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Niche Publications: Their Popularity and Profitability at
Newspapers in Utah and West Virginia

A Thesis
Presented To
The Faculty of the W. Page Pitt
School of Journalism and Mass Communications

In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master's of Art Journalism

By
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Marshall University
May 2009

THIS THESIS WAS ACCEPTED ON April 2 2009
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ABSTRACT

Niche Publications: Their Popularity and Profitability at Newspapers in Utah and West Virginia

By Hilary Groutage Weible

Newspapers have turned to niche, or specialty, publications as a way to boost revenue and readership since the popularity of the Internet and the rapidly changing ways of news delivery left many awash in a sea of red ink beginning in the mid 1990s. There is little empirical evidence that these publications benefit the host newspaper. This study is an attempt to add to that bank of knowledge. Editors, publishers and advertising managers in Utah and West Virginia were invited by e-mail to answer a Web-based survey about the popularity of niche publications among their readers and staffs. The study also asked respondents to gauge how profitable they believe niche publications are. Results of the 31-question survey show overwhelming support for niche publications and suggest adding them may cause a significant increase in revenue.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

For almost two years, Erica Smith, a graphics designer for the St. Louis Post Dispatch, has spent a dozen hours a week with an odd hobby - keeping a running total of jobs lost in the U. S. newspaper industry. It may be the only tally of its kind and given the atmosphere of the newspaper industry in the last decade, it might be akin to collecting obituaries. In the February/March 2009 issue of *American Journalism Review*, under the headline: Is There Life After Newspapers? Smith said she had tallied 15,554 job cuts in 2008. The cuts come from newspapers coast to coast and news of them trickles in to Smith in the form of news releases, wire reports, blog entries and tips from friends. Her updates appear on a Web page appropriately named “Paper Cuts” (Hodierne, 2009).

These are turbulent times in the newspaper business. Job cuts are at historic highs and revenue at historic lows. Smith counted more than 7,979 newspaper jobs lost in the first three months of 2009. She reports 65 newspapers closed (Smith, 2009). Among those newspapers that closed were six that self-identified themselves as respondents later in this study.

Certainly the changing world, where news is available electronically in forms from computers to cell phones might be to blame. But if history repeats itself, we recall the fear that radio would kill the newspaper and television, with one twist of the knob, would be the death of everything.

Researcher Rachel Smolkin writes that traditionally, newspapers have been slow to respond to change and have treated innovation like a trip to the dentist. Innovations

were dreaded torture to be endured, not encouraged, in newsrooms. Certainly, the newspaper trends of the last few decades: more color, flashier design, shorter stories with “chunky text” in boxes and “charticles” that combine graphics and news copy eventually have found their way into even the nation’s most traditional newspapers, but the innovations were usually met with dismay by older, sage editors (Smolkin, 2008).

Many changes in the newspaper industry can be traced to the introduction of *USA Today* in 1982. Touted as “the nation’s newspaper” and initially dismissed as a gimmicky gamble by Gannett, *USA Today* used bright colors and graphics to package the news in a way that served it up to readers in small bites. Readers were able to skim the pages and read short summaries of the stories they cared about (Meyer, 2004).

While there is little empirical data tracing the recent trends in newspapering, the appeal of local news is clearly established in the literature. Simply put, readers want local news and usually cannot get it anyplace else. In a 2000 study, Belden Associates, at the request of *Editor & Publisher* magazine, ranked readers interest in various newspaper content categories. The categories included local, neighborhood news, weather, comics, travel, gardening and home decorating (Astor, 2000). The survey showed 66 percent of readers in 29 markets were “very interested” in local, neighborhood news. Belden CEO Sammy Papert was not surprised when interest in local news took the top slot. “It’s perpetually the first thing readers say they want,” he said.

Local news may be the one thing smaller and mid-sized newspapers are uniquely poised to provide readers. Small and mid-sized daily and weekly newspapers traditionally have been the primary source of information important to households. Where else does a

person find school lunch menus, the middle school honor roll and the happenings of the local garden club?

In recent years, repackaging local news into niche products designed to attract a certain slice of a newspaper's demographic has become a popular, and perhaps last-ditch effort to increase circulation and advertising and add to a newspaper's profitability.

Niche publications are typically distributed free of charge or inserted into the main newspaper on certain days. Themes of niche publications might be hyperlocal, or zoned, community news, seasonal topics such as gardening, and weddings, or more practical parenting, real estate and back-to-school guides. Hyperlocal niche publications typically differ in frequency than the others, since they may be printed weekly and others annually. Niche publications are one of the latest trends embraced by the industry as a way to increase readership and advertising revenue (Smolkin, 2008).

H. Harrison Cochran, in a November 2007 piece in the *Advertising & Marketing Review* said: "In the center of this gloom and doom has been a silver lining trying to shine – free newspapers. It doesn't take market research to see the growing number of community, niche or alternative papers – often in a variety of languages – the evidence is on every street corner. Free dailies are the latest fastest growing segment of this trend worldwide. Cochran and other publishers have found that while the circulation numbers and budgets of large newspapers shrink, the story is much different in smaller newspaper markets. "The deeper you go into the heartland, the better the stories get. Double digit growth (including local Web sites) and margins bankers love. The business advantage rests with local news and ad gathering networks, Cochran said. The niche publications

are typically free and are designed to appeal to certain groups, generally based on geography or demography.

It may be that niche publications are the last bastion of financial success in an era of newspapering that is awash with red ink.

While the popularity of niche publications may have been proven with anecdotal evidence, there is little empirical evidence to gauge their popularity with those charged with producing them and even less evidence to support claims that niche publications help the bottom lines of “host” newspapers.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Baxter Black, a cowboy poet, columnist and radio commentator wrote in 2006 that local newspapers are the “last refuge of unfiltered America – a running documentary of the warts and triumphs of Real People, unfettered by the Spin and Bias and Opaque Polish of today’s Homogenized Journalism. It is the difference between homemade bread and Pop Tarts” (Lauterer, 2006).

Black’s remarks appeared in a column written by Jock Lauterer headlined “Hold That Obit! The report of our death has been greatly exaggerated” in the Winter 2006 issue of *Grassroots Editor*. Lauterer is a journalism professor at University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. The column first appeared in the Chapel Hill Herald and addressed the “gloom and doom fear” that surrounded the announcement in March 2006 that McClatchy Co. was to buy Knight Ridder (Lauterer, 2006).

These are turbulent times for newspapers. The last decade brought very little good news for the industry. Newspaper revenue is at historic lows and newspapers nationwide have closed or cut the size of staffs. At the same time, newspaper readership started to decline. A study by Scarborough Research shows between 1998 and 2001, adult readership of U.S. daily newspapers declined by 7.92% while readership of Sunday newspapers declined 7.06%. The Newspaper Association of America reported the data (*Advertising Age*, 2002). But a spring 2008 survey by Media Mark Research & Intelligence, commissioned by the Newspaper National Network, showed a 2.5% rise in readers from 80.6 million, from 78.7 million from the same period during spring 2007.

The numbers first appeared in the July 2008 issue of *Editor & Publisher*. A post on *editorsweblog.org* on July 21, 2008 notes that newspaper circulation fell for the six months ending March 2008, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations. The drop was 3.5% for dailies and 4.5% for Sunday editions, but overall, readership still grew. The Newspaper National Network said the rise in readers could be attributed to publishers “focusing on the core subscribers and cutting circulation of third-party copies, which went to infrequent readers. Newspaper Web sites may also be drawing people to the print edition” (*Editor & Publisher*, 2008).

Some newspapers found success in what they have been doing for decades, reporting local news. Frequently, the hyperlocal news appeared online or in niche, or specialty, publications designed to appeal to a certain population.

In December 2007, a survey in *Editor & Publisher* showed that 9% of all daily newspapers publish niche publications with the same two goals Rachel Smolkin stated in a 2006 study - increasing circulation and increasing readership. Since the Internet began the grab for newspaper readers, niche publications have increased in popularity.

Typically, niche publications target a specific demographic or geographic group. Newspaper managers have come to realize in recent years that niche publications and local news, or the two in concert with one another, might be the only unique products a newspaper has to offer readers. Indeed, niche publications are the products that have changed the face of the newspaper industry (Attaway-Fink, 2004). The change was the result of the impact of marketing research to discover what readers, or potential readers, want in their newspapers. For the first time in history, targeting specific groups has

become a popular way to market newspapers and specialty publications (Attaway-Fink, 2004).

Studies showed readership and readership habits were changing and the response, which included niche publications, occurred relatively quickly within the traditionally stoic newspaper industry (Day & Shoemaker, 2000).

But there were even earlier warnings of the turbulent times.

Mary Alice Shaver and Regina Louise Lewis in 1997 predicted a future newspaper market in which publications would compete for both readers and advertising dollars with renewed fervor. Niche marketing, they said, is a trend gaining popularity as advertisers look for the most efficient methods to reach specific audiences. There was talk of niche publications even earlier. In a special report dated August 12, 1991 in *Advertising Age*, Myrna Blyth, editor in chief and publisher of *Ladies' Home Journal*, discussed the need to create a niche and reach readers. Blyth accused newspapers of not reporting on women's needs and said coverage of women's issues was "overbimboed." There was a need, she said for more coverage of women's, family and health issues (Rigney, 1991).

But historically, newspapers have been slow to respond to change. When faced with what industry watchers feared was potentially devastating competition from the Internet and other electronic news delivery sources, coupled with dwindling readership, newspapers turned to what they might have done best in the first place – reporting local news and in some cases, packaging it as niche publications (Sutel, 2006).

Newspapers might enjoy a unique advantage over other media when it comes to local news. Typically, they are better connected to their readership and communities than other news outlets, and perhaps newspapers find themselves better poised to turn that relationship into advertising revenue. A study by Borrell Associates estimated newspapers would spend \$5.8 billion on local advertising placed online at newspaper Web sites in 2006 (Sutel, 2006).

The American Press Institute based in Reston, Va., was established in 1947 to serve as a training and development arm of the newspaper industry. Associate Director Carol Ann Riordan said in 1994 that tough economic times would force newspapers to try new ideas (Shaver & Lewis, 1997). In the survey, Shaver and Lewis found that most newspapers launched niche publications to attract advertising revenue as a goal, although one seems to follow the other. Frequently, the publications did not produce revenue at the rate advertising managers had expected and the study also showed one-third of the newspapers studied started and then stopped niche publications. Lack of advertising support was the most common reason cited for canceling production of niche publications (Shaver & Lewis, 1997).

Flexible advertising packages like the ones offered to entice advertisers into both niche publications and pages of the main newspaper were reported to the Newspaper Advertising Bureau as early as 1988 (Shaver & Lewis, 1997). By 1992, a group headed by James Lessersohn of The New York Times Co., cited “individual appeal strategy” as something that should be implemented in the 1990s (Editor & Publisher, 1992).

But at a 2008 meeting of the Newspaper Association of America, a surprisingly simple concern emerged. Andrew Swinard of Starcom USA told publishers their advertising rates and packages for niche publications were too difficult for most advertisers to figure out. “Please, please, please, please make it easier,” Swinard said. Indeed, ease in figuring out ad rates comes into play when television and radio outlets offer simple, easy to understand bundled advertising (Mullman, 2008).

