-oriented digital newsroom.

Through observation, a researcher can understand the essence of an organization (M. Rosen, 1991). Berger and Luckmann (1990) theorized that people define culture, and that culture is simply a social construct. To understand an organization's culture, one must understand the people who make up the organization, and researchers accomplish this through an immersion into the organization (M. Rosen, 1991). A researcher must also acknowledge that through ethnography and the written representation of the study, the researcher's own interpretations will affect the final product (Van Maanen, 1988).

In-depth interviews. An interview is valuable because of the “wealth of detail that it provides” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 139). Spradley (1979) wrote that when conducting ethnographic interviews, researchers must find informants, not subjects or participants. The people are informants because they teach the researcher. Without the informant, it would be impossible to learn. Spradley wrote that to simply treat the people being studied as subjects means the researcher will attach his or her own meanings to what is happening. Van Maanen (1988) argued that ethnography is the description of culture relayed in a specific way depending on the audience. He wrote that researchers can study culture in numerous manners. However, he argued that all ethnography involves some participation on the part of the researcher. A researcher cannot simply observe without there being unintended consequences (Van Maanen, 1988). In ethnography, the people observed can become involved in the study and have their voices heard through interviews (Spradley, 1979).

Weiss (1994) wrote that interviewing gives researchers and readers a window to the past. He described the three functions of interviews: interpretation, summary and integration. Interviews allow researchers to understand how an interviewee sees the world (McCracken, 1988). There are several benefits to conducting in-depth interviews as part of an ethnography. Weiss (1994) surveyed reasons to conduct in-depth interviews: 1.) They are good for developing detailed descriptions; 2.) The method integrates multiple perspectives; 3.) It enables the researcher to describe processes; 4.) They help in developing holistic descriptions; 5.) It aids in investigating how events are interpreted; 6.) The method allows researchers to synthesize multiple points of view (pp. 9-11).

This dissertation began interviews once the researcher gained a firm grasp of the organization. The researcher conducted interviews with reporters, editors, business executives and board members of the news organization; this study represents all occupations connected to the organization. All informants answered from a set of the same questions (McCracken, 1988). However, the researcher asked follow-up questions for the purpose of clarification and elaboration (Weiss, 1994). And, also, sets of questions pertaining to specific tasks or actions undertaken by the interviewee were unique to each participant.

Reflexivity. When conducting an ethnography, a researcher must be aware of his or her own role as a participant and observer (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). When a researcher enters a foreign, already established environment, he or she will inherently affect the organization's culture (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). The researcher does not simply take on the role of passive observer; no matter how much or how little the researcher engages with members of the organization, the researcher is an active participant (Van Maanen, 1988). Therefore, researchers must acknowledge their own presence and role in the organization's culture and social reality constructed. Reflexivity, Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland, and Lofland (2001) argued, allows researchers to acknowledge their own role during the period embedded in a culture; it is also vitally important not to minimize and overstate this role. Goodall (1994) noted that a researcher must be aware of who they are and what biases they bring with them, so that these can be acknowledged and eliminated.

For this specific study, I must acknowledge that as a professional journalist for nine years, I had to fight the urge to interpret situations using prior experiences. Coffey

and Atkinson (1996) wrote that a researcher must present an organization's culture as the members of the organizations see it and behave within it as the researcher experienced it. Past experience at previous similar organizations cannot be part of the interpretation. Therefore, at all instances where I found myself making an inference based on my prior experience as a journalist, I tried to correct myself and ask an organization member for clarification.

B. Ethnographies Of Media Organizations

Studies of newsrooms have utilized ethnography in the past. Many classic media sociology studies combined both observation and interviews (Paterson & Domingo, 2008). Ethnographic sociological studies of media production have “created a solid theoretical corpus to describe rules, roles, and processes and analyze their interrelations and consequences” (p. 18).

Tuchman (1978), Breed (1955) and Gans (1979) conducted three of the most cited and influential ethnographies of newsrooms. The studies found that construction of news processes are heavily predisposed to communication routines level influence. The three focused most intently on institutionalized norms such as the beat system, objectivity, news values, centralizing institutions and more to explain news workers' behavior and why the news looked the way it did when published. Ethnographic studies have shown that changes in leadership can affect how journalists do their jobs (Ryfe, 2009). This finding is consistent with other ethnographies that illuminated how news values shifted in the digital age (Schultz, 2007), and how centralized institutions can affect how journalists construct news (Velthuis, 2006). Ethnography has allowed researchers to understand

media institutions in ways that would not be possible for researchers conducting experiments or surveys (Benson, 2004; Gitlin, 1978).

Ethnography and gatekeeping. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) wrote that comprehending the gatekeeping process revolves around understanding the influences on journalists as a happening becomes—or does not become—a story. For this study, watching the routines of news-making on the individual level will illuminate how news is constructed as “journalistic routines speak to functional and symbolic needs of the profession” (Ryfe, 2009, p. 1999).

Ethnography does not conclude until the patterns and routines observed become redundant and predictive (Van Maanen, 1988). I observed the selected news organization until new occurrences began to cease happening.

C. Studying An Organization

This dissertation will utilize the theoretical model set forth by Schein (2006) concerning how to study organizational culture. For Schein, culture is many things, but generally culture is the values, visions, norms, symbols, systems and behaviors the people of an organization share. Culture takes the form of the “elements of a group or organization that are most stable and least malleable” and the “result of a complex group learning process that is only partially influenced by leader behavior” (p. 5). When examining culture as he defines it, Schein distinguishes between three distinct levels of culture, or levels of analysis a researcher must observe when analyzing an organization: artifacts, espoused values and basic underlying assumptions.

Levels of culture. Artifacts are the surface level characteristics that one can observe easily. These can include observable things such as what we see, hear and feel.

They can also include products that an organization makes or owns, technology it uses, the logo of a place, clothing worn by employees, the layout of the office, etc. Basically, an artifact can be anything someone off the street who's never been inside the organization can observe simply by spending time in it. Schein is very careful to note that one must not read too much into artifacts at first. A researcher must enter an organization with an open mind and not interpret data at the artifactual level until more information is gathered. Implicit in this argument is that a researcher must gather data at other levels of analysis before giving meaning to data at the artifact level.

Espoused values are the center of the second level of culture and analysis. The organization verbalizes or publishes espoused values; they could, for example, be a part of a mission statement. While the organization makes espoused values public internally and/or externally, the organization does not necessarily follow these values in practice. Espoused values are ideas, goals and values that an organization acknowledges. These can be gleaned from documents such as original mission statements.

The final level of culture and analysis are basic underlying assumptions. These are unconscious beliefs shared by members of the organization. These evolve, for example, when a problem repeats itself numerous times and organizational members then solve it with the same solution. In theory, basic underlying assumptions are what prompt members of the organization to behave in the ways they do. Organizational members do not espouse these assumptions. Organizational members do not necessarily verbalize or publish basic underlying assumptions, but rather members share and act on these types of beliefs.

Schein argued that while observing all levels of culture, a researcher must note how the organization distributes power in the workplace. This is accomplished by not only identifying the titles of employees, but also through identifying decision makers who participate in those conversations. Leaders typically grant types of power to others, and finding those others and observing how that power is applied is vital to understanding how culture manifests itself. To see culture, researchers must identify how leaders allocate authority. The distribution of power heavily influences how members of an organization behave (Gabriel, 1999). People in power also develop rules and regulations. These rules are both espoused and implicit. Understanding how members of an organization deal with these rules, communicate with authority and with peers can tell a researcher quite a bit (Kunda, 2006). If a rule is broken or group members perform admirably in their roles, it is possible a reward or punishment will be enacted. Taking note of the system of sanctions and rewards is important for understanding a culture.

For Schein, culture is unique to each organization. It is personality driven and therefore changes from organization to organization because of the different people involved. Assumptions about human nature and time and space shape culture and these change depending on the organization. Most importantly, what Schein argued is that culture is context dependent. We cannot understand an organization's culture without truly comprehending the context within which the organization developed. And we cannot understand culture by simply talking to people about it. Examining different levels of analyses and understanding the variables at play is vitally important. Schein wrote the best manner to understand culture is through ethnography. Through ethnography, a researcher can practice multiple methods to collect data (Van Maanen, 1988).

D. The St. Louis Beacon

A study of one particular case is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2008, p. 26). Hamel, Dufour, and Fortin (1993) argued that by far, the most “critical decision” a researcher makes (p. 1) is picking a research site. The idea, when choosing, is to “make the local global” (Hamel et al., 1993, p. V). The authors argued the case’s potential findings could build knowledge and researchers could generalize portions to similar cases. To effectively understand an organization, a researcher must examine it in totality through observing patterns of behavior, beliefs and rituals.

This dissertation examines *The St. Louis Beacon*, a nonprofit digital news organization located in St. Louis, Missouri. A group of experienced journalists who had previously worked for decades at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, a daily newspaper in the same city as the *Beacon*, launched the *Beacon* in March 2008. The majority of the digital news organization’s 15 paid, full-time employees have experience at the legacy organization.

The St. Louis Beacon was chosen because it has a weak market orientation, an under-studied market model (Beam, 2003), and is an example of a model for digital journalism that is relatively new and gaining in popularity with similar organizations recently started in cities such as Seattle, San Diego, New Haven and Minneapolis. Both of these attributes—a weak market orientation and a digitally native newsroom—are becoming increasingly popular (Kaye & Quinn, 2010; Lowrey & Gade, 2011).

Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2009) wrote that this makes organizations such as the *Beacon* a prime target for scholars of online news:

Rather than continuing to adopt a phenomenon-centered or a theoretically tributary stance, the evolution of online news scholarship will gain much by choosing trends that lead to rethinking major building blocks in the understanding of journalism and its role in society (p. 578).

The following sections explain in detail the methodological procedures undertaken in this study. They will explain how I chose the *Beacon*, discuss the organization members' participation, illustrate how I conducted the ethnography, describe the artifacts studied and also present the processes for coding, writing, analyzing and reflexivity.

Recruitment. I conducted this ethnography in the newsroom at the *St. Louis Beacon*, a nonprofit, daily, online digital “newspaper” (McPherson & Miller, 2008), from Jan. 18 to April 9, 2013. Having worked for seven years as a journalist in New Haven, Connecticut, I became a daily reader of the *New Haven Independent*, another nonprofit, daily, online digital news outlet funded in the same manner as the *Beacon*. My interest in this particular market model led me to the *Beacon*, which I chose based on location. The *Beacon* was the only organization contacted and asked to participate in this study. I initially contacted the organization via email; I made contact with co-founder and editor Margaret Wolf Freivogel. In the initial correspondence, I gave a very brief summary of my study and detailed what the ethnography would entail. I also acknowledged that the *Beacon's* market model appealed to me.

Over the course of three emails within two days, Freivogel and I determined a day and time for me to visit the newsroom and further discuss the project. The final email implied that the news organization was also interested in participating. At a meeting on

Jan. 18, 2013, I first met Freivogel, issues and politics editor Susan Hegger and features and voices editor Donna Korando. After discussing details, both the editors of the *Beacon* and myself decided to participate and we determined a start date. We also discussed broadly how I would observe the news organization and they granted me full access to all meetings and employees.

Participants. The *Beacon* employed 15 full-time and five part-time workers during the time studied. It also utilizes freelance writers and consistently publishes the work of roughly 15-20 a month. Of the 15 full-time employees, I formally met all of them. Twelve of them participated in one-on-one interviews. I scheduled interviews with all 15, but a snowstorm resulted in the cancelation of three interviews, and rescheduling became problematic and ultimately impossible (see Appendix A for a full interview schedule). The majority of the *Beacon's* employees work from home on most days, so I scheduled the majority of the interviews in advance. Although I did not interview two employees, I considered anybody I came in contact with or attended the same meeting as a participant. This included community members who attended various news meetings.

Confidentiality. At our initial meeting, we discussed confidentiality. I offered the *Beacon* and its employees the ability to remain anonymous. The editors declined this option and therefore this study uses the organization and employees' actual names (see Appendix B for the consent form used).

Fieldwork and field notes. I spent a total of 43 days and 367.5 hours in the field. My time at the *Beacon* began on Jan. 18, 2013, and ended April 9, 2013. Weiss (1994) wrote that when information acquired becomes redundant and begins to not add to conclusions, fieldwork should conclude. By the beginning of April, the information I

gathered started becoming redundant. I stayed in the field an extra week to corroborate the correctness of this determination.

I collected field notes in numerous ways. First, I utilized a traditional reporter's notebook to collect observations. I also used a laptop when appropriate. It is vital to take copious and complete field notes on a daily basis (Emerson et al., 1995). For the bulk of my time at the *Beacon*, I sat at a long, oval desk that had seating for 11. Any news employee working on site at the news organization sat at this desk. This put me in the middle of all correspondences. Unless journalists left their desk for conversations or meetings, I heard every utterance spoken during each day observed. Only during restroom breaks and the interviews conducted did I not sit at this desk. I did not take any lunch breaks during my time in the field. The staff conducted daily news meetings at 9:30 a.m. and at around 3 p.m. For these meetings, I took field notes using a reporter's notebook. I took all other field notes on my laptop. The only exception to this occurred during meetings: the weekly staff meetings on Thursday mornings at 9:30, the weekly "news storming" meetings on Friday afternoons at around 2:30 p.m., and any other meeting I attended. For these meetings, which occurred in a conference room, I used a reporter's notebook. On two occasions, I attended after-hours events coordinated by the *Beacon*. I took field notes using a reporter's notebook for these also. I transcribed all field notes taken on a reporter's notebook into a Word document on my laptop within 12 hours. Overall, I gathered 136 single-spaced, typed pages of field notes.

During the recruitment meeting in January, editors told me I would have access to all meetings. As far as I know, this was the case. Editors, particularly Freivogel, attend numerous meetings every week. I chose to attend meetings on a case-by-case basis, based

on my belief about whether each corresponded to my research. Not once in my time at the *Beacon* did anyone decline when I asked to attend a meeting.

I can describe my time in the field through putting activities into three categories: observing the newsroom, attending meetings, and conducting interviews. Here is a description of each category:

Observing the newsroom. I spent the vast majority of my time in the field observing the newsroom. A conservative estimate would say this activity took up 90% of my time. Since I sat at the same desk as *Beacon* employees, anytime a conversation would occur, I would stop doing whatever I was doing and listen, taking detailed notes about anything said. I also listened to every phone conversation, at least in part. If a call concerned the *Beacon*, I took notes about it. If I was unclear about what the journalist on the phone discussed, I would ask the person who took or made the call. At times when *Beacon* journalists did not verbalize anything, I would occasionally observe them performing tasks, also periodically asking pertinent questions. In times between these moments, I would work on personal work, including emails and other research studies.

Attending meetings. I would estimate that I spent 7% of my time in the field attending meetings. Each morning at roughly 9:30, the *Beacon* would hold a news meeting to discuss what stories editors expected that day. A follow-up news meeting that usually discussed what editors and reporters were working on that night and for future days would occur around 3 or 3:30 p.m. Each Thursday the entire full-time staff would meet for a staff meeting at 9:30 a.m. On these days, the news meeting would happen after the staff meeting. Each Friday, editors and web staff would assemble for a “news storming” meeting at 3:30 p.m. On these days, the afternoon news meeting would follow.

Finally, non-recurring meetings concerning an upcoming merger with a radio station, various editorial projects, technology tutorials and financial interests occurred.

Interviews. I conducted interviews with 12 of the 15 full-time employees at the *Beacon*. Of those 12, I did follow-up interviews with six. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and just over three hours. More specific details about interviews follow. I would estimate that I spent 3% of my time in the field conducting interviews.

Interviews. I conducted a total of 18 private interviews with *Beacon* employees. Only one interview happened in the newsroom. I conducted one interview during a driving tour of St. Louis, four at off-site restaurants and the remaining 12 in private areas of the building that houses the *Beacon*. All interviews happened face-to-face. I used a digital audio recorder to record every interview. All total, I conducted 14 hours, 43 minutes and 12 seconds worth of interviews. The average length of each interview was 49 minutes, and they ranged in time between 29.5 minutes and 186 minutes.

I developed an interview guide, based on my research questions and pertinent information, before entering the field (see Appendix C for the interview guide). Lindlof and Taylor (2010) noted the difference between an interview schedule and interview guide. An interview schedule, they wrote, is a list of questions to ask each participant in a very specific order. A researcher cannot deviate from this schedule. An interview guide gives the researchers more flexibility for follow-up questions and other unplanned occurrence. I updated the interview guide used for this study after spending roughly one month in the field. I did not start interviews until after five weeks in the field. I began interviews on March 13. I updated the guide the weekend prior to March 13, on March 11-12. I transcribed the interviews, which provided the first opportunity for analysis.

Artifacts. Schein (2006) identifies artifacts as the first level of culture. He posited that to study an organization's culture, one must examine cultural artifacts; tangible items produced by the organization count as artifacts. The artifacts studied for this dissertation include several brochures meant to describe the *Beacon's* mission to the public; internal, daily emails detailing news budgets; *Beacon* stories published online; essays and stories written by *Beacon* journalists about the *Beacon* itself, and official *Beacon* Facebook entries.

E. Analysis And Writing

Emerson et al. (1995) identified three stages of field note analysis. The first stage finds the researcher closely reading through the field notes and then writing initial comments in the margins. This stage is called writing memos. The second stage involves what Emerson et al. (1995) call open coding. To complete this stage, the researcher must do a line-by-line reading of the field notes and attempt to identify themes and patterns. Focused coding is the third and final stage of analysis, and this occurs when the researcher returns to the field notes with the themes and patterns in mind. This time, the researcher will begin to write a draft of the findings section. Once this is completed, the writing will begin.

This dissertation follows these systematic procedures for analyzing field notes, interview transcripts and artifacts. As previously mentioned, I typed both the field notes and the interview transcripts; this provided an entry point for the data and became an initial reading. As I typed field notes and interviews, I would add notes in a different colored font. During the third and final stage of my analysis, I returned to the data with

patterns in mind and examined it for each research question. For this dissertation, I read the data completely 18 times.

IV. ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS FINDINGS

For the culture portion of this study, this analysis utilizes the theoretical framework detailed by Schein (2006). Schein defined organizational culture as the values, visions, norms, symbols, systems and behaviors shared by the people of an organization; culture describes the most stable parts of an organization that develop through a complicated process of learning influenced by leadership. According to the theory of culture he detailed in *Organizational Culture & Leadership*, a researcher must study an organization's culture on three levels of analysis: artifacts, espoused values and basic underlying assumptions. To answer RQs 1-3, this study examines culture by using this framework.

A. Organizational Culture

To answer RQ1, concerning the *Beacon's* organizational culture, analysis used artifacts, field notes and interview transcripts. The research question asks to describe the organizational culture of the *Beacon*. A description of each level of culture follows.

Artifacts.

The daily operation. The St. Louis Beacon sits in St. Louis' Grand Center neighborhood. This area of the city is known for its many arts and entertainment occupants. Of all parts of the city, this neighborhood includes relatively few residents; only roughly 3,500 people live in the community. Instead, Grand Center includes numerous theaters, restaurants and arts spaces. St. Louis University (SLU), a private, Catholic college with more than 13,000 students, is the largest occupant of the

neighborhood. Its campus covers more than 230 acres. Grand Center is part of St. Louis' Midtown area.

The *Beacon's* office sits not far from the corner of Olive Street and Grand Boulevard at 3655 Olive St. The building that houses the news organization abuts the office for St. Louis Public Radio. And the *Beacon* shares its office space with KETC, the city's Public Television affiliate that also goes by the name The Nine Network. The television network's operations fill roughly 98% of the building. The *Beacon's* main office is only an 11-person semi-circle desk located on the building's second floor in a large room called "The Nine Center for Public Engagement." Offices and workspaces for approximately 15 Nine Network journalists flank the *Beacon's* desk, which only accounts for roughly 15% of the Nine Center for Public Engagement's space. The *Beacon* employs three staff members on its business side; these people do not sit at the semi-circle desk that is the *Beacon's* newsroom. They sit in a small area across a hallway.

The *Beacon* employees share a free, private parking lot with KETC employees. This lot is across the street from the *Beacon* office. When someone visits 3655 Olive St., security must buzz him or her into the building. Once inside, a receptionist will alert the appropriate person of the visitor. If a visitor receives access to the building, they can freely walk around. A *Beacon* employee usually walks downstairs to greet visitors; however, it is not unusual for some visitors to walk by themselves into the *Beacon* newsroom. KETC and *Beacon* employees obtain swipe cards that allow them access to the building during all working hours. On weekends, employees who wish to work from the building must obtain a special passcode to disable the security system once their swipe card allows them entrance.

The Nine Center for Public Engagement features large glass doors on one side, and a single glass door on the side furthest from the building's entrance. If a visitor enters the traditional way, they will get to the double glass doors first. Once inside those doors, the Center is a large, rectangle room. On the left, front side of the center is a large conference room that comfortably fits roughly 16 people. It is set off by see-through, sliding glass doors that typically remain open when nobody uses the room. Three desks line the left-side wall with windows looking over the city skyline. KETC employees sit at these desks. At the back of the left side of the room is an enclosed office for two KETC employees. In the back-center of the room is a rectangle of computers used by KETC producers and interns. In the back-right of the room is a group of moveable desks with computers that serves as a malleable classroom for community members. The *Beacon* does not access any of these areas. In the front-center of the room is a small kitchen area with microwaves, a dishwasher, a refrigerator and flatware for both KETC and *Beacon* employees. There is also a professional coffee machine and two sinks. KETC provides complimentary coffee and tea for everyone in the room.

The *Beacon's* newsroom, the 11-person oval desk, sits in the middle-middle of the Nine Center for Public Engagement. The *Beacon* displays 11 awards on the desk. Different organizations awarded these five trophies and six plaques to the *Beacon* for quality journalism. Four out of the 11 workspaces for people include desktop Apple computers. Specific people use these workspaces. A detailed analysis of the employees follows, but only five *Beacon* journalists work from the newsroom on a daily basis, including the four editors who use the desktop computers. These five people sit next to

each other at the oval desk, meaning on a normal day, more than half of the newsroom remains empty.

During a traditional workday, KETC will conduct tours of the building to various groups including students, donors, community members and more. These tours stop in the Nine Center for Public Engagement. Neither the tour guides nor visitors engage with *Beacon* employees, but the guides refer to the *Beacon* on the tour. The tour guide describes the *Beacon* as “an online newspaper that covers St. Louis.” On most Tuesdays and sometimes on other workdays, KETC will utilize the classroom inside the Nine Center. Groups of students or community members receive training on how to produce video packages. This training is not necessarily journalistic in nature, but rather concerns producing quality video that tells “a good story,” according to a Nine Network community educator. These classes, which include roughly 15 students, can produce lots of noise in the newsroom, although *Beacon* employees do not seem overly affected.

Most of the KETC employees located in the Nine Center work on a live television show titled *Stay Tuned*. This program broadcasts on the city’s PBS affiliate at 9 p.m. Thursday evenings and films directly inside the Nine Center. *Beacon* employees must remove things from their workspaces before leaving on Thursday because if they do not, those things could make it on the air. If *Beacon* employees do not tend to this, a *Stay Tuned* staffer will. *Stay Tuned* occasionally even uses the *Beacon*’s desk for roundtable discussions on the show.

The *Beacon* promotes a casual work environment. For example, during the recruitment meeting, I joked about having not been home to my apartment for a week and therefore could not wear a tie. The editors laughed and stated I should not worry about

ever wearing a tie. *Beacon* employees tend to dress business casual, which means, for men, pants and a tucked-in shirt or a sweater, and, for women, business suits or pants and blouses. Employees wore blue jeans very seldom. One employee, Associate Editor Robert Duffy, however, wore a suit with a bow tie on most days.

The *Beacon* employs 15 full-time and five part-time workers (see Appendix D for a full employee directory). Here are the names and titles of the news organization's 20 full-time and part-time staff, which includes everyone working for the organization except freelancers:

1. Margaret Wolf Freivogel — co-founder, editor and board member
2. Robert Duffy — associate editor, co-founder
3. Susan Hegger — issues and politics editor
4. Donna Korando — features and voices editor
5. Sally Altman — health and science editor
6. Brent Jones — presentation editor
7. Richard Weiss — contributing editor (took a sabbatical in late March)
8. Linda Lockhart — Public Insight Network analyst, copy editor
9. Nancy Fowler — arts reporter
10. Kristen Hare — reporter (became part-time in February)
11. Robert Joiner — reporter
12. Robert Koenig — Washington correspondent
13. Mary Delach Leonard — reporter
14. Jo Mannies — political reporter
15. Jason Rosenbaum — political reporter
16. Dale Singer — reporter
17. Nicole Hollway — general manager
18. Shawn McGinness — business manager
19. Martin Kaplan — office manager
20. Zack Stovall — strategic development manager

Of the 20, only Freivogel, Duffy, Hegger, Korando and Jones work from the *Beacon* newsroom on a daily basis. Hollway, McGinness and Stovall work out of the Olive Street building in a room across the hall from the Nine Center for Public Engagement. All three, especially Hollway, frequently visit the *Beacon* newsroom to discuss issues or to occasionally socialize with other Beaconites, as they call themselves. Besides the newsroom and the business office across the hall, the *Beacon* shares two conference rooms with KETC. The *Beacon* uses the room inside the Nine Center for Public Engagement for the majority of its meetings. However, less attended meetings occur in a smaller, second conference room across the hall and near the business office. This room holds a maximum of roughly eight people.

Established routines. Schein (2006) identified an organization's established routines as clear windows into organizational culture. He placed these routines on the artifactual level of culture. The established routines at the *Beacon* help provide more understanding into the news organization's culture.

The *Beacon* holds a budget meeting each morning at 9:30 a.m. On Thursdays, however, this meeting happens around 11 a.m., after the weekly staff meeting. During the period observed, the budget meeting began a little after 10 a.m. on most days as Freivogel usually arrived in the newsroom at around that time. In general, these budget meetings were low-key. Freivogel, Hegger and Korando would turn their office chairs around to face each other and discuss what reporters were working on. Most of the discussions centered around stories editors planned to publish the next day or in the coming days. Only about 20% of the conversations discussed that day's news. Editors would discuss not only what reporters currently were working on, but also future work. They verbalized

what they liked and did not like about the stories published on the previous day. And, often, some conversations unfolded concerning how stories would appear on the *Beacon's* website.

Freivogel drives the vast majority of the conversations during budget meetings. On the days when she would not work from the office, Korando and Hegger typically did not hold the budget meeting. On occasion, roughly two or three times a week, Jones would participate in these meetings. Usually, he turned around from his computer when editors talked about technology or something directly pertaining to Jones. Only two or three times during the time period observed did Duffy participate in these meetings; he would sometimes join in discussions concerning pop culture or employees' personal lives. On March 13, the setup of the budget meetings slightly changed. At this point, Freivogel invited General Manager Hollway to participate each morning. Freivogel explained the decision:

The point of [Nicole coming each day] is because we make decisions with what we're covering during these meetings and decisions about how we're covering them. We're trying to increase [each story's] impact, and we can do that better if Nicole is part of the process (personal communication, March 13, 2013).

After this change, Hollway attended the morning budget meetings the majority of the time. These meetings tended to last longer, roughly 10 minutes more than the average 30 minutes, and discussed technology more.

The *Beacon* traditionally publishes around 10-15 stories per day, so editors often discussed "the count." They do not want certain days to have few new stories and other days to have more than 15. These morning news meetings sometimes go off-topic and would involve conversations about current pop culture, personal lives or content

produced by St. Louis' major daily newspaper, the *Post-Dispatch*. Morning budget meetings during the time period observed averaged 31 minutes.

At the conclusion of each morning budget meeting, Freivogel, Hegger and Korando would go over a rundown of stories each reporter expected to finish in the future, not that day or the next day. They would come up with an expected publication date for each of these stories after examining when they expected other stories. So, for example, if Hegger expected a story on a Tuesday, but that day featured a lot of other expected stories, the three would collectively decide which piece to hold. At the end of each meeting, Freivogel would send out an email with the daily budget to all *Beacon* employees. Here is an example of some budget items from Tuesday, Feb. 12, 2013, the day of the State of the Union Address (see Appendix E for a full daily budget):

- Durbin hearing on gun control - Rob - story possible later today
- McCaskill press availability - possible story late this afternoon
- Mizzou's Tim Wolfe reflects on anniversary - possible late afternoon
- State of the Union preview - Rob
- State of the union links - Dale - may post late afternoon
- State of the union analysis - Rob - tonight
- State of the union responses - Jason - tonight
- Mayor forum from Mon.
- Nate Silver at Wash U (Mon. night) - Backroom
- Gender part 2 (from Mon.)
- Arch Grants update
- Rambsy poet profile

Each afternoon, at around 3:30 p.m., the *Beacon* holds an afternoon budget meeting. Only Freivogel, Hegger and Korando attend this meeting. This occurs in the newsroom, at the large oval desk. Occasionally, Jones takes part in this meeting also. These afternoon assemblies last for roughly 15 minutes, about half as long as morning budget meetings. Unlike earlier, there is very little small talk. Each editor updates

Freivogel on stories and that evening's plan for who is going to do what from outside the office. Editors discussed the vast majority of the information shared at this meeting earlier in the day.

At 9:30 a.m. Thursdays, the *Beacon* holds a staff meeting for all full-time employees. On some occasions, the business staff would attend these, but during the time period observed, predominantly only editors and reporters would attend. Political reporter Mannies is the only journalist on staff who typically missed this meeting. She is a regular guest on a prominent local radio show during this time and would typically get to the *Beacon* office just after the staff meeting concluded. The majority of this meeting consisted of a discussion of content already produced by reporters. Journalists would share anecdotes and Beaconites would also talk about upcoming work. Freivogel ran these meetings. When she did not attend for some reason, Hegger took over. During the time period observed, the *Beacon* remained in the process of conducting due diligence on a possible alliance with St. Louis Public Radio. This due diligence included committee meetings concerning how an alliance would work. Often, conversation at staff meetings turned toward the alliance's progress.

At 2:30 p.m. every Friday, editors hold what they call a "News Storming" meeting. At one such meeting, Freivogel asked Hollway, who runs the news storming meetings, "Remind me what we're trying to do in these meetings." Hollway described news storming as, "We're looking for ways to further engage people with what we're already trying to do." The general goal of news storming is to discuss with Hollway, a social media expert, and Stovall, the *Beacon's* strategic development manager, what journalists are working on currently. Hollway, Stovall and *Beacon* editors Freivogel,

Hegger, Korando, Jones and Altman all brainstorm on how the news organization can present or publish stories in manners that will reach more people. Associate Editor Duffy and Public Insight Network Analyst Lockhart also attend these meetings on occasion. At one particular meeting, Hollway invited two prominent members of the St. Louis community to discuss issues also. Hollway generated the idea for news storming meetings after attending the South by Southwest media conference.

I started thinking what does the ‘Saturday Night Live’ version of the newsroom look like? I mean, do people from the community come in and say, ‘I am really mad about this issue and I want to tell you why’? And then do people in the newsroom say, ‘Here’s why you can’t do that’? And they have a fight about it and in the end come out with a story, or not ... So in the world of the *Beacon*, I pulled that way, way back and I said, ‘You know, let’s see if we can take some stuff we’re already doing — and I tried to make people realize this isn’t more work and we’re not going to start reporting on something based on what we know might be popular —and let’s look at how we might package our content to see if we can make them land in a different way. Then we could reach a new audience (personal communication, April 8, 2013).

A typical workday at the *Beacon* newsroom begins around 9:30 a.m. and lasts until 5:30 p.m. All of the editors only come into the office on weekdays, but do work from home after hours. As previously noted, only Freivogel, Hegger, Korando, Duffy and Jones work from the newsroom on a daily basis. On Thursdays, due to the staff meeting, several *Beacon* journalists would work from the office until around 3 p.m. Reporter Dale Singer worked from the *Beacon* newsroom for three to four hours about twice a week. Other reporters and journalists communicated with editors via phone, email and GoogleChat.

Reporters maintain that working from home and not at the office does not negatively affect how they do their jobs. Each has worked inside a newsroom before, and

predominantly only notice positive differences. Mannies said that she finds the routine of going to the office each day stunts her productivity and the *Beacon*'s format helps.

It alleviates the pointless things like having to like get all dressed up and get downtown to sit at an office and do what? I was already, when I was at the *Post-Dispatch* the last few years, occasionally I would work from home especially if I was in the writing stage on a big story ... And, also, the way we have our email system, we're all on GoogleChat so they know when you're on, when your little green light is on. I mean, Sue usually sends me a note every day around 10 or 10:30 if she hasn't seen my light on and says, 'What's up?' or whatever. We usually talk on the phone. I would say we average about once a day on the phone—more than that if there is something breaking (personal communication, March 28, 2013).

Lockhart also noted that editors are “constantly online and instant messaging” (personal communication, March 22, 2013). Singer, who works from the newsroom more than any other reporter, notes, “Frankly, there is nothing I can do at the office that I can't do from home, but sometimes I just don't want to sit home all day” (personal communication, March 21, 2013). Rosenbaum finds some disadvantages to not working out of a centralized newsroom, but he also thinks the advantages far outweigh those disadvantages and that, over time, he's developed his own routines.

I usually have a pretty predictable rhythm to the day and for when I'm going to call my editor. While it has some disadvantages like it can be a pretty isolating experience, some people are like, 'Oh, you work from home and you watch TV.' No. I don't watch TV. I take very brief lunch breaks and I'm very busy with things from like 9 to 5 or 6. Sometimes, though, I come into the office because it can be good to talk about things in person. I mean, there can be some disadvantages to working out of an office, too (personal communication, March 21, 2013).

Because the *Beacon* is an online news organization, it does not have any hard deadlines for content. However, over time, the daily routines of the editors contributed to informal deadlines. Unless a reporter is working on breaking news, if an editor is going to publish a story the next morning, the story needs to be edited before the editor leaves the

evening before. For example, if a non-breaking story needs to run Wednesday morning, it should be edited by 5:30 p.m. Tuesday night. This, however, does not always happen. Reporters will put things into the *Beacon*'s content management system after 5:30, and editors will edit the story from home. Typically, the *Beacon* publishes the majority of its daily stories before 8 a.m. This, editors believe, maximizes the chance people will read the stories with their morning coffee or when doing other activities before work. The *Beacon* will also publish some stories throughout the day, but hardly ever anything after about 4 p.m. "If we publish after 4, the story will just get lost," said Freivogel during a budget meeting. Over the weekend, the organization will sometimes publish stories, but will try to limit them to only breaking news because editors do not believe people follow the news as much on weekends.

Editors have embraced these deadlines more than reporters. Hegger believes that because most of the reporters have print newspaper backgrounds, they sometimes forget that there is not a night copy desk waiting to edit stories or they think the *Beacon* should publish prominent stories on a Sunday.

Once, Rob [Koenig] was like, 'This is for the Sunday.' No one's going to read it. It's got to be Monday. So, the timing, the instantaneousness. I mean, when things break, I mean that's the big thing that we are there right away. Like with the pope. When that broke, we had to have something. We had that great story from (freelancer Patricia Rice) ready for just the hour between the white smoke and the naming. But it has changed for us more than it has for some of the reporters because they don't see us working every day and how we do things. Nobody is going to read a story we post on a Sunday or some Wednesday night, for example (personal communication, March 15, 2013).

