

**Case Study of Family-Owned Newspapers**

**by**

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## Introduction

Since the wave of the scientific and technological revolution, innovations are multiplying rapidly, each one having an impact on all sectors. Today, technological challenges affect the press resulting in profound changes in uses and customs of newspapers readers. Increasingly with the Internet, we move toward electronic media to supply to demand for a public "internet generation" which tends to be progressively younger and less likely to read the newspaper compared with earlier generations.

In addition, economic conditions do not help in the sense that the price of a newspaper is not affordable for readership. However, the question that arises is this: Does this change benefit these newspapers that step toward a new era in their ecological cycle? In order to explore this broad question we focused our study on local private family-owned newspapers. The results indicate a number of family-owned newspapers are doing well in this adaptive process, thus preserving their survival in an environment constantly changing.

A family-owned business is the most prevalent form of economic organization in the world, comprising up to 90% of companies in the United States; even higher abroad. It accounts for one-third of the Fortune 500, produces 50% of the Gross Domestic Product, and 60% of the nation's employment (<http://catalystconsultingpartners.com/>).

Since the Communications Act of 1996, large media companies have dominated the media landscape in achieving monopolies, vertical integration economies of scale and scope, synergy and market share. Most research on such practices has focused primarily on publicly

traded corporations and their ownership structure, organizational behavior, and strategic advantages. Focus on private companies, on the other hand, has been limited primarily to the actions of media moguls such as Reinhard Hohn of Bertelsmann or Rupert Murdoch of News Corp. Little has been written on the practices and strategic planning of smaller, medium sized, privately owned media companies in the U.S. (Powers & Sohn, 2012).

On the other hand, privately owned media organizations are some of the fastest growing companies in the U.S. For example, Businessinsider.com lists Community Impact Newspaper as Texas' fastest growing news organization providing relevant and useful information at the community level. Revenues rose from \$1.1 million in 2006 to \$7.1 million in 2009. Another example is Hoffman Media, a private company that publishes an array of homemaker-friendly, special-interest magazines. Revenues for this company increased from \$25 million in 2006 to \$41.3 million in 2009 (<http://www.businessinsider.com/>). Clearly there is a need to study the entrepreneurial and management strategies of smaller, family media organizations. In this study, newspapers were chosen as they are a part of the time-honored media in United States, and at the same time, it is the medium owned by many families that have experienced their own restructuring and revolution during the past century.

As is known, business organizations are always seeking profit maximization. In order to achieve this goal, they need to adjust their strategy to adapt to the changing market. How do the family-owned newspaper companies survive and renovate themselves in organization structures and profit patterns? To address this question, we used organizational ecology, which is a theoretical and empirical approach in the social sciences that is especially useful in

organizational studies. It utilizes insights from biology, economics, and sociology, and employs statistical analysis to try to understand the conditions under which organizations emerge, grow, and die (Hannan & Freeman, 1989). Family-owned organizations, known for their flexibility and competitiveness, are also sensitive to the external changes. And the newspapers have addressed the changing media landscape in many ways including adding internet editions, curtailing home deliveries, and introducing content for mobile (Powers and Sohn, 2012). By using two case studies of local newspapers as well as analyzing websites of fourteen family-owned newspaper in one state with respect to organizational ecology, this study aims to identify how family-owned newspapers adjust their strategy of operation to meet the renewing market environment.

## Literature Review

### A Review of Organizational Ecology

In biology, ecology is the study of the relations that living organisms have with respect to each other and their natural environment including the composition, distribution, number, and changing states of organisms within an ecosystem (Powers and Sohn, 2012). Organizational ecology, which utilizes insights from biology, and employs statistical analysis to try to understand the conditions under which organizations emerge, grow, and die. Simply put, this theory examines the environment in which organizations compete and how a process of natural selection occurs.

In the organizational ecology model, there are three stages during a life of an organization: variation, selection and retention. When an organization moves from one stage to the next one, its orientation would evolve from instrumental to institutional. Researchers applied this theory to explore how family-owned organizations evolve and changed to survive under new industry conditions. In the variation stage, any kind of change occurs: a new product, context, idea, etc., anything new generated consciously or not. Using organizational ecology in a case study of emerging media, Lowrey (2012) claims that new news forms and practices emerge. The survival of these findings, nevertheless depends on how dense is the market. Discussing his findings of the emergent media case study, Lowrey asserts there is evidence of the predicted tendencies to shift from variation toward retention and from institutional to instrumental orientations. The instrumental approach here refers to the practice of news operations of monitoring and calculating market conditions in order to respond accordingly. Whereas the institutional approach means news operations decouple themselves from their commercial environments. Lowrey added that emerging media demonstrated pursuit of available niches, but less well-defined purposes, practices and forms.