Confusion over advertising rates aside, community news publishing giants such as GateHouse Media Inc. and Gannett have invested heavily in the niche market (Edmonds, 1994). Gannett launched 400 niche publications across the country in 2004 and most other newspapers followed. Media watchers at the Poynter Institute dubbed 2004 “The Year of the Niche” because so many specialty publications were launched. Rick Edmonds wrote “What’s hot, hot, hot right now is niche publications – especially those directed at youth, Spanish-speaking audiences and other immigrant groups (Edmonds, 2004). By April 2007, Gannett’s portfolio of niche publications topped 1,006 (Smolkin, 2008). The publications included Spanish-language weeklies, about one dozen weekly city magazines aimed at young people and publications referred to as “zip code” magazines that are written for, and about, people who live in a certain zip code area. Susan Clark Johnson, president of Gannett’s newspaper division, said in an interview with *American Journalism Review* in January 2008 that niche publications target hard-to-reach audiences and “provide a ready vehicle for advertisers that in many cases we haven’t had before” (Smolkin, 2008).

Media consultant and researcher Gordon Borrell heads Borrell Associates Research and told *American Journalism Review* that newspapers can be confident and should “relax about their changing role” because people do not go to the Internet for local school board news or crime news (Astor, 2000).

While small niche products and direct mail programs may seem like newspapers are competing at the low end of the revenue scale, Gary Pruitt of McClatchy said small niche products or direct-mail programs are the kind of business activity that will sustain high-end journalism at its core. GateHouse Media Inc. owns more than 400 publications in 15 states and reaches 9 million people weekly through daily and community newspapers and niche publications (Bellweather, 2008). Many niche publications are zoned, hyperlocalized news sections (Miller, 2007).

The challenge, it seems, is to find the correct niche and accompanying advertisers to support them (Chepesiuk, 1994).

While empirical data on niche publications, the cost to produce them and the benefit to their host newspapers remains scarce, the forays into the niche market in the past decade are well-documented and have not been without twists and turns. National advertising data compiled by TNS Media Intelligence/CMR show a slump in advertising spending in recent years, even among magazines published by newspapers and designed for a target audience, in other words, niche publications (Ranii, 2008).

In a 2000 study of top tier daily newspapers, defined by the Audit Bureau of Circulations and completed by Nielsen Online, the country’s largest newspapers said they

would spend 9 % of their 2000 advertising revenue on local niche publications (Fitzgerald and Saba, 2007).

By mid-decade, newspaper publishers seemed anxious to change the subject from what does not work at newspapers to what does (Mullman, 2006).

In March 2008, the E. W. Scripps Company named Javier J. Aldape vice president of niche products for the newspaper division of the company. In an interview with PR Newswire, officials called it a “strategic move to increase the share of advertising revenue that is derived from niche products” (PR Newswire, 2008).

In the July/August 2008 issue of the *Journal of Advertising Research*, Robert Lavidge writes that the current atmosphere is “the most challenging time in the history of advertising. The focus of advertising research has gone from mass markets to segments to niches.” Lavidge sees the change not as bad business news, but rather as an opportunity to market customized products to customers.

Lavidge said advertising has been traced back to ancient Greece and beyond and “burgeoned” in the 18th century. “By 1759 it had progressed to the point where the famous Dr. Samuel Johnson wrote: ‘The trade of advertising is now so near to perfection that it is not easy to propose any improvement.’”

We know, of course, Johnson was mistaken. Lavidge writes that by 1915, advertising had advanced so far that the *Printer’s Ink* magazine carried the following: ‘When the historians of the 20th century shall have finished his narrative and comes searching for the sub-title which shall best express the spirit of the period, we think it is not at all unlikely that he may select ‘the advertising age’ for that purpose.’”

Lavidge was head of a division of Lever Brothers in the 1950s. “As I recall, approximately 40 percent of the division’s annual revenues were spent on advertising, the vast majority on Bob Hope radio programs. One of our primary responsibilities in marketing and advertising research was to help the technical research people develop products that appealed to the modal group of consumers under the bell-shaped curve, the middle majority, and to help the advertising department reach those people with the Pepsodent messages. Meanwhile, the research people at Colgate, then our leading competitor, appeared to be doing exactly the same thing. We were both aiming at the same part of the market. What word or phrase describes such activity? That was of course, ‘mass marketing.’”

Lavidge writes that the advertising research focus switched in the 1970s when it became evident that not everyone wanted the same products or services. “It could be helpful to segment the market demographically, psychographically, or both.” That was called “segmentation” he said.

In the 1990s, the focus of advertising research turned to niche research when advertisers recognized that individuals have a diverse set of preferences, wants and needs, and not everyone in the same segment was alike. The focus has changed to finding an area of interest and targeting individuals with that interest, he said. .

In the future, Lavidge believes advertising can be focused on the individual. “Advertising research will find ways to understand individuals as individuals, not just as members of cohort groups or segments or niches defined in any manner” (Lavidge, 1999)

An editorial printed in the April 2002 issue of *Advertising Age* said, “Local papers have the opportunity to grow through innovation.”

Dolan Media credits innovation for its success. Based in Minneapolis, Dolan Media has 800 employees in 21 states and revenues of roughly \$100 million. “Life is good here in the niches, all of us are sort of becoming an inch wide and a mile deep,” Founder Jim Dolan told the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* in November of 2003. His company focuses on legal newspapers packed with legal ads and notices which do not require large sales forces. Many of the advertisements are foreclosures, bankruptcies, and other court actions associated with tough economic times (Beal, 2005).

When the McClatchy Company acquired Knight Ridder in 2006, some media pundits said the event was further evidence of the inevitable demise of an antiquated form of communication – the newspaper. Knight Ridder owned 32 daily newspapers and at least 24 community newspapers (defined as weeklies, twice-weeklies, and tri-weeklies). The new McClatchy owned about 59 dailies and the company sold 12 of the newly-acquired big, daily newspapers and kept the other smaller newspapers (Lavidge, 1999).

The reason was clear to Frank Fee, a journalism professor at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. “They’re the ones making money,” Fee said in the January 2007 edition of *Publisher’s Auxiliary*. John W. Stephenson goes on in *The Journal of the National Newspaper Association*. “Thousands of community newspapers are thriving and gaining circulation even as the big boys decline...people today, as in previous years, are hungry to know about what is happening locally. They know their hometown paper is where they’ll find the news they want. There will always be those who say newspapers

are on their way out. But from what I've seen lately, I've never been more optimistic about their future.”

In 2006, Bob Scaife, vice president for smaller market newspapers for the Newspaper Association of America said “local is the thing.” People want to hear more about what is happening in their communities.

Small towns are the bright spot for newspapers and in many ways, community newspapers enjoy advantages that big metropolitan dailies have lost. Readership is holding out better and fewer people have defected to the Internet for news in classified ads. It is no wonder then, that Gannett, known for a devotion to profitability, was the nation's largest owner of weekly, community newspapers in 2006.

In 2007, GateHouse Media Inc. claimed to be the leading community newspaper publisher with more than 450 publications in about 20 states. Its portfolio includes about 90 daily newspapers along with many more weeklies and shoppers that reached an estimated 9 million readers. GateHouse also produces about 90 niche publications focused on local sports, recreation, and health issues, according to a statement released May 16, 2007 on the PR Newswire.

Tom Lowry wrote in the February 19, 2007 issue of *Business Week* that readers are loyal and plentiful in small towns. Because of their loyalty, local advertisers are “keen to reach them.”

GateHouse Media Inc. controls more than 400 publications that stretch from Michigan to the California desert. The company's hold on local advertisers might cause

big dailies headaches and cause Internet giants Yahoo! Inc. and Google Inc. to pause when trying to make a grab for local advertising dollars, Lowry wrote.

The *Business Week* piece said even though GateHouse lacks the size of Gannett Co., its local papers generate profit margins of up to 40 percent, which is more than double of some big city dailies. “These are the dominant media in their towns,” GateHouse Media Inc. Chief Executive Mike Reed said in the article. “That’s why we never look at a market and say it’s too small” (Lowry, 2007).

Lowry writes that the hyperlocal strategy seems to be paying off. In an editorial sense, if a fistfight breaks out at the school board meeting, the news goes on the front page. Peewee football becomes huge news on the sports page. While big papers have been losing national advertisers to cable TV and the Internet and classified ads listings to the likes of monster.com and craigslist, local hardware and grocery stores still rely on the hometown paper to advertise their special prices. Randall Jones, a dentist in Arkadelphia, Arkansas and a regular advertiser in the *Arkadelphia Daily Siftings Herald* said his message would be lost in a larger newspaper.

The future and profitability of hyperlocal online news Web sites is less certain. In the June/July 2007 issue of *American Journalism Review*, Paul Farhi writes about Mark Potts and Susan DeFife, a pair who thought they had come up with a winning formula for a new journalistic venture in 2003 when they launched *Backfence*. Their vision was for a series of hyperlocal news-oriented Web sites with content provided primarily by people who knew the community best, its residents. The Web site’s content would be local news, commentaries, blogs, photos, and calendar listings (Farhi, 2007).

Backfence raised \$3 million in venture capital and expanded rapidly, but soon burned through the money and failed. The experience “may offer no greater lesson than the old one about the pioneers being the ones with the arrows in their backs,” the two told Farhi.

Some estimate there are more than 500 local-local or hyperlocal news sites that show a profit on the Internet, but the vast majority seemed to be losing money in 2007, according to a survey by J-Lab the Institute for Interactive Journalism at the University of Maryland’s Philip Merrill College of Journalism.

Many larger, daily papers are attempting to create hyperlocal Web sites, but their success is still unknown. In the August 2007 issue of *Editor & Publisher*, writers Mark Fitzgerald and Jennifer Saba have discovered most hyperlocal markets are currently being served by weekly papers with the advantages of local brand names and strong ties to the community (Fitzgerald & Saba, 2007).

Richard Karpel, executive director of the Association of Alternative News Weeklies said, “Everyone is talking about the ‘death of print,’ and the funny thing is, you see more newspapers than before. When you are in a market like Boston or New York or Washington, DC you are just being matched to death” (Fitzgerald & Saba, 2007). By the growth of these niche publications it is obvious they are contributing to the bottom line. AAN’s Karpel says, “If you go beyond a top 10 or top 20 markets, our papers (alternatives) are doing well.”

The AAN's statistics show alternative newspaper revenues were up 3.6% in 2005/2006, a time when the Newspaper Association of America reported overall newspaper revenue was down by 0.3% (Fitzgerald & Saba, 2007).

Clearly, newspapers must prepare for a challenging future that includes diversifying the news product, niche, specialty publications and the complexities of turning a profit with the Internet (Attaway-Fink, 2004). In one of the few pieces of empirical research to explore niche publications, Attaway-Fink found that just as media economics theory might suggest, larger, dominant newspapers have more opportunity and more resources for a collection of print niche products. In some cases, the lines between advertising and editorial content become blurred during production. Eckman and Lindlof, in research published in 2003, studied "advertorials" produced at one newspaper and found that even though the products were clearly marked as ads, they were far less expensive than advertisements placed in a traditional newspaper and readers viewed them as more credible than traditional advertisements because they resembled the editorial copy produced by the newsroom (Eckman & Lindlof, 2003).

