To Infinity And Beyond:

An Exploration of the Impacts of Technological and Economic Changes on Journalism

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Abstract

The explosion of digital technologies, coupled with unfavorable economic conditions, has changed newspaper journalism in myriad ways. Converged online publications featuring photos, videos and graphics, which are assembled by fewer and fewer journalists, have quickly become the status quo in the American newspaper industry. In light of these conditions, the purpose of this study was to investigate the perceived impacts of technological and economic changes on both newspaper journalists’ professional ideology and their labor. The research questions asked how technological and economic changes impacted journalism ideology (a set of core values that inform journalism) and newswork (journalism labor) at metropolitan newspapers, which at one time were mainstays of local and regional information. The results indicate that most every task now gets accomplished digitally. In addition, fewer journalists now perform an ever-increasing set of tasks to update and optimize the digital newspapers. These journalists cover larger geographic areas, spend less time on each task and depend increasingly on social media and the Internet to find stories. Through periods of upheaval in the newspaper industry, the core values that inform journalistic ideology help define, and to a certain extent insulate, newsworkers from the deleterious effects of technological changes and the uncertainty of the future.

Keywords: ideology, journalistic values, newwork, technology, social media, multitasking.
Chapter 1: Introduction

“Out with the old and in with the new” - a hackneyed expression with a second clause so obvious it hardly requires utterance. Much of our existence is governed by this cycle: life replaces death, knowledge replaces ignorance, noise replaces silence - and so on. On first glance, this also appears to have been the trend for media organizations in terms of their newsgathering and production techniques and their interactions with audiences. Because the basic functions of journalism include documenting current events and informing the public of them, it must by nature change with the times. The above analogy, however, is overly simplistic. It ignores the agency and decision-making on myriad levels that have led to change in journalism.

On the one hand, journalism, like other information-driven creative practices, is susceptible to constant change. Inventions such as the “telex,” the telephone, the computer, and the Internet have sporadically altered journalistic practices and journalists’ conceptions about their work and their roles in society. Now, most every task in a newsroom – including product design, story creation, editing, and publishing – is accomplished digitally. These forces have fundamentally altered journalistic labor practices, journalists’ roles in media production, and how the news gets consumed. No longer must we wait for the morning newspaper or television newscast to understand what’s happening in the world. Now more than ever, we live in a digital, media(ted) age, where information is ubiquitous and even local news gets consumed at the speed of a network connection (Meyer, 2012).
Yet, just as sides with the most advanced weaponry do not necessarily win wars, change in journalism is not only driven by the emergence of new technologies. Over the past two decades, volatile economic conditions, the shift to a post-industrial global economy, and the trend toward media consolidation have arguably driven changes in journalism at a much faster pace than at any other time in history (Singer, 2007). These seismic economic transformations have forced news outlets to prioritize the bottom line over the public interest, resulting in staffing cutbacks, a preference for “soft” over “hard” news, and an emphasis on speed over accuracy, a byproduct of a competitive media market (Hamilton, 2007; McChesney, 2003). Even more unsettling for the industry is the absence of a sustainable financial plan capable of replacing the dysfunctional advertising-based model, which still relies on outdated “traditional factors of labor, capital, and production” (Vujnovic et al., 2010, p. 286). This old model, therefore, has decayed in the face technological and economic changes, resulting in new modes of news production and consumption.

This decay has also lead to unprecedented job cuts and journalistic outsourcing, which has meant fewer opportunities for established media organizations to pursue in-depth investigative reporting, thereby jeopardizing the media’s normative role as “watchdogs” (McChesney, 2003; Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2010; Singer, 2010). On a larger scale, the parlous economic conditions affecting news media have eroded the historically bound normative values of the press, such as expectations to guard against political abuse or financial wrongdoing, as well as provide contextualized and relevant information to the public. This threatens journalism’s ability to “serve the public’s need to be informed promptly and accurately,” and has compromised the
plurality of voices that defined previous eras (Vujnovic et al., 2010, p. 285). And while these pressures have provided opportunities to democratize journalism, they have also led to profoundly destabilizing changes in the traditional media hierarchy. In a media environment where some believe that anyone with a smartphone can create journalism, many of those working for established news organizations are struggling to distinguish themselves from the mass of bloggers and citizen journalists.

Journalists are struggling to adapt to the new economic and vocational realities (Singer et al., 2011). Increasingly, digital opinionating, social media know-how, a technical command of computer software and audio/video equipment are considered more relevant than upper-level training and a commitment to upholding historically certain journalistic values (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2008; Singer, 2010). While this vocational upheaval is not unique to journalism, an over-dependence on technological skills and the outsourcing of previously newsroom-centered tasks risk undercutting some of the field’s core values, and consequently its role in democracy.

**Purpose of the Research**

The journalism of the early 21st century is thus characterized by a frenzy of technological innovation and economic destabilization that have ruptured the field’s “relative stability” (Deuze, 2008, p. 18). Recent scholarship has begun to explore the perceived impacts of these changes on the practice and labor of journalism, and scholars have called for greater attention to how these changes affect “newswork” (Bélair-Gagnon, 2013; Brennen, 1996, 1998; Nerone & Barnhurst, 2003; Örnebring, 2010; Robinson, 2011; Zelizer, 2009).
Building on this research, the purpose of this study is to understand how metropolitan newspaper journalists in the United States attribute changes in their industry, and how these changes impact journalistic professionalism and labor. To accomplish these aims, I conducted 15 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with newsworkers of various experience levels at three metropolitan (city- and country-serving) newspapers in Missouri. Metropolitan newspapers have been among the hardest hit by recent changes in the industry (Starr, 2009). Being greater in number and less financially stable than the nationally circulated newspapers, they are more vulnerable to the volatile economic climate and technological changes in the field (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2010). Thus, metropolitan newspapers, especially those allocating significant investments in the online product, offer a prime setting for analyzing the state of the industry as a whole.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides the theoretical background for the proposed analysis. It is divided into two sections. The first provides two ways of thinking about journalism: Journalism as ideology and as labor. The second examines change in journalism, briefly expanding upon the themes and trends outlined in the first chapter of this work, before examining in greater detail the perceived impacts of technological and economic forces on journalism.

Two Models of Journalism: Ideology and “Newwork”

There are a number of ways one can conceive of journalism. Often, as Hardt and Brennen (1995) note, we tend to think of journalism in romantic terms, by linking it to its centrality to democracy and the protection of individual liberties. This can often belie other formulations of journalism. Here, I want to discuss two models of journalism: as ideology and as “newwork.” The former is concerned with the normative, sustaining function of journalism (why journalists do what they do), the second with journalism as “newwork” (simply, what they do). I do not claim these models to be dichotomous but, rather, mutually reinforcing (Deuze, 2008), nor do I claim these models to be categorical.

Model #1: Journalism as Ideology.

Journalism, unlike medicine, law, or banking, has never been unanimously considered a profession (Deuze, 2005; Weaver et al., 2007). McChesney (2003) and Meyers et al. (2012) point to the normative and historical origins of professions. They believe that professions are bounded by ideal typical values and prescribed practices. Yet journalism is neither governed by a singular ethical foundation nor is it defined set of
codes. Rather, journalists are driven by a “spirit of critical independence,” which is at odds with the “more rule bound culture of professionalism” (Meyers et al., 2012, p. 190). A lack of consensus over its status as a profession may actually help contextualize, “operationalize, and investigate the ideal-typical values of journalism in terms of how they are challenged or changed in the context of the current cultural and technological developments” (Deuze, 2005, p. 442). Because journalistic practices and values have never been set in stone, communications scholars rely on other distinguishing characteristics. For Deuze (2008) journalists distinguish themselves through “ideology,” or “collective knowledge” they employ in their labor,” rather than normalized routines because as Weaver (1998) points out, “there is too much disagreement on professional norms and values to claim an emergence of universal ‘occupational standards’ in journalism” (p. 468). Thus, “journalism’s ideology serves to continuously refine and reproduce a consensus about who counts as a ‘real’ journalist, and what (parts of) news media at any time can be considered to be examples of ‘real’ journalism” (Deuze, 2008, p. 16).

At the same time, journalism shares several characteristics with professional trades. Deuze (2005) recognizes certain commonalities between journalism and established professions in terms of upper-level training, collective representation, and vertically structured workplaces, but reiterates that, “what typifies more or less universal similarities in journalism can be defined as a shared occupational ideology among news-workers, which functions to self-legitimize their position in society” (p. 446). For Deuze, this occupational ideology consists of the following values: journalism is a public service; it requires practitioners to remain neutral, objective, fair and (thus) credible in their news
coverage; practitioners must enjoy editorial autonomy, freedom, and independence; they must possess a sense of immediacy when it comes to getting the news out; and have a sense of ethics and legitimacy (Deuze, 2005). Situating these values historically, Deuze (2008) writes that the ideology of journalism,

Is a crucial element in the way journalism operates… because of the relative stability of the news industry throughout much of the 20th century, creating the conditions for a firmly sedimented “way of doing things.” It is through this culture that the values of journalism’s occupational ideology get their practical, everyday meaning (p. 18).

However, journalistic ideology has been threatened by change from outside journalism. A report by the International Federation of Journalists notes, “change over the past ten years raises serious new questions about who is a journalist and how we define journalistic work in the age of convergence and user-generated content” (O’Keefe, 2010, p. 2). In a similar vein, Aldridge and Evetts (2003) argue that journalism provides a clear example of the discourse of professionalism as a mechanism of occupational change, and in particular its power as a form of self-discipline because this is a discourse constructed and utilized as much by managers in news organizations as by journalist practitioners themselves (p. 549).

McChesney (2003) agrees, pointing to the historically bound emergence of such values as objectivity and narrative detachment. This definition, however, does not preclude journalists’ responsibility to adhere to the highest standards or act “professionally” (Meyers et al., 2012). Rather, it situates the variety of practices in a historically bound
context, reminding us that there are myriad conceptions of what journalists do and what defines their work.

Thus far, I have examined journalism as an ideology, driven by values of professionalism that sustain the field and perpetuate its practices and professional identity. Another way of looking at journalism is through the lens of “newwork,” centralizing the labor that is engaged in on a daily basis by those who choose journalism as a vocation. It is to this model that I now turn.

Model #2: Journalism as “Newwork.”

While journalism is an institution with a particular social function that is underpinned by journalistic ideology, it is also a form of work that people are employed to do. Hardt and Brennen (1995) write of the tendency to view journalism in romantic terms, focusing on “notions of democracy, progress, and community leadership to produce the image of an institution that has secured the place of journalism in the annals of the United States” (p. vii). This is a tendency that has neglected consideration of journalism as “a place of employment [and] an environment of work” (p. viii). A number of scholars have called for greater attention to how changes in journalism affect the labor of those who do it; in other words, those who do “newwork” (Bélair-Gagnon, 2013; Brennen, 1996, 1998; Hardt & Brennen, 1995; Nerone & Barnhurst, 2003; Örnebring, 2010; Robinson, 2011; Zelizer, 2009). This is especially necessary in an environment where technological advancements and a volatile economic climate have placed an artificially low value on journalistic labor, thereby reducing journalists’ abilities to perform their normative historical duties (Deuze, 2008). In his study of journalists’ conceptualizations of their labor, Gravengaard (2012) claimed that
journalists want to be in control. They want to decide for themselves what news stories they will write. They do not want to be controlled by others, neither by internal actors as editors nor by external actors such as sources, other journalists or other media organizations (p. 1072).

By challenging newsworkers’ roles as sole content creators, these forces have also furthered the intrusion of marketplace values and cheapened newswork by removing it from its hierarchical, temporal and geographic foundations (Deuze, 2008). In this context, newsworkers, “trivialized as individuals and marginalized as a class of workers with professional or quasi-professional aspirations,” become expendable, or at least co-producers of the news (Hardt, 1990, p. 353).

The changes that technology and economic forces inflict on journalism strike at the field’ historical values and place the livelihood of newsworkers in a precarious position. On a vocational level, newsworkers are now expected to “do more with less” (Deuze, 2008; Singer, 2010). This has had a profound impact on newswork:

The skills of journalists have been stretched in unfamiliar directions to meet the expanding content requirements. The shift to multiplatform production is leading to different standards for different media: With fewer people but more work, the care taken with the online product—which generally has the larger audience – is likely to be inferior to the care taken with the legacy one (Singer, 2010, p. 91).

Put another way, overworked employees with more responsibilities are more prone to errors. The result of this convergence has been a reshuffling of newsroom positions, especially at local newspapers that have fewer resources to withstand shrinking revenues.
No longer are newworkers just reporters, designers, or editors. Now, they are multimedia reporters, convergence editors, bloggers and simultaneously web and print designers. The implication here is that “nothing is reliable anymore-the occupational routines that journalists engaged in have been replaced by new ones that include ready and rapid responses to incorporating the web” (Usher, 2010, p. 914). In this sense, the newsroom has become a fluid work environment. A division of labor no longer exists and anyone is expected to know how to perform any task.

In terms of user-generated content, Vujnovic et al. (2010) conclude that news websites are so flooded with information and so understaffed, that they cannot keep up with the requisite level of filtering to remove offensive commentary, third-party advertising, and other irrelevant material. In this way, relevant news gets buried under user contributions, customized information, and timely content. Vujnovic et al. also dismiss the notion that “participatory media channels created in online newsrooms stem solely from democratic goals related to fostering participatory culture and empowering the public” because of the market logic behind such convergent media practices (p. 287). Therein lies new media’s biggest conundrum; the simultaneous need to generate “user” interest/interaction, while informing the public and watching over the powerful all under severe financial constraints.

A distinction should be made here between local and metropolitan newspapers. While there is no singular formal definition of these terms, industry awards generally recognize metropolitan newspapers as those with circulations over 100,000. The St Louis Post-Dispatch and Kansas City Star reach more than 100,000 daily, while the Tribune, a “small city” or “local newspaper,” reaches about 20,000. In this study, the terms “metropolitan,” “city” and “regional” newspaper have been used interchangeably to describe newspapers that dominate city and regional coverage in their respective areas.
**Ideology + newswork = Journalism.**

Of course, journalism cannot be considered as solely an occupational ideology or vocation but as a combination of the two. As such, Hayes, Singer, and Ceppos (2007) call for a more contextual definition. They suggest that “the proper starting place for any inquiry into roles and values is with the content itself,” adding that, “a philosophy of moral values is shaped by the journalist’s or news organization’s need to be perceived by its audience as contributing to public discourse by providing factual reliable, timely, and meaningful information” (p. 265). In other words, rather than performing any one task or adhering to particular values, journalists distinguish themselves by proving their credentials through the products they create and by belonging to media organizations (Aldridge & Evetts, 2003). This more relative definition contrasts with Deuze and Weaver’s contentions that journalism does in fact possess some set of central values. In this case, the conflict concerns whether journalists are defined by what they do, or by what they believe they do.