Precedent innovations affect the selection stage. Among the various paths of changes that occurred, those that have known success in the environmental trend are retained and implemented in the firm and a consequent determines the organization's survival. Selection is readily affected by administrative or technological innovation. The process of selection leads to the survival and reproduction of well-adapted forms and attrition of other types of organizations (David Marple, 1982).

Uncertainty exists during the period of trial of founding in the variation stage. Organizations have to figure out which innovations are to be chosen, as well as the risk of leaving out successful ones being considered. However, reaching the retention stage, the rate of uncertainty is reduced. Over time, relative selected variations are stable providing to the organization some reliability. The risk of failure which is high originally is reduced as an organization ages (Powers & Sohn, 2012). Powers and Sohn, in their case study of family-owned companies, reveal that following the O/E model, a diverse variety of entities is needed so some forms and practices are selected and others are dismissed. Also innovation in their case study mostly centered on the Internet over the past seven years. Media owners tried at the variation stage online free models which lead to the introduction and selection of a pay model. This study also justified the tendency of the small-market newspapers to use an institutional approach with the fact that their sample were located in a small, economically stable markets, However, they also found that family-owned news organizations tend to respond to external change in both strategic and non-strategic ways.

In their studies of O/E, Ebner & Beck, and Baum & Amburgey discussed about a third stage of O/E that is competition. They considered competition as a significant variable that motivate changes in an organizations. Ebner & Beck considered that competition and not the biological aspect of evolution, forms the organizational ecology theory. They argue that organizations are not comparable to biological species, where development is solely dependent on a natural process of evolution based on selection processes in which organizations that have the best fit with the environmental conditions are the one who survive.

## A Review of Family-Owned Business

A family firm can be defined as a firm owned by not more than four individuals or families, of whom a qualified majority want ownership to remain (Sund & Bjuggren, 2007). The structure of family-owned companies, as well as their ability to survive in a challenging environment is the focus of most studies in this period. Theories treated family-owned companies as engaged with their community, and motivated by the interest of the company sustainability.

Family-owned businesses have been studied with regard to ownership, leadership, organizational structure and profit model. For instance, it has been illustrated that a single owner of a family business has important reasons to implement transfer restrictions in the articles of association, which from a study based on an assumption of the uniqueness of family businesses that are worth preserving. It focused on the ownership of the family-owned companies, specifically from the juridical view. The analyzed complexities spurred by the lack of restrictions on transferability, as well as the specialties of family-owned companies' ownership and how it differs from the non-family-owned ones. They also looked at how to protect the ownership as well as some basic situations of ownership switch of a family-owned company.

A major question regarding family-owned business is to evolve and survive when the market changes. Many industries today behave like a massively interconnected network of organizations, technologies, consumers and products. It is important to appreciate that the networked structure we see in many industries today is a relatively recent phenomenon. In this claim, firms fought to keep ahead by generating innovations internally over a broad range of domains, while generally viewing external "change" as a threat to firm survival. The goal is no longer to lock out entire vertical stacks with proprietary advantage, but to be the best in a

chosen area of specialization. This means that the destiny of many organizations is linked together, and interaction between firms has become an increasingly critical and complex phenomenon, sharing elements of both cooperation and competition through a rich network of interrelated products, services, and technologies. Like their biological counterparts, these “ecosystems” are characterized by a large number of loosely interconnected participants who depend on each other for their mutual effectiveness and survival. (Sund & Bjuggren, 2007)

Based on the idea of Hannan and Freeman (1989) that ecological analysis is appropriate when organizations are facing inertial pressures and changeable situations, ecological analysis is used in this study to examine family-owned newspapers and their instrumental and institutional qualities, and how they respond to external change in both strategic and non-strategic ways.

#### Research Questions

RQ1: What is the role of organizational ecology in the development or innovation of family-owned newspapers?

RQ2: How can organizational ecology be applied to newspapers?

RQ3: What elements on the newspapers’ websites are possibly profitable for the newspaper?

#### Methodology

The case study used interviews as the way for data collection. Interview questions covered the following aspects: personal backgrounds of managers, organizational factors related to the managers, specifics as applicable variation stage, instrumental orientation measures selection, population formation stage measures, the way they innovated, the



leadership of the manager and their audience and competitors. Interviewing managers from the two family-owned local newspapers was part of data collection of this study. This study first used qualitative analysis to look for organizational ecology. It used inductive generalization to draw conclusion about how family-owned newspapers use organizational ecology in operation from the case of larger family-owned newspaper.