Tuchman (1978) and Gans (1979) found that the majority of news produced in a newsroom typically comes from the beat system. Editors provide reporters with a beat to cover and the reporter's job is to produce content about his or her beat. Beats are

organized around centralized institutions such as police, courts and government. General assignment reporters would fill in coverage gaps. At the *Beacon*, very few of the reporters have a beat. Most are general assignment reporters. Mannies and Rosenbaum both cover state and city politics exclusively and refer to politics as their beats. Koenig covers national politics. Joiner covers healthcare. Singer refers to education as his beat, but then in the same interview noted that he is “without a doubt, a general assignment reporter. I cover everything” (personal communication, March 21, 2013). Fowler only covers the arts. All other reporters do not have a beat.

The reporters each produce about three to four stories a week. During the time period observed, Singer contributed about five stories per week. And leading up to a mayoral primary, Mannies and Rosenbaum also produced more work than average. All of the reporters interviewed noted that they typically work on about two or three stories at once, and possibly one long-term piece.

Espoused beliefs.

The *Beacon* produces “news that matters.” Journalists consistently mention that slogan as their goal for journalism. The organization also prints the slogan on all promotional material. During the organization’s founding, a lot of discussion centered on what the *Beacon* would cover. With a small staff, the organization would find it impossible to cover everything newsworthy, so founders decided to cover only the “news that matters.” Korando described the genesis of this term as

And I think coming up with the phrase, that was the first thing, peeling away and saying we’re not going to sports. And we’re going to look at what the other media in town do really well and we’re not going try to duplicate that. So we went in with the idea of burrowing in on hard news. That’s the news that matters (personal communication, March 15, 2013).

For Beaconites, the news that matters revolves around context. The *Beacon* editors believe that all news reports should include much contextual information. It is not enough for a reporter to write about how an issue is facing the St. Louis area. The reporter must add contextual information such as why that issue is facing St. Louis, how the issue is being debated by people from all sides of the argument, what experts believe about the issue and how the issue affects other cities. In numerous cases, Beaconites will discuss “surrounding an issue.” When that phrase is spoken, the journalist means answering as many of the questions noted above as possible about an issue. In the vast majority of meetings attended or interviews conducted during this study, employees would note the importance of context. The *Beacon* aims not to just report what happened, but also to explain why it matters.

That’s what the *St. Louis Beacon* is about: taking the snapshots of information swirling around us and putting them in context. Connecting the headlines to your life. Not just reporting the news, but applying the tools of journalism to power a better St. Louis (Beacon, 2012).

Associate Editor Duffy described putting stories into context as important because “you don’t just say this is good or this is bad, but through reporting and context, you bring an understanding about it” (personal communication, March 15, 2013). Health Editor Altman noted that the *Beacon’s* digital format allows its reporters and editors to give readers this context. She said, “We have the opportunity to tell a story in-depth. And you know, we’re not filling a daily news-hole the way a paper is, so we can come back to a story over and over in many different ways” (personal communication, April 5, 2013). During a conversation, Korando and Hegger explained how they view “news that matters” and how the *Beacon* aims for context.

KORANDO: It's about context and that we're giving a fuller picture. I've long thought newspapers ought to sell themselves like, 'OK, you've seen the headlines or you've seen the tweets, but here's where you come to get the backstory and find out how it relates.' You know, here's this side and not just the two sides, but also the shades of grey. And that's what I hope we do.

HEGGER: Yeah, I think we're all pretty much agreed on what the mission is in terms of quote news that matters, in-depth coverage. I think we bring a lot of knowledge to the subjects we cover and that allows us to bring a lot of perspective. I think we're getting better at linking things so people can go around on our site and people can get the backstory and context of things we've covered.

In practice, *Beacon* editors will hold stories if they do not provide enough context. When a reporter finished a story about a potential streetcar in downtown St. Louis, Freivogel and Hegger discussed the story after both read it.

HEGGER: I don't think it's ready for primetime.

FREIVOGEL: I agree. I feel like all of a sudden this story appeared. Where did it come from? Who are the [people involved]? Some of the info she has in here is interesting.

HEGGER: But it needs more info. I'd rather have something with more so people can make a decision about it.

FREIVOGEL: People need to evaluate what's going on.

HEGGER: Yeah, let's table it to next week. The story isn't going away and we need more information.

The journalists at the *Beacon* believe that providing context means looking at each issue in a comprehensive way that is also in proportion. In a morning budget meeting discussing a particular story, Freivogel expounded on what she hopes for all stories. "We don't want to make too much of anything and we don't want to over do it. We want people to get all the information they need to evaluate something, but not too much information."

The emphasis on context emboldens many Beaconites to call the organization a “daily magazine.” Numerous reporters interviewed used this terminology to describe the *Beacon*. They argue that magazines give journalists more room to provide context and depth to news consumers, and the *Beacon*’s digital format and emphasis on “news that matters” gives them the same freedoms and responsibilities. Political Reporter Mannies said that she describes the *Beacon* as a daily magazine to everyone who asks:

I tell people, when I talk about the *Beacon*, well we do have some breaking stuff, which we do — we have that type of news — but I tell people I think of us as a daily news magazine. We don’t cover everything, but what we do cover we try to do in depth. So there will be some duplications with the newspaper, but not too much (personal communication, March 28, 2013).

Journalists at the *Beacon* consistently note that they do not compete with the city’s major daily newspaper, *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. The majority of the journalists on staff at the *Beacon* have previously worked at the *Post-Dispatch*. Founders Freivogel and Duffy and editor Korando all spent more than three decades at the newspaper. Hegger worked at the paper for more than a decade. Of the full-time, non-business staff noted previously, only Health Editor Altman, Arts Reporter Fowler and Political Reporter Rosenbaum have not spent time at the *Post-Dispatch*. The editors working from the *Beacon* newsroom are all intimately familiar with the print publication, but will say they do not compete with the paper. Most of the Beaconites will say their goal is to “fill in the gaps in coverage” produced by other local media. Presentation Editor Jones said that he believes the public understands that the *Beacon* does not compete with the *Post-Dispatch*.

I think when we first started, people thought we were a novelty and there was a lot of attention on us. It’s like they said we were just trying to replace the *Post-Dispatch* and that we would be gone in a year. Neither of these are true and, now, five years later, we’re still here and the *Post-Dispatch* is still here. So we’re just kind of part of everything else now. We’re like them and just doing our own thing (personal communication, March 13, 2013).

When reporter Dale Singer received a tip about a major story concerning the St. Louis University School of Law, he did not publish immediately because he could not verify an important fact. Eventually, other organizations including the *Post-Dispatch* published the story first. Singer believes he had the story before anyone else, so while he supposes he did the right thing in waiting to verify, not publishing first frustrated him. However, by not viewing the *Post-Dispatch* as competition, he did not get as frustrated as he could have.

If I was still working at the *Post*, it would have made me more upset. We wanted to beat everyone. This bothered me, but not as much because when I finally published the story, it was right and complete. That's what we're always trying to do (personal communication, March 21, 2013).

Beaconites embrace the relative smallness of the organization's staff by consistently noting how little "bureaucracy" they have to deal with. In interviews, reporters repeatedly mentioned the consistent availability of editors. The small staff allows reporters the ability to cover the stories of their choice. There is less competition for higher-profile pieces, noted a reporter. Korando described the *Beacon* to someone who called the organizations as, "We're small enough that we don't need rules. The bigger the organization, the more need for stringent rules. We don't have that problem. We're nimble." Many reporters and editors repeated the same sentiment. Because there are so few hard rules and little bureaucracy, reporters say they can work on stories that are most interesting to them. Reporter Singer verbalized this:

As a reporter, you know that if you're working on a story that you came up with, you're much more likely to enjoy it and invest in it than if someone gave it to you, even if it was an assignment that if you had been thinking about it, you would have come up with it by yourself. Everyone likes to work on their own ideas; that's just the nature of things (personal communication, March 21, 2103).

While *Beacon* journalists strongly believe in letting their audience participate in the process of deciding what is news, an espoused belief of the employees is that citizens are not journalists, and that journalists need to make decisions concerning news. This means not only deciding what to cover, but also deciding when to describe something in a story. For example, in one particular story, a reporter wrote that something was “arguably” the most important facet to a story. Freivogel made Hegger take “arguably” out of the story. “We need to know that this is the most important part,” she said. At a meeting concerning an upcoming series about gun violence in the city, Freivogel said that the *Beacon* needed to talk to people in the community, do research and then make decisions about what is important before they publish anything. The implication is that in a sensitive series such as this one, many community members will have strong viewpoints they wish to express and concrete ideas about what is important to the city. But, *Beacon* journalists need to know the community better and make these decisions themselves. Presentation Editor Jones verbalized this belief very clearly at a newsstorming meeting attended by two members of the community. During a discussion about how to frame a particular story, one of the community members provided his opinion on how that story is important to the community. This opinion contradicted what the original reporter believed. Jones said,

Look, our job is to tell the story. If you or someone else doesn't think this is the story, that's not our fault. What else can we say? She knows this story. She reported it and wrote it. That is the story.

The journalists at the *Beacon* believe that the role of the organization is to contribute to the betterment of the city, to enhance the improvability of St. Louis. This does not only occur through providing news and information, but also through what they

cover and who they cover. Arts Reporter Fowler produced a series on transgender people. She did feature stories on people of all ages and races concerning their transition from one gender to the next. Fowler described the series as a way to make the community stronger by providing a voice to people who otherwise might not have it. She said, “I like to bring invisible people into visibility. It’s harder to hate or misunderstand people that you know” (personal communication, April 4, 2013). In the meeting discussing the gun violence series, Health Editor Altman and Associate Editor Duffy stressed that the series needs to go beyond simple reporting about violence. They argued that a series like this could provide a lot of good to the community, if reported correctly. Duffy said, “We need to treat this as a public health issue and not a political one. If 144 people in St. Louis died each year from skin lesions, everyone would be all over it, trying to fix the problem.” Altman concurred, and said, “This is a big and important issue to the health of the community, but how do you intervene? We need to figure out how to reach the most people.” When discussing what he believed is the role of the *Beacon*, Duffy said,

I believe in the improbability of the region. And I believe it’s important. It’s an old community. It’s important in the history of the country. It has wonderful people living here. It’s seriously divided by race and class, but who isn’t? So there’s a lot to be done. What we do, we believe as a consensus, we believe that what we’re doing is material that has some roots and some meaning to people and can help the community (personal communication, March 15, 2013).

The employees of the *Beacon* also consider the news organization a place for the community to have important conversations about the issues they cover. When a website ran a racist cartoon concerning an upcoming mayoral primary, it created dialog in the city. Freivogel views the *Beacon* as an important source for conversations about race. The organization won numerous awards for its coverage of race. After the cartoon became public, and radio and television began discussing its implications, the *Beacon*

adjusted its coverage so “people can talk about this cartoon,” said Freivogel. “We need to see if our coverage can evolve into the community having a conversation. If there is going to be a decent place to have a conversation about race, it should be the *Beacon*.”

The idea that they are producing “progressive journalism” is the final espoused value by members of the *Beacon*. Beaconites embrace digital journalism as the future of the industry and believe that the work they do remains forward-thinking. On more than a dozen occasions, an editor or reporter would casually note that traditional, legacy media organizations such as print newspapers would eventually die and that digital, nonprofit sites would rise to fill those gaps. The journalists at the *Beacon* believe they do more than simply report news, but have also found a way to produce an online product that exhibits all the traditional and necessary tools of good journalism. Strategic Development Manager Stovall said employees “need to understand what we’re doing from a progressive journalism standpoint” (personal communication, March 18, 2013). For example, when discussing the potential alliance with St. Louis Public Radio, Freivogel and Hegger talk about the radio station’s website. The station wants to use its website for content from both organizations, but the radio website is rudimentary and just a simple list of stories and cannot utilize many of the multimedia tools the *Beacon* uses. The editors decide this technology is so bad, it goes against their mission.

HEGGER: It goes against everything we stand for.

FREIVOGEL: It looks like every mid-size radio station’s website and that is not a good thing.

HEGGER: Our new system was all about showing we had depth and news judgment. People can see what’s important on our site. They can’t with that.

This vision of progressive journalism is not just something *Beacon* employees strive for, but something they view as intrinsic to their mission. Associate Editor Duffy sees this brand of progressive journalism as essential to the *Beacon*'s survival:

The *Beacon* is different. And it is radical. So good for us. If we're going to have an enduring journalism in the 21st and 22nd century, it has to be different. It can't be, I talk to you and I take notes on what you said and I put it my language and roll it out for the public. Simply, technology has changed and that becomes moribund. It is dead in the water. Nobody is going to pay any attention to it and we have to have people paying attention to us (personal communication, March 15, 2013).

Underlying assumptions.

Schein (2006) defined underlying assumptions as those beliefs, ones not necessarily spoken, that develop out of solutions that come to be taken for granted. They are automatic and unconscious, and remain embedded in the organization among its members. Six underlying assumptions that help answer RQ1 became apparent through observation and interviews.

Because of limited resources, the Beacon can only do the best it can with what it has. Although the organization prides itself on the quality of journalism produced, there is a belief that it could be better with more resources. Numerous journalists talked about what more they could be doing if only the *Beacon* employed more people. Political Reporter Mannies specifically discussed how the *Post-Dispatch* employs more people to do the same job she does alone, so it leaves her forced to really choose what to cover. Both Mannies and Political Reporter Rosenbaum feel like they should and could cover politics more fully. Reporter Dale Singer lamented that the *Post-Dispatch* had four education reporters, yet he is the only one at the *Beacon*. Hegger and Korando run the day-to-day operations at the *Beacon* and both noted that sometimes even founder

Freivogel forgets the size of the staff. Freivogel will occasionally get excited about a certain topic and want the *Beacon* to cover it from all angles. This is possible, but the rest of the news will suffer, said Hegger.

We have to then manage the after-effects. Because you know, we can throw everything we have at something, which we frequently do, certainly with the election and certainly with the pope, but that means there is always this downturn afterward (personal communication, March 15, 2013).

While Beaconites will explicitly cite the smaller staff as a key to avoiding the bureaucracy one can sometimes encounter at larger organizations, there is an underlying assumption that it hurts more than it helps. Numerous employees discussed how the potential merger with the radio station could mean a larger staff, which would allow journalists to cover more. The smaller staff also affects the *Beacon's* ability to keep freelancers. While the majority of the political and hard news produced by the organization comes from full-time staffers, a lot of the arts coverage and voices columns come from freelancers. Korando is in charge of both these sections and noted that keeping a solid freelance staff and deciding what to cover with the small staff remains difficult:

Trying to figure out how, out of the vast arts and entertainment and trends and neighborhoods and all that, what can we cover and should cover is a constant struggle. I have sort of gone with some of the strengths of the freelancers I can trust, so there's probably more, for example, Americana and jazz than one might think, but I have people who know what they're doing and can write and have the entrees to the people. I really want to know about young musicians, but I'm really not getting that right now. So, I'll keep looking. The other thing that happens is freelancers come and go. You lose them because they need full-time work (personal communication, March 15, 2013).

During the time period observed, it became clear that *Beacon* journalists see the organization as small and unable to cover the necessary amount of stories. Because most journalists at the *Beacon* previously worked at the much larger *Post-Dispatch*, this

feeling seems explainable. The employees who did not work at the *Post-Dispatch* did not mention this problem. They all saw the *Beacon* as more of a niche publication that specifically covers certain things and covers them well.

The Post-Dispatch is competition and its quality has fallen off. While Beaconites explicitly said they did not view the *Post-Dispatch* as competition, their actions belie that espoused value. Numerous times newsroom conversations steered toward whether the *Post-Dispatch* had covered a story. If the newspaper had already covered a topic, *Beacon* editors would sometimes decide not to cover it. Constantly, *Beacon* journalists, especially Freivogel, would vocalize a determination to beat the *Post-Dispatch* to a story. During the mayoral primary race, a local organization held a forum for all the candidates. A *Beacon* reporter covered the event and during it called Korando to say that the *Post-Dispatch* did not have someone there. This generated a lot of discussion in the newsroom and Freivogel decided to give the story more prominence because it would not appear in the *Post-Dispatch*. When a story broke concerning a public St. Louis museum receiving an audit about how it spent taxpayer money, Freivogel noted that the *Post-Dispatch* would post the story to its website quickly, so the *Beacon* should do the same. She said, “I would like to give [the reporter] as much time to work the story as quickly as possible.” Later in that same day, Hegger told Jones, “We need to get the museum story up as soon as possible because others will have it.”

Not only does the *Beacon* compete with the *Post-Dispatch*, its employees believe the legacy newspaper’s quality dipped considerably in recent years. One of the frequent topics of conversation inside the *Beacon* newsroom revolves around how the *Post-Dispatch* utilizes its resources. The Beaconites believe the paper does a poor job covering

the city and that its quality has decreased over the last several years. For example, editors discussed how many resources the *Post-Dispatch* provides for coverage of the city's Major League Baseball team, the St. Louis Cardinals. They joked that more reporters covered the team than the rest of the newsroom combined. Beaconites returned to this conversation frequently. In fact, Associate Editor Duffy cited the *Post-Dispatch's* decline as one of the reasons he helped found the *Beacon*.

First of all, even before the sale [of the paper to a corporation], the paper was in decline. It dates from the death of [former owner] Joseph Pulitzer. In 1993, he died, and the whole sort of complexion of the place changed. He and his brother had taken the company public with all the best intentions, but that was the beginning of the end because they then became slaves to the stock market. So we had watched this devolution of quality and then when it was sold, it was all over (personal communication, March 15, 2013).

The underlying assumption that the *Post-Dispatch* remains competition but it is a failing journalistic enterprise gives Beaconites a purpose. They want to produce quality journalism and cover the city in a way that, they believe, does not occur anymore.

Journalism should be free and easily accessible. One of the byproducts of producing a nonprofit online newspaper is Beaconites believe that all journalism should remain free and available to the public. This is a sentiment mentioned often. If journalism is for sale, then it can be corrupted. In interviews, numerous members of the *Beacon* staff verbalized that one of the main downfalls of the *Post-Dispatch* happened when it was sold to a corporation. They believe the Pulitzer Company did not run the newspaper as a business as much as current owner Lee Enterprises does. One of the reasons, for example, they believe the *Post-Dispatch* does not produce quality journalism lies in the amount of reporters, columnists and editors covering the Cardinals. Beacon editors inferred that the

large amount of resources allocated to baseball is to sell newspapers, and this is the antithesis to quality journalism, they said.

Beaconites also believe the role of their news organization is to help the community, and the community cannot be assisted as successfully if they do not have access to the news. The *Beacon* employees believe they do a far better job covering marginalized communities and the issues these people face. For example, in one meeting, employees discussed a large series the *Beacon* was currently producing concerning obesity in poor neighborhoods. One reporter noted, “The mainstream press ignores this type of story.” The implication being the *Post-Dispatch* would not cover the story.

Presentation Editor Jones, in an interview, noted that the future of journalism does not lie behind an online paywall. “People need access,” he said. “The *Beacon* gives people access because we want the people we cover to be able to read what we produce.” Rosenbaum also noted the difference he sees with the *Beacon*, as opposed to a previous for-profit newspaper that employed him.

I don’t think their business model was about getting a lot of information on the site and disseminating it freely. When I came there and was made the state government reporter, I started a blog ... I never got the sense they thought of it as an opportunity for anything. They saw it as a competitor to their daily paper. And, um, I think that kind of showed because about a year after I left, they put up a paywall ... The difference is at the *Beacon* there’s a basic understanding that there is not ever going to be a paywall, I think it’s the opposite view, that everything gets put up there, the purpose is to widely disseminate and serve the community we cover. If the stuff isn’t widely distributed, we can’t really do that, I think (personal communication, March 21, 2013).

Good journalism incorporates both balance and transparency. Journalists at the Beacon believe that to produce quality journalism, an organization must not only be balanced, but also transparent. *Beacon* journalists make sure to put all sides into stories and also be very transparent about their and the organization’s biases. While discussing

numerous stories in the newsroom, editors questioned aloud whether reporters wrote stories in too much of a one-sided manner. Editors consistently asked this question. In interviews, editors noted that when editing a story, the main question they ask is whether the reporter fairly represented all sides. For example, while reading a story about Medicaid expansion, Freivogel finds it too one-sided. She asks Hegger if she agrees. She does. Freivogel said, “I’m not saying we need a 50-50 split on every story, but there’s like two sentences from people who oppose Medicaid expansion. I feel like without both sides, we’re reflecting the propaganda.”

One way the *Beacon* believes it maintains balance is by not publishing editorials. By not publishing editorials, the *Beacon* does not take sides on issues. The organization does not believe its coverage can achieve balance with an editorial viewpoint. Even if each story about a particular issue contains views from all sides of the issue, *Beacon* editors believe readers will think the specific side endorsed in an editorial will ruin said balance in the minds of readers. When a caller asks Hegger if the news organization would publish something from a certain angle, Hegger declines. She said, “No. We never do editorials. We do not have a point of view. We sometimes have commentary, but we ourselves do not have an editorial page or an editorial position on issues.” The *Beacon* retains the ability to publish opinion-based views on specific subjects through the commentary and voices section. This allows editors to choose representatives from the community who stand on all sides of issue. The *Beacon* can then publish traditional news stories about an issue and also views on various sides of the issue, without clouding this balance with an editorial stance.

For the *Beacon*, transparency is just as important as balance. During an interview, Korando explained why she thinks this is a good organizational policy.

We have to be careful about that issue. We don't want to become, in the mayoral race or in politics, even the gun thing, one sided, you know? I'm really nervous because all my voices are from one point of view. I think it's really important that we're seen as somewhere that will listen to different sides and different points of view or we will turn people off (personal communication, March 15, 2013).

Transparency becomes a potential problem when the *Beacon* interviews one of its donors or does a story about an organization that donates money. *Beacon* journalists and editors consistently question when to note these relationships and when it is not necessary. Many of the *Beacon*'s donors give large amounts of money and are powerful people in the city. Because of this, many city organizations employ *Beacon* donors. Editors want and value transparency, but do not want to go overboard on it. Korando explained this predicament:

Transparency is huge. But you don't want to look silly. If there is a major art show at the Pulitzer, do we have to say Emily [Pulitzer] is a donor? Because would it be covered anyway? Yes, we would. But, there's still that presumption out there, so it's something we think about. My line is, if it's the Show Me Institute, I don't say [major donor] Rex Sinquefield. If we talk to Rex or Jeanne Sinquefield, I do say they're donors (personal communication, March 15, 2013).

Standard operating procedure at the *Beacon* notes when a source is a donor or when an organization helped fund a particular story or series of stories. The *Beacon* can also encounter transparency issues with staff. As Public Insight Network analyst, Linda Lockhart assists in the reporting process for numerous stories about a whole host of subjects, one of which can be education. In mid March, Lockhart's daughter accepted an executive position with St. Louis Public Schools. When Freivogel found out, she began a conversation about how to handle this. "Well I guess Linda shouldn't be doing school stuff now," she said to Hegger. Lockhart is the only employee who analyzes the Public Insight Network, which will be explained in detail later in this study, so this presented a

unique challenge. Freivogel decided that Hegger needed to be “extra careful” editing any story on public schools, paying particular attention to any information the reporter could glean from the Public Insight Network.

Breaking news is important. In conversations, many of the *Beacon* staff will note that breaking news does not align with the mission of the *Beacon*. Yes, they will say, they do cover it occasionally, but not as much as a traditional news organization. The *Beacon* touts news that matters, news delivered with context. It is very difficult to provide this type of coverage to breaking news, employees admitted. Also, breaking news is difficult to cover with smaller staffs. Beaconites provide all these reasons for not covering breaking news, but they all want to cover it more. Reporter Singer said,

Look, I think breaking news is very important. When something breaks, I think most reporters want to cover it, which is part of the excitement of the job. You never know what you’re going to do in a specific day (personal communication, March 21, 2013).

Political Reporter Mannies said that while the *Beacon* only covers some breaking news, it is important to cover breaking news that adds “to the overall picture” (personal communication, March 28, 2013). She provided an example concerning the federal government’s recent sequestration. The *Beacon* focused a lot of resources on covering sequestration, so when Mannies found a breaking news story concerning sequestration, she covered it.

Art Reporter Fowler noted that because the *Beacon* does not cover breaking news on a consistent basis, she very rarely writes reviews or about events that only take place on one day. She focuses on issues that go beyond arts and can affect people who do not even attend arts events. Hegger said that covering breaking news needs deciding on a

case-by-case basis at the *Beacon*, and it is something she usually trusts the reporters to determine.

I think it's a question of mission. When it's breaking news in areas that we generally cover, we generally try to do it. Otherwise, it just seems like you're dispersing resources instead of concentrating resources. And, you know, I like to ask myself what can we add to this that would enhance the story that would be beyond what people would get by watching the TV or by reading the *Post-Dispatch*. And if there's not much that we can offer, then I say well let's not bother. I mean, why take people away from things that they're working to cover those things (personal communication, March 15, 2013)?

Korando said that when the *Beacon* covers breaking news, it should only do so when it can cover it in a manner befitting the *Beacon*. She noted that a breaking piece was one of the first major stories the organization published.

One of the things we started with was spot news, which was the shooting in Kirkwood that killed council members and the shooter. I'd say that that became almost a textbook for covering spot news in the *Beacon* way. But it also was because the *Beacon* people had in-depth knowledge they brought to it. Margie and [her husband and *Beacon* correspondent] Bill grew up in Kirkwood. They knew the mayor. Linda now lives in Kirkwood and really understood the racial dynamic in the town. So we were really able to say, 'Yes, we can do the story.' But there were the connections that made it a story we could do in more depth (personal communication, March 15, 2013).

Experience brings credibility. While occasionally editors would discuss how they would like to add some young writers to the staff, the vast majority of actions at the *Beacon* show that editors believe that journalistic experience adds credibility. This experience helped in the initial stages of the news organization. "We knew this area," said Hegger. "We knew who the players were. So it wasn't like we were trying to familiarize ourselves with a new environment" (personal communication, March 15, 2013). The *Beacon* features a seasoned staff. Only two of the full-time journalists are 31 and under: Political Reporter Rosenbaum and Presentation Editor Jones. The rest of the staff spent decades in the industry, or in another industry in the case of Altman, before

joining the *Beacon*. There's an underlying assumption that this experience brings the organization credibility and allows them to do a much better job than younger, less seasoned journalists. In an interview, Rosenbaum repeatedly stressed his experience, as to make it clear that he covered politics for the last handful of years. He believed that noting this would make him seem more credible. Jones explicitly said that the *Beacon's* experience allowed it to cover the city well. He explained that,

I could have grabbed five people [from my college newspaper] and said, 'Let's run a daily news website in St. Louis. We may have been more technologically savvy, but we wouldn't have lasted six months. Everybody here has such a connection to the city. They know people. They know what people think is important. They know St. Louis and they know what's important in the city. There's so much institutional memory there and they are so good at their jobs and provide a really good service (personal communication, March 13, 2013).

Arts Reporter Fowler said that she believes she finds and writes superior stories because of her prior experience. Because she sometimes reports stories about controversial subjects, the credibility that comes with her experience lets potential sources judge her prior published work and know she will write a story fairly. Other reporters echoed that sentiment.

The editors at the *Beacon* place a large value on experience. When Reporter Singer got laid off from the *Post-Dispatch* after 28 years at the newspaper, he did not remain without a job for long. "I was laid off in August of 2008," he remembered. "I got a call from Bobby Duffy that night and was working here part time two-and-a-half weeks later. I went full time after the election of 2008 (personal communication, March 21, 2013).

The *Beacon* not only values experience for its own staff, but communications implied that they grant credibility only to journalists working at other institutions who

have work experience. When a local online news website published a story about the racist cartoon concerning the mayoral race, Hollway noticed and visited the newsroom to discuss the website and story with Freivogel.

HOLLWAY: They started a newspaper and they made a documentary. Is this what the world is coming to? Anyone can start a newspaper and be a journalist?

FREIVOGEL: Yes, that's exactly what's happening.

HOLLWAY: That makes it more important for people like us to write about this stuff and get the real issues and stories out.

B. Leadership

In this study, RQ2 asks how leadership contributes to the organizational culture of the *Beacon*. Kets De Vries (2001) and Schein (2006) both identified leadership as a prime component of how culture develops in an organization. Leaders have a strong influence on how culture is shaped. At the *Beacon*, Margaret Wolf Freivogel is the clear leader. Freivogel spent 34 years at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, at various points running the newspaper's Washington bureau and editing the Sunday newspaper. When she took a buyout and left the newspaper in 2004, she immediately began wondering about her next step (McPherson & Miller, 2008).

Role of leadership. Over the five years since the *Beacon* began, Freivogel's role at the organization shifted. At the start, employees said she played a much larger role in the organization's day-to-day operation. However, she now contributes to the overall focus of the *Beacon*, but spends most of her time dealing with business issues. During the time period observed, Freivogel focused a lot of time on the potential alliance with St. Louis Public Radio. She frequently attended meetings concerning the alliance. She also frequently worked offsite, editing stories while traveling to visit her children and

grandchildren. Even when she was not physically in the newsroom, however, Freivogel's influence remained.

In the office, Freivogel clearly led the staff. At all meetings she attended, she controlled the conversation and facilitated discussion. Everything went through her. Other editors did not ask Freivogel specific questions about specific stories, but rather questions about the overall issues. For example, when talking about coverage of the State of the Union Address, Freivogel asked Korando how the *Beacon* plans to cover the event. When Korando responded that they will focus on "the facts," Freivogel agreed and made her vision known: "We don't need a narrative. If there is one, great, but if not, just the facts." She said her primary focus with the *Beacon* is quality. "I'm worried about good journalism" (personal communication, March 13, 2013). When Rosenbaum discussed how he dealt with editors, he inadvertently illustrated Freivogel's role at the *Beacon*.

I talk with my editor, Susan, all the time. We have many conversations about stories and she knows what she's looking for. I talk with Donna occasionally, when Susan is on vacation or if I'm doing an arty story or a more featurey story. Occasionally I talk to Sally if it's health related, but not very often. Margie sometimes gets in the mix as a person who pushes you in the right direction or something (personal communication, March 21, 2013).

Rosenbaum's quote explains how Freivogel sets the direction of the news organization without becoming involved in the day-to-day decisions about coverage. Hegger and Korando also said that Freivogel occasionally becomes very interested in a particular topic such as the sequestration, and that means that coverage needs to focus on that issue. Freivogel will not say how she wants the coverage, just that she finds something interesting. Hegger said that Freivogel is very clear on direction.

One thing is that Margie does set direction. She makes it clear. You know, she gives us a lot of leeway and I think Donna and I, well, we pretty much manage the daily. I was going to say paper, but you know what shows up every day. But I

think Margie is very clear about giving direction about the kinds of things she thinks are important (personal communication, March 15, 2013).

Freivogel sets the ethical direction at the *Beacon* also. Employees look to her for the “right” decision. In multiple interviews, Beaconites noted that whenever they find themselves unsure about how to deal with an issue, they contact Freivogel. This illustrates her role because not one reporter discussed Freivogel playing a large part in how they produce stories. When a *Beacon* reporter said “my editor,” they meant either Korando or Hegger, not Freivogel. But ethical decisions come from Freivogel. For example, an organization in a partnership with the *Beacon* became outspoken concerning a certain ballot item. Nobody in the newsroom knew exactly how to deal with the issue and immediately turned to Freivogel for answers. “I don’t want to overreact to this,” she said, “but we cannot be involved in a partnership where they’re strategizing with one side.” The *Beacon* accepted a grant from an arts organization. The grant called for the *Beacon* to hold community meetings to discuss issues in the arts. Freivogel found herself a little indecisive about the experience at first, but after the meetings, thought the partnership worked well. She noted, during a morning budget meeting, this experience as a blueprint for how the *Beacon* should approach grants in the future.

If you were going to articulate a guideline for us, this seems like a start. This felt a little uncomfortable for me at first because we were partnering with an organization that was giving us money and we report on them. But they were also genuinely wanting to know what was going on. So that's a sort of guideline for the future. There are probably organizations we don't want to partner with, like a liquor store that wants to know where liquor is sold.

Strategic Development Manager Stovall noted the tension between the business side of the *Beacon* and the editorial.

There’s never really a bad monetary opportunity for grants or whatever, I think. The editorial side might disagree. The bottom line is it comes down to Margie. I

mean, she has such a great background with journalistic ethics that, like, the line does end with her. So basically we have to feel out what feels right and then think about it. In the end, we ask Margie because she'll have the right answer (personal communication, March 18, 2013).

During the time period observed, the *Beacon* worked on a series of stories concerning obesity in the inner city. The Missouri Foundation for Health funded the series, and Health Editor Altman noted how the editorial side of the *Beacon* worked with the business side of the organization on this type of story.

It's very touchy and it was hard for Margie to say, 'OK, we've got to go out to these foundations and get money.' This is new territory for journalists of course, but it's also our future. So we went. We've been very, very careful. Susan looks carefully at our stories. She takes a political test on all of them so she feels they are unbiased. Margie looks again, as she reads every story. But it's something we're all really careful about (personal communication, April 5, 2013).

Some of the journalists at the *Beacon* consider Freivogel a mentor or an idol. In interviews, numerous Beaconites lauded Freivogel's experience and remarked how much they have or hoped to learn from her. Public Insight Network Analyst Lockhart communicated that Freivogel was the primary reason she came to the *Beacon*. Lockhart considers Freivogel a person to look up to professionally.

When Margie called me and invited me to come, I've always had respect for Margie. I came to the *Post-Dispatch* right out of J-school. I got a scholarship from Mizzou. So I've known Margie since I was 18 years old. And I've always had a lot of respect for her. She's always kind of been a role model to me. You know, she's not that much older than me, just four or five years, but she was kind of setting the pace for things I wanted to do as a woman (personal communication, March 22, 2013).

How leadership shapes culture. Freivogel informs and influences the culture of the *Beacon* on both a daily micro and macro way. During the time period observed, Freivogel worked out of the newsroom 35% of the time. When in the newsroom, the *Beacon* had a more formal environment. The staff held budget meetings, they engaged in

fewer personal conversations, and the workday appeared more structured. On days when Freivogel worked from the *Beacon* newsroom, all major decisions concerning editorial went through her. This did not appear the case on days when she worked offsite. On a more macro level, Freivogel built the foundation of the *Beacon* and the staff enacts her mission for the organization daily. She still retains a firm hold on communicating that mission.

Freivogel enacted the “news that matters” approach taken daily by the *Beacon*. When in the office, the editor sometimes verbalizes this approach concerning a story. When discussing a particular story with a reporter, Freivogel said, “Start with people directly affected and then you build around them, not the other way around. You need a place to start. We need a vehicle.” This advice clearly articulates her vision of an online newspaper utilizing context to tell stories. On a day when Freivogel worked out of the office during a trip to Vermont, Hegger told a reporter over the phone that a story needed more people affected by the incident, thus continuing the mission. When Freivogel is out of the office, Hegger and Korando run the day-to-day operations, but Freivogel’s mission remains present. For the series on gun violence, Freivogel called a meeting to brainstorm ideas. Before the meeting, she told Hegger and Korando that with all her obligations to the potential alliance, she could not oversee the series as closely as she would want. She implied that this meeting would allow her the ability to communicate what she wanted out of the series, even though she would only be tangentially involved. Freivogel originated the idea for the series and called the meeting to make sure Beaconites understood her vision. In the newsroom, to other editors, she said,

I think the key would be doing it in a way that would let people see the patterns of gun violence. Maybe we pick a block that’s in the middle of this and see who’s

here, what's happening and how this intersects with these bigger trends. I will send this note around and say, 'Let's make a big deal out of this.' But I'm doing that without knowing if it is a big deal.

