THE USER-GENERATED DILEMMA:

Can the ways in which media organizations publish audience contributions affect the way the audience feels about the site and their intention to contribute?

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

THE USER-GENERATED DILEMMA:

Can the ways in which media organizations publish audience contributions affect the way the audience feels about the site and their intention to contribute?

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I want to dedicate this dissertation to my wife Merilee and my three children, Lincoln, Holly, and Alexander. Without them, I never would have wanted to go to graduate school or have finished in the first place. You are my inspiration, my reason to try to do some good in the world and make myself a better person in the process.

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THE USER-GENERATED DILEMMA:

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ABSTRACT

More and more media organizations are using the Internet to ask their audiences to submit stories, comments and photographs, but they are seemingly doing it without understanding the implications of their actions. This study examines if the ways in which news organizations publish user-generated contributions affect how the audience feels about the organization and the site. It also looks at whether using audience contributions can have a positive effect on increasing self efficacy and encouraging future contributions.

Through a 2 (author's gender) x 3 (story author) x 6 (experimental order) within subjects experiment, this study compared whether stories written by staff writers, audience members or a collaborative process had an effect on 10 concepts related to the connection readers felt with the site and the author, the credibility they had in the organization and story, and the likelihood and confidence they had in being able to contribute a related story. The study suggests readers connect more with audience written stories, while placing my credibility and expertise in staff written stories. They find collaborative stories the least credible and connecting.

In the final equation, predicting their intention to contribute is a product of determine their interest in the topic, their connection to the site and the amount of self efficacy or confidence in being able to join the discussion the story inspires.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The first stories CNN released on Election Day 2008 focused on the experiences of voters at polling places across the country. But the stories they appeared in did not follow the traditional journalism model, where reporters interview voters as they walk out of the polls. Instead, CNN encouraged voters to submit their experiences online at iReport.com, and reporters in the office collected the submissions into packages that reflected the historic nature of the election and the reasons so many turned out to vote. In fact, the earliest of CNN's election return stories contained almost exclusively comments submitted by users that it conspicuously labeled iReporters (CNN, 2008). Jennifer Martin, CNN's director of PR, said iReport gives the network the opportunity to cover breaking news events, such as the election, well before its reporters and photographers arrive on the scene (Washkuch, 2008).

> "What **iReport** has done for us, is that it has provided an added dimension to our newsgathering. We're not doing less reporting because of iReport**,** but it is enriching the stories that we are doing … Take (the April 2007 shooting massacre at) Virginia Tech, for example. That was a horrific breaking news tragedy, and that cell-phone video of shots being fired, that was an iReport**.** Those (types of videos) provided an extra dimension, but it's not like we didn't send journalists there because we had that" (quoted in Washkuch, 2008).

iReport, which started in August 2006, now receives more than 10,000 submissions a month, and CNN recently spent $750,000 to purchase the iReport domain name to allow users to upload their stories and videos directly to the site and have them instantly appear (Learmonth, 2008). In fact, the new iReport gives users more flexibility and exposure. It displays all submitted stories and videos, not just those handpicked by editors to appear on CNN broadcasts (Abate, 2008). The competition has taken notice. Other major public or citizen journalism ventures include CBS' cbseyemobile.com, which is still in beta testing, ABCNews i-Caught and

the BBC's iCan. Dube's (2008) Citizen Media wiki lists 23 citizen media initiatives published by news organizations (2008).

But the media do more than just enable citizen journalism. The Bivings Group's annual survey of the press said 58% of newspaper web sites publish user-generated photos, even though only 18% took videos and 15% published articles. Seventy-five percent of newspapers – more than double last year – allow users to comment on stories (Johnson, 2008).

Even as more and more news organizations have accepted audience contributions, reporters still don't embrace them. Only 35 % of national journalists and 36 % of local journalists have a positive view of citizens posting news content on news organizations' Web sites (Rosenstiel, 2008). This disdain is sometimes reflected in how the submissions appear online because they are often either hastily edited or not edited at all. For instance, most of the journalists surveyed said they never read the comments audience members left at the end of their stories (Schultz, 2004).

This disconnection between the practice of regularly asking for and not really wanting audience contributions demonstrates what Singer (2004) called the media's struggle to "transition from their role as guardians of what enters the public to builders of a virtual commons." The media are using the Internet to solicit comments simply because they can. While organizations might understand they need to let their audience contribute on the Web, they hardly understand what to do with the contributions once they receive them, and they fail to consider the implications soliciting and accepting this content may have. As the news media rely on the Web more to deliver their products, they must also recognize the different expectations people have for the Web and their impact on the news. As they lose audience share in their traditional products and try to regain it online, they should determine what effect, if any, using

user-generated stories on their sites has. If seeking contributions proves to be beneficial in terms of gaining new readers and finding better news tips, then the media have to ask themselves what they can do to encourage the process.

This dissertation's goal is to examine what using citizen contributions on a news organization Web site could mean to the organization and its audience. In addition, it studies whether featuring work written by audience members alone and in conjunction with journalists can increase self efficacy, or the belief that people will be successful in the actions they choose to take, and whether an increase in self-efficacy will lead to a stronger intent to participate. The key to self efficacy are traditional media measures such as credibility and social presence because, in the end, the connection people feel to the reporters and the media organization helps determine if they feel confident they can join the discussion. It is my hope that comparing these concepts will provide some answers on how journalists can connect their sentiments to the ever growing trend of allowing citizen journalism contributions.

Recent history suggests this is something that needs to happen if it is not already. Mashable, an influential Web log, named the coverage of the 2008 presidential election on the Internet – from CNN's iReport coverage to Pres. Obama's decision to publish his election speeches and weekly radio addresses on YouTube – one of its 20 key tech events of the year (Aune, 2008). The *Christian Science Monitor* said 2008 marked the first year that major news networks started "carving out reporting slots for non-professionals on one of their marquee topics – the election" (Friedman, 2008). This collaboration between audience members and professional journalists enriched journalism and helped news organizations improve their credibility, Russ Shaw, deputy editor for news at MSNBC.com said.

> "Citizens can give us observational journalism that is probably from a slightly different perspective than the professional journalists there ... It shows that you're not sitting in an

> ivory tower and that you're interested in what other people are observing" (quoted in Friedman, 2008).

Besides adding perspective and credibility, collaboration online directed news organizations toward important coverage areas and encouraged them to dig deeper on important stories. Mayhill Fowler, a blogger, said citizen journalists picked up the reporting slack after professional journalists flooded the small town of Zanesville, Ohio following Obama on the campaign trail (Friedman, 2008), then left just as suddenly. Their follow-up stories appeared on OffTheBus, a user-generated election blog on The Huffington Post. Amanda Michel, who directs OffTheBus, said other contributors have steered reporting in whole new directions. Sixty OffTheBus volunteers "detailed former President Bill Clinton's powerful financial impact on Sen. Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign, poring over everything from his book-tour itinerary to lists of people who stayed in the Lincoln bedroom during his presidency" (quoted in Friedman, 2008).

Gillmor (cited in Friedman, 2008) said news organizations have to be careful they do not overestimate the impact of user contributions. They cannot think they will replace their original reporting, but they cannot dismiss them either. Instead user contributions and journalism should go hand in hand.

> "In national politics, the traditional media still have the most power and the most ability to influence the general public, after advertising … You can't separate citizen journalism from traditional journalism. They have a symbiotic relationship" (quoted in Friedman, 2008).

The approach the media has typically taken to user-generated news has not embraced this symbiosis. The earliest Web sites to provide citizen journalism opportunities, including Gillmor's Bayosphere and Backfence.com, offered unprecedented autonomy to their users, but no clear direction on how the contributions would be used or what constituted a successful post.

They simply published comments and stories as they received them. They did little to encourage submitters because they operated under what Gillmor (2006) called the "field of dreams" scenario: If we build a Web site for your contributions, you will post. He blames this attitude, in part, for his site's demise:

> "Citizen Journalists need and deserve active collaboration and assistance. They want some direction and a framework, including a clear understanding of what the site's purpose is and what tasks are required. I didn't do nearly a good enough job in this area"(2006)

On the other hand, some citizen journalism sites supported by major news organizations feature more direct editorial control, yet this emphasis could make people nervous about contributing. When iReport, which up until last year required an editor to look over all submissions before they went online, recently allowed submissions to go live to the site without review, the number of submissions surged to close to 10,000 a month (Learmonth, 2008). This jump, however, did not change CNN's policy of heavily vetting all submissions. In fact, sometimes submissions came down nearly as fast as they went up. When choosing iReport videos to use during CNN broadcasts, the editors are even more selective. In fact, those that are prominently featured cover breaking news events or reactions to popular news stories, such as celebrity deaths. CNN exerts its control by placing announcements encouraging contributions at the beginning and the end of only certain stories. In addition, the main iReport page highlights one designated topic each day. One of the greatest successes CNN's iReport had was the 2008 election when site editors struck a middle ground between autonomy and control, when they established the model for success by directing contributions toward one topic but then left audience members alone in how they would approach it.

In other words, these examples suggest audience contributions can positively impact how audiences look at an online publication. Anecdotally, the amount of control or collaboration also

seems to have a direct effect on the number of contributions a publication receives. The way a story author appears online also can affect perception and participation. Recent successes suggest that a collaborative approach may have more impact that stories written by staff writers or audience members alone.

To understand why, we need to look at what makes the Internet different and why people choose to use it over another medium. What makes the Internet a more attractive choice, the literature suggests, is the connection it enables between authors and users. This dissertation plans to explore whether the Internet can enhance or detract from the connection people feel toward a reporter and a news organization and how this connection alters the definitions of credibility under which the media operate. Taken together, connection and credibility lead toward one of what Albert Bandura calls a "basic theory of human understanding." His Social Cognitive Theory of Human Interaction is based in choice and helps explain why some people choose to act and others do not. Self-efficacy, or the belief in the success of one's actions, is the main determination.

One of the biggest differences between online and traditional media is the concept of interactivity. Though defined many different ways in the literature, interactivity online boils down to be able to do more and connect with people in meaningful ways. The interactivity available online offers users many simple ways to contribute, and the successful demonstration of interactive features can provide the vicarious modeling component of self efficacy. But more than anything, interactivity and the other factors that might influence the confidence and impact of the models people see.

Interactivity is more than bells and whistles. Rafaeli (1986) and others argue it is the key to forging lasting relationships. True interactivity does not occur until real collaboration occurs.

These relationships also inform how users view the news organization itself, because trust, belief, and community connection (Meyer, 1988) have long formed the basis of how researchers conceptualize credibility. The strength of the connection a news organization has with its audience can directly influence how successful it can be in instilling confidence and, thereby, motivating contributions. How much people identify with reporters and news organizations and how similarly they think their perceptions are can also enhance credibility (Meyer, Marchionni & Thorson, 2006).

To begin, the dissertation will lay the groundwork for applying social cognitive theory to motivating online contribution through a brief history of online contribution and the news media's response, before examining theories on why and how people use the Internet and online news resources. Uses and gratifications theory offers a fitting starting point because the Internet epitomizes its assumption of active media choice (Ruggiero, 2001). Because this study examines behavior – contribution – and not just media choice, it will expand uses and gratifications theory to include concepts such as connectedness discussed in the Media Choice Model (Thorson & Duffy, 2006), social presence and perceived similarity (Reeves & Nass, 2002). Ultimately, this study follows Eastin and LaRose (2004) in operationalizing contributing news stories as a behavior, not just a choice. Action hinges on self-efficacy beliefs and maybe the connection people perceive.

This overall research question of this dissertation is does the way in which news organizations solicit contributions affect how many contributions they will receive and the way audience members perceive the site? To begin to provide some answers, I will focus on how people react to online news stories written alternately by staff reporters, audience members, and staff reporters and audience members collaborating. Alternating the authors will create models

similar to those described in Social Cognitive Theory and help determine if one more than the others affects the social presence, expertise, coorientation, credibility and interest participants have. Connection, the literature explains, is closely tied to concepts such as credibility, perceived similarity and interactivity. In addition, the stronger the connection people have to a model, the more likely it will be to motivate them to behave likewise.

The experiment will also ask participants to rate how efficacious reading the stories make them feel in order to gauge their intent to contribute. Increasing their intention to contribute could also increase not just participation, but readership. As news organizations struggle with how to ask for and what to do with contributions, they are also striving to find their place in the online landscape, and I hope with this dissertation to give them answers on what kind of niche they can carve out in an increasingly crowded online marketplace.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Internet is fundamentally a social medium. From the beginning, it has been socially constructed to fulfill people's need to interact with others, Rafaeli, Raban & Kalman (2005) argue. As a network, its value is based on the number of people using it and what they decide to do with it. But a social foundation is not unique to the Internet. All media, in fact, are social, Reeves & Nass (1996) said, and people react to the media in much the same way they would to a real person.

Instead of recognizing the 'Net as a social system, early Internet researchers focused on the technology and suggested it represented a potentially harmful step down from face-to-face communication. It could be so convenient to use that it might discourage people from ever leaving their homes (Rafaeli, Raban & Kalman, 2005). By acknowledging the 'Net's social fabric, however, researchers have learned that it operates more as a companion to face-to-face communication, rather than a replacement. The Internet operates as a better social facilitator in some aspects of life because it brings groups of people together from more diverse backgrounds and geographical locations than was ever possible before. One way in which it has brought people together is by giving them a place to contribute their own stories.

Media response

The news media, however, have been slow to recognize the social Internet, and even slower to tap into its potential. At least 1,200 newspapers have created Internet sites since 1995 (Singer, 2003), but like many established businesses, they have joined without understanding the Web and have been disappointed by their results (Korgaonkar and Wolin, 1999). From the beginning, most newspaper editors and publishers saw only the disruption the Internet presented,

not its potential. Any time a business venture starts with a disruptive mindset, "it is likely to suffer from chronic under commitment" (Gilbert, 2002). This under commitment is most evident in what news organizations actually put on their sites. Most at one time relied on "shovelware" or a daily, repurposing of stories that were in the print edition (Singer, 2003), and, typically they included less than half of what they printed. Two thirds of the newspaper executives reported putting 25 % or less of the day's news content online (Saksensa and Hollifield, 2002). Only 24 % reported making half of the printed content available online because they "feared that if they made available their content from the print edition to the online edition, it might lead to a drop in circulation" (82).

How to protect circulation was also commonly misunderstood. Many publishers used the Internet as an entrenchment strategy. "Publishers said they started online editions in order to reach new readers, gain an advantage over the competition and stay on the cutting edge of technological development" (Saksena and Hollifield, 2002: 77). But in all three areas, researchers suggest newspapers failed. First, they looked for new readers outside their communities. While the Internet's global nature eliminates geographical constraints, "equal access does not mean an equal chance to find a niche online. The geographic market definition should be of more importance, not less, when examining the online newspaper market" (Chyi and Lasorsa, 1999: 11). In other words, many people in their communities used the Internet as a supplement to the daily newspaper. The Web reached far fewer people outside the community.

Rather than actively using their sites to gain an advantage over the competition, newspapers merely created "place holders, which provided few outside links and required lengthy stays to get access to a complex array of stories, many of which provide variation without much difference in content or perspective" (Barnhurst, 2002: 488). This is emblematic of

why newspaper Web sites have not attracted a larger audience. “Internet newspapers are clearly not expressions of the exciting possibilities of the Web” (487). These exciting possibilities include interactive features, such as comments, photo and story submission, interactive maps and graphics or instant news updates, but Saksena and Hollifield (2002) found few newspaper Web sites offered them. Most included only weather updates or links to sites that give current information about the town, not the participatory elements that build stronger communities.

Papers that merely lifted content from their print editions fundamentally misunderstood the advantages of the Internet (Gilbert, 2002). Web sites compliment the print edition (Chyi & Lasorsa, 1999) said. Althaus and Tewksbury (2000) found that even in a community of Web-minded individuals, relatively few people went to the ‘Net first for news. In fact, overwhelmingly, people chose the local newspaper first, and they used the online edition as a way to get access to quick information that is useful in their lives. “The overwhelming use of all sites, even the most local, small market ones, is they create readership” (Gilbert, 2002).

During the 2000 elections, editors seemed to catch on somewhat (Singer, 2003). They saw their online editions as a way to provide more timeliness and depth, but only a handful of editors mentioned using the Internet to engage readers in political discussion. Adding this interaction will not only encourage community participation, Singer (2003) said, but will also limit the newspaper from jeopardizing its role as a trustworthy and relatively impartial source. (51)

Citizen Journalism

To find news sites fully taking advantage of the social nature of the net, users had to step away from the mainstream media. The site credited with starting the citizen journalism

movement began as a reaction to mainstream media coverage of South Korean elections (Yeon-Ho, 2004). In 1999, Oh Yeon-Ho, frustrated with the "one-way journalism of the 20th century and the haughty attitude common in the Korean media," launched OhMyNews (Oh, 2004). Four years later, his site had more than 32,000 citizen reporters and worldwide respect. "The citizens of the Republic of Korea had long been preparing for a grand revolution in the culture of news production and consumption," he said. "All I did was raise the flag" (Oh, 2004). The motto of his site and many of the other 82 independent citizen journalism ventures Dube (2009) lists is simple: "Every citizen is a journalist (Gillmor, 2004; Yeon-Ho, 2004).

Content creation online

In fact, the growth of citizen journalism since OhMyNews' introduction follows the growth of the Internet itself. The Pew Internet and American Life Project estimated the Internet has penetrated more than 73 % or 147 million homes in the United States (Madden, 2006). Once online, Internet users have more than 225 million Web sites to choose from, according to Netcraft's March server survey (2009), which offer anything from mindless entertainment to detailed news analysis to personal diaries.

Research into why people create content online suggest some users need to do more than just read. A Pew Internet and American Life Project study found people who write Web logs or blogs do it primarily "to express themselves creatively and to record their personal experiences" (Lenhart and Fox, 2006: 7). Overwhelmingly they do not consider themselves journalists but think their writing serves a vital function. "Blogging promises a democratization of voices that can now bypass the institutional gatekeepers of mainstream media" (1). The group most likely to take advantage of blogging, according to an earlier Pew study, have an average age of 25 (Lenhart et al. 2004).

Other age groups create content as well. Older creators had an average age of 58 and most frequently maintained personal Web sites to post photos and videos. They were also the most enthusiastic about online genealogy (Lenhart et al., 2004: 10). Those in the middle age range are content omnivores. With an average age of 40, the members of this group were online the most, and they have tried the most Internet activities. More than one third have contributed content online in traditional forms, such as a newsgroup or a family, business or organization's Web site (Lenhart et al., 2004: 11)

To successfully meet the needs of all active users, sites must be based on "metaphorical structures that show Web site users the 'way in' to recognize and realize the informational value of the Web site" (Eighmey, 1997). One of the best ways to tap the Internet's potential is to allow audiences to become involved. "Personal involvement centers on a Web site's capacity to make the user feel welcome, while items associated with interest in continuing communication indicate the user's interest in spending a longer amount of time at a Web site or returning to it later" (61-62).

Finding ways to involve the audience goes beyond blogs and discussion boards. In categorizing how news appears on the Web, Deuze (2000) contrasted the amount of editorial control the organization behind the site exercised with the degree of connection they had with audiences. He theorized the sites that would be most successful in adapting to the changing communication landscape would be those that balanced control and connection equally in a way he called dialogic. Instead of just providing news, some of the sites he looked at created conversations with audiences about the issues that the news organization deemed most important (2000). In the future, more and more news organizations will need to great these dialogues and

move from *gatekeeping* to *gatewatching* (Bruns, 2004). Tremayne (2006) sees editors' roles "skew(ing) heavily toward teaching and coaching" rather than traditional writing and reporting.

To understand why people want to become involved with the news and contribute their own stories online, however, we need to start with a basic theory that helps to explain why people choose one medium over another. The reasons for choosing the Web, in fact, revolve heavily around the ability to contribute. The next chapter will focus on uses and gratifications theory and how it has been applied to online environments.

CHAPTER 3: MEDIA CHOICE THEORY

Uses and Gratifications

With its basic assumption that media use is an active process based on the social and psychological needs it fulfills, uses and gratifications theory represents a reaction to direct media effects theories. It developed in the 1940s as scientists became interested not simply in media effects, but why audiences chose various media (Ruggiero, 2000). What they found is that people deliberately selected a medium and used it actively to fulfill needs. On the Web, for example, users do not just visit one site. They actively jump between sites as they follow links or their own interests. This active environment makes the Internet a potentially better way to fulfill users' needs than any other medium because it "provides users with a broader range of needs on the gratifications-opportunities dimension" (Dimmick, Chen, and Li, 2004: 28). Active Web users "are most attracted to information formats that speak to them in a more personalized voice and in a broader entertaining context" (13).

People do not turn to the Internet just for information. "Consequently, in an information age, simply providing information may not be enough" (Korgaonkar & Wolin, 1999). Rodgers & Sheldon (2002) found more than 100 different motivations for media use in a meta-analysis of U&G studies. For the most part, however, Web use motivations have generally followed Korgaonkar and Wolin's (1999) model, which found seven different needs the Internet fulfilled among survey respondents. These seven needs included information-seeking, shopping, entertainment, and socialization. Sheehan (2002) classified the needs in two dimensions: goal-directed and experiential. Goal-directed users are selective and intentional in their online choices, purposefully exposing themselves to specific content. Experiential users turn to the 'Net for

escape, diversion and relaxation, which suggests there is not a specific outcome to the session (Sheehan, 2002: 63). Users can often switch from goal-oriented to experiential needs in the same online session (69). Sundar (1999) explained that users do not always see information-seeking and experiential uses as mutually exclusive. “Receivers could very well be perceiving a great deal of entertainment value in news and a great deal of information value in entertainment” (373). The gratifications Internet use fulfills can also change over time (Rodgers & Chen, 2005).

Motivations are also likely to change depending on the type of usage, Assael (2005) argued. He studied only those identified as the heaviest Internet users to expand the classification “beyond demographic descriptors to typically include psychographic variables” (93). Even the heaviest users fall into six categories similar to those other researchers found studying all those who use the ‘Net. Assael (2005) identified his users as 1) web generalists, 2) downloaders, 3) self-improvers, 4) entertainment seekers, 5) traders, and 6) socializers. All of his categories were goal directed. People were motivated to use the Internet, he argued, even those he classified as generalists, for a specific purpose.

Ford and Nichols’s Taxonomy of Human Goals explained that goals, personal agency beliefs and emotion are the key components of motivation (cited in Ford & Smith, 2007). In other words, an active media choice, such as choosing to contribute to an online site, is a goal that is motivated by beliefs in one’s capability and the context in which one acts (156). Combining Assael classification with Ford’s (2007) taxonomy of goals, traders and downloaders, are performance goal oriented because they are seeking a specific reward, such as a file, a hot stock, or show time. Others are mastery goal oriented – the socializers, self-improvers and even generalists – because they are concerned with intrinsic needs, such as making friends, improving oneself or getting more familiar with the Web.

Rodgers & Sheldon (2002) make the connection between uses and gratifications and goal theory more apparent when they apply Deci & Ryan's (1985) theory of functionalism to their meta-analysis of uses and gratifications research. Behavior is best explained by understanding what function it holds for the person acting (85). Out of the more than 100 motivations they found, they propose four main ones for Web use: research, communication, shopping and surfing. The first three are goal-oriented; people go online for a specific reason, either obtaining information, talking to friends or finding something to purchase. The last – surfing – emphasizes the experience of traveling around in cyberspace with no particular goal in mind, which they say is an intrinsically motivated activity.

Technology Acceptance Model

These intrinsic motivations are vital elements to understanding what motivates people to use the Web, Sanchez-Franco & Roldan (2005) argue, because there is a direct and positive effect between attitude towards Web usage, usage intention and actual usage. This is the basis of the technology acceptance model (TAM), which asserts the key to the successful design and implementation of technology requires understanding human factors such as extrinsic and intrinsic motivations. The nature of the motivation will often determine how someone uses the Web. "Goal-directed users are more driven by instrumental factors and focused on their decision-making process while experiential users are more motivated by the process" (41). In other words, the gratifications people fulfill with Web use can depend greatly on their motivation, and that motivation can sometimes even change during their time online. "Users might start surfing a Web site, then shift to looking to see if the information interests them, or vice versa, and finally experience an intrinsically enjoyable state" (41).

While uses and gratifications theory explains media choice and not behavior, it suggests that the reasons why people choose the Web over other media lie in what they can do with it. In the final analysis then, choice is first step toward action, and the motivations behind the choice may also form the basis for eventual activity.