Secondly, a content analysis of fourteen local family newspapers' websites was conducted. According to Moos (2012), there has been an increase of interest for newspaper business in small town in general as evidenced by buyouts such as Warren Buffet's purchase of Media General's holding (cited in Powers & Sohn, 2012). The fourteen family newspapers were chosen within the state of Kansas. Websites were observed and coded during Fall 2012.

Newspaper websites were analyzed using two coders. We looked at the category of stories on the front page, links within stories, photos graphics, financial info, and features. We were also interested in observing the use of multimedia (streaming video, audio, and galleries), corporation information (contact, newspaper history, mission, and job listings), e-commerce (online shopping, classified ads, and front page advertisements), interactive (voting polls, news tip line, contexts/games, search option), local helpful links, cross promotion (radio, television newspaper, links to other media, pay walls), and social media. The purpose of this analysis was to identify quantifiable data on news ecological development, drawing on O/E theory.

## Results

### Results of Case Study #1

According to the interview with the larger family-owned newspaper, family-owned news media companies are following an ecological development adapting change. Organizational

ecology in news media suggests that populations cohere and stabilize over time, also, it regards decision-making process as a particular example of its wider predictions.

Why did the organizational ecology come into use in media companies? During the time in the 1980s and 1990s, city's media industry has seen a variety of shutdowns and laid-offs, which called for innovation in media field. Such innovation made media companies as well as journalists work in institutional ways, as to adjust themselves to both commercial and institutional environment.

Variation, which is described as departure from routine or tradition, could refer either to the broadening of media divisions or the change in approaches toward the audiences. For example, the previous leader of the larger newspaper, whose son has led the whole company to get involved in cable TV in late 1960s, said the fundamental philosophy of the company was "Try and fail and try again", which led them to try and fail with various. To broaden its company, the larger family-owned newspaper innovated to the telephone and Internet industry as these two become part of the mainstream of modern technology. To fit with the change of environment, it merged into cable and broadcasting when there was a recession in the newspaper industry. It also competes with other newspaper prints that are "free."

As mobile devices such as iPhone and iPad have come into play, the company also has been considering making its news content available on App Store to meet the need of its users. A large amount of the company's target audience is the young generation, in addition to its previous target newspaper subscribers. It has also started a giveback program, which allows people with their giveback card to get \$30 credits as they text back when they are consuming in

restaurants. These are examples of variation and as instrumental approach in the larger-market newspaper.

### Results of Case Study #2

The organizational ecology also involves instrumental to institutional orientations. Instrumental orientation focused on gaining a resource niche, while media tend to develop institutional orientation which requires co-dependent institutions and audiences to develop shared understandings that solidify media practices and forms. Usually older newspapers with a number of niches have a strong instrumental orientation at their startup, but they also show signs of a stronger institutional orientation today. Just as the audiences of the larger family-owned newspaper were the “Boomer Generation,” who subscribe to newspapers, they also would like to read on their tablets, they aim at young people as well.

Table 1. Different strategies during different periods

Variation	Selection	Retention
<p>“About the Management, our basic approach is by exception We have ways we have done things for a long time. If something comes up different from that. Then we get all over it than they have. And that allow us to delegate a lot of responsibility, a lot of authority to the department has which I think it has should be. So you know that means my dad and I should not to get involved in every little things. And I think that is the best.”</p>	<p>When it comes to decision-making, the managers` dad and brother are members of his peer group, so is the publisher group. There are some other media organizations. “They are all separated but are all owned by certain members of family.”</p>	<p>They have two main missions: the first one is “Serving information needs of their readers Which is the most important one. The second one is to “serve the needs of business connection with potential and current customers. Because they pay the bills.” Here customer refers advertiser.</p>

These three stages on a whole can be regarded as the process of innovation. Take the smaller family-owned newspaper as example; there are two main innovations over the past five years to now of this newspaper: the first one is “the creation of the website”, as many newspapers have done. Early on, that content was free. Within past five years, they changed cost on website that start charging of that site. For example, even though they allow access to these amounts of content, to get a full story from the newspaper, the readers have to subscribe. Some of the other content can be got for free. Include searchable databases, video, breaking news headlines, and kinds of information that is not available to print. On the important line of demarcation in 2009, the newspaper started to charge for the content because the manager found the free access to the e-edition did not work out at all.

