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**Making Change:
Diffusion of Technological, Relational, and Cultural Innovation
in the Newsroom**

Brian Ekdale, Jane B. Singer, Melissa Tully, and Shawn Harmsen

Abstract:

Diffusion of innovations theory typically has been applied to the spread of a particular technology or practice rather than the interplay of a cluster of innovations. This case study of a news company undergoing significant change seeks to offer a deeper understanding of multi-faceted industry upheaval by considering the diffusion of three interdependent yet distinct changes. Findings suggest technological change faces the fewest hurdles, as journalists recognize the need to adapt their practices to newer capabilities. Changes to audience relationships face greater resistance, while responses to changes to the professional culture of journalism remain the most tepid.

Keywords: Diffusion of Innovations, newsroom study, professional culture

Diffusion of innovations theory typically has been applied to the spread of a particular technology or practice, and the associated constellation of changes has been either set aside or subsumed under a peripheral consideration of social systems, consequences, or other parts of the theory. Yet in *Diffusion of Innovations*, Everett Rogers (2003) calls for more research into *technology clusters* – assemblages of interdependent innovations that diffuse in social systems at or around the same time. Within the news industry, journalists face a cluster of innovations including the increased use of digital and social media technologies, a reformulation of the

relationship between journalists and their communities, and a reconfiguration of professional culture as news organizations experiment with new ways of doing business (García Avilés et al., 2004; Lewis, 2012; Ryfe, 2012; Singer, 2004). This study seeks to offer a deeper understanding of the multi-faceted upheaval confronting journalists and news organizations by considering the diffusion of three related changes: technological, relational, and cultural.

It does this through triangulation of questionnaire and interview data from an independent media company that recently has experimented with dramatic alternation of its products, mission, management, organizational structure, and audience interactions, abandoning some innovations and sticking with others. Amid these transformations, our case study examines the responses of newswriters to changes in digital and social media technologies; relationships and interactions with community members; and perceptions about the nature and goals of contemporary journalism, perceptions that company executives have been especially eager to alter.

Findings suggest that technological change, the focus of many earlier diffusion studies, faces the fewest hurdles, as journalists are increasingly convinced of the merits – indeed, the necessity – of adapting their practices to newer technological capabilities. The diffusion of changes related to audience relationships faces greater resistance, while changes related to the professional culture of journalism remain the most challenging. Considering these changes holistically as part of an innovation cluster, we find that newswriters broadly are favorable to changes that they believe increase the quality of journalism and are consistent with existing norms and values, while they resist changes they see as disruptive of journalistic autonomy, damaging to the news product, and communicated poorly by company leadership.

Diffusion and Newsroom Change

Diffusion of innovations theory. Originally articulated to explain the uneven adoption of hybrid seed corn (Ryan & Gross, 1943), diffusion of innovations theory has been widely applied by communications scholars ever since publication of Rogers' seminal book in 1962. Rogers (2003, p. 5) defines diffusion as "the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system." Many diffusion studies focus on the innovation itself: the "idea, practice or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption" (p. 12). Rogers notes that innovations often overlap or are introduced in packages, rather than one at a time. Although individuals may recognize distinctions between each innovation, such changes will likely be understood as an interdependent cluster of new ideas. Rogers argues that diffusion scholars largely have overlooked such innovation clusters, and he encourages research that examines "the degree of compatibility perceived by individuals among interrelated ideas" (p. 240).