Content Creation Motivations

In one of the earliest studies of online communities, James & Wotring (1995) found that the ability to interact motivated people to join two of the first online bulletin boards – Compuserve and Prodigy. Both sites served important information transmission, education and socialization functions, but they were more than just media to use. Information sharing, by itself, was a form of socialization because posters noted their satisfaction with just being on the boards to answer questions. Others noticed the quality, accuracy and detail that came from online posters were nearly as good as that from experts in the field. These conversations helped bulletin boards serve as a "surrogate for interpersonal communication" because they relied on many of the "same conventions, habits and demands as face-to-face communication" (James & Wotring, 1995).

As the Internet has evolved, so has its ability to provide information and socialization. Seeking information remained the primary reason people went online, but in online discussion communities where most of the information is generated by the users, the quality of that information is vital to predicting whether people will remain involved (Ridings & Gefen, 2004). To find quality, people started to turn to information they could trust, and they found it from people with which they had a relationship. By sharing information, users are providing something of value to others and are extending themselves (Bakardjieva, 2003). By seeking to share rather than gain information, users demonstrate to others how they can be successful

online. Ridings & Geffen (2004) underscored this finding by saying the need for quality information and the need for friendship and social support made up more than one-third of the reasons people identified. “Even in such an information-centered medium, friendship is a crucial bond, keeping patrons in communities” (Ridings & Gefen, 2004).

Whether communities form does not indicate success. The perception of community members is more important. In the online communities she studied, Hartelius (2005) found moderators largely existed to protect perception and help members feel confident about contributing. One moderator Nip (2004) interviewed said she saw her role as “smoothing over tension that might disrupt the friendly atmosphere of the bulletin board, not as enforcer of the values of the … group” (Nip, 2004). Building a social network takes a commitment from all involved, Elliot (2004) said:

> “That people are born into social worlds constituted by objectified networks of commodity, affect and locality is clear. That social agents must continue to invest in those networks if their meanings are to be maintained is a point that is often overlooked.”

Predicting Online Participation

Predicting continued participation is where the research rightly moves away from media choice. Rafaeli (2004) characterized those who choose a discussion group but do not post as “lurkers,” and the difference between lurkers and posters is stark. Lurkers in the virtual community are the same as political free riders, or people who do not think they need to vote because everyone else will take care of it for them (Rafaeli, Ravid, & Soroka, 2004). Lurkers fail to receive the same social benefits from a site as others. In fact, Rodgers and Chen (2005) agree because they suggest that continued use of a site goes beyond fulfilling gratifications. The longer women participated on a site that served as a support network for breast cancer survivors, the less likely they were to seek information from it. Instead, they sought to provide information that

could help and influence others (Rodgers & Chen, 2005). Posting frequency was linked to the psychosocial benefits a user derived from the site. “The more women posted to the online discussion board, the greater improvement was shown in their mood” (Rodgers & Chen, 2005).

Just as mood improvement is a byproduct of the site’s use, the formation of social networks is largely determined by how much a person participates. Whether a poster received a reply to his or her first post strongly predicted whether the person would continue to post (Joyce & Kraut, 2006). Interaction among group participants also influenced whether newcomers posted again.

> “Newcomers may feel a sense of obligation to continue the conversation or the relationship with the person who responded to them. Alternatively, they may take the responsiveness of the individual who responded to them and generalize this to the group as a whole, thinking perhaps the group is a friendly or useful place” (Joyce & Kraut, 2006).

Surprisingly, the nature of the reply had little influence on whether a newcomer stayed. The likelihood of posting again was not associated with the length or the tone of the reply. The one exception was newcomers were more likely to post again if their reply was a question (Joyce & Kraut, 2006), because they felt some obligation to continue the discussion. In fact, questions posed as subsequent responses seemed to increase the confidence of participants because they were seen as valued elements of the continued conversation.

In other words, understanding content creation online and the news media’s role in it requires a social focus. Researchers cannot approach the Internet in the same way they approached newspapers or TV broadcasts. Neither can media professionals if they are to embrace the Web’s potential to involve audiences. The key is to shift their role from content producers to content managers and editors (Tremayne, 2006). But more than anything, the motivation to contribute, no matter how goal-directed or need influenced the person might be, relies in large

part on the connection the individual has forged with the community in which he or she operates. This need for connection is something that the Internet magnifies through interactive features, but it might also hinge upon many traditional media measures, such as credibility, social presence and coorientation.

The next chapter examines how the Internet is different, how it can offer people more ways to fulfill needs and achieve goals while strengthening their relationships with each other and the site. Definitions of interactivity start with what the Web can offer people to do but ultimately end with how it brings them together. In the same vein, the motivation behind online contribution starts with the quality of the information but extends to the relationship users have with the site.

CHAPTER 4: INTERACTIVITY AND CONNECTION

Interactivity

Most communication in computer-mediated environments is interactive (Downes & McMillan, 2000). Online this is especially true because so much information is available online that people must make active choices. “The only restriction comes by way of the attention span and interest of the receiver. The onus is now upon the receiver to actively sift through content and select a portion of it for consumption” (Sundar and Nass, 2001: 59).

But interactivity is not only up to the users, nor does defining it entail counting the bells and whistles a site offers. Interactivity theories in the literature range from the features of a medium to what people can do with those features (Sundar, 1999) to how people can use those features to establish relationships (Rafaeli, 1988). In an effort to synthesize the literature, Kiousis (2002) said interactivity exists as “the degree to which a communication technology can create a mediated environment in which participants can communicate (one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many) both synchronously and asynchronously and participate in reciprocal message exchanges” (379). But what his definition does not include is where interactivity actually resides.

Sundar (1999) would say interactivity is determined by the users themselves. The level of interactivity in a site depends largely on how people use it and whether they take advantage of all the possibilities it has to offer. The ability to choose in an online environment affects how people view the media organization. People generally rate information they find more credible than information that is given to them. In Sundar and Nass’ (2001) experiment, users rated the stories they choose higher than stories supposedly chosen by professional editors. However, they gave the highest ratings to stories chosen by the computer on their behalf. They wanted guidance

based on who they are and how they use the site. To enhance the connection people feel to sites, system designers must find ways to enhance a user's involvement with the information (Sundar, 2004). "Greater interactivity will lead to increased learning simply because it involves more interaction with the interface" (388).

Even greater effects will occur if the interaction occurs between more than just a user and the medium. In fact, true interactivity exists only when users and editors have formed a relationship (Rafaeli, 1996). The medium may set the upper bounds, remove barriers, or provide necessary conditions for interactivity levels, "but potential does not compel actuality". Instead sites must foster an active process that relates "both to previous messages and to the way previous messages related to those preceding them" (120). In other words, a comment on a story is not interactive unless it refers to a previous article the person wrote. This kind of interactivity requires a shift from information source to virtual communication tool (Ko, Cho, and Roberts, 2005). Communication roles become interchangeable (Rafaeli, 1988). "Role assignment and turn-taking are to be nonautomatic or nearly so" (111).

In real world terms, good first steps could be offering e-mail addresses for reporters or discussion boards, but that, in itself, is not enough. Schultz (2004) found that few reporters and editors even respond to e-mails. Fewer still participate in online discussions.

> "Even when forums are 'hosted' these hosts do not belong to the core staff of the media organization in many cases. Online staff usually are organizationally and often also spatially separated from the newsroom, which makes it even more unlikely that reporters, columnists and editors notice what is going on online" (214).

Whether interactivity resides in the users, the site itself or the interaction between reporters and editors, it can foster acceptance, satisfaction and heighten performance quality, motivation, a sense of fun, cognition, learning, and sociability (Rafaeli, 1988). In a business sense, it will engender more positive responses from consumers (Ko, Cho, and Roberts, 2005).

Interactive features on a Web site generate a positive attitude toward the site and ultimately lead to a positive attitude toward the newspaper in general, which in turn influences purchase intention (67).

For news organizations, interactivity must mean more than adding a few graphics (Sundar, 2000) or a discussion board (Rafaeli, 1988). Citizens should have the chance to take control of the news. Reporters, on the other hand, must transform into content editors who guide readers through the process, but this too represents a danger for the traditional media company. "Interactivity may represent a threat to institutions and professional communicators at the same time that it creates new opportunities for individuals participating in a collaborative and interactive environment" (Downes & McMillan, 2000: 164). New media reporters and editor cannot assume so much control they take away readers' online identities. In fact, they should look for the balance that Sundar and Nass (2001) found between acceptance and control.

Credibility

Enhancing interactivity online could simply be a way for news organizations to re-establish the relationship they have always tried to maintain. A familiar news mantra is that all media organizations have to sell is their credibility. But in an interactive environment, from where does credibility come? On its face, credibility seems straightforward. The more credible a person finds a news source, the more likely he or she will be to use it. Credibility encompasses the depth of issue coverage provided and the amount of work that went into getting it. It also depends on a news organization's position within the community and its reputation within the field of journalism itself.

However, studies have suggested the direct, supposedly common sense statements above are not always true. People continue to use media they say they do not find credible. For

example, audiences have consistently awarded higher credibility marks to TV, even though TV stories lack the depth of and commonly borrow extensively from newspaper reports (Reeves & Nass, 1996). When comparing credibility estimations with actual behaviors, researchers and media professionals have to scratch their heads and ask, what are people thinking? Within individual thought patterns, they will find their answers.

At its most basic level, credibility – no matter how you define it – includes a human dimension. Flannagin & Metzger (2007) write that credibility is not simply an objective measure of a medium's features or messages. It revolves around individual audience member's subjective evaluations of how stories, sources and organizations are presented. It also depends upon the relationships media establish with their audiences. Researchers such as Reeves & Nass, Wackman, Kim, Sundar and Rafaeli have shown that credibility needs to include measures of how much a person likes a medium, how much they have come to rely on it, and how connected they feel to it and its agents.

The human dimension of the "credibility crisis" Gaziano first wrote about in 1986 has become even more complicated in 2009. The Internet has made more information available than ever, while muddling some of the core concepts of traditional credibility. Deciding what is credible requires examining relationships between people and their sources for news even more. To survive in the digital world, it is vital that news organizations critically examine the traditional definitions of credibility, with an eye toward adapting them to the new media. This examination must account for the changes the new media have wrought in how people receive and evaluate news and the kinds of relationships they can establish with news providers.

To answer, then, why sometimes credibility does not seem to make sense, especially in a digital world, I will start by examining credibility definitions that researchers have applied to the

traditional media. Next, I will discuss new definitions that examine the relationships between audiences and media more closely, including the media equation, social presence, interactivity and social cognitive theory. Finally I will look at how traditional and new definitions combine to measure credibility within a new media environment.

Traditional Credibility

Early media scholars approached credibility from the common sense approach described above. They included two measures: do you trust the media and do you believe what you read? Gaziano & McGrath (1986) expanded the definition considerably to include 12 different measures. Their scale coupled questions about trust and believability with concepts such as objectivity, complexity, completeness, truth and reputation. Despite the comprehensive nature of the Gaziano & McGrath scale, researchers found other elements. Meyer (1988), a former newspaper editor himself, boiled the Gaziano & McGrath scale down to one element – believability – while adding the idea of community affiliation. Beaudoin & Thorson (2004) reinforced Meyer's addition, showing that credibility is one of the most important elements in determining a community's attitude toward a newspaper, and credibility grows the more the newspaper connects to the community. Perloff (1984) suggested another human element in examining persuasive research – perceived expertise. Expertise links credibility to what people see as the extent of sources' knowledge and experience on a topic.

As more elements were added, it was necessary to break credibility into separate components that examined message, source, and organizational credibility separately. Source credibility, for example, could include Perloff's expertise dimension, while organizational credibility spoke more to Meyer's addition of affiliation. Separating the concepts has proven useful. Sundar (1999) demonstrated the need to examine source credibility on its own when he

asked readers to rate stories based on the type and number of quotes they had. But he also found an interesting connection between a person's relationship with a source and credibility. People judged sources based more on who the source was rather than what he or she said. His study speaks to the personal nature of credibility definitions, whether they deal with sources, messages or organizations.

Credibility's evolution

Understanding credibility then requires understanding personal psychology and examining what people look for in and get out of the news. Wackman (1976) wrote the goal of communication for information exchange is to increase coorientation between two people. He defined coorientation as the level of similar attitudes, perceived congruency and the accuracy of these attitudes. Successful encounters would increase the accuracy between congruent attitudes. By extension, people turn to news to orient themselves to the world around them, and they'll be more successful if they find sources with which they already have something in common.

Finding something to relate to in the media is not hard. In fact, Reeves & Nass (1996) said it is natural. In what they called the "media equation," they suggested coorientation between source and receiver existed even as messages were disseminated through the media. People have evolved to respond to other humans. When they see something that resembles a human, they respond to the media the same way they would to another person, and they tend to like media that act in a human fashion. People find TV news more credible, they said, because they respond to the human element of the broadcast much better than they do to dry, flat text. The human elements of messages take three forms – social presence, coorientation, and expertise – which work together to create a connection that lead to credibility.

Social Presence

The ways in which non-human agents such as TV news broadcasts or even newspapers make receivers feel as if they are human constitutes what researchers call social presence. Short, Williams and Christie (1976) introduced social presence 30 years ago, drawing on scholarship that seeks to explain the social phenomena of mediated environments. They defined presence as "the degree of salience of the other person in the interaction and the consequent salience of the interpersonal relationship." Personal-communication researchers identify three dimensions of social presence: (1) source attention, defined as the degree to which the source is focused on relative to other cues, (2) co-presence, or the feeling of existing with another person, and (3) mutual awareness or psychological involvement — the feeling of being "known" by another (Biocca et al., 2001; Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997; Tamborini & Skalski, 2005). Many current researchers, however, define social presence not as a characteristic of the medium, but rather how participants use the medium to communicate (Gunawardena, 1995; Swan, 2002).

For example, Kim (2007) defined social presence as the idea of interacting with another person through a medium or interacting with a virtually created person without really noticing the person was not there or that he or she might not be real. Social presence is the personal characteristics that make a receiver connect with the source. It can be created from pictures, word choice, and tone, among other elements. The more social presence grows, she writes, the more connected audience members will feel to the media.

Coorientation

Recognizing a human presence is not enough, however. Research has shown credibility also depends on how closely a person allies with the source. This is coorientation. Most research on coorientation has been conducted since the mid-1960s but is an eclectic synthesis of five older

schools of thought dating back to 1902 (McLeod & Chaffee, 1973). Contemporary research has looked at everything from teenagers' coorientation behavior toward pop music (Clarke, 1973) to the ways scientists view newspaper reporters based on personal contacts with them (Ryan, 1982).

In a special edition of *American Behavioral Scientist* devoted to explicating coorientation, Wackman (1973) identified three coorientation dependent variables useful in interpersonal research: 1) Agreement, or the similarity between two people's cognitions about an object; 2) congruence, or the similarity between one person's cognition about an object and estimate of another person's cognition about that object; 3) accuracy, or the similarity between one person's estimate of another's cognitions about an object and that other person's actual cognitions about the object.

One way to enlarge the idea of coorienation, though, is through balance theory, (Heider, 1958) which involves a triad of relationships: a person or perceiver, another person and an issue or object. Balance theory posits people strive for balance among the three. When the three are not harmonious, such as when a likable person expresses an unlikable idea to a perceiver, the perceiver has several choices. Those include determining the other person is no longer likable or that the unlikable idea perhaps is not so bad afterall. The key to balance is person similarity, or whether a perceiver views another as being similar to him or her (Anderson and McMillon, 1995; Heider, 1958), and likability, the extent to which a perceiver likes another, perhaps because of similarities (Perloff, 2003). This closely relates to the concept of congruence stipulated under coorientation theory and suggests that balance and likeability might be elements of an overall picture of coorientation.

Expertise

Another element, however of source credibility is perceived expertise. Source credibility attracted the attention of social psychologists as a result of the work of Carl Hovland and his

colleagues at Yale University in the 1950s. Hovland, Janis and Kelley (1953) proposed an approach to attitude and change that includes four determinants: source, message, recipient and channel. Hovland et al. (1953) suggested a two-dimensional measure of source credibility, "trustworthiness" and "expertise," arguing a receiver's tendency to accept a speaker's message would depend on the receiver's perception of how informed and intelligent the speaker is and how motivated the speaker is to make valid assertions. Among the indicators of expertise is similarity to receiver in status, values, interests and needs, or, taken together, social background.

More recently, Perloff (2003) argues expertise, or special skills or know-how, is a core characteristic of credible communicators. But he notes whether a communicator should emphasize expertise or similarity to another can be tricky. When an issue concerns factual matters, for instance, an expert's intellectual knowledge might be more persuasive than similarity (Perloff, 2003). Journalists must consider this tradeoff carefully because of the media's premium on credibility.

In order for news to connect with readers, it must pay attention to each of the three elements, because stronger connections have the ability to dramatically alter users' perceptions. As connection grows, so does credibility. Sundar (1999) identified relatedness as one of four elements that defined both online and newspaper credibility. Greater social presence can also lead to reliance, which Wanta & Hu (1994) suggested, can increase credibility. Increased reliance, Ball-Rokeach (1988) writes, can lead to dependency, which may not affect credibility, but will definitely determine use. In fact, the more a person depends on a medium, the more he or she will use it, even if they start to find it not credible. The determining factor in dependency relationships, she writes, is how useful and convenient people find the medium, not how credible.

Building on Relationships

But the greatest effect social presence and its ilk can have in a news environment, Kim (2007) writes is when it leads to interactivity. She does not define interactivity as the number of things a person can do with the news. Instead, she relies upon Rafaeli's 1988 definition of interactivity as occurring only when readers and responders refer to past conversations, not just current ones. Interactivity has the potential to increase learning (Eveland & Morton, 2002), participation (Rafaeli, Ravid & Soroka, 2004), and positive affect (Rafaeli, 1988). Other studies (Kiousis, 2001; Greer, 2004), suggest that increased interactivity can lead to greater credibility online.

Defining credibility for the Internet age, then, requires more than just a study of site features. Flannagin & Metzger (2007) applied traditional and relational definitions of credibility to the Web and found that source matters. The nature of the organization and its messages were determining factors in the credibility respondents assigned. Participants consistently gave news sites the highest credibility scores, even when they had never seen that particular news site before. They could learn from the social cues the site provided how credible it was, but interestingly, the more social presence the site had the less credible it was. Personal weblogs were rated the least credible even though they had the exact same story as the news, and e-commerce sites. Meyer, Marchionni & Thorson (2006) also found social presence was not positively related to the credibility of news web sites. The main predictor in their study was expertise. Subsequent analysis revealed coorientation *not* social presence positively predicted expertise.

Credibility online

The impact of new credibility concepts, such as coorientation, social presence, expertise and interactivity online does not invalidate the more traditional credibility definitions originally applied to newspapers. But they must be considered alongside the Web's ability to make connections through technology and traditional concepts of trust, believability and expertise. Defining credibility also necessitates an understanding of the values and purpose of Web communication. Sites that connected most with audiences (Flannagin & Metzger, 2007) are sites that present trustworthy information in formats that spoke to the audiences and allowed them to connect. For example, e-commerce sites, they argue, have greater credibility when they post objective news items alongside the products they sell and allow users to review products. They fail, however, when they publish information or user reviews that try to look objective but exist only to sell a product.

Johnson & Kaye (2004) also suggest relationships help determine why users rate opinionated blogs more credible than news Web sites. They linked credibility both on- and offline, with how familiar a person was with the medium. Those with more familiarity with the Internet and less with traditional media rated blogs more credible. These were mostly younger people who had grown up using the Internet and had not developed a relationship with traditional media. They thought the traditional media could attract these people online if they adopted more of the social presence and coorientation attributes of the Web. For example, they found bias is a virtue online, as long as it is made clear. One reason they suggested why frequent Internet users did not rate the traditional media as credible was they did not trust reporters who were not willing to state their own bias.

Flannagin & Metzger (2007) confirmed how important coorientation is when they actually gave their study respondents an easy opportunity to verify the information on the site.

Few took it, even those with the most experience online. It seemed people knew they might not be able to trust the information, but if it looked credible based on the nature of the site, they did not actually check it.

Even if people do not take advantage of it, the verification function is available online only because the Web offers interactivity. This demonstrates the powerful ability this concept has, both in site features and in forging connections, to increase source, message, and organization credibility. Kovach & Rosenstiel (2006) argue how important transparency, or letting the audience know from whom and how reporters obtained their information, is. Interactivity makes transparency as simple as providing a hypertext link or offering a place for readers to ask questions. Johnson & Kaye (2004) suggest the inclusions of links to sources outside of the blog and to mainstream news sources helps add to their credibility. They also discussed the self-correcting nature of blogs, where alert readers can signal errors in stories and their efforts are taken seriously. Singer (2002) said few news sites in her study were willing to offer links outside of their own organization, and even less, at that time, gave readers the chance to comment. This could also help explain why news organizations lack credibility even as they move toward publishing on the Web.

Interactions, such as these, underscore how important incorporating the human element into a new definition of credibility for the Web is, but they also suggest how slow the news media have been to adapt. Gillmor (2004) said he envisions the Web making possible "journalism as a conversation," but media professionals have been slow to relinquish their roles as the sole purveyors of news. They cannot adapt, in part, because they may be too tied to the traditional definitions of credibility they have so long tried to follow.

In forging a new definition of credibility for the Internet, we cannot turn our back on the established traditions. Trust and believability remain central. Expertise is what journalists need more and more in the online world to earn trust and belief. Community affiliation fulfils the public service and democratic missions journalism must accomplish. How these important tenets of credibility are established is what needs to change. Simply publishing good information is no longer enough, if it ever was.

People want to be connected to the news, and the Internet has given them the tools to do it. Social presence and the media equation explain that even though this connection occurs through an impersonal medium, it can still be lasting and fulfilling. Interactivity offers ways to get readers started on a news site, but also explains why these credibility-establishing efforts fail. Comments and links do not satisfy the audience's connection needs when journalists are not involved. They also do not work when they are added to a site without considering how people will use them. To measure and increase credibility in the Internet age, researchers need to examine not only if trust, belief, and expertise exist. They must look at how individuals come to create these feelings and how the options available online can help.

If news organizations want their readers to take the next step and actually add their own news stories to their sites, they cannot end at improving their credibility. Submitting a news story is a more engaged behavior than simply reading one that is already there. Behaviors, such as this, must be motivated, and this dissertation now turns to a motivation theory that relies upon social connections to suggest reasons why people may act. In fact, many researchers have argued that Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory is a perfect match to the Internet and a perfect complement to uses and gratifications theory because it builds upon active choice to suggest the forces that may be at work motivating behaviors.

CHAPTER 5: SOCIAL COGNITIVE THEORY

Bandura first proposed Social Cognitive Theory or SCT in 1986 and related it to media, such as the Internet, by describing the modeling functions media serve. Rafaeli et al. (2005) describe it as the "cognitive underpinnings of social behavior. Social Cognition studies how social structures and social processes are mentally represented, and how social interaction is important for the development and practice of cognition" (59). Online, SCT can describe what motivates people to go online and use different online services. Its concepts, such as self-efficacy, can also help explain the level of success people expect from their online actions and their subsequent motivations to continue.

The Theory

Social Cognitive Theory grew from social learning theory in which Bandura and his colleagues tried to explain how children learned from the models. Initially, he (1977) identified three basic ways of observational learning:

1. A live model, which involves an actual individual demonstrating or acting out a behavior.
2. A verbal instructional model, which involves descriptions and explanations of a behavior.
3. A symbolic model, which involves real or fictional characters displaying behaviors in books, films, television programs, or online media.

But in developing social cognitive theory, he recognized the reciprocal relationship of personal or cognitive factors, the environment, and behavior. No one determined the other perfectly. The changes in one also change the others. This reciprocal relationship exists only because human beings have unique capabilities that allow them to reflect upon and judge their actions, even basing these judgments on what they see in others and speculating how they might affect them in the future.

People have with *symbolic capabilities* that allow them to interpret and use symbols. Language is the ultimate symbolic representation, but symbolic capability is not limited to words and phrases. Symbolizing affects how people derive meaning from the world around them. They see environmental portent in growing rain clouds or create fairy tales to represent ideal behaviors. The ability to find and understand symbols also leads to a *vicarious capability*. If people had to learn everything from they own experience, they would not survive, Bandura argues. People can learn more and learn faster by watching others. They can judge the utility or effect of behaviors based on whether they see others succeed or fail.

To learn from vicarious experiences, humans have to be able to think before they act. Bandura calls this the *forethought capability*. Based on what they know and what they see others do, people can list the consequences and benefits of actions before they undertake them. Forethought also applies learning to real world situations. Knowledge is useless if people cannot draw upon it before they act.

For knowledge to work effectively, people have to be able to control themselves. The *self-regulatory capability* allows people to put off biologic needs, such as hunger and thirst, but it also allows them to not act the same way as the models they have seen. This is akin to free will, which Sheldon (2006) describes as a person's veto power against biologic drives and societal pressures. Other researchers, such as Deci & Ryan (1984) have built upon this capability to explain that people function best when they feel they are free to make their own decisions.