The second innovation is “the creation some contents online which is not replicate from the paper edition we can generate some revenue.” The manager`s brother-in-law started that company as a branch of one of our papers called video networks. So the website could deliver a streaming video of a high school football games. the instrumental and institutional orientation of the smaller family-owned newspaper can be illustrated as the following table (Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of Instrumental and institutional orientation of the smaller family-owned newspaper

<b>Instrumental</b>	<b>Institutional</b>
The two innovations that they have done.	“We have already set up ways to run a and we run in that way. If there is something unusual than we start to get on it.”

## Results of Content Analysis

In content analysis, we used coding sheet to record the number and existence of several elements as variables, and then used SPSS to do statistics.

Table 3. Average of front-page stories, photos and advertisements

Nominations	Local Stories	Sports Stories	Other news*	Photos	Advertisements
Means	3.78	2.43	2.28	4.21	3.64

Table 3 provides the mean of the variables that we observed on the website front page. The average number of local stories for the fourteen newspapers is 3.78. On the front page of the website, the mean is 2.43 is for local sport stories. The mean is 2.28 for news stories other than local; that is national and international. The mean number of advertisements on the front page is 3.64, and the mean score for number of photos is of 4.27.

Figure1. Frequencies of Multimedia

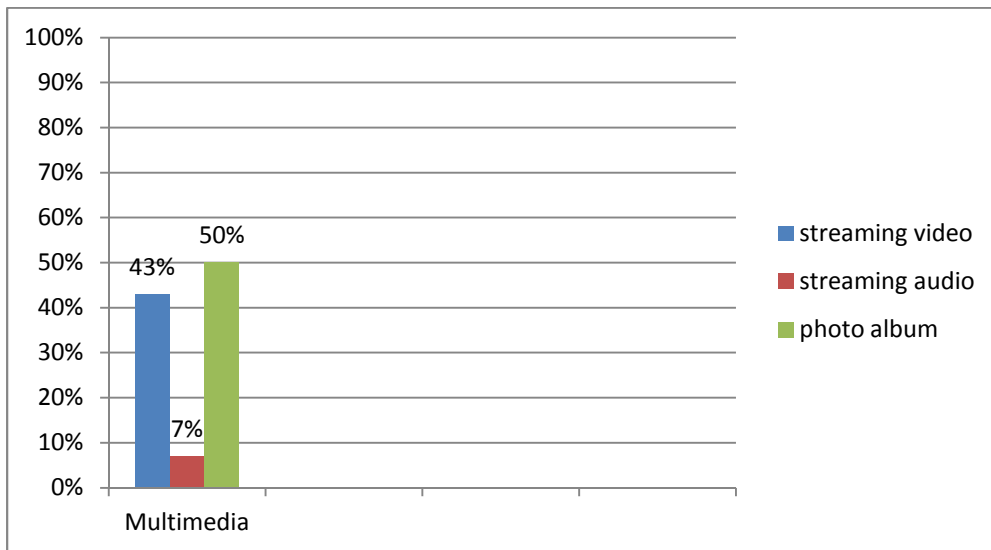


Figure 1 is the frequencies of multimedia usage in the newspapers' websites: 43% of the newspapers have links to streaming video. 7% (one over fourteen) has audio link, 50% have photo album accessible from the website.

Figure2. Frequencies of Corporate Information.