When the *Beacon* faced the quandary of whether to publish the racist cartoon concerning the mayoral race, the staff looked to Freivogel for the decision. Freivogel verbalized what she saw as the predicament. The *Beacon* could run the cartoon, letting the community see the depiction, but also spread a racist image. Or the organization could describe it, and not give it any more prominence. Eventually, Freivogel decided on the latter. "I'm inclined to describe it and not print it. People can find it if they want," she said.

When Reporter Singer wondered how to proceed with a story about the St. Louis University School of Law, Freivogel assisted in the decision. Singer had off-the-record sources concerning an administrator at the school, but struggled with publishing the piece without attribution. Freivogel stepped in and verbalized that she did not feel comfortable running the story without this particular attribution. Singer held it. Freivogel consistently makes this type of decision, one that could potentially affect the *Beacon's* credibility. Even when she is not physically present, during the time period observed, Beaconites called Freivogel to solicit advice. Therefore, even as time passes, and Freivogel delegates more and more decision-making power to staffers, she is still shaping culture. Schein (2006) wrote that a particularly strong leader's vision would powerfully influence culture even after they step down from a leadership position. Over time, that influence dissipates, but not without the emergence of a new significant leader. This has not yet happened at the *Beacon*, where Freivogel still shapes culture on a daily basis.

C. Ownership

Schein (2006) and Morgan (2006) both found that ownership structure can influence the development of organizational culture. Ownership intrinsically links with leadership. When an organization begins, ownership traditionally assumes a leadership role. However, the *St. Louis Beacon* does not have an owner. As a nonprofit organization, a board of directors controls the *Beacon*. But before assembling a board of directors, four people started the work that would become the *Beacon*.

History. In 2005, Freivogel and Duffy accepted buyouts from the *Post-Dispatch*, but neither thought about retiring. Those two, along with Freivogel's husband, Bill, and former *Post-Dispatch* editor Richard Weil founded the *Beacon* after failing, along with two other *Post-Dispatch* employees, to purchase the *Post-Dispatch*. Duffy remembered the failed purchase as a good turn of events:

We had some good legal advice on how to set something up called an employee stock ownership company, and that's how we were going to finance it. We got pretty far. We had a commitment of \$850 million. We didn't have any of it in our pockets. We are very fortunate the family told us to go away. We would have been in serious financial trouble. It would have been a disaster. First of all, we had no business experience at all. We had no idea. We knew how to do journalism, but we had no idea about business (personal communication, March 15, 2013).

At this point, the four did not hatch a plan for the *Beacon* yet. In the summer of 2006, the quartet met after hearing about *Voices of San Diego*, an online nonprofit news organization based in Southern California. Duffy went to San Diego to observe how *Voices* ran a news organization. "I saw that we could do it," he said. For the next 18 months, the quartet planned the *Beacon*, focusing on generating a mission. "News that matters," said Duffy, "just really serious, experienced and seasoned approach to newsgathering."

By the end of 2007, the four began assembling a staff. The founders approached Hegger and Korando before they fleshed out the idea for the *Beacon*. Hegger remembered the beginning:

Well, we were here from the beginning. I think Donna and I were both approached at what might have been the end of 2007. It was then that the *Beacon* was actually going to happen. You know, I think they had been working at it, Margie and Bob, for a while. And we started part time in February of 2008, and then went full time like mid March ... We were trying to get sources, talking about what kind of stories we were going to do, and just kind of getting an infrastructure together (personal communication, March 15, 2013).

The *Beacon* first published content in February of 2008. At the time, the organization called itself *The St. Louis Platform*, but soon after changed its name because the *Post-Dispatch* began a blog called *The Platform*. Rather than fight for the name, the founders simply rebranded as the *Beacon* (Tritto, 2008).

Currently, a 10-person board of directors controls the *Beacon*. Freivogel, who did not take a salary in her role as editor until 2010, remains on the board. Weil serves as the chairman. The board makes the major decisions about the organization. In the beginning, Weil is the person who pushed for a full-time staff reporter located in Washington, D.C. Hegger noted that Weil thought a reporter at the capital would provide the *Beacon* with prestige.

Richard was determined we would have a Washington reporter. So that was a top priority. I mean, frankly, if I made that decision, I don't know because I look at the local area and think we could do this or that. But I think Richard wanted something that would give us some prestige and even though, if you look at the [*Post-Dispatch*], they have one person, but he doesn't do a lot. This gives us something that others don't really have (personal communication, March 15, 2013).

Despite a board of directors, Freivogel still controls the *Beacon*, according to employees. Her opinions and decisions drive the culture of the newsroom. Because businessmen and

women who work for and run other organizations make up the board of directors, the board remains a hands-off entity. The board mostly consists of prominent St. Louis dignitaries and major donors to the *Beacon*. McManus (1994) argued that corporate ownership led to non-journalists making the majority of a news organization's major decisions. This does not happen at the *Beacon*, where even the chairman of the board is a former journalist. Freivogel and the other founders insulated themselves to outside meddling and kept control of the organization they founded. This allowed Freivogel to shape the culture of the *Beacon*. The organization's funding model permitted her to stay in control.

In the time period observed, besides Freivogel, of the board members, only Weil ever appeared in the newsroom. His influence during these visits seemed quite marginal. On one occasion, he visited to find only Jones and this researcher in the newsroom. He spent some time complimenting Jones on a graphic he recently made, and then left. On Feb. 26, Weil pitched a story to Freivogel and Hegger. The editors decided to look into the issue, but ultimately, after Weil left, decided the idea would not turn out well and declined to research it further. Finally, on one occasion, Hegger tells Weil that Reporter Singer began to encounter problems reaching sources at St. Louis University. This seemed like an innocuous conversation, but Weil notes that he'll email Singer and contact the university to see if he can fix the problem. In short, Weil and the board have very little influence on how the *Beacon* runs on a day-to-day basis, but Weil's vast journalistic experience in St. Louis has left him with some influence, and he occasionally uses that to help operations at the *Beacon*.

Funding. The *Beacon* boasts a donor model. In 2010, the organization reported \$2.22 million in revenue, while its expenses only totaled \$1.29 million (Knight, 2011). The organization's revenue comes from a mix of foundation grants, individual donations and fundraising events. In 2010, 59% of revenue came from donations, 35% from grants and 6% from fundraising events. More than 53% of the *Beacon*'s expenses come from editorial costs. The rest of the news outlet's expenses come from marketing and development (24%), general administration costs (19%) and information technology costs (4%).

The funding structure affects the *Beacon* culture in numerous ways. Unlike a traditional news organization, the *Beacon* does not rely on advertising to fund its product. The *Beacon* founders also do not envision the organization as a means to make profit; the *Beacon* is a service not a business (Freivogel, 2009). But that does not mean funding does not have an effect on newsroom culture.

Grants do not just fund the *Beacon* in general. Some grants, for example one provided by the Knight Foundation, do go to pay for general operating costs. However, a grant from the Missouri Foundation for Health directly pays the salary of the *Beacon*'s health reporter. The same foundation also gave the organization funding for the series concerning obesity. Health Editor Altman views this as a sign of the future. She said that this is the way people will fund journalism in the future, and she noted the *Beacon* employs professionals who will not be influenced. During a brainstorming meeting for the series on gun violence, Freivogel asked Altman and Duffy, "Can we look into funding sources to help with this?" However, Freivogel stated numerous times that the *Beacon* does not accept grants that could affect the organization's journalistic integrity. "I would

not accept a grant that would change how we did the story,” she said (personal communication, March 13, 2013). The grant for the obesity series is far more than just a set of stories. The *Beacon* also held community meetings with residents and experts to discuss the issue of obesity and help people. Altman said this does not directly affect coverage though. “These grants do not have an impact on content,” she said. “No. Not at all. All we do is complete a report at the end of the year. There is no agreement on content.”

Beacon staffers mentioned donors far less often than grants. They all know that certain notable St. Louis business people and foundations provide large donations to the *Beacon*, but it is not directly discussed. The majority of the *Beacon*’s individual donations are large. During a meeting concerning the potential alliance between the *Beacon* and St. Louis Public Radio, it is noted that an alliance will benefit both organizations because “the *Beacon* is really good at getting large donations, but the radio station is better at getting small, little donations.” In one staff meeting, however, during a staff meeting, Freivogel did talk about Duffy seeking donations, but it was in the context of how excited people were about the *Beacon*.

He’s getting support and being told what a great idea everything is. I think five or six years ago, people were really only starting to talk about where they get their news. But now it’s more of a discussion. People understand that it’s an issue, and to get high-quality journalism, there needs to be more players.

Political Reporter Mannies noted that occasionally she will speak to a group of donors about the *Beacon*, but, she stressed, repeatedly, that it was not her job to solicit donations.

I have no part in raising money except sometimes I speak to groups that include donors. But I don’t talk about money. I talk about what we’re covering. And I don’t see any difference in that than when I worked for the *Post-Dispatch*. Except for the last three or four years, you know, I worked for the family. I mean, I worked for the Pulitzer family. It wasn’t like they were making us write

something or cover something in a certain way, but it meant sometimes when I was covering political stories, there would be a Pulitzer involved. People ask, 'Aren't you put in an odd situation because you have to deal with donors occasionally.' And again I am not, and I don't (personal communication, March 28, 2013).

The *Beacon's* mix of using grants and donations for the bulk of its funding allows journalist Freivogel to control the organization without having business influences exert much power. Weaver et al. (2007) and McManus (1994) both found that journalists discussed the financial situation of their organizations often. Lowrey and Gade (2011) posited that traditional journalistic organizations' uncertain future forces journalists to constantly worry about the future and discuss their organization's financial health. At the *Beacon*, the ownership structure insulates journalists from these questions. More than one Beaconite off-handedly would dismiss traditional journalism by saying, "We don't have to worry about profit margins." This refrain can be heard consistently around the *Beacon*, and this affects the culture of the organization. It allows the founders, especially Freivogel, who are all journalists, to have greater influence and shape the culture of the organization without outside, non-journalistic, influence.

V. FINDINGS

In recent years, the difference between news organizations with a strong market orientation and those with a weak one grew exponentially (Lacy & Broadrick Sohn, 2011). While Beam (1998) found that many news organizations at the turn of the century belonged in the middle of the continuum that measures market orientation, Kaye and Quinn (2010) argued that the digital age brought with it a stark contrast in funding models; a large amount of news outlets now lean heavily toward the weak or the strong end of the continuum. According to the conceptual definition introduced by Beam (1998), the *St. Louis Beacon* belongs firmly on the weak side. Research questions 4 to 6 examine how its weak market orientation affects the *Beacon*.

A. Market Orientation

Five themes emerged using both field notes and interview transcripts to answer RQ4, which asked how market orientation affects construction of news processes at the *Beacon*. Those five themes are the philosophy of the organization; story selection and composition; innovation; marketing; and importance of being first.

Market orientation on news construction.

Philosophy of the organization. The *Beacon's* weak market orientation first and foremost affects the philosophy of the organization as a whole. With an almost absent business side, the *Beacon* can focus on editorial content without much compromise. Beam (1998) and McManus (1994) both described market-driven news outlets that produced news with an eye on both journalistic quality and financial gain. These two goals intertwined, which made McChesney (2004) remark that only when business and

journalistic goals align will citizens receive journalism untainted by financial goals. The *Beacon's* weak market orientation allows its journalists to remain insulated from many of the financial pressures faced by journalists at traditional media.

Unlike most news organizations, a member of the editorial staff leads the *Beacon* and makes all important decisions. One of those decisions put the three employees on the business side of the *Beacon* in a different room from editorial, creating a very strong separation between the divisions. Beaconites believe that this separation is not only important for the quality of the journalism, but also as “piece of mind” for the journalists. Arts Reporter Fowler noted that she’s been lucky in her journalism career; most of the organizations she worked for featured a strong separation between editorial and business. However, she said, the *Beacon* features the strongest “wall.”

I mean, I know other places this is not the case and at certain places I’ve had to fight to keep that wall in place. So the potential for the wall to go away has been present everywhere I’ve been. But not at the *Beacon*. That’s just not something that ever crosses my mind here (personal communication, April 4, 2013).

Associate Editor Duffy said that by not having to worry about the erosion of this wall, Beaconites can break rules and experiment with elements that could provide better journalism. “We just don’t think about those sort of things anymore,” he said, adding that corporate news organizations focus on those rules because they remain tried and true pillars that add to the financial bottom line (personal communication, March 15, 2013). One of the major rules broken by the *Beacon* early on consisted of the hiring of Health Editor Altman. Before arriving at the *Beacon* at the founding of the organization, Altman spent 35 years in the healthcare industry and had no journalism experience. Altman said that her hiring helped the *Beacon* focus its health coverage in nontraditional areas. Traditional news organizations “tended to cover hospital news, hospitals as employers,

hospitals as businesses, and there weren't many voices advocating for the community and that's very different" (personal communication, April 5, 2013). The *Beacon* also publishes stories in non-traditional formats. While the trend in market-driven journalism, as argued by McChesney and Nichols (2010), is toward narrative, on numerous occasions, Freivogel and other editors told reporters that certain stories "don't need narrative; we just need the facts here."

Beam (2002) found that the more market oriented a news organization, the more it covers lifestyle, features, arts and entertainment and sports stories. Early on, the *Beacon* decided to focus on hard news. Beam hypothesized that this shift toward soft news came because consumers wanted it, and McManus (1994) and Lacy and Broadrick Sohn (2011) agree. The *Beacon* does not prioritize what its readers want, but rather what they need. During a conversation about how to cover the sequestration, Freivogel at one point mentioned that readers need to know about "what's happening with their neighbors." Duffy immediately jumped in and discussed what readers "need to know," and how the *Beacon* can inform the citizens of St. Louis best. Jones agreed and added that readers might not see the effects of sequestration immediately, but journalists and the *Beacon* specifically should inform them concerning what they might experience. During the brainstorming meeting about the gun violence series, a Beaconite noted that people want to read politicized arguments in favor or against gun control; they don't want to hear about the story as a public health issue. Freivogel does not care, and noted, "We need to let people see the patterns of gun violence. We can pick smaller stories and see how they intersect with bigger trends." She later added, "People in the region have different views on guns and the legislature have done all kinds of goofy things with the bills being

introduced” and people like to read that content, but the *Beacon* needs to do something different.

Political Reporter Mannies stressed that her job is not about pleasing readers, but rather “to make the *Beacon* a place for people to get what they need politically” (personal communication, March 28, 2013). In a news storming meeting that discussed how the *Beacon* could get more people to read an already completed story about the small town of Pinhook, Missouri, community members attending the meeting provided ideas that could arguably stretch journalistic ethics and misconstrue the story’s focus. One of the community members advised that more people would read the piece if, through social media, the *Beacon* marketed the story as similar to Hurricane Katrina, but in Missouri. *Beacon* journalists immediately admonished the community member, and insisted that the story affects people as is, and if people do not want to read it, that’s fine. After that meeting, *Beacon* journalists, in the newsroom, questioned news storming altogether. “It’s one thing to discuss how we can highlight stories better,” said Korando, “but it’s something else to change them. That’s not what we’re about.”

The *Beacon*’s market orientation forced the founders to become more specialized. They could not cover everything, and decided that hard, investigative news, which more traditional news organizations “ignored,” would serve the community best. Hard news, to many Beaconites, means a strong focus on politics. Hegger noted that many St. Louis news outlets do not pay close attention to the politics of the region and that *Beacon* distributes many of its resources to the subject. Hegger said, “We are so good at politics. We have a whole team, a complete team” (personal communication, March 15, 2013). Because of the focus on hard news, the *Beacon* cannot cover certain subjects such as

sports, which Korando argued remains important to the St. Louis community. However, both Hegger and Korando noted that when something very important happens, such as the death of local baseball legend Stan Musial, the *Beacon* does cover it. “We have to,” said Korando. “If we don’t, it looks like we don’t understand St. Louis” (personal communication, March 15, 2103).

Story selection and composition. Beam (2002) and McManus (1994) both found that organizations with a strong market orientation choose story topics that appeal to potential consumers. They will also use more official and expert sources. The *Beacon* does not participate in either of these. One of the main factors that influence whether the *Beacon* covers a story using a freelancer is cost. The strength of an organization’s market orientation does not determine its operating budget. A strongly market oriented newsroom can fail financially and also consider cost before covering a story. However, a weak market orientation ensures that the *Beacon* will more than likely never prosper as much as it potentially could with advertising revenue. “We hope we our fundraising (increases) and will put that (money directly) into the paper,” said Freivogel, “but we won’t ever be able to spend money like a newspaper did in the ’70s and ’80s” (personal communication, Feb. 15, 2013).

During a phone conversation with a potential freelancer, Freivogel said, “It sounds like a good story, but I don’t think we can afford it.” Editors stated this sentiment numerous times around the office. If a Beaconite could not cover something, they use freelancers only when it fits within the budget. Editors make some hard decisions, said Korando. Staffers also noted that breaking news remains more expensive than other types of hard news. Because the staff is so small, redirecting resources toward a breaking story

means removing a reporter from the pieces they are currently completing. This could potentially affect the amount of content the *Beacon* provides on a given day. Editors said breaking news receives coverage only when the *Beacon* can provide more context than other media in town.

The *Beacon* can choose stories based on journalistic worth rather than potential page views, though. For example, on March 5, 2013, Hegger received a phone call asking her to run a poll concerning gun control. At least three other major media in St. Louis published the poll that day or the next one. The *Beacon* did not. Even though the poll would have pleased some people and angered others, Hegger simply told the caller, “We don't publish polls from interest groups.” Hegger noted that *Beacon* policy states not to run interest group-funded polls and figures despite potential community interest. In the aftermath of an Illinois state election, Freivogel noted that people do not read about municipal elections. “They only care about the little elections where they are,” she said. However, she added that these elections remained very important, so the *Beacon* would continue covering them. The *Beacon* does not closely cover the Illinois capital in Springfield, but when editors thought a breaking story would affect the St. Louis metropolitan area, they discussed how to find a freelancer for the piece. This showed that even though only a tiny amount of *Beacon* readership lived in or even near Springfield, the *Beacon* would cover the area if they thought it served their community.

Beam (2002) found that strongly market-oriented newsrooms produce shorter stories that focus on more surface-level issues. The *Beacon* prides itself on providing readers the “complete story.” A good example of this during the time period examined is coverage of the St. Louis Democratic mayoral primary. The primary would decide the

mayoral race since the Republican Party did not nominate anyone. The race featured three candidates. In all of its coverage, the *Post-Dispatch* only mentioned the third candidate, Jimmie Matthews twice, and never provided any information on his views or stands (Ferrucci, 2013). Political Reporter Rosenbaum noted that completely covering the election and specifically Matthews may affect resources and people might not care about his campaign, but it does improve coverage.

Jimmie Matthews was clearly not a viable candidate. He hadn't raised any money. He had run an election six months before where he got 10 percent of the vote in a two-way race, and he was kind of a perennial candidate. But I think that we wanted to have a more robust, comprehensive view of the race, so you had to include him in there somehow ... it's important for him to have his say in the press (personal communication, March 21, 2013).

Political Reporter Mannies agreed with this assessment and added, "There was potential, also, that Matthews could, depending on how close the race got, he could make a difference and take votes away from [candidate Lewis] Reed" (personal communication, March 28, 2013). Health Editor Altman said that the *Beacon* could write the complicated stories that other media would not because they do not worry about readers' desires for simplicity. She noted that stories, especially ones concerning health, can be very complicated, but good journalism will surround an issue such as gun violence. "It would be easy to just print the obvious and move on, but my job is to bring light to stories and parts of stories that would not otherwise be told" (personal communication, April 5, 2013). In a newsroom discussion concerning the racist cartoon, Freivogel noted that many news outlets do not cover issues of race for a fear of controversy. The *Beacon* on the other hand, hoped to become the catalyst for many discussions of race.

The *Beacon* also selects stories based on what reporters and editors believe to be important, not what numbers foretell. Even though the organization publishes only

digitally and superficially gathers analytical data on what people read, the editorial department does not use these numbers. During a staff meeting, General Manager Hollway told the staff that a certain piece got the most page views of any in the last month. The staff laughed and wondered why, but then immediately dismissed the topic and moved on. It became very clear that they did not care what stories garnered page views. When asked about how the *Beacon* used these numbers, Hollway said, “We don’t really use them. We don’t make assignments or switch resources around based on metrics and we don’t make money off of page views” (personal communication, April 8, 2013).

Innovation. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) and Beam (2002) found that news organizations without a focus on profit do not focus on innovation. Organizations of all types innovate because they aim to attract new potential customers and out maneuver competition (Morgan, 2006). The *Beacon*, however, does not emphasize innovation despite its status as a digital-only, progressive news organization, one that Kaye and Quinn (2010) would label fundamentally innovative. While the *Beacon* does host conversations amongst journalists about utilizing new tools and experimenting with technology, the consensus remains that innovation is positive, but only if it is secondary to journalistic quality. There is no push to innovate simply to gain audience.

Presentation Editor Jones argued that innovation can really add to a story, but Beaconites must decide if the loss of resources makes sense.

We could do something because it would be cool or different, but, really, what we have to do is decide if it’s something we should spend our resources doing. Is it going to impress readers or help with their understanding and knowledge of a story (personal communication, March 13, 2013)?

In one example during the time period observed, Jones made an interactive map that illustrated an issue graphically. It took some time to finish, but generated a significant

amount of interest on social media. He noted that “it got three times as many views as anything else the *Beacon*’s done” in the last two years, but that does not mean he would do it for more stories. “Only when it makes sense,” he said.

Rosenbaum wrote a story about the creator of the Netflix series *House of Cards*. The creator has St. Louis roots, and *Beacon* editors discussed a sidebar to the story that would show where other St. Louis celebrities attended high school. Freivogel asked Jones if he could produce an interactive element. Jones noted that the “first step to doing anything is to figure out what we want before we spend any time doing something that would just be fun or something.” A newsroom conversation concerning a popular graphic about where tax money goes further illustrates this point:

HEGGER: Maybe you should do more of those, Brent.

JONES: We don’t want the novelty to wear off.

HEGGER: People seemed to like it.

JONES: Yeah, but maybe just because it’s pretty.

FREIVOGEL: There are things you can see better visually versus print and this is one of those. You did the digging out of information. That’s hard, but it’s very helpful to readers, which is why we did it.

The *Beacon* uses the same philosophy when deciding whether to shoot video to augment a story. Political Reporter Rosenbaum serves as the newsroom’s video expert, even providing a tutorial to the staff at one point during the period examined. But while according to Lowrey and Gade (2011), some newsrooms attempt to add video to every story just as a selling point to readers, Rosenbaum stressed, “Every story does not need video. They don’t. This is where news judgment comes in.” Freivogel told the staff that video does not have to add too much to the story, just enough to be worthwhile. She explained that video helps in certain circumstances, but do not go “overboard” and think video needs to be professional and anymore than “highlights.”

Marketing. All news organizations perform some functions meant to promote its content (McChesney, 2004). The difference between a strongly market-oriented organization and weakly market-oriented one lies on in how employees perform the promotion. While the *Beacon* believes its journalistic integrity is the primary responsibility and marketing and promotion should not compromise the journalistic process even minimally, Beaconites do want more of the public reading. The organization does attempt popularizing its brand and generating more readers.

The primary way the *Beacon* journalists engage in marketing-based activities is through news storming meetings. This weekly meeting at 2:30 p.m. on Fridays expressly endeavors to generate more interest in content. Freivogel defined the meetings as a way to think about “how to reach people we’re not already reaching” (personal communication, Feb. 15, 2013). She noted, however, that the process for reaching people cannot in any manner affect how *Beacon* journalists construct stories. The next month, at a news storming meeting, someone asked Freivogel the point of the meetings and she noted “we want to reach more people than we’re reaching and in different ways.” The last part of that sentence implies changing the way Beaconites cover stories, and Freivogel understood that and added, “That’s not quite right. What we’re really trying to do is increase impact.” According to Strategic Development Manager Stovall, news storming helps and assists the business side of the *Beacon* more than the editorial. He explained that the point is not to change anything about the quality of journalism produced, but rather having editorial explain upcoming stories helps him and others better understand the pieces and come up with more intuitive and specified ways to promote the pieces. “News storming gets me in on the ground floor,” he said. “That’s been so helpful to me

because it gives me more of a clear assignment and an understanding of what I need to do” (personal communication, March 18, 2013).

Part of the focus of news storming meetings is for the business side of the operation to discuss with editorial the “small tasks” that journalists can do to help better promote their own pieces. Jones, the presentation editor and unofficial technical advisor to the newsroom, stressed that editors need to do a better job of placing meta tags on stories so they appear in Google searches more often. A better use of tags would also allow readers to find related stories more easily. When discussing the Pinhook story in a meeting, General Manager Hollway told the story’s editor that the reporter needs to forward the finished piece to all the sources she spoke with. Hollway opined that when reporters do this, interested parties would spread the piece around to “readers who will probably be interested and help the story get noticed.” This sentiment, emailing story links to sources, became repeated often during the time period observed. However, in a different circumstance, Hollway said that there is a limit on how many readers any story can draw. The *Beacon* provided thorough coverage of the election of the recent pope. Editors believed that their coverage rivaled all national publications that did not have a reporter in Rome. One of the rumored potential pope candidates was born in St. Louis, so *Beacon* staffers wanted to have a plan in place in the case of his election. The idea, said Freivogel, was “it probably won’t happen, but if it does, this place will be descended upon by everyone and we need to be ready to be the place people come to for information.” The *Beacon* wanted complete coverage of the papal election, and wanted to make sure that if the story became local, national media would utilize and promote the

“complete” coverage the *Beacon* would produce. “We want to be first,” said Freivogel, “and we want to have all the information before anyone.”

Korando asked Hollway, “When we have something like the pope, when we know our stuff is really, really good, what can we do to get it to more people?” Hollway gave an answer that fits with what McManus (1994) argued market-driven organizations believe. She said, “It has to cut through everyone else’s coverage and be very different. It can’t just be ours is the best.”

Editors consistently focused on how to receive the best leverage from perceived good work, though. Stovall said that he tells editors and reporters that if they really understand whom they are writing about, tell him and he’ll spread the story.

All our editors are really on top of their given topics. For instance, like Sally. She’s on healthcare and education. She has a lot of different contacts with people at say [Washington University’s] school of medicine or a hospital. It seems like these editors have topics and they have connections and they know people who would be interested who are within networks. We’re not necessarily top of mind right now, so we have to do more legwork to get the news we publish out. They’re good about that and they’re good about directing me (personal communication, March 18, 2013).

One of the ways the *Beacon* markets itself is through partnerships with other organizations. These partnerships sometimes provide funding, but more often than not, *Beacon* staffers believe that the promotion that comes along with them is just as valuable. While Freivogel can and does veto some potential partnerships if she believes they could even minimally affect the *Beacon*’s journalistic credibility, Stovall said the business side always looks for opportunities.

They come about in different ways that essentially equate to happenstance or very convenient conversations, but we’re always looking. Our [general manager] Nicole is very active. She’s always out. She’s always willing to talk to anyone about anything. On the business side, that’s our whole philosophy. It’s trying to be as open as possible. If someone has some idea to partner with us like, yeah, we

can do that. We try to keep an open mind. We had a partnership with an AM station where they broadcast our [weekend news program] and that exposed us to a broader audience because they reach x amount of people (personal communication, March 18, 2013).

When the *Beacon* holds an event with a partner, business-side employees will attend and bring brochures with the *Beacon*'s mission, along with samples of the organization's work. In one staff meeting, Hollway announced she planned on attending an event, and Freivogel made sure to ask if she would bring *Beacon* brochures.

The *Beacon* also uses technology to market itself. Hollway explained that she uses web analytics not for revenue primarily, but to see if stories published correlated to progress in the community. She then shares that information with the public. "We look at revenue maps to our content and not in a traditional commercial way," she said, "but in a way that shines a light on how we're strengthening the community" (personal communication, April 8, 2013). She added that she can use certain metrics to better understand what potential partners might look for and then use the information to entice the partners.

You know, I look at how can we use our content to build relationships with people and then therefore understand those relationships ... I did something called Beaconomics that really sort of looked at the old, traditional metrics of how many views, how many clicks, how many downloads. You know, I was looking at how many people came to an event, how many stories came from the event, how many people were better informed (personal communication, April 8, 2013).

Presentation Editor Jones argued that web analytics should not be used to influence news coverage, but for promotion purposes, they can be a real tool.

I say the numbers are the numbers. If you want to look at them then look at them, OK. If you want to look at them to see what maybe we should be covering, maybe not. Nicole [Hollway] always says it's about starting a conversation and I think that's true. If people are aware of what we're doing and what we think is important, if we're able to make people aware of what about a story is interesting or what they should be paying attention to or that kind of thing, I think that's the

goal with the numbers, using them to get people to pay attention (personal communication, March 13, 2013).

Importance of being first. McManus (1994) found that strongly market-oriented newsrooms believed exclusivity generated profits. If a news organization could produce a story that others did not have, or they could produce a story before others had it, this would then translate into more profit. McManus found that organizations would publish before attaining “the full story” just for exclusivity purposes. Schultz (2007) found that economic gain provided enough of an impetus for exclusivity to become a new news element; an organization found an exclusive story more newsworthy.

At the *Beacon*, journalists often desire exclusivity. Reporters and editors consistently wonder if they will produce a story before the *Post-Dispatch* or another area media. However, Hegger believed they did this because “we have a lot of old print journalists in the room and it’s hard to get past that” (personal communication, March 15, 2013). So while Beaconites would like to be first, it is not a value emphasized at the organization. In fact, when another media organization does publish a story first, instead of writing their own report, the *Beacon* will often put a link to its competitor’s story on the *Beacon* website. When the *Post-Dispatch* wrote a piece on a big government audit, Freivogel decided the *Beacon* could not add anything to the story, so she decided to link to the *Post-Dispatch* story on the *Beacon* site. On a different story, a reporter followed up on an organization’s piece, but the *Beacon* linked to the original in their story. Even when the *Beacon* gets a story first, they are not proprietary about it. When the *St. Louis Business Journal* linked to a piece from the *Beacon*, editors took pride in this.

A story concerning the St. Louis University School of Law best illustrates the *Beacon*’s take on exclusivity. Reporter Singer worked on the piece.

I had heard over the weekend that first thing Monday morning they were going to lock [the dean's] office and ban [him] from the building, so I went over there at 8:45 in the morning and there was no sign anything was happening. So I was just being told a lot of things that didn't turn out to be true. In the context of the wider story at the university that I'd been following with the president and the academic vice president and everything, it just made me think, boy you want to be right, but jeez, you don't want to jump the gun (personal communication, March 21, 2013).

While Singer thought he had the story correctly, he remained unsure. He discussed the situation with Freivogel, who advised holding off on publishing right away. Singer wrote the full story, but left it in the *Beacon's* content management system. For the rest of the day, he tried to confirm the story, but could not. "I consider it a multi-layered story," said Singer to the newsroom. "I have all the bottom levels, but nothing from the top. I have all the details, but nothing confirmed and no idea what's real or not." At a staff meeting the next week, Freivogel led a round of applause for Singer's "dogged journalism" concerning the piece. She said,

I just think this story was a model of how to do our journalism. I don't care that we had the story later than some. Anytime we have a chance to be right or first, I choose right. We could have ran the story and said, 'Sources say,' and we may have been right. But that's not enough.

Journalists' perception of influence of market orientation.

Journalists at the *Beacon* perceive that market orientation impacts the organization's content. Interviews and field notes provide the data that answers RQ5. Journalists openly acknowledged the impact of market orientation on numerous occasions, and noted the *Beacon's* weak orientation influences the organization both positively and negatively.

Positive perceptions of market orientation. *Beacon* journalists believe that having a weaker market orientation allows them to take chances they otherwise could not and write about subjects other organizations would avoid. Public Insight Network Analyst

Lockhart believes the *Beacon* covers stories in a way that bigger “newspapers that focus on the bottom line like the *Post-Dispatch* can’t” (personal communication, Feb. 14, 2013). She said other places focus on reaching as large of a population as possible, while the *Beacon* can serve its community, intimating that an inherent difference between the approaches.

We write about St. Louis. But the real question is how you do this? I live outside the city, but I still care about the city and what happens in the city. And the city is really complicated. You could write and try to make it for everyone, or you can write for who it affects. Like when something like the Newtown shooting occurs. Do you want to get your information from the places who drop in because of a big story, or do you want to get your information from the places that cover the place all the time? I choose the second, and I think the *Beacon* does that because we cover the city all the time (personal communication, Feb. 14, 2013).

In a staff meeting, Freivogel noted how many different organizations are so set in their ways, and the *Beacon*'s organizational makeup allows it to adapt. Lockhart said, “We’re freer in our thoughts because we started from nothing and just did it. We didn’t need to think about a lot of things. We didn’t need a definitive plan.” Reporter Singer added, “To a degree, we’re making this up as we go along. And we live with that uncertainty, and that allows to do some great things and not worry about some other things.”

Singer believes that the freedom associated with the *Beacon*'s market orientation allows him to cover important stories that could be left untold.

We don't have to build an audience for advertising like a commercial news site. I mean, you want to be able to show impressive numbers when you're going to funders and show impressive numbers for your own psychic satisfaction but, overall, I don't think about whether the story will get big numbers. And nobody asks me about that. I think about whether it's important. And, you know, a lot of important stories don't get told because they wouldn't have numbers (personal communication, March 21, 2013).

Singer and other reporters also spoke positively about how when they have a story idea, they can write it and use resources without having to discuss the situation with someone

outside of editorial. They just have to ask their editor. “There aren’t as many layers,” said Singer. Others said they “loved” the autonomy this type of organization provided. They did not have to worry about when readers ignore their stories online. *Beacon* journalists want their stories read, but they do not have to stress about whether the stories do get read. Arts Reporter Fowler said that the *Beacon* allowed her to follow her “passion” and write about what she thinks matters most. “Time and time again, they let me – and I love this – gravitate toward arts that have a social justice purpose” (personal communication, April 4, 2013). She said that some other places she worked would not let her cover this material for fear that it would alienate potential readers or viewers.

Negative perceptions of market orientation. The staffers at the *St. Louis Beacon* believe that the organization’s weak market orientation remains a function of its nonprofit status and its lack of advertising funding. Lowery and Gade (2011) and numerous other researchers have found that advertising revenue continues falling at news organizations across the country. However, the *Beacon* staff attributes tight resources, some editorial decisions, a lack of promotion and an uncertain future to market orientation. Journalists consistently said their biggest fears came from a sudden loss of major grants or donations. Confidentially, one said, “What happens when one of the major donors just decides to back something new?” This sentiment came up numerous times.

In a staff meeting where employees discussed the potential alliance with St. Louis Public Radio, one journalist asked if the alliance could result in a staff photographer. This question became the catalyst for a discussion about how “nice” it would be to have a photographer on staff who could lend multimedia elements to all stories. *Beaconites* noted that the market orientation does not allow them to have certain resources such as a

photographer. Hollway informed Korando that a freelancer would like to partner with the *Beacon* on a series of multimedia features on city musicians. Korando noted that these are exactly the kind of youth-oriented pieces the organization needs, but budget restrictions would get in the way. Simply spending a lot of freelance resources on covering the election of the pope left Korando without the money to pay for this series. Hegger noted that when deciding what to cover,

You know, sometimes we're still at a point of saying no more than yes because at a certain point, if I had more money or more staff, I would do more. I think we have certain aspirations that are hard to achieve with the kind of small staff we have. So things like explanatory journalism and investigative journalism are the two things I think are hard for us to do because they're both so time consuming (personal communication, March 15, 2013).