Innovation attributes, as seen by potential adopters, have been especially useful for understanding why some new ideas diffuse quickly and easily while others do not. They are:

- Relative advantage, defined as "the degree to which an innovation is perceived as being better than the idea it supersedes" (Rogers, 2003, p. 257)
- Compatibility, or "the degree to which an innovation is perceived as consistent with the existing values, past experiences and needs of potential adopters" (p. 258)
- Complexity, or "the degree to which an innovation is perceived as relatively difficult to understand and use" (p. 258)
- Trialability, or "the degree to which an innovation may be experimented with on a limited basis" (p. 249)
- Observability, or "the degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others" (p. 250)

Although most early diffusion studies focused on individuals as the units of adoption, organizations are key to the adoption of many innovations. Rogers identifies five stages in the

adoption process in organizations, two in an initiation phase of diffusion and the rest in an implementation phase. The initiation phase consists of *agenda-setting*, or identifying organizational problems that create a perceived need for innovation; and *matching*, which involves fitting an innovation to the identified problem and planning for implementation. The implementation stage of organizational innovation begins with *redefinition and restructuring* as the innovation is tailored to the organization's specific needs and structures, which are typically altered in the process. The next step, *clarifying*, occurs as an innovation gains more widespread use throughout the organization and its contextual meaning becomes clearer to adopting individuals. The last step is *routinizing*, when the innovation is incorporated into normal organizational activities.

As critics and Rogers himself have noted, diffusion of innovations theory is not without limitation. For one, the theory has a "pro-innovation bias," implying that innovations are desirable and should be adopted quickly and without modification (Rogers, 2003). Diffusion theory also presents adoption as linear and stable, even though research indicates that adoption can be multidirectional, regressive, and volatile (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2002). Consequently, diffusion studies can simplify or ignore the complex process through which innovations are altered or rejected by active agents (Micó, Masip, & Domingo, 2013). Some scholars explain change in the news industry using theoretical perspectives as diverse as actor-network theory (Anderson, 2013), organizational development theory (Gade, 2004), and an institutional approach (Ryfe, 2012); yet, we believe diffusion theory's innovation attributes and implementation stages best explain how workers in our study respond to the cluster of innovations advanced by their news organization.

This cluster of innovations includes changes in technology use, audience relationships, and professional culture. First, the news organization has adopted a “digital first” policy and encourages newswriters to increase their use of digital and social media in news gathering and reporting. Second, organization leaders seek to transform how newswriters view members of their community. Rather than viewing journalists as content providers and the audience as content consumers, the organization has invited members of the community to produce content and have greater input in coverage decisions. Finally, the CEO is leading an effort to change the way journalists think about what they do. Through management directives and a new mission statement, the organization is promoting a mindset change that involves newswriters seeing themselves as change agents in the community and being open to experimenting with new ways of “doing news.” These three sets of innovations are distinct yet interdependent, comprising a cluster of innovations similar to those adopted by newsrooms across democratic societies, as demonstrated by a summary of previous research into our three categories of interest.

Changes in technology use: The diffusion of digital technologies within newsrooms has been studied extensively. Garrison’s (2001) early longitudinal study, tracing the initial spread of “interactive information-gathering technologies,” found that reporters’ growing Internet use was redefining newsroom roles but also encountering resistance, with staffers citing inadequate training and time as reasons for lack of adoption. Research into each successive wave of change over the past two decades has produced similar results: professed acceptance of the technology itself (with varying degrees of enthusiasm), paired with concerns related primarily to perceived complexity of the innovation and its compatibility with established norms and routines. More recently, Reich’s longitudinal study suggests that journalists approach technological change conservatively, adapting new tools to fit existing practices rather than allowing new technologies

to transform newswork (Reich, 2013). Other scholarship similarly has moved away from seeing technology as driving change and toward a conceptualization of change as the result of interaction among professional, organizational, economic, and social factors (Anderson, 2013; Boczkowski, 2004; Paulussen & Ugille, 2008).