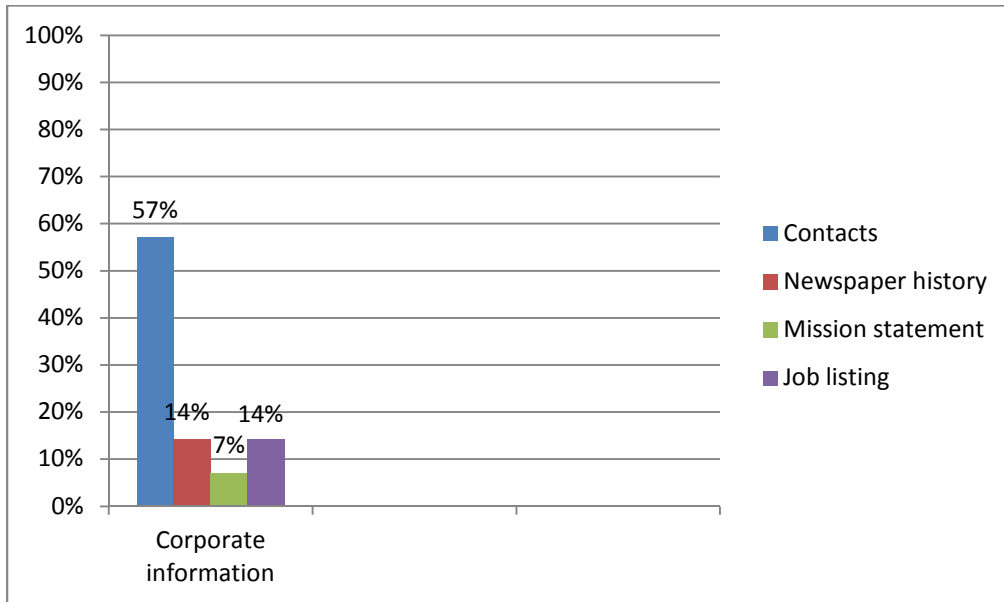


Figure 2 is percentage of newspapers that have corporate information available on their website. Fifty seven percent have personnel contact information. Fourteen percent (two over fourteen) have the newspaper history. Seven percent of the newspapers have a mission statement and 14% list their job; that is a list the newspaper activity or service that they provide.

Figure 3. Frequencies of interactivity

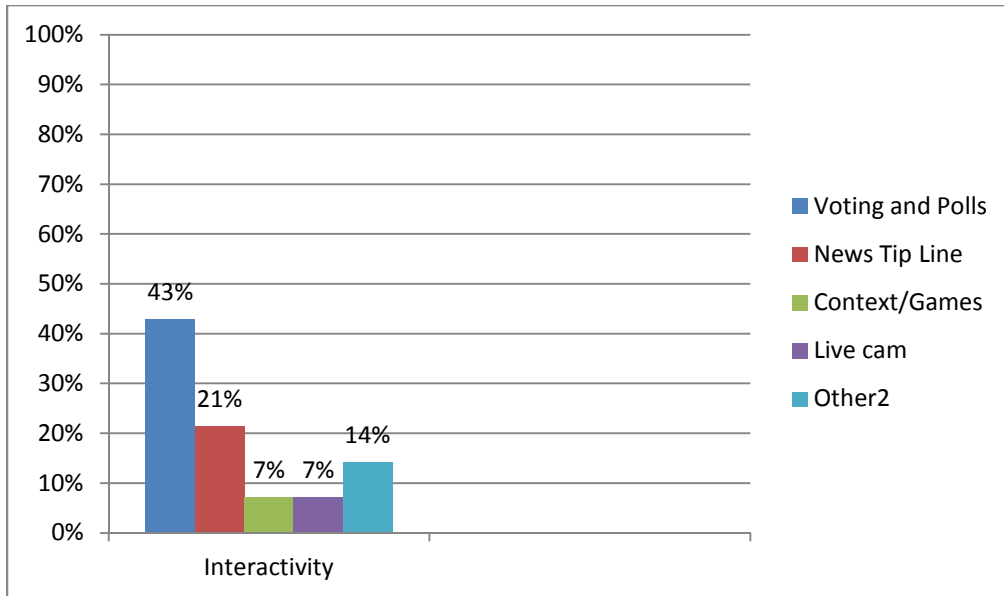


Figure 3 is the percentage of interactivity of the newspapers. Vote and polls is 43%, 21% of newspapers have a news tip line. Seventeen percent have games online and a live cam. Fourteen percent of the newspapers have other interactive content such as guestbooks or online chats.