Political Reporter Mannies noted that political coverage necessitates multiple stories about every subject because issues can be “extremely complicated.” She said that, because of staffing, at the *Beacon* she picks and chooses stories and cannot cover all that she wants. Korando serves as the editor for the organization’s “Voices.” Freelance columnists pen opinion pieces for the *Beacon*. Korando noted that finding, editing and curating these used to be a full-time job for her on the Editorial Desk at the *Post-Dispatch*. “I spent all my time doing that before,” she said, “and now it’s secondary. And for while it was third. So I know how little I’m doing compared to what can be done” (personal communication, March 15, 2013). Presentation Editor Jones said *Beacon* staffers must think about how they use resources, both money and time, because of the organization’s small staff, which he attributed to market orientation.

I think we need to think carefully about what we do given that we have pretty limited resources in terms of both money and people and all that. I feel like it’s pretty important to choose where we focus. We don’t have the luxury of just saying, ‘Oh, I’ll just do whatever.’ I mean, we do that a lot of times, I think. But I always try to be, when I have some input, I always try to be very mindful about,

‘Is this the right way to be spending my time, or Susan’s time, or Donna’s time, or whoever’s time?’ (personal communication, March 13, 2013).

The lack of funds means *Beacon* staffers turn toward grants occasionally. Grants partially fund some stories and series published by the *Beacon*, and journalists believe this money is necessary to craft the best stories possible. Arts Reporter Fowler said, “Grants really help with my stories. They allow you to, you know, hire a videographer, travel out of town to compare St. Louis with another city, those extra things that really add depth to a story” (personal communication, April 4, 2013). Health Editor Altman noted that grants fund almost all health coverage, and while the funding adds numerous dimensions to coverage, it can also affect credibility.

You know, this is pretty touchy. How do you get money to support unbiased journalism? Do grants bias you? And [political reporters] Jo and Jason have told us they have heard remarks from politicians and different groups that, ‘Oh, the *Beacon* gets money from a foundation that is known to support an expanding Medicaid program.’ So are we suspect in that regard? (personal communication, April 5, 2013).

Strategic Development Manager Stovall said the *Beacon* always looks for potential grants, but he understands the potential negative perceptions of this type of funding. He believes Freivogel remains essential to this process because, he said, she would never allow the *Beacon* to be put in a compromising situation. However, *Beacon* staffers subconsciously think of grants and partnerships as a means to funding. In numerous cases, checking with Freivogel about available funds did not appear primary; instead, journalists and staffers would wonder about potential outside resources. For example, after a meeting with St. Louis Public Radio revealed that if the two allied, both organizations wanted the other to migrate to their own website. *Beacon* staffers found the radio station’s website subpar. Hollway, without wondering if there was a budget for web

development, voiced the idea for a partnership with a web company to build a new, common site.

Another negative perception of the organization's market orientation came from Reporter Singer and others. He noted that because the *Beacon* did not rely on page views for revenue, staffers paid little attention to increasing the number of reads on a story. He said this sometimes discouraged him because as a reporter, he always wants more people to read his material. He noted that when he worked at the *Post-Dispatch*, he could post a story to the website and receive a significant amount of views within an hour. Finally, Political Reporter Mannies best articulated the last negative perception acknowledged numerous times. Numerous employees implied they did not view this market orientation, even after five years, as sustainable. Mannies said,

I mean, [taking this job] was a leap of faith. I wasn't sure what was going to happen down the road for us, but I know that I've had more than four really good years and I enjoyed the people I work with and more importantly, I enjoy what we're trying to do. I mean, we in it for the right reasons. We're not in to make money or push a point of view. We're just in it to cover the news. And I don't think that's the case in most places. But will it work? (personal communication, March 28, 2013).

Weakly market-oriented newsroom's perception of competition.

Answering RQ6 involved analyzing field notes and interview transcripts. The question asked how a weakly market-oriented newsroom perceived its competition. Beam (2002) and others argued that the more strongly market-oriented a newsroom, the more it will focus on its competition. As previously noted, the majority of Beaconites spent a considerable amount of time at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, which made that print organization a consistent topic of conversation. *Beacon* employees constantly noted the *Post-Dispatch's* coverage and also frequently reminisced about past experiences at the

print publication. However, to answer the research question, I used only observations and comments made about other media as competition, not stories about the past or gossip concerning journalists at different institutions.

While *Beacon* employees, at times, discussed public radio, a business journal and broadcast news stations as competition, the staffers saw the *Post-Dispatch* as its biggest competitor. However, all clearly noted, at other times, that they did not compete with anyone, that the *Beacon* carved out its own niche “that is unique in this area.” The *Beacon* did not focus on other organizations as competition very much, but certainly did want to best other media, specifically the *Post-Dispatch*, in the area. The *Beacon* journalists perceived its competition in three ways: as antiquated, market-driven journalism; as competitors to be first; and as not real competitors for quality.

Antiquated, market-driven journalism. Beaconites perceive the *Post-Dispatch* as an organization stuck in the past that makes the majority of its decisions based on financial gain. They often marvel at the newspaper’s vast financial resources and question how poorly management distributes those resources. *Beacon* journalists consistently note how the *Post-Dispatch* covers topics solely because they might entice more readers. For example, a 15-minute conversation on Feb. 18, concerned the *Post-Dispatch*’s allocation of journalists to cover the St. Louis Cardinals’ spring training. “They’ve got more people there than we have on our entire staff,” one person joked. “I don’t think they’ll miss any big stories that happen in Florida,” one said sarcastically. There is a general, pervasive feeling amongst Beaconites that their competition does not look deeply into the issues, and that this is legacy media’s downfall. They believe people

want and need context. Hegger and Freivogel conversed about one particular *Post-Dispatch* story concerning politics.

HEGGER: It does the basics, but it doesn't really go into it deeply. There's also some context missing.

FREIVOGEL: It doesn't get people to the point of thinking about issues they haven't already thought about. It just recaps. What's the point?

HEGGER: It's a big problem. Why would anyone want to read this?

Health Editor Altman agreed with the overall sentiment. She said that most of the *Beacon's* competition just get "the easy story" and refuse to allocate enough resources to give readers the whole story, the context they need to make informed decisions. "The hard story, the full story, the one that's going to help the community and not just talk about something superficial to grab attention, that's the story we want" (personal communication, April 5, 2013). Political Reporter Mannies noted that when she worked at the *Post-Dispatch*, editors focused on news hooks too much. She said, "They just get caught up in stuff and lose the big picture. They care about headlines, but what about the story?" (personal communication, March 28, 2013). Associate Editor Duffy argued that because the *Post-Dispatch* focuses so strongly on financial gain, people are turning away from the newspaper; he called it an industry trend that he believes became antiquated. "Before us, there just wasn't any place to find good journalism here" (personal communication, March 15, 2013).

The journalists at the *Beacon* believe the *Post-Dispatch's* quality and journalistic integrity lessened when a corporation bought it from founders the Pulitzer family. They often noted that the purchase ushered in an era completely focused on stock prices and stories of dubious quality that grabbed readers. They argued that the allocation of resources changed then. For example, Korando, in a staff meeting, argued that the

Beacon should produce of voting map after the mayoral primary because it allows readers to understand the city better. She said, “The *Post* used to do this but they stopped and it’s way too important not to do.” Duffy said that after the purchase of the newspaper, *Post-Dispatch* staff noted the changes immediately. “We all got reduced to writing 6- and 10- and 12-inch stories. We no longer had the chance to use our talents and do what was thrilling and important” (personal communication, March 15, 2013).

Reporters noted the different styles of competitors. Singer argued that, for example, the *Post-Dispatch* published stories the same way for decades and that their style seemed obsolete in today’s era of journalism.

The *Post-Dispatch* has a habit that even when they’re doing a policy story, they seems to think they have to call a half dozen school districts and get their views. What’s the point, really? People want to know how it affects them, not a bunch of canned opinions on policy changes (personal communication, March 21, 2013).

Beaconites also believe the *Post-Dispatch* has yet to come to terms with the access to information provided by the internet. They note how when another organization beats the *Post-Dispatch* to a story, the newspaper pretends that the information is not already available and prints a piece with old news. For example, when the *Beacon* published a story about a cold murder case, the *Post-Dispatch* wrote about it four days later, prompting *Beacon* journalists to joke that the *Post-Dispatch* does not believe people can get information somewhere else. “Do they think people haven’t heard the story by now?” one asked. Freivogel said that at least the *Post-Dispatch* should mention that the *Beacon* broke the story. The *Beacon* always does that because “we don’t want to look like we’re just stealing stuff.”

Be first. The *Beacon* sees its competition as impediments to breaking a story. In a meeting, a *Beacon* editor explained the organization’s desire to publish information

before other media as “not really about getting more eyeballs, but it’s sign we’re doing our jobs well and know our subjects.” The majority of discussion in the *Beacon* newsroom concerning competition revolves around which organization published a story first. This is a secondary or tertiary goal for Beaconites, though, as their primary task remains “cultivating a contextualized and full story.” But if the Beaconites can accomplish that goal and publish information first, all the better.

When a source provided a *Beacon* reporter exclusive material pertaining to the mayoral race, the reporter immediately called an editor to share the good news. Korando told the reporter to write up the information as soon as possible, so the *Beacon* can break the story. When Singer thought he had an exclusive story concerning an anniversary for the University of Missouri’s president, editors changed the day the piece would run. Editors did not alter content, but planned to run the story on a Thursday, and ran it a day earlier to have an exclusive. On several occasions editors asked reporters to finish stories earlier than expected because they did not want other organizations to publish first. *Beacon* reporters consistently work on numerous pieces at the same time, and when a story about a single event such as a press conference or speaking event received coverage, reporters most of the time wanted to write these less complex stories last. *Beacon* editors wanted those types of stories quickly because they believed if another organization published first, then the *Beacon*’s story served no function. An example of this occurred when Washington bureau reporter Rob Koenig reported what editors deemed a good story. Freivogel told Hegger, “We have a lot of stuff to run on Monday, so we’ll hold the story for Tuesday, but tell Rob if he thinks someone else will get it before Monday, we’ll run it early.”

Not real competitors for quality. While Beaconites minimally compete with other media organizations for exclusivity, they believe they have no competition for quality. *Beacon* journalists consistently note that when they allocate resources to a subject, they will cover it better than other local media. On one occasion, a reporter wondered about publishing a story immediately because another news outlet presumably would publish shortly. Freivogel said that first would be nice, but do not let it get in the way of superior quality. She implied the *Beacon* should worry most about continuing to produce “better” journalism than other places. On a separate occasion, the *Post-Dispatch* published a story two hours before the *Beacon*, but an editor noted that “as always, ours is much better, had a lot more information.” When a big story in the city broke, Hegger told a reporter that others will have the piece, but to make sure the *Beacon*’s had all the information; she implied others would not. With the previously described story about St. Louis University’s School of Law dean, *Beacon* staffers celebrated Reporter Singer for his “dogged journalism” and “complete story,” even though he published it a full day after some other organizations. In a staff meeting, Freivogel said she knew Singer would write a great piece with confirmed details that displayed good journalism.

Singer noted that he did not think the *Beacon* reached nearly as large of an audience as the *Post-Dispatch*, but he felt like that did not reflect on quality. Political Reporter Rosenbaum said that the *Beacon*’s political coverage remained far more complete than the *Post-Dispatch*’s. He argued that the print newspaper barely covers most of the political news in the area. For a recent election, he said,

I was responsible for a lot of the state legislative races, state senate races and other down ballot races. They may not be the races with the most attention, but they’re really important to people. Most papers, like [the *Post-Dispatch*] don’t cover them at all (personal communication, March 21, 2013).

Rosenbaum added that this type of complete coverage set the *Beacon* apart locally. He said if people really wanted to understand local, state and national politics from a St. Louis perspective, they could only get that with the *Beacon*. He does not believe any of the other media organizations in the city attempt to compete with the *Beacon* in terms of quality of political coverage. *Beacon* journalists repeated this refrain consistently: They simply do not believe they have competition for producing quality, “good” journalism.

Market orientation plays a large role in how the *Beacon* situates itself within the journalism industry and in how Beaconites perform their jobs. The organization’s market orientation affects the philosophy of the entire *Beacon*, affects how journalists select stories and source, contributes to the lack of innovation at the news outlet and decreases the *Beacon*’s drive for exclusivity on stories. The *Beacon*’s weak market orientation provides journalists the ability to cover oft-ignored or controversial subjects such as race. It also affects journalists’ perceptions. They believe the orientation creates less bureaucracy, and allows them to ignore what audiences might want, not need, to read, However, it does come with drawbacks, according to Beaconites. The lack of advertising results in a smaller operating budget and a perception of less stability within the organization. Finally, the *Beacon*, due to its market orientation, can also pay less attention to its perceived competition.

B. Technology

Lowrey and Gade (2011) argued that technology, along with economics, continue to affect the journalism industry more than any other factors. They wrote that in this rapidly changing digital environment that journalism currently situates in, consistent change occurs to the traditional long-held principles and routines of journalism. This

section examines how the *St. Louis Beacon* incorporates technology into its daily construction of news processes, how journalists perceive the role of technology in their jobs and how technology allows the *Beacon* audience influence over the news organization.

Technology in construction of news processes.

The *Beacon* incorporates technology into its daily endeavors in numerous ways. As a digital newsroom, some integrations are obvious, while others remain more clandestine. The data for RQ7 comes from both field notes and interviews. The *Beacon's* assimilation of technology can be broken down in four ways: its digital environment; decision-making processes; integrated elements; and overall philosophy of technology.

Digital environment. All but one of the *Beacon* staff use Macintosh computers. Only Political Reporter Rosenbaum uses a PC laptop. Editors Duffy, Korando, Hegger and Jones all use desktop computers the majority of the time, with only Jones spending some time on a laptop. In 2011, the *Beacon* paid a company to develop a content management system called Lantern. This system incorporates a host of Google products into its environment. All Beaconites have access to Lantern and directly put their stories into the system and subsequently alert their respective editor of the piece's completion. Either Korando or Hegger will complete a first edit on a story and then communicate with the reporter concerning any necessary changes. Many times, Freivogel will peruse Lantern and edit any story that she finds interesting. She will communicate any potential qualms or feelings directly to Hegger or Korando, who will then communicate with the reporter. Each story progresses through Lantern's staging server, which allows editors to

change the story's status, from not edited to edited and the like. Once editors deem a story ready for publication, it will sit in Lantern until its scheduled publication date.

Since *Beacon* reporters predominantly work from outside the office, editors and reporters do not often communicate face to face. Most of this communication takes place via GoogleChat. Beaconites use this interface because *Beacon* email runs through Gmail. Some communication is done over the phone and also through email, but the bulk of it occurs over Google's instant-messaging interface. This transpires throughout the day. Occasionally, when breaking news occurs, political reporters directly post stories onto the *Beacon* website into an area called "Backroom." Beaconites refer to Backroom as a blog, but in the traditional sense, this is not a blog. Rather, Backroom is a categorization of a story. Editors have the ability to let Backroom be its own page on the site, or for the front page of the *Beacon* to incorporate the last three stories published in Backroom. Either Mannies or Rosenbaum immediately notify editors if they have directly published a piece.

The *Beacon* publishes roughly 12-15 stories per day on its website. The website's front page features news that editors deem most important to citizens. The front page features a frame on the right of the side of the page with five options. Interspersed with these options is a scrolling, clickable list of links. These links are headlines of stories recently published by wire services or other local media. The five options also on this right-side frame include "register," which lets readers become a member of the *Beacon*. This is a free service that allows those who sign up the ability to receive daily or weekly news updates from the *Beacon*, comment on stories and hear about upcoming events. For people who previously registered, there is a "sign in" link. The "about" option brings

readers to a page describing the *Beacon*'s history and mission and shows a list of the members of the organization's board. The "contact" option provides people with a web form to fill out with comments or thoughts. There is also a link to a list of *Beacon* staffers and their emails. Finally, a "donate" link allows readers the opportunity to make an online donation to the organization.

The website also features a menu on the bottom of the page with seven links:

MY BEACON: This link lets registered users read news categorized by their interests.

ISSUES & POLITICS: This link groups together all stories published concerning public issues and local and national politics.

ARTS & LIFE: This category separates out stories about the local arts scene. The *Beacon* publishes pieces about visual art, theater, dance, film and music.

INNOVATIONSTL: This category's title appears as "InnovationSTL" on the screen, as it is a combination of the word innovation with the abbreviation for the city of St. Louis. The category predominantly features news about St. Louis businesses.

HEALTH & SCIENCE: This category features news about health care and science, with a specific focus on the healthcare industry, which is the largest provider of jobs in the region.

VOICES: This category incorporates opinion columns written by non-*Beacon* employees about various issues affecting the region.

EVENTS: This option brings readers to a page with a calendar listing reader-submitted community events and events sponsored and put on by the *Beacon* itself.

Editors provide each story one or more categorization so if the piece appears on the *Beacon* main page first, it will also appear on each category's page thereafter for a period determined by how often editors publish stories in that category. For example, each page displays 10 stories, so how long a story remains on each category's page is determined by how quickly 10 stories get published in that category. The front page of the *Beacon* site

also features a search bar on the lower right side. All *Beacon* stories remain archived indeterminately.

Editors can organize the main page of the site in a variety of manners. It is possible for one story to occupy the entirety of the top of the page, or this area can be shared by two stories. Editors will have two stories share this space with each receiving 50% of the area, or one getting 60%. Thumbnail photos accompany headlines with a brief, one-sentence description of each story. When a user clicks on the story, they are brought to a page with the corresponding piece and whatever other multimedia elements accompany it.

Beaconites rely on Lantern for most of their day-to-day activities. All stories receive editing within this system, and reporters put stories directly into Lantern. Only freelancers send editors emails with the inline text of a story or a Word attachment with the story. When Lantern encounters problems, the entire *Beacon* operation suffers. One evening, Korando wanted to edit a story she received from a reporter late on a Thursday night, at around 11. If she finished editing the piece that night, the *Beacon* would publish it first thing in the morning. However, Korando encountered a problem within Lantern and could not edit the piece. Instead, she went to bed and the story did not get published till the next afternoon. This occurred often during the time period observed.

During the time period observed, Beaconites confronted one major problem with Lantern. A reporter wrote a story about a particular up-and-coming neighborhood in St. Louis. Editors, for numerous reasons, found that the piece did not contain enough context and overlooked potentially negative issues faced by the community concerning the neighborhood's rapid growth. The story remained in Lantern while the freelance

journalist worked on mollifying editors' concerns. Ten days after editors communicated these problems to the reporter, Presentation Editor Jones found the story linked on Facebook. Editors did not yet publish the story and the freelancer did not yet change the original version. A not completely edited, incomplete and potentially wrong story leaked to the public. Beaconites conducted some research and found that anybody specifically searching for something could gain access to the organization's staging server, the area of Lantern stories remain in after an initial edit. Jones found that if someone knew "exactly what to look for," they could conduct a Google search and find anything on the *Beacon's* staging server. "This is terrible and there has to be an emergency fix," said Freivogel upon hearing about the issue. She asked Jones if they could password protect the staging area of the site. Freivogel noted that the breach "is a libel issue and also a competitive issue. We don't want people seeing what we're publishing before we do it." The *Beacon* then contacted the developers of Lantern, and solved the issue.

During the time period observed, four large snowstorms hit the St. Louis area. Three of these made it very difficult for employees to commute to the *Beacon* office. Unlike at a traditional media organization, this did not affect the day-to-day operations of the news outlet because editors and reporters could easily work from home. The day after one particular storm, one editor noted that a newsroom did not seem to be necessary for editorial purposes. Her statement implied that for the *Beacon*, technology made a newsroom superfluous. In the weeks prior to her statement, four snowstorms made it very difficult for editors and reporters to work from the newsroom, so the office closed those days, but the editor's statement shows that editors did not think this affected news production much, if at all. Digital tools allowed Beaconites to work offsite seamlessly.

Decision-making processes. The *Beacon* does not incorporate technology into its decision-making processes concerning stories very often. However, the organization members do make certain judgments and assessments due to technology and their beliefs concerning its effects. For example, *Beacon* editors will occasionally find themselves with more than 12-15 stories ready for publication on a specific day. In these cases, they choose, from this group, only 12-15 pieces for the site that day. *Beacon* editors believe readers will experience trouble finding more than this specific amount of pieces on the organization's website. "When we publish more than that," said Freivogel, "the site gets overloaded and things get lost." She did not mean that the website encounters technical problems, but more that readers will not scroll down the page far enough to find all of the stories. *Beaconites* believe that, in this situation, *Lantern* allows editors the opportunity to practice news judgment. They utilize the technology *Lantern* affords to make decisions about what pieces appear on the top of the front page of the website versus down below. These decisions are based on what editors believe to have the most news value.

Beacon reporters also routinely noted that technology allows them the ability to publish stories at the length of their choosing. They stress that writing too much results in poor stories just as much as writing too little does, but the "unlimited" space provided by a digital interface lets them tell complete stories. Reporter Singer discussed this:

As long as you don't get carried away, this is a good thing. When you get an assignment, you know, you want to write it what it's worth. Part of the experience is knowing you're better off stopping at 20 inches instead of 40, even though the electrons are free ... Do you want spend that much time writing and talking to sources just to make it longer, just because you can? Probably not (personal communication, March 21, 2013).

Arts Reporter Fowler concurred. She said, “You’re not constrained by space or a 600-word story or a 1,500-word story. Obviously, you don’t want to make your story endless, but you can add and it’s no big deal” (personal communication, April 4, 2013).

The vast majority of Beaconites come from a newspaper background, and their experience is that when a piece gets published in the paper, it is complete and will not change thereafter. They believe digital technologies alleviate this rule, and that *Beacon* stories get published on the website, but reporters and editors can continue tweaking and bettering them. “You know,” said Associate Editor Duffy, “technology lets us build a story and the public can read along as we go. If something newsworthy happens, it can be sort of a rolling story. You can add stuff in as new information happens” (personal communication, March 15, 2013). This idea of rolling stories manifested itself numerous times during the time period observed. After the *Beacon* published a story using a specific female source, the woman called and told Hegger that she believed the reporter took her quotes out of context. Hegger told the story to the newsroom after the phone call and noted, “I’m not going to take her out of the story, but I’ll go in and expand her part a bit to fix her concern.” On a different occasion, after the *Beacon* published a story about a racist political cartoon, but did not publish the cartoon, a reader emailed the organization and asked the *Beacon* to print its reason for not publishing the cartoon at the bottom of the page. *Beacon* editors then did this.

For many stories, especially parts of series, Beaconites brainstorm before the reporting and writing begins. Presentation Editor Jones believes that at this point in the process, journalists should decide how technology will play a role in the story. “I think then we ideally look at our resources we have and figure out what we’re trying to

accomplish and figure out what's best going to accomplish that. Every story doesn't need to have a multimedia presentation" (personal communication, March 13, 2013). *Beacon* journalists seldom discuss technology early in the process. When Freivogel decided on a series on gun violence, she told Hegger that before publishing anything, they could produce a map containing all of the city's gun murders. They would then use the map as a starting point to generate conversation by forwarding it to Beaconites and community leaders. Freivogel believed ideas generated by the map could inform the series. The *Beacon* never produced the map, and during a staff meeting focused on brainstorming the series, technology received only a scant mention, as part of the very last sentence spoken during the 55-minute meeting.

Political Reporter Rosenbaum remarked that technology plays a large role in his decision-making process while producing a story. He said he thinks about what methods best tell a story. "You should consider every method you can" (personal communication, March 21, 2013). At a staff meeting, Jones wondered if Beaconites could use YouTube while producing stories. He thought posting video about a story could then become a catalyst for readers and other staffers to help brainstorm a story. While writing one story during the time period observed, Singer tweeted about the subject and used the responses to help formulate the focus of the piece. During the previously mentioned brainstorming staff meeting pertaining to the gun violence series, the one sentence concerning technology revolved around using the Public Insight Network (PIN). This online tool allows *Beacon* journalists to send out a question to people who have signed up for PIN. Reporters can then use those responses to help formulate, brainstorm or populate their

stories. At the end of that meeting, Freivogel asked how PIN could help the series. Many reporters do use PIN to gather information about a subject or find sources for a story.

Integrated multimedia elements. The *Beacon* incorporates numerous multimedia elements into its stories. This happens on a case-by-case basis and the reporter retains the primary decision-making ability and option concerning if a multimedia element will accompany a piece. During the time period observed, editors requested a multimedia element on fewer than a handful of occasions. Arts Reporter Fowler acknowledged that most *Beacon* reporters follow a similar policy concerning multimedia. She said, “If it fits, it fits. What I mean is that sometimes it can bring so much to a story, and when that’s the case, I use it. Video, for example, it can bring characters to life.”

Of all multimedia tools, the *Beacon* utilizes video more than any other. Editors encourage reporters to use iPhones or FlipCams to shoot video. If a reporter does not own either, the *Beacon* purchased numerous FlipCams for reporters. Political Reporter Rosenbaum, of all the staff, adds video to his stories the most. During the time period observed, he held a tutorial for *Beacon* staff concerning how to produce video. Of video, he said,

Sometimes it just helps to have a story and a video that you shot with your phone attached to it so you can get a sense of the person you talked to and how he was talking, how he answered questions, his tone, his demeanor. That’s technology, but you have to take the time to learn how to do it in a way that’s going to inform people (personal communication, March 21, 2013).

During the tutorial he ran, Rosenbaum identified four subjects for videos. All reporters except one attended this meeting, and Rosenbaum provided examples of what to shoot and how to shoot it. He noted speeches, one-on-one interviews, press conference question-and-answer sessions, and story settings as potential videos. He followed these

examples with very basic tips on how to shoot and edit, acknowledging the importance of sound, lighting and zoom. The *Beacon* posts all videos onto a YouTube channel and then embeds those videos onto the *Beacon* site. On almost all occasions when a *Beacon* reporter produced video, they used the content to augment a text-based story posted to the site. The text story provided the bulk of the information and readers did not need the video component to understand the story. The only exception to this came when Jones produced video packages about a series of “open mic” events held through a partnership between the *Beacon* and the arts organization the Kresge Foundation. The two organizations held four events, one on each day on a Monday through Thursday. Each occurred in a different St. Louis neighborhood and encouraged residents or artists of the neighborhood to discuss their feelings on the local arts scene. Jones spent roughly six hours recording and editing each video and then uploaded them to the site. He received a lot of praise from both *Beacon* and Kresge staffers for the videos.

The *Beacon* also utilizes technology to add web links to its stories. When publishing a piece concerning a specific topic, the *Beacon* will, within the story, link to other stories published about that topic. These stories sometimes come from the *Beacon* and other times other local media or wire services originally published them.

Occasionally, the links will bring readers to other material. For example, a story concerning racial stereotypes linked to an online experiment conducted by Harvard University social scientists. The experiment utilized response times to determine how much participants held certain stereotypes. The end of the experiment provided participants with an explanation to the process. The *Beacon* also collected links about specific subjects and bundled them together to email readers who have expressed an

interest in these subjects. Beaconites called this process “curating news,” and consistently discussed doing more curating of certain subjects. For example, during one staff meeting, journalists talked for 20 minutes about curating an email newsletter of links concerning the city’s arts scene. They did not know of another organization performing that function and thought readers would benefit.

The *Beacon* journalists will utilize social media only occasionally to augment stories. For example, after publishing a short story concerning Missouri Senator Claire McCaskill’s support of gay marriage, Political Reporter Mannies tweeted the story’s link with a note concerning the senator’s history with the subject. Mannies said, “Many of my readers know to look at Twitter for news stories and a lot of times I’ll link to new stories with a bit of information not in the story” (personal communication, March 28, 2013). Also, when adding an element such as a map to a story, Presentation Editor Jones sometimes publishes the map on the *Beacon*’s Facebook pages with a link back to the story, which will not contain the map, only a link to Facebook. This puts extra content only on the social networking site.

Finally, the *Beacon* publishes two podcasts weekly. One podcast focuses on politics and one on general news. After each Thursday staff meeting, Beaconites will record the podcast. At the end of each staff meeting, the editors will spend roughly two minutes deciding the three subjects of the general news podcast and the political reporters will determine the subjects of the political one. The podcasts are recorded using a digital microphone hooked up to an iPad. Usually three reporters will speak and present story context during the general news podcast, while Rosenbaum and Mannies speak during the political one. The podcasts last no longer than 20 minutes and just provide listeners

with more context concerning whatever the editors deemed the most important stories. After the recording, Presentation Editor Jones will slightly edit each and post them on the *Beacon* site.

Philosophy of technology. The overall philosophy of the *Beacon* concerning technology revolves around the belief that technology, by and large, only augments the written word. *Beacon* staffers believe that while technology such as the website and the content management software allow them to run a journalistic organization for a significantly less amount of money because it alleviates printing and delivery costs, when actually producing journalism, digital tools simply add to the main part of the piece: the text.

During one conversation about video, Freivogel commented that multimedia elements and video specifically “simply add heft to stories.” In that statement, she implied that the story exists without the digital tool; the multimedia portion is not part of the story, just an add-on. Reporters need to determine how much time they need to allot to properly cover the subjects they write about, and then make two decisions: Is there time remaining? If yes, will a multimedia element assist understanding and accessibility for readers?. Again, the implication is clear: Digital tools and technology remain secondary to producing text-based pieces.

How journalists discuss technology in weakly market-oriented newsrooms.

This study’s RQ8 asks how journalists in a weakly market-oriented newsroom discuss technology. To answer this question, I only used data spoken directly by Beaconites. This data came from both field notes and interviews. *Beacon* staffers

discussed technology in the context of four subjects: news judgment; supplementary tools; promotion; and the future.

News judgment. *Beacon* employees consistently mentioned technology as something that necessitated further news judgment. Media scholars such as J. Rosen (1999) and Rosenberry and St. John (2010) argue that, in a sense, technology allows all citizens to become journalists and disseminate information on a mass scale. *Beacon* staffers explicitly contradict this. They believe many news organizations simply use multimedia tools as a marketing ploy, and use them for non-journalistic purposes. *Beacon* editors, especially, consistently warn staffers to closely examine any and all multimedia elements and use solid news judgment when making decisions about digital tools. During a conversation about a different “online newspaper,” Freivogel dismissed the site’s founders as “non journalists.” Clearly, publishing stories using digital tools does not make someone a journalist in her opinion. When discussing the potential alliance with St. Louis Public Radio and possibly merging on the radio station’s website, Freivogel argued that this could never happen. She said that the station’s site simply published one story on top of another and did not allow journalists to make news judgments based on the importance of specific stories. Freivogel recalled that the *Beacon* developed Lantern mainly so journalists could make these decisions and implement news judgment as much as possible.

Political Reporter Rosenbaum discussed his consistent use of Twitter and the evolution of his news judgment. Early on, he noted, he would simply tweet about anything to do with his workday. After talking to his editors and gaining a better

understanding of the tool, he began making decisions rooted in news judgment before each tweet. He said,

I actually downloaded my Twitter archive three or four weeks ago and looked at my early tweets and was aghast at how stupid they were. Some of them were like, ‘Going to the Capital.’ Nothing was informative. Now I think about what I’m telling readers each time (personal communication, March 21, 2013).

Supplementary tool. Beaconites consistently discuss technology as a supplementary tool to the act of journalism. Journalism, to the staff, remains the reporting and writing of text-based stories. Once those stories become formulated or, in some cases, completed, journalists can then, if time allows, consider ways to augment their stories with multimedia tools such as videos, infographics, social media features or other elements. Presentation Editor Jones summed up this idea. He said, “Overall, with technology, anything we’d choose bring to in, it’s to make the stories more accessible and relatable to the audience we’re trying to reach” (personal communication, March 13, 2013). Freivogel echoed this comment by saying the *Beacon* adds multimedia elements to stories only when those elements help readers understand the story.

During a staff-meeting conversation about the potential alliance with the radio station, Reporter Singer brought up a previous partnership content committee meeting. The two organizations formed multiple committees to discuss various elements of the alliance, and the content committee conversed about how the aligned newsroom would cover events. Singer noted that the biggest question coming from the radio side of the committee remained which “stories would be radio stories and which would be print.” The fact that this discussion characterized stories as “print” shows that *Beacon* staffers do not think of them as multimedia pieces. Before Rosenbaum gave the staff his tutorial on video, he thought about attending a video seminar conducted by the PBS station, the Nine

Network, for its employees. This seminar provided participants the skills to make professional videos, ones that could be broadcast on a PBS station. Rosenbaum and other staffers decided he did not need so much training and could use more “simple” techniques. Staffers agreed that the *Beacon* also produces “supplemental videos” so learning how to produce complex, broadcast packages did not make good use of time.

When Freivogel asked Jones about why he did not put a graphical element up on the *Beacon*'s Facebook page, he said, “I don't put everything up on Facebook. Everything doesn't need a social media part.” The same conversation touched upon whether Jones planned an interactive graphic for another. He said he did not plan on creating the graphic because “I think that story works fine without one.” In both of these cases, staff discussed multimedia elements after the completion of a text-based story and determined neither benefitted from such an element. When two reporters finished a story on a St. Louis neighborhood, Hegger suggested Jones create an interactive graphic that would allow readers to click on neighborhood storefronts to see what organization occupies each. Again, planning came after the execution of the story and the multimedia element served as an add-on, not a part of the piece.

Similar to other decisions at the *Beacon*, Jones said he determined whether to develop multimedia elements primarily based on time, which again implies that these decisions come after they believe reporters complete stories and the stories do not necessitate the elements. Hollway summed up the *Beacon*'s reliance on multimedia elements in a manner that best illustrates the belief that they are secondary. She said,

I would describe our relationship with technology as subservient. And this is a conversation we're having more because of the alliance. Like, you can be a technology-led organization or technology can do whatever you need it do for whatever you do. And that's what I feel like we mostly are, the latter. We use

technology to do what we want, but we don't use it as an integral part of the operation, besides in the obvious ways, certainly not with the journalism (personal communication, April 8, 2013).

Promotion. *Beacon* staffers view technology as a way to allow potential readers better access to content. They note that while readers will access a story through the main page of the website, Beaconites can attain an even larger audience through the use of technology. Strategic Develop Manager Stovall noted that he can use various forms of social media such as Twitter and Facebook and amass a larger audience within seconds. However, he said, the most effective promotional use of technology comes from email. When a *Beacon* reporter writes a story, oftentimes Stovall will email the piece to affected or potentially interested parties. "If you hit the right people," he said, "then those people will not only read it but they'll also forward to groups of people they know" (personal communication, March 18, 2013). He believes that email works better than social media at getting potential readers to actually read a story. However, Political Reporter Rosenbaum said that when he posts his stories on social networking sites, they become more widely read. He echoed Stovall and noted that if the story reaches the right people, those people will then promote the piece also. Whenever Freivogel discusses social media, the vast majority of the time it concerns "getting the word out" about a particular story. She sees the sites as chiefly marketing tools.

Associate Editor Duffy argued that technology "allows us to reach readers where they are" (personal communication, March 15, 2013). His thought revolves around the idea that sometimes potential readers simply do not seek out news, even if they are interested, but technology lets the *Beacon* "take the story straight to them" (personal communication, March 15, 2013). Hegger, discussing a particular story's multimedia

elements, noted that those digital tools could provide “entry points” to the “superbly written story.” When asked about using multimedia elements as “entry points” to find a larger audience, Stovall agreed.

