

GATEKEEPING AND UNPUBLISHING: HOW EDITORS MAKE PUBLISHING AND UNPUBLISHING DECISIONS

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ABSTRACT

Through in-depth interviews and qualitative analysis, this thesis studies decision-making within American newsrooms regarding the handling of unpublishing requests as well as the influences on editors' decision-making. The journalism industry does not currently have a standardized policy for dealing with unpublishing despite the fact that editors see cases on a regular basis. The problem is furthered by the fact that newspaper editors expect to receive more removal requests because of the shift toward more digital publishing. The research questions address how newspaper editors deal with unpublishing and what factors, including the threat of legal action, influence decisions to publish or unpublish. Gatekeeping theory includes multiple ways that editorial decisions are influenced by external factors, and the results of this study support that the law is one of the biggest influences.

It soon becomes apparent that the newspaper industry is very hesitant to remove anything that has already been published. The final results show that a reasonable solution is to include a statement acknowledging that the newspaper does not remove online stories except in extreme circumstances.