As successive waves of digital technologies have diffused throughout contemporary newsrooms, journalists have had to incorporate technological considerations into every aspect of their job, from the selection of an appropriate tool for capturing a multimedia story element to working knowledge of digital troubleshooting at the final editing stage (Robinson, 2007). Several studies have reported similar newsroom concerns about quality, time pressures, and inadequate training with increasingly complex technologies (Fenton, 2010; Wallace, 2009; Witschge & Nygren, 2009). Newer social media technologies, notably Twitter, have diffused rapidly, perhaps because their features are compatible with established breaking news practices (Hermida, 2010). The speed and ease of posting a tweet offer clear advantages to journalists who value getting information out quickly (Weaver et al., 2007), further enhanced by compatibility with mobile communication devices. In fact, despite initial skepticism, early adopting journalists helped speed public diffusion of Twitter through coverage that emphasized its utility for social awareness as well as its commercial and civic benefits (Arceneaux & Weiss, 2010). Recent work indicates widespread journalistic use of social media but also considers the degree of compatibility with professional norms. For example, journalists seem to be “normalizing” Twitter in ways that broadly align with (but also tentatively challenge) existing norms and practices (Lasorsa, Lewis, & Holton, 2012).

Changes in audience relationships: After the advent and rapid diffusion of blogs in the early 2000s, news organizations opened their websites to user input and resurrected, in some

fashion, an emphasis on communal relationships that had risen and then fallen with the rise and fall of civic journalism a decade earlier (Robinson, 2007). Journalists who once interacted with members of the public almost exclusively as sources now had to reconceptualize them as critics and partners in content creation. Although professional journalists and community members can collaborate successfully, user-generated content initiatives are often a source of contestation and confusion in the newsroom (Groves, 2012; Thurman, 2008). Yet the interactions between professional journalists and community members on social media sites such as Twitter have resulted to new forms of collaborative verification and innovative strategies for engaging audiences (Hermida, 2012; Holton & Lewis, 2011). The result of this changing relationship has been an ongoing tension between a network ethic of participation and a professional one of information control (Lewis, 2012).

While multimedia journalism requires journalists to alter their practices to accommodate new tools, participatory journalism has necessitated an articulation of what journalists do that those outside the newsroom do not (Lowrey & Mackay, 2008). Their response to this existential question has centered on professional values and normative standards, with journalists arguing that commitment to such norms as accuracy and impartiality sets them apart (Singer, 2010). Despite the resulting culture clash (Hermida & Thurman, 2008), pressures continue to mount for what Robinson calls “an end to thinking about news as a discrete product and the beginning of considering news production as a shared, distributed action with multiple authors, shifting institution-audience relationships and altered labor dynamics” (Robinson, 2011, p. 137).

Changes in professional culture: Any innovation that affects journalists’ norms and practices has cultural implications, but certain innovations seek to make broader and more substantive changes to professional culture. Such efforts, typically spearheaded by organization

management, challenge widely held beliefs about the profession and ask those in the news industry to rethink what it means to be a journalist. Over the past several decades, managers have advocated for a variety of cultural changes within their respective news organizations, often resulting in friction between rank-and-file journalists and organization leadership (Daniels & Hollifield, 2002; Gade, 2004; Gade & Perry, 2003).

Managerial efforts to reduce negative responses to organizational change have little effect on journalists' job satisfaction, which tends to decline during times of cultural change (Daniels & Hollifield, 2002). In fact, when promoting organizational change, news managers sometimes view "newsrooms as laboratories to experiment with new and far-reaching change initiatives," leading journalists to feel more like victims than participants in such change (Gade, 2004, p. 45). Yet despite having been heavily contested at the time of adoption, some cultural changes, such as "newsroom convergence," are commonplace today (Huang et al., 2006; Ketterer et al., 2004; Silcock & Keith, 2006; Singer, 2004b). For example, Dailey, Demo, and Spillman (2005) found that although forms of newsroom convergence that fit smoothly into existing work practices were fairly common by the mid-2000s, true convergence, which requires a change to newsroom structure and culture, was virtually non-existent. Over the subsequent decade, however, producing content for different platforms has come to be seen as a necessity, resulting in changes in newsroom organization and journalistic work that in turn created an increased need for coordination and cooperation (García Avilés et al., 2009).