Figure 4. Frequencies of helpful link

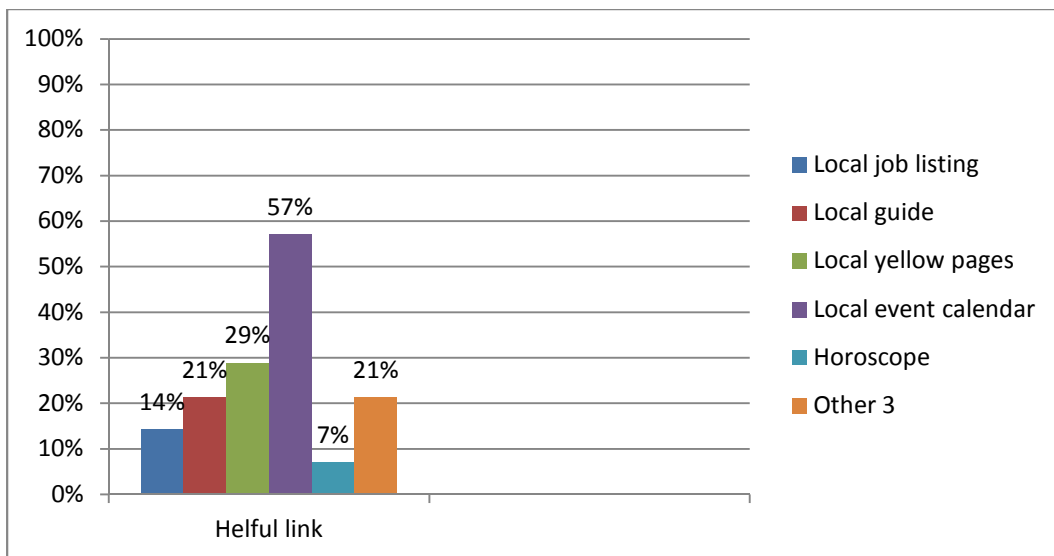


Figure 4 is the percentage of helpful links present in the newspapers' websites. We found 14% that have a local job listing; twenty one percent have a local guide; twenty nine percent have yellow pages; Also, fifty seven percent of the websites have a local event calendar; seven percent have a horoscope; twenty one percent have other helpful features such as local weather forecasts and life style.

Figure 5. Frequencies of social media.

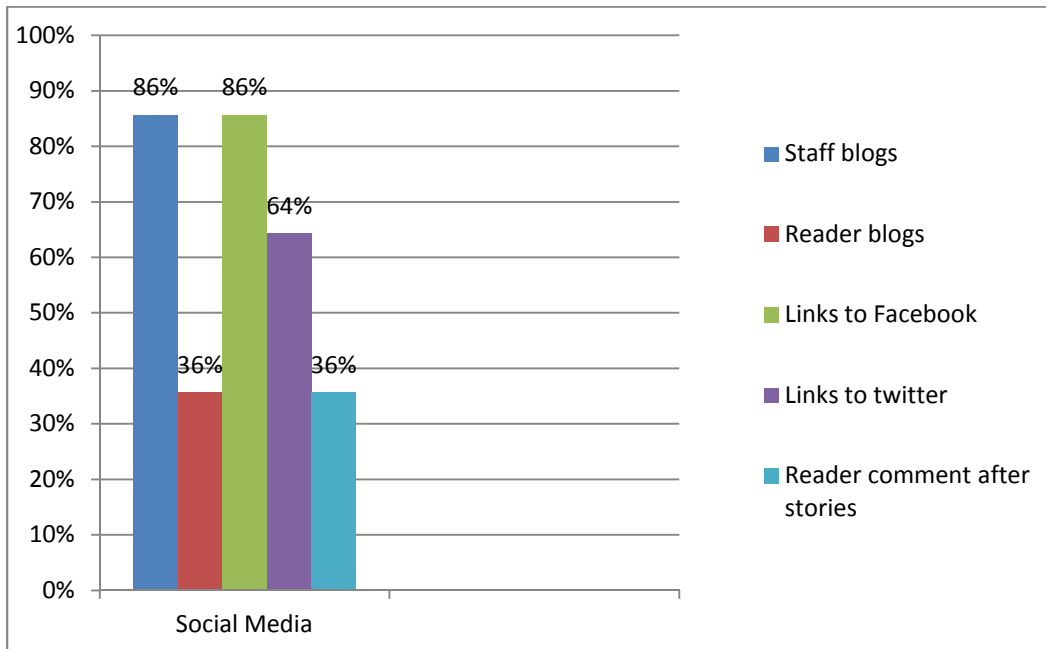


Figure 5 is the percentage of social media in the newspapers' websites. The finding shows that 86% of newspapers have a staff blog; also 86% are connected to Facebook, 66% are connected to twitter. Only one newspaper is connected to YouTube. We found that 36% of the websites have comments after stories. Readers must have access to comment on stories.