Forethought and self-regulation are moot, however, if people do not have a way to determine whether their behaviors were correct. The *self-reflective capability* enables people to learn and grow from their actions. It also builds upon self-regulation to allow people to decide who they want to be and determine how much progress they are making. These capabilities form

the basis of human thought and action. They work together to inform decision making. In fact, the more people believe their actions will succeed largely determines whether they will act. This is self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy

Bandura (2001) defined self-efficacy as the belief in whether one's action will achieve the desired outcome. "Unless people believe that they can produce desired effects and forestall unforeseen ones by their actions they have little incentive to act" (270). Self-efficacy is possible only because of mankind's unique capabilities. Symbols, for example, help a person judge whether a behavior will be successful. Vicarious experience gives him or her something to compare to. Forethought allows him or her to think before acting, while self-regulation gives him or her control. Self-reflexivity might be the most important component of self-efficacy because it makes possible the comparison between self and others, among likely outcomes and differentiation of one's abilities.

Modeling

One of the main elements affecting self-efficacy is whether a person has seen someone achieve success from similar behavior. Models form the foundation of human learning. Two types of models exist, he said – mediated and unmediated. Unmediated are the models with which people personally interact. They can be friends or family. Mediated models are those we see in large contexts, such as through the media or through symbolic interactions. The mass media, in fact, may form the basis for many of our beliefs because they have become so pervasive. The influence of mediated models largely depend on how commonly they are seen, how much prestige they have, how successful they have been and, most importantly, how closely a person relates to them. Models play such an important role in learning because of our vicarious

capabilities. We must learn from others. We cannot experience everything. At the same time, modeling relies on symbolic and self-reflexive capabilities so people can see themselves in the model's shoes.

Our capacity to learn from models also relates directly to our relationship to them (Bandura, 1997). People engage in a process of social comparison daily, where they compare themselves to others around them. This process influences self-efficacy beliefs because as people see others like them succeed, they feel more confident they will succeed. Social comparison is especially important when one is uncertain of one's capabilies, or when two models, such as personal and vicarious experience conflict (87). The best models for self-efficacy are those that are predictable and controllable. We learn more for people who are like us, not just physically or socio-economically, but who seem more realistic. "Persons who are similar or slightly higher in ability provide the most informative comparative information for gauging one's own capabilities" (96). The best models are often those who have failed and have regained prominence again, such as Michael Jordan who was cut from his junior high basketball team, because it makes goals seem more attainable, predictable and controllable.

The media have exceptional power to sustain these personal appraisals because they encourage a process called "cognitive rehearsal" (93). Modeling with cognitive rehearsal builds stronger perceived efficacy than modeling alone. By watching others succeed and verbally explain how they did it, people compare their abilities to the model and use their vicarious capabilities to envision their chance of success. What this process in the end creates are two kinds of models: peer models and expert models. In both cases, it is important that neither peers nor experts seem way above or below a person's capabilities.

Social Cognition Online

Self-efficacy beliefs and models, especially those in the media, work better as an explanation for human behaviors online than need-fulfillment as explained in U&G theory every could. Suggesting the only motivation for using a medium is whether it can fulfill a person's need fails to recognize the complex nature of the Internet (Eastin, 2005). While U&G has tried to evolve "from a mechanistic perspective's interested in direct effects of media on receivers to a psychological perspective that stresses individual use and choice" (Ruggiero, 2000), cognitive models are still needed to give individuals the skills and internal standards needed to guide online behavior. With its focus on self-efficacy and outcome expectations, social cognitive theory provides a better model to predict Internet use. SCT is a broad theory of human behavior that may be applied to media attendance as well as media modeling (LaRose & Eastin, 2004).

Like U&G, SCT assumes people are "self-organizing, proactive, self-reflecting and self-regulating, not just reactive organisms shaped and shepherded by environmental effects of inner forces" (Bandura, 2001:266). However, SCT focuses more on action than choice, and online this means not just the sites people use but also what they do with them. SCT better incorporates such online concepts as interactivity because it focuses on action. It also recognizes the relationship people have with the media they choose. People evaluate the "soundness of their views by checking them against what others believe" (269). Social networks, for example, provide meaning through mutual feedback (291). But it is the transactions that occur within these social relationships rather than the ties themselves that explain behavior (292).

As the media have expanded, their ability to build social networks has improved. Online virtual networking expands this ability even further by extending membership beyond geographical boundaries and by giving members an easy way to disband when the group has

served its usefulness. In the context of the Internet, LaRose & Eastin (2004) argue SCT is a better predictor of continued media usage than U&G.

> "Comparing gratifications sought with those obtained reflects outcomes in the past, but not necessarily the likelihood they will be repeated in the present by engaging in further media consumption. Rather SCT assumes that outcome expectations are continually updated as a result of self-observation of our experience and (vicarious) observation of the behavioral consequences that occur to others" (LaRose & Eastin, 2004).

Computer-mediated communication, Rafaeli, Raban & Kalman (2005) say, is founded upon the idea that having multiple media available online can create a culture or social space in its own right.

> "In fact, the 'richness' of CMC is a variable, not a characteristic. Computer-mediated contexts, we submit, deserve treatment on their own terms, coming out from under the shadow of what used to be called 'real life' or 'meat space.' CMC is real enough" (61).

All communication should be understood for the modeling it offers toward understanding the consequences of behavior. People may choose online over face-to-face communication, for example, to interact with colleagues at work because the "leaner" medium may better fit the cognitive and operational needs of participants (72). In addition, online behavior mirrors real-world actions. Rafaeli & Raban (2004) found that both contexts require similar decision making biases and heuristics.

> "Online groups should be understood in this context: Just like offline groups of people, each one is different and evolving, and the fact that the interaction takes place online, thus linking participants separated by time and or space, should not result in a focus solely on the technological similarity between them, but rather should take into consideration socio-cognitive aspects that will affect the sociability of the group" (Rafaeli, Raban, & Kalman, 2005: 69).

Self-Efficacy Online

Recognizing the Internet as an amalgamation of artifacts (computer screens), social and mental systems, Yan (2006) said scholars need to expand the boundaries of Internet research to include cognitive development, social-cognitive development, and social development. One

variable all those developmental areas have in common is self-efficacy, and Internet users have been found to have high levels of self-efficacy (Kaye, 2005). In looking at how people used election information online, Kaye (2005) measured respondents' self-efficacy by having them rate their level of agreement with statements such as "people like me don't have any say about what the government does," and "every vote counts in an election, including yours and mine". High self-efficacy influenced people to turn away from traditional media, such as newspapers and TV news, and toward media that allow them to publicly express their own opinions and to affiliate with like-minded individuals, like the Internet (90).

While self-efficacy might have initially steered some toward the Web, it also explained how people make the most of their online experiences. Yan (2006) said understanding how complex the Internet can be technologically and socially is a vital element to self-efficacy. Through fill-in-the-blank exercises and drawing activities with grade school children, Yan found a reciprocal connection between understanding the technical and social complexity behind the Internet and overall use. Children may understand the technology in fifth or sixth grade, but this is a full year or two before they get its social complexity. "It is essential to teach children more scientific knowledge about how the Internet works in order to induce social understanding that will lead to appropriate caution about online safety" (427).

Understanding the technology might be the first step toward self-efficacy, but Eastin (2005) argues education needs to go further. Greater self-efficacy will decrease negative outcome expectations, and this growth will occur only when users understand different motives of Internet use have different efficacy expectations. He focused on three primary motives teens have for Internet use: entertainment, information seeking and socialization. The socialization model is doubly important because how teens see others using the Internet provides examples of

how likely their desired outcomes are. Overall, he found self-efficacy and its development an important moderating component to investigating "psychological divides as well as more traditional models of communication such as information processing of online information" (71). For example, self-efficacy was a strong determinant in information seeking and entertainment models, but failed to predict the socialization context. Eastin (2005) struggled to explain why:

> "Perhaps are youths observe peers struggling to orient themselves to information online, efficacy levels and subsequent use decrease … Perhaps, social Internet use is so prevalent in today's society that social influence models no longer have an effect on these specific self-regulatory mechanisms. Here a measure such as habit could better explain use" (71).

What is more likely, he argued, is the continually changing nature of the Internet forces users to continually modify their self-efficacy beliefs with each online experience.

The key to improving the online experience is finding ways to increase self-efficacy. Whitty & McLaughlin (2007) found it plays a critical role in determining how people will use the resources available online (1444). They found that those higher in self-efficacy were more likely to seek information online. But they were also more likely to go online for computer-based entertainment. Even seemingly easy tasks, such as finding information online about sporting events or one's hobbies required a modest level of self-efficacy because this action needed more skills than aimlessly surfing the Web. The study's goal was originally to find how people who described themselves as lonely used the Web differently, and they found these people used the Web most for online entertainment and as an alternative for offline entertainment. "An implication of such a finding is that if researchers find that use of the Internet for entertainment is beneficial for lonely people, then we might want to train these individuals to use the Internet more effectively" (1444).

Another way to improve self-efficacy, Wu & Tsai (2006) found is to change users' attitudes toward the Internet. In a study of Taiwanese college students, they found how much

control students thought they had over their Internet experience was a significant predictor of their overall self-efficacy. Use, in fact, might have been the main difference between self-efficacy scores. “Students, who used the Internet more frequently, tended to attain better communicative self-efficacy regarding the Internet” (448). Educators who expect their students to survive online will need to provide some “effective ways to improve students’ independent control of using the Internet and their capacity of Internet-based communication and interaction of Internet-based environments” (448).

Modifying and maintaining high self-efficacy online is important because self-efficacy not only determines whether someone will use the ‘Net, but also what outcomes they get from the actions. Self-efficacy, for example, has been found to significantly predict continued participation in online environments, such as discussion or support groups (Rafaeli, Ravid, & Soroka, 2004). The social dimensions of the Internet and self-efficacy are even more important when considering self-efficacy is not only specific and changeable, it can also be universal. Schwarzer et al. (1999) wrote self-efficacy is not indigenous to one culture. They suggested that acknowledged self-efficacy measures had similar effects on Canadian citizens, German teachers and German high school students.

In summary, self-efficacy is a strong determinant for behavior, which, through modeling, the media can easily influence. Increasing self-efficacy toward online contribution means the media cannot simply publish stories in which staff writers are the sole authors. They can provide *peer* models by publishing stories from audience members or they can provide *expert* models by working with audience members collaboratively. Either way, it is vital for the media to help their audiences determine the metaphoric structures upon which Web sites are based. This can be as simple as participants how their contributions will be used and effectively guiding them through

the submission process. It also means not undermining confidence by assuming complete control of the process. The media can also provide peer models that

Self-efficacy and social cognitive theory emphasize the need for connection and credibility online. The foundation of SCT is socialization, and the Internet is a social medium first and foremost. The strength of that socialization is a powerful motivation. People learn more and are persuaded more by models to which they feel connected. In fact, the strongest models and persuaders are like-minded individuals, such as family members, but also people who have similar points of view and who have experienced similar life experiences (Bandura, 1993).

The expansion social cognitive theory makes on uses and gratifications offers a way in which to judge media participation. Add the concepts of social presence, coorientation and expertise as predictors of credibility and merge them with the relationship building power of interactivity, and this literature review suggests a media participation model. The model begins with credibility, but adds the influence of interactivity in the online world, and in turn, may explain why online credibility does not exactly mirror its mainstream media counterparts.

Online it is so much easier to form connections that it must be considered in not only why people use a medium, but why they chose to contribute to it as well. Thorson & Duffy (2006) suggest that the need for connection is one of the main elements of media choice in the online landscape in their media choice model. This study, however, takes the next step in suggesting that connection goes beyond choice to explain whether people interact with the media. Social cognitive theory underscores how important connection is in driving self-efficacy, which Bandura (1997) argues can be the main determinant for behavior. Figure 1 presents a graphic depiction of this theoretical model based on the literature and the foundation for the research which will follow.

CHAPTER 6: HYPOTHESES AND METHODS

To explain the relationship between online news features and the attitudes it creates, especially in relation to self efficacy and the intention to contribute, this dissertation has created an experiment that tests how altering the byline, or who wrote the story, affects concepts such as credibility and in turn influences self-efficacy and the intention to participate. The manipulations are based on the peer and expert models discussed in SCT (Bandura, 1997) in order to determine if the ways in which the media use stories submitted by their audience members affect a person's attitude toward the site and the reporter. It asked respondents to rate the social presence, expertise, coorientation, credibility, interest and perceived interactivity they perceived after reading stories online written by CNN staff writers, audience members and staff and audience working together and comparing the ratings. Through random assignment, the experiment accounted for the influence of confounding variables, such as story topic, the order in which the authorship conditions were presented and the writer's gender. The experimental design offers allowed me the opportunity to isolate the unique contributions story authorship makes, while factoring out the randomness that occured in the real world.

In setting up the questionnaire, I followed two experiments I have already conducted (Meyer, Marchionni & Thorson, in press; Marchionni, Meyer & Thorson, 2007) by asking participants to read six news stories. All six news stories were originally written by CNN staff writers, and they encompassed six different topics: Health, U.S. News, World News, Entertainment, Technology, and Crime. I also presented the stories within a CNN Web site frame and told participants that I took each of them from the site itself.

In creating the six random conditions of the experiment, I manipulated the original stories to chance who wrote them. Of the six stories participants were asked to read, two were written

by staff writers and were almost exactly like the stories pulled from CNN.com. The only change I made to ensure participants recognized the author was to add a clear byline at the beginning and an "About the Author" box at the end that explained how long the reporter have covered the topic for CNN.

I changed two to suggest they were written by CNN audience members who submitted the stories through iReport.com. To do this, I changed the byline to "iReporter" instead of staff writer. I also changed the "About the Author" box to clearly indicate this person did not work for CNN but either worked within or had commensurate experience in the topic. This manipulation fits the peer motivation model.

The final two stories were manipulated to suggest that staff writers and audience members wrote them together. To do this, I changed the byline to read "Written by CNN Staff Writers in conjunction with iReporters like you." Throughout the story, I changed the attribution of the quotes to indicate they were sent to CNN either by audience members or found by CNN staff writers scouring the Internet. In the box on the right, I explained the process of contributing to CNN while also trying to help people feel confident they would be successful. I changed the "About the Author" box to shed light on the collaborative process. I did not mention a specific reporters' name or experience. This fits the expert model because it encourage "cognitive rehearsal" and should, according to the literature, enhance self-efficacy and the intent to participate even more.

In the six experimental order conditions, I did not change the order in which the topics appeared. Participants always read a technology story first, followed by U.S. News, entertainment, world news, crime and health. I did change the order in which participants received the different manipulations. For example, the first condition had a staff written

technology story first, followed by an audience and then collaborative story. The second condition had participants read an audience written story on technology first, followed by a collaboratively written story on U.S. news and staff written story on entertainment.

The process was repeated twice for each story condition to ensure that one story or the other did not prejudice the responses. For the audience and staff written stories, I also changed the gender of the reporter to test whether gender had a random effect. The first story in the first experimental condition, for example, was a staff written story written by a man, while the second was an audience written story written by a woman. I have tried to represent the six experimental conditions on Table 1.

Table 1 2 (reporter's gender) x 3 (self-efficacy) x 6 (experimental condition) within-subjects design

	Story Topic					
	Technology	U.S.	Ent.	World	Crime	Health
1	Staff, M	Audience, F	Collaborative	Staff, M	Audience, F	Collaborative
2	Audience, F	Collaborative	Staff, M	Audience, F	Collaborative	Staff, M
3	Collaborative	Staff, M	Audience, F	Collaborative	Staff, M	Audience, F
4	Staff, F	Audience, M	Collaborative	Staff, F	Audience, M	Collaborative
5	Audience, M	Collaborative	Staff, F	Audience, M	Collaborative	Staff, F
6	Collaborative	Staff, F	Audience, M	Collaborative	Staff, F	Audience, M

The experiment was designed as a 2 (reporter gender) x 3 (self-efficacy) x 6 (condition) within subjects matrix. The six experimental conditions control for the effects of story order and reporter's gender. It gave participants two stories with each manipulation to control out the effects of topic.

After each story, participants answered the same block of questions based on the variables in the model. I operationalized the concepts as follows:

- Social Presence – how much readers notice a real person behind the story
  - I felt like I got to know the reporter.
  - At times, I felt like the reporter was in the room with me.
  - I thought of the reporter while reading the article.
- Expertise – the level of proficiency the reporter has with the topic

    - The reporter sounds like he knows what he's talking about
    - The reporter sounds like an expert on this topic.
    - The reporter has done his homework on this story.
- Coorientation – how closely allied the reader feels with the reporter
    - I understand the story's issue in the same way the reporter does.
    - I felt like this reporter probably is a person kind of like me.
    - I think this reporter has my interests at heart.
- Story Credibility – how much readers trust and believe in the article they are reading.
    - The story was accurate.
    - I believe what I read in the story.
    - I can trust what I read.
- Organization Credibility – how much readers trust and believe in the organization behind the article they are reading.
    - I think I can rely on this site.
    - This company probably cares about readers like me.
    - The company seems in-touch with the average person.
    - The company probably thinks it's important to publish quality reporting.
- Interactivity – the level of involvement participants see with the site and the organization
    - I can see a lot of ways to interact on this site.
    - The way this story is presented uses the power of the 'Net.
    - The site helps me get to know the reporter.
    - If I comment on this story, I'm confident the reporter will respond.

After each story, I will also ask participants about how much they liked and were interested in the story.

- Interest / Involvement
    - Overall, I liked this article.
    - This article was involving.
    - This article was NOT interesting (reverse coded).
    - This article was relevant to my life.

The main dependent variable for this experiment will be intent to participate, which I have operationalized as how likely they would be after reading the article to share something similar on the same site. I used the following questions, based on Wise, Hamman & Thorson (2007):

- Intent to participate
    - I would enjoy contributing to this site.
    - I think I would reply to the author.
    - I am hesitant to voice my opinions about this story (reverse coded).
    - I am interested in reading other stories from this author.
    - Reading this story made me less interested in participating (reverse coded).

Intent to participate is a close approximation of actual participation, which is almost impossible to measure in an experimental setting. I thought about providing a comment at box at the end of each story, but Wise, Hamman & Thorson (2007) found that few participants accepted the opportunity. Those that did said they felt compelled to to get credit for the experiment. While this measure has similarities to self-efficacy, I operationalized self-efficacy alone to determine how effective the manipulation was and to provide an additional independent variables. I used the following questions:

- Self-efficacy
  - Seeing how others have contributed helps me know I could do this too.
  - I am confident I would be able to contribute to this site if I wanted to.
  - The site persuades me that I would be able to join the discussion.

The self-efficacy manipulation provides a way to test how the other dependent variables including social presence, coorientation, expertise, credibility and connection change, if at all, in different authorship conditions. The combination of social presence, coorientation, expertise, and credibility could lead to a new variable – connection – that might be a better measure of how much participants trust and believe in the site than credibility.

Hypotheses

Based on the authorship conditions, this study tested the following hypotheses:

H1. Measurements of social presence, coorientation, expertise, credibility, interactivity, and perceived self-efficacy will be higher when the story is written by the audience (the peer model) than when the story is written by a staff writer.

H2. Measurements of social presence, coorientation, expertise, credibility, interactivity, and perceived self-efficacy will be higher when the story is written collaboratively by staff and audience members (the expert model) than when the story is written by a staff writer.

H3. Measurements of social presence, coorientation, expertise, credibility, interactivity, and perceived self-efficacy will be highly correlated between stories that are written by the audience and stories that are written collaboratively.

After testing for mean differences between the independent variables, this study also established a model to determine what predicts the main dependent variable, intent to participate. The following hypotheses address the relationships the literature suggests:

H4. Increasing connection to the reporter (through coorientation, social presence and expertise) and the site (through credibility) will have a direct positive effect on perceived self-efficacy.

H5. Increasing perceived self-efficacy will have a direct positive effect on respondents' intent to participate.

To test these hypotheses and administer the experiment, I obtained permission from the University of Missouri's Institutional Review Board before recruited participants. I started by offering the experiment to students in the Missouri School of Journalism. I advertised the study on the school's SONA Experiment Management System, which lists all the students students can complete for extra credit in journalism classes. Almost all of my student participants came from three sections of the introductory journalism class J1100: Principles of American Journalism.

However, other experiments I have conducted using SONA have been criticized, unfairly, for relying only on students. In addition, I wanted at least 30 participants in each of the six conditions for statistical power. I opened up participation to Columbia and university communities at large by advertising the study through small classified advertisements in the *Columbia Daily Tribune* and on *Craigslist.* I also posted announcements about the study on several Columbia message boards and on e-mails lists including FreeTalkColumbia and FreeCycleColumbia and on the LinkedIn group for University of Missouri alumni.

Participants completed the entire study online. To ensure the random assignment necessary to make the experimental findings of this study valid I created a computer program using PHP code that randomly assigned participants to one of the six experimental conditions. When participants visited the Web site I advertised, the program ran behind the scenes and provided them a link to click. The link was chosen at random by the computer from the list of six

sites I provided. I set up each experimental condition separately on FreeOnlineSurveys.com, an online survey site.

To encourage participants to start and complete the study, which took most more than 30 minutes, I offered a random drawing for one of five $50 iTunes gift cards. At the end of the experiment, I asked participants to include their e-mail address if they would like to enter the drawing, but I kept the list of e-mail addresses separate from the responses. I did not connect their responses to their e-mail address.

CHAPTER 7: RESULTS

In all, 224 people participated in the study. Of those, 175 completed the entire study. Of the 49 who did not, almost all of them only read the first story and answered the questions about it. I do not have demographic data on those who did not complete the study because I asked those questions at the end. I imagine that most of those people are students who did enough to get their extra credit point and then quit. I also made it clear from the beginning and throughout the study that participants would read six stories. After reading the first, many might have decided six was too much.

Random assignment to experimental conditions attempted to mitigate the impact of demographics, but I asked some demographic questions about the participants at the end of the study. Less than 45 % of those who completed the entire study were students (74 out of 175), and the ages of the participants ranged from 15 to 72. Participants were almost equally divided between men (46 %) and women (54 %). I allowed participants to report their exact age. Besides the students who were mostly 18 (15 %) or 19 (30 %), the age ranges were varied, with no more than five people at one age. Five participants reported their age as 28, five said they were 29, while four said they were 39 and four said they were 52. Four participants were 65 and older.

The sample was 88 % white, 5 % Black and 3 % Hispanic and 2 % Asian. It also represented a wide range of other socio-economic factors such as education and income. More than half of the participants had attended some college 53 %, while 18 % said they had an advanced degree (either a Master's or a Ph.D.). Another 53 % reported incomes less than $25,000 annually, while 12 % had incomes of more than $100,000 a year.

One of the components of self-efficacy is previous experience, so I asked participants when the last time they had contributed to an online news site was and how often they contribute.

Even though the participant pool included 75 students, who are supposed to be online all the time, few participants had ever contributed something online, even a photograph or a comment on another story. For both questions, more than 50 % of respondents said they had never contributed at all, while another 30 % said they contributed as infrequently as once a year or once a month. The nearly even split caused me to combine these questions and create a single dichotomous variable of whether the person had ever contributed a story or comment. Less than 48 % of study participants said they had never contributed, while 52 % had contributed at least once.

To determine if participants noticed the story authors and the experimental manipulation, I asked them to answer who wrote the story after reading each one. More than 80 % of the authors were identified correctly.

The random assignment script assigned nearly equal proportions of participants to each of the experiment conditions. However, the numbers of those who completed the entire study were not equal. Condition one had 24 participants, condition two had 23, condition three had 30, condition four had 41, condition five had 28, while condition six had 33. Based on the uneven numbers of people assigned to the conditions and the 49 people who did not complete the entire study but read at least one story and completed the corresponding block of questions, I created two databases to examine the hypotheses. The first used the participant as the unit of analysis and grouped all of a person's responses on one line. This allowed for a within subjects design where the person served as his or her own control.

The second database used the story as the unit of analysis and broke out the responses to each of the six stories on its own line. It also recorded individual information about each person, the condition in which the story appeared and the topic of the story. This allowed for between

subjects testing based on the experimental manipulations and prediction tests that could factor out the influence of story topic, experimental condition number and reporter's gender.

Factors

In the first database, I performed a confirmatory factor analysis to see if the questions I used to operationalize the concepts were ultimately related. I also combined the two stories they read that had the same author (either staff writer, audience member or collaborative) to test if there were any differences between the stories. In all cases but one the questions and the two different stories with the same author type factored together.