Some managers have sought to institute *radical innovation*, which Rogers (2003, p. 426) defines as a change so significant "that it represents a new paradigm for carrying out some task." For example, Gade and Perry (2003) studied the short tenure of a *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* editor who entered the job with the goal of "cultural transformation," including a shift from beats to

team-based reporting and an embrace of civic journalism. Although journalists initially were optimistic about the proposed changes, they soured after these changes failed to improve newsroom operations or the newspaper's quality. Similarly, Ryfe (2009) notes that a newspaper editor's attempts to shift the way journalists covered their beats and produced news were met with confusion and indignation as these changes challenged reporters' convictions about what constituted "good" journalism. His study ultimately documents a newsroom culture of professionalism "remarkably resilient and resistant to change" (p. 198), as journalists "see how they gather and report the news as how they *ought* to gather and report the news" (p. 211). Therefore, central to the adoption of changes to professional culture are questions about relative advantage and compatibility, whether the changes in question produce better journalism and are consistent with how journalists view their profession.

This overview of diffusion theory and scholarship on newsroom change leads to the following research questions concerning the diffusion of three distinct yet interdependent changes taking place at the news organization in this study:

RQ1: What factors have impeded or facilitated the diffusion of change in technology use?

RQ2: What factors have impeded or facilitated the diffusion of change in audience relationships?

RQ3: What factors have impeded or facilitated the diffusion of change in professional culture?

Because these three changes comprise a cluster of innovations, our final research question examines holistically the diffusion of these distinct yet interdependent changes. Drawing from Rogers' stages of organizational innovation, we ask:

RQ4: How fully have these three changes diffused in relation to each other?

Methodology

Case studies offer an optimal approach for investigating contemporary phenomena within their real-life context (Yin, 2003). Using triangulated data from a single case reveals how people with different organizational roles interpret the same newsroom changes (Nip, 2008; Robinson, 2011). This study draws on questionnaire and interview data gathered from employees of an independently owned media company in a mid-sized Midwestern city. The company produces a 50,000-circulation daily newspaper, a market-leading TV news outlet, and associated websites. The frequency and speed with which this media company has invested in, pursued, and abandoned innovation make it a prime candidate for a diffusion study. In the past few years alone, it has experimented with frequent and dramatic changes to its products, mission, workforce, management and organizational structure, and audience engagement efforts. In 2008, the organization hired a new editor with a vision that differed markedly from the views of his predecessors. Over the following year, a major reorganization separated those responsible for creating content from those responsible for editing and delivering the content in print, over the air, and online – an experiment termed “the Great Divide” by newsroom wags and widely seen as disastrous. There were newsroom layoffs in 2009. After the editor left in 2010, product and content were reunited, but the newsroom was reorganized again, this time into topical teams responsible for covering key community issues. A mostly new executive leadership team was brought in, none with newsroom experience. The newspaper and television staffs, historically separate, converged in 2011 in an attempt to share reporters, resources, and stories. In early 2012, the leadership team drafted and circulated a new mission statement that sought to redefine the company’s values, vision, and sense of “who we are and where we are going.” In early 2013, the

company instituted a new round of layoffs and announced a financial restructuring from a family-owned company to an employee stock ownership plan.

Our study focuses on data collected from workers at the news organization in late 2012 and early 2013. In August 2012, a newsroom manager circulated a recruitment email to all 124 company newswriters, asking them to participate in interviews and an online questionnaire. In addition to those who volunteered to be interviewed, the research team recruited other interviewees in order to achieve a maximum variation sample (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Between August 2012 and January 2013, research team members conducted in-depth interviews with 20 newswriters. Interviewees included the CEO, a vice president, newsroom managers, several editors, a graphic designer, a columnist, and several reporters with a variety of topical responsibilities and newsroom experience ranging from a few months to more than 30 years.¹ Most interviews lasted an hour or more and focused on the individual's role in and response to several changes in company and newsroom practices as well as the innovation attributes that enhanced or impeded adoption. Several questions focused specifically on the degree of compatibility/incapability of the cluster of innovations adopted by the organization (Rogers, 2003). Interviews were transcribed in full; the researchers then coded and recoded for themes related to the diffusion of technological, relational, and cultural changes. Each interview was coded by at least two researchers.