Figure 6. Frequencies of cross promotion, pay walls and classified ads

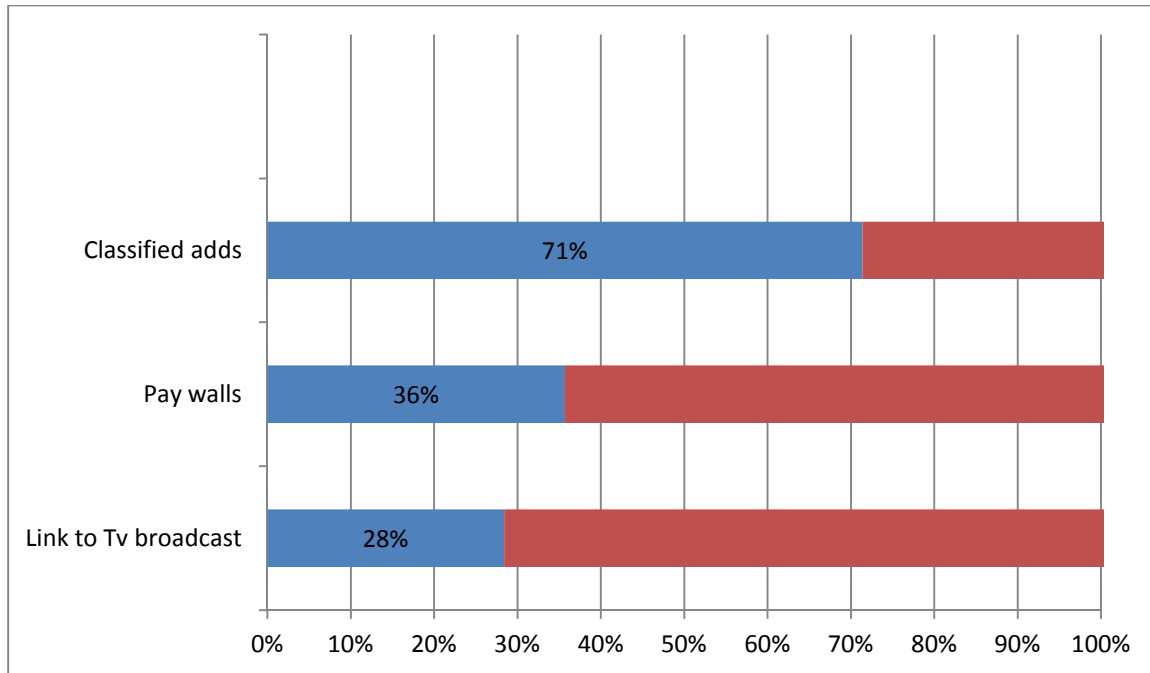


Figure 6 represents the frequencies of classified ads, pay wall and cross promotion. Like it is shown on the figure, 71% of the newspapers have classified ads; 28% have links to television channels. The most common broadcasts were PIX, CBSNEWS, AP, CNET and E.). Only 36% of the newspapers have a pay wall. These newspapers require a subscription from readers in order to read the full version of news stories. Two newspapers have the registration price available online.



Table 4. Correlation between variables

		Photos	Local sports stories	Regional/national/international	Multimedia	Social media	Helpful links	Reader blogs	Advertisements/front page	Interactive
Photos	Pearson Correlation	1	.378	.253	.483	.199	.013	.342	.427	.241
	Sig.(2-tailed)		.183	.382	.080	.495	.966	.232	.128	.406
	N	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
Local sports stories	Pearson Correlation	.378	1	.647*	.399	.463	.045	-.102	.195	.256
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.183		.012	.157	.096	.878	.730	.503	.376
	N	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
Regional/National/International	Pearson Correlation	.253	.647*	1	.584*	.232	-.237	-.016	.036	.153
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.382	.012		.028	.426	.415	.957	.904	.602
	N	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
Multimedia	Pearson Correlation	.483	.399	.584*	1	.352	.136	.473	.543*	.508
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.080	.157	.028		.217	.642	.088	.045	.064
	N	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
Social media	Pearson Correlation	.199	.463	.232	.352	1	.209	.539*	.672**	.484
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.495	.096	.426	.217		.474	.047	.008	.080
	N	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
Helpful links	Pearson Correlation	.013	.045	-.237	.136	.209	1	.482	.499	.660*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.966	.878	.415	.642	.474		.081	.070	.010
	N	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
Reader blogs	Pearson Correlation	.342	-.102	-.016	.473	.539*	.482	1	.702**	.636*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.232	.730	.957	.088	.047	.081		.005	.014
	N	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
Advertisements/front page	Pearson Correlation	.427	.195	.036	.543*	.672**	.499	.702**	1	.626*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.128	.503	.904	.045	.008	.070	.005		.017
	N	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
Interactive	Pearson Correlation	.241	.256	.153	.508	.484	.660*	.636*	.626*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.406	.376	.602	.064	.080	.010	.014	.017	
	N	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Finally we looked at whether or not advertisements on the front page related to interactive, multimedia and helpful links, which might indicate profitability. For example, there were significant correlation between advertisement and interactive, social media and multimedia, that is to say, the more advertisements there were, the more interactivities, social media and multimedia would be.