The one question that did not factor together was *Intent to Participate* as adapted from Wise, Hamman & Thorson (2007). The factor scores clearly displayed two variables, one that included the questions "I would enjoy contributing to this story," "I think I would reply to the author," and "I am interested in reading other stories from this author." The second factor included the two questions "I am hesitant to voice my opinions about this story," and "Reading this story made me less interested in participating" which were reversed coded to match the direction of the others. The negative phrasing of the questions could have led them to group together. Regardless, I created two measurements from the original *Intent to Participate* factor that I labeled "Intent to Participate with the Reporter" and "Intent to Contribute a Story." Table 2 displays the Cronbach's alpha scores for each concept divided by story author.

Table 2 Cronbach's alpha scores for questions that explain concepts listed.

Concept	*α*	***Concept***	*α*
Social Presence (Staff)	.702	**Interest (Staff)**	.782
Social Presence (Audience)	.803	**Interest (Audience)**	.807
Social Presence (Both)	.838	**Interest (Both)**	.836
Expertise (Staff)	.759	**Interactivity (Staff)**	.842

Expertise (Audience)	.838	**Interactivity (Audience)**	.813
Expertise (Both)	.865	**Interactivity (Both)**	.772
Coorientation (Staff)	.785	**Intent to Participate: Reporter (Staff)**	.830
Coorientation (Audience)	.809	**Intent to Participate: Reporter (Aud.)**	.874
Coorientation (Both)	.829	**Intent to Participate: Reporter (Both)**	.825
Story Credibilty (Staff)	.870	**Intent to Participate: Story (Staff)**	.573
Story Credibilty (Audience)	.868	**Intent to Participate: Story (Audience)**	.734
Story Credibilty (Both)	.902	**Intent to Participate: Story (Both)**	.566
Organization Credibility (Staff)	.850	**Self Efficacy (Staff)**	.804
Organization Credibility (Audience)	.900	**Self Efficacy (Audience)**	.832
Organization Credibility (Both)	.884	**Self Efficacy (Both)**	.870

Hypotheses 1-3

To test H1-3, the effect of the author of the story, I used the first database and set up a 3 (authorship) x 6 (experimental condition) repeated measures ANOVA that looked at each of the 10 concepts I addressed in the study. I entered author as a within subjects variable to test if participants rated the three authorship conditions differently, and condition as a between subjects variable to account for the variance from the experimental condition to which participants were randomly assigned. I compared each authorship condition across all 10 concepts. The findings are summarized in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3 Repeated Measures ANOVA table of factor variables contrasting the story's author (CNN reporter, both, or CNN audience member) with the random experimental order in which participants were placed (1-6).

		Social Presence	***Expertise***	***Coorientation***	***Story Credibility***	***Organization Credibility***
				Within Subjects		
	df			F		
Author	2	224.045**	40.490 **	6.459**	25.938 **	5.326**
Author * Order	10	1.979*	5.151**	4.403**	4.367**	21.131**
Error	346	(.704)	(.600)	(.605)	(.528)	(.392)

			Between Subjects			
Source	1	3792.624**	5897.568**	5191.002**	5924.720**	3986.953**
Intercept	5	1.135	2.474*	2.946*	2.045	1.859
	173					

		Interest / Involvement	***Interactivity***	***Intent to Participate: Reporter***	***Intent to Contribute a Story***	***Self-Efficacy***
				Within Subjects		
	df			F		
Author	2	15.163**	70.206**	13.521**	4.744**	40.802**
Author * Order	10	4.263**	12.338**	4.607**	1.908*	1.760
Error	346	(.508)	(.453)	(.510)	(.490)	(.518)
				Between Subjects		
Source	1	7096.164**	4765.559**	2558.262**	6059.805**	4240.053**
Intercept	5	1.742	2.010	2.520*	1.785	1.540
Error	173	(1.657)	(1.649)	(2.675)	(1.839)	(2.299)

Note: Values in parentheses represent mean square errors.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

The ANOVA suggested direct effects for nearly all of the variables without accounting for between subjects differences from the experimental conditions. The largest differences between the three story types were social presence ($F=224.045$, $p<.01$), expertise ($F=40.49$, $p<.01$), story credibility ($F=25.938$, $p<.01$), organization credibility ($F=5.326$, $p<.01$), interest ($F=15.163$, $p<.01$), perceived interactivity ($F=70.206$, $p<.01$), intent to participate with the reporter ($F=13.521$, $p<.01$), intent to contribute a story ($F=4.744$, $p<.01$) and self efficacy ($F=40.802$, $p<.01$). Figures 2 – 12 graphically represent the mean square differences between the concepts and are found in Appendix 1. Table 5 also displays the pairwise differences and their statistical significance while adjusting for multiple comparison with the Bonferroni method.

Table 4 Pairwise comparison of mean differences between the authorship conditions used in the study for each concept tested adjusting for multiple comparisons using the Bonferroni method.

Story Author (I)	***Story Author (J)***	***Social Presence (I-J)***	***Expertise (I-J)***	***Coorientation (I-J)***	***Story Crediblity (I-J)***	***Organization Credibility (I-J)***
Staff Writer	Audience	-1.740**	.241*	-.042	.336**	.012
	Both	-.180	.736**	.237*	.560**	.196*
Audience	Staff	1.740**	-.241*	.042	-.336**	-.012

Both	Both	1.560**	.495**	.279**	.224**	.184**
	Staff	.180	-.736**	-.237*	-.560**	-.196*
	Audience	-1.560**	-.495**	-.279**	-.224**	-.184**

Story Author (I)	***Story Author (J)***	***Interest (I-J)***	***Interactivity (I-J)***	***Intent to Participate: Reporter (I-J)***	***Intent to Contribute a Story (I-J)***	***Self Efficacy (I-J)***
Staff Writer	Audience	-.140	-.854**	-.200	-.088	-.682**
	Both	.275**	-.345**	.200*	.142	-.479**
Audience	Staff	.140	.854***	.200	.088	.682**
	Both	.416**	.509**	.400**	.230**	.203**
Both	Staff	-.275**	.345**	-.200*	-.142	.479**
	Audience	-.416**	-.509**	-.400*	-.230**	-.203**

The most significant differences exist between stories written by audience members and those written by staff writers, suggesting partial support for **H1**: Measurements of social presence, coorientation, expertise, credibility, interactivity will be higher in the peer model than in the control (straight news) model. The mean score differences for social presence, story credibility, interactivity and self efficacy are all statistically significant at the $p<.01$ level. Participants in the study found stories written by a staff writer more credible, but less interactive. They also found more social presence and perceived self-efficacy in stories that were written by audience members. Expertise was also statistically significant at the $p<.05$ level, meaning participants found staff writers more expert than audience members even though both stories had a tagline at the bottom explaining the author's experience with the story topic.

For **H2**: Measurements of social presence, coorientation, expertise, credibility, interactivity will be higher in collaboratively written stories or the expert model than those written by staff writers, strong statistical support ($p<.01$) was found only for the interactivity and self-efficacy concepts. Participants found the stories written collaborative much more interactive and more inspiring in self-efficacy than those written by a staff writer alone. On the other hand strong statistical support ($p<.01$) was evident for the mean differences between collaborative and staff written stories on the concepts of expertise, story credibility, and interest, but in the

opposite direction than hypothesized. Participants rated stories written collaboratively less expert, less credible and less likeable than those written by staff writers. There was also statistical support at the $p<.05$ level that participants also cooriented toward and intended to participate with the reporters of collaboratively written stories less than with reporters who wrote alone.

For **H3**, which suggests that collaborative and audience written stories will be highly correlated, I once again found partial support, but these stories were highly negatively correlated. In fact, participants found more social presence, expertise, coorientation, credibility, interest, interactivity, intention to participate with a reporter, intention to contribute a story, and self efficacy in stories written by audience members than stories written collaboratively. All of these differences were statistically significant at the $p<.01$ level.

When examining why some of the mean differences were not statistically significant as hypothesized, I looked to the between subjects scores on the repeated measures ANOVA. For the concepts of expertise ($F=2.474$, $p<.05$), coorientation($F=2.946$, $p<.05$), and intent to participate with the reporter ($F=2.520$, $p<.05$), the intercept, meaning the interaction between story author and experimental condition is statistically significant. Figures 14 - 16 graph the mean differences for these concepts as separate lines for each experimental condition. Table 5 also displays the estimated marginal mean scores that account for the between subjects effect of the experimental condition.

Table 5 Estimated marginal mean scores for all concepts accounting for differences between experimental conditions.

Condition	***Story_Author***	***Social Presence***	***Expertise****	***Coorientation****	***Story Credibility***	***Organization Credibility***
1	Staff	2.944	4.764	3.910	5.326	4.479
	Audience	4.924	4.236	3.764	4.542	3.715
	Both	3.236	3.910	3.757	4.438	4.139

2	Staff	3.217	5.036	4.507	5.239	4.261
	Audience	5.217	5.464	4.957	5.580	5.297
	Both	3.514	4.645	4.188	4.964	4.775
3	Staff	3.050	5.389	4.583	5.300	4.811
	Audience	4.506	4.628	4.150	4.711	4.250
	Both	2.922	3.611	3.639	4.044	3.428
4	Staff	3.004	5.122	4.285	5.577	4.740
	Audience	5.057	4.780	4.451	4.931	4.089
	Both	3.321	4.374	4.317	4.874	4.703
5	Staff	2.946	4.786	4.042	5.202	3.887
	Audience	4.833	4.976	4.774	5.054	4.946
	Both	3.202	4.685	4.286	5.298	4.732
6	Staff	3.419	5.106	4.702	5.222	4.753
	Audience	4.485	4.672	4.187	5.035	4.561
	Both	3.465	4.561	4.419	4.889	3.975

Condition	***Story_Author***	***Interest / Involvement***	***Interactivity***	***Intent to Participate: Reporter****	***Intent to Contribute a Story***	***Self Efficacy***
1	Staff	4.719	3.396	3.472	4.615	3.889
	Audience	4.656	3.656	3.035	4.365	4.072
	Both	4.255	3.948	3.104	4.271	4.062
2	Staff	4.707	3.239	3.957	4.587	3.881
	Audience	5.364	4.870	4.580	5.076	4.913
	Both	4.658	4.011	3.543	4.565	4.304
3	Staff	4.975	3.571	3.617	4.875	3.906
	Audience	4.767	4.188	3.633	4.842	4.550
	Both	4.058	3.217	3.072	4.467	4.389
4	Staff	5.088	3.601	3.671	4.915	4.000
	Audience	4.954	3.942	3.622	4.707	4.642
	Both	4.848	4.168	3.521	4.677	4.499
5	Staff	4.522	3.089	3.226	4.589	3.714
	Audience	5.290	4.862	4.190	5.089	4.821
	Both	4.915	4.036	3.595	4.795	4.571
6	Staff	4.875	4.102	3.889	4.386	4.340
	Audience	4.697	4.602	3.970	4.417	4.823
	Both	4.500	3.689	3.793	4.341	4.778

The estimated marginal means scores demonstrate that some variance among the three concepts may be accounted for by the different experimental conditions to which people were assigned. Experimental condition one had much lower expertise, coorientation and intent to participate: reporter scores than the other conditions. This condition had the most straightfoward story order. Participants read a straight news story first, followed by an audience written and then a collaborative story. This presentation could have accounted for some of the variance in the concepts.

However, experimental condition four also had a similar story order, except the gender of the reporters was different, and its scores were not markedly different from the others. In addition, the between subjects F scores are significant at the $p<.05$ level, while the within subjects F scores for all three concepts were statistically significant at the $p<.01$ level. This means that not all of the variance can be accounted for by experimental condition, but it could explain why none of those concepts were statistically significant in the pairwise comparisons between models.

In addition, I tested the effect the reporter's gender might have in confounding the variance explained between the experimental models. I used the second database based on obsevations to perform an independent samples T test on the staff and audience member written stories only because the expert or collaborative condition did not identify the author's gender, and found statistically significant ($p<.05$) differences on three concepts. Table 6 below presents the results of the T test.

Table 6 Independent samples t-test comparing mean scores of concepts with the gender of the author of the story. The results are also separated by whether the author is a CNN audience member or a CNN reporter.

Story Author		***Reporter's Gender***	***N***	***Mean***	***SD***	***t***
Audience	Social Presence	Female	163	4.7935	1.42879	.145
		Male	182	4.7711	1.43813	.145
	Expertise	Female	163	4.7178	1.40036	-.467
		Male	182	4.7857	1.29971	-.465
	Coorientation	Female	163	4.2474	1.42801	-1.463
		Male	182	4.4560	1.21993	-1.450
	Story Credibility	Female	163	4.8732	1.30432	.150
		Male	182	4.8535	1.13238	.149
	Interest / Involvement	Female	163	4.8865	1.16508	2.559*
		Male	182	4.5701	1.13043	2.554*
	Organization Credibility	Female	163	4.3579	1.40280	-.896
		Male	182	4.4853	1.23960	-.890
	Perceived Interactivity	Female	163	4.2071	1.22336	1.154
		Male	182	4.0563	1.20108	1.152
	Intent to Participate with	Female	163	3.6973	1.41461	-1.936
	Reporter	Male	182	3.9799	1.29558	-1.927
	Intent to Contribute a Story	Female	163	4.7791	1.24238	3.315**
		Male	182	4.3132	1.35567	3.331**

	Perceived Self Efficacy	Female	163	4.4847	1.27453	-1.694
		Male	139	4.7290	1.21869	-1.700
Reporter	Social Presence	Female	211	3.1927	1.37849	-1.189
		Male	165	3.3596	1.31388	-1.196
	Expertise	Female	211	5.0126	1.14681	.220
		Male	165	4.9859	1.19640	.219
	Coorient	Female	211	4.3318	1.11957	-1.059
		Male	165	4.4525	1.06811	-1.065
	Story Credibility	Female	211	5.3618	1.14699	1.576
		Male	165	5.1697	1.20558	1.566
	Interest / Involvement	Female	211	4.8472	1.19075	.055
		Male	165	4.8409	.93911	.057
	Organization Credibility	Female	211	4.4344	1.22681	.218
		Male	165	4.4061	1.28366	.217
	Perceived Interactivity	Female	211	3.6256	1.21655	2.322*
		Male	165	3.3455	1.08569	2.354*
	Intent to Participate with	Female	211	3.5387	1.21366	-.771
	Reporter	Male	165	3.6364	1.22409	-.771
	Intent to Contribute a Story	Female	211	4.4621	1.14475	-1.477
		Male	165	4.6333	1.07654	-1.489
	Perceived Self Efficacy	Female	211	4.0482	1.25121	1.381
		Male	165	3.8727	1.18537	1.390

What this test suggested is that participants were more likely to find a story written by a woman interesting and interactive. They were also more likely to participate with the reporter if she was a woman. I did not test whether the participants' gender mattered because the experiment did not create an express way to compare the differences between staff or audience written stories by men or women.

Hypotheses 4, 5

After establishing the relationship between the concepts and the author of the story, I turned to the database that used the observation as the unit of analysis to determine the relationships between the concepts and test **H4**: Increasing their connection to the reporter (through coorientation, social presence and expertise) and the site (through credibility) will have a direct positive effect on perceived self-efficacy, and **H5**: Increasing perceived self-efficacy will have a direct positive effect on respondents' intent to participate. The observation database also better allowed me to account for the variance explained by the confounding variables such as

experimental condition (or the order in which participants read the different story types), story topic and demographics, such as age, gender, education and income. I did not test for reporter gender after it was only statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level in the independent samples T test and because it only related to two of the three models I tested.

To test **H4**, I set up a hierarchical linear regression to predict self-efficacy scores. I ran this test four separate times: first on all the observations, then separating out the peer, expert and control models. The general linear model begins with demographic variables at level one, adds the confounding variables experiment number and story topic at level two and whether the people have ever contributed to an online news site at level three. Previous experience is one factor Bandura (1997) identifies as a potential precursor to self efficacy. At level four, the model adds the concepts the literature identifies as leading to a connection, namely social presence, expertise and coorientation. Finally, the model adds two measures of credibility, story and organization, to determine if connection and credibility work together to predict how participants will rate their self-efficacy. The results of all four regressions are summarized in Tables 7 – 10.

Table 7 Hierarchical Linear Regression predicting self efficacy for all authorship conditions.

	Model 1		***Model 2***		***Model 3***		***Model 4***		***Model 5***	
Variable	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*
Participant's Gender	.024	.009	.013	.005	.000	.000	-.040	-.016	-.054	-.021
Age	-.003	-.029	-.005	-.048	-.005	-.051	.000	-.006	.001	.009
Education	-.015	-.019	.008	.010	.009	.011	.015	.020	.019	.026
Income	.041	.046	.044	.049	.046	.051	.033	.037	.030	.033
Experiment			.099	.132**	.100	.132**	.098	.130**	.099	.131**
Story Topic			.027	.036	.027	.036	-.043	-.058	-.032	-.043
Contributed?					-.081	-.032	-.017	-.007	-.014	-.005
Social Presence							.264	.320**	.240	.291**
Expertise							-.035	-.037	-.037	-.039
Coorientation							.259	.257**	.182	.181**
Story Credibility									-.119	-.120**
Organization Credibility									.245	.257**
R^2	.002		.020		.021		.227		.258	
F for	.385		9.062**		1.001		87.015**		20.076**	

R^2Change	

* p < .05 ; ** p < .01

Table 8 Hierarchical Linear Regression predicting self efficacy for all stories in which the author is identified as an audience member.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Variable	*B*	*B*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*
Participant's Gender	.042	.017	.029	.011	-.009	-.004	-.082	-.033	-.064	-.025
Age	-.002	-.016	-.004	-.037	-.005	-.047	.001	.011	.004	.042
Education	.074	.098	.102	.135	.108	.142	.072	.094	.067	.088
Income	.004	.004	.003	.003	.008	.009	.012	.013	.030	.033
Experiment			.112	.157*	.113	.160*	.108	.152**	.101	.142**
Story Topic Contributed?			.021	.027	.024	.031	-.088	-.114*	-.046	-.060
					-.264	-.105	-.147	-.058	-.142	-.056
Social Presence							.228	.257**	.184	.209**
Expertise							.066	.071	.009	.009
Coorientation							.289	.310**	.199	.213**
Story Credibility									-.049	-.048
Organization Credibility									.293	.311**
R^2	.008		.031		.041		.301		.350	
F for R^2Change	.551		3.186*		3.025		33.215**		9.940**	

* p < .05 ; ** p < .01

Table 9 Hierarchical Linear Regression predicting self efficacy for all stories, in which the author, a staff writer, indicated he or she collaborated with the audience to write the story.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Variable	*B*	*B*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*
Participant's Gender	.136	.055	.123	.050	.106	.043	.060	.024	.024	.010
Age	.002	.024	.001	.000	.000	-.004	.003	.030	.004	.040
Education	-.004	-.006	.023	.032	.024	.032	.055	.075	.057	.078
Income	.028	.032	.032	.037	.035	.041	.033	.037	.017	.020
Experiment			.132	.176**	.133	.176**	.075	.099*	.093	.123**
Story Topic Contributed?			.015	.022	.015	.022	-.060	-.086	-.045	-.065
					-.101	-.041	.045	.018	.055	.022
Social Presence							.185	.218**	.145	.170**
Expertise							.024	.027	.068	.079
Coorientation							.302	.322**	.263	.279**
Story Credibility									-.178	-.196*
Organization Credibility									.199	.226**
R^2	.004		.035		.037		.257		.279	
F for R^2Change	.407		5.669**		.616		35.270**		5.283**	

* p < .05 ; ** p < .01

Table 10 Hierarchical Linear Regression predicting self efficacy for all stories in which the author is identified as a staff writer.

	Model 1		***Model 2***		***Model 3***		***Model 4***		***Model 5***	
Variable	*B*	*B*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*
Participant's Gender	-.102	-.041	-.104	-.042	-.090	-.036	-.108	-.044	-.100	-.040
Age	-.010	-.100	-.012	-.121	-.011	-.118	-.008	-.083	-.006	-.061
Education	-.095	-.129	-.076	-.103	-.077	-.104	-.059	-.079	-.053	-.072
Income	.093	.107	.101	.116	.098	.112	.069	.079	.065	.074
Experiment			.059	.079	.058	.078	.081	.109*	.077	.103*
Story Topic			.049	.069	.050	.070	-.011	-.016	-.010	-.014
Contributed?					.100	.041	.048	.019	.043	.018
Social Presence							.276	.304**	.268	.296**
Expertise							-.014	-.013	-.057	-.054
Coorientation							.163	.146*	.085	.077
Story Credibility									-.048	-.046
Organization Credibility									.200	.204**
R^2	.028		.041		.043		.179		.201	
F for R^2Change	2.444*		2.227		.555		18.293**		4.459*	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

For all the stories, no matter who is the author, self-efficacy is predicted most strongly by the connection people feel to the story author. The strongest predictors in this equation are social presence (β=.291) and coorientation (β=.181). In addition organizational credibility is a statistically significant predictor ($p<.01$) at β=.257, which is nearly as strong as social presence. Other predictors in the equation that are not mediated are the experimental condition (β=.131) and story credibility, which interestingly is β=-.120. Even though experimental condition is significant, it adds very little to the percentage of variance explained ($R^2 = .018$), while the negative score for story credibility and strong positive beta for organization credibility add just .03 to the variance explained. This supports **H4**: Increasing connection to the reporter (through coorientation, social presence and expertise) and the site (through credibility) will have a direct positive effect on perceived self-efficacy. Connection makes the most difference in the equation as it added more than 20 % to the total variance explained.

Stories written by a staff writer have similar results; social presence and organization credibility are the strongest predictors and are the only ones that are statistically significant at the $p<.01$ level. Adding social presence in step four increases the variance explained by more than 13 %. Experimental condition is significant at the $p<.05$ level but adds a little more than 1 % to the variance explained.

For collaborative stories and those written by audience members, coorientation emerges as the strongest predictor above social presence, organization credibility and experimental condition, which remain significant at the $p<.01$ level. Coorientation ($\beta=.279$) seems to mediate some of the influence of social presence, whose β drops to .170. Story credibility is a negative predictor at the $p<.05$ level. Social presence and coorientation, once again, add the largest percentage to the variance explained at more than 22 %.

Coorientation remains statistically significant when I looked at stories written by audience members separately; however organization credibility emerged as the strongest predictor by far. At $\beta=.311$, organization credibility added 5 % to the more than 35 % of the variance the model explained. Coorientation ($\beta=.213$), social presence ($\beta=.209$), and experimental condition ($\beta=.142$) were all significant at the $p<.01$ level.

What this suggests is that connection to the reporter, defined by social presence and coorientation, and connection to the site, defined by organizational credibility, directly and positively predict self efficacy, or in this case, how confident participants felt in being able to contribute a story. When the stories were written in part or completely by their peers, how similarly they felt – coorientation - also become important. The negative effects of story credibility in the overall and collaborative models, which means that the more credible participants found the stories, the less confident they felt in being able to contribute, suggest that

the more capable participants found the authors, the less likely they were to want to join them. This could refer to Bandura's (1997) discussion of the importance of models seeming obtainable to increase self-efficacy.

While self-efficacy is an important first step to behavior, I wanted to test if this feeling of confidence could lead to action. This is the premise of **H5**: Increasing perceived self-efficacy will have a direct positive effect on respondents' intent to participate. But more than examining if self efficacy predicted the intent to participate, I wanted to see which of the components of self-efficacy from the hierarchical models I tested in **H4** had the most impact. In addition, I wanted to see if the concepts of liking or interactivity also had a direct, positive effect on the intention to participate. Because the factor analysis of the set of intent to participate measures identified two factors, I set up two sets of hierarchical regressions to predict them.

First, I tried to predict the intention to participate with the reporter concept based on all the stories and then separately for each author type. Next, I tried to predict the intention to contribute a story concept in the same manner. The hierarchical model this time had seven steps, beginning with demographics and ending with credibility as the self-efficacy prediction models, but adding interest and interactivity at step 6 and self-efficacy at step 7. Tables 11 – 19 summarize the results.

Table 11 Hierarchical Linear Regression predicting participant's intent to interact with the reporter for all authorship types.