Yeah, absolutely. I think [the Beaconites] all have a very good ear and feeling for what can be added for who would want to hear what, and to spread it more organically. We’re not necessarily top of mind right now, so we have to do more legwork to get the news we publish out. They’re good about that and they’re good about directing me too (personal communication, March 18, 2013).

A local university invited Jones to discuss how the *Beacon* utilizes social media. Before the speech, he asked Korando to clarify the *Beacon*’s general feeling on the subject. “We do it to promote,” she said. “If I use Twitter, for example, I want to make sure it reaches people who don’t already read the *Beacon*. I’m not sure how, though. But we use it to promote stories.” This feeling about technology and social media seems instinctual to Beaconites. For example, on the afternoon of March 7, Facebook announced a plan that would allow members to create their own “personal newspaper” through aggregation of their favorite news sources. Jones announced to this newsroom after reading about Facebook’s press conference online. Immediately, even though the staffers remained unaware of the specific details of the announcement, a 20-minute conversation began about how the *Beacon* could use this new feature “to get the word out about us.”

The future. While Beaconites fail to view technology as an integral part of the journalistic process and more as a supplemental add-on, a promotional tool and something that allows further news judgment, they do view technology as something that will attain a much more prominent role in the future. Journalists believe the role of technology will only become more pronounced both at the *Beacon*, and in the journalism industry in general, in the years ahead.

Currently, the *Beacon* website, according to its staffers, does not integrate video in the most efficient and visually intuitive manner. Beaconites regularly note this predicament, but do not particularly label it as a problem. They do, however, pontificate about a future date when this will need fixing because video will become more prominent. In a similar vein, during a staff meeting, someone asked about training on the software program Final Cut Pro, which people use for video editing. Presentation Editor Jones replied, “Maybe in a couple years we’ll have that program because we need it, but I don’t think training on it makes sense now because we do basic things.” When discussing multimedia tools in general, Rosenbaum said, “I think about them like this: Story first and video and that stuff later. Maybe some day it’ll all be one, but not now” (personal communication, March 21, 2013).

During a conversation about technology, Public Insight Network Analyst Lockhart mentioned that her Twitter bio says she’s “still telling stories, just using new ways to do it.” But when asked about those new ways, she said, “Well, I guess it’s a lot of the same ways, we’re just not publishing in a newspaper. But you can see that journalism is changing and all the things we think might not be the same soon.” Korando echoed this sentiment and admitted the *Beacon* does not know how technologically can be best used currently, but that evolution continues.

I think we’re all open to the technology, but we were all print people and we’re adapting. And how to tell an in-depth story with video is, to me, a mystery still. I think that’s the same for many people. How to use video in an in-depth story is what I finally realized can be done. We’re learning. Who knows what we’ll be doing in a year or two years or three? (personal communication, March 15, 2013).

Technology and the audience.

In their edited volume that discusses the role of technology in today's journalism industry, Lowrey and Gade (2010) submitted that new digital advancements allow a news organization's audience more power to help set the agenda. Fundamentally, the argument proffered says technology lets the audience communicate easier with journalists and therefore it can effectively exert some control over output. This idea also remains one of the bedrock's of gatewatching from Bruns (2005). This study's RQ9 examines the ways the audience exerts some control over the *Beacon's* output. This happens in four ways: the Public Insight Network; Voices and commentary; social networking sites; and comments.

Public Insight Network. American Public Radio founded The Public Insight Network (PIN) in 2006. PIN connects newsrooms and journalists with sources nationwide. Citizens sign up for PIN through the nationwide website, a newsroom's website or through physical sign-up cards. Once part of the network, a citizen provides contact information, demographic information and a list of subjects that interest them and/or they consider themselves knowledgeable about. Only American Public Radio stations used PIN at first, but currently 78 newsrooms utilize the tool and more than 199,000 citizens have signed up as sources (APR, 2013). Once a citizen signs up, PIN newsrooms contact sources through telephone, email, survey forms, texting and social networking sites. The *St. Louis Beacon* joined PIN in 2008, becoming the network's first non-radio member. Freivogel heard about the tool, found it appealing for a small newsroom and made Lockhart the PIN analyst for the *Beacon*. In this capacity, Lockhart

sends out PIN queries for Beaconites. She explained how the news organization adapted the PIN:

We took to it right away as an easy way to help our limited staff. I call it a new electronic Rolodex. It's a place that I can go to and find people, but the joy of it is that it's not the same old people. It's new voices coming in every day, and because of technology, we can search by keywords and, boom, I have 100 names that pop out. I still have to comb through, but, you know, it makes it easier for us to find the sources. It's much better than man on the street ... This way, it targets people in your area who say they are interested in specific subjects (personal communication, March 22, 2013).

The *Beacon* recruits new PIN sources in a variety of ways. On the organization's website, editors put a link to sign up for the tool. People from all the country also sign up on their local newsroom's website and at the national PIN site. Also, at any *Beacon*-sponsored event, staff will pass out PIN flyers that provide people with the website to sign up, or let them fill out the back of flyer and hand it right back to a staffer. Lockhart also goes to various unaffiliated events in the city and passes out flyers, and also places the flyers at coffee shops and other businesses in the area. Lockhart explained why it is so important to keep recruiting new sources:

You know, it's a constant churn, and I have to find new sources and people leave. It's a voluntary thing, so people who didn't know what they signed up for or move out of town or change their email address and don't tell me, I lose them. You know, I'm losing sources every day so I have to keep generating new sources every day (personal communication, March 22, 2013).

The *Beacon* seldom uses the PIN for breaking news stories, but will utilize often for stories known about in advance. Either an editor or reporter will inform Lockhart of a potential PIN query, or Lockhart will contact reporters and ask if they are working on anything that could incorporate the PIN. A query works in two ways. First, Lockhart can search the PIN database for a specific type of person, for example someone born in Massachusetts but living in St. Louis, or she can search for people who indicated they

were interested in a specific subject. Lockhart can then pass the contact information for those people to the reporter, who can then cull through them and contact some if desired. The second way the PIN can work revolves around sending a question, via email, to a group of signed-up citizens. If a reporter needs information on a specific restaurant, for example, Lockhart can send a question to all St. Louis residents asking if they have eaten at the business and what their thoughts are on the place. She'll collect the responses, remove the not-needed ones and pass them on to the reporter with some thoughts. Finally, PIN sources can also directly contact the *Beacon* and provide news tips or story ideas.

The PIN provides the *Beacon* journalists with insight from its audience. If anyone truly wants a say in a story, they can respond to a PIN query. Lockhart also noted that when a source sends a story idea or news tip, the *Beacon* will consider the idea or tip in 100% of circumstances and, "if it's not something completely inappropriate, we usually do the story." Basically, Lockhart noted, she serves as a researcher, editor and reporter in her role as PIN analyst.

I'll send out the query and then wait to see who will answer. The answers will come in and I'll filter through them. And unless there's a real kook, I just hand them all over to the reporters. I usually highlight some of the answers that I think are most interesting or have the most salient points (personal communication, March 22, 2013).

During the time period observed, the *Beacon* used the PIN numerous times. For example, the organization produced a story concerning how people would spend St. Louis Cardinals' Opening Day. Lockhart sent out the query and passed the results on to reporter Mary Leonard. Leonard contacted sources who responded to the query and used those people in the story. Political Reporter Rosenbaum wrote a story about the St. Louis parks system. The city wanted to cut funding for some park activities and Rosenbaum

noticed that numerous regular people showed up to political meetings to protest the idea. He realized the PIN could help him reach some of these outspoken people on all sides of the issue.

So, in this case, I think we wanted something about what people were saying. The popular reaction was part of the story. I think PIN was a good way of doing it because we kind of cast a net and those people voluntarily came to us to tell their stories. So in that way it was very useful (personal communication, March 21, 2013).

The PIN does have its limitation, though. Just before the Council of Cardinals elected the current pope, Lockhart sent out a PIN asking people what they desired in a new pope. By the time Lockhart collected sources and sent them off to the reporter, too much time passed and the reporter already wrote the piece. Also, when planning story series, PIN seems like an afterthought to *Beacon* editors. In two separate brainstorming sessions for a multi-story series, editors barely mentioned the PIN as a potential tool. In one such meeting, it did not receive a single mention. And then at the very end of a meeting, Freivogel said, “Start thinking about how we can use PIN for this.” It did not receive a mention at the follow-up meeting. Korando sees the benefit of the tool, but also noted that traditional reporting can result in the same effect.

When it works well, it brings in voices that we wouldn’t otherwise have. And it takes away the ‘Who do you know within the newsroom thing’ that results in the same sources. The thing that I’ve seen, and this is what we talked about before, is that people sign up and say, ‘I’ll participate.’ And then when an actual call is made, it’s not a good time for them or they choose not to. So too often you get some of the same people. I think it works best when there is a specific query that goes out and you get a representative sampling of people at that time. So these are people that are engaged right at that minute (personal communication, March 15, 2013).

Voices and commentary. The *Beacon* incorporates the views of the community into its coverage by having a “Voices” section, which collects commentary pieces from

members of the St. Louis area. All voices and commentary pieces come from non-*Beacon* staffers. Korando acts as the editor of the section and constantly seeks out new contributors. Anybody from the community can apply to participate, but Korando looks for original voices on all sides of current issues. Contributors include regular citizens along with local dignitaries, politicians, academics and members of think tanks. The *Beacon* seeks a wide variety of contributors on a host of issues, said Korando. The news organization does not run letters to the editor, nor does it publish editorials or take any type of a stand on issues. Instead, Korando chooses people connected to various issues to provide counterpoints. She explained,

Well, let's say right now I want to get someone to do something that's anti gun control because we have so much from the other side. I did write the NRA, but got nothing. I mean, I might try again today and ask if I can I reprint [Executive Vice President Wayne] LaPierre's speech from [the Conservative Political Action Conference]. So there are times, for example, when I'm looking for both sides of Medicare expansion and I'll call around. Other times, people come to me (personal communication, March 15, 2013).

Overall, the *Beacon* uses its Voices section as a voice for the community on various issues. Because technology allows the *Beacon* as much room to publish as it wants, the space provided on an editorial or op-ed page does not limit the organization. If an issue needs coverage from more than two angles, the *Beacon* can provide that. If a particular person really speaks for the community, Korando said, then she will use that person for many subjects or even give them a regular spot.

Social media. With its Twitter handle and Facebook page, the *Beacon* communicates with its readers. All *Beacon* staffers have their own Facebook or Twitter account, also, and use those to communicate with readers. *Beacon* editors and reporters all look closely at conversations happening through their social media accounts and

incorporate ideas and comments into stories or potential stories. Political Reporter Rosenbaum said he used Twitter to get “wells of feedback” from readers. He will then use those ideas during future reporting. He and other Beaconites will use Twitter to directly talk to readers, asking them what’s on their mind or what they would like to read about. Strategic Development Manager Stovall also stressed the importance of reaching out and beginning conversations with readers through social media. He argued that people can communicate directly with journalists through these channels and not have their ideas filtered through editors or even emails that lack the ability for an immediate response or for others to join the conversation. According to Stovall, the *Beacon* receives numerous story ideas and sources through social media.

For example, during the time period observed, *Beacon* editors began brainstorming a potentially controversial story idea. After coming up with a handful of ideas for the piece, the *Beacon* posted a question to its Facebook readers asking what they would like answered about the topic. Presentation Editor Jones collected the responses and shared them with editors during a second meeting. This prompted a significant discussion and meaningfully shaped and informed the actual story. Commenters had a direct impact on output.

However, while the *Beacon* does utilize social media often in its day-to-day activities, General Manager Hollway believes it could do more. She said,

We don’t put the resources toward social media that we could. I think there are opportunities to see what’s trending and who’s following you and go in there with information that we’ve got from our site and use it. I do a lot of work on Facebook outside of work and, you know, it’s really clear that people, well, you need to build a community before you can expect a community to click and like things and communicate with you (personal communication, April 8, 2013).

Hollway's argument fundamentally states that while the *Beacon* does consider social media a tool to communicate with its readers, it does not do enough to build up its image on social media outside of the *Beacon* itself. When Beaconites communicate on social media, the messages pertain to specific *Beacon* goals. Hollway believes the news organization could receive more reader feedback if it posted on social media sites more consistently and not only when asking direct questions of the audience or promoting specific stories.

Commenting. The final way the *Beacon's* audience exerts some control over output is through comments directly on the *Beacon* site. Like most online news outlets, the *Beacon* allows readers to leave comments at the bottom of story pages. The news organization only allows registered users the ability to comment. The *Beacon* does not receive many comments on stories, but editors read each and every one.

During the time period observed, a commenter noted that a *Beacon* story ignored one aspect of a particular story. The editors knew this when they published the piece and made the determination to focus only certain elements of the story. However, after the comment appeared, a discussion ensued and Freivogel and Hegger decided the reporter should next undertake a piece on the missing aspect. This *Beacon* would not have published this follow-up piece without the comment. Presentation Editor Jones noted that editors not only read each comment, but also discuss them internally. He said many story ideas have come from comments, but he also noted that editors remove comments with untrue facts. On one occasion, a commenter asked Beaconites a pointed question about whether they published a biased story. Ultimately, editors decided the story did not feature any bias, but the comment did become the catalyst for a 20-minute conversation

about bias and the story itself, ultimately resulting in editors deciding stories about this particular subject needed more than one read by editors.

Hollway noted that when consultants for the potential alliance with the radio station analyzed the St. Louis region, they told her, “St. Louis had the lowest commenter rate of any city in the country” (personal communication, April 8, 2013). She said that this may provide clarity on why the *Beacon* does not receive as many comments as other similar online news providers such as *Voice of San Diego* or the *New Haven Independent*. But, Hollway noted, the *Beacon*’s quality of commenter remains very strong and as long as that stays the case, Beaconites will continue to place a high importance on all comments on the website.

Technology plays a considerable role in the day-to-day operations of the *Beacon*. Advances in technology allow the news organization the ability to disseminate information without, for example, a printing press or a broadcast license. It is essential for Beaconites to accomplish goals. Journalists have also incorporated technology into their decision-making processes as they believe there are limitations to the amount of stories readers will consume from the website, that stories can be longer and more nuanced, and, finally, editors can continuously edit stories even after publication. However, Beaconites view technology as a secondary tool, something that allows them to do their job, but is not necessarily part of the journalistic process. It does, though, help market the *Beacon* and will be essential in the future. The *Beacon*’s audience utilizes technology to contribute to the newsgathering process through the Public Insight Network, a robust program of reader-written columns, conversations of social networking sites, and comments directly on the *Beacon*’s website.

C. Public Journalism

During the height of its nationwide popularity in the 1990s, the reform movement public journalism changed how many journalists performed the functions inherent in their jobs. The movement aimed to change routines and, in numerous ways, bring the public into journalism (J. Rosen, 1994). Scholars and practitioners believed that if journalists altered their routines to incorporate citizens into news construction processes, the results would better serve democracy. Much of the idea behind the reform movement centered on the public wielding the same amount of power as journalists in setting news agendas. By the early 21st century, public journalism began vanishing from newsrooms across the country and many ultimately deemed it a failure. This study examined if any of the remnants of public journalism remained in the workings of the weakly market-oriented digital news organization the *St. Louis Beacon*.

Prior research concluded that public journalism included four distinct elements and goals: creating an open dialogue and line of communication with the public; allowing the public the ability to help set the news agenda; making journalism more accessible and easier to understand; and using the news to galvanize and not frustrate the public (Nip, 2008). Overall, founders identified engagement as the main goal of the movement. To answer RQ10, I used data from field notes and interviews to identify ways the *Beacon* fulfills those four previously stated goals and its vision for overall engagement.

However, it is important to first note many of the *Beacon* staffers' history with public journalism. Gade and Perry (2003) conducted a four-year organizational study of the *Post-Dispatch* from 1996-2000. The researchers examined organizational change, and public journalism became one of the main implementations studied. They found that by

the end of period studied, *Post-Dispatch* journalists overwhelmingly disliked public journalism and found it a marketing ploy and not something enacted to enhance journalistic quality. All of the major decision makers at the *Beacon* took part in the Gade and Perry study, and all still expressed consternation and tremendously negative feelings toward their experience with public journalism more than 13 years later in interviews for this study. Hegger recalled those years:

Those were the nightmare years. My immediate reaction was forcing an agenda. At the *Post-Dispatch*, [then new editor] Cole Campbell had an agenda. And (public journalism) was going to be the focus. It is not so much that we were trying to find out what people were interested in or whatever. He was basically forcing stuff down their throats and our throats. The fact of the matter, in practice, he couldn't care less what anybody said. And that's it. He so derailed the *Post-Dispatch*. I mean it was a nightmare. It's like he told you what you were doing and it didn't matter if that was actually going on in St. Louis. Oh, it was terrible. (personal communication, March 15, 2013).

Korando argued that the lack of public involvement begat the failure of the reform movement at the *Post-Dispatch*. She said new editors did not talk to the general public, but rather to local and even national elites.

I think all you have to do is you look at one thing. It's supposed to be public journalism. So for example, [Campbell] brought in Ed Schlossberg, Caroline Kennedy's husband, to talk about some program he had done at [the Metropolitan Museum of Art or The Museum of Modern Art]—I forget—about how you build this mixed-use art ... But rather than talk to artists in St. Louis, he brings in a New York *un fite* art leader for a luncheon with editors and civic leaders. To me, that was the epitome of not-public journalism (personal communication, March 15, 2013).

Even with this institutional negativity toward public journalism, Beaconites still believe in the movement's ultimate goals. Staffers discussed the goals and enacted decisions based around accomplishing them.

A new, overhauled version of public journalism?

Engagement. The *Beacon* identifies engagement, the stated overall goal of public journalism, as an integral part of its mission. General Manager Hollway defined engagement as

It is an exchange of information. Somebody at a conference last year was talking about cross-cultural engagement, and she said it's not enough to say 'I invited you.' Or 'I invited you and you didn't come.' Or 'I reached out, I invited you, I engaged you.' You have to be able to say, 'I invited you, you said no. I asked you why you said no. And then I changed my invitation and you came.' And that's the idea of it being an ongoing conversation that isn't even two ways, but sort of like a partnership toward a shared goal of understanding (personal communication, April 8, 2013).

Korando, possibly recalling her experience at the *Post-Dispatch*, remarked that for engagement to work, there needs to be “a deep, huge and clear disconnect between efforts to monetize and making connections and having these ongoing connections” (personal communication, March 15, 2013).

The *Beacon* considers engagement an integral part of its operation. When the news organization began in 2008, founders identified public engagement as a main goal. During the time period observed, Freivogel arranged for Joy Mayer, a University of Missouri faculty member and journalist who specializes in engagement, to speak on the subject at the *Beacon*. Freivogel noted that she scheduled Mayer because of her definition of engagement. “Joy has the same definition of engagement as we do,” Freivogel said. “She doesn't call it engagement. She just says it's doing our jobs.” This is how ingrained engagement is at the *Beacon*. During a staff meeting, Hollway announced to Beaconites three new engagement opportunities the news organizations planned. During the late spring, the *Beacon* would co-host a poetry night with local artists, sponsor a public movie screening at a museum and co-host a night dedicated to raising money for a charity. Hollway stated that all of these events would allow the community to create more open

dialogue with the news organization. After one particularly successful engagement event, a Beaconite wondered why the organization's website does not feature an "engagement" link, one that would highlight the different engagement endeavors conducted. "We can call the page 'Beacon Engagement,'" Strategic Development Manager Stovall told staffers, "and it can be a place where people can understand half our mission."

Open dialogue and line of communication. As part of engagement, The *Beacon* undertakes many different initiatives ensuring an open line of communication between the organization and the community. Associate Editor Duffy introduced a "community program" that eventually became a weekly radio show titled *Beacon & Eggs*. The goal of the program revolved around organizing meetings at libraries, schools, social clubs, neighborhood stores and other high-traffic spots to ask, according to Duffy, "regular people about their problems and enthusiasms" (personal communication, March 15, 2013). Duffy and fellow Beaconites believe that you cannot just wait for the community to speak, you have to bring the news organization to the community. *Beacon & Eggs* engages the community without much effort on the citizens' part. "The idea," said Korando, "is to make us regularly available. We go into a neighborhood saying, 'We want to hear from you'" (personal communication, March 15, 2013). Editors said reporting on these events is not the purpose, although some ideas do come from them. The purpose is to open dialogue and speak directly with people. "That's journalism," explained Jones, "as much as going out and reporting a story. We're making ourselves accessible and finding out what matters to people" (personal communication, March 13, 2013). Reporter Leonard did note in a staff meeting, however, that along with

communicating directly with people without a story in mind, she did get a lot of story ideas from *Beacon & Eggs*. “Stories I would have not known about otherwise,” she said.

The *Beacon* partly holds news storming meetings as a form of communication with readers and citizens. For many of the meetings, the *Beacon* invites members of the community to discuss future stories and what the news organization could be doing better. People invited tend to know about the subjects that will be discussed. “People you invite to the table,” explained Hollway, “are people who have a sort of knowledge or are a stakeholder with something to offer. They are people we want to reach and inform, so we ask how we can do that better” (personal communication, April 8, 2013). Korando expounded on this by saying, for these meetings, the organization invites people they know are credible, and people whose biases they understand. Over time, the meetings have evolved, but the primary goal, according to Hollway, remains determining how to better engage the community. For example, at a news storming March 1, 2013, the topic of the Cherokee Street neighborhood in St. Louis came up. A *Beacon* freelancer already penned a story about the neighborhood, but the invited community guests both rented commercial space in that neighborhood. Both had differing views concerning the strength of the area and expressed facts and opinions not included in the story. Editors wrote all this information down and immediately decided to not publish the story. After news storming, Korando contacted the freelancer and relayed the ideas brought up by the news-storming guests. The open dialogue created through news storming clearly affected editorial decisions.

The Public Insight Network helps create conversation between the *Beacon* and the community also. PIN allows citizens to contact editors and reporters directly, and also see

what the *Beacon* staff plans on covering in the future. “PIN really opens the door. It finds people and gets them thinking and we tap their insight,” said Lockhart (personal communication, March 22, 2013). Editors also use PIN to reach out to the community and invite it to various events such as *Beacon & Eggs*.

A series concerning race became one of the first efforts to communicate with the audience directly for the *Beacon*. The series’ success became the catalyst for more engagement endeavors. Duffy helped start that series also. He explained,

We did this really dynamic program called ‘Race Frankly’ early on that took on this really serious discussion of race that nobody else wanted to touch. And we did it in a dignified and non-inflammatory way, but a really pointed way. We did such things as having high school students act out experiences, and we had [comedian and social activist] Dick Gregory come and give a talk, and we had movies. Plus, we had big meetings and small meetings where six or seven people would get together and talk about their experiences with race and racial biases and have an open discussion of prejudices (personal communication, March 15, 2013).

Duffy said this program catalyzed some stories, but ultimately the purpose was to speak directly with the community about a topic most mainstream news organizations would not approach due to fear of upsetting people and losing money. When a different story pertaining to race arose during the time period observed, Freivogel told the newsroom that the *Beacon* “must lead the conversation about race,” implying that the staff prioritized conversing directly with people.

The *Beacon* also relies on technology to open up lines of communication with the general public. Rosenbaum said he uses Twitter to speak with people and converse with his readers and the general public. “It’s a more immediate way of engaging. And one of the *Beacon*’s philosophies is meeting with people and talking with them about what you’re writing. Twitter can do that” (personal communication, March 21, 2013).

While the Council of Cardinals deliberated on the election of new pope, *Beacon* editors discussed the community's interest. They wondered what Catholics and non-Catholics wanted to read. Editors believed there would not be enough time to hold an event and find out, so they brainstormed the idea of having *Beacon* freelancer and noted expert on Catholicism Patricia Rice hold an online question-and-answer session with the community.

The public and the news agenda. A key element of public journalism was allowing the public some influence on setting the news agenda. Health Editor Altman discussed the *Beacon*'s series focusing on obesity in the city. Through reaching out to the community, Beaconites learned of this problem. After acquiring a grant, the organization then moved forward with a series about the problem. But Altman and Reporter Joiner, specifically, did not start by mapping out story ideas. Instead, they convened community meetings. Altman explained,

What we hope to do is to identify the issues that individuals and communities have around obesity. We might be talking about safe places to exercise. We might be talking about cultural norms, differences in African-American cultural norms of beauty than in certain parts of the Caucasian community ... We hope these things will surface during discussions at these meetings and then [Joiner] will write about the issues (personal communication April, 5, 2013).

Before even scheduling the meetings, Altman reached out to neighborhood churches, health centers and other organizations to take part. The goal is to have a large representation of the affected community in attendance to understand the issues. In a staff meeting, Altman said the goal of the meetings "is to engage the community through a series of meetings to find out what they think about obesity. Bottom line, our job isn't to just report on the issue, but the stories and points that come from the meetings." With the

series on obesity, the community originally set the agenda by communicating with the *Beacon* the problem itself, and through discussions, will set agenda of the series itself.

Lockhart referred to PIN as another way for “regular people and community folks to set our news agenda” (personal communication, March 22, 2013). And Arts Reporter Fowler said through talking to people all around the city, she found that gender transitioning became one of the bigger talking points in the arts community. She then began a series that focused on people in the arts transitioning their gender. Political Reporter Mannies noted that she speaks to political and civic groups as a “way to find out what they’re thinking about” (personal communication, March 28, 2013). She’ll use those findings as news subjects.

Finally, the *Beacon* joined with a local arts organization, the Kresge Foundation, to hold a series of open-mic events. On four consecutive days in late March, the organizations visited four different St. Louis neighborhoods and invited residents, artists, and organizations from that community to discuss the issues important to them. “And the whole purpose,” said Hollway, “was to really listen to the community and pull out some key topics or initiatives” (personal communication, April 8, 2013). The *Beacon* then used these topics and initiatives as the basis for its news agenda concerning the arts.

Accessible and easy to understand. One of public journalism and the *Beacon*’s stated goals revolves around taking complicated issues that usually appear in the news and making them more accessible to readers. Too often, Freivogel said in a staff meeting, a news organization will print stories about an issue without fully explaining it and making it clear how and why this affects the community. Jones said, “Almost anything

we do, well, it's to make stories more accessible and relatable to the audience we're trying to reach" (personal communication, March 13, 2013).

One of the stated ways Beaconites attempt to attain better accessibility is through applying more narrative to stories. They consistently discuss how narrative allows readers to connect with people and understand the issues better. Altman explained how *Beacon* journalists get the material to construct quality narratives.

We need to get personal stories. It's one thing to do a story on obesity rates in America and use statistics and a relatively superficial interview with an individual, but it's a whole other thing to have an in depth with an individual, with their family, maybe spending a day with the family, watching how they interact, listening to the individual challenges. You know, we're going to be with a group of individuals for a long time (personal communication, April 5, 2013).

Fowler commented that her series on gender transitioning would have made "far less impact" if she didn't focus on real people and provide their stories (personal communication, April 4, 2013). She said that when telling complex stories, using regular people's lives to illustrate the point helps people understand and broadens the impact of the piece.

Beaconites also point to interactive graphics that make statistics relevant as a way to make information digestible and easier to understand. Staffers noted that statistics mean something to people and help tell fuller stories, but without putting the numbers in context, many times the statistics leave readers wondering what it all means. Rosenbaum used a graphic he put together to illustrate this point. He said the community hears a lot about political donors impacting government, but news organizations infrequently clearly explain how this happens. He put together a graphic depicting the 15 biggest political donors in Missouri.

We were able to show, in a graphical way, a list of the people and you can click on each and search their donations. I think it provided a valuable database of information to people and showed why certain people might donate to certain causes and candidates (personal communication, March 21, 2013).

All Beaconites look to accomplish this with graphics. After Jones put together one concerning a new tax citizens would soon vote on, Duffy came in the next morning praising it. “It’s just the facts man,” he said. “Now people can read it and understand it. That’s the way to do it.”

Finally, staffers said that providing more context provides a way to make information more clear. On one occasion, Freivogel told a reporter to stop working on an article and first discover “what the actual issues are so we can be clear to people.” When discussing sequestration, Duffy noted that people would not immediately see effects and therefore might “write the issue off.” He said the *Beacon* must provide the relevant facts and context to allow people to understand the effects when they begin to see them. Rosenbaum also noted that after a recent election, he wrote about voter turnout. He said he could have simply provided the turnout statistics, but that would not have impacted people and the information would not have been clear. By explaining the numbers, “People were able to see why this seemingly arbitrary number mattered” (personal communication, March 21, 2013).

Galvanize, not frustrate. When the founders formed the *Beacon*, Duffy explained that they knew “if we don’t use what’s good, we’re not going to, well, we will cease to have any influence or impact at all. It’ll just be more, sort of noise” (personal communication, March 15, 2013). The *Beacon* identified, in other media, an over reliance on bad, negative news that does not provide readers with any potential fixes. Duffy said he think communities react to this and simply stop listening and reading, adding that

news organizations have to discuss the issues in a way that can make the community better, not frustrate it.

Fowler said she picks stories with social justice angles because they can improve society. She said, “It’s harder to discriminate against people you know” (personal communication, April 4, 2013). She pointed to her series on gender transitioning to illustrate this. She said she could have simply written about the amount of people in the arts community transitioning, but this could frustrate both people in the arts and the community at large by making an issue bigger than it is and overlooking art for telling a potentially sensational story. Instead, she wrote detailed feature stories that discussed these artists “as people first” (personal communication, April 4, 2013). She said the goal of the series remains bringing people together through differences, not pushing them apart. Altman communicated the same basic principle. She wants stories she edits or reports to present issues facing the community in a manner that will push people to do something about it, rather upset them that the organization is highlighting the issue again. She said the gun violence series is a good example of this. The *Beacon* could discuss all the gun deaths in the area and refer back to automatic weapons bans and drugs, but that would just potentially frighten or turn off the community. To galvanize them, she said, the *Beacon* would approach the issue as a public health one, noting that just like a disease, many people succumb each year to gun violence. If this many died from a rare disease each year, she said, the community would ban together to fight the problem, but because guns have such a political connotation, this does not happen. The *Beacon* series would eliminate the political elements as best as possible, she said, so the community can focus on solving the problem without the rhetoric.

Technology and public journalism.

Numerous public journalism scholars theorized that technology harnessed in the digital age could have made implementing public journalism easier (e.g., Marchionni, 2013; Nip, 2008; Rosenberry & St. John, 2010). RQ11 asks how the *Beacon* utilizes technology to accomplish the four aforementioned goals of public journalism: creating an open dialogue and line of communication with the public; allowing the public the ability to help set the news agenda; making journalism more accessible and easier to understand; and using the news to galvanize and not frustrate the public.

Open dialogue and line of communication. *Beacon* staffers create open lines of communication with their audience using technology in multiple ways. General Manager Hollway discussed how social media allows the news organization the ability to have direct conversations with readers. For example, the *Beacon's* Facebook page is open and anybody who “likes” the page can comment. *Beacon* staffers will often comment back through the *Beacon* account, or Beaconites will comment directly using their personal Facebook accounts. The same can be said of Twitter. Hollway said that creating these lines of communication through social media allow the conversation to happen openly and not in private. People do not have to actively participate to engage in the conversation. Associate Editor Duffy said that technology is “absolutely essential to us communicating with our readers and them communicating with us” (personal communication, March 15, 2013). Public Insight Network Analyst Lockhart noted that the *Beacon* can use technology to let community members know about their engagement mission. Consistently communicating with people over social media, she said, allows the

community to foster trust with the news organization, and therefore acts as a catalyst toward open communication.

Political Reporter Rosenbaum repeatedly mentioned how he uses social media to directly communicate with the audience. He said that Twitter, in particular, allows readers to start a conversation with him. And he finds that the more people communicate with him, the more others will join the conversation. Presentation Editor Jones said that “technology is all about starting conversations” and that he believes the *Beacon*’s own commenting system illustrates this (personal communication, March 13, 2013). He said readers can comment on the organization’s website and those will serve as a conversation starter between people and journalists. One such example occurred when a reader asked the *Beacon* why a particular story did not delve into a specific issue. Editors engaged in a conversation with that reader and others about this very topic through the commenting system, and the initial comment also sparked a newsroom discussion. During one staff meeting, Jones relayed that he found out that some use YouTube “as a means for connecting with the audience through social media.” Prior to this, he viewed YouTube as simply a site to host *Beacon* videos. This became a conversation starter in the newsroom that clearly illustrated how the Beaconites look for technologies to better open lines of communication with their audience. When Freivogel wanted the *Beacon* to host a “conversation about race,” she looked at the website as the place to hold this conversation. The staff then posted numerous stories about the situation and directly asked readers to comment, so to start the discussion. Finally, when the organization wanted to communicate with the audience about the election of the pope, they decided on an online question-and-answer session as the best way.

The public and the news agenda. The majority of the ways *Beaconites* allow the public some influence on setting the agenda comes from in-person engagement measures. However, one illustrative example of how the news organization harnesses technology to provide citizens some influence on the news agenda is the Public Insight Network. Once signed up, these members can communicate directly with *Beacon* editors about what they would like to see in the news. Lockhart will also periodically send out messages to all PIN sources asking what is on their minds.

For example, the *Beacon* received a grant directly from the national Public Insight Network for the obesity series. This allowed Lockhart to communicate directly with the targeted audience about what they would like to see in this series. This gave some influence on the agenda to the community. It also allowed her to invite all members of the PIN to the meetings and discussions held on the topic. *Beacon* journalists would use these events to form the agenda for the entire obesity series.

Accessible and easy to understand. The most basic way technology allows the *Beacon* accessibility comes through the site itself. Without printing costs, the *Beacon's* relatively small operating budget is enough for the organization not to institute a paywall. In fact, part of the *Beacon's* stated mission is to be free and open to all, with internet access, of course. However, Freivogel is quick to note that various spots such as public libraries provide free computers and internet access to all citizens. Political Reporter Rosenbaum stressed free accessibility as one of the ways the *Beacon* can engage with people. He also provided the example of his interactive graphic of political donors. This graphic would not exist without technology and, he said, it would be increasingly hard to

make the information easy to understand and accessible without making the graphic. He also said technology allows the *Beacon* to break down information and inform easier.

Technology, it just allows us to do stuff you can't do in a regular newspaper. That engagement element is about more than just giving people something, but also holding yourself accountable. And the fact that the *Beacon* is an online newspaper, I think there is a lot of necessity to harness content, to harness technology to make our content more attractive and accessible to people, to make it so they can understand it. That's so important (personal communication, March 21, 2013).

Jones said that, to him, social media, specifically Facebook, lets staffers make material more accessible. He said the reaching people on a familiar medium such as Facebook, in his experience, makes information easier to digest. He noted that he will often put information up on Facebook that summarizes a story. "While I don't mind going through 12 paragraphs to get a story," he said, "some people do. So by putting a graphic or something up on Facebook, it gives people a choice of how to get information. It's making news accessible."

Galvanize, not frustrate. *Beacon* staffers provided two examples of how technology allowed them to galvanize the community and not frustrate it. Fowler gave her gender series as a way to accomplish this goal, but specifically noted that video elements of the story made the task easier.

With the gender series, I'm interviewing people and it's hard to talk about someone without them. You've got a teenager who was born a girl, but feels like a boy and is a boy for all purposes. How does he look when he talks? What does his voice sound like? How does he present? You can take a still picture and write about this stuff and you still don't get that flavor, but when you hear him talking it's like, 'Huh, he's just a guy' (personal communication, April 4, 2013).