In a market that continues to be driven by profit and advertising, the role of journalists and their obligations to remain fair, objective and accountable, debates over such projects are at an all-time high (Attaway-Fink, 2004). In the past, research has found that advertisers are protected if their contributions to the annual bottom line are great enough. In some cases, Attaway-Fink said, large advertisers like large car dealerships might be warned about upcoming negative news coverage, violating the canons of professional journalism (Attaway-Fink, 2004). But the author contends that readers, as

well as journalists, expect news gathering organizations to adhere to high standards of ethics. However, if a reporter gives readers what they want, based on survey research and focus group findings, is the reporter a journalist working in the advertising department or a journalists working in the newsroom, Attaway-Fink asks.

In her study of editors randomly selected from the *Editor & Publisher International Yearbook*, Attaway-Fink found that editors with 16 to 20 years of experience and those at newspapers owned by a media conglomerate rather than an independent group more often agreed with adding special sections, or niche publications, based on the results of focus groups and surveys. The research was followed up by interviews with randomly selected managing editors who offered qualitative research suggesting they were more willing to adhere to corporate profit margins more than the editors with less experience were.

Though primarily aimed at the Internet, the findings of Day and Shoemaker in 2001 showed that small newspapers may not want to participate in emerging technologies in the beginning, because of a fear they will pursue the wrong technological path at a cost they can ill afford. The pair said many firms repeatedly are “unable or unwilling to make aggressive commitment to an emerging technology once they decide to participate.” Managers, they said, are concerned with the possibility of cannibalizing existing profitable products to place content in a niche publication online, so they hold back their support (Day & Shoemaker, 2001). The fear is so tangible that Chyi and Lasorsa, in a 2001 study, refer to it as the “cannibalization effect” in relation to the Internet because original news content is “cannibalized” and placed online where readers access it for

nothing. Editors and newspaper advertising managers both are concerned about the business ramifications of so-called cannibalization of the news pages that amounts to retooling them for use in niche publications. Offering information previously available only by subscription free to readers who negotiate a Web site and find it for nothing might not make the best business sense (Chyi & Lasorsa, 2001). Perhaps the fear that free content online or in niche publications will erode the paid newspaper's subscription base is real. The same could be true about niche products, since many of them are distributed free of charge to a certain population as well as their content placed online. Applying Chyi and Lasorsa's conclusions to newspaper niche products might suggest further research is needed on the so-called cannibalization effect in relation to niche publications that are both distributed free of charge and placed online.

Attaway-Fink concludes in her 2004 study that cooperation is essential if newspapers are to survive and perhaps thrive in coming decades. "Whether driven by the journalist's social responsibility and/or the reader's appetite for entertainment, [newspaper] management agrees that teamwork is essential." She said as these cross-pollination increases in the newsroom and content that used to be used only in the main publication now is rewritten many times and used in various specialty publications, the emphasis on separate departments in the newsroom decreases. Production of niche publications is viewed as good management, not a divisive force. "The future of newspapers depends on managers who embrace these new cooperative management styles," she said.

The methodology of this thesis draws from experience during roughly the same time frame as Attaway-Fink's 2004 study. The popularity of niche publications with readers has been well established, but empirical evidence delving into the attitudes of the editorial and advertising staffs that create them is lacking. Is it possible for editors and advertising managers to cooperate in the creation of niche publications at a level that makes them a sound investment of newsroom resources?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The newspaper industry faces a difficult time and its future is in question. The purpose of this exploratory study of niche newspaper publications is to determine their impact on the viability of the host newspaper.

Historically, newspaper advertising has gone through many phases. First, there was mass marketing when the whole population was considered homogeneous. The next phase was market segmentation, when advertisers recognized that a mass marketing approach may reach most of the market, but acknowledged there were distinct segments in the population that were not being reached and could be uniquely targeted. The third phase is niche marketing, a period when experts recognized that individuals have diverse preferences, wants and needs and what appeals to one may not appeal to another.

The newspaper industry has followed these phases, albeit at a slower pace. Historically, newspapers have been slow to change and resistant to new ideas as long as profit margins were healthy. During the last decade, the tide has turned, the profitability of newspapers has steadily declined and the industry has been forced to turn to new, innovative ideas with an eye to survival, not just profitability. Niche publications are one innovation of the last decade designed to attract new readers and advertising dollars. The purpose of this study is to explore the adoption of these specialized publications. Three broad areas critical to newspaper success will be examined, circulation, revenue, and management. From these three areas, research questions were formulated.

RQ1: Do niche publications increase circulation?

RQ2: Do niche publications cause managerial problems for editors?

RQ3: Do niche publications increase advertising revenues?

RQ4: Do niche publications impact total revenue?

Definitions

For this study, a niche publication was defined as a product separate from the main newspaper that contained approximately 60 percent advertising copy and 40 percent editorial copy. While the 60-40 equation is the industry standard, it was used as an approximate gauge, not an absolute rule. As an approximation, it prevented inclusion of products that contain only advertising copy, so-called "shoppers," newspapers designed only to sell products and services. All niche products considered in this study, then, had both advertising and editorial content.

Questionnaire

To test these research questions, a questionnaire consisting of 31 questions was developed. The full questionnaire is included as appendix A. Questions two through 14 use a Likert type scale as follows; strongly agree (sa), agree (a), disagree (d), strongly disagree (sd), or do not know (dk). Questions 15 through 24 are fill in the blank. The final question was open-ended for comments.

Each question was developed to measure an aspect of the research questions. The following shows which questions were used for each research questions. The questions ask in a straightforward way about the topic with no misdirection or underlying meanings attached.

RQ1: Niche publications increase circulation. This research question will be tested using the following four questions: 2. Our newspaper added niche publications to increase readership. 5. In general, our readers like niche publications. 13. Subscriptions have increased as a result of niche publications. 19. Approximately what percentage change, if any, have you seen in total newspaper subscriptions as a result of niche publications _____% (+/- 0% to 100)

RQ2: Niche publications cause and managerial problems for editors. This hypothesis will be tested using the following five questions: 4. In general, editors at our newspaper like niche publications. 6. Niche publications increase the workload of the editorial staff. 7. Niche publications increase the workload of the advertising staff. 16. In a typical year, the paper received positive reader feedback on the content of niche publications _____ times. 17. In a typical year, the paper received negative reader feedback on the content of niche publications _____ times.

RQ3: Niche publications increase advertising revenues. This research question will be tested using the following three questions: 3. Our newspaper added niche publications to increase advertising revenue. 11. New advertisers are more likely to place ads in niche publications than in the main pages of the newspaper. 12. New advertisers are more likely to place ads in niche publications if the ads are sold in a package that also includes placement in the pages of the main newspaper. (sa, a, d, sd, dk)

RQ4: Niche publications increased total revenues. This research question will be tested using the following two questions: 14. Total revenue at our newspaper has increased as a result of niche publications. 18. Approximately what percentage change, if

any, have you seen in total revenue as a result of niche publications? _____% (+/- 0% to 100%).

Sample

The sample frame population for this study consisted of editors, advertising managers and publishers of approximately 57 daily and non-daily newspapers in Utah and 81 daily and non-daily newspapers in West Virginia. They were sent e-mail invitations to complete an online questionnaire to gauge attitudes toward niche publications. The e-mail distribution list was compiled from three sources: mailing lists obtained from press associations in both states and the *Editor & Publisher International Yearbook*. The Utah list was distributed using Microsoft Word's e-mail merge feature. The West Virginia list was distributed by staff members of the West Virginia Press Association. To ensure the mailings were accurately distributed, the author was included in the recipient list of each mass e-mailings done by the WVPA.

The e-mail messages inviting participation were distributed by e-mail during the weeks of October 2, 2008; October 16, 2008 and October 30, 2008. Appendix B contains copies of the cover letters sent in each e-mail distribution.

The goal of the project was a response rate of 25%. The final response rate is discussed in Chapter 4. After the first e-mailing, prospective participants in both states were again invited to complete the survey and told that for every completed survey received and recorded in the online database, a \$1 donation would be made to the Student Press Law Center in Arlington, Va. The SPLC was chosen for its past support of student

press law issues, not for any connection to or interest in niche publications. In the end, a donation of \$60 was made to the SPLC on Feb. 26, 2009.

Why Utah and West Virginia

A sample drawn from West Virginia and Utah was selected for numerous reasons - the states represent both the eastern and western portions of the United States; the populations of both states are similarly dispersed with urban population centers scattered from border to border with vast, remote rural populations between; both states enjoy active press associations and established daily and non-daily (weekly, bi-weekly or tri-weekly) publications across the state. In addition, in both states, Denver-based MediaNews has an interest in the newspapers of record, *The Salt Lake Tribune* in Utah and the *Charleston Gazette* and *Charleston Daily Mail* in West Virginia. It is interesting to note that the newspapers are among a handful remaining in the country that still operate under Joint Operating Agreements allowed under the Newspaper Preservation Act of 1970. The second newspaper involved in Salt Lake City's Joint Operating Agreement, the *Deseret Morning News*, is owned by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, not MediaNews. Further, MediaNews owner Dean Singleton¹ has been embroiled in legal battles over ownership issues connected to the newspapers in both Utah and West Virginia for several years.

¹ Dean Singleton is chairman of the board of directors of The Associated Press. He is founder, vice chairman and CEO of MediaNews Group, the fourth largest newspaper company in the United States. Known for acquiring newspapers on the edge of closure, Singleton also has successfully orchestrated a number of newspaper takeovers and is publisher of the *Denver Post*, *Salt Lake Tribune*, and *Detroit News*.

While the presence of Joint Operating Agreements surely has some bearing on the conception and choices of niche publication production, it is mentioned here merely as an interesting fact connecting the two newspaper markets. The long-term effect, if any, on newspaper niche publications is a topic for further research. In Utah, niche publications have been produced under the umbrella of the Joint Operating Agreement with mixed results. In 2005, *The Salt Lake Tribune* and *Deseret Morning News* both launched community news niche sections. While advertising and production costs were shared, the editorial content was separate. In 2008, the *Deseret Morning News* pulled out of the project, but the *Tribune* stayed, even though the number of weekly, zoned niche community news publications was cut in half, from eight to four. By early 2009, both newspapers included a community news presence on their respective Web sites, and the *Tribune* continued with four printed editions of *Close-Up*, zoned to target readers along a 35-mile stretch of the Wasatch Front.

CHAPTER 4 – RESULTS OF DATA ANALYSIS

Data Collection

E-mail invitations to participate in the questionnaire were sent October 2, 2008. Ten responses were received. Two weeks later, on October 16, 2008, a follow-up invitation was sent. An additional 30 responses were received. To increase the response rate, a third invitation was e-mailed October 30, 2008, and netted 10 additional responses. A total of 50 responses were received. A summary of the responses by date are shown in table 1.

Table 1. Responses by date

Date	Total	Utah	West Virginia	No Indication
10/02/2008	10	7	3	
10/16/2008	30	12	17	1
10/30/2008	10	7	3	

Response Rate

Calculating response rates from this dual population of 57 daily and non-daily newspapers in Utah and 81 daily and non-daily newspapers in West Virginia, for a total of 138 newspapers, is problematic for several reasons. First, there are three possible respondents at each newspaper, the publisher, the editor and the advertising manager. Therefore, a total possible population of all responses would be 414. Second, many of these are small weekly newspapers where some individuals hold the same position at multiple newspapers. Third, at other newspapers, some individuals hold multiple positions at the same newspaper. These confounding factors reduce the total probable number of respondents to about 350. Fifty responses were received for a response rate of 13% when considering individuals as the sample. Finally, another way of calculating response rate is to consider responses by individual newspapers. This analysis is also problematic in that the responses are anonymous and do not identify individual newspapers. If each response was from a different newspaper (most likely they were not) the 27 responses from Utah represent a 47% response rate, and the 22 responses from West Virginia represent a 27% response rate. The total response rate would be 36%.