	Model 1		***Model 2***		***Model 3***		***Model 4***		***Model 5***		***Model 6***		***Model 7***	
Variable	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*
Participant's	.064	.024	.056	.021	.050	.019	-.031	-.012	-.052	-.019	-.063	-.024	-.051	-.019
Gender														
Age	-.005	-.051	-.006	-.062	-.007	-.063	-.002	-.022	.000	-.003	-.003	-.032	-.003	-.027
Education	-.068	-.085	-.055	-.069	-.055	-.068	-.035	-.043	-.035	-.044	-.026	-.033	-.035	-.045
Income	.007	.007	.007	.008	.008	.009	-.006	-.006	-.004	-.004	.000	.000	-.008	-.008
Experiment			.060	.077*	.061	.077*	.043	.055*	.044	.055*	.032	.040	.016	.020
Story Topic			.095	.123**	.095	.123**	-.004	-.005	.012	.015	.025	.032	.028	.036

Contributed?				-.039	-.015	.051	.019	.048	.018	.026	.010	.040	.015
Social Presence						.213	.247**	.209	.242**	.104	.120**	.084	.098**
Expertise						.179	.181**	.122	.124**	.126	.127**	.126	.127**
Coorientation						.330	.312**	.269	.255**	.165	.156**	.142	.135**
Story Credibility								.035	.034	-.022	-.021	.001	.000
Organization Credibility								.129	.129**	-.051	-.051	-.051	-.051
Interest / Involvement										.308	.272**	.280	.246**
Interactivity										.255	.232**	.163	.148**
Self Efficacy												.215	.205**
R^2	.016		.037		.037		.382		.394		.452		.480
F for R^2Change	4.035**		10.604**		.214		181.616**		9.517**		51.858**		52.024**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 12 Hierarchical Linear Regression predicting participant's intent to contribute a story for all authorship types.

	Model 1		***Model 2***		***Model 3***		***Model 4***		***Model 5***		***Model 6***		***Model 7***	
Variable	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*
Participant's Gender	.105	.044	.106	.044	.102	.042	.061	.025	.030	.012	.014	.006	.013	.005
Age	.012	.124*	.012	.126*	.012	.125*	.013	.136**	.016	.166**	.013	.142**	.013	.142**
Education	-.027	-.038	-.030	-.041	-.030	-.041	-.023	-.032	-.027	-.038	-.031	-.043	-.031	-.043
Income	-.071	-.084*	-.072	-.084*	-.071	-.083*	-.073	-.086*	-.067	-.079*	-.066	-.077*	-.065	-.076*
Experiment			-.011	-.016	-.011	-.016	-.028	-.039	-.027	-.038	-.026	-.037	-.026	-.036
Story Topic			.011	.016	.011	.016	-.019	-.027	.004	.005	.011	.016	.011	.016
Contributed?					-.026	-.011	.005	.002	-.004	-.002	.001	.001	.001	.000
Social Presence							-.025	-.032	-.015	-.019	-.066	-.084*	-.065	-.083*
Expertise							.108	.121**	-.002	-.002	-.025	-.028	-.025	-.028
Coorientation							.168	.176**	.105	.110*	.000	.000	.001	.001
Story Credibility									.159	.169**	.054	.058	.053	.057
Organization Credibility									.072	.080	-.024	-.026	-.024	-.026
Interest / Involvement											.387	.377**	.388	.378**
Interactivity											.071	.072	.076	.076
Self Efficacy													-.010	-.010
R^2	.010		.010		.010		.073		.096		.160		.161	
F for R^2Change	2.360		.247		.114		22.024**		12.498**		37.271**		.083	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 13 Hierarchical Linear Regression predicting participant's intent to interact with the reporter for stories in which the author was identified as a member of CNN's audience.

	Model 1		*Model 2*		*Model 3*		*Model 4*		*Model 5*		*Model 6*		*Model 7*	
Variable	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*
Participant's Gender	.119	.041	.078	.027	.056	.019	.034	.012	.036	.013	-.018	-.006	.003	.001
Age	-.008	-.073	-.008	-.071	-.009	-.076	-.004	-.038	.001	.008	-.005	-.040	-.004	-.040
Education	.017	.019	.036	.042	.039	.045	.029	.033	.026	.030	.035	.040	.014	.017
Income	-.072	-.070	-.101	-.097	-.098	-.094	-.084	-.081	-.056	-.054	-.050	-.048	-.055	-.053
Experiment			.130	.160**	.131	.161**	.091	.112*	.088	.108*	.072	.089*	.057	.070
Story Topic			.183	.207**	.185	.209**	.042	.048	.104	.119*	.130	.147**	.132	.150**
Contributed?					-.157	-.055	-.010	-.004	-.025	-.009	-.024	-.008	.011	.004
Social Presence							.002	.002	-.029		-.165	-.163**	-.175	-.173**
Expertise							.181	.170**	.019	.018	.047	.044	.037	.035
Coorientation							.515	.483**	.393	.368**	.268	.251**	.244	.228**
Story Credibility									.150	.130	.025	.022	.037	.032
Organization Credibility									.281	.260**	.053	.049	.044	.041
Interest / Involvement											.363	.285**	.340	.267**
Interactivity											.373	.313**	.276	.232**
Self Efficacy													.214	.187**
R^2	.016		.068.		.071		.413		.474		.546		.566	
F for R^2Change	1.144		7.593**		.843		52.080**		15.280**		21.054**		12.205**	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 14 Hierarchical Linear Regression predicting participant's intent to contribute a story for stories in which the author is identified as a CNN audience member.

	Model 1		*Model 2*		*Model 3*		*Model 4*		*Model 5*		*Model 6*		*Model 7*	
Variable	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*
Participant's Gender	.114	.045	.113	.045	.095	.038	.087	.034	.070	.028	.014	.005	.007	.003
Age	.016	.162	.017	.172	.016	.167	.018	.186*	.022	.220*	.017	.176	.017	.176
Education	-.020	-.027	-.030	-.039	-.027	-.036	-.031	-.041	-.029	-.038	-.053	-.069	-.046	-.061
Income	-.152	-.168	-.157	-.173*	-.154	-.170*	-.147	-.163*	-.131	-.145*	-.108	-.119	-.106	-.117
Experiment			-.029	-.041	-.028	-.039	-.048	-.068	-.044	-.063	-.034	-.048	-.029	-.041
Story Topic			.023	.029	.024	.032	-.044	-.058	-.009	-.012	-.011	-.015	-.012	-.016
Contributed?					-.128	-.051	-.058	-.023	-.082	-.033	-.046	-.018	-.058	-.023
Social Presence							-.009	-.010	-.003	-.003	-.072	-.082	-.069	-.078
Expertise							.095	.102	-.050	-.054	-.047	-.051	-.044	-.048
Coorientation							.246	.265**	.187	.201*	.065	.070	.073	.079
Story Credibility									.242	.241**	.007	.007	.004	.003
Organization Credibility									.043	.046	-.048	-.051	-.045	-.048
Interest /											.557	.503**	.565	.510**

Involvement														
Interactivity											.090	.087	.120	.116
Self Efficacy													-.067	-.067
R^2	.023		.026		.029		.133		.167		.278		.280	
F for R^2Change	1.630		.412		.698		10.725**		5.483**		20.190**		.954	

* p < .05 ; ** p < .01

Table 15 Hierarchical Linear Regression predicting participant's intent to interact with the reporter for stories in which the author, a CNN reporter, indicated he or she collaborated with the audience to write the story.

	Model 1		***Model 2***		***Model 3***		***Model 4***		***Model 5***		***Model 6***		***Model 7***	
Variable	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*
Participant's Gender	.089	.034	.077	.029	.050	.019	.001	.000	-.029	-.011	-.023	-.009	-.033	-.013
Age	.001	.009	.000	-.009	-.001	-.014	.001	.006	.001	.014	.000	.002	.000	-.005
Education	-.130	-.167*	-.108	-.139	-.108	-.138	-.042	-.054	-.041	-.053	-.040	-.051	-.053	-.068
Income	-.001	.000	.003	.003	.007	.008	.003	.004	.001	.002	-.011	-.011	-.014	-.015
Experiment			.126	.158**	.127	.159**	.050	.062	.056	.070	.053	.066	.032	.040
Story Topic			.067	.090	.067	.091	-.041	-.055	-.031	-.042	-.027	-.036	-.019	-.025
Contributed?					-.152	-.058	.042	.016	.037	.014	.012	.004	.010	.004
Social Presence							.272	.301**	.265	.293**	.182	.201**	.174	.192**
Expertise							.194	.211**	.169	.184**	.140	.152*	.126	.137*
Coorientation							.253	.253**	.219	.219**	.111	.111	.070	.070
Story Credibility									.012	.012	-.042	-.043	.000	.001
Organization Credibility									.070	.075	-.095	-.101	-.096	-.103
Interest / Involvement											.341	.329**	.296	.286**
Interactivity											.199	.179**	.129	.116
Self Efficacy													.228	.214**
R^2	.028		.060		.063		.441		.444		.506		.536	
F for R^2Change	2.637		6.073**		1.258		80.105**		1.000		22.066**		23.131**	

* p < .05 ; ** p < .01

Table 16 Hierarchical Linear Regression predicting participant's intent to contribute a story for all stories in which the author, a CNN staff writer, indicated he or she collaborated with the audience to write the story.

	Model 1		***Model 2***		***Model 3***		***Model 4***		***Model 5***		***Model 6***		***Model 7***	
Variable	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*
Participant's Gender	.218	.089	.215	.088	.203	.083	.158	.065	.086	.035	.078	.032	.072	.030
Age	.019	.204*	.019	.199*	.019	.196*	.019	.202*	.021	.222**	.020	.209**	.019	.205**
Education	-.130	-.180*	-.125	-.172*	-.124	-.172*	-.103	-.143	-.103	-.142	-.101	-.140	-.109	-.150
Income	.001	.001	.001	.002	.004	.004	.007	.008	.008	.009	-.009	-.011	-.011	-.013
Experiment			.028	.038	.028	.038	-	-.009	.003	.004	.000	-.001	-	-.017

						.007						.013		
Story Topic		.005	.008	.006	.008	-	-.036	-	-.003	-	-.005	.001	.001	
						.025		.002		.004				
Contributed?				-	-.030	-	-.003	-	-.011	-	-.011	-	-.011	
				.072		.006		.025		.026		.027		
Social Presence						.009	.010	.003	.004	-	-.045	-	-.051	
										.038		.043		
Expertise						.112	.131	.022	.026	-	-.027	-	-.036	
										.023		.031		
Coorientation						.150	.161*	.070	.075	-	-.041	-	-.066	
										.038		.061		
Story Credibility								.107	.119	.023	.025	.047	.052	
Organization Credibility								.121	.139	.017	.020	.016	.019	
Interest / Involvement										.398	.413**	.372	.386**	
Interactivity										.057	.055	.017	.016	
Self Efficacy												.130	.132*	
R^2	.029		.030		.031		.100		.123		.194		.205	
F for R^2Change	2.659		.266		.319		9.120**		4.597**		15.538**		5.090*	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 17 Hierarchical Linear Regression predicting participant's intent to interact with the reporter for stories in which the author is identified as a CNN staff reporter.

	Model 1		***Model 2***		***Model 3***		***Model 4***		***Model 5***		***Model 6***		***Model 7***	
Variable	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*
Participant's	-	.000	.012	.005	.038	.015	-	-.010	-	-.009	-	-.011	-	-.002
Gender	.001						.024		.021		.026		.006	
Age	-	-	-	-.112	-	-.106	-	-.057	-	-.045	-	-.080	-	-.062
	.009	.095	.011		.010		.005		.004		.008		.006	
Education	-	-	-	-.086	-	-.087	-	-.053	-	-.052	-	-.031	-	-.027
	.068	.093	.063		.064		.039		.038		.023		.020	
Income	.077	.089	.092	.106	.087	.100	.040	.046	.038	.044	.051	.058	.037	.042
Experiment			-	-.061	-	-.062	-	-.021	-	-.024	-	-.051	-	-.060
			.045		.046		.016		.018		.038		.045	
Story Topic			.125	.176**	.127	.179**	.023	.033	.026	.037	.047	.066	.046	.065
Contributed?					.171	.070	.110	.045	.109	.044	.086	.035	.090	.036
Social Presence							.331	.365**	.329	.364**	.259	.286**	.232	.256**
Expertise							.187	.175**	.161	.150*	.149	.139*	.156	.145*
Coorientation							.201	.180**	.167	.150*	.055	.049	.052	.047
Story Credibility									-	-.003	-	-.045	-	-.039
									.003		.048		.041	
Organization Credibility									.079	.080	-	-.085	-	-.083
											.083		.081	
Interest / Involvement											.292	.255**	.271	.236**
Interactivity											.221	.207*	.150	.140*
Self Efficacy													.180	.180**
R^2	.019		.048		.053		.353		.356		.411		.434	
F for R^2Change	1.592		5.214**		1.650		50.903**		.943		15.121**		13.353**	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 18 Hierarchical Linear Regression predicting participant's intent to contribute a story for all stories in which the author is identified as a CNN staff writer.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6		Model 7	
Variable	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*	*B*	*β*
Participant's Gender	-.013	-.006	-.008	-.003	.008	.004	-.050	-.022	-.060	-.026	-.059	-.026	-.076	-.033
Age	.000	-.006	.000	-.006	.000	-.002	.000	-.005	.003	.034	.001	.017	.001	.001
Education	.078	.115	.075	.110	.074	.109	.063	.094	.052	.077	.051	.075	.048	.072
Income	-.076	-.096	-.073	-.092	-.076	-.096	-.074	-.093	-.074	-.093	-.068	-.085	-.057	-.071
Experiment			-.031	-.046	-.032	-.047	-.047	-.068	-.050	-.073	-.053	-.077	-.047	-.069
Story Topic Contributed?			.031	.048	.033	.050	.030	.047	.051	.078	.065	.099	.065	.099
Social Presence					.110	.049	.123	.054	.130	.057	.135	.060	.132	.058
Expertise							-.177	-.213**	-.166	-.199**	-.180	-.217**	-.158	-.190**
Coorientation							-.123	-.125*	-.023	-.024	-.003	-.003	-.002	-.002
Story Credibility							-.138	-.135*	-.091	-.089	-.016	-.015	-.018	-.018
Organization Credibility									-.147	-.151*	-.099	-.102	-.094	-.097
Interest / Involvement									-.044	-.049	-.017	-.019	-.018	-.020
Interactivity											-.222	-.211**	-.239	-.227**
Self Efficacy											-.037	-.037	-.095	-.097
													-.148	-.161**
R^2	.010		.014		.016		.070		.087		.108		.127	
F for R^2Change	.876		.574		.774		6.432**		3.077*		3.823*		6.936**	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

All the models predicting the intention to participate with the reporter predict at least 45 % of the variance explained. Second, adding the interest, interactivity and self-efficacy variables mediate the variance explained by the experimental condition, at least to the point where experimental condition is no longer a statistically significant predictor. Third, the influence of the credibility measures is also almost completely mediated by self-efficacy, which makes sense because they were such strong predictors of that concept.

On the down side, the concept *intent to contribute a story* was made up of just two questions, which were both negatively phrased in the study. While it meets the criteria for a dependent variable in a regression, the models predicted less than 20 % of the variance in all instances. In fact, the strongest predictor in most of the tests of this concept was interest, which could be considered a confounding variable.

Regardless, the sense of a connection generated by identifying with the reporter, the self-efficacy participants reported they felt and the interactivity inherent in the site were strong predictors of their intent to participate. In testing how the concepts predicted intention to participate with the reporter, interest was the strongest predictor (β=.246), followed by self efficacy (β=.205), interactivity (β=.148), coorientation (β=.135), expertise (β=.127), and social presence (β=.098) in a model that predicted more than 48 % of the variance. In the equation testing intent to contribute, interest was again the strongest predictor (β=.378), followed by age (β=.142), and negative predictors social presence (β=-.083), and income (β=-.076), in a model that predicted 16 % of the variance.

When breaking the models down by story author, the equations yielded similar findings. In predicting intent to participate with the reporter for stories written by audience members, interest was the strongest predictor (β=.267), followed by interactivity (β=.232), coorientation (β=.228), and self-efficacy (β=.187). This model predicted 57 % of the variance. Social presence was a significant negative predictor (β=-.173). Intent to contribute a story was predicted only by interest (β=.510), in predicting 28 % of the variance.

Staff written stories relied mainly on social presence (β=.256), to predict intent to participate with the reporter, but interest (β=.236), interactivity (β=.140), and self efficacy (β=.180), were also significant at the $p < .01$ level in accounting for 44 % of the variance. The strongest predictor for intent to contribute a story when looking at only audience written stories was interest (β=.227), followed by negative predictors social presence (β=-.190), and self-efficacy (β=-.161) in accounting for 13 % of the variance.

Collaborative stories or those in the expert model relied on interest (β=.286), self-efficacy (β=.214), and social presence (β=.192) to predict 54 % of the variance in the intention to

participate with a reporter. Interest (β=.386), also was the main predictor of the intent to contribute a story when looking at only those stories written collaboratively, but age (β=.205), and self-efficacy (β=.132) also were statistically significant in a model accounting for 20 % of the variance.

H5, *increasing perceived self-efficacy will have a direct positive effect on respondents' intent to participate*, was only partially supported because self-efficacy was only a significant predictor in six of the eight models. It positively predicted the intent to participate with a reporter all four times, but was a positive predictor of intent to contribute only when the story was written collaboratively and a negative predictor when the story was written by a staff writer. Interest was the strongest predictor in all the models, while interactivity and the connection variables also played roles. The large amount of variance accounted for in the intent to participate with the reporter concept suggest the models, in their complexity, have power to describe the relationship between the concepts in the experiment and be applied to real world contexts.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION

This goal of this dissertation was to examine the impact publishing user-generated news stories on traditional news organization Web sites may or may not have on the attitudes users have toward the site. Answering this question is especially important as more and more traditional news sites, such as CNN.com, have added user-generated news. Have these sites considered, for example, whether adding user-generated stories helps or hurts their credibility? Do these stories enhance or detract from the connection the audience feels toward the reporter or the organization? Does it matter if the site's editors take an active role in selecting and editing the stories or is it enough to just slap them up? If the end goal is encouraging submissions, how does the way in which sites publish the stories affect how confident the audience feels in being able to contribute? How does self-efficacy influence whether they actually will participate?

To provide some answers, this dissertation set up a controlled experiment in which participants read six online news stories that were manipulated to have three different authors. Two stories were supposedly written by CNN staff writers, while two were written by CNN audience members and two were written by CNN staff writers and audience members working together. Participants responded to the same questions after reading each story, questions which were designed to explore 10 concepts related to their attitudes toward the site and their confidence in and intention to participate. By comparing how the concepts, such as social presence, coorientation, expertise, credibility, interest, interactivity and self-efficacy differed depending on who wrote the story, this study suggests that allowing audience members to contribute stories makes a big difference in how the audience relates to the site. In addition, examining how the 10 concepts relate to each other in a predictive model suggests that something as simple as the way in which a news site explains who wrote the story can have a

direct and positive effect on how likely audience members are in feeling they can and want to contribute.

The story's author matters

First of all, comparing the concepts across the authorship conditions suggest the way in which a news site identifies a story's author matters, especially if that author is not a staff writer. I designed the experiment to maximize the contrast between the story's author by making that the only manipulation between the conditions. The only changes made between staff, audience-written, and collaborative stories were the byline, the "About the Author" box at the end of the story and the sourcing cues throughout the story. For example, audience-written stories did not cite interviews with key public figures, instead referring to Web sites or changing the sources to appear as friends or coworkers. The collaborative condition turned all the sources into audience members who had either sent stories to the site or who the author, a staff writer, had found through Web searches on blogs, discussion groups, or story comments.

Audience-written

The starkest differences occurred in testing **H1**: measurements of the connection between the reader and the source, as measured by social presence, coorientation, expertise, credibility, interactivity, and perceived self-efficacy. Not all of the concepts tested yielded differences in the same direction. The experiment suggested the largest difference exist on concepts that revolve around how much the participant relates to the author. Participants notice more strongly when the author is an audience member (social presence) than when he or she is a staff writer. This was the largest single mean score difference of any tested (a difference of 1.7 on a scale of 1 to 7). In other words, participants felt like they got to know the reporter or thought of the reporter more if he or she was an audience member, not a staff writer.

However, noticing the author did not seem to make a difference on how much they connected with him or her. No statistically significant difference existed between the coorientation scores of audience and staff written stories. What this suggests is that participants do not think staff writers are out of tune. In fact, how much they feel like they know the person who wrote the story has little effect on whether they think they understand the story the same way as the author. Simply putting the staff writer tag behind the reporter's name, however, makes a world of difference on how credible participants found the story and how expert they think the author is. Mean score differences between the two authorship conditions were consistently significant, and the differences were almost the same between expertise and story credibility. Finding a staff written story more credible and a staff reporter more expert makes sense, even if the experiment tried to equalize how expert the authors seemed. The "About the Author" box at the end of the story gave both the audience member and the staff writer a connection to the topic and a specific number of years of experience.

What's interesting, however, is the differences in story credibility and expertise made almost no difference on participants' estimation of organization credibility. The mean score differences were not statistically significant. Across experimental conditions, the scores were almost identical (as demonstrated in Figure 16). What this suggests is readers do not take their organizational credibility cues from the stories or their authors. The site itself makes the most difference, as Flanagin & Metzger (2000) suggest. All stories appeared within CNN.com frames, and this study suggests the credibility participants attached to CNN did not change as the site incorporated content from audience members.

What these findings demonstrate is a complex relationship between the audience and the author. Participants in this study are much more likely to say they find stories written by a paid,

full-time journalist more credible and expert, but when it comes right down to it, they seem much more likely to connect to stories written by their peers. The large mean score difference in self-efficacy is telling because it suggests one of the keys to getting people confident in feeling they can submit a story is to show them plenty of examples of their peers succeeding. They also find stories written by other audience members far more interactive than staff written stories. Providing interactivity (Rafaeli, 1997; Eveland, Mortan, Seo, 2004; Singer, 2004) is one of the keys to online success or at least to fulfilling the exciting possibilities of the Internet. Adding stories written by audience members can increase participants self-efficacy and their perceived interactivity while it does not seem to lessen the credibility of the organization in participants' eyes even if the stories themselves seem less credible.

What this means is the industry needs to find a middle ground between stories written by audience members and staff writers. They cannot simply post staff written stories. They need to add interactivity and inspire confidence in their audience by encouraging them to submit stories. They need to effectively show how those stories will be used. This will encourage people to connect with their sites. As news organizations are trying to increase their online audiences as they lose print readers and broadcast views, they need this connection. It is part of the social nature of the Web.

But the study also strongly suggests that turning over the writing duties completely to the audience is not the solution either. What the media would make up in connection with their audience, they would lose in story credibility. They would risk becoming like any other social networking site, providing only stories the audience thinks are important. This study seems to suggest that people want stories directed by professional reporting staffs. They understand the media exists sometimes to tell them things they or their peers do not already know. The

difference in the interest concept between audience and staff written stories was not statistically significant, meaning participants did not particularly like stories written by their peers any better.

In other words, the key is combining the connection audience written stories offers with the credibility that staff written stories provide. What this potentially means is news staffs need to find ways to connect with their audiences, whether this is offering them a chance to write their own stories or simply encouraging them to add their comments. But they cannot stop there. It is not enough to offer comments if no one in the newsroom ever reads them. In fact, a good middle ground **H1** of this study suggests is finding a way to work with the audience to tell stories together.

Collaboratively written

In fact, the collaborative or expert model in this study represents what this relationship might look like. The stories in these models were developed to show reporters and audience members working together to write the most complete news story possible. I developed **H2**: *measurements of social presence, coorientation, expertise, credibility, interactivity, and perceived self-efficacy will be higher for collaborative stories than for staff written stories* to test how participants would reaction to these stories. The results of this study, however, do not suggest that collaborative stories are the ultimate solution. In fact, these stories seem fraught with many of the same concerns as audience written stories.

The only mean difference scores in which collaborative or expert modeled stories have higher statistically significant means than staff written stories are interactivity and self efficacy. For both of these concepts, participants rated collaborative stories higher than staff written ones. This could simply be that participants noticed and appreciated that staff writers were using the

audience. In 80 % of the cases, participants in the study were able to correctly identify who had written the story.

However, in nearly all of the other concepts, participants rated staff written stories higher. They said the stories were more credible, and the difference was similar to that between staff and audience written stories. They also rated the staff writers more expert, and this difference was much higher than between staff writers and audience members. This could be because the collaborative stories did not include specific cues in the "about the author" box on the reporter's connection to the story or the length of time he or she had spent in that field. In fact, expertise was much more clearly spelled out for both audience and staff written stories. This could represent a flaw in the study's design.

However, the difference between social presence mean scores was not statistically significant , while coorientation and organization credibility were statistically significant in a direction that was opposite of what I hypothesized in H2. Participants understood the story more similarly to the staff writer than the collaborative writers, and they found the organization behind the staff written story more credible than the one behind the collaborative story, even though both stories were placed in CNN.com frames. These differences represent the potential dangers of the collaborative model. Collaborative stories do not seem to increase one of the most important elements of connection - coorientation, and they also have a detrimental effect on the organization's credibility that even stories written alone by audience members do not. The prospect of weakening organizational credibility should discourage online news site editors from using collaborative stories over audience written stories, because even though the gains in interactivity and self-efficacy are significant, they are not that much greater than those gained by offering audience written stories.