The line between these two definitions, however, may not be so sharply defined. Singer espouses a combination of these two concepts. She writes, “information in and of itself is not necessarily valuable” (Singer, 2007, p. 262). Instead, “the value of information derives from the values of those who create it” (p. 262). In this sense, journalists define themselves by providing information that is informed by their commitments to certain values, such as accuracy, timeliness, and transparency. Yet without a firm definition or uniform code of conduct, journalism is open to constant redefinition. It also becomes liable to challenges by those who feel that newsworkers possess no special power or prestige (Larson, 1977; Robinson, 2011). The emergence of
mobile technologies, weblogs, and the extensive incorporation of user-generated content in newspapers highlight the extent to which technology has affected journalistic ideology and driven change in the field over the past decade (Singer, 2010). I now turn to an examination of change in journalism and its drivers, with particular attention to how these changes transform journalistic ideology and newwork.

**Change in Journalism**

Today’s newspaper newsrooms and advertising offices would likely appear as a complete mystery to newswomen and men of previous eras. The digitization of news production has altered many traditional journalistic practices and values. More specifically, “interactivity, customization of content, hypertextuality, and ‘multimediality’ are redefining journalism from the perspective of the Internet, yet their components have implications for journalism in general” (Bardoel & Deuze, 2001, p. 96). These changes can be contextualized when one considers online journalism as an unstoppable force that is changing the profession in myriad ways. The journalist, for example, no longer depends solely on the media organization for employment or job security. In addition, “the new journalism is a job with multiple skills, formats, and employment patterns at the same time – an at once functionally differentiated and more holistic profession (Bardoel & Deuze, 2001, p. 97). In this new environment, the newspaper, in particular “becomes an unbounded and unfinished thing, never final and never finite but instead interconnected with all the other unfinished things with which it now shares its communication space in a way that it never did – or could – as a physical printed product” (Singer, 2008, p. 122). The result is that fewer newsworkers are producing more now, whether it is for 24-hour rolling television bulletins or multi-section newspapers.
(Aldridge & Evetts, 2003; Project for Excellence in Journalism 2010). The implications of these patterns strike at the very heart of this country’s political system; a representative democracy that requires an informed citizenry to make important political and financial decisions in the context of an occasionally overwhelming globalized existence. This necessitates examination of two major drivers of journalistic change: Technology and economics.

**Technology as a driver of journalistic change.**

In April 1999, John Pavlik, associate dean for research at Northwestern University in Qatar, was unequivocally positive about new technologies in journalism. New digital mobile technologies, he excitedly predicted, would, “enable the journalist to transform the news gathering process and become a fully functioning newsroom in the field” (p. 55). Pavlik wrote this during the early stages of the digital media era – before most newspapers had digital versions and before “bloggers,” user-generated content, and ubiquitous mobile digital photography/videography had begun to challenge en masse the journalistic hegemony that had existed for over a century.

Technology’s effects on journalistic practice are manifest in multiple ways. Lievrouw and Livingstone (2002) find that the continuous digitization in all sectors of society is congruent with 20th century journalism’s professionalization process. This digitization is most visible in how news gets presented – through websites, digital applications, multimedia stories, and other channels – as well as in journalists’ newsroom practices. Deuze (2001) situates newsrooms as the primary locations of journalistic experimentation; places where media organizations are constantly pushing the technological boundaries of news production.
News organizations were once modeled on a more strict division of labor. Since the mid-1990’s however, “a structure of convergent multimedia news organizations has been emerging…with companies all over the world opting for at least some form of cross-media cooperation or synergy between formerly separated staffers, newsrooms, and departments” (Deuze, 2004, p. 142). This convergence requires the broadening of specific practices, especially in terms of the use of mobile technologies such as smartphones. It also means an increase in story formats. More importantly, however, convergence necessitates, “the partial integration of newsrooms,” the blurring of lines between formerly disparate newsroom positions (Deuze, 2004, p. 141; Singer, 2010). Consequently, “newsrooms are being dramatically resized and reconfigured, and roles within them rethought” (Singer, 2010, p. 89). The reconfiguration process has so far taken on several forms.

The emergence of “mojos” (mobile journalists) - geographically flexible newsworkers capable of applying a variety of technical skills to news production across various formats - is perhaps the most tangible example of the newsroom reconfiguration Singer (2010) and Deuze (2004) refer to. Increasingly, mojos are becoming the norm in newsrooms as a result of the never-ending demand for digital content across multiple platforms (Lowrey & Gade, 2011). A Pew Research study found that newsroom executives justified convergence by explaining that readers on news websites now “want strong visuals, concisely-packaged information and easy navigation” (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2008, p. 5). Singer (2010), likewise, suggests that, “this trend has been driven both by the burgeoning online audience and its expectation that the media website will offer timely (and free) news” (p. 91). Not only have these trends
cheapened the advertising revenue newspapers used to depend while placing an artificially low value on journalistic labor, but they have also influenced higher education in journalism.

The creation of “convergence education” in universities and journalistic training institutes also reflects the industry’s need for technologically savvy employees (Castañeda, 2003; Deuze, 2004). Deuze (2005) supports this view, arguing that; “digital media and more recently, multimedia newsrooms are transforming training and education of journalism worldwide” (p. 450). Specifically, new crops of digital natives are expected to “prepare content for both the website and the legacy product, double as bloggers or contribute to various social media offerings (providing Twitter feeds, publicizing stories through sites such as Facebook, and serving as online pitchmen in other ways) (Singer, 2010, p. 92).” Journalists are also expected to create content in a timely fashion that fits into the 24-hour news cycle (Hemingway, 2008). News coverage of a 2010 London legal hearing involving Julian Assange, aptly displays these new practices,

The judge’s first concern wasn’t Assange but the fourth estate – specifically the international journalists sitting on the packed wooden benches in front of him. Several were already playing furtively with their Blackberry handhelds. They were micro-blogging the hearing live to the outside world (Leigh & Harding, 2011, p. 235).

Timeliness, as Deuze (2005) points out, is a core journalistic value, but the WikiLeaks hearing and today’s 24-hour news cycle imply an organizational tendency to prioritize speed over accuracy, which can lead to errors and/or ethically questionable decision-making (Singer, 2010). A 2010 report compiled by the International Federation of
Journalists concluded, “web-first publishing has centered on the requirement for speed over accuracy” (O’Keefe, 2010, p. 10). The report expressed concern over the pressure on standards when journalists are made to supply instant coverage and to all platforms (O’Keefe, 2010).

But perhaps the most radical change wrought by media convergence and digital technology concerns newsworker’s relationships to their audiences. While reader participation has a long history, the emergence of bloggers, independent web-based commentators who publish on blog websites, has been one of the central technological challenges to traditional journalistic values and practices (Singer et al., 2011). Blogs have changed journalists’ relationships with their audiences, presented additional newsroom tasks and blurred the traditional lines between reporting and opinion. Now, journalists must simultaneously report, add blogs to news websites, and express their own opinions for their readers.

While editing has long been standard practice in journalism, bloggers generally face little or no oversight, affording them the editorial freedom to perform similar journalistic functions as established newsworkers, but also to opine. Blogs are now standard fare at news websites, even at the local level (Gunter et al., 2009). Moreover, journalists are expected to maintain their own blogs, presenting them with a new set of newsroom tasks (Bradshaw, 2008). By contributing to the “blogosphere” journalists can appear more conversational, less formal and therefore, more audience-oriented. This less formal face of newspapers is important in two ways. For one, it provides an opportunity for newspapers to attract readers who might otherwise migrate to personal blog websites. It is also an opportunity for journalists to market themselves as transparent, expressive,
and in that sense, more human (Wall Street Journal, 2008). In this way, journalists and media organizations have embraced the entrepreneurial spirit espoused by neoliberalism, a key ingredient to success in the “new work” environment (Kinsman, 2011). The proliferation of blogs exacerbates the erosion of traditional journalistic values, which are especially strong in print journalism (Robinson, 2011).

Since the early 2000s, blogs have attracted large audiences looking for information congruent with their own political or social values (Singer, 2007). User-generated content in the form of comments, electronic posts and “featured blogs” are commonplace on American news websites. A 2008 study indicated that 58 percent of the nation’s largest newspapers offered some form of user-generated content, a 24 percent-increase from the previous year (Bivings Group, 2008). An Online Publishers Association article even revealed that “A-list” political/sports commentator, Nate Silver, whose blog, *FiveThirtyEight*, appears on *The New York Times*, generated as much as 20 percent of all traffic to the *Times* website on election night 2012 (OPA, 2012). These statistics indicate that, “journalists now are a part of a network in which the long-standing hierarchy among contributors to the public discourse has been significantly flattened” (Singer et al., 2011, p. 15). The emergence of blogs, therefore, points a new era of media-community relations in which journalists are no longer the only gatekeepers. It also indicates a new division of labor in newsrooms.

While newspaper journalists have generally continued to abide by ideal-typical values of accuracy, monitoring the powerful, and objectivity, audiences do not seem to care. They have begun to look elsewhere for their news (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2013). Blogs are often more linguistically accessible and the vast variety of
blogs ensures that users can find content that is congruent with their personal belief systems (Lowrey, 2006). And if blogs generate readership, and hence revenue, then it only makes economic sense for cash-strapped papers and news websites to incorporate such independent voices into their products (Vujnovic et al., 2010).

The development of *micro-sites*, areas of major news website tailored to individual reader’s interests, and *hyper-localism*, a fixation on local news, are direct results of the “blogification” of digital media (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2008; Singer, 2010). Blogs and user-generated content, which include user comments on news websites, tweets, and other electronic responses, have therefore eroded journalist’s control over information. Considering the prominence of Internet accessibility, this has even occurred at local newspapers (Lewis, Kaufhold & Lasorsa, 2010). While this erosion is a relatively recent phenomenon,

the open and unbounded online environment obliterates the concept of limits on the quantity of available information, the desirability of “multiperspectival news” from more scattered and less easily accessible sources suggested a need for changes in journalistic practice well before the rise of the Internet as a news medium (Singer, 2010, p. 128).

Lewis, Kaufhold and Lasorsa (2010) support this claim in their study of user-generated content at local newspapers in Texas. User-generated content, they conclude, is “blurring traditional boundaries and roles of news producers and news consumers and threatening to undermine the gatekeeping function so central to the professional purpose of the press” (p. 163). Journalists, therefore are no longer the only “gate-keepers,” “agenda-setters,” fact-checkers, or news producers. On a larger scale, the conundrum for newspapers is
situated in a conflict between their ideal typical societal roles and the democratization of content production. Lewis, Kaufhold and Lasorsa (2010) capture this issue:

What arises, then, is a tension for newspaper journalism in the twenty-first century: the practical logic of building participatory platforms to attract greater communities of users, for economic survival as well as to foster greater civic dialogue, against the professional logic of retaining authority over information flow (p. 164).

Whereas journalism ideology situates newworkers as the authoritative guardians over information, the Internet, along with the emergence of mobile technologies, have challenged that notion. Now, anyone with Web access and a smartphone has the capability of providing information and the potential to produce unlimited content for anyone to see.

It even appears that the seemingly unlimited flow of information cannot fully quench news consumer’s desire for more information. Thussu (2008) explored the cultural thirst for entertaining information immediacy and news outlets’ corresponding ability to satisfy that demand, which he claimed reinforces a vicious cycle of information saturation and “infotainment.” Deuze (2005) identifies new media and multiculturalism as the dominant forces shaping journalistic practices at present:

The combination of mastering newsgathering and storytelling techniques in all media formats (so-called “multi-skilling”), the integration of digital network technologies coupled with a rethinking and reconfiguration of the news-producer-consumer relationship tends to be seen as one of the biggest challenges facing journalism in the 21st century (p. 451).
While this assertion identifies the strong vocational pressures emerging from digitized media, it nevertheless fails to account for the transformative powers of economic forces.

**Economics as a driver of journalistic change.**

The emergence of digital technologies can only go so far in accounting for the massive downsizings within mainstream media organizations. Characterizing this new media landscape as the result of a deterministic evolution in supply and demand, or a commonsensical tendency toward adapting “newer, faster, and better” technologies, is thus, inadequate. It is in this regard that “the bureaucratization of mass media has been fueled by capitalist materialism,” and that such “economic power must be understood in concert with a spiraling technological sophistication” (Currah, 2009, p. 158). Technology, volatile economic conditions, and a fixation on the bottom line are the main culprits in changing journalistic practices and in the decay of the field’s values. The relation between these forces needs to be more fully understood.

*New Republic* contributor Paul Starr (2009) traces newspaper history through different ages of history, concluding that, “when they were financially strong, newspapers were better able not only to invest in long-term investigative projects but also stand up against pressure from politicians and industries to suppress unfavorable stories” (Starr, 2009). Financially weak newspapers are thus more susceptible to editorial interference. In this sense, Curran (2001) pessimistically writes, “the increasing capitalization of media industries has introduced an invisible system of ideological control by preventing groups with limited financial resources from competing in the market and restricted consumer power by narrowing the range of choice” (p. 218). McChesney (2003) pointed out that financial blows to the news industry have led to a “decontextualization” of news in favor
of a marketable product, an over reliance on official sources (via press releases), and a reluctance to engage in meaningful investigative journalism, especially as such journalism concerns marginalized or underrepresented sections of society.

The overwhelming tendency for media organizations in the 21st century has been to ensure economic survival by cutting costs and staff and shifting coverage toward user-generated and entertaining content (O’Keefe, 2010). The Internet and digital technology have both democratized the news and led traditional print media on a path to destruction. For Vujnovic et al. (2010), “once unlimited information joins the mix, production processes are transformed and outcomes inevitably become unpredictable” (p. 286). Bardoel and Deuze (2001) proposed that the Internet “has the potential to make the journalist as an intermediary force in democracy superfluous” (p. 91). Likewise, Beam and Meeks (2011) suggest “the Web also is affecting the limited control that the profession has been able to achieve over the terms of work” (p. 234). Therefore, because of the Internet’s capacity for unlimited information flows, journalism requires both geographically and temporally flexible labor.

The growth of digital networks, along with volatile economic conditions, and bottom-line business mentalities jeopardized the financial security of smaller media organizations (Bagdikian, 2001; McChesney, 2003; Vujnovic et al., 2010). The 2008 global economic further destabilized an already fragile labor force, whose hegemony and very identity had been challenged (Örnebring, 2010). This trend highlights newspapers’ increased needs to generate attention-getting stories and package marketable news to fit the 24-hour news cycle, even at family-owned, or local newspapers. The result is an endless competition to attract readers, and in that sense, new organizations now focus on
being the first to provide the “scoop,” rather than ensuring that their journalism is accurate (Singer, 2010).