Fowler noted that when readers can see and hear people different from them, it helps them understand that these are not very big differences, and that "people are people."

Through technology, different people can enter your home, she added, and when you know people, it is harder to hate simply based on difference.

Hollway said that when the St. Louis media discusses African-Americans, the content usually features bad or negative news. She said this frustrates the community. The *Beacon* wants all people to become engaged. Hollway recalled one way the news organization tried to galvanize came from a partnership with the Municipal Theatre Association of St. Louis (The Muny). During the summer of 2012, the outdoor theater The Muny put on a production of *Dreamgirls*, and for one performance, asked Tony Award-winning Jennifer Holliday, who originated the lead role in the musical, to reprise her role. When Hollway heard this, she decided a partnership between The Muny and the *Beacon* would work.

I have a theater background and I also do stuff with race. And I thought this is a really big deal. Black people are obsessed with Jennifer Holliday. Black people are obsessed with *Dreamgirls*. There are going to be more black people at The Muny than ever before and we should do something about it. So I have a friend who works at the box office and he said, 'Yeah, we're getting calls from like Memphis and Nashville and people are renting busses and they're coming to see Jennifer.' So we ended up doing a series of videos and photography pieces where we reached out to videographers and photographers and asked, 'What part of this conversation resonates with you?' (personal communication, April 8, 2013).

Beaconites may speak negatively concerning public journalism, but the organization still incorporates many of the elements of the journalism reform movement into its routines and practices. For all intents and purposes, the *Beacon's* very mission revolves around the same fundamental goals of public journalism. Advances in technology allows Beaconites the opportunity to more easily accomplish the main tenets of public journalism, such as creating open lines of communication with the public, letting the public have a say in setting the agenda, making information more accessible to

the public, and, finally, creating journalism that galvanizes and does not frustrate the public.

D. Gatekeeping Theory

Understanding the numerous influences on news coverage necessitates separating the world studied into theoretical levels of analysis. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) posit that when examining a case through the lens of gatekeeping theory, one must assess five levels of analysis: the individual, the communication routines, the organizational, the social institution, and the social system. “These order the world into a hierarchy that can help us study communication and build theory” (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 31). RQ12 asks what influences construction of news processes in a weakly market-oriented, digital newsroom such as the *Beacon*. To answer this question, one must examine how elements from these five levels of analysis affect news construction.

The individual level. In early gatekeeping research, scholars primarily studied how individuals contributed to the gatekeeping process (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Many of these studies took a similar approach to the original “Mr. Gates” work, which examined how a single wire editor, the gatekeeper, chose stories to publish (White, 1950). At the *Beacon*, individuals retain some influence on news coverage in a variety of ways. This influence comes from individual journalists’ background, age, ideologies, and decision-making ability.

Background. Four women make the vast majority of all editorial decisions at the *Beacon*. All stories get assigned, all meetings run, and all staff supervised by Freivogel, Hegger, Korando and Altman. The full, 20-person staff of the news organization includes 10 women and 10 men, including three African-Americans, two disabled people, three

gay employees, and people from all religious backgrounds. Interviews with editors illustrated that the *Beacon* considers diversity amongst its staff very seriously.

Journalists at the *Beacon* rely on their personal backgrounds for determining coverage. The vast majority of the organization's arts coverage, for example, focuses on the fine arts. The *Beacon* writes about theater, visual arts, classical music and independent film consistently, but very rarely touches on more popular art. Features Editor Korando said, "With what we cover and what we should cover, I've sort of gone with what the freelancers I trust think" (personal communication, March 15, 2013). However, Korando, Hegger, Freivogel and Duffy all personally care more about the fine arts. On numerous occasions, Korando lamented the *Beacon's* lack of pop culture reporting, so the intention to cover those subjects remains, but the motivation seems small considering the backgrounds and interests of the people in charge.

Health Editor Altman worked for 35 years in the health care industry, with no prior journalistic experience before joining the *Beacon*. She found herself attracted to covering the health industry because of her background. Based on her personal experience, she directs the *Beacon's* coverage toward a more public health focus. Other organizations cover the health industry in a very specific way, she said, but her background in the industry makes her coverage very different.

My concern had been that we are a hospital-dominated health care town. And unlike a Boston, or a Philadelphia or even a Chicago, we tend to have small physician practices and not big specialty physician practices. And everything is medically oriented. And if you're medically oriented, you're focused on the individual's experience with the disease, or the individual disease and not a robust public health program. That really changes the character of a city and in many ways the politics of a city and what the news sources are likely to cover (personal communication, April 5, 2013).

Altman's background and belief that media coverage focused too strongly on hospitals and hospital news became the catalyst for the *Beacon's* coverage of health issues. For example, the *Beacon's* series on gun violence focuses on the deaths as a public health issue, and coverage follows accordingly. This belies traditional coverage of gun violence, and Altman's background in the industry largely drives this focus.

Age. Of all the Beaconites, only Presentation Editor Jones and Political Reporter Rosenbaum lack considerable work experience. With that experience comes age. *Beacon* journalists are almost invariably over 50 years old. This attribute surely affects news coverage. In the rare instances when popular music received coverage during the time period observed, for example, a reporter wrote about a Johnny Cash tribute band. Rosenbaum also noted that occasionally he and Mannies have differing opinions concerning the newsworthiness of political subjects. Occasionally, he acknowledged, these differences could be attributed to age.

Ideology. During the time period observed, it became obvious that all *Beacon* journalists identify as politically liberal. While they strive to maintain balance, this ideology could conceivably affect news choices. For example, three Beaconites expressed that people from outside the organization have questioned the *Beacon's* partialness on the subject of Medicaid expansion. Both political reporters and the health editor noted that this is a subject the news organization focuses on extensively, and people from the outside have said the *Beacon* coverage implicitly favors expansion, an opinion shared by many liberal citizens. *Beacon* journalists deny subjectivity on the subject, but the lack of conservative checks and balances in the newsroom and outside opinion suggests this possibility.

Decision-making. Individual journalists at the *Beacon* acknowledged and exhibited the ability to make decisions concerning coverage. Every reporter interviewed said they originated story ideas more than 75% of the time. For some, editors only contributed ideas roughly 10% of the time. “The editors trust me a lot,” said Singer. “I come up with maybe up to 90% of stories I write. That’s part of the job, I believe” (personal communication, March 21, 2013). Therefore, Beaconites have considerable say in what becomes news. Arts Reporter Fowler noted that she “keeps up with events and looks for trends” (personal communication, April 4, 2013). Singer said this freedom comes from the *Beacon*’s lack of a bureaucracy. “At a larger organization, there are still so many more layers where ideas come from” (personal communication, March 21, 2013).

Both Hegger and Korando, who act as the immediate editors for all reporters besides Joiner on staff, said they relied on their reporters’ expertise and reporting ability for story ideas. There are many times when editors assign stories, but this remains the exception, they said. Korando recalled a recent incident when she assigned a story to a specific reporter. The story did not interest the reporter. “She didn’t want to do it,” said Korando. “I remember her complaining. But there was no choice in it. You know, we were going to do something. It’s a huge local story” (personal communication, March 15, 2013). The initial skepticism from the reporter toward covering this story illustrates how rare such an assignment is for the *Beacon* newsroom.

Editors trust Political Reporter Mannies with decision making almost completely, as evidenced by the fact she can publish straight to the website, without any editing. Once published, editors will read and potentially change a story, but only after readers can

theoretically see it. Mannies said that she does not post straight to the site very often, maybe once or twice a week. Posting links from the wire or from other local media is one of Singer's jobs at the *Beacon*. He chooses these stories himself, without interference from editors. Sometimes he will ask an editor if something belongs on the site, but the majority of these decisions he makes singularly, which once again illustrates the influence of individuals at the *Beacon*.

Individual-level influences affect the news construction processes at the *Beacon* in numerous ways. Individual journalists' backgrounds, ages, ideologies and decision-making ability all have the ability to shape content.

Communication routines. The communication routines level of analysis focuses on the routines that have become ingrained, repeated and fundamental to how journalists perform their job (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). These routines are not unique to particular news organizations, but rather transcend the individual newsrooms and describe common practices of the media industry. At the *Beacon*, communication routines such as news values, professional backgrounds, the beat system, sources, organizational context, the goal of balance, and orientation to the audience all affect news construction processes.

News values. Journalists use established news values as a way to determine what is and is not news. When a message contains a news value that a particular organization uses, that message can pass through a gate more easily. At the *Beacon*, journalists primarily rely on five distinct news values to determine newsworthiness: impact, proximity, prominence, timeliness, and progressiveness.

Impact is the news value employed by Beaconites more than any other. At the news organization, journalists look for stories that impact the city of St. Louis and its

surrounding area. Oftentimes, when describing the reason behind covering a potential story, *Beacon* journalists mention “the need to tell the people of St. Louis what matters,” as Duffy said in a news meeting. Impact, to *Beaconites*, is measured by how much a story will directly affect the lives of people in the St. Louis metropolitan area. The more people a story could affect, the more impactful editors gauge the story. Reporters and editors will discuss stories and brainstorm how the piece will affect citizens. When one reporter pitched Hegger a story idea, her response back asked, “It could be interesting, but how does this matter to people?” This response or one like it occurred numerous times in the newsroom. When editing a piece on a potential downtown trolley, Freivogel read a story and opted to hold it until the reporter did a better job of explaining how and why it should matter to readers.

The *Beacon*'s oft-repeated mission remains producing “news that matters.” Inherent in that sentence lies impact. The editors and reporters partially abstain from covering spot and breaking news partly because of cost and competition, but also due its lack of lasting impact. Korando said, “We could do more of it here and there, but usually breaking news happens and that’s it. Our stories should go beyond what happened and let readers know how it could affect their lives” (personal communication, March 15, 2013). The *Beacon* displays a clear predilection toward news that significantly impacts the population, and this can be appreciated in everything from content choices, to mission statements to newsroom discussions.

The second news element reporters and editors employ is proximity. The *Beacon* fundamentally considers itself a St. Louis news organization that reports on St. Louis and the surrounding areas. In pamphlets handed out at events, the *Beacon* presents itself as an

organization utilizing “the tools of journalism to power a better St. Louis” (Beacon, 2012). One example of how the newsroom values proximity comes from the employment of a reporter based in Washington, D.C. While the *Beacon* boasts a reporter based in Washington, that journalist only publishes information from a St. Louis perspective.

Hegger explained,

We don't want him to just write what other people in Washington write. Readers can get that somewhere else. Rob [Koenig] can talk about Washington from our own angle. He gives us access to our politicians that are located in Washington (personal communication, March, 15, 2013).

For example, when Koenig covered President Obama's State of the Union Address during the time period observed, editors said his stories would “get local reaction to the speech,” meaning he would discuss the address' implications with representatives and senators from Missouri and Illinois.

When a major vote occurred in the Illinois state legislature, the editors discussed whether to send a reporter to Springfield, or to hire a freelancer for the trip. The talk centered on whether this story mattered “to enough people.” The *Beacon* considers the St. Louis area and the state of Missouri as its main coverage area. They think more of their readership lives in Missouri, so political reporters Rosenbaum and Mannies consistently travel to Jefferson City for stories. However, a fair amount of the St. Louis metropolitan area lies in Southern Illinois, and the goings-on in the Illinois legislature affect those readers. Hegger said it is a constant struggle deciding how to cover Illinois government. This struggle becomes verbalized in the newsroom whenever a story such as when the state senate passed a gay marriage bill on Feb. 14. Often, the *Beacon* decides to use a wire story for Illinois government pieces because, ultimately, editors do not believe something happening in Lincoln is close enough to affect the majority of its readership.

The third news element the *Beacon* values is prominence. Editors and reporters seek out stories concerning people with high levels of prominence in the area. There is a strong focus on politicians, city leaders, business leaders and other citizens in positions of power. Whenever a major figure, for example, speaks in the area, the *Beacon* will cover that event regardless of its impact. When former vice president Al Gore conducted a book signing in St. Louis, *Beacon* editors spent a relatively considerable amount of time ensuring coverage. During the time period observed, one of the *Beacon*'s more popular stories in terms of readership came from coverage of a speech given by health care activist Sandra Fluke. The controversial former law student discussed contraception and the legality of health care issues at Washington University in St. Louis on Feb. 13. Hegger assigned Singer to cover the event, and the piece became the most-read story on the *Beacon* website over the next two-week period. Editors decided on coverage, they said, because Fluke had a prominent name and her speech could interest people.

Political Reporter Mannies believes the news organization should cover visits to St. Louis from the Missouri governor every time, even when the visit does not pertain to something inherently newsworthy. His prominence, she said, should necessitate coverage since anything he says could potentially be news then or in the future. She explained,

For example, [Rosenbaum] covered [Governor] Nixon's visit this week and I've covered Nixon a few times. He's been having these Medicaid events around the state. It's gotten to the point where we don't write about every one, but A, you can get him on other topics because the governor has always agreed to talk on other topics. And B, you can get a sense of what he's saying so when you do write your next story, which may be next week, he may not be here next week. Well then you can say in his most recent visit, he said this this and this (personal communication, March 28, 2013).

Timeliness is the fourth news value held by *Beacon* journalists. The staffers at the news organization place a high value on reporting on stories when they happen. If the *Beacon* editors believe other outlets already covered the happening or time passed lessened its impact, they will cancel or reevaluate coverage. For example, when the city announced it would audit the finances of a public museum, the *Beacon* assigned Singer to the story. He worked the piece and sought sources for more than 12 hours, but could not gather enough information to write a complete story. The next afternoon, *Beacon* editors decided to run a link to a *Post-Dispatch* story concerning the issue and assigned Singer a different story about the audit. This happened numerous times during the period observed. If reporters encountered troubles delivering the “full, contextualized story” editors expected in a timely manner, oftentimes Hegger or Korando would determine that the issue no longer merited coverage.

On one occasion, Reporter Bob Joiner attended a citywide discussion concerning gun violence in St. Louis. The meeting occurred on a Friday, and Joiner emailed an editor that he would finish the story for a Monday publication. Hegger and Freivogel determined the piece needed publication by Saturday or, as Freivogel said, “it would not matter any more.” Hegger called Joiner and instructed him of the change. In an interview days after this example, Hegger said, “You know, if we publish stories a couple days after they happen, it lessens their impact. We need to take that into consideration” (personal communication, March 15, 2013).

The final news value *Beacon* staffers look for when determining news coverage is progressiveness. *Beacon*ites choose stories based on if an issue is politically progressive compared other issues. This does not necessarily come from a bias against conservative

principles, but rather an interactive relationship between the organization's mission of "news that matters," its focus on news judgment and members' own political ideologies. For example, during the time period observed, state legislatures in both Missouri and Illinois proposed politically conservative new gun laws. In Missouri, the proposed gun law aimed to outlaw laws that put restrictions on firearms. While other local media covered these bills extensively, the *Beacon* did not. *Beacon* staffers are in favor of putting restrictions on gun ownership, but that is not the only reason this potential new law did not receive coverage. Editors also likely found the law unreasonable and, in some ways, dumb. They believed covering the law would result in wasting resources that could be better used on a different story. They also did not understand how this law would affect people and simply dismissed it as a politically motivated waste of time that would not gain traction in the state.

When the organization brainstormed a series on gun violence, editors dismissed the new law proposals and focused coverage around a handful of progressive measures, ones that they deemed could possibly become law. Also, Medicaid expansion always received extensive coverage. *Beacon*ites such as Political Reporter Mannies noted that covering Medicaid expansion became second nature. Each time a local politician discussed the issue, even in a minor way, Mannies said she would cover it. *Beacon*ites also devoted considerable resources covering the Affordable Care Act. Journalists at the *Beacon* consistently provided coverage to issues championed by progressive politics, but did not do the same for some more conservative causes. *Beacon*ites incorporated this news value into their everyday routines. Part of the reason for this news value's incorporation also more than likely comes from the organization's imagined audience.

The *Beacon* believes that the vast majority of its audience has a liberal ideology, so subconsciously or consciously editors may aim to please this group.

Professional background. The journalists at the *Beacon* come from very similar professional backgrounds. Only three of the full-time staffers working in the digital newsroom did not previously work for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. In fact, the vast majority of Beaconites spent more than 15 years at the daily newspaper. More broadly, only Health Editor Altman does not have print journalism experience. This provides *Beacon* staffers with a very similar foundation for a definition of news. Public Insight Network Analyst Lockhart verbalized this.

No question that most of us learned this craft at the *Post*. We learned what it meant to be a journalist; and I think we all took the best parts of that here. By the end at the *Post*, things were different, so we leave that behind (personal communication, Feb., 28, 2013).

Lockhart explained that Beaconites who worked at the *Post-Dispatch* before Lee Enterprises purchased the paper from the Pulitzer family partook in quality journalism that they try to implement at the *Beacon*, unencumbered by “financial considerations.”

Reporter Singer noted that even though the *Beacon* abstains from breaking news except in rare circumstances, the majority of the reporters still write breaking stories because of this background. Singer said,

Bobby Duffy, in particular, kind of disdains scoops and breaking news. He always says, ‘I’m not interested in having it first. I’m interested in giving a full report.’ Some of us reporters though, I think Jo Mannies and I in particular, have more of a racehorse mentality and you can see it coverage. It’s difficult to get rid of that part of our training (personal communication, March 21, 2013).

Numerous Beaconites, including Mannies, relayed the same sentiment about breaking news. While the organization’s unwritten policy remains to only cover breaking news when the *Beacon* can add something to the coverage from other institutions, many of the

reporters still cover it when they discover a potential story. For example, Singer spent more than two days reporting and researching the story concerning St. Louis University School of Law's dean. The piece examined the dean's potential and upcoming termination or resignation. The story epitomizes breaking news and Singer acknowledged that the traditional *Beacon* strategy would involve examining the fallout from the dean's removal and providing the contextual big picture around numerous administrative issues at the university. However, both Singer and editors focused intently on breaking the story because their backgrounds as print journalists ingrained, said Mannies, "a fondness for scoops" (personal communication, March 28, 2013). Numerous other examples of reporters closely following and reporting breaking news occurred during the time period observed. Editors and reporters treated breaking news as importantly as non-breaking news, but when it became clear another organization would or did break the news, the *Beacon* receded and began formulating a longer, more in-depth piece.

Beats. Numerous media sociology studies of newsrooms found that reporters and editors often found ideas for stories through the beat system, which allows reporters to cover subjects focused around centralized institutions, such as government or police (e.g., Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978). The *Beacon* does not assign the majority of its reporters to a beat, but some do cover centralized institutions. Political reporters Mannies and Rosenbaum both focus their coverage around city and state government, relying on sources from these large institutions for stories. Rosenbaum said,

I like to call it the A political reporter and the B political reporter, which is common at most major metropolitan newspapers. So the A reporter would cover most of the major things. For example, in the election, Jo covered the governor's race, the US senate race and most of the coverage of the congressional race between [Lacy] Clay and [Russ] Carnahan. I was responsible for a lot of state legislative races, state senate races, down ballot races. They may not have been

the races with the most attention, but in a lot of papers with one political reporter, those are the types of races that don't get covered at all, let alone, well, what I did was give overviews of them (personal communication, March 21, 2013).

The *Beacon* relies on these beat writers to formulate their own stories to satiate the organization's reliance on political coverage. Mannies said, "Our audience demands great political coverage and cares a lot about it" (personal communication, March 28, 2013).

The *Beacon* also employs two other dedicated beat writers: Health Reporter Bob Joiner and Arts Reporter Nancy Fowler. Both of these reporters rely on their beats for stories to cover. However, other than these four, *Beacon* editors consider all reporters general assignment, which results in more enterprise work, according to Hegger.

Sources. Because the *Beacon* does not rely heavily on the beat system, the news organization also eschews elite and official sources often. Past research determined that the majority of news organizations rely on official sources for their information (e.g., Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Sigal, 1973). However, Beam (2003) found that news outlets with weaker market orientations use non-official sources more often. The *Beacon* implements multiple routines to avoid relying too heavily on official sources.

The *Beacon's* adoption and devotion to the Public Insight Network came directly from a desire to not focus on elite sources. PIN Analyst Lockhart stated that this journalistic tool allows Beaconites to reach people who are not connected to major institutions, but do have some expertise on a subject. Editors often discuss ways to introduce more non-official sources. For example, during the brainstorming meeting about the gun violence series, a five-minute discussion ensued about how to "avoid the people that always get talked to about this." Freivogel mentioned the PIN as a way to

accomplish this. The main goal of the PIN remains incorporating “new and fresh” sources, said Lockhart.

Numerous reporters including Rosenbaum provided social media as an example of how to use fewer official sources. As a political reporter, Rosenbaum noted, many stories rely on getting an elite source such as a politician’s view or stance on an issue, but too often that is all that these stories provide. Rosenbaum said he can use a tool such as Twitter to speak directly with his engaged audience and find sources for information. Many Beaconites noted that Facebook and Twitter let them speak directly to potential sources who they would not otherwise discover. The *Beacon* also utilizes other tools to gather non-official sources. For example, the series on obesity will rely on community voices, said Health Editor Altman. The community discussions planned for the series occurred before even the series’ first story. This allowed editors and reporters to gather sources and find regular people directly affected by the issue.

Organizational context. The *Beacon* organization provides a foundation for numerous routines that emerged during the time period observed. First, the *Beacon* typically publishes up to only 15 stories per day, so reporters need to fill that news hole. On some days, that means editors ask reporters to write more because of a light amount of news planned. On some other days, reporters will receive more time to work on a piece or a story will hold because the editors have more than 15 already.

When working on a story concerning the Missouri state government, Rosenbaum took an extra two days for reporting and adding more context because the *Beacon* already had 14 stories for each of the upcoming two days. Hegger said, “It’s a big story and it’s not as timely, so we don’t want it to get lost.” Singer worked on an education story for

almost a week and, in an interview soon after the *Beacon* published the piece, said, “During some weeks, I would have gotten that in and out there much quicker, but other stories needed to run and I got more time” (personal communication, March 21, 2013).

Mannies noted that, over time, the way the *Beacon* focuses on “news that matters” and not breaking news changed her. She said her main focus when she worked at the *Post-Dispatch* remained finding stories and breaking them as soon as possible. But the *Beacon* does not publish as much breaking news, so she finds herself “subconsciously taking [her] time with stories and really working them longer and deeper” (personal communication, March 28, 2013). Over time, many of the Beaconites have been socialized to understand that faster does not necessarily mean better at the organization. Because a premium is placed on context, reporters automatically take a longer time with stories. “I work on things a lot longer than when I worked at [my old newspaper],” said Rosenbaum. “And I don’t think about anymore. I have a good relationship with my editor and I know what’s expected of me” (personal communication, March 21, 2013).

The *Beacon* publishes stories throughout the day, but the bulk of pieces appear on the website before 8 a.m. Editors will sometimes publish stories in the afternoon, but very rarely after 4 p.m. In atypical cases, editors will post a story after 6 p.m. if the piece contains breaking news. During the time period observed, editors published more than 80% of stories in the morning. “That’s when people read the most,” explained Freivogel. Ostensibly, the editors hope that readers will consume the stories while drinking their morning coffee before they go to work. They believe readers will once again check the site around lunchtime, but then will not return until the next morning, barring some breaking news. Routines have developed based around these deadlines. If a reporter does

not finish a story by around 5 p.m., oftentimes editors cannot read it and have it ready for posting the next morning. Therefore, when reporters finish stories during the evening, editors will spend the morning reading those pieces, but will not publish most of them till the next morning. Because of these deadlines and the minimal breaking news published, reporters spend most of the day working on stories knowing they will not appear until the next day or the following one; this provides more time to write in-depth pieces. “I know that if I don’t finish something by dinner,” said one reporter, “I might as well keep it and make it through the next day since it won’t go up for another day anyway.”

Balance. The *Beacon* does not explicitly discuss balance, but often practices it. For example, editors will often contact reporters concerning stories that are too “one-sided.” Freivogel, on more than one occasion, exclaimed she did not need stories with all sides of issue given equal space, but all sides do need representation. Editors noted that they place a deep importance on denoting all sides of each story published. However, they “don’t go overboard,” said Korando. For example, in the series on obesity, Altman noted, “Nobody’s in favor of obesity, so the series will be all about preventative measures, not both sides of how this happens” (personal communication, April 5, 2013).

The communication routines level influences how the *Beacon* operates in numerous ways. The *Beacon* reports on issues that fall into specific categories of news values; Beaconites utilize routines learned at prior workplaces; some journalists cover assigned beats; reporters utilize specific types of sources; the organizational context of the news organization provides a foundation for some routines to emerge; the reporters try to achieve a balance of opinions on the issues reported on; and the journalists’ orientation to their audience also effects routines.

Audience. According to gatekeeping theory, journalists have some exposure to their audience. This exposure leads to an imagined audience, meaning the journalists have an approximate idea of what their audience looks like and makes decisions based on this idea. A journalist's orientation to their audience allows them the ability to produce news they believe will interest their audience.

At the *Beacon*, the reporters and editors believe their audience features primarily middle-to-upper-class individuals with decision-making power. They also believe *Beacon* readers have high levels of education. These beliefs come from some exposure to the audience through communication routines, and also the list of donors to the *Beacon*. Reporter Singer said, "The people that read us tend to be important" (personal communication, March 21, 2013). Another Beaconite likened the news organization to *The New Republic* by arguing that while the *Beacon* circulation is small, it reached important people.

Because of this imagined audience, the *Beacon* journalists pay very close attention to certain issues. Political Reporter Mannies believes *Beacon* readers come to the website for "outstanding" political news and demand "great political coverage" (personal communication, March 28, 2013). There's an inherent belief that this intelligent and relatively wealthy audience craves political news and other reports concerning controversial, progressive subjects.

The audience also impacts communication routines through the publishing process. Freivogel and other editors believe the audience will predominantly only read stories during the morning hours, before a traditional workday begins, and during the mid-afternoon hours, when typical lunch breaks happen. This belief led to a very specific

publishing schedule. The *Beacon* publishes the vast majority of its stories in the morning, at around 6 a.m., and then publishes certain other stories between roughly 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. Also a very select few pieces will first appear on the website outside of those hours. So as detailed before, if a reporter finishes a story at an hour that makes it difficult for an editor to edit the piece, its publication could become delayed. Over time, the routine of when to publish became institutionalized, especially amongst editors, and this resulted in changes to news production.

Organizational. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) ascribe the organizational level of analysis' power to the ability to hire and fire the gatekeepers and to set policies and rules. However, at the *Beacon*, because of numerous elements, the organizational level shows more influence than other levels. Overall, because of the news policies, size of the organization, management, market orientation, and staffing, the organizational level of analysis heavily influences news coverage at the *Beacon*.

News policies. The policies followed in newsrooms get set at the organizational level. At the *Beacon*, the majority of those policies began when Freivogel, Duffy and Weil founded the organization. At the heart of the news outlet lies the mission to produce “news that matters.” This oft-stated policy forms the basis of how the *Beacon* constructs news. There are numerous implications to the policy. First, the *Beacon* editors consistently acknowledge that news that matters relies on contextualizing stories. Beaconites do not produce inverted pyramid stories; instead they focus on “coming at an issue from all angles and giving people all the information they need to make a judgment,” said Korando during a staff meeting.

This policy also implies a focus on impactful news, rather than stories featuring other oft-noted news values such as oddity. Editors and reporters decide on stories by weighing how much a specific message impacts people. Beaconites will repeatedly pass on story ideas that do not impact enough of their St. Louis readers. For example, a freelancer pitched Freivogel a story about Sudanese refugees. The piece would have essentially traced a refugee's journey from Africa to Missouri. Freivogel and Hegger discussed the story. Freivogel noted how much she loved the idea and thought it would make for "a fine story," but ultimately the editors decided to pass on the piece. She determined that while the story's narrative could interest readers, the subject matter would not impact the area enough for the *Beacon* to cover it. In the view of *Beacon* decision makers, how interesting a story can possibly be is secondary to how important it is, in their determination, to the community. The *Beacon's* policy also minimizes the impact of sports, and severely limits sports coverage.

The *Beacon* also places a strong focus on cultivating non-official sources. When Freivogel first heard of the Public Insight Network in 2008, she lobbied the nonprofit American Public Radio to become the first non-radio member of the network. She said her primary motivation for adopting the tool came from a belief that journalism should remain for the people and by the people. The PIN, she thought, would allow the *Beacon* to add many sources it would not otherwise use. The *Beacon's* organizational policies also extend to engagement, which focuses on generating different and non-official sources. Reporter Singer discussed finding sources:

We don't want the same old people that are always in stories. It took some getting used to because at the *Post-Dispatch*, we talked to many, many of the powers that be. Here, we want to find regular people, but regular people who know what they're talking about. We don't do man-on-the-street stories very much. Those

aren't informative. But if we can get people's stories, the ones that are affected by issues, then we're doing what we're supposed to here (personal communication, March 21, 2013).

Reporter Mary Leonard noted the same sentiment. She said the *Beacon* stresses finding sources who have stories to tell, and not necessarily the official sources common to news coverage. "That's not what we do," she said. "Readers respond to regular people who have been affected by a situation" (personal communication, Feb. 28, 2013).

Size. By not having an affiliation with any other news outlet, the *Beacon* remains a small organization with very few layers. Bagdikian (2004) noted that because chains and conglomerates control the vast majority of today's news organizations, many important decisions get made by people not directly involved at a particular organization. At the *Beacon*, editors, reporters and, rarely, the board of directors make all decisions regarding the organization. Reporter Singer noted that ideas come from far fewer layers than at a larger newspaper owned by a chain.

Numerous reporters said the ability to speak directly to superiors who make all the important and relevant decisions is one of the most positive aspects of working at the *Beacon*. They acknowledged that at prior jobs, unknown people, mostly not working at the newspaper itself, would make decisions affecting their job. One reporter recalled when working at a large chain, the mission of the whole paper changed "literally overnight" and nobody there actually made the decision or agreed with it. At the *Beacon*, she said, staffers could simply ask Freivogel or another editor in person about a decision or if any question came up.

Lockhart did note one of the drawbacks to the lack of layers at the *Beacon* comes in the form of copyediting. She said,

Back in the olden days, the dark ages, or even at a larger place now, when a reporter wrote a story, it might have been edited by five pairs of eyes before it got into type. And then a proof was pulled and you read it again and you still found something wrong with it. And, so, that's when you had a city editor, a copy editor, a copy desk chief, a news editor, and then the guys in the composing room were re-reading things (personal communication, March 22, 2013).

The lack of staffers due to the size of the *Beacon* contributes to less gatekeeping. At the news organization, typical story construction involves a reporter finding a story, writing the story, sending it to Korando or Hegger and then it gets published. Sometimes, depending on her schedule, Freivogel will read it prior to publication, but this is not a certainty. Therefore, each story typically passes through only two gates.

Reporter Singer acknowledges that he still, sometimes, covers news in the same way that he did when working at the *Post-Dispatch*. He covers education often, and wants to attend and write about all school board meetings, for example. However, this contradicts many of the principles the *Beacon* follows concerning avoiding spot news. In one instance, Singer decided to cover a particular school board meeting and sent an email to Hegger about this. She responded in the affirmative, but when Freivogel noticed the story in the ready-to-edit queue in the *Beacon's* content management system, it upset her. She told Hegger that the organization should not use resources to cover that type of story and Singer could have spent his time better elsewhere. The reduced layer of gatekeepers can also affect a story's accuracy and how grammatically correct it appears on the webpage. Public Insight Network Analyst Lockhart, a longtime copy editor at the *Post-Dispatch*, noted that she will often read stories after publication and find "grammar mistakes or a little, tiny thing wrong that changes a meaning big time." She attributed these issues to the lack of people reading a story before publication. She said that in her

previous life at the *Post-Dispatch*, five or six people would read a story before publication, while at the *Beacon*, only one or two will.

Management. At the *Beacon*, Freivogel makes the preponderance of the major decisions. Her leadership shapes the culture at the news organization. Hegger said, “Margie is very clear about giving direction about the kinds of things she thinks are important (personal communication, March 15, 2013).” In interviews, Beaconites consistently noted how hands-on Freivogel remained in the day-to-day operations of the organization, even though she made few decisions about daily content. During the time period observed, Freivogel ran every staff meeting except one. She provided input on every major decision observed.

Freivogel directed much of the overall coverage of the organization. After a reporter completed a story concerning a neighborhood meeting about gun violence, Freivogel unilaterally decided on undertaking a full series on the subject. She asked both Hegger and Korando how they felt about the series, but ultimately made the decision herself. Then, she called a brainstorming meeting to discuss the issue with other staffers. At the meeting, she acknowledged others could convince her not move forward with the series, but staffers already began formulating ideas by that point. Freivogel also made the majority of decisions concerning story placement on the website. Beaconites believe in putting stories they determine more newsworthy at the top of the page. Those newsworthiness decisions came from Freivogel; Hegger or Korando would only decide when Freivogel was absent from the office.

While Hegger and Korando coordinated the day-to-day coverage provided by reporters, Freivogel would sometimes veto previously made decisions. She used this

power minimally during the time period observed, but enough for it to be noticeable.

With fewer layers and fewer staff at the *Beacon*, leadership, in this case Freivogel, could more easily learn of daily goings-on and make decisions concerning their worthiness.

Staffing. The *Beacon* founders wanted an organization dedicated not only to journalism, but also diversity. This goal manifests itself through coverage, but also staffing. The *Beacon* employs a diverse staff with a non-traditional power structure. This diversity implicitly affects coverage choices.

The *Beacon* employs four women as its primary editorial decision makers. Freivogel, Hegger, Korando and Altman assign all stories, run all meetings and supervise all staff journalists and freelancers. The full, 20-person staff of the news organization boasts 10 women and 10 men, including three African-Americans, two disabled people, three gay employees, and individuals subscribing to numerous different religious viewpoints. In an interview, Hegger said that news organizations should be diverse and representative of the community they cover, and the *Beacon* prides itself in diversity.

Besides having women running the operation, the *Beacon* also has others in non-traditional roles. In opposition to what Craft and Wanta (2004) found typical of news organizations, the *Beacon*, an organization with women editors, features a woman covering politics, a man who primarily covers education and a bevy of general assignment reporters covering various issues. The organization also displays a clear trend toward hiring journalists for any newsroom-related role. Presentation Editor Jones' initial role primarily involved design work and technology-based issues. However, his previous experience included a strong journalistic background, which he said he uses when making decisions concerning technology. He noted that while his journalistic—and not

technological—background has made some of his role more difficult, it has helped in other ways.

Obviously, if I'd been taught coding or had an IT background, I'd be more efficient at the things I do. And if I was in graphic design, I'd be more adept at that. But I think we've run into some problems balancing the news side of things with technology. So I think my background has helped with the other people in the room ... I think they realize that I have that judgment and I'm not going to do something inappropriate for a journalist or not consider something that a journalist should (personal communication, March 13, 2013).

Similarly, Freivogel hired Strategic Development Manager Stovall to help grow the *Beacon's* reputation from a branding standpoint. His main role remains promoting the organization and finding ways to generate more donors and partnerships. Yet, before the *Beacon*, Stovall worked primarily as a journalist. He said,

I think that's one of the reasons they hired me, because of my journalistic background. You know, when we make a partnership, I'm able to tell people who want us to just publish stuff, 'No, we can't just republish your shit. We do our own reporting.' You know, that background helps me understand the mission of the *Beacon* (personal communication, March 18, 2013).

Finally, General Manager Hollway also has some journalism in her varied background and she noted that this experience helps her “intrinsically understand what we're trying to do” (personal communication, April 8, 2013).