The actual response rate falls somewhere between the straight 13% individual response rate and the 36% newspaper response rate. A number in the low 20% range likely represents the actual response rate for the current study.

Sample Demographics

The sample frame for this study consisted of editors, advertising managers and publishers of approximately 57 daily and non-daily newspapers in Utah and 81 daily and non-daily newspapers in West Virginia. The characteristics of the response sample are as follows. Of the 50 responses received, 33 have niche publications at their newspapers and 17 did not. Twenty-seven of the respondents indicated their newspaper was located in Utah, 22 indicated they were from West Virginia, and one did not indicate. Thirty-three of the newspapers were not part of a group or corporation, 16 were owned by corporations and one did not indicate its ownership. Responses came from 14 publishers, 18 editors and 17 advertising managers. One response did not indicate the respondent's position. Twelve of the newspapers are located in urban settings, eight in rural settings, 12 indicated they covered both urban and rural areas, and 18 did not indicate their location. A summary of the sample characteristics is shown in table 2.

Table 2. Summary of sample frame characteristics

Characteristic	Utah	West Virginia
Total newspapers	57	81
Sample n	27	22
Have niche publications	19	14
Ownership	26	22
corporate	10	5
private	16	17
Position		
Publisher	8	6
Editor	13	5
Advertising manager	6	11
Location		
urban	12	0
rural	1	7
both	5	7
Number of Niche Pubs	110	63

Research Question Analysis

RQ1: Niche publications increase circulation

Four questions on the questionnaire are used to test this research question. An analysis of each of these questions is now presented.

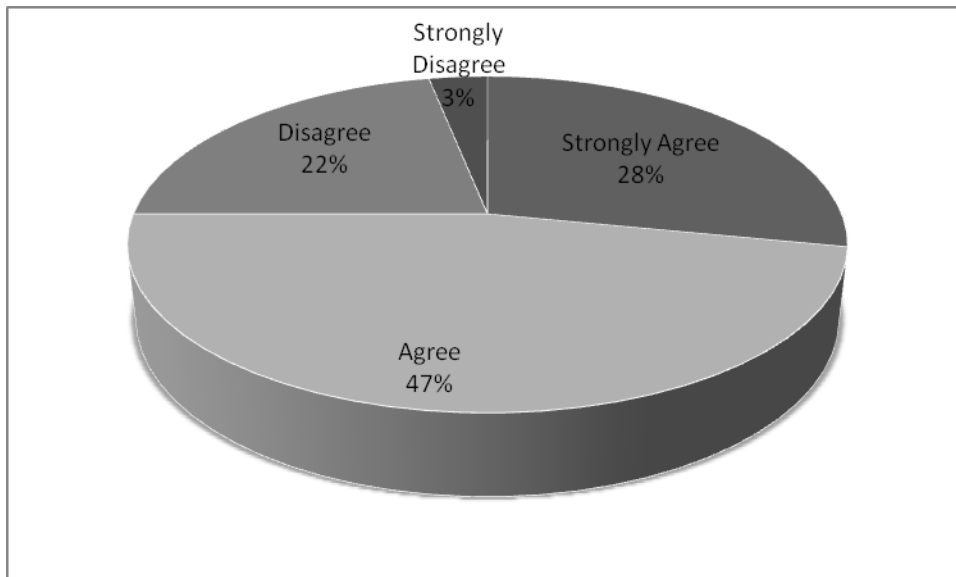
The first question for RQ1 is, “Our newspaper added niche publications to increase readership.” Thirty-two respondents answered this question. The frequency distribution of their answers is shown in table 3.

Table 3. Niche publications increase readership

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	9	18	28.1	28.1
	Agree	15	30	46.9	75
	Disagree	7	14	21.9	96.9
	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3.1	100
	Total	32	64	100	
Missing	System	18	36		
Total		50	100		

Table 3 and Figure 1, show 75% of the respondents either agree or strongly agree niche publications increase readership. The mean value for this question is 2.00.

Figure 1. Niche publications increase readership



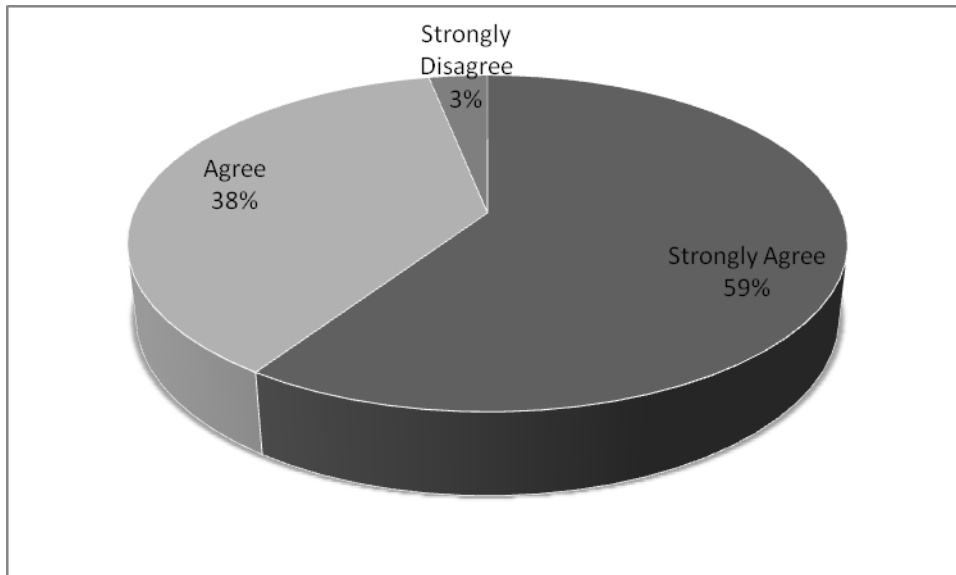
The second question examined is, “In general, our readers like niche publications.” Thirty-two respondents answered this question. The frequency distribution of their answers is shown in table 4.

Table 4. Readers like niche publications

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	19	38	59.4	59.4
	Agree	12	24	37.5	96.9
	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3.1	100
	Total	32	64	100	
Missing	System	18	36		
Total		50	100		

Table 4 and figure 2 show that 96.9% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that readers like niche publications. The mean value for this question is 1.87.

Figure 2. Readers like niche publications



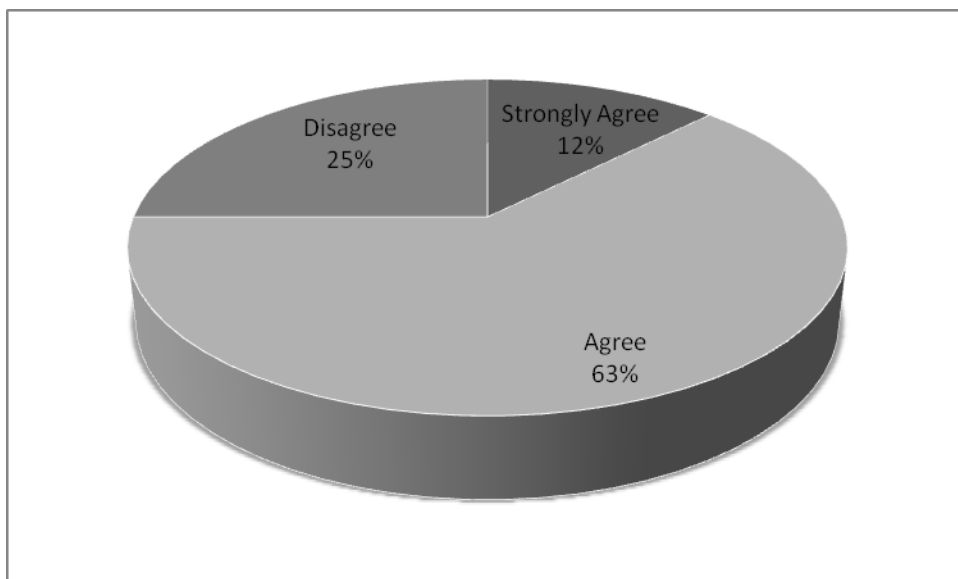
The third question is, “Subscriptions have increased as a result of niche publications.” Thirty-two respondents answered this question. The frequency distribution of their answers is shown in table 5.

Table 5. Niche publications increase subscriptions

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	4	8	12.5	12.5
	Agree	20	40	62.5	75
	Disagree	8	16	25	100
	Total	32	64	100	
Missing	System	18	36		
Total		50	100		

Table 5 and figure 3 show that 75% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that subscriptions increase as a result of niche publications. The mean value for this question is 2.75.

Figure 3. Niche publications increase subscriptions



The last question used to analyze research question 1 is, “Approximately what percentage change, if any, have you seen in total newspaper subscriptions as a result of niche publications?” Twelve respondents answered this question. The frequency distribution of their answers is shown in table 6.

Table 6. Percentage increase in newspaper subscriptions as a result of niche publications

Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
2%	2	4.00%	16.67%	16.67%
3%	1	2.00%	8.33%	25.00%
7%	1	2.00%	8.33%	33.33%
10%	4	8.00%	33.33%	66.67%
20%	1	2.00%	8.33%	75.00%
25%	1	2.00%	8.33%	83.33%
35%	1	2.00%	8.33%	91.67%
100%	1	2.00%	8.33%	100.00%
Missing	38	76.00%		
Total	50			

The mean value for this question is 19.5%. Table 6 shows the range from +2% to +100%.

The aggregate evidence supports research question 1. More than 28% of respondents strongly agree that niche publications increase readership and more than 54% report that readers enjoy them, while 12.5% report that subscription numbers increased.

RQ2: Niche publications cause managerial problems for editors. This research question will be tested using the following five questions.

The first question is, “In general, editors at our newspaper like niche publications.”

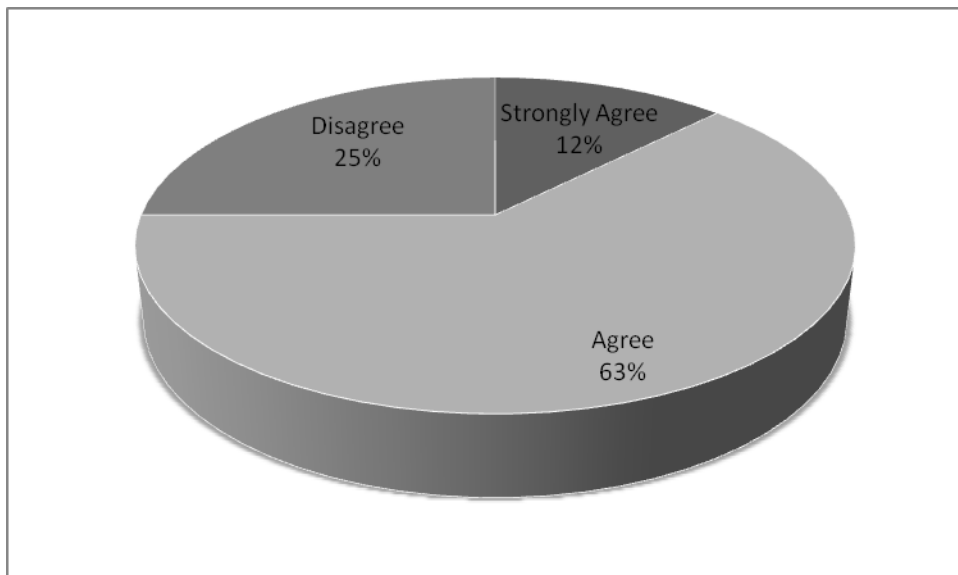
Thirty-two respondents answered this question, and the frequency distribution of their answers is shown in table 7.