### Discussion

The long successful newspaper business model is under pressure and facing dual challenges on the revenue front. Readership of newspapers in print form is declining, affecting revenues. Advertising revenues are declining concomitantly. However, technological changes have provided opportunities including targeted advertising, media convergence, and global reach, so newspaper-publishing companies are beginning to adopt strategies to exploit technology to increase profits.

As most organizations have structural inertia that hinders adaptation when the environment changes, those organizations that become incompatible with the environment are eventually replaced through competition with new organizations better suited to external demands. Organizational ecology serves as a process to understand the forces that shape the structures of organizations over time.

Through the context of the interview, we could find that in order to survive under changes, the family-owned newspapers started their own site. At the same time, they maintained their advantages and cooperated with other local news resources. Basically, all the

competitors from outside would meet the barrier. And that is also why the niches of the two newspapers in study are solid. The newspapers also tried to keep a balance between deliver local and national, even world news.

#### Answers to Research Questions

Answer to RQ1: Since organizational ecology aims to understand the conditions under which organizations emerge, grow, and die, organizational ecology could be regarded as an approach that family-owned newspapers can apply to innovation. Meanwhile, successful innovation of family-owned newspapers can reflect the ideas of organizational ecology to a certain extent.

Answer to RQ2: Applying organizational ecology to newspapers should follow the structure of organizational ecology, that is to say, three basic elements: variation, selection and instrumental and institutional orientations should be applied according to newspapers' niche groups, their aim of innovation and their present shortcomings.

Answer to RQ3: According to the correlation, variable "advertisements on the front page" has a good positive correlation with variables interactive, multimedia and helpful links, which indicate that interactive, multimedia and helpful links have potential value for the profitability of newspapers.

Meanwhile, as this study of family-owned newspapers studied simply local newspaper companies, it may not be necessary that each aspect of this case in study could be generalized to other media. Future research concerns about a broader range of family-owned newspapers would be necessary to look for more similarities and come to more generalized conclusion on the use of organizational ecology on family-owned media.

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## Appendix 1: Interview Questions

1. Describe your leadership style.
2. What are some innovations over the past 5-8 years?
3. Describe the digital version of your product.
4. How do you see mobile products (like Kindle, Ipad, Iphone etc.) becoming part of your news product?
5. Whom do you see as your audience niche, or target audience (by demography, interest, geography)?
6. Do you have some economic pressures?
7. Who is your peer? Who do you ask for advice when you are making a decision?

## Appendix 2: Content of Local Newspaper Websites Chart A

Newspapers	Local stories	Sport stories	Other news*	Photos	Advertisement
Belleville Telescope	4	0	0	3	4
Clay center dispatch	13	5	7	19	6
Colby free press	0	0	0	0	0
Daily Union	8	5	10	4	7



Emporia Gazette	3	3	1	3	6
Independence daily reporter	3	0	0	3	1
Lawrence Journal World	2	1	2	6	8
Lions Daily	0	0	4	2	3
Iola Register	3	2	1	2	2
Manhattan Mercury	6	8	12	4	2
Marion County Record	7	0	0	4	4
Montgomery County Chronicle	0	0	0	0	0
Sabetha Herald	4	4	0	8	3
Salina Journal	5	6	0	1	5
Average	3.78	2.43	2.28	4.21	3.64

Appendix 2: Content of Local Newspaper Websites Chart B

Nominations	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total %
Financial information	14	86	100
Live Cam	7	93	100
Links within stories	21	79	100
Streaming video link	43	57	100
Streaming audio link	7	93	100
Personnel info/Contact	57	43	100
Newspaper history	14	86	100
Mission statement	7	93	100
Job listing	14	86	100
Classified ads	71	29	100
Voting polls	43	57	100
News Tip line	21	79	100
Context/Games	7	93	100
Search option	79	21	100
Other 2*	14	86	100
Photo album	50	50	100
Local job listing	29	71	100
Local guide	21	79	100
Local yellow pages	29	71	100
Local event calendar	57	43	100
Horoscope	7	93	100
Other3*	21	79	100

Link to television broadcast	28	72	100
Staff blogs	85	7	100
Reader blogs	36	64	100
Link to facebook	86	14	100
Link to twitter	64	35	100
Reader comments after stories	36	64	100
Pay walls	36	64	100

Other 2\*: Guestbook, Chat.

Other 3\*: life, weather forecast.