By employing journalists and former journalists in roles not traditionally filled by journalists, Freivogel can place the goals and ethics of journalism centrally within the organization's culture. Schein (2006) noted that the people leaders hire in important roles affects culture, and if they hire people with different background and goals, culture can significantly shift. By hiring people with journalism backgrounds even in business-related roles, Freivogel maintains that the *Beacon's* primary goal of producing “news that matters” comes before anything financial, she said. This helps lessen or, as some *Beacon*

staffers argued, completely removes any tension between the journalistic and business sides of the organization.

Market orientation. Beam (1998) and McManus (1994) both found that decision-makers on the organizational level control market orientation. As discussed in the findings sections for RQ4-6, the *Beacon*'s weak market orientation significantly influences decisions made concerning content. This study found five themes emerged during an analysis of field notes and interviews concerning how market orientation influences news coverage: the philosophy of the organization; story selection and composition; innovation, marketing; and importance of being first. This section will briefly discuss each of these themes; for a full analysis, see the findings section for RQ4.

Upon its founding, the *Beacon* established its policy of producing “news that matters.” This policy eschews what founders dubbed trivial news for a focus on stories that impacted the area and its citizens. Associate editor and co-founder Bob Duffy explained, “Because we’re not trying to sell news, we can print the actual news, not the stuff that might interest people for prurient or other non-news reasons” (personal communication, March 15, 2013). This policy also extends toward context. Beaconites believe that news should not only report stories that matter to people, but also provide contextualized information so people can easily understand why and how the stories matter.

The *Beacon* selects and chooses stories based on journalistic worth. Staffers repeated this sentiment continuously throughout interviews. Many added that because the organization did not rely on advertising, journalists retained the ability to pick only the stories they believed impacted the area. For example, Singer said the *Beacon* would not

write stories such as “someone kidnapping one girl or something, unless we could substantially add to it and provide enough context for it to affect people” (personal communication, March 21, 2013). In a staff meeting, another reporter said, “We’re not Nancy Grace and we don’t have to be.” The sentiment behind this statement implied the *Beacon* did not need to titillate its audience with salacious stories that did not demonstrably affect the area.

The *Beacon*’s founders have chosen to refrain from prioritizing innovation. Instead, the news organization embraces technology as a tool to publish and augment certain stories. This decision, which coincides with the findings of Beam (2002) concerning weakly market-oriented newsrooms, affects how journalists construct stories. Countless Beaconites acknowledged that the organization utilizes technology to publish its content, but will only spend the time and resources to augment stories with other multimedia tools “when it makes sense for the story,” as Jones said in a staff meeting. By placing a premium on text-based stories, the choice certainly affects how readers consume the stories. McManus (1994) found that newsrooms with a focus on video will often choose stories based on the aesthetics of video; the *Beacon* avoids these choices by using the text as the primary delivery tool for almost all stories.

The *Beacon* organization utilizes donations, grants and partnership funds for operating costs. Certain grants and partnerships affect story selection and construction. Editors noted that partnerships not only provide funds, but also help market the organization. But these partnerships also affect how journalists cover the news. When the *Beacon* entered into a partnership with the Kresgy Foundation, it received \$20,000, but also became obligated to cover a series of open-mic nights concerning the arts.

Beaconites said these events would have received coverage otherwise, but whether the events would have received as extensive of a focus is unknown. Presentation Editor Jones spent multiple hours on four consecutive days crafting video packages about each open mic. During the time period observed, this project took, by far, more of his time than anything else. One package, in particular, took more of this time than anything else observed. Grants, such as one provided by the Missouri Foundation for Health, provide the money to employ a health writer who predominantly only covers the health care industry.

The *Beacon's* market orientation allows the organization to not focus extensively on exclusivity. While the news outlet clearly enjoys the distinction of reporting stories first, it does not prioritize this. As illustrated by the story about the St. Louis University School of Law dean, the *Beacon's* belief that publishing first should not affect news judgment significantly changed how the organization reported that story. Singer could have written a story that said, "Sources said the university would soon fire the dean for sexual harassment of students." Other local media reported exactly that, and it is presumed Singer found the story first. However, because the *Beacon* does not strongly value the notoriety and potential implied financial gain from exclusivity, it waited and published a more accurate story.

The organizational level influences the *Beacon's* content in numerous ways. Founders and editors set strict and specific policies currently followed by all employees; the size of the organization influences news practices and the construction of news processes. Management plays a large role at the *Beacon*, with leaders primarily influencing organizational culture and wielding the power to make all major decisions,

including staffing. Finally, as discussed previously, the *Beacon's* market orientation significantly affects news construction processes.

Social institutional. Gatekeeping theory's social institutional level of analysis examines how other institutions affect news construction processes at news outlets. At the *Beacon*, numerous other institutions wield at least minimal influence on how the organization operates. The outside institutions affecting how *Beacon's* construction of news processes include markets, the audience, the board of directors and financial donors, public relations firms, the government, various interest groups, and other media firms.

Markets. The majority of the *Beacon's* funding comes from large donations made by various wealthy people. When the news organization first started, the country found itself in the middle of a depression. The depression affected the stock market, which affected the personal wealth of many potential *Beacon* donors. In a meeting discussing the potential alliance between the *Beacon* and St. Louis Public Radio, Freivogel noted that the *Beacon* would soon start a new fundraising drive and hoped the uptick in the economy would positively affect this. Since the *Beacon* relies heavily on donations, fluctuations in the market could severely affect how much money the organization can spend on operating costs. It is conceivable, said one journalist, that any sizable drop in donations could result in fewer reporters, which would affect content. On the positive side, a complete recovery from the country's recent economic malaise could significantly increase donations and allow the *Beacon* an opportunity for growth.

Audience. The audience of the *Beacon* affects news construction processes significantly. In news storming meetings, selected members of the outlet's readership

receive invitations for a meeting that brainstorms coverage. In one instance, editors delayed publication of an already completed story and asked the reporter for significant changes, only due to feedback given by the audience at this meeting. General Manager Hollway said this input formed the basis of news storming, and although outside people have not attended these meetings too often, the plan for the future revolved around more invitations. She expected readers to frequently attend these meetings in the near future. And editors said they looked forward to more readers at news storming meetings.

The Public Insight Network allows audience members more influence on story construction and selection. Members of the PIN can directly influence the formation of a story by volunteering as a source or contacting the reporter directly once a story topic is announced. A PIN member can also send Beaconites story ideas directly. The PIN analyst will also periodically solicit story ideas from PIN sources. “Absolutely,” said Lockhart, “the people who sign up for the PIN can and do change and affect what we cover and how we cover it” (personal communication, March 22, 2013).

The *Beacon* allows commenting on all stories published on the website. Not only does this provide audience members a forum to discuss and critique coverage, editors closely monitor comments. On more than one occasion during the time period observed, a comment led to a serious discussion. Oftentimes, after the discussion ended, editors did not mention the subject again. However, on at least one occasion, editors decided to have a reporter write a follow-up story that directly answered the question posed by the commenter. The *Beacon* does, however, gatekeep its comments. When an editor deems a comment unsuitable, they will remove it. Presentation Editor Jones explained the news outlet’s stance.

I think in a way, we have a valid role in kind of fact checking, but it's more you don't let people spread bad information on your site, which I think a lot of news sites do. We wouldn't let an error in fact go in a story whether it was made by the reporter or a source. We would correct that in the story. And so if that's the case, why would we let it go in the comments (personal communication, March 13, 2013)?

The organization also distributes influence to the audience through its numerous engagement discussions. The *Beacon* periodically holds community discussions concerning issues happening in the city and beyond. Many times these meetings involve very specific topics such as obesity. The *Beacon* planned to populate the series on obesity with stories found at these discussions, which were open to the public. For the then-upcoming series on gun violence, editors planned to host similar discussions. Things said at these discussions would affect stories. On one related occasion, Health Editor Altman put together an “ad-hoc focus group” consisting of people in their twenties. She asked the participants about *Beacon* coverage and the types of things they wanted to see published. This focus group received considerable discussion in a staff meeting and some of the opinions shared during the focus group minimally shifted story planning and selection. For example, one participant wanted to see a story about a particular subject. After the meeting, Hegger assigned the subject to a reporter.

Funders, board of directors. In a traditionally funded news organization, advertisers influence news construction processes (e.g., Baker, 1994). The *Beacon* does not run advertising, but its funders and board of directors exert similar, yet significantly less influence as an advertiser. In one particular instance, *Beacon* editors published a story concerning a racist cartoon about the mayor, and a member of the *Beacon's* board of directors called and asked if a specific sentence could be altered. Editors then changed the sentence. During the time period observed, this remained the only instance of a board

member or donor asking for something. However, if editors made this change, it must be noted that stories could receive alterations based on what donors or directors might think. Also, Chairman of the Board Weil suggested numerous story ideas during the time period observed.

Whenever the *Beacon* writes a story that even tangentially concerns a major donor, the reporter will acknowledge this in the text. Grant-giving organizations also influence coverage. Many times, the *Beacon* receives grants pertaining to very specific subjects, which means the news outlet will cover that subject for the grant. The idea for the series on gun violence came from Freivogel, and not until after a brainstorming meeting did the idea of a grant come about. Therefore, the idea came first, the potential grant second. But the grant, as in the case of the obesity series, could mandate a certain number of community meetings and educational summits, which could affect how a story receives coverage.

Public relations. Like most news organizations, the *Beacon* receives dozens of press releases throughout the day. Editors noted that they do not use the vast majority of them because the news outlet does not focus on events or products, which they said account for the majority of releases. However, press releases do provide the catalyst for some stories.

For example, during the time period observed, the *Beacon* received a release concerning the hiring of a new high-level administrator at Washington University. Once the release came in, editors began searching for a freelancer who could cover the story over a weekend. Editors utilized press releases for news concerning the various universities, city and state government and arts and entertainment events. In particular,

the arts coverage from freelancers revolved around press releases Korando received and found interesting.

Government. Besides free-speech laws, legal regulations and the actions or inactions of various political sources, the manner in which the government most affects the *Beacon's* operations comes through tax incentives. As Nee (2013) noted in her study, nonprofit news organizations rely on the government for nonprofit status. Without this status, the *Beacon* would not continue to operate, said Freivogel. This status allows the organization to bypass most taxation, and therefore does not negatively affect the *Beacon's* relatively small operating budget. This tax status does not directly influence the *Beacon's* content, but simply allows it to continue publishing. However, if for some reason government policies changed and these alterations affected the *Beacon's* tax status, the organization could choose to keep functioning with a significantly smaller operating budget and, presumably, a smaller staff, which would considerably affect coverage.

Interest groups. During the time period observed, interest groups did not exhibit influence on the *Beacon* in any explicit manner. However, the *Beacon's* major donors fund certain interest groups such as the Show-Me Institute, a libertarian think tank based in St. Louis. In this instance, Rex Sinquefield, one of the largest donors, founded and runs the Show-Me Institute. Members of this think tank contribute to the *Beacon's* voices commentary. Also, interest groups such as FOCUS partner with the *Beacon* in various ways and could subtly influence which events receive coverage. In the instance of FOCUS, the organization lobbied for the passing of a particular tax, and the *Beacon* wrote extensively about this tax. Arts organizations such as the previously mentioned

Kresge Foundation can influence content by providing grants for certain types of coverage. In the Kresge Foundation example, the group provided funds to specifically have the *Beacon* help organize and cover a series of events concerning the various local arts scenes. Also, for some stories, the *Beacon* reaches out to numerous community groups for engagement purposes. For example, before beginning the series on obesity in St. Louis, the *Beacon* reached out to existing community groups for help gathering an audience of affected individuals.

Other media. As previously noted, other local media significantly influence the *Beacon*'s construction of news processes. For a more thorough explanation, refer to the findings for RQ6. The *Beacon*'s founders imagined the organization as an outlet that would "fill in the gaps" made from other local media. Because of this, the *Beacon* focuses on political news and arts coverage, two things editors believe other local media do not cover enough.

Hegger noted that when another media outlet can tell a story as well as the *Beacon*, more often than not the *Beacon* will abstain from reporting the story. When another organization publishes a story before the *Beacon*, more often than not Hegger or Korando will simply provide a web link to that story and the *Beacon* will not cover the issue or just augment the pre-existing coverage.

The social institution level exerts a significant amount of influence on news construction processes at the *Beacon*. Outside institutions such as markets, the audience, the board of directors and individual donors, public relations firms, the government, various interest groups and other media organizations all affect on how news is produced by journalists at the *Beacon*.

Social system. The social system level of analysis examines how the “news media reflects the organizing philosophy of a society” (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 98). The norms, rules and opinions of society, both at the macro and micro level, affect the news produced and published by the *Beacon*. Organizing philosophies of the world, country and city shape the news produced by the organization. The *Beacon* is situated in the United States, almost exactly on the Missouri and Illinois border, and in the large city of St. Louis. All of these characteristics affect news coverage and how journalists do their jobs.

Race is a consistent and recurring theme of *Beacon* coverage. The outlet won multiple awards for its coverage of race. *Beacon* stories, explained Hegger, strive to give a voice to the powerless and help mend societal inequality. After a local group published a racist cartoon, the *Beacon* reacted by covering the issue and admonishing, in the story, the makers of the cartoon. This illustrated an obvious societal influence, one that says racism, including subtle racism, is wrong. This societal influence is expected by residents of the United States. The *Beacon's* coverage of the issue was shaped by this organizing philosophy. This is merely one small example of how the country's norms can affect coverage. However, the *Beacon's* focus on race-related stories can also be explained through the city of St. Louis' history. Beaconites will consistently discuss the city as more racially divided than other major American cities. Journalists believe part of their job is to break down these divisions, and one way to do that comes through covering the issue. As Arts Reporter Fowler said, “It's harder to hate or misunderstand people you know” (personal communication, April 4, 2013). Fowler said the quote while discussing people in the arts community transitioning gender, but the sentiment can describe

Beaconites' feelings about all that they classify as minorities. The structural pluralism of the city affected the *Beacon's* coverage in this instance.

Similarly, mere months after the Newtown, Connecticut shooting, the *Beacon* planned a series on gun violence. In the brainstorming meeting, the Newtown incident did not receive a mention, but the overall culture of society made a discussion of gun violence closer to the status quo. During the meeting, Freivogel noted that the “time was right” for a series on gun violence and “people would have more of an open mind” about it. Again, these statements make no mention of the Newtown incident, but the clear implication is that mere months after the shooting, people in the United States, and St. Louis specifically, would be more open to the discussion. That incident shaped societal culture, which then had an effect on what the *Beacon* covered.

In another instance where the city's organizing philosophies affected coverage, the *Beacon* covered the Cardinals Opening Day in April. Reporters and editors all pointed to sports as something competitors do well and a topic the *Beacon* abstains from covering. Yet, the news outlet covered Opening Day because, Hegger said, “We'd look dumb otherwise. You can't be media in this city without acknowledging Opening Day. It's huge” (personal communication, March 15, 2013).

While it employs a rare and relatively new business model, the *Beacon* still receives influence from all levels. Forces from the individual, communication routines, organizational, social institutional and social system level affect news construction processes at the *Beacon*. Because of its market orientation and use of technology, though, the organizational level influences the *Beacon* most.

VI. DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, & FUTURE STUDIES

A. Organizational Assessment

The St. Louis Beacon remains an award-winning digitally native news nonprofit primarily covering issues of interest to the St. Louis area. The three main co-founders of the organization, Editor Margaret Freivogel, Associate Editor Robert Duffy and Chairman of the Board Richard Weil, all spent more than three decades in prominent positions at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, the main daily newspaper in the city. All three founders remain heavily involved in the St. Louis community through charities and civic organizations.

As a newsroom, the *Beacon* spends more than 53% of its operating budget on the editorial department, and its large staff, relative to its operating budget (Knight, 2011), displays a clear and sizeable commitment to editorial quality. The organization prides itself on this commitment, with numerous mentions in promotional materials speaking to its nonprofit status and goal of providing contextual reporting that connects “the headlines to your life” (Beacon, 2012). The organizational culture of the *Beacon* revolves around this commitment to quality. This mission clearly stems from a deep-seated negative opinion of the *Beacon* editors’ former workplace, the *Post-Dispatch*. While not always explicitly noted, the editors consistently provide a negative analysis of the city’s long-time daily newspaper and dependably criticize *Post-Dispatch* ownership. All *Beaconites* with prior *Post-Dispatch* experience romanticized their time at the newspaper before Lee Enterprises purchased the organization in 2005. In personal interviews and implicitly during newsroom conversations, *Beacon* editors denounced the quality of the

newspaper in the years since Lee took control. All of the *Beacon's* editors, besides Sally Altman, worked at the newspaper for at least a year after the sale. And all lamented Lee Enterprise's focus on profit at the expense of the newspaper's quality.

This study illustrated that this perceived lack of quality directly led to the *Beacon's* establishment. Founders, especially Freivogel, believed the city needed another media source, one that would "fill in the gaps in coverage" created by other local media, specifically the *Post-Dispatch*, as noted by Duffy (personal communication, March 15, 2013). Founders acknowledged that they believed a nonprofit media source would alleviate the need for high profits and allow the *Beacon* to focus on providing readers with quality and important news. After surveying the country and hearing about *Voice of San Diego*, *Beacon* founders decided they could start and support a similarly structured enterprise.

During the time period observed, this focus on quality and contextualized reporting became overtly apparent. *Beacon* staffers consistently espoused and displayed an allegiance to what the organization deemed quality journalism. Beaconites rarely discussed finances, the only exception coming in dialogues concerning the upcoming potential merger with St. Louis Public Radio. While some staffers displayed an underlying fear concerning the long-term viability of the organization's market model, none relayed fears of layoffs or losing their job. McManus (1994) found that in market-driven organizations, a need for continuously growing revenues permeates into the newsroom and affects news production. The *Beacon* displays none of this. Conversations expressly concerning the wants of the audience did not occur. In fact, I observed quite the opposite numerous times. *Beacon* editors and reporters occasionally discussed how the

audience did not want, for example, coverage of small county elections, but journalists believed this coverage affected readers and therefore boasted strong importance.

News judgment remains the underlying main element of the *Beacon's* culture. Editors preach and practice an unadorned focus on news judgment. Reporters should find and report stories that represent the *Beacon's* definition of news. Editors will consistently imply that content is completely dependent of news judgment. The best illustration of this underlying assumption came during a meeting with St. Louis Public Radio concerning the website a potentially merged organization would use. Freivogel could not contain her disappointment with the radio station's website. She forcefully announced that regardless of the situation, the *Beacon* would not move to that website's structure. The reason provided revolved around the *Beacon's* focus on news judgment; the current website allowed editors the ability to judge content on its worth through the positioning of stories. Throughout the period observed, Beaconites made decisions based on this judgment.

Schein (2006) presented a theory of organizational culture that researchers can only see and understand culture through three levels of analysis: artifacts, espoused beliefs and basic underlying assumptions. The *Beacon* presents an aligned culture based upon these three levels. From promotional material to personal interviews to underlying assumptions, the *Beacon* demonstrates a newsroom focused on providing its own definition of quality journalism, which revolves around contextualized reporting on issues that affect the community, or as Beaconites call it, news that matters.

This unified vision remains due to strong leadership from Freivogel. Both Schein (2006) and Kets De Vries (2001) stress that leadership shapes organizational culture. They wrote that, especially at the beginning when original leaders remain in positions of

power, leadership provided the most important influence on culture. At the *Beacon*, Freivogel takes this role seriously. During the time period observed, staffers did not make important decisions without her. At various instances, when a staffer encountered an issue, they turned to Freivogel for a solution. All staffers noted her ability to steer the *Beacon*, even when not intimately involved in a situation. Beaconites discussed Freivogel as someone constantly lurking behind the scenes, making the final decisions about major issues and, as Rosenbaum noted, “someone who pushes you in the right direction.” Staffers all value her leadership.

As Schein (2006) and Kets De Vries (2001) noted, leadership can shape the culture of an entire organization. This study illustrates that in a newsroom, leadership plays a much larger and more important role. McManus (1994), Gans (1979) and countless other researchers found that news organization leaders tend to focus on profits and, in recent years, this attention to stock prices affected newsrooms (Bagdikian, 2004). More often than not, journalists do not lead news organizations (e.g., Barnouw, 1997; McChesney, 2004). Going all the way back to Joseph Pulitzer, journalists acknowledged the potential tension between news and profits (Schudson, 1978). McChesney (2004) argued that very rarely does this tension dissipate, only when the goal of quality news coverage aligns with the goal of financial profits. Therefore, in a news organization, leadership’s influence on culture remains critical. McManus (1994) found that journalists still vocalized an ultimate goal of quality, but remained highly skeptical of leadership. At the *Beacon*, because staffers believe in Freivogel’s journalistic credibility, and because it is Freivogel’s primary mission, the entire newsroom acts accordingly. In most businesses, there is one primary, ultimate goal, but journalism serves a dual market, one for audience

and one for advertising (Baker, 1994). The *Beacon* does not compete in the market for advertising and only barely competes in the market for audience, and this is a direct result of Freivogel's leadership. However, the *Beacon* does compete in the in a market for donors, so it is still a dual-market product. But both of these markets feature less competition. The *Beacon* wants a larger audience, but makes very few decisions directly linked to accomplishing that goal. A commercial media organization needs an audience for survival, while the *Beacon* does not rely on the audience directly for survival. On the other hand, the *Beacon* does rely on donors for survival, but unlike advertisers who want a large audience, donors are less concerned about the *Beacon's* readership. This is illustrated in the Missouri Foundation for Health's grants. The *Beacon* primarily reaches an educated and decidedly middle class and above audience, yet the foundation directly serves a different group of people. However, it still provided the *Beacon* with numerous grants. So while the *Beacon* still serves a dual market, it is a decidedly different one than Baker (1994) discussed.

This study finds that in a newsroom, leadership becomes more important to the ultimate vision than in other businesses. In traditional newsrooms, leaders on the editorial side predominantly answer to leaders on the business side. These sides, according to McChesney (2004), rarely have the same goals. Schein's theory of organizational culture primarily focuses on how leadership determines ultimate success. Disagreements arise between leaders and workers primarily because of differing goals. Freivogel's leadership keeps the ultimate goals of Beaconites uniform.

However, the spirit of the pre-2005 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* permeates the *Beacon* newsroom. With the vast majority of Beaconites holding so much favorable institutional

memories concerning their prior place of employment, many of the previous routines and goals of that newspaper, at least according to editors, still have a place at the *Beacon*. This is part of the online news organization's culture. How this will shift in the future should provide a glimpse into the lasting power of established routines. Current Beaconites, by and large, should retire in the next two decades and how future leadership, presumably not tied to the journalistic heyday of the *Post-Dispatch*, shapes culture and changes some routines could be telling.

B. Market Orientation

The *Beacon's* weak market orientation affects its construction of news processes considerably. Beam (2002) identified four primary ways market orientation affects content: stronger market orientation means more added components such as photos or video; more lifestyle and sports coverage; less focus on investigative news; and more reliance on official sources. The *Beacon* adheres to Beam's conclusions seamlessly.

The online news organization does not employ a photographer or videographer and places a premium on text; they augment with added components only when time permits. The *Beacon* publishes very few lifestyle stories and does not cover sports at all. Editors verbalized that one of the reasons for the *Beacon's* founding revolves around a dearth in investigative reporting from other local media. And, finally, the *Beacon* adjusted traditional communication routines specifically to incorporate fewer official sources.

The concept of market orientation presupposes that all newsrooms operate according to the market in some manners (Beam, 1998). Main and Baird (1981) argued that in a market economy, consumers decide quality and value; producers will respond to

consumers' needs and desires; a market will self correct if not fulfilling those needs; consumers possess a freedom of choice; the market allocates society's resources efficiently; and producers possess a motivation to succeed and innovate. And McManus (1994) argued that commercial news organizations in the United States trade within four markets concurrently: the market for audience, in which firms compete for readers and viewers; the stock market, because most firms trade stock of their corporations and desire higher valuations; the advertising market, as most firms compete for advertising revenue; and a market for sources, as the firms compete for information to disseminate from sources.

The *Beacon* does not compete in the same markets as most journalistic organizations. The main element that differentiates the *Beacon* from the traditional newsrooms described by Beam or McManus or a host of other researchers lies in how each treats the reader or consumer. In a traditional market, the consumer retains a large majority of power because organizations place a premium on pleasing consumers and those consumers decide quality. The *Beacon* does not have the same need to please a consumer. While staffers consistently expressed a desire to reach more readers, the operation's success is not measured in numbers. General Manager Hollway clearly noted that the *Beacon* rarely looks at web analytics detailing what readers like or do not like. The *Beacon* staffers choose news and form their website based on what the journalists believe constitutes the best news. Many economic scholars such as Main and Baird would argue the *Beacon* does not operate based on the market. However, Beam and McManus would argue otherwise and this study's findings do illustrate how the *Beacon* does in fact trade within certain markets.

Of the four markets McManus (1994) presented in his market theory for news production, the most obvious one the *Beacon* trades within is the market for sources. The news outlet clearly competes with other media to attain information from various sources. The more the *Beacon* can attain information, the more it can disseminate and the more sources will want to continue providing it information. The *Beacon* also still competes in the market for audience. While the online nonprofit does not need or value an audience as much as strongly market-oriented news organizations do, it still needs readers or, presumably, it would be hard to generate donations and gather information to disseminate. While the *Beacon* does not compete in either the stock market or the advertising market, I propose there is one more market the *Beacon* depends on: the donor market.

The theory proposed by McManus (1994) predates the wave of nonprofit and innovative digital news sites emerging in cities and communities all over the country (Kaye & Quinn, 2010). Some of these sites allow advertising, but still heavily rely on grants from organizations such as the Knight Foundation, which supports “transformational ideas that promote quality journalism” (Foundation, 2013). The donor market also includes individual donors who could support an organization such as the *Beacon* or any other nonprofit or charity. Nonprofit and, sometimes, for-profit news organizations compete in this market, and Kaye and Quinn (2010) argued that news organizations will rely more than ever on grants and donations in the future. Therefore, McManus’ theory should evolve as news organizations have evolved. While most newsrooms still compete in those four markers, some bypass a market or two and many

news organizations now compete in the donor market. Market theory for news production should include this market.

The *Beacon's* market orientation affects its coverage in numerous ways. The news organization places a large premium on producing content filled with contextual information, which takes a longer amount of time to produce. Organizations following strict market theory want news that takes the least amount of time and least resources, thereby increasing ability for financial gain. The *Beacon* also produces content not aimed at pleasing readers, but rather serving the community. This philosophy illustrates how the *Beacon* sees news as a service and not a product, which Barnouw (1997) argued does not often happen in the modern news business. It clearly changes traditional routines because the majority of *Beacon* journalists do not cover a beat. They are also issued more time and resources to work on stories.

Finally, the organization's market orientation allows it the ability to utilize fewer official sources and alter that traditional routine. Herman and Chomsky (2002) argued that because conglomerates and members of groups in power control news organizations, the news aims to maintain the status quo. Arguably, the *Beacon's* market orientation allows it to subtly weaken the status quo. The organization focuses on issues affecting the poor, and aims to, as Arts Reporter Fowler noted, give a voice to the people without one. Without advertising, the *Beacon* does not to fear the repercussions Schudson (2003) discussed concerning losing advertising due to covering controversial subjects such as race or gun control. While the *Beacon* still relies on many elites for donations, editors said they could not remember once when a donor affected coverage and, during the time period observed, this research also did not witness an instance. However, Beaconites

would of course argue that donors did not influence coverage, yet this could very well have happened on occasions.

Staffers believe that the organization's weak market orientation allows them more leeway to write newsworthy stories. This belief affects how *Beacon* journalists go about their workday. Numerous times, they said they thought about newsworthiness and not what the audience would want. Gabriel (1999) wrote that when organization members all share beliefs, they act accordingly even if the shared belief does not permeate through the whole organization. So while leadership could place more of an emphasis on building an audience than staffers believe, their actions follow these beliefs. Their backgrounds at strongly market oriented news organizations, however, do provide pause when they discuss the *Beacon's* long-term future. Some staffers, despite an industry-wide advertising revenue downturn, wondered if the *Beacon* could survive on donations and grants. Beaconites held this fear, seemingly, because of an institutionalized belief that all of the journalism industry's future remains precarious.

The *Beacon's* market orientation allows it to conceive competition differently. This matters because without the pressing need for exclusivity or to provide similar content as other media, the *Beacon* covers what it perceives as "news that matters." With that said, while the *Beacon* may not compete in some of the same markets as other local media, it still desires exclusivity, and when another organization publishes a story first, this does affect *Beacon* coverage. One way Beaconites argue they produce more complete news coverage is through providing numerous links on its website. Since the *Beacon* does not conceive competition in the same manner as organizations competing in

the same markets, the *Beacon* will link to stories from other local media such as the *Post-Dispatch*. This provides readers all-encompassing news coverage.

The *Beacon's* market orientation should not exclude it from pursuing advertising revenue in the future. Grants and, to a much lesser extent, donations already affect news construction processes at the organization, but through the leadership of Freivogel and an emphasis on news judgment, the *Beacon* insulates itself from these influences better than previous studies showed more traditional media organizations do. With this mind, as the *Beacon* grows, it can seek out advertisers for the website and augment its funding model with other opportunities. This could potentially allow the organization to increase its operating budget and provide the newsroom with more resources. While other digitally native news nonprofits dabble in advertising, all of these entities should partake, and I think this will happen in the relatively near future.

C. Technology

Kaye and Quinn (2010) describe many of the recent, all-digital news outlets as progressive as much for their market model as their use of technology. However, the *Beacon* integrally incorporates technology in fulfilling its mission and its daily operation, but technology clearly remains secondary and not an element in the initial construction of news processes. As General Manager Hollway noted,

I would describe our relationship with technology as subservient ... Like, you can be a technology-led organization or technology can do whatever you need it do for whatever you do. And that's what I feel like we mostly are, the later. (personal communication, April 8, 2013).

In the majority of circumstances, the *Beacon* incorporates technology only after reporters complete the text-based portion of a story, or, in some instances, during the reporting of a story, but after the brainstorming.

The *Beacon's* main use of technology centers on dissemination. The internet and Lantern, the organization's content management software, allow the *Beacon* the power to disseminate information without printing and distribution costs. More and more newspapers and magazines continue limiting their printing and distribution costs by completely eliminating home distribution or by printing newspapers fewer than seven days a week (Kaye & Quinn, 2010). The *Beacon* uses the internet as its only distribution model. Without the technology, the *Beacon* would not have the operating budget to disseminate news. The *Beacon's* weak market orientation, consistent with the findings of Beam (1998), translates into a lack of focus on innovation. Organizations innovate as a way to differentiate themselves from competition and create a larger market share (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007). The *Beacon* does not differ in this way. The organization does not focus on innovation. Some of this lack of innovation may come from the average age of a Beaconite. However, market orientation gives the *Beacon* no motivation to innovate. The Beaconites have not found a way for technology or innovation to improve their journalism, so there is no emphasis on innovation. Now, age and familiarity with technology clearly hinders any potential visions concerning how innovation could improve newsgathering and dissemination, but this study did not find any ill feelings toward technology or innovation that would negatively affect innovation, but rather a mindset that focused on utilizing limited resources in proven ways, not taking chances with inherently risky innovations.

However, in a non-journalism way, the organization does rely on technology. Various digital methods create the main manners in which the *Beacon* promotes itself. The news outlet utilizes social media and other various digital tools such as the Public

Insight Network to promote itself and build a larger base of readers. Technology plays a large role in how, especially, the business side of the news outlet spreads the word about content.

The *Beacon* journalists discuss technology as something that will revolutionize the journalism industry in the future. They acknowledge that technology allows them to create a news outlet that could not have existed in the not-so-distant past, but foresee a future where all organizations will deliver news electronically and use multimedia tools for storytelling. But, as Korando noted, “I think we’re all open to the technology, but we were all print people and we’re adapting. And how to tell an in-depth story with video is, to me, a mystery still.” Korando went on to imply that she believes telling a multimedia story in a way that truly informs and does not incorporate multimedia elements just do so remains a mystery to the industry. However, Beaconites agree that multimedia storytelling is the future of journalism. They do not, though, know how to accomplish and will wait for the answer, not search for it.

The organization does utilize technology as add-on to a traditional text-based story, and that is how staffers primarily discuss technology. They see it as something that can add to the main element of a story: the text. This all confirms Beam’s finding about weakly market-oriented newsrooms. They do not feel the need to innovate because garnering a larger audience, while important, remains a far lesser priority than producing the perceived best journalism possible. Editors and leaders believe resources must be spent on quality, not attempts at innovation.

However, the *Beacon* does use technology in one manner that qualifies as innovation, but the news outlet sees it as natural. One of the core goals of the *Beacon*’s

mission remains engagement. The fundamental objective of engagement is to create an open line of communication with citizens. The *Beacon* harnesses technology as a means to create a closer bond and communicate with its audience and other members of the St. Louis area.

The news outlet remains a relatively constant presence on social media through its own Facebook and Twitter accounts and the accounts of staffers. The Beaconites embrace the technology and attempt to foster discussion, solicit ideas and feedback and generally interact with people. Without this technology, an organization such as the *Beacon* would not have the resources, both time and people, to devote as much energy to engage with the people. *Beacon* staffers see social media as essential to the operation. The Public Insight Network also contributes to engagement. Journalists utilize this tool primarily as a means of engagement, but also to generate sources and solicit story ideas. The PIN remains a prototypical example of how the news organization incorporates technology into its routines for audience engagement. Technology also provides editors the ability to publish numerous opinion columns featuring commentary from dozens of members of the community. Korando recruits and solicits people with knowledge of specific subjects to contribute outlook columns pertaining to those issues and subjects. Finally, the website allows commenting, which utilizes technology to potentially open a dialogue with readers.

Overall, technology may remain secondary to the *Beacon's* construction of news processes, but it does play a role in engagement and members of the organization clearly anticipate the role of technology increasing exponentially in the future. But there is no incentive for the *Beacon* to become a leader in technology innovation. Based on the

finding of this study and previous results from the likes of market theorists, the *Beacon* will only innovate and fully incorporate technology when it becomes necessary to survival and the cost of entry becomes minimal. The leaders of the *Beacon* see their mission as creating quality of journalism, something they conceptualize as text-based stories, sometimes with augmentable multimedia components. When they believe digital tools and technology have progressed enough that they are essential to quality journalism, the *Beacon* will adapt. Until then, though, technology will play a relatively minor role in the day-to-day operations of the newsroom and the journalists' construction of news processes.

D. Not Public Journalism, But Public Service Journalism

While founders Rosen and Merritt envisioned public journalism as a way news organizations could recover lost audience and allow ordinary citizens a chance to set the news agenda, many journalists and scholars alike concluded that the revolution in journalism primarily became a marketing tool (e.g., Carpenter, 2008; Nip, 2008). The majority of the journalists at the *Beacon*, including four of the six editors and the four longest-tenured members of the organization, gained experience with public journalism during their decades working at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. All of the Beaconites with this experience felt the public journalism experiment at the *Post-Dispatch* failed completely and ushered in a time when the newspaper simply wanted to improve circulation with a marketing tool. The majority of *Post-Dispatch* staffers felt this way (Gade & Perry, 2003). Because of this, interviews with *Beacon* staffers revealed a hostile and negative attitude toward public journalism. However, using the criteria defined by

Nip (2008) and others, the *Beacon's* philosophies and goals almost perfectly lined up with those of public journalism.