Table 7. Editors like niche publications

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	4	8	12.5	12.5
	Agree	20	40	62.5	75
	Disagree	8	16	25	100
	Total	32	64	100	
Missing	System	18	36		
Total		50	100		

Table 7 and figure 4 show that 75% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that editors like niche publications. The mean value for this question is 2.125.

Figure 4. Editors like niche publications.



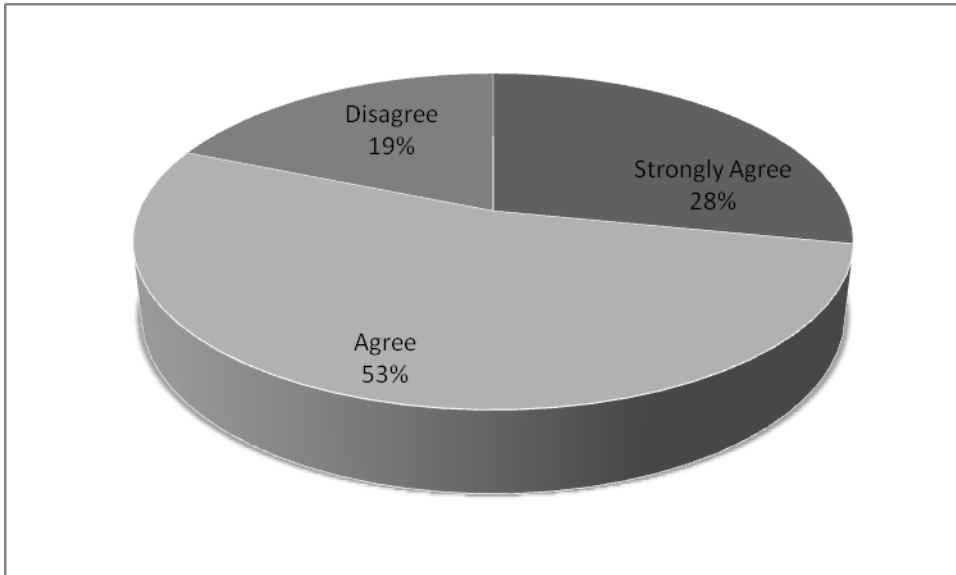
Question 2 testing RQ2 is, “Niche publications increase the workload of the editorial staff.” Thirty-two respondents answered this question, and the frequency distribution of their answers is shown in table 8.

Table 8. Niche publications increase the workload of the editorial staff

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	9	18	28.1	28.1
	Agree	17	34	53.1	81.2
	Disagree	6	12	18.8	100
	Total	32	64	100	
Missing	System	18	36		
Total		50	100		

Table 8 and figure 5 show that 81.2% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that niche publications increase the workload of the editorial staff. The mean value for this question is 1.90.

Figure 5. Niche publications increase the workload of the editorial staff



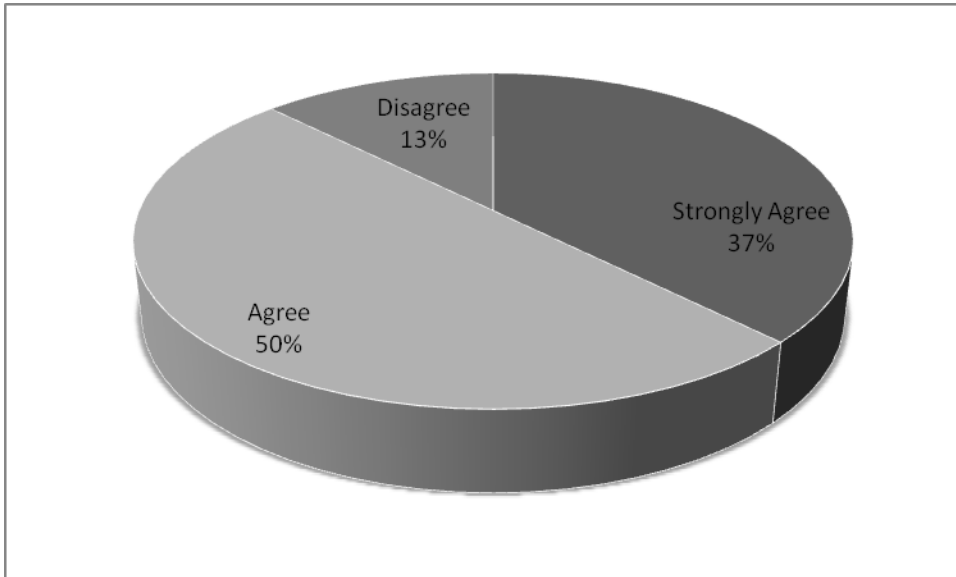
The third question testing RQ2 is, “Niche publications increase subscriptions.” Thirty-two respondents answered this question, and the frequency distribution of their answers is shown in table 9.

Table 9. Niche publications increase subscriptions

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	12	24	37.5	37.5
	Agree	16	32	50	87.5
	Disagree	4	8	12.5	100
	Total	32	64	100	
Missing	System	18	36		
Total		50	100		

Table 9 and figure 6 show that 87.5% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that editors like niche publications. The mean value for this question is 1.75.

Figure 6. Niche publications increase subscriptions



RQ2's next question is, "In a typical year, the paper received positive reader feedback on the content of niche publications _____ times." Twenty seven respondents answered this question, and the frequency distribution of their answers is shown in table 10. The response mean is 18.67 and the range is 0 to 100.

Table 10. Positive reader feedback counts

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	1	2	3.7	3.7
	2	2	4	7.4	11.1
	3	1	2	3.7	14.8
	5	2	4	7.4	22.2
	6	1	2	3.7	25.9
	10	3	6	11.1	37
	12	3	6	11.1	48.1
	15	4	8	14.8	63
	20	4	8	14.8	77.8
	24	2	4	7.4	85.2
	27	1	2	3.7	88.9
	50	2	4	7.4	96.3
	100	1	2	3.7	100
	Total		27	54	100
Missing	System	23	46		
Total		50	100		

The final question testing RQ2 is, “In a typical year, the paper received negative reader feedback on the content of niche publications _____ times.” Twenty-seven respondents answered this question, and the frequency distribution of their answers is shown in table 11. The response mean is 3.52 and the range is 0 to 20.

Table 11. Negative reader feedback counts

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	11	22	40.7	40.7
	1	1	2	3.7	44.4
	2	4	8	14.8	59.3
	4	2	4	7.4	66.7
	5	4	8	14.8	81.5
	6	1	2	3.7	85.2
	10	2	4	7.4	92.6
	12	1	2	3.7	96.3
	20	1	2	3.7	100
	Total	27	54	100	
Missing	System	23	46		
Total		50	100		

Responses to questions testing research question 2 show affirmative support, as not one of the respondents strongly disagreed with any of the three questions.

RQ3: Niche publications increase advertising revenues. This research question will be tested using the following three questions.

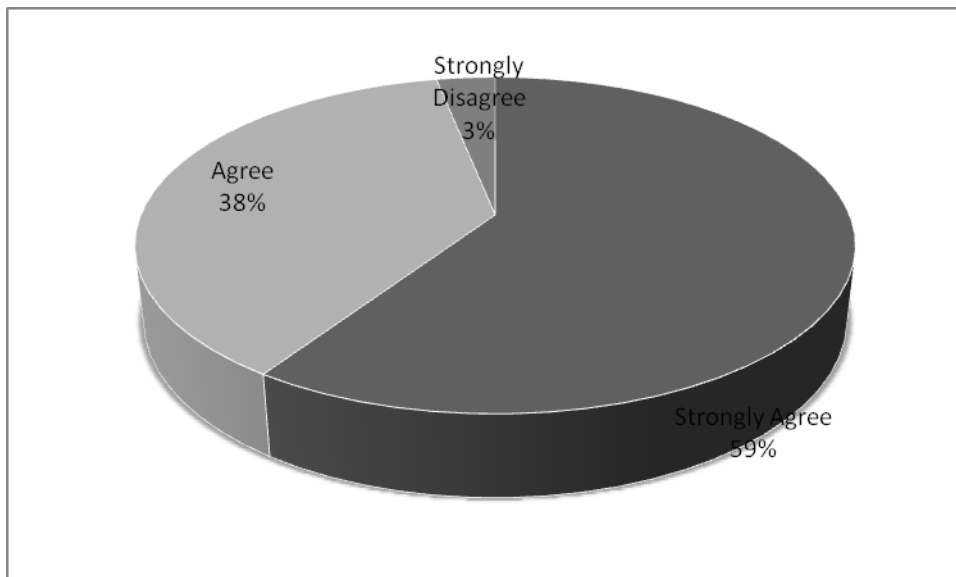
The first question to test RQ3 is, “Our newspaper added niche publications to increase advertising revenue.” Thirty-two respondents answered this question, and the frequency distribution of their answers is shown in table 12.

Table 12. Niche publications increase advertising revenue

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	19	38	59.4	59.4
	Agree	12	24	37.5	96.9
	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3.1	100
	Total	32	64	100	
Missing	System	18	36		
Total		50	100		

Table 12 and figure 7 show that 96.9% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that niche publications increase ad revenue. The mean value for this question is 1.47.

Figure 7. Niche publications increase advertising revenue



The second question testing RQ3 is, “New advertisers are more likely to place ads in niche publications than in the main pages of the newspaper.” Twenty-eight

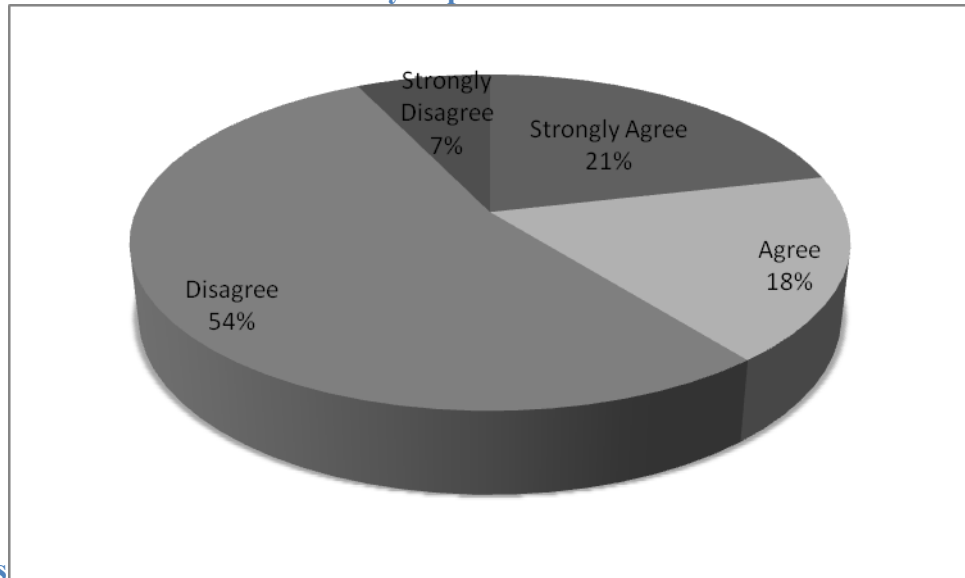
respondents answered this question, and the frequency distribution of their answers is shown in table 13.