The online questionnaire (Q1), administrated in August 2012, included open- and closed-ended questions that addressed adoption of multimedia technologies – “technological change” (Table 1; $\alpha = .77$), the relationship between newswriters and the community – “relational change” (Table 2; $\alpha = .64$),² and changes to organizational and professional culture – “cultural change” (Table 3; $\alpha = .86$). Questions also gauged the level of understanding of terms from the

company's new mission statement (Table 4). Forty-two people participated in the questionnaire. In the months following the first questionnaire, newswriters experienced several changes at the company, including a round of layoffs, a major financial restructuring, and a three-month training program in multimedia journalism for eight reporters. In January 2013, newswriters were invited to complete a second questionnaire (Q2), which largely replicated Q1 but with modifications based on preliminary data analysis as well as a consideration of changing newsroom conditions. Twenty-one people participated in Q2.

To understand the factors that influenced the diffusion of this cluster of innovations, we adapted a questionnaire from a previous newsroom diffusion study (Singer, 2004b). In particular, several items measured the five innovation attributes – relative advantage (e.g. “The changes will result in better journalism”); compatibility (e.g. “I am comfortable interacting with community members through social media”); complexity (e.g. “In general, I feel that I understand the changes proposed by company executives”); trialability (e.g. “I have the time I need to keep up with new social media options”); and observability (e.g. “The more tools I know how to use well, the better the journalism I can do”). In interviews, participants were asked similar questions – for example, “Will changes result in better journalism?” and “How comfortable do you feel working with multimedia technologies?” Additionally, responses to open-ended questions and interview responses were coded for these attributes during data analysis.

Of the 42 Q1 respondents, more than a third (N=16) identified themselves as reporters or anchors; another 13 identified as editors, producers, or managers. The rest held jobs including photographer/videographer, designer, and columnist. Longevity in their current job ranged from 4 months to 38 years; the average length of time with the company was just under 9 years. Of the 21 Q2 respondents, nine were reporters or anchors, and seven were editors, producers, or

managers. Only three had held their current jobs for 10 years or more; however, the average length of time with the company overall was comparable to that of Q1 respondents.

Questionnaire respondents had the option of entering their email addresses, which enabled response comparison, though nine Q1 respondents and four Q2 respondents chose to participate anonymously. In all, 18 individuals participated in more than one part of the study, and five completed all three (interview, Q1, and Q2). We can identify 47 unique participants – though this number is likely higher, considering the anonymous questionnaire entries – meaning at least 38% of those recruited participated in this study. Because we were unable to pair all responses from Q1 and Q2, we tested for change using unpaired t-tests for each statement. Due to the lower response rate for Q2, none of the results were statistically significant. Consequently, unless otherwise indicated, questionnaire data provided below draw from Q1. Data from Q2 are only reported for items that were added after Q1.

Findings

Technological change: In recent years, the news organization has placed an emphasis on using new digital technologies in news gathering and reporting. Specifically, leaders promote a “digital first” policy, advocate for more multimedia storytelling, and encourage newswriters to be active on social media. As **Table 1** shows, in general, questionnaire respondents viewed technological change favorably. All respondents but one said they enjoyed learning new technologies that they could use in their work, generating the highest average level of agreement of any statement in our questionnaire. Large majorities also said they were comfortable with digital technology and believed better journalism resulted from the ability to use it well, though

there was substantial concern about insufficient time or training to develop technological skills. Most also saw the value in newer social media technologies.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

A digital-first publishing strategy, derided as “scooping ourselves” during early newsroom convergence efforts (Singer, 2004a), received widespread support from respondents. “Digital first and then get out of the way,” one reporter wrote in response to a question about the company’s best ideas for change. “If you’re clinging to your print work schedule and not blogging, why do you have a job here?” A veteran reporter, whom managers identified as a newsroom opinion leader, stressed a need for “changing people’s minds that, ‘Hey, as soon as you know it, you’re going to put it online.’ The old idea that you held onto it until it landed on somebody’s doorstep in the morning doesn’t work anymore.” Study participants also expressed strong support for the need to enhance the company’s news websites.