The old advertising-based model that for so long sustained print media has crumbled in the face of cheaper online advertising, the explosion of information, and unfavorable economic conditions (Starr, 2009). As a result, media outlets - from national chains to local dailies - are under immense financial pressure. News organizations can no longer afford to operate under the old model, which has caused “leading news organizations to tip the balance between professional and commercial goals in favor of the latter” (Beam & Meeks, 2011, p. 237). In other words, when financial challenges arise, news organizations tighten the purse strings by looking for ways to cut labor costs. The logic behind such decisions is often presented in the guise of technological determinism (Örnebring, 2010). Former New York Times reporter Alex Jones (2009) notes this has taken an especially hard toll on metropolitan and local newspapers, where “the fashion is now for hyper-local news, which often means news that looks a great deal like local television news - wrecks, fires, and features, but little on politics, policy, accountability, and watchdog journalism” (p. 56). Considering the costs of watchdog journalism and lack of resources that many newspapers must contend with, it is logical they would rely on day-to-day stories, as opposed to longer-form investigative work.

For local and metropolitan newspapers, this concentration on daily news has resulted in a clash between journalistic values and the cost of doing business. Hallin (2005) situates this trend in an “inherent tension between a news organization’s commercial and professional goals,” which creates, “a consistent challenge to journalism’s public service mission” (p. 151). Newspapers’ need to survive financially
has therefore compromised many of their normative values, especially in such financially challenging times. Beams and Meek (2011) are skeptical that public service journalism can coexist in an era of such rampant media commercialization and a “bottom-line” mentality, because, “what is in the best interest of the public may not be in the best economic interest of the organization” (p. 236). In other words, “news making in the United States is now mostly a commercial enterprise,” with an ever-decreasing presence of independent and publicly funded news outlets (p. 236).

The 2008 global economic recession has added to these profit pressures and furthered the dire financial situation of American media organizations. This has resulted in massive job cuts, decreased public funding for journalism, as well as the closure of many newspapers nationwide (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2010). One consequence of these cuts is a “pronounced drop in time-consuming investigative projects and serious day-to-day local accountability reporting,” especially at regional newspapers (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2010). At the same time, “small dailies and community weeklies, with the exception of some that are badly positioned or badly managed, still do better” than big city papers (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2010).

**Summary and Research Questions**

The above literature review has provided a workable framework for an investigation into the linkages between change in journalism, its causes, and its human impacts. Additional studies that connect economics, new communication technologies, and vocational practices and values are needed to elucidate the impact of such changes on journalism and American society. This work will be particularly essential at the level of metropolitan and local news, as the world continues its unbounded march towards a
globalized, interconnected existence. Metropolitan and regional newspapers, once the bastion of city or county-wide information, are losing out to the Internet, which “contains connections that transcend geography, with the potential to link any pieces of content no matter where in the world they originated” (Singer, 2011, p. 122). The pressures of emerging communication technologies and parlous economic conditions on the newspaper industry helped shape the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How are technological changes perceived to impact journalistic ideology at metropolitan newspapers?

**RQ2:** How are technological changes perceived to impact newswork at metropolitan newspapers?

**RQ3:** How are economic changes perceived to impact journalistic ideology at metropolitan newspapers?

**RQ4:** How are economic changes perceived to impact newswork at metropolitan newspapers?
Chapter 3: Method

The review of literature suggests that the adoption of communication technologies in newsrooms, coupled with parlous economic conditions, have pressured journalists across all employment levels to “do more with less” and to emphasize speed above other traditional values. In other words, journalists are expected to perform a large variety of tasks while incorporating an ever-expanding knowledge of technologies into their daily practices while getting the news out as quickly as possible. This study investigated changes to journalistic labor practices and ideology as well as journalists’ understandings of these changes through interviews at metropolitan newspapers.

This study consisted of multiple semi-structured, in-depth interviews at three Missouri metropolitan newspapers. The inclusion of three newspapers in this study was intended to strengthen the validity of the data. In this section I elaborate on the research and analytical methods employed in the study. I first explain the overall justification for the research method, before describing in detail the steps involved, and, finally, how I evaluated the data.

Method Used

Due to the complex nature of the forces affecting news production and the myriad ways in which news organizations respond to these changes, this study demanded a triangulated approach. I therefore compiled data by performing interviews with journalists at three different metropolitan newspapers, The Kansas City Star, The St. Louis Post-Dispatch, and The Columbia Tribune. The Kansas City Star and St. Louis Post-Dispatch are corporately owned newspapers with daily circulations around 200,000,
while *The Columbia Tribune* is privately owned, with local ties and a daily circulation of fewer than 20,000. Corporately owned entities are expected to conform to certain profit margins, and thus, are typically under more pressure to cut costs (Gunther, 1999). Privately or family-owned enterprises, by contrast are less subject to corporate pressures. Interviewing journalists at three organizations with different ownership structures and circulations provided a sound basis for cross-comparison, thereby increasing the validity of the data (Tuchman, 1991).

This research was informed by previous literature, namely comparative newsroom studies and political-economic analyses of how economic conditions and decision-making at the management level affected journalistic labor and values. I utilized grounded theory to examine this data. Specifically, I performed a textual analysis of interview responses and utilized constant comparative analytical methods to explain what “was going on,” both in the context of the newsroom and in the wider practice of newspaper journalism. In essence, this is an extended case study that analyzed a set of phenomena in relation to broader social and economic forces, as well as narrower, institutional pressures. Below, I discuss specifics of the method I employed.

**In-depth interviews.**

In-depth interviews are ideal for capturing rich qualitative data. They are also particularly useful in capturing the unique conditions of a subject’s lived experiences, especially within wider social, political, and economic contexts (Anderson & Jack, 1991). Furthermore, if arranged properly, one-on-one interviews can elicit more candid responses than focus groups or surveys, which are less direct.
Despite their distinct organizational and regional cultures, print journalists perform some similar tasks, such as designing printed newspapers, filing and editing stories, and editing photos with a computer. This common starting point reflected the need for both consistency and fluidity, which is why I used semi-structured interviews. Specifically, semi-structured interviews allowed me to work from a universal set of questions, while at the same tailoring the protocol to each individual interview. Keeping the selection criteria consistent for the interviews helped elucidate patterns in journalistic routines between these newspapers through convergent validation (Adcock & Collier, 2001).

I selected Missouri-based, non-teaching news outlets because of their geographic proximity and “professional” (i.e. non-student produced) content. I interviewed both “cubs” (new) and veteran journalists in a variety of positions, as my interest is not restricted to any one area of the newsroom, but newspaper journalism in a broader sense. I conducted 15 semi-structured interviews with newspaper journalists at three metropolitan newspapers over a two-month period. The 15 newsworkers had on-the-job ranges of six-and-a-half months to 25 years in the same position. Of the 15, four worked at the Columbia Daily Tribune, six worked at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, and the remaining five worked at the Kansas City Star. I interviewed two assistant metro editors, two web editors, a graphics editor, an assistant managing editor, a lifestyles editor, a copy editor, five reporters, a photographer, and a columnist. The 15 semi-structured interviews totaled eight hours, 31 minutes (511 minutes) and lasted 34 minutes on average. I conducted all four interviews with Columbia Daily Tribune employees in person, and the other 11 over the phone. After 15 interviews, I noticed data saturation, or repetitions in
the interview responses (Small, 2009). I then proceeded to transcribe, code, and analyze the interviews.

Interviewing multiple media employees of different ages and career “levels” at each organization provided a broader sense of the technological requirements and newsroom practices, and how these practices varied. I asked participants what types of tasks they engaged in on a daily basis, to what extent day-to-day tasks had changed since the journalist began his/her career, how journalists understood the changing newsroom, and to what they attributed these changes. I also asked questions regarding newsworkers’ period of employment, what specific skills they possess, what they valued in their work, their daily and long-term tasks (how they prioritize, how they went about accomplishing these tasks, how thoroughly they felt they were able to complete them), and how they felt about the state of newspaper journalism.

To ascertain how industry changes affected journalistic work, I asked such questions as: how did your education or previous jobs prepare you/not prepare you for your position here? What have you learned since you began working here (specifically regarding digital technology)? Can you tell me what you do on a daily basis in the newsroom? What types of tasks involving social media or digital technology do you conduct on a daily basis? What about editing user-generated content? What about shooting and/or editing photos/video? What new technological skills have you learned since you began working for this media outlet?

I then asked journalists the following questions about how they attributed change in the industry: Has the pressure to do something fast ever compromised the accuracy or quality of your work? Could you please tell me more about that instance? Are you doing
more now than ever before in your jobs? What would make you better at your job? What aspects of your work do you consider most important in a specific and more general sense - as a newspaper journalist? Do you think that you could do higher quality work if you had fewer tasks to accomplish? Finally, I asked newsworkers how they used user-generated content. A full list of questions can be found in the Appendix.

**Process of Analysis**

After interviews, I conducted a qualitative critical discourse analysis of the data. The purpose of a critical discourse analysis is to track the underlying meanings of verbal expressions. It is a rigorous interpretive technique for analyzing discourse in light of larger sociological constructs, such as class, race, gender, power structures and others. In this way, it is useful in decoding the responses of employees in hierarchically structured work environments in the context of wider conditions (van Dijk, 1991). Workers may not always say exactly what they mean in order to preserve their positions. A critical discourse analysis that codes responses and simultaneously analyzes them in both specific and larger context helped provide a nuanced understanding of the interviews.

To track this data, I created a digital coding sheet that charted: journalistic training/experience, technological/computerized know-how, and attributions for changes. The coding sheet documented the prevalence of a certain type of skill or requirement by considering how often they appeared and how they related to job tasks. I paid particular attention to positions that require a variety of skills: with certain computer programs, such as Adobe Photoshop, Final Cut Pro and others; with digital audio/video and/or photo recorders, with social media; with blogging; as well as attitudes towards work or
journalism in general. Additionally, the use of coding to organize responses ensured that I had a sound basis for categorizing and comparing the data.
Chapter 4: Findings

The goals of this study were to look at how technological and economic changes are affecting newsworkers in the digital age. Specifically, I sought to understand how technology and the economy influence journalistic ideology and newwork at metropolitan newspapers. To address the research questions, I asked newspaper journalists what they valued about their work, if and how those values had changed, how they understood the state of the industry and what tasks they performed in their daily routines. In this way, I tried to account for the complexity of a changing work environment for 21st century newspaper journalists.

Overall, newsworkers identified with several values Deuze (2005) associated with traditional journalistic ideology, such as, serving the public, informing democracy and holding those in power accountable. With two exceptions, newsworkers did not feel that what they value about journalism or newspapers had changed over the course of their careers in response to technological changes. In this sense, technological changes were not perceived to affect these newsworkers’ journalistic ideology.

Yet technological changes have profoundly impacted newwork to the point where newsworkers accomplish almost every task, including inter-workspace communication, digitally. The Internet and certain digital devices, such as computers, tablets and smartphones, permit an immediacy of publication. This immediacy has encouraged all of these newspapers to emphasize their websites over the printed product. It has also led to an organization-wide emphasis on timeliness.
Newsworkers primarily attributed the state of the newspaper industry to two sources, the economy – specifically the global economic recession, and technology – the capacity of the Internet and digital technologies to obsolesce certain newsroom positions and print advertising, and also create an unencumbered amount of online information. Newsworkers generally did not believe that economic factors had changed their core values, ideology or the ultimate goals of their newspapers, but did feel that economic changes shifted newspapers’ focus – from the printed-paper to the Web.

Finally, newsworkers acknowledged that economic factors had affected their work. Each of the newspapers had enacted several rounds of layoffs, pay cuts, furloughs, and/or other forms of cost reduction. Those who remained at the newspapers after these actions said that fewer people were required to do more work with fewer resources. These cost saving actions also affected newsworkers’ morale and their attitudes. Technological and economic changes, therefore, have profoundly changed newswork, but have had minimal impacts on these newsworkers’ journalistic ideology.

**RQ1: Perceived Impacts of Technology on Journalistic Ideology**

My first research question asked about how technological changes were perceived to impact journalistic ideology at metropolitan newspapers. I asked newsworkers what they valued about journalism and newspapers, how the industry-wide shift to digital news formats had affected their values, and finally, how they understood the state of the newspaper industry. I found newsworkers had generally held the same core values throughout their careers. I also found technological changes had minimal impact on newsworkers’ journalistic ideology, despite their acknowledgement that such changes had created several new challenges for traditional newspaper journalism.
What newworkers valued about journalism and newspapers.

As discussed earlier, the ideology of journalism contains several core values, such as informing the public, protecting democracy, holding power accountable, timeliness, truth telling, and accuracy (Deuze, 2005; Weaver, 1998). When asked what they valued most about journalism in general and newspapers in particular, newworkers conformed to traditional journalistic ideology. Five of the 15 newworkers said that informing the public was what they valued most. A photographer from the Kansas City Star with 12 years of on-the-job experience, for example, said that, “journalism is extremely important for the public’s right to know so they can make informed decisions.” Two others discussed holding power accountable. A reporter at the Columbia Daily Tribune with six-and-a-half months of on-the-job experience said he valued “holding people accountable” and doing what he could “to either inform the public or expose something that’s wrong.” In addition, two newworkers valued journalism for its ability to record history. In this way, an editor from the Columbia Daily Tribune who had been in her current position for six years explained, “we’re very much tuned into what’s current or what’s future, but I think that being able to record what’s going on culturally as a resource for the future is important.”

Two other newworkers valued journalism for the opportunity to tell stories, while another two valued it for its role in protecting democracy. An assistant managing editor from the Kansas City Star with five years of on-the-job experience said that journalism “is a crucial component of democracy” and that he valued newspapers “for their ability to not just report the news, but to report what’s behind the news.” In terms of truth telling as a journalistic value, one newworker, a reporter from the Kansas City Star
for the past 25 years, said that he believed “that papers will still remain the highest
standard of accuracy and fairness in journalism.” Finally, in a slight deviation, a copy
editor at the Kansas City Star with 15 years of on-the-job experience said that she valued,
“being where the interesting things are happening.”

While newsworkers aligned themselves with different values from journalistic
ideology, they generally seemed to agree that newspapers provide a contextual depth that
other news media formats could not match. Five of the 15 newsworkers said that they
valued newspapers for their tendency to go deeper into important issues and provide
greater context to current events. An assistant managing editor at the Kansas City Star
with five years of on-the-job experience said that “newspapers actually dig deeper into
stories, analyze them or find out and explain them better with nuance to readers,” and that,
“newspapers help society be more transparent about who’s doing what to whom and why,
and they do that better than any other medium.” Along with holding those in power
accountable, transparency and accuracy form two cornerstones of journalistic ideology.