Table 13. New advertisers are more likely to place ads in niche publications over the main newspaper

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	6	12	21.4	21.4
	Agree	5	10	17.9	39.3
	Disagree	15	30	53.6	92.9
	Strongly Disagree	2	4	7.1	100
	Total	28	56	100	
Missing	System	22	44		
Total		50	100		

Table 13 and figure 8 show that only 39.3% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that new advertisers are more likely to purchase ads in niche publications. The mean value for this question is 2.46.

Figure 8. New advertisers are more likely to purchase ads in niche



publications

The last question for RQ3 is, “New advertisers are more likely to place ads in niche publications if the ads are sold in a package that also includes placement in the pages of the main newspaper.” Twenty-six respondents answered this question, and the frequency distribution of their answers is shown in table 14.

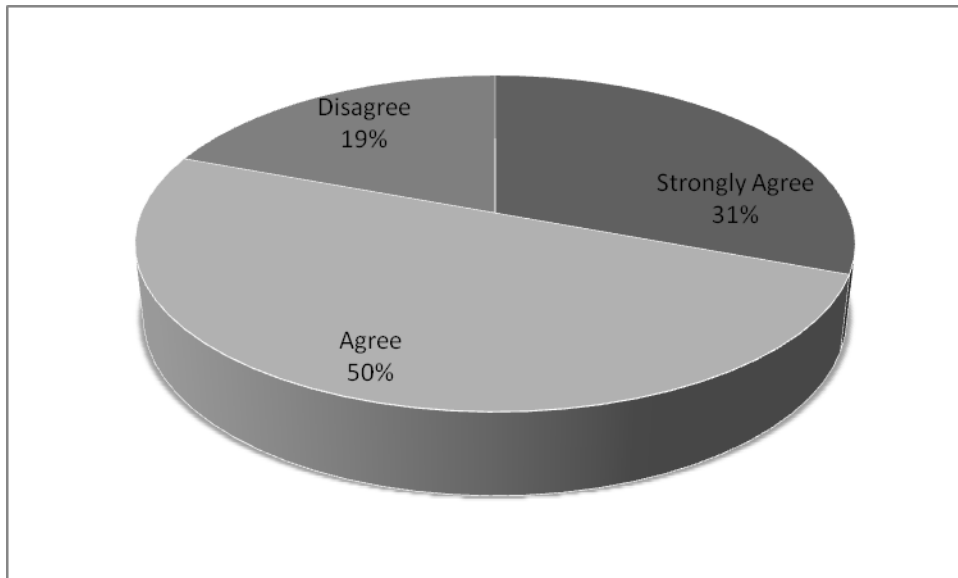
Table 14. New advertisers are more likely to purchase ad packages

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	8	16	30.8	30.8
	Agree	13	26	50	80.8
	Disagree	5	10	19.2	100
	Total	26	52	100	
Missing	System	24	48		
Total		50	100		

Table 14 and figure 8 show that 80.8% of the respondents agree or strongly agree

that new advertisers are more likely to place ads in niche publications when packaged with ads in the main publication. The mean value for this question is 1.88.

Figure 9. New advertisers are more likely to purchase ad packages



Editors, publishers and advertising managers who completed the niche publication overwhelmingly agreed with research question 3.

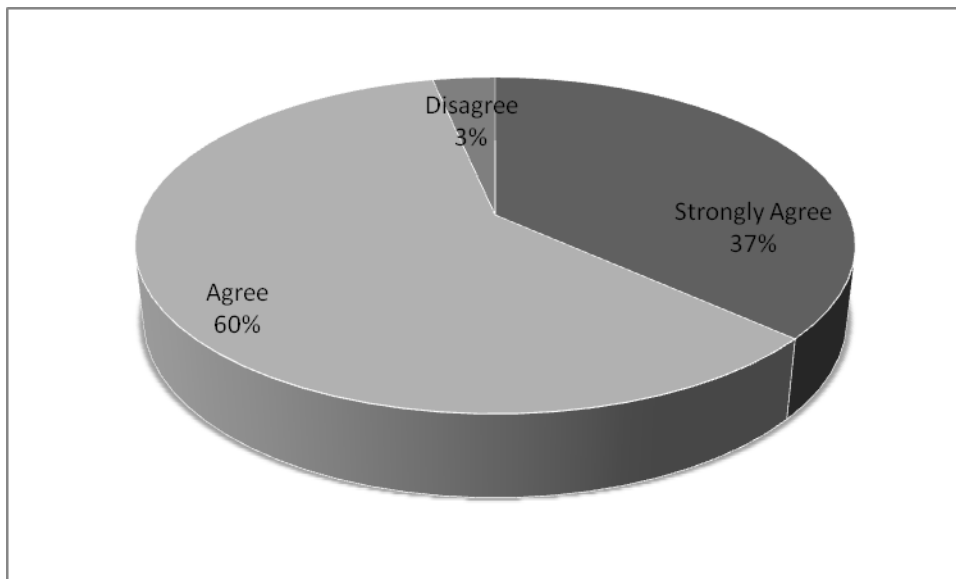
RQ4: Niche publications increased total revenues. This research question will be tested using the following two questions: The first question is, “Total revenue at our newspaper has increased as a result of niche publications.” Thirty respondents answered this question, and the frequency distribution of their answers is shown in table 15.

Table 15. Niche publications increased revenue

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	11	22	36.7	36.7
	Agree	18	36	60	96.7
	Disagree	1	2	3.3	100
	Total	30	60	100	
Missing	System	20	40		
Total		50	100		

Table 15 and figure 10 show that 96.7% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that niche publications increased revenue. The mean value for this question is 1.667.

Figure 10. Niche publications increased revenue



The final question is, “Approximately what percentage change, if any, have you seen in total revenue as a result of niche publications?” Thirteen respondents answered

this question, and the frequency distribution of their answers is shown in table 16. The response mean is 18.31 and the range is 2 to 100.

Table 16. Percentage change in revenue resulting from niche publications

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	2	4	15.4	15.4
	3	1	2	7.7	23.1
	4	1	2	7.7	30.8
	7	1	2	7.7	38.5
	10	4	8	30.8	69.2
	20	1	2	7.7	76.9
	25	1	2	7.7	84.6
	35	1	2	7.7	92.3
	100	1	2	7.7	100
	Total	13	26	100	
Missing	System	37	74		
Total		50	100		

Only one respondent disagreed with the research question asking if total revenue at the newspaper had increased because of niche publications. More than 96 % agreed or strongly agreed that total revenues had increased as a result of niche publications.

CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This research investigated four basic questions about niche publications. Do they increase readership? Do they cause managerial problems? Do they increase advertising revenue? Do they increase total revenue? The answer was yes to all questions. The analysis of the data collected indicates niche publications increase readership, increase total revenues and at the same time, create managerial challenges. The question of increased advertising revenue is supported, but not as strongly as the other three questions. That said, the responses to questions about the percentage change of the impact of niche publications on readership and revenues indicate 18.5% and 19.5% increases, respectively. Adding niche publications can have a significant impact on the viability of a newspaper.

The analysis of each of these questions will now be presented individually and discussed.

RQ1: Niche Publications Increase Circulation.

Discussion

Four questions on the questionnaire are used to test this research question. The results show strong support in all four questions. The first three are summarized in table 17 and figure 11.

Table 17. Niche Publications Increase Circulation: Cumulative Percent Responses to related questions

Cumulative Percent	Add to Increase Readership	Readers Like	Subscriptions Increased
Strongly Agree	28.1	59.4	12.5
Agree	75	96.9	75
Disagree	96.9	96.9 (0)	100
Strongly Disagree	100	100	100 (0)

Figure 11. Niche Publications Increase Circulation

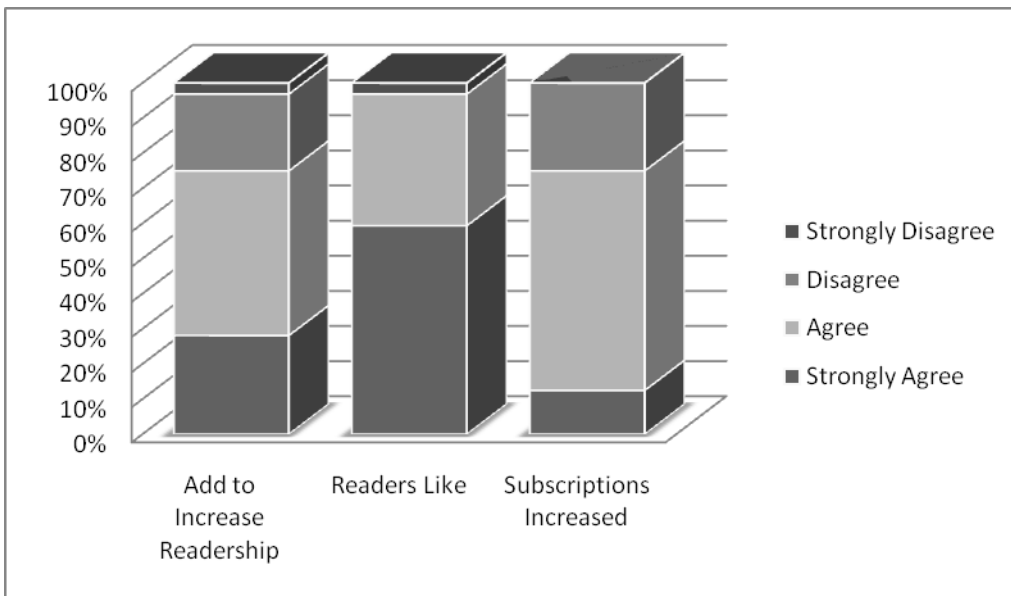


Table 17 shows that all three questions support this research question, Niche Publications Increase Circulation, with cumulative percents of 75, 97, and 75. Seventy-five percent of the respondents agree or strongly agree that niche publications result in more readers and increased subscriptions and 97 percent agree or strongly agree readers like them.

On the fourth question, “Approximately what percentage change, if any, have you seen in total newspaper subscriptions as a result of niche publications?” all respondents said increases occurred ranging from 2 to 100% and a mean of 19.5%.

Conclusions

Given the current problems of declining newspaper subscriptions and readership, this is an important finding. Newspapers may be able to help slow declining subscriptions and slipping readership by creating niche publications their audiences are interested in reading. At least 75% of the respondents agreed niche publications increase readership and subscriptions. Because the estimated rate increase is almost 20%, it would seem the addition of niche publications may have strong positive impacts on readership.