At its purest level, public journalism aimed to engage the public in numerous ways and better include them in news construction processes. The *Beacon* and other similar-minded organizations prioritize this without calling it public journalism. The industry-wide negative stigma attached to the term public journalism necessitates the formulation of a new concept that articulates what the *Beacon* and other organizations continue practicing. For that purpose, this study indicates that the goal behind this purer form of public journalism is, effectively, to participate in a public service. Therefore, because this practice is slightly different than public journalism and that term brings with it a negative connotation, this study humbly suggests the term public service journalism.

While there inevitably remains some form of marketing behind engaging in this type of journalism, *Beacon* staffers said that other digital nonprofits such as *Voice of San Diego*, and *MinnPost* do the same thing. This practice revolves around practicing a type of journalism meant to strengthen and galvanize the community. The best example of this remains the *Beacon's* series on obesity. As Health Editor Sally Altman noted in an interview, the *Beacon* could have simply written one story about the city and surrounding area's large problem with obesity. This tactic sheds light on the problem and would more than likely also provide some solutions. However, it does not cast the problem as a public health issue, one that, as Altman said, "affects everyone, not just the obese, but everyone in many ways" (personal communication, April 5, 2013). Instead, the *Beacon* partnered with nutritionists, grocery stores, churches, fitness experts, politicians and neighborhood civic groups and scheduled numerous public meetings. Linda Lockhart used the PIN to

promote the meetings. Altman and reporter Bob Joiner did not immediately write about the series, but instead attended these meetings geared toward educating the public and creating a safe spot for citizens to share their struggles with obesity. After gathering information and understanding how the problem affects those struggling, the *Beacon* set out to contextualize the issue by providing detailed narratives of those ailing, talk to health and insurance experts about how this affects even the most healthy of citizen and help the public at large understand why so many end up obese. The stories, Altman said, would treat the issue as a problem for the entire community and present ways to fix this. In essence, the series perfectly adheres to the agreed-upon four elements of public journalism: engage the community through an open dialogue; let ordinary people have power to help set news agendas; make the news more digestible and easy to understand; and report on issues in a way that galvanizes, not frustrates the community. But the *Beacon* expended resources on this issue not primarily as a marketing tool to promote itself, but as a way to better its community, said Freivogel. “That is what we are here for,” she said (personal communication, March 13, 2013).

Public Service Journalism should incorporate the four elements of public journalism and public journalism’s main goal of engagement, without fostering a negative perception. Organizations practicing Public Service Journalism should not treat disseminating news itself as a benefit to a community, but should first consider how an issue matters to the community and then explain it in a easy-to-understand manner that doesn’t frustrate but incorporates the community into the news gathering and news construction processes.

Yet it is important to note that public service journalism remains somewhat different than traditional public journalism. The original founders of public journalism envisioned ceding significant control over the news agenda to the public (J. Rosen, 1996). The reform movement aimed to give the public the same power as journalists. This undoubtedly made many journalists, perhaps including those at the *Post-Dispatch*, uncomfortable with public journalism. At the *Beacon* and other organizations practicing public service journalism, the journalists still cede some power to the public, but their own independent news judgment remains sacrosanct. The *Beacon* wants to avoid market-driven news and printing stories simply based on what the public wants. By keeping some control of the news agenda and still practicing news judgment, *Beacon* journalists and other practitioners of public service journalism attempt to accomplish the main goals of public journalism while also avoiding the perceived pitfalls of the reform movement.

E. Gatekeeping Theory

This study's overall focus revolves around construction of news processes. The ethnography conducted examined a newsroom with two fundamental differences compared to traditional media organizations; Lowery and Gade (2011) identified technology and economics as the two factors primarily changing journalism. The *Beacon* differs from most legacy media in terms of both. Singer (2008) argued that no media organization is unique, and that future studies should especially concentrate on ethnographies of digital newsrooms.

Shoemaker and Vos (2009) identified five levels of analysis for gatekeeping studies: the individual, the communication routines, the organizational, the social institution, and the social system. Both market orientation and technology fall under the

organizational level (e.g., Beam, 2002; McManus, 1994; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

However, this study found that a shift in those two factors — economics and technology — can result in changes on three, and maybe four, levels of analysis.

By and large, the social system level of analysis influenced content at the *Beacon* in the same way it would influence all news outlets in the United States and, specifically, the St. Louis area. An examination of this study's findings juxtaposed with other gatekeeping studies finds the individual level with all the same influences on news content. One can argue that the *Beacon* predominantly hires former print journalists from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, a paper once renowned for its quality (Gade & Perry, 2003), but now with a less-than-stellar reputation due to its owner, Lee Enterprises. Beaconites all worked through the *Post-Dispatch's* switch in ownership and carry a negative opinion of corporate-owned news. Because of these opinions, it is very possible that individual journalists freed from a chain-owned outlet could intentionally look for stories they believe they would otherwise not be able to tell. For example, Arts Reporter Nancy Fowler said she believed her job description entailed telling stories nobody else would. She illustrated this point by talking about a series of articles she wrote about people within the arts community who went through a gender transition. She said, "I don't believe that any mainstream news place would have touched that series" (personal communication, April 4, 2013).

At the *Beacon*, individuals theoretically have more influence on news construction because the organization features fewer layers of gatekeeping. A journalist can choose story and once a single editor approves, that story eventually gets published. At a larger organization, the idea could potentially have to make its way through

numerous gates before earning an approval. In the future at the *Beacon* and organizations of its ilk, it is very possible the influence of the individual level will increase. As the organization hires fewer people with traditional news backgrounds, they will be less familiar with established routines and, hypothetically, will make more decisions independent of those established routines.

A change in market orientation and technology certainly affected communication routines at the *Beacon*. First and foremost, all reporters and one editor worked from home. In his study of newsroom routines, Breed (1955) found that routines become institutionalized primarily through socialization. News reporters, for example, observe what successful veteran reporters do and consciously and subconsciously model that behavior. Ryfe (2009) found the same thing when he observed a modern newsroom undergoing tremendous changes. By working from home, journalists can develop their own routines for news production. At the *Beacon*, most reporters primarily worked from home, while others found coffee shops functioned well. The *Beacon's* focus on engagement and giving the audience more influence on news content resulted in shifts in routines. Beaconites found stories through community meetings designed to foster communication, utilized technology such as the PIN and social media as part of news construction processes.

This study found the organizational level very different from traditional newsrooms. In most for-profit newsrooms, a businessperson oversees a news organization. While journalists steer the editorial department, as Gans (1979) and others have found, the business side of the organization tends to have direct influence on editorial leaders and makes wide-reaching decisions that affect the news side

considerably. At the *Beacon*, a journalist leads the organization. Because of its nonprofit status and weak market orientation, the *Beacon* can focus on delivering what it deems quality journalism without the stress of plummeting stock prices or advertising revenue. The *Beacon* would like an increased readership, but Freivogel remains adamant that no decision that devalues or diminishes news quality will be made concerning the organization. Other, more strongly market-oriented newsrooms, inevitably deal with the tension between profits and quality journalism that scholars such as McChesney (2004) warn about, but the *Beacon* does not have that same tension because of its nonprofit status.

The main difference on the social institution level of analysis comes from the influences of advertising, board members and donors and the audience. Without advertising, the *Beacon* does not face that influence. Both Baker (1994) and Schudson (2003) identified advertising as the largest extra-media influence on content. Both argued that news outlets compete in a dual-market and thus advertising can shape content in numerous ways. That does not happen at the *Beacon*. However, the *Beacon* does rely on donations and grants for operating costs. It's possible that donors could influence content, although this study only found very minimal evidence of this. Grants, on the other hand, sometimes necessitated specific coverage such as the open mics sponsored by the *Beacon* and the Kresge Foundation. However, as the findings showed, Freivogel and other leaders make decisions on grants on a case-by-case basis a distinct focus on whether the grant could affect the organization's credibility. This is a subjective decision, however, and as the major grant from the Missouri Foundation of Health that funds a health

reporter, showed, taking that grant from a foundation in favor of Medicaid expansion affected some readers' opinion of the *Beacon*.

This level could potentially increase its influence rather easily. In a traditional newsroom, extra-media influences have an indirect relationship with journalists. They will contact a journalist, provide press releases or sources, provide competition or even set laws that affect the news organization, but, in general, the journalists then decide how to use this information. They are not, theoretically, forced to write a story a certain way. However, at the *Beacon*, interest groups can provide a grant to the news organization and directly influence coverage. The Kresge Foundation provided the *Beacon* with a grant that stipulated the news organization must cover and organize a series of open-mic events. This very clearly and directly influenced coverage since, of course, the *Beacon* then covered the event. Beaconites will argue that they would have covered the series regardless, but it is not entirely definite the series would have even happened without the *Beacon*. The *Beacon* organized and hosted the series. In essence, the *Beacon* created news through influence from an interest group. Another group could do the same. While the time period observed illustrated the *Beacon* leaders would not accept a grant that they believed clearly negatively affects credibility, events such as the series of open mics sit in a gray area. Yes, the *Beacon* would cover those events if they happened, but the news organization may not have spent nearly as much time as Presentation Editor Jones did on those stories. And, again, in this instance, the *Beacon* became a minor catalyst for the events actually happening. This illustrates the potential powerful influence interest groups can have on news organizations depending on grants from various interest groups.

Finally, the main influence at the *Beacon* on the social institution level is not advertising, but rather the audience. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) identify the audience as a growing influence on construction of news processes, but the *Beacon's* organizational philosophy accentuates that influence even more. The audience, through technology and adjusted communication routines, affects news construction at the *Beacon* considerably. While the organization places a very high emphasis on news judgment and the audience cannot affect content without an affirmative judgment from a journalist, there is a strong emphasis on letting citizens in the process.

This thorough examination of the *St. Louis Beacon* illustrates how subtle and major shifts in various characteristics can result in large changes to content. Both economic and technological changes result in the *Beacon* producing a slightly different type of journalism. These changes work together to produce the effect on the *Beacon*.

The organization's weak market orientation and digitally native nature make it starkly different than traditional legacy media organizations. The *Beacon* does not primarily aim to increase readership and please its audience, and because its market orientation does not primarily focus on profit, the *Beacon* does not prioritize innovation. These two changes significantly affect the construction of news processes at the *Beacon*. Journalists make news decisions based on their perceptions of newsworthiness. This allows the *Beacon* to practice an updated version of public journalism. Through public service journalism, the *Beacon* can engage the public and provide stories the organization deems important to the community, but it can still retain the ultimate power over setting the news agenda. If the *Beacon* had a stronger market orientation, it would likely need to compete with the *Post-Dispatch* for readers and, ultimately, advertising dollars. This

would make it very difficult to ignore what readers wanted and focus on what the organization believes readers need.

Construction of news processes remain significantly affected by the profit goals of traditional legacy media. These organizations need to please both consumers and advertisers, hence the dual market Baker (1996) identified. Pleasing both of these groups can seriously compromise the normative goals of journalistic enterprises. If what an organization deems newsworthy does not please readers and/or advertisers, the issue may not receive the same type of coverage journalists would have given it otherwise.

Prior gatekeeping research identifies the communication routines level as having the most influence on news construction (e.g., Gans, 1979; Gieber, 1964; Ryfe, 2009; Tuchman, 1978). Evidence supports this assertion, but the findings of this study suggest this could shift. If one looks at the *Beacon* as a microcosm for the ever-shifting journalism industry, one can see why the influence of the organizational level continues expanding.

While corporation still own the vast majority of media in the United States, technology lowers the barriers for entry. Organizations such as the *Beacon* and other online, multimedia journalism sites continue appearing in numerous shapes and sizes (Kaye & Quinn, 2010). These organizations typically employ fewer people and leadership can maintain a stronger hold on culture. Staff size decreases and a shift toward online news alter communication routines. This allows leaders to create slightly new routines that break free from the long-established ones continuously found by prior media sociologists. Even something as seemingly trivial as a newspaper such as the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* only publishing in print six times a week and in broadsheet

some days and tabloid other days can significantly affect routines. The advent and explosion of natively digital news organizations can only illustrate these routine shifts more readily. And these shifts happen because of organizational makeup.

While the *Beacon* employs a fundamentally innovative market model, the innovation achieved, desired and its actual newsroom makeup remains conservative. However, after a series of snowstorms forced editors and reporters to completely work from home, one questioned whether a newsroom remained necessary. This tangentially brings up a potentially major shift in journalism. As more and more organizations abandon print publication and migrate completely online or start out just digital, the need for a newsroom will decrease. The *Beacon* journalists come from a tradition of a newsroom-centric organization, but as time progresses and people become more confident with technology, a newsroom could become an unnecessary financial expense. Many scholars argue that communication routines become established through socialization (e.g., Breed, 1955; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Breed (1955) described how young journalists saw how their older, more celebrated counterparts curried favor with leadership and followed suit. Ryfe (2009) discussed how journalists view how veterans work throughout their day and internalize those routines. In short, to these scholars, a newsroom remains vital to the socialization process. Without one, hypothetically, different and less established and uniform routines could become institutionalized, which, again, is why organizational level influence will only grow as journalism continues to change due to economic and technological effects.

The *Beacon* provides a window into some of the potential changes. Some socialization still occurs. Reporters saw Editor Freivogel begin a round of applause

because of Reporter Singer's delayed and contextual coverage of the ouster of the dean of St. Louis University's law school, thus understanding what would please leadership. Also, the reliance on GoogleChat to communicate throughout the day became institutionalized. However, with all reporters working from home on most days, socialization becomes much harder, and would become even more so without a newsroom altogether.

These organizational changes would no doubt lead to shifting routines. At the *Beacon*, many of the journalists spent considerable time at the *Post-Dispatch* and brought some established routines to the new organization. Over time, the *Beacon* will presumably hire more people without traditional newsroom experience and therefore with established routines less internalized. With shifting market models could also come different news values. At the *Beacon*, progressiveness became a clear news value. Reporters and editors sought stories with a liberal leaning. Newsrooms with fewer established routines could result in more non-traditional news elements.

Finally, these shifts in the organizational context primarily come from advances in technology, which will surely continue altering communication routines. At the *Beacon*, reporters and editors relied on tools such as Facebook, Twitter and the Public Insight Network and have incorporated them into routines. This is due to organizational philosophies. Technology also allows Beaconites the ability to more easily reach non-elite sources, which potentially alters the makeup of news stories considerably.

The evolution of news organizations could create seismic shifts in other levels of influence, but the catalyst for these shifts will occur on the organizational level. This is

why I argue it will soon become the most significant influence on news coverage, and it should be focused on in future research.

F. Limitations, Future Studies

This research comes with limitations. While this dissertation allowed the researcher to fully immerse himself in the culture of a weakly market-oriented newsroom, there are also limitations inherent in ethnography. The main limitation of ethnographic research is that a particular study does not have much breadth; while some of the findings can be generalized, the data primarily describes and provides insights into the culture of a specific organization (Bird, 2009). This limitation, while correct, can be argued with over time. For example, the more ethnographies done examining digital newsrooms, the more we can generalize and know (Paterson & Domingo, 2008). One limitation specific to this study involves the time period studied. As with any ethnographic study, the time a researcher spends in the field remains finite. I only spent 10 weeks at the *Beacon*. The possibility remains that had I spent the 10 weeks before I began or the 10 weeks after I concluded at the *Beacon*, I would have observed an a slightly different organization. This limitation is especially pertinent in that while I observed the *Beacon*, discussions about the possible alliance with St. Louis Public Radio certainly shaped many of the Beaconites' actions and thoughts.

While this study may provide insight into the workings of other digital newsrooms with the same market model, it would be misleading and foolish to generalize these findings without more analysis of similar newsrooms. Future research should and can replicate this study and build more evidence concerning the culture and construction of news processes of digital, nonprofit news sites.

Future research should also examine how content produced differs in this type of newsroom versus a traditional news organization. This market model remains relatively new, so research could also evaluate its future viability by examining long-term plans. It would be interesting and telling to discover if leaders at other newsrooms with this market model have an alternative funding plan if the grants many depend on become unsustainable (Knight, 2011). Most importantly, future research should continue examining new market models and determine if the model itself affects quality, as the goal of all journalism research should be to help sustain and improve journalism (Gans, 2004).

Comparative studies of new market models could illuminate how organizational level influences affect content and news practices. These studies could also provide both academics and professionals with a detailed look at some of the many different market models Kaye and Quinn (2010) detail. This could illustrate how each type works and what type of news they provide.

As discussed above, the journalism industry continues shifting due to technology. A research agenda concerning construction of news processes should not only focus on specific market models and long-term viability of various market models, but how the organizational changes detailed previously in this study affect actual news workers. Organizational change will result in large changes on the individual, communication routines and social institutions level of influence. Understanding and documenting these changes could add a significant contribution to the literature. Researchers could accomplish this through more ethnographies, case studies, interviews and even quantitative methods examining published content or journalists' perceptions.

At the *Beacon* specifically, future research should focus on how the organization adapts over the years. In the near future, the *Beacon* may enter into an alliance with St. Louis Public Radio; this will certainly affect how the organization constructs news. New routines will develop and leadership may slightly shift. As with all the digitally native news nonprofits around the country, the *Beacon* remains primarily staffed by former print journalists who brought with them the established routines still flourishing in media organizations everywhere. These routines came from places such as college classes and journalism workshops, but primarily from institutionalization at mainstream media outlets. As time goes by, the *Beacon* and other digital nonprofits will begin hiring younger journalists who never worked at a traditional newsroom and therefore new routines will develop and have some effect on news construction processes. The *Beacon's* future could provide researchers with valuable data concerning the future of the journalism industry.

In conclusion, this research is new and original in several ways. Kaye and Quinn (2010) suggest that in the future, more and more news will reach audiences digitally, and that the manners to fund news continue to shift. Of all the relatively new market models for news forming all over the country, the *Beacon's* model has become the most popular and seemingly the one with the most potential for longevity and growth (Nee, 2013). This is the first ethnographic study of this type of newsroom and one of the first handful to investigate the market model in any manner. As economics and technology continue to significantly alter the way journalists define, gather and disseminate news, it becomes vitally important to examine how these changes can potentially affect construction of news processes. McChesney et al. (2005) and Gans (2004) argued that without a robust

and free press, a society cannot attain true democracy. As new market models gain traction, it is incumbent upon scholars to ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of each. Without this information, the information reaching people could potentially mislead. Understanding the influences on news coverage better helps us understand the news. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) argued, “Making the news better is not accomplished by force of will” (p. 135). We cannot make news better unless we understand how it is constructed, and each type of newsroom does this in a different way. This study illustrates how the *St. Louis Beacon*, one of numerous similar digital nonprofit news outlets disseminating information all over the country, does it.

VII. RESEARCHER'S PERSPECTIVE

This ethnographic study utilized, according to the typology defined by Van Maanen (1988), a realist format to present findings. In this typology, Van Maanen also described the confessional format, which acknowledges the researcher's involvement in an organization and the information-gathering process. A confessional tale answers numerous questions that the realist tale does not. How does the researcher affect the environment or culture studied? How do the people studied react to the researcher? How did the researcher interact with the people studied? Schein (2006) also argued that researchers can only gather usable data if the members of the organization believe the researcher can help the organization. With this in mind, I believe a short chapter explaining my background and my time at the *Beacon* is important to inform the findings.

The following paragraphs explain why I chose this project, my interactions with the *Beacon* staffers and my perceptions of how the organization received me. I will also provide my reaction and opinions of the organization. While I recorded field notes throughout this ethnography, I also noted my own reactions and how people reacted to me.

My interest in this topic began while working at the *New Haven Register*, a daily newspaper in New Haven, Connecticut. I began work at the newspaper in the summer of 2004. Prior to moving to New Haven, I worked as a copy editor and columnist at a Gannett newspaper in Eastern Connecticut and spent two years freelancing for music and lifestyle magazines while living in New York. When I first brainstormed this topic, my title at the *Register* was arts and entertainment editor and interim multimedia editor.

In the late summer and early fall of 2009, New Haven became a media center after the murder of Annie Le, a graduate student at Yale University. While I did not cover the story in any capacity for the newspaper, I did oversee our online content and spent a considerable amount of time editing some web stories about the subject. While the story unfolded, I could not help but notice that the *Register's* main competition, a nonprofit daily news website called the *New Haven Independent*, also produced a bevy of content on the subject. The differences between the content of both news outlets struck me. The *Independent* utilized journalists who previously worked at the *Register*, and both organizations employed trained journalists. So why did the content read so differently? This began my interest in digital, nonprofit journalism. My research agenda at the University of Missouri focused on understanding how technology and market models affect news content.

This interest led me to the *St. Louis Beacon*, a daily nonprofit news website funded and structured in the same manner as the *Independent*. After finishing with my dissertation proposal, I formally contacted Margaret Freivogel, the *Beacon's* editor. I went to St. Louis and officially met with Freivogel and editors Susan Hegger and Donna Korando on Jan. 18, 2013. We formalized my access and briefly discussed the focus of this project. On this first day, Freivogel also introduced me to Associate Editor Robert Duffy.

After visiting the *Beacon* two times over the course of the next month, I officially began my observation Feb. 11. On the first day, Freivogel told me to arrive at 9:30 a.m. for the news meeting. When I arrived, I was the only person in the *Beacon* newsroom. This felt awkward, but within 10 minutes, Korando arrived and set me up on Hegger's

computer as she was on vacation for the week. I received a re-introduction to Duffy from Korando and met Presentation Editor Brent Jones for the first time. During this first week in the newsroom, I reiterated to everyone the particulars of my study and introduced myself to numerous KETC employees who shared office space with the *Beacon*. On Thursday, Feb. 14, I attended my first staff meeting. Before the meeting began in earnest, Freivogel introduced me to staff—who had not yet heard of me or my study—and then I took five minutes to discuss my study, the participation I hoped for and then handed out consent forms. Everybody signed the forms and returned them. After the meeting, a couple staffers asked me particular questions about my background. One staffer in particular seemed especially guarded and a little untrusting of me. This marked the only occasion during my entire time at the *Beacon* I felt this. Later on during my observation period, however, this staffer canceled our interview time and never attempted to reschedule despite a sincere effort from me. All other staffers immediately reacted positively toward me and always acted friendly.

As time went on, I felt more and more comfortable in the newsroom. Staffers began treating me just like any fellow employee. For example, Office Manager Martin Kaplan, a former bakery owner, bakes cakes or pies for each employee's birthday. On the Thursday of the person's birthday week, he will bring the baked good to the staff meeting. Without knowing, he baked one for me during my birthday week. Over time, I became closest to both Korando and Hegger. First, as editors, I think I naturally gravitated toward both since they performed the most similar job to my past. Both discussed television and film a lot, two things that also interest me. Finally, during the observation period, the three of us, along with Jones, spent the most time in the actual

office. Overall, I felt overwhelmingly welcome at the *Beacon*, and editors and reporters never declined any of my requests for access.

After about a month of observation, I began interviewing staffers. I found everyone contacted amenable to my requests. I told employees interviews would last roughly 30 to 45 minutes, and more than half went on far longer. I conducted my longest interview with Public Insight Network Analyst Linda Lockhart, who gave me a very long driving tour of various St. Louis neighborhoods. She told me that she takes “all new employees” on the tour. I felt no discomfort from the staffers during any of the interviews. All staffers were very generous with their time. All of them seemed very happy to discuss how the *Beacon* differed from their previous jobs. From interviews and observations, I feel like morale is very high at the organization. And, I must admit, I found myself admiring the work they perform on a daily basis. During the time period examined, I read every story produced by *Beacon* journalists and found myself overwhelmingly impressed with the breadth and quality of the work.

I consistently encountered feeling as if I worked at the *Beacon*. I steadily fought against this feeling, and only offered thoughts when asked. I occasionally participated in news meetings when asked of my opinion. This usually involved headlines, thoughts concerning something arts-related or the irregular general news question. Near the end of the observed period, a staffer did invite me to a community event he emceed, but I declined the request due to other plans. I did not participate in any activities with staffers outside normal business hours.

This study became a consistent source of levity for various staff members. When Freivogel would introduce me to non-staffers, she would always say something similar

to: “This is Pat. He’s getting his Ph.D. at Missouri and he’s here to tell us what we do.” Other staffers would jokingly ask me, “Found anything yet?” And, most consistently, staffers would say, “I can’t imagine you’re finding anything.” When not joking, some staffers, such as Korando and Hegger, would often sincerely ask about the study’s progression. To all these jokes and questions, I would answer vaguely or simply say, “It’s going well.”

By the end of the time period observed, I felt staffers completely accepted me and did not even notice my presence. I began asking fewer questions because new occurrences ceased happening. At the last staff meeting I attended, I received some hellos and some head nods, but no questions or conversations. Prior to this meeting, this never happened. I believe staffers no longer looked at me like a novelty and I successfully immersed in the organization’s culture as much as an outsider could.

VIII. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Schedule

Schedule of Interviews with Beacon staff members

Name	Title	Date (all 2013)	Length (nearest min.)	Place
Margaret Freivogel	Editor	Feb. 15	45	Conference room
Linda Lockhart	PIN Analyst	Feb. 28	186	Interviewee's car
Mary Leonard	Reporter	Feb. 28	37	Conference room
Dale Singer	Reporter	March 7	32	Conference room
Brent Jones	Presentation Editor	March 13	64	City Diner
Margaret Freivogel		March 13	33	Conference room
Bob Duffy	Associate Editor	March 15	35	Beacon newsroom
Susan Hegger	Issues and Politics Editor	March 15	59	Osage Cafe
Donna Korando	Features and Voices Editor	March 15	69	Osage Cafe
Zack Stovall	Strategic Development Manager	March 18	30	Hotel Cafe
Dale Singer		March 21	41	Beacon cafeteria
Jason Rosenbaum	Political Reporter	March 21	48	Beacon cafeteria
Linda Lockhart		March 22	31	Boat House restaurant
Susan Hegger		March 22	32	Conference room
Jo Mannies	Political Reporter	March 28	46	Conference room
Nancy Fowler	Arts Reporter	April 4	30	Beacon cafeteria
Sally Altman	Health Editor	April 5	31	Beacon cafeteria
Nicole Hollway	General Manager	April 8	34	Beacon cafeteria
Total			883	

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Purpose of Research

This research will focus on how news is constructed at this organization.

Specific Procedures to be Used

You will be observed while you do daily work. And you will be interviewed about how you do your job.

Duration of Participation

The observation will be conducted over a three-month period, from Feb. 11 through April. The interview will last between 45-90 minutes.

Benefits to the Individual

You may learn more about your own understanding of how you do your job.

Risks to the Individual

The project poses little to no risk for you and is comparable to risks you would encounter in daily conversation.

Voluntary Nature of Participation

Participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate in this research project if you don't want to. If you do agree to participate, you can withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.

Human Subject Statement:

If you have any questions you may contact the researcher at prfgz3@mail.missouri.edu. If you have any question regarding your rights as a research participant or feel that your rights as a research participant have been violated, you may contact the University of Missouri's Institutional Review Board at (573) 882-9585 or you may reach them at 483 McReynolds, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO, 65211.

I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS CONSENT FORM, ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND AM PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT.

Participant's Signature

Date

Participant's Name

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide

1. What is your role at the *Beacon*?
2. How has it evolved over time?
3. How do you determine whether or not to work on a story?
4. Who else is included in these choices? How?
5. What do you think about when choosing a story?
6. How do you think about the potential audience of the story?
7. Do you choose stories based on what the audience may want? How so? Why? If not, how does the audience play a role?
8. Have you worked anywhere else as a journalist? How did it differ?
9. Do you think it matters that this news organization is nonprofit? How so? Does it affect the stories you write?
10. How do you know when you have done a good job?
11. How do you know when maybe you haven't done as well of a job?
12. How do you use technology on an every day basis?
13. How does technology play a part in how you choose stories?
14. How about how you actually write them? When do you start thinking about technology when you're reporting a story?
15. Overall, how much autonomy do you have? Give me an example?
16. Can you also give an example of a story you didn't write? Why didn't you?
17. What are the values of this organization? How do those compare with your own?
18. In your view, what is the role of leadership?
19. How do you engage readers?
20. In what ways does the *Beacon* engage, and how much of a priority are these?

APPENDIX D

Employee Directory (Non-Freelancers)

Name	Title	Observed Role
Margaret Freivogel	Editor	Freivogel oversees the <i>Beacon</i> . She edits stories, runs meetings, and supervises all departments. She shapes the newsroom's overall culture.
Robert Duffy	Associate Editor	Previously, Duffy was second in command on the editorial side, but now he does very little editorially. He writes some obituaries and covers some arts stories, but primarily fundraises for the <i>Beacon</i> .
Susan Hegger	Issues and Politics Editor	Hegger oversees all hard news and political coverage. She supervises all reporters except the arts and features reporters, and the health and science one.
Donna Korando	Features and Voices Editor	Korando oversees all features, arts and commentary coverage. She supervises the arts reporter, dozens of freelancers and finds and editors the commentary/voices contributors.
Sally Altman	Health and Science Editor	Altman oversees all health and science coverage. She supervises the health and science reporter.
Brent Jones	Presentation Editor	Jones is a jack-of-all-trades in terms of technology issues at the <i>Beacon</i> . He also contributes graphics and various multimedia tools. He also does some data-driven reporting.
Richard Weiss	Contributing Editor	Weiss works part time and went on a sabbatical beginning in mid March. He contributes some stories, oversees some projects and runs the outlet's podcasts.
Linda Lockhart	Public Insight Network Analyst	Lockhart oversees the Public Insight Network. She sends out PIN questions and promotes the network. She also does copy editing.
Nancy Fowler	Arts Reporter	Fowler writes about the arts for the <i>Beacon</i> .
Kristen Hare	Reporter	Hare writes part time for the <i>Beacon</i> .
Mary Leonard	Reporter	Leonard is a general assignment reporter.
Jo Mannies	Political Reporter	Mannies is the main political reporter for the news organization.
Jason Rosenbaum	Political	Rosenbaum covers politics for the <i>Beacon</i> .

Dale Singer	Reporter Reporter	He covers secondary stories. Singer is a general assignment reporter. He also cover most education issues and aggregates the internet links on the <i>Beacon</i> website.
Nicole Hollway	General Manager	Hollway is in charge of finding potential partnerships and managing the donors. She also leads the outlet's engagement activities. She serves a community liaison and helps get the <i>Beacon's</i> brand known. She also oversees social network marketing.
Shawn McGinness	Business Manager	McGinness does the <i>Beacon's</i> accounting and generally oversees financing.
Martin Kaplan	Office Manager	Kaplan does some secretarial work and oversees payroll.
Zack Stovall	Strategic Development Manager	Stovall oversees some social network branding, engagement activities and searches for partnership activities. He also assists Hollway in marketing <i>Beacon</i> content.

APPENDIX E

Example of *Beacon* Daily Budget, Feb. 13, 2013

Today:

State of union analysis - Rob - from Tues. night
State of union response - Jason - from Tues. night
Pope - Benedict's legacy, hopes for next pope - Pat Rice
ZMD - Dale
Tim Wolfe anniversary - Dale
Sandra Fluke - speaking Tues. night, story expected Wed. morning - Dale
Arts valentine spotlight - Nancy - use Tues.
Riegel obit
Durbin gun control from Wed.
McCaskill possible from Wed.
spotlight
New comedy club on Cherokee - Jason Schwartzman
Cappies
Voices: Lana mayor limits; Wrighton ghana

Thursday plan so far:

Mayor race - Joiner - possible
Gender part 3 (w/ video?)
Stl social media love - Kristen
ZMD ex comm meeting - Dale - possible
SLSO preview - Krasnoff
Quincy Troup poet - use Fri.
Teen CERT - Kristen - can hold
Voices: Guzy

Later:

Arch improvement meeting preview - Charlene - for Mon.
Grand/Cherokee development - Crone - expected Tues.
Manary profile, Ross, will be in on Wednesday
proliferation of groups/websites promoting St. Louis (expected Tues., Kristen suggested it run Valentine's Day.)
Carmina Burana preview - opens Feb. 21 - use Mon. or Tues.
Sped the plow review - Nancy - expected Thurs.
Feb. 15-Sun., Feb. 17: GOP Lincoln Days in St. Louis - Jo/Jason
Sat., Feb. 16, 8th district Dems select candidate - Jason; Jo covering Jindal Sat. night
arts series preview quincy troupe (poet) - Terry - expected Tues., use Thurs.
Joiner getting audios on first 2 health graphics; will need editing by Brent: late this week

Teen CERT - Kristen - ready
congressional priorities of local delegation - Rob
Arch 50th anniversary take 5 with author - Mary - in, can hold
True False film festival preview - expected Wed.
St. John's Bayou, a look at what's happening w/ sw illinois - Rob - expected Tues.
Q and A w/ new local head of Realtors about positive turn in local housing market - Mary
Whatever happened to plans to move traditionally black Bootheel town of Pinhook,
which was destroyed in flood - Mary
The price of urgent care; it's not always cheaper than emergency rooms - Mary
PIN/Kirkwood (roundup from query) - Kristen
Disabled high school athletes - Dale
Edwardsville update - did Wildey Theater spark development? - Barry - expected Fri.
St. Louis school adult programs - Dale
Kresge neighborhoods - coverage and video of each area - 4 articles and 4 videos, may
run on 2 days, every other week - may start Fri. or Mon.
spotlights Tu, W, Th
1963 - Joiner/Donna - work in progress

Voices:

Levis on guns

Mayor's race coverage plan (March 5 primary, April 2 general)

-- Issues: Race (Bob) -- is it a factor in the mayoral contest? or is the situation more complex than that? as bob has noted before, we will have to define what we mean by playing the race card, find some credible examples, and note that comments with racial overtones don't necessarily add up to playing the card. And then explain the relevance of all of this to voters. Story expected Wed.

-- Issues: Economic development (Dale) -- would include discussion of northside regeneration/mckee, the airport and tax credits. May not be in until next week.

MONDAY, FEB. 18

-- Issues: Crime, police (Jo):

WEDNESDAY, Feb. 20

-- Issues: health disparities (Bob)

FRIDAY, Feb. 22

-- competitive aldermanic races (Jo, Jason)

MONDAY, Feb. 25

-- continuation of competitive aldermanic races (Jo, Jason)

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X. VITA

Patrick Ferrucci (Ph.D., 2013, University of Missouri-Columbia) is an assistant professor of journalism in the Slane College of Communications and Fine Arts at Bradley University in Peoria, Ill. His research focuses on influences on news coverage, specifically how technology and economics affect news organizations. He also examines other areas of media sociology such as race, and popular culture. At Bradley, Ferrucci teaches digital journalism and other theory and skills courses.

Prior to attending the University of Missouri, Ferrucci earned a bachelor's degree in sociology and writing from Providence College in Providence, R.I., in 2001. His undergraduate thesis examined reality television through the lens of Jean Baudrillard. He also earned a master's degree in convergence journalism from Emerson College in Boston in 2003. His master's thesis utilized the spiral of silence theory to examine coverage of the 2002 gubernatorial race in Boston.

Before returning to school for his doctorate, Ferrucci worked as a pop culture journalist, music critic and editor from 2002 to 2010. His stories and criticism have appeared in numerous magazines, both regional and national. He's spent time at newspapers in both Massachusetts and Connecticut, including more than six years as the entertainment editor, columnist and chief music writer at the *New Haven Register*. He also previously worked as an adjunct professor of journalism at Southern Connecticut State University from 2006 to 2010, teaching classes in magazine journalism and history of mass communication. He additionally worked as a media analyst for the communications firm Engage121 from 2008 to 2012.