Three others said that they valued newspapers for their public service and their
ability to help readers make informed decisions. A reporter at the Columbia Daily
Tribune with three years of on-the-job experience valued newspapers for “the opportunity
to inform pubic debate and try to get people up on the issues before they go and address
their city council representative, planning and zoning commissioner, state representative.”
Likewise, an assistant editor at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch compared newspapers to other
media, explaining that they “do a better job of informing people of how to manage their
own democracy [and] how to manage their own lives.” Two others agreed, explaining
that newspapers delved deeper into stories and issues than television or radio.
Several newworkers valued the opportunity to tell stories, which relates to newspapers’ capacity to inform and educate the public. A reporter from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* with four years of on-the-job experience, for example, said that he still liked a “good story and not necessarily because this guy had to file… he wants to get something up on the boards because it’s all about producing.” Part of newworkers’ appreciation for stories had to do with the specific efforts involved in the process of compiling an article. In this way, a reporter from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* who had been in his current position for eight years said that he valued, “the way you feel especially after you come out with a large project or 60-, 70-, or 80-inch story, where you’ve interviewed dozens of people and been able to organize it all into something that seems coherent.” Whatever it was that journalists personally valued about journalism and newspapers, all but two said that technology had not substantively changed their values. Journalistic ideology among these newworkers has therefore endured technological changes. That does not mean, however, that technological changes in newspaper newsrooms had no effect on newworkers’ attitudes toward their organizations and toward their industry.

*Changing technology, evolving attitudes, enduring ideology.*

Newworkers across experience levels did not feel that technology had affected their core journalistic values or ideology. They did say, however, that their attitudes towards their work and expectations for the future of the newspaper industry had both changed over the course of their careers. But newworkers tended to blame economics, rather than technology for these changes. For instance, a graphics editor from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* said,
I don’t know if the values have changed, but I think my expectations have changed a bit. Mostly that just sort of reflects the position that the industry is in at the moment. We’re trying to figure out how to be profitable again [laughs] and how to give people what they need, but also give people what they want at the same time.

Likewise, a reporter from the Kansas City Star with 25 years of experience in the same position said “the idea hasn’t changed, but the manpower has changed… The size of the newsroom is smaller than when I started in 1981 and part of that reduction has been editors and writers… it’s across the board – so there are fewer people, so the scope has shrunk a little bit, but not the agenda, not the purpose and not the idea or the ideal.”

A columnist/reporter from the St. Louis-Post-Dispatch with eight years of on-the-job experience said, “I don’t think my priorities have changed, which are to tell a good story.” At the same time, newswoman did say that newspapers’ focus had shifted because of technology. The same columnist/reporter said, “because of the multimedia aspect of journalism, newspapers in general are maybe paying too much attention to doing videos and that’s not why people come to newspapers.” This specific newswoman’s ideology had not changed, but he felt that his organization’s use of technology had impacted the focus and quality of their work. The implication here is that a decision from above to push for expanded multimedia has distracted from newspapers’ normative functions.

An editor from the Columbia Daily Tribune with six years of on-the-job experience agreed:
There’s that feeling that everything is now and that everything is instant and we, just to be in the present is not fast enough. We want to be in the future. Something that journalists forget sometimes is that our work is a record for the future.

In other words, newspapers are trying so hard to stay current and relevant in the present that they are forgetting one of their core missions—to act as a public service by recording history. An assistant editor at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* with four years of on-the-job experience highlighted newspapers’ emphasis on the here-and-now, explaining,

I do think that obviously we’re doing more faster these days than when I started. I think it’s all always been important, but the part informing people quickly about things that are important to them has become more possible, more doable in real-time than it ever has before.

Despite their core values, therefore, newsworkers are sometimes at the mercy of technology when it comes to performing their vocational duties. That is not to say that newsworkers change their ideology to fit in with new digital technology, but rather to acknowledge that technology has added new pressures to the job.

**How newsworkers understand the state of the newspaper industry.**

All but two newsworkers admitted that it was a difficult time to be a newspaper journalist. While several newsworkers mentioned that technology had rendered some newsroom positions obsolete, none of them directly blamed technological changes for the state of the newspaper industry. The two who did not feel that it was a difficult time, a columnist/reporter at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* with 25 years of newspaper experience, and an assistant managing editor at the *Kansas City Star* with five years of on-the-job experience, said that it has always been difficult to be newspaper journalist. For these two,
it may now be more competitive to enter the industry, but they both felt that it was no
more difficult to remain a newspaper journalist than in the past. Even so, they both
acknowledged certain challenges. The columnist explained,

there’s more people getting into journalism… I don’t think that died down, but
what I think has happened is there’s been many people wanting to get into the
business, but I don’t think the increase in jobs certainly has not kept up with the
increase in people coming out of college looking for jobs.

Overwhelmingly, though, newsworkers said it was a difficult time to work for a
newspaper and pointed to a variety of forces that led to this difficulty.

The other 13 newsworkers blamed the global economic recession, falling
revenues, an outdated advertising model, the Internet, the emergence of smartphones and
other digital technologies, the initial failure by news organizations to charge for web
content, lack of business innovation, eroding trust for institutional journalism, changing
reader preferences or a mix of these developments for the industry’s recent hardships. An
editor from the Columbia Daily Tribune with six years of on-the-job experience said that
technology contributed to the parlous state of the newspaper industry by giving news
consumers cheap infotainment. She said,

The decrease in jobs and the expectation that people were going to do more; I
mean that was an issue before that [the recession] began… I mean, I can read
Vanity Fair, you know, which, Condé Nast publication, it’s expensive to produce
– all of those people who work for that company are expensive, or I can go online
and look at Perez Hilton.
Thus, in the wake such technological and economic changes, online media have created a niche for online infotainment to the extent that even a seasoned newspaper editor acknowledged a personal conflict between her predilections for legacy media and digital infotainment.

A reporter from the *Kansas City Star* also acknowledged that technology created new challenges for newspapers by allowing anyone with a blog or a smartphone to post content online:

> What to me has changed isn’t the approach because we’re in the digital age, it’s that today’s type of journalism is available to be practiced by anybody who wants to practice it. It doesn’t cost anything to start a blog and it doesn’t cost anything to take a cellphone photo and post it or run a video and have that posted. And all of a sudden you’ve created the same opportunity for news, or what you might want to define as news today as a trained journalist has. And one of the big challenges is continuing to be able to convince an audience that the best journalism is coming from the traditional journalism sites or products.

Most newsworkers said that more than one factor caused the parlous state of the newspaper industry. This response, from a *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reporter with eight years of on-the-job experience, is particularly comprehensive,

> You can’t make a certain amount of money with digital advertising as you can with print advertising, which is obviously declining. But I think it’s a comfort level that newspaper executives had for such a long time, you know, probably up until 2005, that they were going to be able to maintain the status quo. I think that they did a horrible job of anticipating the kind of shock that Internet was going to
bring to the industry. And they just failed to innovate. And also I think a big problem was, and is still, that we kind of made the decision collectively to give away all of our content for free.

Even a less experienced reporter from the *Columbia Daily Tribune*, who had only been in his job for six-and-a-half months, explained that online advertising was “taking away advertising money that was traditionally in newspapers—it’s going elsewhere and papers have had to think of a thousand different ways to make up for that – cutting staff, trimming the newspaper and other tough decisions.” An assistant editor at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* with 10 years of on-the-job experience explained the same conundrum in a different way,

Suddenly we didn’t need a printing plant to go online and neither does anybody else and it just changed the game completely… I’ve watched this happen and it’s disconcerting in a lot of ways, but it also offers opportunities that we never thought that we would have. I never thought we would be posting live news competing with television for what’s happening right now, or that we’d be posting video.

A web editor from the *Kansas City Star* with 14 years of on-the-job experience said of his colleague’s attitudes towards technology,

I worked on the digital side, web sites, mobile and everything like that. And there are many people in our organization, in the newsroom too, who really resent that whole angle because in a way that had a lot to do with the fall, the diminishing of newspapers.
Finally, a columnist/reporter from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* with eight years of on-the-job experience said,

> technology makes it easier in a variety of fields to have less jobs – whether it’s printing the paper – computers can do what five typesetters used to do. So I think technology in every aspect of our life, sort of eliminates all jobs except for the people who repair the technology.

Newworkers therefore understood that these technological changes had decreased newspapers' influence and created new challenges, but this understanding did not change their beliefs, their journalistic ideology, or their perceived valuations of their work. As such, these responses indicate that technology has not fundamentally altered journalistic ideology or newspapers’ goals, but that technology now requires newworkers to perform new tasks and adapt to new routines and expectations.

**RQ2: Perceived Impacts of Technology on Newwork**

My second research question related to the perceived impacts of technology on newwork at newspapers. To address this question, I asked newworkers about: their daily routines, the kinds of technologies they used in their work, expectations from superiors regarding newworkers’ technological knowhow, their attitudes towards technology and how they interacted with user-generated content.

The digital era has ushered in several new newsroom tasks and all newworkers said that they interacted with digital technologies on a daily basis. New newsroom positions have also emerged at newspapers, such as web editor and graphics editor, which require newworkers to have a specific set of technological skills. All newworkers said that they had used social media and user-generated content in their work, either for story
ideas or on their newspapers’ websites, but were skeptical that such content could supplement their own work. They also feel that user-generated content did not belong in the printed newspaper.

**Newworkers’ daily routines.**

All of the respondents engaged in some form of digital newwork on a daily basis, which included: using the Internet to gather background information, compiling and editing stories or blogs, using content management systems to post stories online, engaging with social media, shooting and/or editing photographs and sending email. Aside from making phone calls from the newsroom and interviewing subjects in-person, newworkers performed all of their tasks on a computer, with a cellphone or with other digital equipment, such as a tablet or a camera. Even newsroom positions that were not technology-centered, such as reporting, required a significant use of the computer, social media, and smartphones. A reporter from the *Columbia Daily Tribune* with three years of on-the-job experience, for example, discussed his routine,

> I come in in the morning and check my email, phone messages, scan Twitter… look at sometimes Facebook and LinkedIn and stuff like that, just kind of check all the means of communication so-to-speak and see what’s going to be on the budget for the day.

An assistant managing editor from the *Kansas City Star* with five years of on-the-job experience described his work in a similar way:

> I sit here all day essentially and browse the Web, browse my email, browse Twitter, browse Facebook, seeing things, and posting Tweets… then, we just assign stories, get stories going, making sure we’re covered on various angles or
various stories that pop up during the day, edit stories as they come in, make changes on them, make sure they get posted to the Web pretty quickly – before five-ish or so.

Social media are very much part and parcel of newswork at these newspapers. A photographer from The Kansas City Star with 14 years of experience in her position said that part of her day could be devoted to photo or video editing, but that she also was expected to use social media. She said,

Facebook is big, they want us to post stuff on Facebook from the Star’s website…

They don’t say, “well you must do this,” but, they encourage it because then it will take readers back to the Star’s website and get us hits.

At the Kansas City Star, then, the use of Facebook and other social media was not just restricted to promoting content or sharing photos, but to finding stories and performing background research.

The extent to which newsworkers utilized digital technologies depended both on their job positions and personal preferences. For example, while none of the newspapers enforced quotas or specific requirements in terms of social media, all newsworkers were encouraged to have some presence on Twitter and/or Facebook. Newsworkers from the Columbia Daily Tribune and the St. Louis Post-Dispatch said their newsrooms distributed a standardized social media policy. In addition, newsroom positions, such as “graphics editor” and “web editor,” are entirely devoted to optimizing viewers’ digital experiences through the organization of stories online (adding photo, video, headlines, captions, etc.) and the promotion of stories through social media. These positions function as a response
to newspapers’ primary content delivery system, digital news. A web editor from the
*Kansas City Star* with 14 years of on-the-job experience explained his routine,

I work three nights in the office, from five to one a.m., basically just making sure
that all of the content from the newspaper gets to the Web, to the different
platforms and not only in good shape in terms of being easily assimilated on the
Web or on your phone or on your tablet, but also enhancing that content with
different kinds of references, video.

The daily routine of a web editor from the *Columbia Daily Tribune* points to how
drastically newswork has changed over the past decade as the Internet and other digital
technologies have made their ways into the newsroom. He explained his daily routine,

For me when I come in in the morning, the first thing I’m going to do is do some
moderations, just check the comments that were posted overnight, check Twitter
and Facebook to see, you know, what we got on that, just see what’s overnight.

Content moderation, content management, and social media production, now standard
practices in editorial positions at these newspapers, simply did not exist two decades ago.

Reporters from each of the newspapers said that there were fewer expectations for
them to understand or use a variety of technologies and that they were generally
encouraged to focus on reporting the news, but that they still used the Internet for
background information and in three cases, online court databases. These reporters said
that their newspapers encouraged them to learn new skills, but did not require them. One
of the less tech-savvy newsworkers, a reporter from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* with four
years of on-the-job experience said,
I don’t just get into work and drive around looking for stories. I’m going to spend some time driving around, checking out things, talking to people. But as far as technology goes, you know, because I do get tasked to do certain daily assignments, of course I use the Internet.

A columnist/reporter from the same publication discussed how the Internet had changed newswork,

If you go back to 1999-2000, it was a novelty. And so a lot of newspapers went, “oh this is some cute little thing” that just the computer heads in various places and now we have this, what do you call it – the World Wide Web? So I think a lot of newspapers were caught... I think every newspaper was caught way behind.

An assistant editor at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch with 10 years of on-the-job experience said that he uses email for just about all communication, “even with reporters who are sitting 20 feet away.” Despite their specific positions, then, newsworkers at these three newspapers used the Internet and other digital technologies in their daily routines, even for the most rudimentary tasks, such as background research and communication.

**Technological expectations for newsworkers.**

Each separate newsroom position required distinct capabilities with digital technologies. While none of the three newspapers expected reporters to shoot photos or video on a regular basis, two had begun to train their reporters in these skills. At both the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and Kansas City Star, reporters had been trained to shoot photo with their smartphones and are now being asked to learn a mobile video recording application on their smartphones called “Videolicious.” A reporter from the St. Louis Post-Dispatch with eight years of on-the-job experience said that his editors “wanted me
to do some video for this breaking news story. And the guy ran me through how to do
video. That was video on an iPhone with a program called Videolicious.” Generally,
however, the newspapers only asked reporters to shoot photo or video when a
situation/story, such as breaking news, called for it. All three publications are “union
papers” that theoretically require a division of labor whereby newsworkers are given
certain tasks and asked not to encroach on the tasks of others, unless otherwise instructed.
Based on the interviews however, this division of labor did not appear strict, as several
newsworkers said that unionization had a minimal impact on their daily routines and even
then, only placed loose restrictions on overtime work.

In a few cases, newsworkers learned technological skills on-the-job, while most
came to their positions with the requisite technological skill set. A photographer from the
Kansas City Star with 14 years of experience in her current position said that she learned
how to use Adobe Premier Pro, a video-editing program, at work. A graphics editor at the
St. Louis Post-Dispatch similarly said that,

when something new pops up, whether it’s a new JavaScript library or if there’s a
new mapping software that comes out, I usually try to take a couple of days and
just dig into it as best I can to see if it’s something that could be useful to us.

Because of the torrent of new technologies and evolving reader preferences, then,
newsworkers in technology-centered positions must keep up, or else fall behind.