Audience vs. collaborative

This distinction becomes even more clear when testing H3: *Measurements of social presence, coorientation, expertise, credibility, interactivity, and perceived self-efficacy will be highly correlated when stories are written by audience members and collaboratively.* Even though it is not explicitly stated in the hypothesis, the literature seems to suggest the correlation between audience written and collaborative stories will be positive, with collaborative stories that exemplify concepts such as coorientation and interactivity scoring higher. However, most of the correlations between the models, as tested through pairwise mean differences, are negative.

Audience written stories have significantly higher mean scores on all 10 concepts. Social presence has the highest differences, but this can be explained, because the audience written stories have one clearly designated author, while the collaborative stories have one unnamed CNN staff writer who is drawing from three or four audience members who are named in the story text. However, the higher scores on coorientation, expertise, interest, story credibility, interactivity, and self efficacy are harder to explain by how the author was introduced. In fact, participants did not identify with collaborative stories at all. The mean differences for interest seem to be the clearest indication. Even though more people were involved and story topics did not change, participants rated audience-written stories more interesting. One possible explanation is that stories like this are relatively new. Many participants might not have ever been exposed to them before. They may not know what to think about them.

However, there is also the possibility that collaborative stories do not synergistically mix the best features of audience and staff written stories. Mixing staff and audience comments might create an inferior product. The differences that support this idea are the organization credibility scores. Of all three authorship types, the collaborative stories scored the lowest on organization

credibility and had statistically significant differences with the other two. In other words, adding collaborative stories to a site has the most potential to damage an organization's credibility. It makes little sense to do this, even though it might increase readers' connection to the site, when adding audience written stories has even greater potential to increase connection without the appreciable drop in organization credibility.

Increasing self efficacy and the intent to participate

While the mean difference scores between the authorship types in the experiment offer some insight into the online news environment, the relation between the concepts can tell us more about the effect of adding user-generated content to a site and the power it has in motivating users' behavior. In essence, H4: *Increasing connection to the reporter (through coorientation, social presence and expertise) and the site (through credibility) will have a direct positive effect on perceived self-efficacy,* and H5: *Increasing perceived self-efficacy will have a direct positive effect on respondents' intent to participate,* brought the concepts together. As the mean score differences illustrate, none of the authorship models are perfect. Each has its advantages and disadvantages. By examining the relationship between the concepts, I tried to determine which had more impact in creating a connection and leading to self-efficacy and the intention to contribute. What I tried to do is suggest how news industry professionals should focus their attention. What the experiment found is a complex relationship between interest, interactivity, self-efficacy and the strength of the connection the audience feels toward the reporter and the organization.

Self Efficacy

To begin, creating self-efficacy in audience members is much more a product of the organization's credibility, social presence and coorientation, than it is of story credibility. In the

first set of models, I used a five-step process to predict perceived self-efficacy, which participants rated through questions about their level of confidence in contributing and the persuasive power of the models they saw, for all three authorship types. The strongest single predictor in an equation that explained 26 % of the variance was social presence, or whether the participants felt like they got to know the reporter. This was also the strongest predictor when I looked at stories written by staff writers and stories written collaboratively, and was the second highest predictor when looking only at audience written stories. For people to feel confident they can contribute, they must notice the author, and they have to relate to him or her in some way. The more this person resembles the author or the author presents a reasonable outcome, the more likely they are to feel they can mimic the behavior.

The strong predictive power of coorientation on all of the experimental models except stories written by staff writers underscores this finding. When the story is written by an audience member or written collaboratively, the participant needed to look at the story in the same way the author did in order to feel like he or she could contribute. This matches Bandura's (1997) explanation of how models predict self-efficacy. That coorientation is not significant on the equation predicting self-efficacy for staff written stories suggests staff writers may not present realistic models. They may be too expert for people to relate to them. In other words, people feel they cannot equal the staff writer, who has experience or maybe even a journalism school degree, so they are reluctant to try. Audience members or even those who work with staff writers do not have the same qualifications and are more persuasive. Expertise is never a statistically significant predictor in any of the equations.

The only other predictor that is statistically significant across all authorship types and in the general model is organization credibility, and this concept represents nearly as strong a

predictor as social presence and coorientation. When the audience member is the author, this concept is the strongest predictor, in fact, because organization credibility is what news companies want to preserve and promote online the most, especially as they add comments and stories from their audience members.

In sum, the models suggest that if news organizations want their audience members to feel confident they can participate in an online discussion or contribute their thoughts and feelings on a topic or even their footage of accidents and natural disasters, they must enhance the connection to them. Organizations need to connect in a way that does not undermine their credibility. As H1-3 suggest, they might be able to best achieve this by giving audience members the opportunity to contribute in a prominent place without editing their contributions so much as they remove the connection the audience might have with the reporter. Collaborating directly with audience members has the potential to decrease organizational credibility rankings. Increasing the ways in which reporters connect with audience members also can increase self-efficacy, especially as they help audience members see the topic from the same point of view.

From confidence to action

Increasing self-efficacy through connection and organizational credibility is the first step for news organizations looking to increase online contributions. Actions start with confidence in achieving a successful outcome (Bandura, 1997). But I also set up the experiment to test a reasonable facsimile of how likely participants were to capitalize on the confidence they gained and actually contribute a story. This is a difficult concept to measure in an experiment because I could not offer a realistic opportunity to contribute. In addition, I would have had no way of determining if the contribution was a result of the experimental conditions or of their attitudes. I relied instead upon tested measures (Wise, Hamman, & Thorson, 2007), but those measures did

not all factor together. I ended up testing two measures of intention to participate, one that dealt mainly with the intention to participate with the reporter and one that related to likelihood to voice opinions and contribute a story. The second factor, intent to contribute a story, was based on two questions that had a statistically significant correlation of R=.338. I created two hierarchical logistic regression equations to see what would predict both of the factors. Even though the hypothesis focuses on the predictive power of self efficacy, I included all of the concepts I had in the models to predict self-efficacy to weight their relative importance. I also added other measures the literature suggested including perceived interactivity, which I measured with questions about how fully the site used the power of the 'Net, how much the site let participants get to know the reporter and how confident the participant was the reporter would respond if he or she commented, and interest.

Self-efficacy was a statistically significant predictor in six of the eight models, offering strong support for **H5**. The two models in which it was not a predictor used the second weaker intent to participate factor as the dependent variable. In fact, in predicting that factor for stories written by audience members, interest was the only statistically significant predictor. This makes sense because interest could go a long way to determining if participants would contribute. The more interested they were in the topic, the more they would probably know about it and the more they would have to write about.

Interest was also a predictor in all of the models and was especially strong in those predicting the second factor, which I called intent to contribute. Originally, I had intended to try to factor out the influence of interest as a covariate, but I did not factor it out because it has explanatory power. It is hard to contribute to a discussion you have no interest in. However, in the regressions predicting the intent to interact with the reporter, it was not always the strongest

predictor. In many cases, self-efficacy, which was added to the equation last, mediated some of its influence.

For example, when the story was audience written, interest was the strongest predictor in an equation accounting for 57 % of the variance. However, its beta score and the score for interactivity were much higher before adding self efficacy, and self-efficacy added another 2 % to the variance predicted. In addition, interest and interactivity mediated some of the influence of coorientation, but that variable accounted for about 30 % of the variance by itself as shown in step 4 of the model.

A similar thing happens in the model predicting intent to interact with the reporter when the stories are written by staff writers. Self-efficacy, added last, adds 3 % to the variance explained and mediates the impact of interest and interactivity, even though both remain statistically significant predictors. Self-efficacy actually reduces the interactivity score by almost half. However, coorientation, rather than social presence is the connection concept that remains in the end of the model after predicting about 30 % of the variance by itself.

Social presence is also one of the main predictors when the staff writer collaborates with the audience, and interactivity, one of the main predictors in the other equations is not statistically significant in the final model. Interest once again has the largest beta score, but self-efficacy, again mediates its influence. Social presence accounts for 35 % of the variance by itself and is a statistically significant predictor in a final equation that accounts for 54 % of the variance.

While this is not a true measure of the intention to participate, the regression equations predicting the intention to participate with the reporter underscore some of this studies earlier findings and offer some suggestions to media professionals as they approach their audiences

online for contributions. If they really want their audiences to join the discussion, they need to seek their input, first of all, on stories they are in interested in. This is not something they can control. What they can control are factors that lead to self-efficacy. Namely, they can control how they present audience contributions on their sites, and the models suggest this can have a dramatic effect on whether people contribute. This effect is nearly equal to how interested people are in the topic. First, if news organizations decide not to feature audience written stories prominently on their site, they need to make sure their reporters are easily identifiable and provide some cues to help the audience get to know them. They must make sure the site is interactive, which in this experiment meant ways to contribute exist and the reporters listen and respond to comments.

If they feature stories written by audience members, they need to maximize the level of coorientation between author and audience member. In other words, they have to let the audience know this is a person like them, not someone CNN recruited because he or she is an expert. They also have to make sure the audience can talk back to and get to know this author, even though he or she is not a staff member. For those who decide to collaborate, making sure the audience can connect and get to know the author, both the staff writer and the people quoted, is vital. This might mean offering more social networking possibilities or improving the ways in which authors are identified.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

By examining the literature surrounding credibility, connection, and self-efficacy, this dissertation proposed a theoretical model (see Figure 1) that suggested ways in which a person would move from making a simple choice on which media to use to becoming an active contributor in that process. The model theorized the credibilty a person placed with the author and the news organization was contingent on the levels of expertise, coorientation and social presence. Connection with the reporter and organization occurs when interactivity is added to credibility, giving people the opportunity to use their estimation to actually get to know the reporter and organization. Connection then leads to self-efficacy or the belief that if I contribute I will succeed, and self-efficacy comes from two modeled sources, peers and experts. In fact, the literature makes no distinction on which is more effective. Both lead to action, which in the model is the intent to participate.

In the end, however, the model is more complex. I present the theoretical model this study suggests in Figure 2. First, the concepts of social presence, expertise and coorientation are connected. The more you notice reporters, whether they are staff writers or audience members, the more likely you are to coorient with them. Expertise depends on this coorientation but also on who the reporters are. People find staff writers more expert.

However, expertise does not determine credibility alone. It might enhance a reporters' credibility but does little for the organization's credibility. To simply things, the new model does not differentiate out reporter and organization credibility because the study suggests expertise may predict reporter credibility but social presences and coorientation have a stronger influence on organizational credibility. The new definition of credibility has to include all dimensions. Online, it is no longer enough to trust a reporter or an organization. People have to notice and think like them.

That also explains why connection in the revised model occurs after self-efficacy. Connection cannot simply be a component of feelings toward a reporter and the interactive opportunities a site offers. It also revolves around the confidence people feel they have in being able to participate with them, and in this, the author matters. If the author is too expert, such as a staff writer, self-efficacy can decrease because people do not feel participation is attainable. If the person is like them, self-efficacy can increase.

The revised model also accounts for interest, which this study suggests is one of the key predictors in determining a person's intent to participate. Interest, however, does not predict self-efficacy because this study shows news organizations can increase self-efficacy regardless of interest. Even though a person may be interested in the topic, that alone does not predict intent to participate. They also need to feel they can reasonably achieve their goals.

What the revised model means for the industry is engaging audiences online begins with recognizing the social nature of the Internet. Reporters and their editors have to know that writing stories is no longer enough, especially if they hope their audience members will respond. First of all, news professionals should consider engaging their audiences in a conversation about the news, whether it leads to contributions or not, because this is what the Internet is all about. The World Wide Web makes possible not just interactive features such as information graphics and games, but it also enhances the relationship reporters can build with their audiences. To make the transition to the online world as seamless as possible, it is vital that their Web sites reflect the exciting possibilities of the medium, not just in what people can do, but in how they can connect.

Forging the connection may go a long way toward helping the media reestablish their credibility, at least online. The connection concepts tested in this study, such as coorientation and

social presence, are relatively easy to achieve online. It just means that reporters need to let readers get to know them and their points of views better. Staff blogs, for example, could be one way that reporters let their guard down, but they have been reluctant because many see it as underlying their credibility. However, this study suggests that while people will always find straight news, inverted pyramid, objective stories the most credible, they also assign high credibility to organizations that reach out to the audience. Story credibility was not one of the predictors of self-efficacy or the intent to participate with a reporter. Connection concepts such as social presence and coorientation are much more important.

For audience members to take the next step that many news organizations are asking them to, which is contribute their own stories, connection can be just as important as the person's interest in the story. What this study also suggests is that the industry needs to make that connection clear by telling the audience how their story will be used and then giving people the freedom to write what they want. The collaborative story process online seemed like it might have been a fitting middle ground between connection and credibility, but participants in this study did not respond to it. In fact, they consistently gave it lower scores than the other authorship types. One reason is they might not be used to seeing this. Few sites operate under the collaborative exercise CNN used on election day. Before other organizations implement it, they may want to consider its impact. While collaborating with their audience may lead to better coverage, this study suggests it does not enhance the organization's reputation with its audience. In fact, it might detract from the two concepts it is designed to promote, connection and credibility. Participants in this study felt less connected to collaborative stories and found them less credible. Most importantly, they also found the organization behind them less credible as well.

The explanation for these findings may lie in the way the organization portrayed in this study sought and used contributions. The collaborative stories lumped submitted stories, comments, and blog entries together rather randomly. What this effectively did is relieve those who submitted of any control they might have felt over their submissions. From a self-efficacy standpoint, this undermined their confidence because it made it seem their contributions did not matter. They were at the mercy of an editor they hardly knew. Other motivational theories, such as self determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2004) would explain that the sense of control is just as important as the confidence in being able to succeed. Collaborating with the media might then mean learning from the professionals behind the organization what topics are important and what kind of writing is expected. It could even include some help from working journalists because this would enhance the connection people felt. However, it does not mean giving away the byline. People want to be recognized for their work.

Limitations

It is difficult to determine from this single study exactly what kind of collaboration audiences are looking for in the news. This study purposely focused on a single facet of the news story – the story's author – in an effort to create strong internal validity within the experimental design. By the same token, internal validity in this experiment also does not necessarily translate to external validity or the ability to generalize from these findings. This study strongly predicted and compared the experimental participants against each other and themselves, but it is impossible to know if this group accurately represents society as a whole.

Randomly assigning the participants to one of six experimental conditions was supposed to ensure that personal characteristics and experiences did not predict the changes in the variables. However, this study did find some statistically significance in comparing the different

experimental conditions, especially when considering the concepts expertise, coorientation, and the intent to participate with the reporter. It also found slight differences if the reporter was male or female on the concepts of interest, intent to contribute a story, and interactivity. In trying to account for as many intervening variables as possible, this experiment might have tried to do too much. The different experimental conditions also accounted for the differences in story topics, but there might have been statistically significant differences there as well if I had tested them. The influence of interest added another variable that limited the explanatory power of the concepts proposed.

It might have been better to isolate and focus on one variable for this study instead of accounting for so many. For example, the study might have benefitted from merely studying self-efficacy alone and not in conjunction with concepts that predicted it, such as coorientation and social presence. It might also have been better if I would have limited participation to one story instead of six. Based on the number of people who did not complete the entire study (nearly 50) it seems like fatigue was a factor. A between subjects design in which participants read just one story with one type of author and then I compared the responses against the others might have been a simpler design. I would have needed a much larger sample size, however, to attain statistical significance.

The study design also suggested other variables that need further study, such as story topic. Some of the preliminary tests I performed suggested participants had a different relationship with health studies than government or crime stories. They seemed more likely trust an audience written story on that topic than a staff written one. This could have something to do with the nature of health advice, much of which comes from friends and relatives. It could also suggest that people turn to professional journalists more for information on topics they do not

understand or have access to, such as national and world government. There were not adequate data, however, to make those conclusions here.

The relationships between gender and the concepts were also not adequately defined and tested here. The statistically significant differences between male and female reporters found in this study are not discussed in the literature cited here. I also did not test whether it mattered if the participant was male or female. This could make a big difference because it makes sense that women might find stories written by other women more interesting. This, however, is something to undertake and define better in future research.

Future Research

Other avenues of future research I could pursue based on the findings of this study include determining what predicts expertise. The way I set up the stories included a tag line describing the experience the staff and audience writers had with the topic. I included no such information with the collaborative stories. This could explain why this concept scored much lower on those stories. In addition, expertise has predictive power in the credibility concepts, and the mere lack of mention of qualifications could have influenced those findings. The question to ask for future research is what kind of experience means more in determining expertise. Is it more valuable to have covered Hollywood for 10 years for CNN or to have worked as a gaffer on film productions for the same amount of time? A study trying to answer this question could shed additional light on how participants react to audience and staff writers. It could also enhance our understanding of the relationship between expertise and credibility.

Another question is how to define connection. This study hypothesized based on the literature that it would revolve around how much participants noticed and got to know the reporter, but the definitions of interactivity that include whether an ongoing conversation occurs

go much farther. It would be interesting to replace the collaborative authorship model with a conversational model. For example, this model would show an initial story followed by user comments that add information and opinion. It could also test what it means for the reporter to enter the conversation by responding to some of the comments or indicating he will use them in future stories. This kind of interaction could preserve the control missing in the collaborative model created here and potentially enhance self-efficacy and the intent to contribute more than the audience written model.

This study tested only how the author of the story affected self-efficacy and the intent to participate. Social cognitive theory also discusses the importance persuasion has to enhance self efficacy and encourage action. The stories in this experiment included some language that expressed confidence in participants' ability to contribute. A future study could focus exclusively on which terms are the most persuasive. For example, does offering to train audience members before they submit enhance or inhibit self efficacy? In the same vein, the way in which a story is displayed could also have persuasive power. Does giving audience submissions equal footing with staff written pieces enhance credibility, for example? Finally, the concept of control in increasing self-efficacy and the intent to participate deserves further study. Does CNN help or hurt its cause by directing audience members toward which stories they can contribute? Asking for comments on Michael Jackson's death might lead to more stories online, but it might also affect how people consider their relationship with the organization.

Summary

In examining the relationship between connection, credibility and self efficacy, this study provides some answers to the basic question of what effects offering user-generated news have on how people think about the site and whether they are likely to contribute. Adding stories

written by audience members has the potential to enhance the connection between audience and organization without undermining how credible the audience thinks the organization is. But it only begins to explore the user-generated content dilemma in a time when news organizations are turning to the Web and their audiences more than ever. It is my hope that this dissertation leads researchers and media professionals alike to examine a few basic premises of their sites before asking their audiences to contribute. They should ask first how they will use the contributions and how much editorial oversight they will give them. They need to also wonder how they will identify the authors and whether they will give them free reign to write about whatever they want or direct them to specific topics. Finally, they must seriously explain their reasons before collaborating with audience members on stories because this study suggests collaboration has the potential to undermine connection and organization credibility.

Even as I write that, I hate to think that I am discouraging collaboration. To stay relevant in the technological age, reporters and editors need to step off their ivory towers to find out what their audiences really want. But it seems they cannot leave behind their journalistic mandate. They still need to guide the discussion, but they need to do it without stifling the users to which they connect. I believe this is possible, and this dissertation offers a start to learning how.

Chapter 10: Figures

Figure 1 Theoretical path model synthesized from the literature depicting the relationship between credibility, interactivity, connection and self-efficacy on the intent to participate.

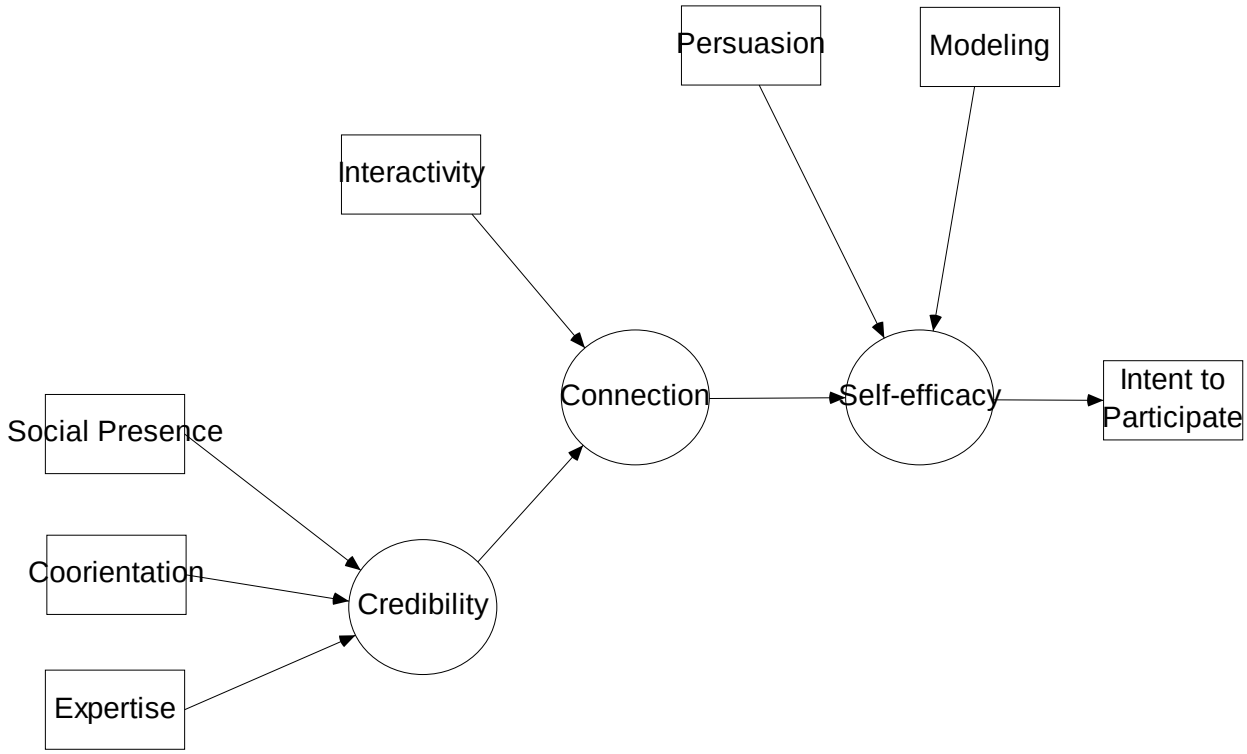


Figure 2 Theoretical path model suggested by this study depicting the relationship between credibility, interactivity, connection and self-efficacy on the intent to participate.

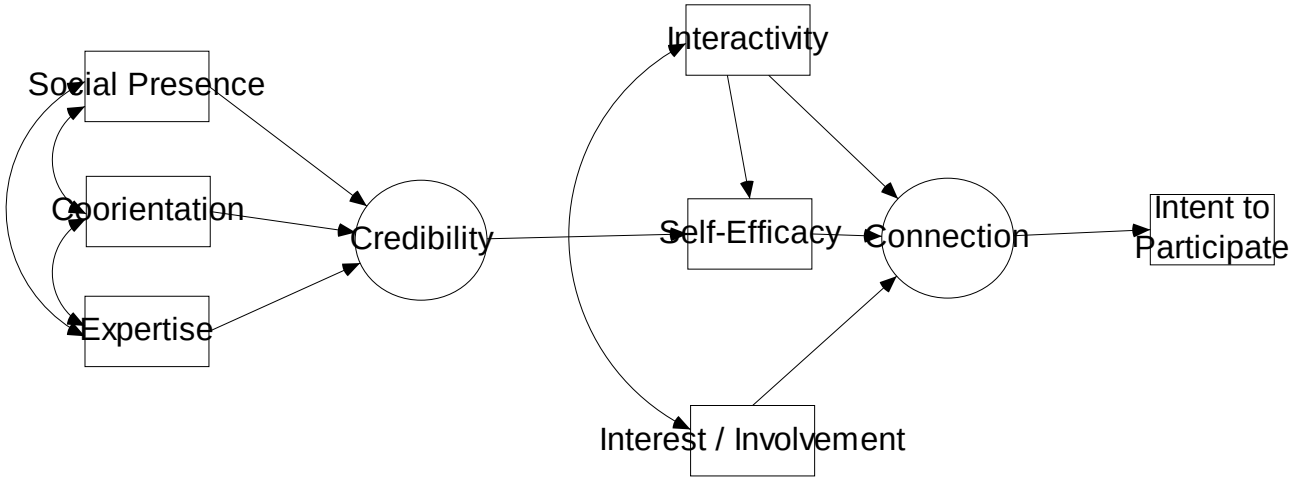


Figure 3 Mean scores of social presence compared across story author conditions.