These findings suggest some newspapers would be well served to add niche publications as a way to increase their subscriptions and readership. Indeed, this may already be occurring. As this conclusion is being written, the *Deseret Morning News*, Utah’s second largest newspaper, made staffing and editorial changes Assistant City Editor Josh Loftin and a group of other editors and reporters said were aimed at turning the newspaper into a “niche publication for Mormons.” While the newspaper is owned by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the move, and demotion of two popular editors on February 25, 2009, prompted a byline strike by most reporters on the City Desk who saw the shift as the latest in a long line of unethical attempts to re-shape the news reported at the newspaper. In a radio interview, Publisher Joe Cannon shied away from using the word “niche” as he spoke on KCPW on February 26, 2009. He said he

was simply following a plan to give his readers what they want. But the argument may be one of semantics. Cannon said the *Deseret News* has simply done what other newspapers in the country are attempting to do. The *News* has found, and will hold on to, a strong reader demographic, “Newspapers are geographic. We are geographic just like other newspapers,” Cannon said. “We happen to be blessed with a heck of a demographic,” Cannon said. That demographic is the 1.8 million members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who live in Utah. While the total population of Utah is now less than half Mormon, the 1.8 million who are Mormon and want to read a newspaper produced with that in mind, create a unique readership demographic and may set Salt Lake City up as a solid two newspaper town, where one of the last newspaper Joint Operating Agreements in the country still works. Indeed, Cannon said circulation of the *News* has increased in the last year, a time when most newspapers, including *The Salt Lake Tribune*, the *News*’ partner in the JOA, are scrambling for readers. Cannon claims the increase is due to a new section of the newspaper, *Mormon Times*, and its renewed mission to give Mormon readers, the newspaper’s demographic, what they want.

RQ2: Niche Publications Cause Managerial Problems For Editors.

Discussion

The analysis of the five questions testing this research question shows strong support. A summary of the responses to the first three questions are shown in table 18 and figure 12.

Table 18. Niche Publications Cause Managerial Problems for Editors, Cumulative Percentages

Cumulative Percent	Editors Like	Increase Editorial Workload	Increase Ad Staff Workload
Strongly Agree	12.5	28.1	37.5
Agree	75	81.2	87.5
Disagree	100	100	100
Strongly Disagree	100 (0)	100 (0)	100 (0)

Figure 12. Niche Publications Cause Managerial Problems

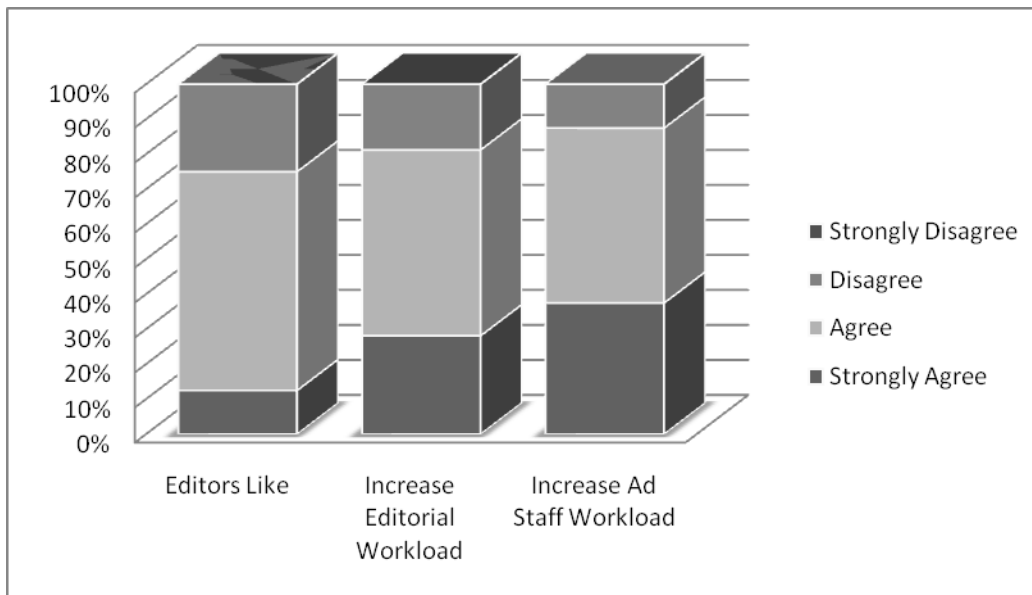


Table 18 shows great support for RQ2. Not one of the respondents strongly disagreed with any of these three questions. The cumulative percent for respondents who strongly agree and agree are 75%, 81.2% and 87.5% respectively. A majority of the respondents confirm niche publication cause managerial problems for editors, leaving room for further research.

RQ2's next questions are about reader feedback. Positive reader feedback received a range of 0 to 100, with a mean of 18.67 and negative reader feedback received a range of 0 to 20, with a mean of 3.52. Although mainly positive, feedback is an issue managers will have to review and respond to as needed, if the findings are in any way relevant to other publications.

Conclusions regarding RQ1 & 2

The addition of niche publications increases the workload of both the editorial and the advertising staffs of the targeted groups. This is not a surprising discovery. Logically, the addition of niche publications would cause more work for those involved. To produce niche publications, editors either must assign reporters to write additional stories to fill the pages or they must save and re-tool existing copy that is borrowed, or "cannibalized" from the main edition of the newspaper and reused in a niche publication. For example, a feature story about an outstanding high school student who wins a national geography competition might run in the newspaper on the day the winner is announced and be recycled, or cannibalized, for a back-to-school niche publication. On the advertising side, sales people must keep niche publications in mind when selling ads for the main newspaper in much the same way. Would this advertisement be successful in the Back to School edition? they must ask themselves. In addition, producing niche publications requires communication and cooperation between the advertising and editorial staffs of newspapers, two groups not known for consulting each other about their work

RQ3: Niche Publications Increase Advertising Revenues

Discussion

Three questions were analyzed to determine support for this research question. RQ3 is supported on the base question, “Our newspaper added niche publications to increase advertising revenue.” In that regard, 97% of the respondents agree or strongly agree.

However, when asking about new customers, “New advertisers are more likely to place ads in niche publications than in the main pages of the newspaper,” the support disappears.

On the final question, “New advertisers are more likely to place ads in niche publications if the ads are sold in a package that also includes placement in the pages of the main newspaper,” support returns, but the question does not isolate niche ad revenues.

Cumulative percentages of the responses are shown in table 19.

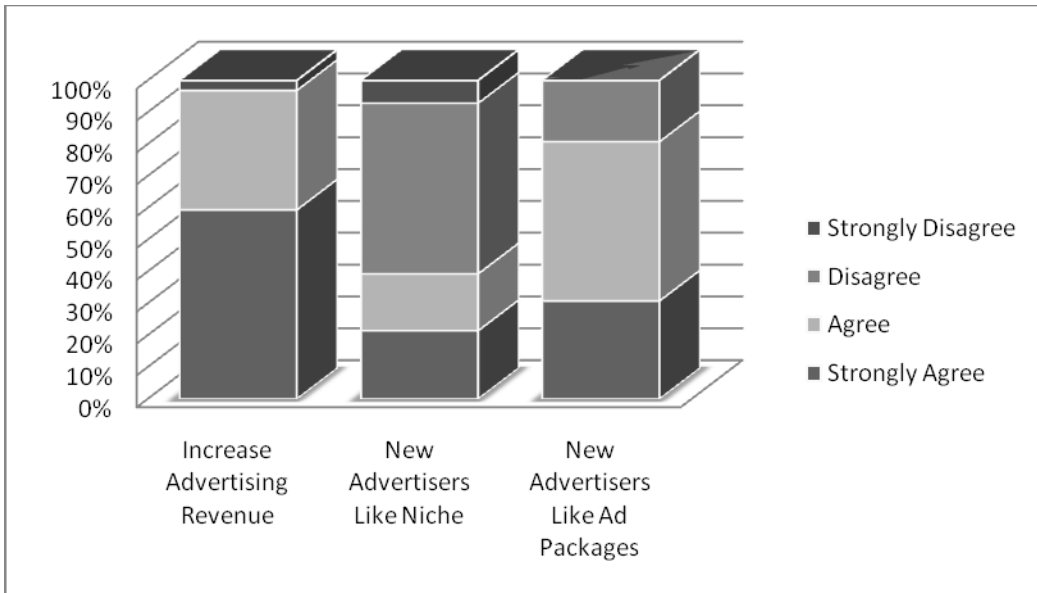
Table 19. Niche publications increase advertising revenue

Cumulative Percent	Increase Advertising Revenue	New Advertisers Like Niche	New Advertisers Like Ad Packages
Strongly Agree	59.4	21.4	30.8
Agree	96.9	39.3	80.8
Disagree	96.9 (0)	92.9	80.8 (0)
Strongly Disagree	100	100	100

In table 19, the surprise is the response for question 2, “New advertisers are more

likely to place ads in niche publications than in the main pages of the newspaper.” More disagree than agree for this question, 39.3% agree or strongly agree, 53.6 disagree and 7.1% strongly disagree (60.7% total). Figure 13 shows these results.

Figure 13. Niche Publications Increase Advertising Revenue



Conclusions

Niche publications are designed to increase advertising revenues, but they may not be as effective with new customers as they are with current customers, if the data can be translated safely to other, untested publications.

RQ4: Niche publications increased total revenues

Discussion

This research question is tested using the following two items: “Total revenue at our newspaper has increased as a result of niche publications,” and “Approximately what

percentage change, if any, have you seen in total revenue as a result of niche publications?”

On the first question, there was resounding support with 96.7% either agreeing or strongly agreeing that total revenues increased because of niche publications. Only one respondent disagreed.

On the second question, about percentage change, the response mean is 18.31% and the range is 2 to 100.

Conclusions

There is strong support that niche publications increased total revenue in the targeted groups. An activity that can result in an 18% increase in revenue would seem to be an excellent opportunity for a newspaper.

Limitations of this Research

Several factors limit the generalizability of this research. First, only two states, Utah and West Virginia, were included in the sample frame. These two states are most likely not representative of all 50 states. Next is the response rate. A response rate of 20% is low but acceptable and telling for the current study. However, the population of newspaper editors, publishers and advertising managers is traditionally difficult to survey and typically respond at a low rate. Third, the sample was self-selecting. This could introduce bias into the results as only individuals interested in niche publications may have responded. Fourth, the questions used to measure each research question may not fully capture the complexity of each question. Further research is warranted. Finally,

more rigorous statistical analysis of a larger sample would provide stronger evidence in support of these research questions.

Suggestions for future research

The limitations of this study should be addressed. A larger population and the use of a random sample would make the results more generalizable.

A study analyzing quantitative data from the newspapers before and after niche publications were launched would be useful. Data such as subscriptions, readership, ad revenue, total revenue, and profits should be studied. While the addition of niche publications appears to solidly increase revenue potential at a newspaper, the current study does not address whether the cost in staff time to produce them is worth the potential revenue. The current questions also do not consider the staff issues that occur when reporters are told to increase their story count and produce copy for niche publications, although such issues have been reported anecdotally by several editors.

A comparison of the three constituent views of the current research, publishers, editors and advertising managers would also be useful. What are the implications for the differences in these views? Can knowing these differences help individuals perform better in their various positions?