Some newsworkers, especially those with seniority or in editorial positions,
acknowledged that the less technologically savvy newsworkers were limited in what they
could accomplish. For instance, a web editor from the Kansas City Star with 14 years of
on-the-job experience said,
Things go too fast. They drop stuff on you and they expect you to figure it all out. And if you don’t, you’re going to be left in the dust. We still have people in our newsroom who have a real time picking up technology and it limits them, it really does, you can see it.

A reporter from the Kansas City Star with 25 years of on-the-job experience felt that, people who are still working in newspapers today, you know, evolved with social media, or have attempted to evolve with social media to keep up. Those who resisted, I don’t know how successful they ended up being or whether they’re still in the business.

In other words, unless newsworkers keep up with common newsroom technologies, including social media, they will fall irrevocably behind and thereby jeopardize their futures in journalism.

At the same time, an assistant managing editor from the same publication reinforced the value of traditional journalistic abilities, such as reporting:

I think more and more people are coming out of J-schools more equipped to work in a multimedia fashion, okay? Now all of that’s great, but if I have a choice between hiring a reporter who’s demonstrated a capability to dig out information and write a comprehensible story, I’m going to hire the other guy, or the other woman.

An assistant editor at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch with 10 years of on-the-job experience bolstered this assertion, explaining that despite layoffs and cutbacks at his newspaper, there was still a strong focus on reporting:
There was a concerted effort to try to protect the best they could the people who actually produced the work from the ground-up. And at the same time, we’ve remained large enough that for those people, the reporters who want to shoot pictures, who want to shoot video, we welcome it, we train them, we give them a form for it. For those who don’t feel like they have the skills, or they’ve been around a long time, it’s just a new trick they don’t want to learn, for the most part they’ve not been pushed into it, they’ve been allowed to do their work and work around that.

In this way, newsworkers, especially reporters, who admitted to being less technologically savvy or enthusiastic about technology, said that their value to the company came from other areas. A reporter from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, for example, said, “My strong suit is just being motivated and being interested in certain things and giving it the best I can, you know, until it’s done…You know. I’m just a reporter; I think editing would be tough.” A reporter from the same newspaper with eight years of experience echoed this sentiment,

I could really regret not pursuing a lot of these technologies you know five or ten years from now. But right now at this moment in time a lot of like Twitter, video, and those technologies just don’t seem totally necessary to my job and kind of the things that I like about my job.

Similarly, a reporter from the *Columbia Daily Tribune* with three years of on-the-job experience said that he also was expected to focus on reporting, but remained cautious about the future. He said,
I guess I did kind of go in expecting to really just report. I can’t say I’ve really had to do much more than that. I mean I guess, you know we kind of all know in the back of our minds, that it’s probably not going to look like it does 10 years from now.

It would seem newsworkers’ technology usage and understanding of certain programs were generally tailored to their specific newsroom positions or levels of personal interest. At the same time, the less technologically savvy were less optimistic about their own futures in the industry and less confident that technology could improve their journalism.

**Newsworkers’ attitudes towards technology.**

Generally, newsworkers viewed their personal daily use of technology as a necessary and acceptable part of the job. Newsworkers understood that traditional newsroom tasks, such as background research, interviews, inter-newsworker communication, and editing had simply migrated to the digital world. An assistant editor from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* with 10 years of on-the-job experience said, “Pretty much everybody’s caught up with at least the basics of the technologies we use. I mean everybody uses email, everybody takes pictures with their phones…you just don’t run into anybody internally-or-externally who’s not conversant with it.”

On a wider scale, newsworkers (especially editors) felt that technology had the potential to allow for new story presentation formats, decrease newsroom costs, increase labor efficiency, expand readership and “do things online that we could never do in print.” A few newsworkers, however, expressed skepticism or cautious optimism that technology had somehow improved newspaper journalism. A columnist/reporter from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* with eight years of on-the-job experience and an assistant manger
from the same newspaper with 10 years in his same job, expressed caution over the use of technology at their newspaper. The columnist/reporter said that the newspaper’s attempts to incorporate video distracted from the organization’s most important tasks, explaining,

to me technology is in and of itself harmless. It’s how you use it, and I think that newspapers and the media use it… I think it can be dangerous when you fall in love with the technology and forget that people still depend on us to have well-written stories and well-shot photos.

An editor at the Columbia Daily Tribune with eight years of on-the-job experience said that she had seen “some colleagues that have taken on more responsibility than they can handle.” For the most part, however, newsworkers accepted that technology was a commonsensical feature of today’s labor environment and that it had both led to job cuts, layoffs and other damaging trends, while allowing newspapers to do things that they had never done before. An assistant managing editor from the Kansas City Star said, “The impactful stories that you write not only go in the physical paper, they go online to be seen around the world now.” In other words, the Internet and digital media, simultaneously challenge newspapers’ influence while creating new opportunities for journalists to gain global readership. As such, journalists did not see technology as the enemy of newspapers, but rather, as a complex and ideologically neutral feature of the newsroom. One particular feature of today’s media environment that has both created opportunities and challenged newspapers’ influence was user-generated content.

**The use of user-generated content.**

User-generated content includes anything from outside blogs, to reader comments, photos, and videos, as well as social media posts on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. All
of the newworkers said that they had engaged with user-generated content, either for a story idea or as part of a package for the website. They were quick to point out, however, that all user-generated content went through a strict vetting process before it could be used, that user-generated content had never made its way into the printed newspaper, and that they would not use user-generated content from “untrusted sources.” Newworkers equated untrusted sources with non-institutional journalism (i.e. citizen journalists, local non-syndicated bloggers). They were also all skeptical about the usefulness of citizen journalism. A web editor from the Columbia Daily Tribune with two years of on-the-job experience said,

We do have a variety of blogs, but I guess you could say we screen them in a sense. They go through an informal hiring process. They hook up with the editor in charge of the section that they would be blogging for and they work on an arrangement there.

A managing editor from the Kansas City Star with five years of on-the-job experience said that he often found stories through blogs, Tweets, or Facebook posts, but that, “You just have to be careful of user-generated content regarding if there’s a lie or flat-out falsehoods. People will not be entirely truthful sometimes and you just have got to be careful of that.” By contrast, a web editor from the same publication with 14 years of experience in his position, said, “It’s really a thing with some of our upper-level editors are really scared of… Well they’re great gatekeepers, let’s put it that way… it’s kind of the control thing that some people have to have I guess.” The common skeptical treatment of user-generated content among these newworkers fits in with the concept of gatekeeping, which serves to differentiate newworkers from non-newworkers,
especially during volatile economic times. In this way, newworkers’ values have served as ideological anchors though unprecedented technological upheavals, legitimating their new tasks and routines in spite of new technologies and economic conditions.

**RQ3: Perceived Impacts of Economic Change on Journalistic Ideology**

The third research question asked how economic changes were perceived to impact journalistic ideology at metropolitan newspapers. To address this question, I asked newworkers about whether economic changes had affected their approaches to their work, their morale and attitudes towards their work, as well as their expectations for the future of the industry. Economic changes were not perceived to affect newworkers’ journalistic ideology or their approaches to their work. At the same time, these economic changes had profoundly impacted newsroom morale and newworkers’ attitudes towards their jobs. Economic changes had also lowered newworkers’ expectations for the future of the newspaper industry.

**The perceived impact of economic changes on newworkers’ job approaches.**

As discussed earlier, journalism ideology is not defined by any one task or value. Most newworkers said that the state of the industry had not affected their approaches to their jobs. They still generally approached their work the same way that they always had and still valued the same things about journalism and newspapers. Five newworkers, a reporter from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, a copy editor from the *Kansas City Star*, a web editor from the same publication and an editor from the *Columbia Daily Tribune*, however, said that that economic hardships had affected their approaches to their jobs, but not necessarily what they valued about newspapers or journalism.
The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reporter with eight years of on-the-job experience said, “I think in the beginning, when we were first having those layoffs it was really easy to slack off… I mean it’s probably more important to do your best work at those times. But it didn’t feel that.” A copy editor from the Kansas City Star who had been in her position for 14 years discussed how cutbacks had changed her general approach, explaining,

With fewer people doing more work, I can’t afford to be quite as thorough as I used to be. I can’t be as picky as I used to be.... There was a time when I would go through every single fact, every punctuation and every name, everything in a story. And I can’t… I do that with A-1 stories now only. I can’t afford to really do that with many others.

Similarly, a photographer from the Kansas City Star with 12 years of on-the-job experience said,

I believe very strongly in the freedom of the press, the First Amendment, the public’s right to know – that hasn’t changed. But what has changed is some of the idealism of how things get done. And that’s just being seasoned; that’s working in the real world and having to deal with real circumstances where you can’t maybe do everything you wanted to do because of the time or the money to do a story that you want to do.

The editor from the Columbia Daily Tribune expanded on the photographer’s idea, “In 2008, when the U.S. economy crashed, we lost about a third of our newsroom. People say the economy’s back, climbing back, but we have not replaced those jobs – I think that staff that have remained are used to working you know, to having that extra
responsibility.” The Kansas City Star web editor lamented the perceived effects of job cuts at his newspaper, “Well the quality of the product is not what it used to be…When we only have one person working on the Web, when we used to have two or three at a time, the quality goes down.”

On the other hand, most newsworkers were quick to dispel the notion that outside forces had changed their individual approaches to their jobs and felt that economic changes had affected the organization they worked for rather than their individual work. A general assignment reporter from the St. Louis Post-Dispatch with four years of on-the-job experience said that despite his tendency to find his own stories, editors had continued to assign him stories, but that other less maverick reporters in his newsroom were generally more at the whim of editors’ ideas:

I get tasked to do stories, but I haven’t been tasked as much as I thought I would because the story ideas aren’t there because the ideas are found on the ground with people out reporting and because there are fewer reporters… I mean I’m still doing some dailies, but I still get to do my in-depth stuff.

An editor from the Columbia Daily Tribune with six years of on-the-job experience said, “when I started in 2007– right before the recession, I was hired and my I have taken on more responsibility, but those have been interesting on a personal level, so it has not been a negative thing for me.” Finally, a photographer from the Kansas City Star with 14 years of on-the-job experience said that she didn’t think the economy, had any effect on my creativity or my ability to make a great photo or video. I think what it’s had though is put a lot of personal stress onto me – a lot of
sleepless nights, lots of worries and concerns and the uncertainty – it’s hard to be in an uncertainty like that.

Newworkers openly discussed ways in which the economy had changed their organization or the industry as a whole, but were generally reluctant to admit if it had altered their individual approaches to their jobs and certainly did not feel that it had changed their values or journalistic ideology. This reluctance likely reflects their ideological stubbornness and tendency to cling on to their values through economically difficult times. As a whole, therefore, newworkers were still driven by the same core values and went about their work with the same journalistic ideology.

The perceived impact of economic changes on newsroom morale.

Nearly every newworker explained that the economy had negatively affected their morale and lowered their expectations for the future of the industry. A reporter with eight years of on-the-job experience from the St Louis-Post Dispatch, for example, said that, “after a layoff it’s like the Walking Dead around here, when everybody’s kind of like walking down, walking around the corridors with a 1000-yard stare” The same reporter also said that, “when those first rounds of layoffs started happening, it was really hard to be motivated. You kind of think, ‘what am I doing this for? It’s really hard to maintain your discipline during those times.” Others expressed similar reactions, though used less candid language. An assistant editor from the St. Louis Post-Dispatch with four years of on-the-job experience, for example, said that the result of economic hardships, were sort of just a morale pounder for a while, but I don’t know that it made me work… like double my efforts to work harder because I don’t want to get laid off
or something. I think that I put in what I put in and I’m trying to give it my all, all of the time… I think that every time…we had several rounds, it just sort of drains a little bit your morale for a while.

In other words, the Recession, resulting layoffs, pay cuts, and other economic changes are bad for morale, but that has not changed our company’s mission. Economic changes, then, did not fundamentally impact journalistic ideology at metropolitan newspapers. They did, however lead to a reduction in the workforce, leaving fewer newworkers with more responsibilities and tasks. Even so, journalistic ideology has weathered both technological and economic changes. Thus, it remains foundational for newworkers in its ability to guide them through precarious times and reaffirm their place in the labor market. In spite of massive newsroom reconfigurations and new work routines, then, newworkers still believe in the importance of their work.

**RQ4: Perceived Impacts of Economic Changes on Newwork**

The fourth and final research question asked how economic changes were perceived to impact newwork at metropolitan newspapers. Since the global economic recession, newspapers across the country responded to decreasing revenue by cutting staff, enforcing pay freezes, paid vacation time and other cost-saving measures. These responses have had profound impacts on newwork. Fewer newworkers perform a larger variety and quantity of tasks than before. Newworkers spend less time on each task, engage in fewer long-term projects and are tasked with more day-to-day and breaking news stories. Newspapers have devoted more staff and energy to the digital product as print subscriptions continue to decline.
Perceived effects of newsroom reorganizations on newworkers’ responsibilities.

Newworkers from all three publications who had been in their positions prior to or since the beginning of the global economic recession said that their staffs had been drastically cut in response to financial hardships. More recent hires discussed similar organizational responses in previous positions, or else related stories from colleagues. Overall, layoffs, staff reductions, and position adjustments forced newworkers to spend less time on each individual task, devote fewer resources to longer in-depth work, cover broader areas in their localities or else become more generalized in their work.

A managing editor from the Kansas City Star with five years of on-the-job experience said about the reduction of his staff,

You just go on… and as far as the resources and the strain it’s put on our business – we used to have 13 business reporters and now we have five. But, people lament that and I said… I remember back when we had 13 business reporters, you know, I wanted 20 business reporters. The desire for resources… the desire for more space, more resources – that really hasn’t changed, you always want that.

The same assistant managing editor said that, “right now there’s probably less opportunity for specialization” for newworkers. A web editor at the Kansas City Star explained that,

people who work in journalism now, we have to be able to do a lot of different things all at one time. A news event happens and I’ve got four or five tasks that I have to accomplish within minutes to get that distributed in our various platforms.
A copy editor from the same newspaper with 14 years of on-the-job experience admitted that her newspaper did not even have the time to edit breaking news briefs,

For news, the initial material that goes onto the Web, there’s no copy-editing at all.

I hate to tell you that, but it is the truth [laughs]. I wish they would change that, you know, it wouldn’t take five minutes...I think that industry-wide, based on what I’ve read, there’s just not a lot of interest in editing breaking stuff.

Whether through the pressure of competition or the reduction of staff, newspapers have placed a premium on timeliness, which requires newsworkers to spend less time on each individual task.