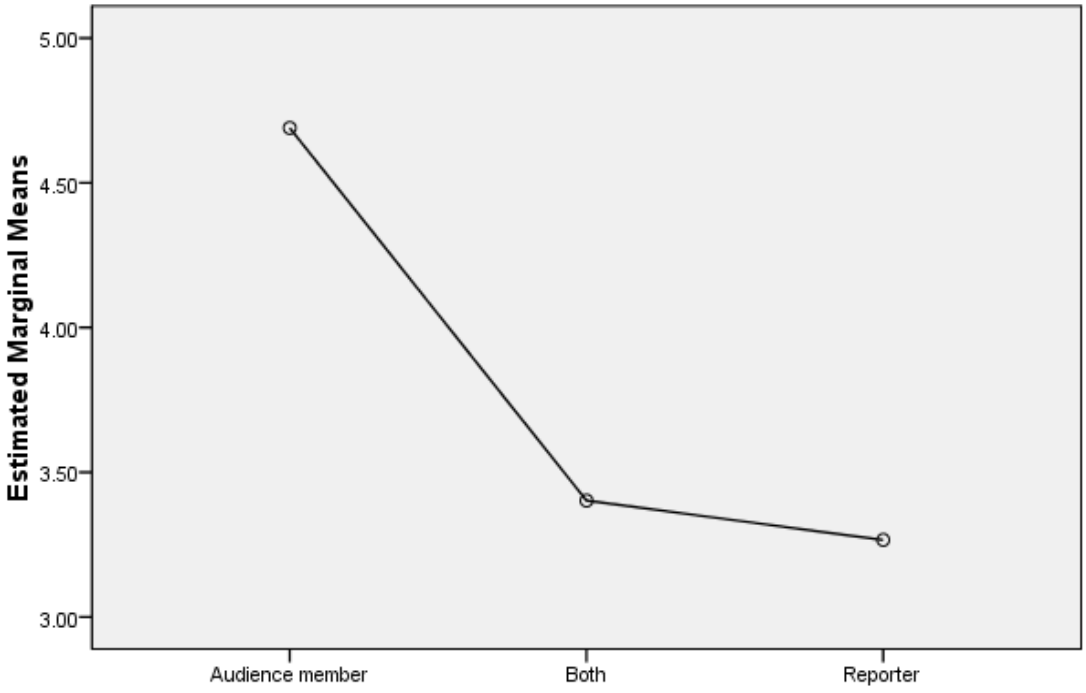


Figure 4 Mean scores of expertise compared across story author conditions.

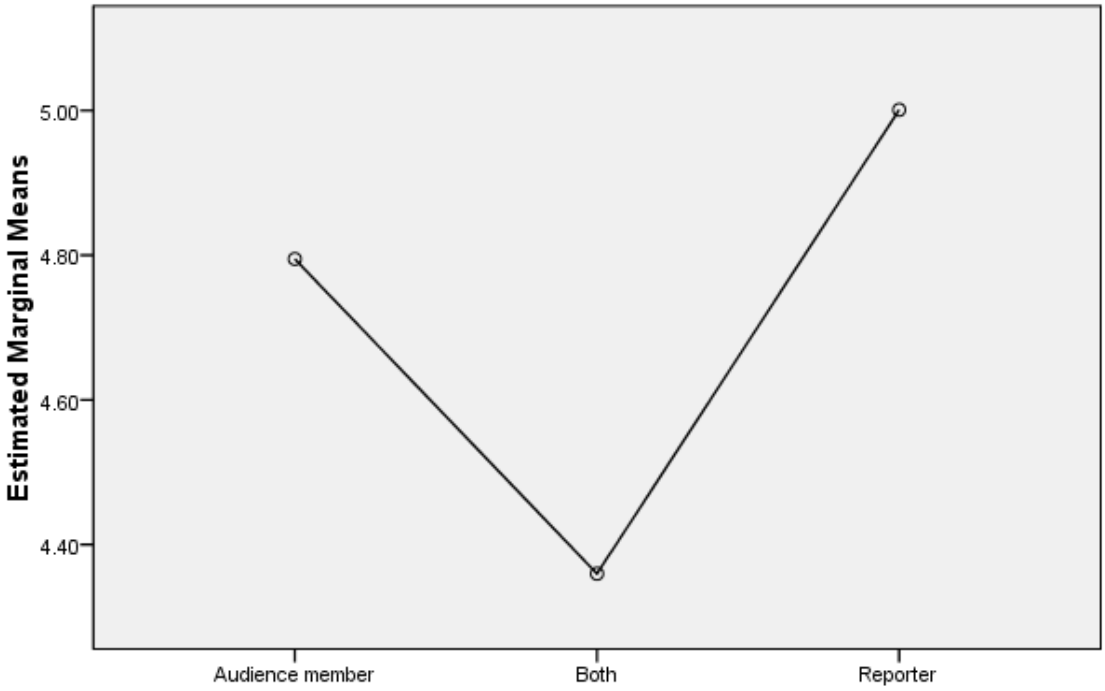


Figure 5 Mean scores of coorientation compared across story author conditions.

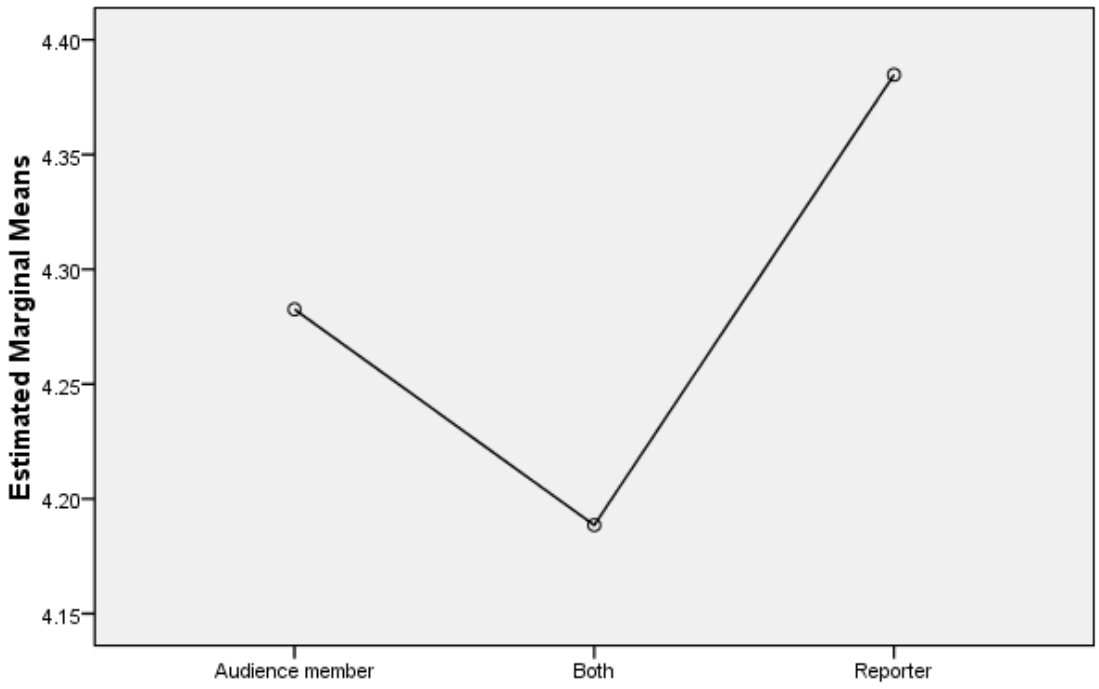


Figure 6 Mean scores of story credibility compared across story author conditions.

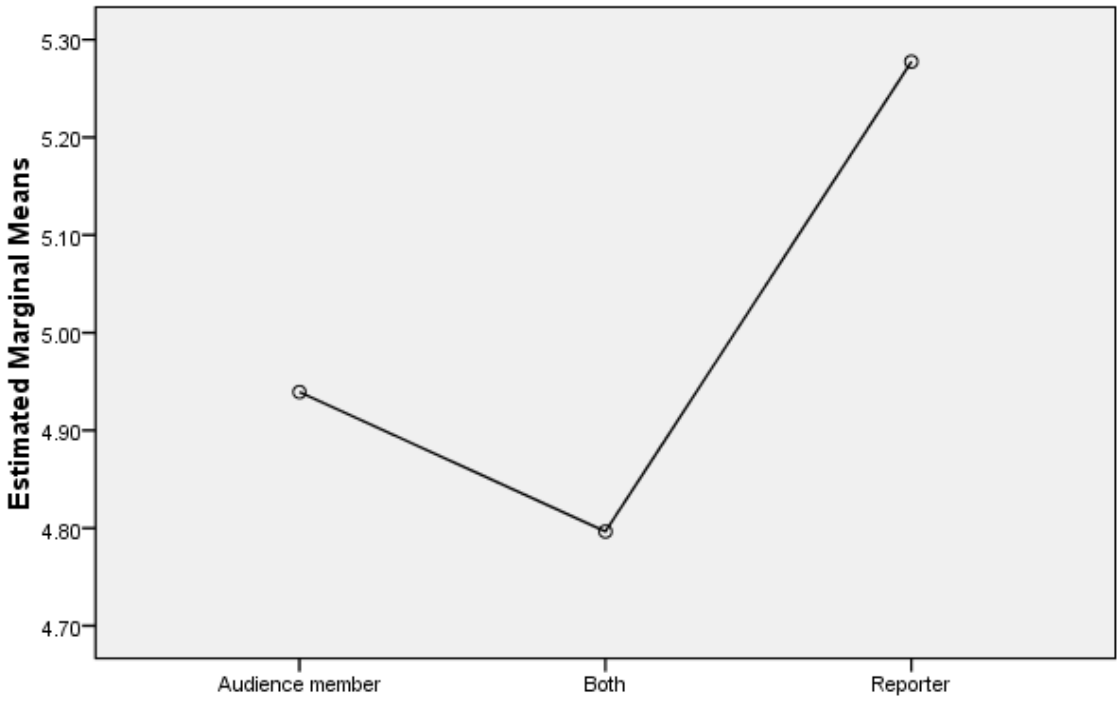


Figure 7 Mean scores of organization credibility compared across story author conditions.

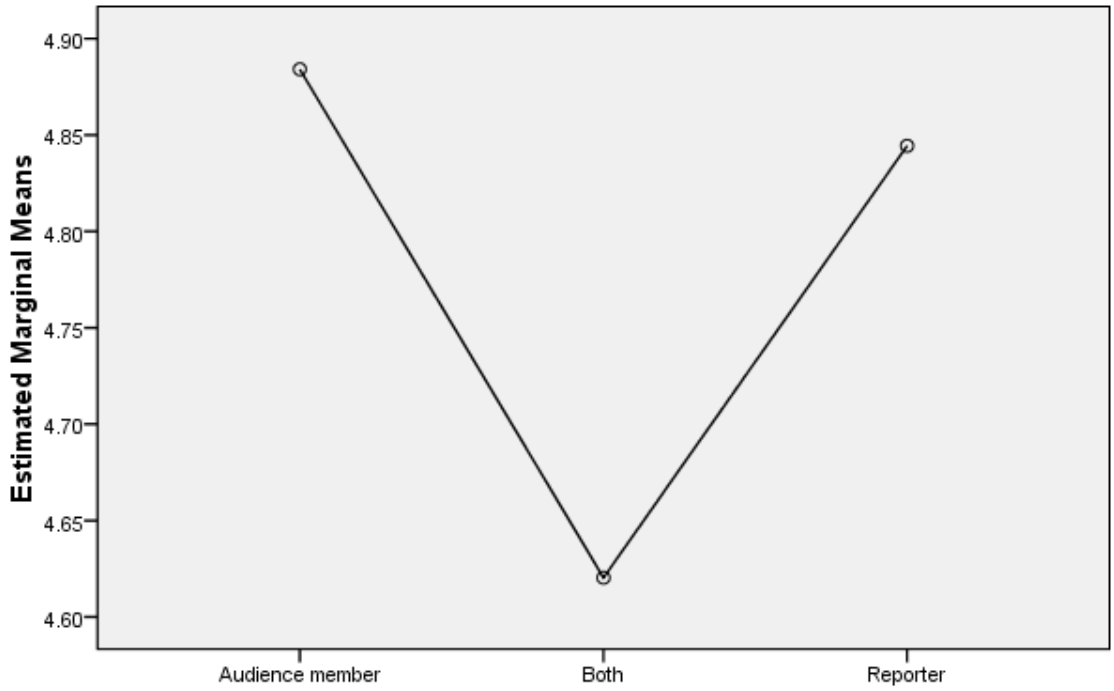


Figure 8 Mean scores of interest concept compared across story author conditions.

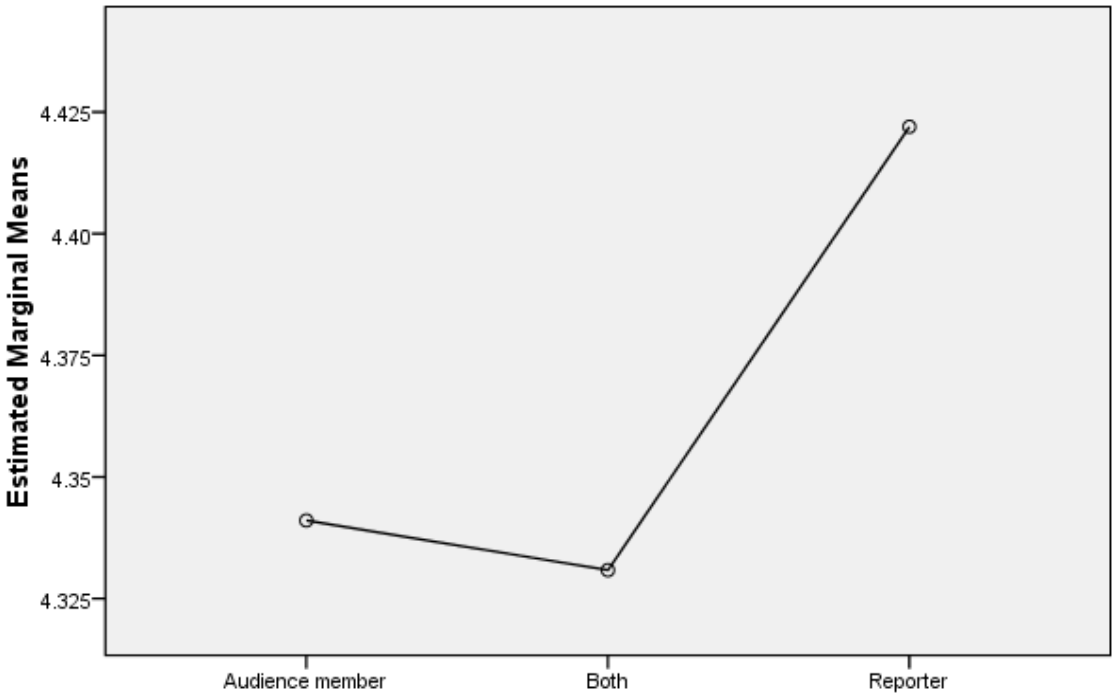


Figure 10 Mean scores of perceived interactivity compared across story author conditions.

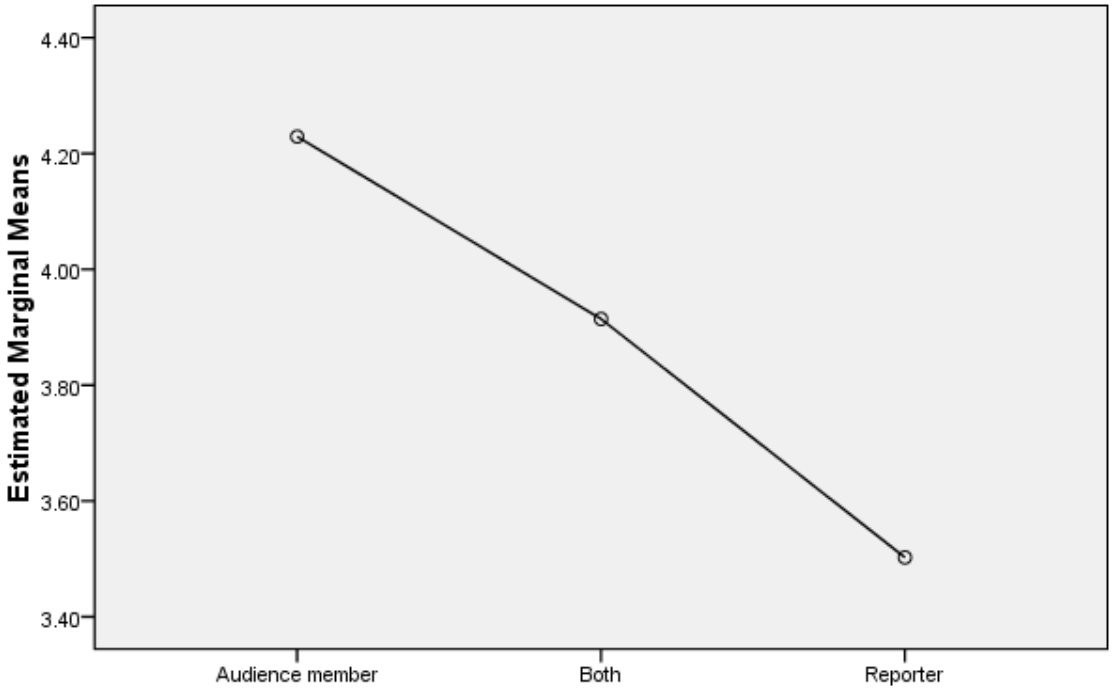


Figure 9 Mean scores of intent to participate with the reporter compared across story author conditions.

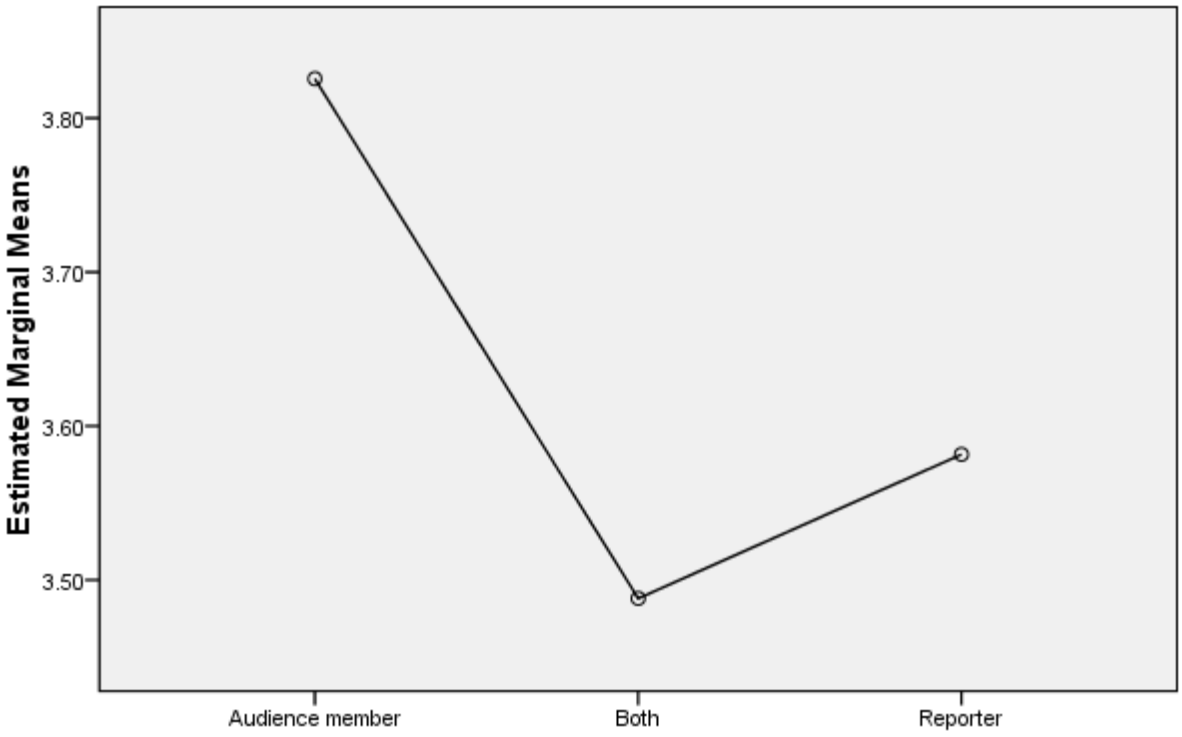


Figure 12 Mean scores of perceived self efficacy compared across story author conditions.

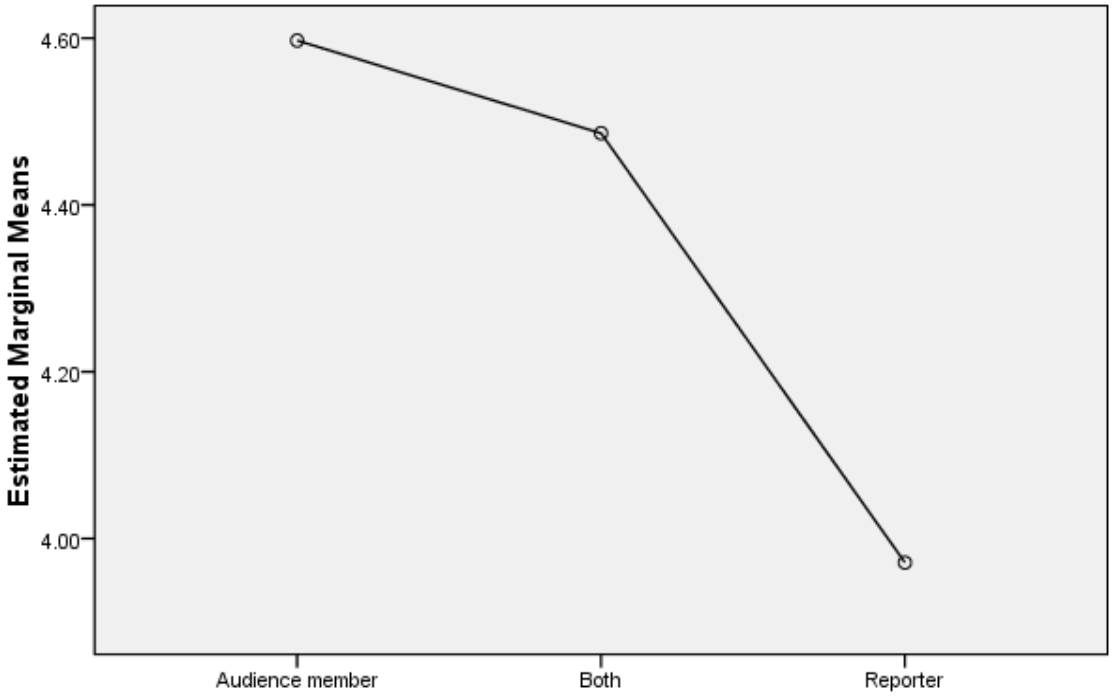


Figure 11 Mean scores of intent to contribute a story compared across story author conditions.

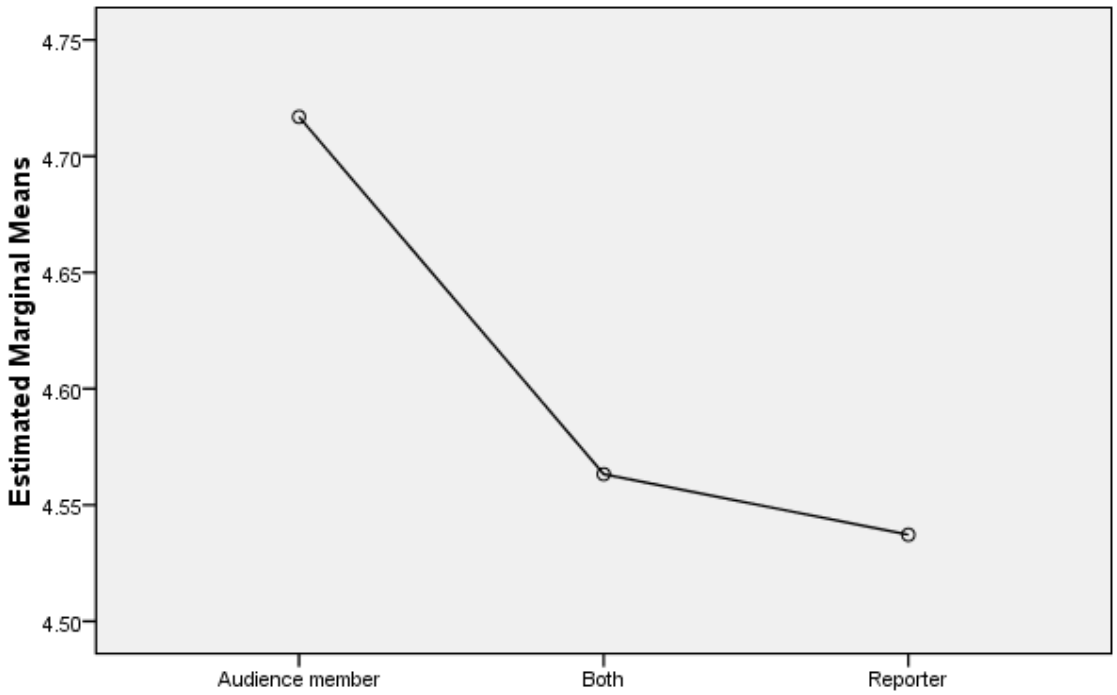


Figure 14 Plot of estimated mean scores for coorientation separated by experimental condition.