In sum, however, the data provide useful insight into the financial health and potential future of struggling newspapers of all stripes and circulation numbers. If all politics is local, so is all news. And it is that specialization that may well turn the tide of red ink black again if the niche is done properly. A telling story circulates in journalism schools around the country regarding local news. It is used to help steer students into

viable careers amidst uncertain times. It is advice meant to assure, if the student will only take it to heart. The story goes that no matter what consolidation does to news delivery in radio, television or newspaper, there is still only one place to get your kid's lunch menu at school, the scores from the middle school football game, the recognition of the honor roll for every student who earned a 3.5, or more soberly, the news of a friend's death and funeral arrangements. It is the local paper. There is no substitute. There never will be a substitute, no matter how many jobs are cut. Local news, gathered by local people, should weather the current economic storm if the data are any indication. And the data are an indication, even though their prescriptive influence is somewhat limited. Newspapers can stay afloat longer if they heed advice Horace Greeley once gave a local newspaper editor. It is said that Greeley told the editor not to let the birth of a calf occur within his circulation area without noting it in the local press. Newspapers would do well to pay attention to their own backyards and let someone else cover the other stuff. After all, who best to cover that backyard but the journalists who live and work in it?

For garden club notes, see A3.

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APPENDIX A

A Study of Niche Publications in Utah and West Virginia

Thank you for completing my questionnaire.

For the purposes of this study, a niche publication is defined as a product containing both advertising and editorial copy.

1. My newspaper publishes niche publications yes no
 If you answered no to question 1, please skip to question 29.

Please indicate your agreement with each of the following statements, using the scale: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, or do not know.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
2. Our newspaper added niche publications to increase readership.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Our newspaper added niche publications to increase advertising revenue.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. In general, editors at our newspaper like niche publications.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. In general, our readers like niche publications.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Niche publications increase the workload of the editorial staff.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Niche publications increase the workload of the advertising staff.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Advertising managers at our newspaper like niche publications more than editors do.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. The publisher at our newspaper likes niche publications more than advertising managers do.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. The publisher at our newspaper likes niche publications more than editors do.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. New advertisers are more likely to place ads in niche publications than in the main pages of the newspaper.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. New advertisers are more likely to place ads in niche publications if the ads are sold in a package that also includes placement in the pages of the main newspaper.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Subscriptions have increased as a result of niche publications.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Total revenue at our newspaper has increased as a result of niche publications.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

15. Our newspaper has been publishing niche publications for years.

16. In a typical year, the paper received positive reader feedback on the content of niche publications times.

17. In a typical year, the paper received negative reader feedback on the content of niche publications times.

18. Approximately what percentage change, if any, have you seen in total revenue as a result of niche publications? % (+/- 0% to 100%). + or - % don't know

19. Approximately what percentage change, in any, have you seen in total newspaper subscriptions as a result of niche publications % (+/- 0% to 100%) + or - % don't know

20. Did your newspaper create niche publications to target an audience based on demographics or geography or both? Demographics Geography Both

21. How many days a week is your newspaper published?

22. What is your daily circulation, based on figures from the Audit Bureau of Circulations?

23. If you publish on Sunday, what is your Sunday circulation?

24. How many niche publications does your newspaper publish in one month?

25. Please check the boxes that most closely represent the topics of niche publications produced throughout the year. Check all that apply:

<input type="checkbox"/> Community news	<input type="checkbox"/> Bridal/Wedding guide	<input type="checkbox"/> Parenting	<input type="checkbox"/> Senior living
<input type="checkbox"/> Finances	<input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment/TV listings	<input type="checkbox"/> Gardening	<input type="checkbox"/> Home Improvement
<input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Spirituality	<input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor Recreation	<input type="checkbox"/> Health/Medical	<input type="checkbox"/> Teen life/College life
<input type="checkbox"/> Ethnic or minority populations	<input type="checkbox"/> Real Estate		

Other(s), Please Specify

26. Please describe the readership of your niche publications urban rural
 Both

27. Please describe the largest readership of your main newspaper urban rural
 Both

28. If you started and then stopped production of niche publications, please describe why.

29. What is your position at the newspaper?

Publisher Editor Advertising Manager

30. Please describe the ownership of your newspaper. If the corporate owner of the newspaper is listed, please select it, if not, please fill in the blank.

- Not part of a group or corporation
- Champion Publishing
- Gannett
- Gatehouse Media
- MediaNews
- Newhouse News
- Thomson Reuters
- Other, please specify

31. Are you located in Utah or West Virginia? Utah West Virginia

Other Comments:

Thank You!!
Hilary Groutage Weible
Marshall University
email:
weible5@marshall.edu

Thesis Chair
Christopher Swindell, PhD
Assistant Professor
email: swindell@marshall.edu

<u>S</u> ubmit	<u>R</u> eset
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Thank you for your participation in my survey.

APPENDIX B – COVER LETTERS

[Original Letter]
October 2, 2008

Brent Low, Advertising Manager
Salt Lake Tribune
Salt Lake City UT 84101

Dear Brent Low,

Thank you for opening my e-mail. Please accept this invitation for you or another member of your staff to participate in a research project about niche, or specialty publications, and their value to newspapers and readers in Utah and West Virginia.

After 20 years as a reporter and editor, I developed a keen interest in products and trends that might help newspapers in these turbulent times. This project is being conducted to fulfill requirements for my master's degree from the W. Page Pitt School of Journalism & Mass Communications at Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia. The research project has been approved by Marshall's Institutional Review Board and is being supervised by Dr. Christopher Swindell.

While I have attempted to make the initial e-mailing exhaustive, please feel free to pass the survey along to other members of your staff who also are knowledgeable about niche publications. Since I am interested in responses from publishers, advertising managers and editorial staffs, the survey has been sent to all.

To complete the survey, click on the following link or copy it to your browser address line: <http://www.rwel.com/niche/>. The survey is comprised of 31 questions and should not take more than 10 minutes to complete. Your answers will be kept confidential and replies will only be presented in aggregate form.

If you choose not to participate in the survey, simply do not proceed. The survey is Web-based and will be returned to me in its completed form by clicking the box marked "submit" at the end.

Results of the survey will be shared with press associations in both states.

If you have any questions, please contact me or my supervisor. You may also contact the Marshall University Office of Research Integrity at (304) 696-4303.

Thank you,

Hilary Groutage Weible
W. Page Pitt School of Journalism and Mass Communications
Marshall University
Room 136A
One John Marshall Drive
Huntington, WV 25755
weible5@marshall.edu

Dr. Christopher Swindell
W. Page Pitt School of Journalism and Mass Communications
Marshall University
One John Marshall Drive
Huntington, WV 25755
swindell@marshall.edu

Official Notice:

This survey is comprised of a brief online questionnaire that should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. Your replies will be confidential. There are no known risks involved with this study. Participation is completely voluntary and there will be no penalty or loss of benefits if you choose to not participate in this research study or to withdraw. You may choose not to participate by not completing the questionnaire. You may choose to not answer any question by simply leaving it blank. Completing the survey online indicates your consent for use of the answers you supply. If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Hilary Groutage Weible at (304)-690-6080 (email: weible5@marshall.edu).

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant you may contact the Marshall University Office of Research Integrity at (304) 696-7320.

By completing this survey and returning it, you are also confirming that you are 18 years of age or older.

Please keep this page for your records

[Second Mailing Cover Letter]
October 16, 2008

Brent Low, Advertising Manager
Salt Lake Tribune
Salt Lake City UT 84101

Dear Brent Low,

A few weeks ago, I sent a request for your help with my questionnaire concerning niche publications at newspapers in Utah and West Virginia. If you have not yet had the time to respond, please do so in the next couple of days. To complete the survey, click on <http://www.rwe1.com/niche/>

If you have already completed my survey, accept my thanks and pardon the interruption. **As an added incentive for you to complete the survey, I will donate \$1 to the Student Press Law Center for every survey that is completed. The Student Press Law Center is an advocacy group for student free-press rights that provides information, advice and legal assistance to students at no charge. For more information on the Student Press Law Center, visit www.splc.org**

I am a former reporter and newspaper editor who currently is a candidate for a master's degree in journalism at the W. Page Pitt School of Journalism at Marshall University in West Virginia. My research is being supervised by Dr. Christopher Swindell and has been approved by Marshall University's Institutional Review Board.

The survey consists of 31 questions and should take about 10 minutes to complete. Your answers will be kept confidential and will be presented only in aggregate form. Please forward the survey to other members of your staff. Results of the survey will be shared with press associations in both states.

If you choose not to participate in the survey, simply do not proceed. The survey is Web-based and will be returned to me in its completed form by clicking the box marked "submit" at the end.

If you have any questions, please contact me or my supervisor. You may also contact the Marshall University Office of Research Integrity at (304) 696-4303.

Thank you,
Hilary Groutage Weible
W. Page Pitt School of Journalism & Mass Communications
Marshall University
Room 136A
One John Marshall Drive
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weible5@marshall.edu

Dr. Christopher Swindell
W. Page Pitt School of Journalism & Mass Communications

Marshall University
One John Marshall Drive
Huntington, WV 25755
swindell@marshall.edu

Official Notice:

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If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant you may contact the Marshall University Office of Research Integrity at (304) 696-7320.

By completing this survey and returning it, you are also confirming that you are 18 years of age or older.

Please keep this page for your records

The research has been approved by the Marshall University Office of Institutional Research

[Third Mailing Cover Letter]
October 30, 2008

Brent Low, Advertising Manager
Salt Lake Tribune
Salt Lake City UT 84101

Dear Brent Low,

A few weeks ago, I sent a request for your help with my questionnaire concerning niche publications at newspapers in Utah and West Virginia. If you have already completed my survey, accept my thanks and pardon the interruption. If you have not yet had the time to respond, please do it now. To complete the survey, click on <http://www.rwe1.com/niche/>. Please feel free to forward this to other members of your staff.

As an added incentive for you to complete the survey, I will donate \$1 to the Student Press Law Center for every survey that is completed. The Student Press Law Center is an advocacy group for student free-press rights that provides information, advice and legal assistance to students at no charge. For more information on the Student Press Law Center, visit [www. splc.org](http://www.splc.org)

I am a former reporter and newspaper editor who currently is a candidate for a master's degree in journalism at the W. Page Pitt School of Journalism at Marshall University in West Virginia. My research is being supervised by Dr. Christopher Swindell and has been approved by Marshall University's Institutional Review Board.

The survey consists of 31 questions and should take about 10 minutes to complete. Your answers will be kept confidential and will be presented only in aggregate form. Please forward the survey to other members of your staff. Results of the survey will be shared with press associations in both states.

If you choose not to participate in the survey, simply do not proceed. The survey is Web-based and will be returned to me in its completed form by clicking the box marked "submit" at the end.

If you have any questions, please contact me or my supervisor. You may also contact the Marshall University Office of Research Integrity at (304) 696-4303.

Thank you,

Hilary Groutage Weible
W. Page Pitt School of Journalism & Mass Communications

Marshall University
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weible5@marshall.edu

Dr. Christopher Swindell
W. Page Pitt School of Journalism & Mass Communications
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One John Marshall Drive
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swindell@marshall.edu

Official Notice:

This survey is comprised of a brief online questionnaire that should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. Your replies will be confidential. There are no known risks involved with this study. Participation is completely voluntary and there will be no penalty or loss of benefits if you choose to not participate in this research study or to withdraw. You may choose not to participate by not completing the questionnaire. You may choose to not answer any question by simply leaving it blank. Completing the survey online indicates your consent for use of the answers you supply. If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Hilary Groutage Weible at (304)-690-6080 (email: weible5@marshall.edu).

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