At one point, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* sent reporters overseas, or at least, across the country for assignments. An assistant editor with 10 years of on-the-job experience and a general assignment reporter with four years of experience in his position from the Post Dispatch said that they felt privileged when the newspaper allowed them to travel for a story recently. The assistant editor said that his reporters “improbably traveled all over the country at various times to gather information for stories” and that they “don’t have the travel budget that we once had.” The reporter “convinced [editors at the Post-Dispatch] to send me and a photographer to Afghanistan for a month this time last year, which seemed kind of bold for this paper, because they’re trying to cut off travel.” The same reporter said that he and other general assignment reporters were now generally tasked to do more daily, “quick hit” stories,

And so I’m thinking “with all of these people leaving, my job’s going to suck,” I mean they’re going to have me chasing all kinds of stuff that isn’t enterprise, it’s not really where I want to go, just because they have to have it covered. Well,
what’s happened is we don’t have the reporters scratching out there and knocking on doors and requesting and demanding people talk to us, showing up at the random meetings, walking neighborhoods. You don’t have them out there looking for the news to report, and so what do editors have then? They’ve got a smaller group of people looking for stories, so there are fewer stories. And then they’ve got… you know they’ve kind of got to live and die from what’s sent to them online, or from what they see online, or from what somebody’s Tweeting, you know, because you’ve got to have some stories.

An assistant manager from the Kansas City Star also lamented the commonality of the updateable news brief explaining, a mainstay of daily and breaking news, explaining, “I’d much rather not do those stories anymore and focus my stories on doing impactful A-1 stories. So the product has suffered in its comprehensiveness and in its perceived completeness to what it was.” When she’s not on an assignment, a photographer at the Kansas City Star with 14 years of on-the-job experience doubles as a multimedia editor. “Last night I worked until 12:30 a.m. doing photo editing. So I also sub in for that; the whole staff does at the Star. We rotate the night photo-editing job at the Star,” the photographer said. While economic changes have not necessarily forced newsworkers to expand their technological knowhow, they have placed a premium on multitasking, Internet research, and daily news. They have also stretched newsroom staffs and forced newsworkers to do more with less while shifting newspapers’ focus from the printed product to the online version.
A focus on the digital newspaper.

Despite the decline in print subscriptions and high print operating costs, the printed newspaper continues to be a staple of newspaper journalism, as well as the source of a considerable portion of newsroom labor. However, the Internet and certain digital technologies, coupled with evolving reader preferences, have shifted the focus at newspapers away from the printed product and towards digital platforms. This has not only meant that newworkers must tailor their routines and tasks to new deadlines, but that newspapers have created new positions, such as web-specific editors, graphic designers, website designers, among others. Newworkers generally understood this as an evolution in labor and reader preferences, similar to the use of color photographs in printed papers. Newworkers also said that the focus on digital newspapers had impacted the content of the newspaper as well as their labor.

An assistant managing editor at the Kansas City Star with five years of on-the-job experience said that

The onset of the Internet and things like that have sometimes drawn the focus more on to stories that generate lots of clicks, page views, and those aren’t often the stories that I got into the business for, although, newspapers have always had stories like that in their pages.

In this vein, an assistant editor from the St. Louis Post-Dispatch with four years of on-the-job experience said,

Even in 1999-2000, when I started here at the Post, we had a website, but it was sort of the place where our stories would eventually make their way online, but we didn’t really break things online, we didn’t start stories there, we didn’t post
things and continually update them. So, part of it I think it’s all always been
important, but the part of sort of informing people quickly about things that are
important to them has become more possible, more doable in real-time than it
ever has before.

And while the digitization of news has brought with it opportunities, it has also created
everous challenges for newsworkers and their organizations. A reporter from the
*Kansas City Star* with 25 years of experience in his position said,

what to me has changed isn’t our overall approach (because we’re in the digital age), it’s that today’s type of journalism is available to be practiced by anybody who wants to practice it… And one of the big challenges is continuing to be able to convince an audience that the best journalism is coming from the traditional journalism sites or products.

In light of such technological changes, then, newspapers must ensure their survival by providing the public with relevant information in ways that engage and attract readers.

Newswork is evolving in several ways in response to economic changes. The global economic recession exacerbated what was already a financially unstable industry on the cusp of technological upheaval. As a result, fewer newsworkers work on the printed newspaper now, while new newsroom positions emerged to accomplish digital tasks. Reduced newspaper staffs focus more on day-to-day events and breaking news, instead of longer-form investigative stories because, in the words of the general assignment reporter from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, “they have to have the day-to-day covered.” These staffs also spend less time on individual tasks. Geographically, newspapers can no longer afford to pursue stories where they once could. In spite of their
reduced scope, then, newsworkers have maintained a strong sense of journalistic self. Newspapers may not generate the revenue that they once did, but their employees are no less committed to their core values.

**Summary**

Newsworkers generally felt that technological changes in the newsroom had not affected what they valued about journalism in general or newspapers as a specific medium. As a whole, therefore, technological changes were not perceived to have an impact on journalistic ideology (RQ1). Newsworkers’ attitudes towards certain technologies, however, were not always congruous with their superiors’. Newsworkers’ ideology sometimes personally deviated from what they perceived to be the ideology or core mission of the organization they worked for, but only two said that economic changes had affected their values in any sense. Furthermore, newsworkers perceived timeliness as an increasingly important value in today’s newspaper journalism.

Technological changes were perceived to have fundamentally changed newswork (RQ2). Newsworkers perform nearly every task digitally, despite how technologically savvy they feel. Even in the same workspaces, newsworkers communicate with each other through the Internet and spend most of their days using a computer, smart phone, or other digital device for their work. While the three newspapers did not force their employees to learn any specific technological skill or program, they encouraged newsworkers to use some, such as social media or smartphone/mobile photography and video. Newsworkers saw social media as an important method of promoting news and engaging with readers. They also saw it as a tool for news organizations to stay relevant in their readers’ lives.
Just as technological changes were not perceived to impact newsworkers’ journalistic ideology, economic changes likewise appeared to have no impact (RQ3). That is not to say that newsworkers attitudes, expectations for the future of the industry, or approaches to their work had remained unchanged, but to underscore the deeply held values that inform journalistic ideology among these newsworkers. Finally, economic changes were perceived to have expanded newsworkers’ responsibilities, creating new newsroom positions, shifting their focuses to day-to-day news events and by placing a premium on information immediacy (RQ4). Recent economic changes have hit the newspaper industry hard and generally reduced revenues, workforces, and as I’ll explore in the following chapter, perhaps even the depth and comprehensiveness of the newspaper, two characteristics that had defined newspaper throughout their history.
Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand how technology and the economy are perceived to impact newspaper journalism in the digital age. In particular, the research questions asked how technological and economic changes are perceived to affect journalistic ideology and newwork at metropolitan newspapers. Furthermore, because journalism of the early 21st century is subject to a frenzy of technological innovation and economic destabilization, this study tried to understand how metropolitan newspaper journalists attribute and respond to changes in their industry. To that end, its ultimate goal was to, “record what’s going on as a resource for the future,” as one newworker put it. In other words, it is only by understanding past and present conditions that we can look toward the future.

Summary and Significance of Major Findings

**RQ1: Perceived impacts of technology on journalistic ideology.**

Technological changes were perceived to have minimal impact on newworkers’ journalistic ideology. Data showed newworkers generally held the same core journalistic values throughout their careers. Newworkers also valued newspapers for the same reasons as when they began working in the industry. Yet they also acknowledged that technological changes had decreased newspapers' influence in society by creating new challenges, such as increasing the competition for readership. Even so, these patterns did not change newworkers’ beliefs or their perceived valuations of their work. Technology therefore does not appear to have fundamentally altered journalistic ideology, but it does require newworkers to perform new tasks and adapt to new routines and expectations.
As discussed earlier, journalism can be conceived of as both a form of labor and an ideology that legitimizes newsworkers’ positions in society (Deuze, 2008). In the broadest sense, journalistic ideology is based on a “spirit of critical independence” (Meyers et al., 2012, p. 190). In this way, it helps distinguish newsworkers from non-newsworkers while reinforcing the importance of journalistic labor. Most newsworkers valued journalism and newspapers for their contributions to democracy, whether that meant holding those in power accountable, exposing corruption or malpractice, or informing the public. That newsworkers’ values had not changed over the course of their careers makes sense because journalistic ideology and the concept of professionalism sustain the field and perpetuate its practices and identity. In other words, the core values that inform journalistic ideology help define, and to a certain extent insulate, newsworkers from the deleterious effects of technological changes and the uncertainty of the future. As such, journalistic ideology is a stronger component of newsworkers’ identities than the individual tasks they perform or the news organizations to which they belong.

The digital era is not unique in having ushered in new vocational practices and challenges to newsworkers’ hierarchical status. If anything, digitization and its accompanying challenges have strengthened newsworkers’ values and their resolve, especially in light of the diverse set of tasks they perform. Just as the telephone, the typewriter, and the personal computer altered methods of communication and modes of production, so have the Internet and social media provided new responsibilities and changed expectations across myriad industries. Citizen journalism, blogs, and social media pose significant challenges to newsworkers’ autonomy and their media hierarchy.
Yet none of these developments have fundamentally changed newworkers’ journalistic ideology because as Aldridge and Evans (2003) pointed out,

journalism provides a clear example of the discourse of professionalism as a mechanism of occupational change, and in particular its power as a form of self-discipline because this is a discourse constructed and utilized as much by managers in news organizations as by journalist practitioners themselves (p. 549).

In other words, journalistic ideology, or newworkers’ deeply ingrained beliefs in their work and the roles that they play in society, help them cope with change. This is especially true in an environment where technological advancements have lowered the value of journalistic labor. And it is precisely this diminishing value that threatens newworkers’ job security, and therefore, their capacity to perform their normative duties. Thus, adhering to certain unchanging values helps newworkers distinguish themselves from the mass of bloggers, citizen journalists and social media users.

The fact that technological changes and challenges from the “outside” have not fundamentally altered journalistic ideology or newworkers’ belief in their work means they are just as determined as ever to deliver the news. It also means that newworkers believe in journalism as a profession, treat their work just as seriously as ever, and remain confident that they can deliver a quality product to their readers. Whether the quality of the product has remained consistent is another matter, but newworkers’ prevailing values and ideology connote an unshakeable confidence in the importance of their labor and even imply a defiant attitude towards the parlous state of the industry. In this sense, newworkers would not require additional motivation or encouragement to continue their work and have not met new vocational expectations with significant pushback. This is
precisely the response that management and newspaper executives would hope for – that newsworkers are as pliant and committed to their labor as ever, even in the face of trying circumstances. As such, this attitude fosters a more fluid work environment in the context of the Web, which “is affecting the limited control that the profession has been able to achieve over the terms of work” (Beam and Meeks, 2001, p. 233). Thus, despite technological changes that have loosened newsworkers’ control over their labor, their enduring commitment creates more opportunities for executives and managers to control the terms of such labor, as well as the general work environment. In this sense, journalistic ideology is a double-edged sword, allowing newsworkers to persevere, while undercutting their vocational autonomy.

Technological changes may have expanded newsworkers’ tasks and altered their methods of communication, but they have not disrupted their ethos. For this set of newsworkers then, journalistic ideology is a belief in the ethics of journalism; a binding force that trumps the difficulties of reskilling and taking on new duties (mostly with no additional pay) as well as a means of affirming their self-worth. Journalistic ideology, therefore, has provided a philosophical anchor and motivating factor in the face of vocational upheaval, while legitimizing newsworkers’ labor through changing newsroom conditions.

**RQ2: Perceived impacts of technology on newswork.**

The digital era has ushered in several new newsroom tasks. All newsworkers said that they interacted with digital technologies on a daily basis. New newsroom positions have also emerged at newspapers (such as web editor and graphics editor) that require newsworkers to have a specific set of technological skills. Interacting with social media
in particular, has become a *de facto* requirement in newswork and has gained special importance as a source of news stories following staffing cutbacks. The extent to which newsworkers used social media varied, but it has become a go-to source for story ideas, as well as a way of promoting the newspaper and interacting with readers. All newsworkers said that they had used user-generated content in their work, either for story ideas or for posting to their newspaper’s’ websites. Newsworkers were generally skeptical, however, that such content could realistically supplement their own work. They also felt that user-generated content did not belong in the printed newspaper.

While some aspects of newswork, such as background research and story filing have simply migrated to digital formats, others – such as blogging, social media and content management (optimizing readers’ digital experiences and digital outreach) – are entirely new. And yet none of the three newspapers enforced blog or Twitter quotas or explicitly required newsworkers to use social media. However, in light of the papers’ reduced staffs and daily requirements for content, newsworkers essentially had no choice but to scour Twitter, Facebook, or LinkedIn for story ideas or promote their stories there. Blogging, likewise, was never mandatory, but newsworkers also scoured blogs on a daily basis for story ideas or else occasionally blogged themselves. The pressure for newspapers to deliver content, attract readers, and bring web traffic to the newspaper meant that not participating in social media or not blogging would be disadvantageous because, as one reporter from the *St Louis Post-Dispatch* acknowledged, newspapers “have kind of got to live and die from what’s sent to them online, or from what they see online, or from what somebody’s Tweeting.” In other words, newsworkers essentially have no choice but to maintain a social media presence because stories could break there
at any time and using the Internet is simply a more efficient and cost effective way of finding stories than knocking on doors, attending meetings or talking to strangers on the street. Thus, social media has become a new hotbed of story ideas, a veritable mine of information, though not always verifiable in its accuracy. Its importance has also increased for newswriters because the reduction in newsroom personnel has meant that each newswriter has had to shoulder greater responsibilities. Reporters now cover larger geographic areas, cross into other beats, and even – in the case of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch – take on copy-editing duties. Social media, therefore, has become a convenient source of daily information. In effect, newspapers are indirectly telling their staffs, “you don’t have to use social media, but if you don’t, you’re potentially missing out and not doing the best work that you possibly could.” Reporters who used social media were also lauded for doing so. Whether newswriters enjoyed using social media is beside the point, but it has become an integral part of today’s newswork and is symptomatic of newspapers’ growing dependence on the shorter, less nuanced, requisite daily offerings. On the surface, newswriters’ use of social media is similar to the pre-digital work of beat reporters, who monitored agencies or other official sources on a daily basis. Yet the increased pressure for timely content affords greater importance to social media and has meant that newswriter spend less time looking for longer-term original stories.

The fact that newswriters used social media on a daily basis to search for local content (e.g., on law enforcement, local government/politicians, and other organizational Twitter feeds) suggests an organizational shift away from investigative and enterprise journalism. This is not to say that these newspapers have completely abandoned investigative journalism or complex stories, but it does underscore the potency of social
media (and other digital technologies that contribute to information immediacy) to shape newswork. This is not a pattern restricted only to reporting, either. After less than a year in his current position, a graphics designer from the *St Louis Post-Dispatch* said, “you have to make stuff that people enjoy looking at, clicking on or looking at in their paper.”