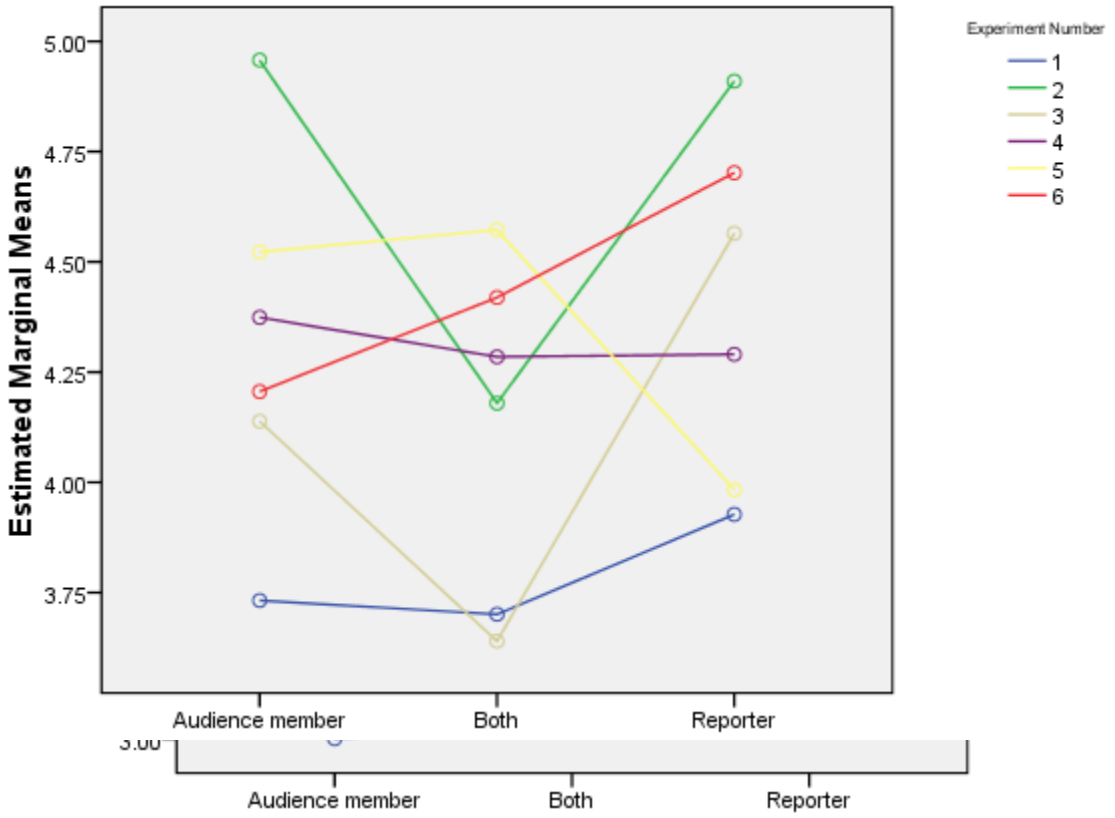


Figure 13 Plot of estimated mean scores for expertise separated by experimental condition.

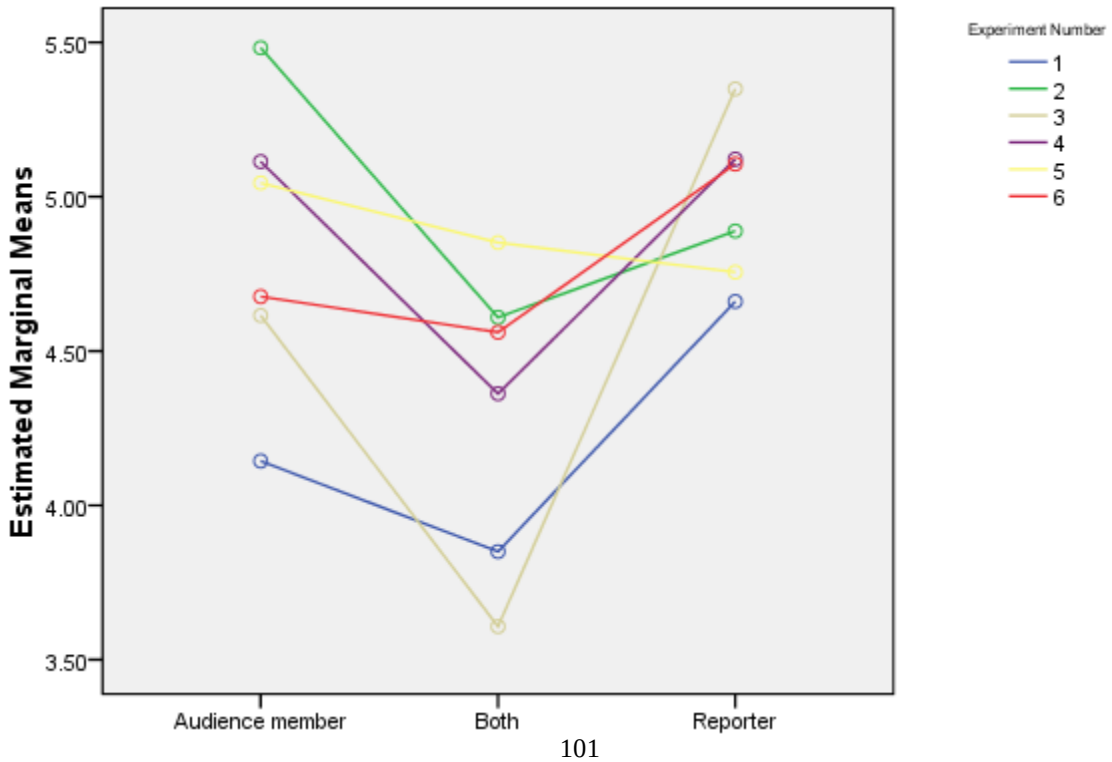
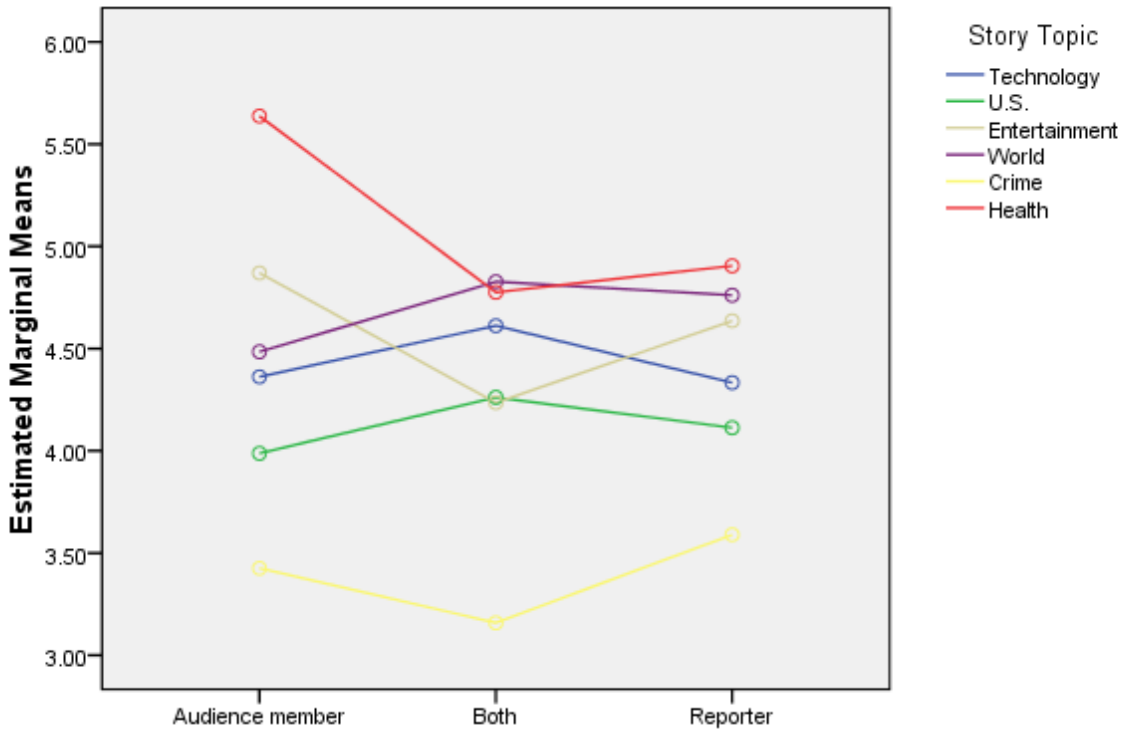


Figure 16 **Plot of estimated mean scores for intent to participate with the reporter separated by experimental condition.**

Figure 15 **Plot of estimated mean scores for intent to participate with the reporter separated by experimental condition.**



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VITA

I knew I wanted to be a reporter from the first time I joined a newspaper staff in junior high, but like many other journalists, I became disillusioned after a nearly 10 year career as a reporter and editor. This was especially true in the last two years of my career when I was editor of the *Desert Dispatch*, a 6,000-circulation, daily newspaper in Barstow, Calif. I finally thought I'd have the power and ability to make a difference in a community, but instead I found myself turning people away because our newspaper just didn't have the space.

When I started graduate school in 2004, my initial goal was to learn a few tips and make a few contacts to get back to the industry, this time to be able to make the difference that had eluded me. Instead I found the democratizing and connective power of user-generated news working to help start MyMissourian.com, a citizen journalism venture. Working with the site and with some great faculty members who understood that research must connect with practice, I learned I probably make the biggest difference in the industry by helping them see how to use the Internet to rebuild and reconnect with their audience.

In Fall 2009, I'll start as an assistant professor at Ohio University, and I hope to bring my community newspaper background and online journalism research experience together to find some solutions for an industry struggling to stay relevant in a changing world.

Appendix – Experiment Questionnaire

CNN.com Study 1

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Remember, your responses are confidential. We will not link them to your name, e-mail address or IP address.

If you are a student in J1100 at the University of Missouri and signed up for the study through the experiment management system (SONA), you will receive extra credit in your course for your participation.

This survey will ask you to read six different stories taken from CNN.com and then answer the same brief set of questions about each story. Base your responses on the stories you have read and on the Web page you see. Remember, there are six stories, so please make sure you click to go to the next page. There are 31 total pages and 38 total questions in the survey. That seems long, but answering it completely will take less than 30 minutes. The stories are short and the questions require you to simply click a response.

After you complete the study, if you would like to participate in a drawing for *one of FIVE $50 iTunes gift cards,* please include your e-mail address. I want to do something to thank you. I wish I could give something to everyone who participates. Even if you enter your e-mail address at the end, I assure you that your responses remain anonymous and confidential. I will not link your answers to your e-mail address. In fact, I'm recording them in separate databases.

Participation in this survey is voluntary. You may choose not to participate in the survey at any point. You also can pick and choose which questions you respond to. You do not have to answer them all. Even though some of the questions in the survey may be personal in nature, you can be assured that your responses will never be matched with your name.

Risks for participation are minimal. You may experience some eye or back strain from staring at the computer for 30 minutes, but that's why I've made sure the study is short.

If you have any questions, please contact me at hkm3hb@mizzou.edu or (573) 864-4949. You can contact my adviser, Dr. Wayne Wanta at wantaw@missouri.edu or (573) 884-9689.

Research at the University of Missouri-Columbia involving human participants is carried out under the supervision of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Questions or concerns about research participants' rights may be directed to MU Campus Institutional Review Board, 483 McReynolds, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO 65211. Phone: (573) 882-9585. Fax: (573) 884-0663.

By clicking "Next Page" below, you acknowledge that you have read and understand the benefits and risks of this study and you give your consent to participate.

STORY 1 of 6

Please read the following story. Make sure you scroll all the way down and to the right. When you are finished, please click "Next Page." Refer to this story to answer the questions on the next four pages.

1) Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with statements about the ***person*** who wrote the story you just read:

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Strongly Agree
I felt like I got to know the reporter.							
At times, I felt like the reporter was in the room with me.							
I thought of the reporter while reading the article.							
The reporter sounds like he or she knows what he or she is talking about							
The reporter sounds like an expert on this topic.							
The reporter has done his homework on this story.							
I understand the story's issue in the same way the reporter does.							
I felt like this reporter probably is a person kind of like me.							
I think this reporter has my interests at heart.							

2) Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the ***story*** you just read.

	1 Stongly Disagree	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Strongly Agree
The story was accurate.							

I believe what I read in the story.							
I can trust what I read.							
Overall, I liked the story.							
This story was involving.							
This story was NOT interesting.							
The story was relevant to my life.							

3) Who wrote this story?	
A CNN reporter	
A CNN reader	
CNN reporters and readers collaborated	

4) Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the ***Web site*** you just read:

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Strongly Agree
This story makes me think I can rely on CNN.							
This story shows me that CNN probably cares about readers like me.							
This story makes it look like CNN is in touch with the average person.							
I can see a lot of ways to interact with this story.							
The way this story is presented uses the power of the 'Net.							
The story helps me get to know the reporter.							
If I comment on this story, I'm confident the reporter will respond.							

5) Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the ***story*** and the ***Web site*** you just read:

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Strongly Agree
I would enjoy contributing to this story.							
I think I would reply to the author.							
I am hesitant to voice my opinions about this story.							
I am interested in reading other stories from this author.							
Reading this story made me less interested in participating.							
Seeing how others have contributed helps me know I could do this too.							
I am confident I would be able to contribute to this site if I wanted to.							
The site persuades that I would be able to join the contributors.							

STORY 2 of 6

Please read the following story. Make sure you scroll all the way down and to the right. When you are finished, please click "Next Page." Refer to this story to answer the questions on the next four pages.

6) Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with statements about the ***person*** who wrote the story you just read:

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Strongly Agree
I felt like I got to know the reporter.							
At times, I felt like the reporter was in the room with me.							

I thought of the reporter while reading the article.							
The reporter sounds like he or she knows what he or she is talking about							
The reporter sounds like an expert on this topic.							
The reporter has done his homework on this story.							
I understand the story's issue in the same way the reporter does.							
I felt like this reporter probably is a person kind of like me.							
I think this reporter has my interests at heart.							

7) Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the ***story*** you just read.							
	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Strongly Agree
The story was accurate.							
I believe what I read in the story.							
I can trust what I read.							
Overall, I liked the story.							
This story was involving.							
This story was NOT interesting.							
The story was relevant to my life.							

8) Who wrote this story?	
A CNN reporter	
A CNN reader	
CNN reporters and readers collaborated	

9) Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the ***Web site*** you just read:							
	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Strongly Agree
This story makes me think I can rely on CNN.							
This story shows me that CNN probably cares about readers like me.							
This story makes it look like CNN is in touch with the average person.							
I can see a lot of ways to interact with this story.							
The way this story is presented uses the power of the 'Net.							
The story helps me get to know the reporter.							
If I comment on this story, I'm confident the reporter will respond.							

10) Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the ***story and the Web site*** you just read:							
	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Strongly Agree
I would enjoy contributing to this story.							
I think I would reply to the author.							
I am hesitant to voice my opinions about this story.							
I am interested in reading other stories from this author.							

Reading this story made me less interested in participating.							
Seeing how others have contributed helps me know I could do this too.							
I am confident I would be able to contribute to this site if I wanted to.							
The site persuades me that I would be able to join the contributors.							

STORY 3 of 6

Please read the following story. Make sure you scroll all the way down and to the right. When you are finished, please click "Next Page." Refer to this story to answer the questions on the next four pages.

11) Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with statements about the ***person*** who wrote the story you just read:

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Strongly Agree
I felt like I got to know the reporter.							
At times, I felt like the reporter was in the room with me.							
I thought of the reporter while reading the article.							
The reporter sounds like he or she knows what he or she is talking about							
The reporter sounds like an expert on this topic.							
The reporter has done his homework on this story.							
I understand the story's issue in the same way the reporter does.							
I felt like this reporter probably is a person kind of like me.							
I think this reporter has my interests at heart.							

12) Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the ***story*** you just read.

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Strongly Agree
The story was accurate.							
I believe what I read in the story.							
I can trust what I read.							
Overall, I liked the story.							
This story was involving.							
This story was NOT interesting.							
The story was relevant to my life.							

13) Who wrote this story?

A CNN reporter	
A CNN reader	
CNN reporters and readers collaborated	

14) Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the ***Web site*** you just read:

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Strongly Agree
This story makes me think I can rely on CNN.							
This story shows me that CNN probably cares about readers like me.							
This story makes it look like CNN is in							

touch with the average person.							
I can see a lot of ways to interact with this story.							
The way this story is presented uses the power of the 'Net.							
The story helps me get to know the reporter.							
If I comment on this story, I'm confident the reporter will respond.							

15) Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the ***story and the Web site*** you just read:							
	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Strongly Agree
I would enjoy contributing to this story.							
I think I would reply to the author.							
I am hesitant to voice my opinions about this story.							
I am interested in reading other stories from this author.							
Reading this story made me less interested in participating.							
Seeing how others have contributed helps me know I could do this too.							
I am confident I would be able to contribute to this site if I wanted to.							
The site persuades me that I would be able to join the contributors.							

Story 4 of 6

Please read the following story. Make sure you scroll all the way down and to the right. When you are finished, please click "Next Page." Refer to this story to answer the questions on the next four pages.

16) Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with statements about the ***person*** who wrote the story you just read:							
	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Strongly Agree
I felt like I got to know the reporter.							
At times, I felt like the reporter was in the room with me.							
I thought of the reporter while reading the article.							
The reporter sounds like he or she knows what he or she is talking about							
The reporter sounds like an expert on this topic.							
The reporter has done his homework on this story.							
I understand the story's issue in the same way the reporter does.							
I felt like this reporter probably is a person kind of like me.							
I think this reporter has my interests at heart.							

17) Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the ***story*** you just read.							
	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Strongly Agree
The story was accurate.							
I believe what I read in the story.							
I can trust what I read.							

Overall, I liked the story.							
This story was involving.							
This story was NOT interesting.							
The story was relevant to my life.							

18) Who wrote this story?	
A CNN reporter	
A CNN reader	
CNN reporters and readers collaborated	

19) Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the ***Web site*** you just read:							
	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Strongly Agree
This story makes me think I can rely on CNN.							
This story shows me that CNN probably cares about readers like me.							
This story makes it look like CNN is in touch with the average person.							
I can see a lot of ways to interact with this story.							
The way this story is presented uses the power of the 'Net.							
The story helps me get to know the reporter.							
If I comment on this story, I'm confident the reporter will respond.							

20) Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the ***story*** and the ***Web site*** you just read:							
	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Strongly Agree
I would enjoy contributing to this story.							
I think I would reply to the author.							
I am hesitant to voice my opinions about this story.							
I am interested in reading other stories from this author.							
Reading this story made me less interested in participating.							
Seeing how others have contributed helps me know I could do this too.							
I am confident I would be able to contribute to this site if I wanted to.							
The site persuades me that I would be able to join the contributors.							

STORY 5 of 6

Please read the following story. Make sure you scroll all the way down and to the right. When you are finished, please click "Next Page." Refer to this story to answer the questions on the next four pages.

21) Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with statements about the ***person*** who wrote the **story** you just read:							
	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Strongly Agree
I felt like I got to know the reporter.							
At times, I felt like the reporter was in the room with me.							
I thought of the reporter while reading the article.							

The reporter sounds like he or she knows what he or she is talking about.							
The reporter sounds like an expert on this topic.							
The reporter has done his homework on this story.							
I understand the story's issue in the same way the reporter does.							
I felt like this reporter probably is a person kind of like me.							
I think this reporter has my interests at heart.							

22) Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the ***story*** you just read.							
	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Strongly Agree
The story was accurate.							
I believe what I read in the story.							
I can trust what I read.							
Overall, I liked the story.							
This story was involving.							
This story was NOT interesting.							
The story was relevant to my life.							

23) Who wrote this story?	
A CNN reporter	
A CNN reader	
CNN reporters and readers collaborated	

24) Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the ***Web site*** you just read:					
	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3 Neutral	4	5 Strongly Agree
This story makes me think I can rely on CNN.					
This story shows me that CNN probably cares about readers like me.					
This story makes it look like CNN is in touch with the average person.					
I can see a lot of ways to interact with this story.					
The way this story is presented uses the power of the 'Net.					
The story helps me get to know the reporter.					
If I comment on this story, I'm confident the reporter will respond.					

25) Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the ***story*** and the ***Web site*** you just read:							
	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Strongly Agree
I would enjoy contributing to this story.							
I think I would reply to the author.							
I am hesitant to voice my opinions about this story.							
I am interested in reading other stories from this author.							
Reading this story made me less interested in participating.							
Seeing how others have contributed helps me know I could do this too.							
I am confident I would be able to contribute to this site if I wanted to.							
The site persuades me that I would be							

able to join the contributors.							

STORY 6 of 6

Please read the following story. Make sure you scroll all the way down and to the right. When you are finished, please click "Next Page." Refer to this story to answer the questions on the next four pages.

26) Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with statements about the ***person*** who wrote the story you just read:

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Strongly Agree
I felt like I got to know the reporter.							
At times, I felt like the reporter was in the room with me.							
I thought of the reporter while reading the article.							
The reporter sounds like he or she knows what he or she is talking about.							
The reporter sounds like an expert on this topic.							
The reporter has done his homework on this story.							
I understand the story's issue in the same way the reporter does.							
I felt like this reporter probably is a person kind of like me.							
I think this reporter has my interests at heart.							

27) Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the ***story*** you just read.

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Strongly Agree
The story was accurate.							
I believe what I read in the story.							
I can trust what I read.							
Overall, I liked the story.							
This story was involving.							
This story was NOT interesting.							
The story was relevant to my life.							

28) Who wrote this story?

A CNN reporter	
A CNN reader	
CNN reporters and reader collaborated	

29) Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the ***Web site*** you just read:

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Strongly Agree
This story makes me think I can rely on CNN.							
This story shows me that CNN probably cares about readers like me.							
This story makes it look like CNN is in touch with the average person.							
I can see a lot of ways to interact with this story.							
The way this story is presented uses the power of the 'Net.							
The story helps me get to know the							

reporter.							
If I comment on this story, I'm confident the reporter will respond.							

30) Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the ***story*** and the ***Web site*** you just read:							
	Strongly Disagree			Neutral			Strongly Agree
I would enjoy contributing to this story.							
I think I would reply to the author.							
I am hesitant to voice my opinions about this story.							
I am interested in reading other stories from this author.							
Reading this story made me less interested in participating.							
Seeing how others have contributed helps me know I could do this too.							
I am confident I would be able to contribute to this site if I wanted to.							
The site persuades me that I would be able to join the contributors.							

Now, we'd just like to ask you a few questions about yourself. Remember, all your responses are confidential.

31) Are you ...	
Male?	
Female?	

32) How old were you on your last birthday?

33) Are you ...	
White?	
African American?	
Hispanic?	
Asian?	
Native American / American Indian?	
Other (Please Specify):	

34) What is the highest level of education you have completed?	
High School	
Some college	
Associate's Degree	
Bachelor's Degree	
Some graduate school	
Advanced degree (Master's or Ph.D.)	

35) In which of the following ranges did your income fall last year?	
Less than $25,000	
More than $25,000 but less than $50,000	
More than $50,000 but less than $75,000	
More than $75,000 but less than $100,000	

More than $100,000	

36) How often would you say you contribute to online news Web sites?	
Never	
Once a year	
A few times a year	
Once a month	
Once a week	
Several times a week	
Every day	

37) When was the last time you contributed (either with a comment, photo or story) to an online news site?	
I have never contributed	
More than six months ago	
Less than six months ago but more than a month ago	
Less than two weeks ago but more than a week ago	
Last week	
Yesterday	
Today	

38)

That was the last question! Thanks for your participation!

If you would like to enter the drawing for a $50 iTunes gift card, please enter your e-mail address here. Your e-mail address will be used only to select a winner in the drawing. It will not be connected to your responses.