As such, newswork is increasingly about reporting the here and now. It is also more about providing glitzy news packages and attracting a fragmented audience in any way possible than pursuing the difficult, time-consuming complex stories. And while that may not seem problematic, the implications of these patterns strike at the very heart of newspaper journalism and at American democracy.

Watchdog journalism is expensive, time-consuming, and difficult. It follows logically that financially “lean and mean” newspapers would focus more resources on creating timely content to quench the demands of the 24-hour news cycle and simply getting the word out, as opposed to pursuing risky and potentially money-draining investigative work. As a result, newsworkers more concerned with daily stories that emerge from social media and the Internet have fewer opportunities to pursue enterprise and investigative journalism. And if newspapers shift their focus away from such journalism, in effect, they will be less capable of acting as the watchdogs of society, of holding those in power accountable for their actions or playing a critical role in sustaining democracy. If metropolitan newspapers cannot tell us how our tax dollars are being misused or who is polluting where they should not, who will? If newspapers are not willing to spend their resources on informing the public, who, in the words of Joseph Pulitzer will
fight for progress and reform, never tolerate injustice or corruption, always fight demagogues of all parties, never belong to any party, always oppose privileged classes and public plunderers, never lack sympathy with the poor, always remain devoted to the public welfare, never be satisfied with merely printing news, always be drastically independent, never be afraid to attack wrong, whether by predatory plutocracy or predatory poverty? (quoted in Schnell, 1999, p. 631)

At the same time, newsworkers did not singularly blame technology or social media for an increase in daily stories. But they were still concerned by what this pattern portended for the future of newspaper journalism. An assistant editor with 10 years of on-the-job experience said,

Here’s what frightens me about journalism and it’s exacerbated by the technology. Whether you agreed with what was on the Post-Dispatch’s front page, trained professionals who watched the world for you said that these were the most important stories and they’re on the front page. And they gave you some sense of hierarchy. You lose some of that with the Internet and you lose a lot of that with the 24-hour news cycle, where it’s just repeated endlessly and incremental developments are magnified dramatically to desperately try to woo a new audience. And so, I’m afraid we have less influence. And I think that’s a bad thing for democracy.

That is to say, newspapers are losing control of information and lamentably, in this editor’s view, are no longer the only gatekeepers because information online is ubiquitous and not necessarily held to the same standards as what goes into the newspaper.
However, there is more than one side of the story. Newworkers do not solely depend on social media or on the Internet to find stories or accomplish every task. “Legwork” remains an important part of the job, which could entail reporting, shooting photographs, writing stories or designing a graphic. And yet, the data indicates that technological changes have altered journalistic labor by expanding newworkers’ responsibilities in an adverse economic climate that favors shorter, updateable daily stories over longer, more complex investigative and enterprise journalism. Increasingly, newwork requires efficiency and technological knowhow and embraces quantity as opposed to quality.

As mentioned earlier, today’s newwork also speaks to a belief in digital technology to increase efficiency, which, it seems, had been used as a justification by some of these newspapers for their cost-cutting measures. Certain new newsroom positions, such as web editor and graphics editor for example, require a particular skillset with content management systems, graphics/photo editing software, social media, and coding systems. As the recession hit, these newspapers, already focused on the digital product, looked for ways to reduce staff, especially in print-oriented areas. Reducing staff often meant laying off copy editors, designers, mid-level management, and in some cases reporters. Many of those who remained have since had to pick up the slack for their ex-colleagues. For reporters at each of these newspapers, this has meant covering a wider geographical area, picking up stories on other beats, putting in shifts on the copy desk, or learning how to use smartphone image or video capturing technologies. While reporters were not generally asked to complete these tasks on a daily basis, the fact that they were asked to do so in the first place indicates a widening of vocational responsibilities at the
expense of specialization. Indeed one of the more defiant participants in this study, an assistant managing editor at the *Kansas City Star*, admitted, “one thing that has changed is that you don’t have as many specialized beats anymore, or, we have… a reporter has three or four beats these days, or areas of emphasis, whereas before they only had one.”

That technology was perceived to have an enormous impact on newswork should not come as a surprise. Nearly every industry, especially those driven by information, has undergone seismic changes as a result of digitization (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2002). Indeed a reporter/columnist at the *St Louis Post-Dispatch* with 25 years of experience reinforced this idea:

Like every place else in corporate America, there’s less jobs [at newspapers]. And technology makes it easier in a variety of fields to have less jobs. You know, whether it’s printing the paper, computers can do what five typesetters used to do.

So, I think technology in every aspect of our life, sort of eliminates all jobs except for the people who repair the technology.

If technology increases the efficiency of some newswork, then unfavorable economic conditions gave newspaper executives the impetus to enact cost-cutting measures and justify them by pointing to “redundancies” in the newsroom. Eliminating these redundancies, newsworkers said, has frequently meant pay furloughs, layoffs, and a reduction of content in the printed newspaper. The result has been an increasing reliance on daily stories, social media, and digital story presentations to entertain and thereby generate clicks. Yet in spite of their attitudes towards technology, newsworkers accomplish almost every task digitally. They also do not blame technology for the state of the industry. Rather, they acknowledge that it is among a series of complex forces that,
taken together, have undermined newspapers’ influence in society and newsworkers’
traditional hierarchy, but surprisingly, not journalistic ideology.

**RQ3: Perceived impacts of economic change on journalistic ideology.**

Staff reductions, pay furloughs, hiring freezes, and a reduction of content in the
printed product occurred at each newspaper. Yet, economic changes were not perceived
to affect newsworkers’ journalistic ideology. At the same time, economic changes were
found to profoundly impact newsroom morale and newsworkers’ attitudes towards their
jobs. They also lowered newsworkers’ expectations for the future of the newspaper
industry. Newsworkers said that economic changes had also affected the quality of their
newspapers and had shifted the focus from the print to the digital product. Yet in spite of
these attitudes, newsworkers said that economic changes had not affected their core
journalistic values. Thus, journalistic ideology has weathered both technological and
economic changes. Journalistic ideology remains foundational for newsworkers in its
ability to guide them through precarious times and reaffirm their place in the labor market.
In spite of massive newsroom reconfigurations and new work routines, then,
newsworkers still believe in the importance of their work and in the higher calling of
journalism.

That economic changes would profoundly affect newsroom morale and
newsworkers’ expectations for the future is not surprising. Simply being present in the
newsroom during such turbulent times over the past decade would likely affect morale.
Yet being forced to shoulder additional responsibilities and witnessing a reduction in the
quality of the newspaper, as nearly all newsworkers did, also negatively affected morale.
In this way,
the shift to multiplatform production is leading to different standards for different media: With fewer people but more work, the care taken with the online product—which generally has the larger audience— is likely to be inferior to the care taken with the legacy one (Singer, 2010, p. 91).

It was not just the diminished quality of the product that worried newsworkers, but their very job security as well. Several newsworkers said they feared being laid off. But in spite of this fear, newsworkers affirmed their commitment to their companies and generally maintained that their approaches to their work had not deviated.

Newsworkers thus acknowledged certain challenges associated with recent economic changes, but were also quick to defend themselves ahead of their publications. In general, newsworkers said they approached their work as they always had. A consistent approach to one’s labor, or else a lack of evolution in one’s vocational values, indicate a conscious effort to block out extra-vocational concerns. In this sense, newsworkers deflected responsibility for the detrimental conditions at their newspapers, either to the decisions made by their organization as a whole or to larger forces, such as technology or the economy. This tendency works both ways. In a labor environment characterized by neoliberal values of self-direction, entrepreneurship, and efficiency, individuals are quick to point out the faults of others while espousing their own accomplishments (Kinsman, 2011). This “it was them, not me” tendency simultaneously insulates individuals from blame while reaffirming their individual value to the organization. This reaction is therefore congruous with Deuze’s (2008) assertions that journalistic ideology helps sustain newsworkers’ identities and differentiate them from non-newsworkers. If newsworkers maintained their general approaches to their work
while espousing the same journalistic ideology, economic conditions and technological changes are independent forces outside of newsworkers’ control. In this sense, several newsworkers attributed unfavorable conditions to the corporate side of their publications. A photographer from the Kansas City Star said,

McClatchy has to answer to shareholders and all they care about is the quarterly return, I think. They don’t care about long-term projects, they don’t care about, you know… I’m not saying the company doesn’t care, I’m saying the shareholders want to just keep their prices up, their stocks up, so they don’t see the public good that newspapers do.

That newworkers would point to economic changes as the main culprit for the diminished state of the newspaper industry and for a reduction in quality at their publication also makes sense. Following this logic, it’s not newworkers’ core values or their efforts to adhere to these values that have changed. Rather, the economic conditions generally do not allow them to engage in the same labor. Furthermore, witnessing firsthand the consequences of economic changes in the workplace would understandably convince these newworkers that economics shape their company’s product and the industry as a whole.

That this has happened across myriad industries worldwide lends further credence to the argument that economics profoundly affect newspaper journalism (Aldridge & Evans, 2003). A web editor at the Kansas City Star said that his newsroom used to occupy three floors and now barely fills one. He said that he approaches his work the same way he always had, but that the quality of the newspaper is not what it used to be, a statement echoed by multiple newworkers at each publication. Economic changes,
therefore, did not fundamentally impact journalistic ideology at metropolitan newspapers. They did, however lead to a reduction in the workforce, leaving fewer newsworkers with more responsibilities and tasks. Overall, newsworkers not only blamed internal decisions for the diminishing quality of their paper and the state of the industry, but also technology and economics. What stands out most, however, is the stubborn perseverance of journalistic ideology, even in the face of such momentous changes. In hindsight, it served as a reference point for these newsworkers during turbulent periods. Specifically, journalistic ideology helped strengthen newsworkers’ resolve, allowing them to attribute organizational hardships to other sources, which in turn encouraged them to continue working in the same fashion. This speaks volumes about newsworkers belief in journalism and their ability to preserve despite the misery of layoffs or the amount of new tasks forced upon them.

**RQ4: Perceived impacts of economic changes on newswork.**

Fewer newsworkers now perform a larger variety and quantity of tasks. Newsworkers spend less time on each task, engage in fewer long-term projects and are tasked with more day-to-day and breaking news stories. Newspapers have devoted more staff and energy to the digital product as print subscriptions continue to decline. The global economic recession exacerbated what was already a financially unstable industry on the cusp of technological upheaval. As a result, fewer newsworkers work on the printed newspaper now, while new newsroom positions emerged to accomplish digital tasks. Geographically, this has also meant that newspapers can no longer afford to pursue stories they once could due to staff shortages.
Newsworkers felt that economic changes had more of an impact on their work and on the newspaper industry in general than technological changes. This is not to discount the role that digitization has had in shaping the workplace, but to acknowledge the potency of bottom-line economics. Each newspaper had gone through several series of layoffs and staff reductions, newsroom reorganizations, and pay furloughs. The first rounds of major layoffs occurred shortly after the beginning of the global economic recession in 2008. In light of the timing of these actions, several newsworkers suggested that company executives felt the need to protect a certain profit margin. An editor at the *Columbia Daily Tribune* described this trend:

> Advertisers know when their numbers are down, so they say, “where can we cut costs?” and unfortunately with media, our higher-ups are not always journalists and so they’re looking at bottom-lines and they’re not… I mean, “that person’s job is expensive, that person’s job is expensive, let’s just cut them out,” and that’s to the detriment of the product that we’re producing.

In other words, newsworkers are now doing more with less so that company executives can ensure their profits are as high as possible. This directly correlates with Beam and Meeks (2011) assertion that “leading news organizations tip the balance between professional and commercial goals in favor of the latter” (p. 237). In other words, when financial challenges arise, news organizations tighten the purse strings by looking for ways to cheapen labor. All newsworkers agreed that this had happened at their organizations to varying degrees. The same editor from the *Columbia Daily Tribune* went on to say that everyone on her staff began shouldering more responsibilities after the
global economic recession, which other newworkers from all three publications also acknowledged.

In most cases, doing more with less did not necessarily mean an expansion of individual tasks or more multitasking, though in some cases it did. More often, newworkers found themselves covering a larger geographic area in their work or taking on additional beats or stories as reporters and editors. Frequently, newworkers lamented this trend had lead to negative consequences. Perhaps the most insightful comment in this regard came from a copy editor from the *Kansas City Star* with 14 years of on-the-job experience:

Well, with fewer people doing more work, I can’t afford to be quite as thorough as I used to be. I guess that’s the best word for it. I can’t be as picky as I used to be, I can’t… you know there was a time when I would go through every single fact, every punctuation, every name, everything in a story. And I can’t… I do that with A-1 stories, and that’s about it [laughs]. I can’t afford to really do that with many others.

Newworkers at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* likewise discussed their organization’s emphasis on daily stories and breaking news, which they said often cost reporters the opportunity to leave the newsroom and engage in enterprise work. Newworkers therefore, generally spent less time on each individual story or task, a pattern that portends negatively for the quality, scope and general accuracy of the newspaper. At the same time, newworkers said that more care still went into the printed newspaper than into the digital one. Yet counter-intuitively, newworkers said that their organizations
focused more on the online product than on the print version, partially because of readers’ changing preferences.

A reporter from the *Kansas City Star* also said that the pressure to be timely on social media had more than once resulted in him sending out erroneous information on Twitter, which he felt detracted from both his and his organization’s journalistic credibility. Likewise, a reporter from the *St Louis Post-Dispatch* made a factual error in a story, which his editors needed finished within a day. These inaccuracies, in some sense at least, are symptomatic of web-first publishing and the 24-hour news cycle, which, O’Keefe (2010) suggests, prioritizes speed over accuracy. If journalists are defined as much by what they do as what they believe, then the current practice of web-first publishing at these newspapers directly conflicts with what the majority of newsworkers valued about newspapers – their ability to accurately tell an original story. In this way, what newsworkers do and what they say they value are two different things. Yet this dichotomy does not necessarily contradict the normative historical role of newspaper journalism. Newspapers, as an assistant managing editor at the *Kansas City Star* explained, “have always been a mix of the big story and the little story, the gossip and the news, you know the weird little stories and the important bigger ones.” The bridge between what newsworkers actually do and what they value therefore is journalistic ideology – the driving force behind their labor that overshadows gloom cast by even the most unfavorable technological and economic changes in the newspaper industry.

**Theoretical Implications**

This study conceives of journalism as an ideology and as a form of labor shaped by technology and the economy. My study builds on prior scholarship by exploring the
interactions between ideology and labor and examining the perceived effects of technology and the economy on newswork at three metropolitan newspapers.

The conclusion that journalistic ideology helps newworkers cope with technological and economic upheavals is consistent with Deuze’s assertion (2008) that “ideology serves to continuously refine and reproduce a consensus about who counts as a ‘real’ journalist” (p. 16). The findings also support Aldridge & Evetts (2003) conclusion that ideology “provides a clear example of the discourse of professionalism as a mechanism of occupational change.” In addition, this study also found that as a result of such changes, fewer newworkers do more with less. This reflects Singer’s (2007, 2010) findings regarding the new challenges ushered in by certain digital technologies and journalistic concepts, such as user-generated content. Following Singer (2010), I found that reduced newspaper staffs now have fewer opportunities to pursue longer-term investigative and enterprise projects, they spend less time on each individual task, cover larger geographic areas, engage in more daily assignments and increasingly, interact with social media. In these ways, my study also reflects the findings of Beam & Meeks (2001). In particular, it reaffirms their assertion that “The Web also is affecting the limited control that the profession has been able to achieve over the terms of work” by requiring geographically and temporally flexible labor and reducing newworkers’ capacity to adhere to core journalistic values (Beam & Meeks, 2001, p. 239). Finally, newspapers have also prioritized the digital product over the printed newspaper. The result, as both Singer (2010) and Hemingway (2008) pointed out, has been an organizational focus on timeliness and generating “clicks,” often at the expense of accuracy. Thus, this study
reflects O’Keefe’s (2010) conclusion that “web-first publishing has centered on the requirement for speed over accuracy” (p. 10).

At the same time, this study diverges from others. Firstly, its theoretical approach departed from Deuze’s (2005, 2008), which conceived of journalistic ideology as a historically bound “collective knowledge” that newsworkers employ in their labor. My study, on the other hand, found that ideology both informs specific tasks and routines, and at other times leads newsworkers to question their labor when it does not fit in with their values. Furthermore, like Deuze (2005, 2008), Hardt & Brennan (1995) and McChesney (2003), this study conceives of ideology as a historically bound set of normative values or ethics that newsworkers possess. Yet, unlike these studies, mine does attempt to fit particular tasks or routines into a historical framework, but looked at how ideology and labor presently overlap or contradict each other in the field. In other words, this study understands journalism as a dynamic and constantly changing form of labor that is informed by historically bound values and ethics. While the labor changes and occasionally conflicts with newsworkers’ beliefs, their ideology endures.

In addition, this study’s dual exploration of the perceived effects of both technology and the economy departs from previous newsroom-centered research that tended to focus on how one or the other force influenced journalism (Robinson, 2011; Singer 2007, 2010; Singer et al, 2011; Vujnovic et al, 2010). Situating newswork in particular settings, as these studies did, helps track and contextualize certain tasks and routines, but also risks ignoring the impact of underlying macro level forces. It also risks underplaying the influence of ideology on newswork. My study tried to atone for these shortcomings in two ways. For one, I asked newsworkers about their specific values
instead of approaching the research with pre-conceived notions of journalist as gatekeepers, for example. I tried to account for the perceived impact of macro level forces on newswork by considering the perceived both economic and technological changes. Like Örnebring (2010), Singer (2007, 2010) and Vujnovic et al (2010), this showed that technological changes were not perceived to affect newsworkers’ values. In fact, the findings suggest that these changes strengthened journalistic ideology. Nevertheless, they tended to focus on how technology affected newswork, as opposed to conceiving of technology and economics as two intertwined driving forces for change.

Finally, that this study differs from previous studies, particularly the work of Singer (2007, 2010), Singer et al (2011), and Vujnovic et al (2010), through its broad consideration of digital technology, as opposed to a study of one particular feature or program. These studies tended to look at how specific technologies or journalistic paradigms, such as citizen journalism, affected newspaper journalism. While I did ask newsworkers about certain programs, devices and journalistic concepts, my study considers a broader spectrum of technological advancements and in doing so, attempts to account for the variety of tasks and routines that newsworkers across different positions now perform. I found, for example, that newsworkers were still hesitant to incorporate user-generated content into their organization’s products, but just as these scholars concluded, newsworkers recognize some value in blogs, Twitter, and photos that readers send to the newspaper. As a copy editor from the Kansas City Star explained, user-generated content is “click bait.” This study builds on previous scholarship and creates new paths for potential inquiry. The study of both current newsroom conditions and
ideology provide a platform on which additional scholarship can investigate change in journalistic values and labor over time.

**Practical Implications**

This study provides both positive and negative takeaways for journalists and members of the public. Because of the important watchdog role that newspapers have played throughout the 20th century, the implications of these findings would likely be of particular interest to other journalists and members of the public, who would hopefully be buoyed by newsworkers’ bullish approaches to their work in the face of momentous technological and economic changes. That newspaper journalists are no less motivated or driven than before bodes well for the future of the industry, especially for hiring managers looking for motivated, self-directed, and enthusiastic employees. Newspaper readers could also feel comfortable knowing that employees of the Fourth Estate approach their work consistently and that they feel committed to informing the public and contributing to democracy.

At the same time, those who see journalism as a crucial component of democracy might deem several of the findings disturbing. An unsustainable financial model rooted in advertising can generally no longer support newspapers, public service journalism, or the same level of in-depth investigative journalism of the past. It could just be, as one newworker theorized, that newspapers have yet to figure out how best to monetize in the digital era and that once they do, they will “continue in a very healthy way,” yet the scope of newspaper journalism appears to have decreased substantially since the global economic recession. In particular, there are fewer opportunities for newworkers to engage in longer-term projects, such as investigative and enterprise stories. Investigative
journalism, specifically, is expensive and time-consuming, but fundamental in its capacity to monitor the powerful and provide citizens with relevant information that they may not be able to get elsewhere. Investigative journalism is not entirely a thing of the past at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the Kansas City Star, or the Columbia Daily Tribune, but newsworkers said that there are fewer opportunities now to work on such stories. Correspondingly, fewer newsworkers cover larger geographic areas and focus more on day-to-day current events. Policymakers and members of the public would likely find this disconcerting, as newspapers, especially at the regional and metropolitan level, were critical historically in investigating the powerful and informing citizens of relevant information. That no institutions outside of newspapers have embraced this role en masse should be even more worrying. This study indicates that the newspapers’ historical role as the watchdogs of society may be eroding.

A final thread from this study that current and prospective newsworkers might find interesting relates to the role of specialization in newspaper newsrooms. In January 2014, New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman wrote a column called “Average is Over.” In the column, he discussed today’s labor model by situating it in relation to that of the early post-industrial era (1990’s and early 2000’s). At that time, Friedman contends, “workers with average skills, doing an average job, could earn an average lifestyle. But, today, average is officially over” (Friedman, 2012). He continues,

It can’t when so many more employers have so much more access to so much more above average cheap foreign labor, cheap robotics, cheap software, cheap automation and cheap genius. Therefore, everyone needs to find their extra – their
unique value contribution that makes them stand out in whatever is their field of employment.

In other words, simply knowing the basics will not suffice anymore because anyone can learn those. What the world of work needs, in Friedman’s view, are specialists, or at least creative, self-motivated types able to work in temporally and vocationally fluid environments, while still maintaining a unique expertise. In spite of the fact that Friedman’s assertion ignores the important role of labor unions in ensuring “average” workers’ benefits and wages, he nevertheless captures an important slice of the contemporary work environment, especially with regards to skilled and technologically driven industries. In that sense, newsworkers have traditionally provided a particular expertise through their labor, which technological and economic changes have cheapened, or in some cases, made redundant. In this light, Friedman explains, “there will always be change – new jobs, new products, new services. But the one thing we know for sure is that with each advance in globalization and the I.T. revolution, the best jobs will require workers to have more and better education to make themselves above average.” While journalism practitioners might be skeptical that “more and better education” would stop newspapers’ allegorical bleeding, they might be interested to learn that specialization, especially in the context of unique, enterprise and investigative journalism can help differentiate a news organization from its competition. In this way, an assistant editor from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* boasted,

> We do have a lot of specialist beats and we try to fill them with people who have credentials. Something that’s happened at the Post-Dispatch that hasn’t necessarily happened everywhere else—and I credit the people running the paper
for this—they have tried like hell not to disturb the reporting staff. For the most part, we’ve lost rather few reporters.

In this sense, the once popular idea of a fully converged newsroom where every newsworker can comfortably manipulate myriad technologies, while reporting, filing, and editing stories, feels somewhat off the mark. Specializing is fundamental to journalism.

Newspapers rely on their ability to produce original content. As newspaper embrace web-first publishing, this becomes more difficult. And yet, it is something they still strive for—telling original stories creatively.

**Limitations of the study**

Like all scholarly research, this study is limited by its design as well as the amount of time and resources that were devoted to it. Some of these limitations were apparent before the first interview, while others only emerged at the end of data collection. For instance, this study did not concentrate on one particular type of technology or economic trend to establish stronger links between newswork and those forces. I asked newsworkers about the technology they used and only mentioned vague references to social media, content management systems, and blogging. Differentiating between specific digital technologies or programs could help elucidate the ways that each one affects newswork or poses significance to newspaper journalism. Likewise, this study did not differentiate between economic changes. It did not, for example, consider the specific effects of each cost-cutting action following the 2008 recession. Incorporating this information would help clarify the extent to which layoffs, pay furloughs, and other newsroom changes individually affected both certain aspects of journalistic labor and newsworkers’ morale.
In addition, I could have interviewed newsworkers from newspapers outside of Missouri. A cross-state comparative study would have helped establish more concrete links between technological and economic changes and newswork. Finally, a study that compared online only newspapers to mixed format publications would have expanded the scope of this study’s technological investigation.

Despite attempts to recruit an equal proportion of women and men as well as a broad range of newsroom positions, just four of the respondents were women, none of them in management positions. The majority of newsroom workers listed on these companies’ websites were in fact men, which likely reflects the overall gender composition of the newspaper industry.

**Directions for future research**

There are several avenues for additional studies. For one, research that elucidates the perceived long- and short-term effects of technological and economic changes on newswork would be essential in tracking how these forces vary over time. By the same token, a study that focused on one newsroom position would be insightful in articulating the perceived effects of technology and the economy. A more ambitious project could involve comparative studies between local, metropolitan, and nationally circulating newspapers. Such a study could also clarify the extent to which technology and the economic affects newswork at different circulation levels of newspaper journalism.

Furthermore, studies that consider other journalistic media, such as television and radio news, would provide a sound basis for comparison with newspapers and thereby establish a basis for discussing the entire journalism industry. Radio and television, by contrast, are much more dependent on specific technologies and programs than
newspapers. A study of television and radio stations could build on my findings. In this vein, comparisons between local/metropolitan, national, and internationally syndicated news networks would be especially insightful, especially in light of the world’s unbounded march toward a globalized existence.

Conclusion

This study investigated the perceived effects of technological and economic changes on journalistic ideology and labor. Journalism consists of newswork (journalistic labor) that is informed by the historically bound normative values and ethics (journalism ideology) of its practitioners (newsworkers). As the newspaper industry digitized and readership migrated to the Web, executives looked for ways to cut costs and were spurred into action when profits began to dwindle following the 2008 global economic recession. In this way, technology and the economy together have exacerbated the diminished the influence of metropolitan newspapers.

One result of these changes at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, the *Kansas City Star*, and the *Columbia Daily Tribune*, is fewer newsworkers who are forced to complete additional tasks with fewer resources. In addition, these newspapers also contain some newsworkers devoted solely working on the digital product. Economic changes have resulted in an institutional focus on daily stories, breaking news, social media interactions, as well as attractive digital story presentations. In essence, newspapers are understaffed, less comprehensive and appear more concerned with simply getting the news out or attracting readership. Correspondingly, newspapers are worse equipped to feature enterprise stories and investigative journalism, which require more time and resources.
Considering these immense shifts in the media environment, Americans should be concerned that the institutions that for so long monitored the powerful and played a critical role in protecting average citizens are less equipped to do so. For this reason, new media watchdogs, such as WikiLeaks, and non-profit news organizations, such as ProPublica, are leading the way for potentially paradigm changing journalism, bringing relevant political information right to the people. Whether newspapers can re-emerge along with these new media remains to be seen. Additional studies that clarify the specific ways in which the economy and technology affect journalism across different media and organizations of different sizes are necessary. Ultimately, no matter what becomes of American news media or the global economy, the world will always need quality journalism committed to providing an accurate, contextualized understanding of the world. Therefore, despite what new inventions we develop, “our technology does not retire our old responsibilities” (Starr, 2009).
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Appendix: Interview Questions

**RQ 1:** *How are technological changes impacting journalistic ideology at metropolitan newspapers?*

1. How long have you been working here? What other positions have you had in journalism? Do you enjoy your work? Why or why not?

2. What do you value most about journalism in general? What about newspapers/print journalism specifically? How, if at all, has this changed since you entered the industry?

3. What are the general responsibilities of a journalist? What (if any) core values do you feel drive your work? What do you do in your own work specifically to fulfill these responsibilities? Have they changed at all since you entered the field/began working here?

4. Would you say that it's a difficult time to be a newspaper journalist? Why or Why not?

5. What or who do you think is most responsible for the state of the newspaper industry in the United States? Why do you think that?

**RQ 2:** *How are technological changes impacting newswork at metropolitan newspapers?*

1. Tell me a bit about your daily routine. What kinds of equipment or technologies do you use in your work (photo, video, audio capturing/editing technologies; social media; blogging) are you expected to use for your job? How often do you use such technologies?
2. What are the expectations of your superiors in terms of your capability with these technologies? Aside from writing, reporting, and/or editing, what responsibilities do you have in your current position?

3. How do you feel about using technology in your work? Is it something you’re used to at this point, or do you feel it requires extra attention and effort? Are there skills that you wish you had that could improve either your journalism or your attractiveness to employers?

4. What new tasks have you taken on since you began working in journalism? How do you feel about those changes?

5. Have you ever felt that these technologies are preventing you from doing the best job that you can? Or rather, that they enhance your job? How important do you think that these technologies are to providing the best journalism for your readers and for the industry as a whole?

**RQ3: How are economic changes impacting journalistic ideology at metropolitan newspapers?**

1. What impact does the state of the newspaper industry have on your approach to your work? Do you feel differently about journalism knowing that newspaper jobs have become increasingly competitive and that newspapers are going through a tough time?

2. On what basis do you decide to include blogs or other user-generated content into your work? Has there ever been a time that you weren’t able to pursue a local story or shoot a photograph and had to depend on the work of others?
3. Have you ever been in a situation before where you felt that the pressure to do something as quickly as possible compromised the quality of your work? Please describe the situation.

4. Have you ever been let go from a journalism job? If so, how did it make you feel? If not, why do you think that many newspapers across the country have cut thousands of newspaper jobs over the past five years? What do you think the result of these cuts have been on the industry as a whole?

**RQ4: How are economic changes impacting newswork at metropolitan newspapers**

1. What do you think that the result of recent changes in the industry (mentioned above) have had on your job position—both at your newspaper and in general at other publications?

2. Have you ever been forced to do something at work that was completely different from or outside of your original job description? Can you talk about that?

3. Do you think that if the newspaper industry in the US was more stable, that there would be more jobs and fewer responsibilities in these jobs (in terms of the division of labor)? Why or why not?

4. What do you think about the concept of “mobile journalists?” Is that you in any sense?