Resistance to technological change has not vanished entirely, though, and its source has remained consistent over time. Journalists continue to express concerns about pressures on what they consider more important storytelling components – which invariably involve traditional journalistic practices. “Sometimes using more tools dilutes the reporting process,” a reporter wrote in our questionnaire. “Having to tweet, shoot photos and video, post online and on Facebook ultimately takes away from how much time a reporter has [for] composing the story.” An editor said that having to “go through hoops to process the photos and put things online” means less time is available to find gaps or catch errors, which he called “the actual editing.”

However, many newswriters have come to see – or at least claim to see – use of multimedia as beneficial and even necessary to their careers and to effective journalism. One print reporter described the “ideal” as someone covering a story being able “to write words for it.

Write a story for it. Change it up a little bit so it's written for a TV script. Shoot a compelling photograph with it that can run in the paper, and also grab your video camera and shoot some video." Again, though, implementation of the stated ideal has diffused more slowly than has the acceptance of its merits, largely because of perceived complexity and incompatibility with other demands. Doing all those things, the same reporter said, "is extremely stressful and extremely different and leads to incredible challenges," adding, "I'm not to a point where I do all that."

Although social media is a newer phenomenon, its relative lack of complexity as well as high observability and trialability outside the newsroom support its rapid diffusion as a journalistic tool, even as newswriters adapt it to boost compatibility with existing norms (Lasorsa, Lewis, & Holton, 2012). Our data suggest that unlike proficiency with multimedia tools, which appears unrelated to age, younger journalists for whom social media are embedded in their personal landscape are more likely than older colleagues to see Twitter, in particular, as part of their professional landscape, as well. "It opens you up to a lot of nuance and allows you to see a lot of things that you wouldn't see," one recent college graduate said of her use of Twitter to quickly disseminate news from meetings and to find sources with interesting perspectives. "It's nice to be able to have a wide range of colors to choose from on the palette."

Relational change: Organization leaders also seek to change how newswriters relate to members of the community, seeing them as collaborators rather than merely consumers. In practice, this means fostering new relationships with sources and community members through providing opportunities for the public to submit news content and provide input into coverage decisions. In general, as **Table 2** shows, questionnaire statements about changes in interactions with community members generated more ambiguity than did technology statements. For example, three-fourths of respondents agreed that "members of the community should have input

into our coverage decisions” (mean = 4.8), while a majority disagreed that “members of the community should be part of our news team” (mean = 3.17). At the same time, respondents overwhelmingly agreed with statements about using social media to engage in conversations with audiences. Large majorities of questionnaire respondents felt that social media helped them get important information both to and from community members, and smaller but still substantial majorities said they were comfortable interacting with community members this way.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

But while respondents favored journalistic uses of social media, they expressed misgivings about freer-form user contributions, reflecting a perception other research also has identified: that content from audiences is not fully compatible with journalistic norms and quality standards. In fact, questions about relational change showed considerable skepticism that new ways offered a relative advantage to old ones. Respondents seemed open to new ideas when they interpreted that change as being compatible with their overall role of informing the public. While innovations they disliked were typically seen as incompatible with that role. Only about half the respondents agreed that “the proposed changes will enable us to better serve our community.”

Less bold attempts to bring more community voices into the newsroom often involved contributions to sports, weather, or lifestyle reporting, something that many newswriters supported. A number of interviewees believed that interacting on social media, including community contributions in certain sections, and posting sports stories from high school journalists on the website were positive and feasible ways of changing relationships with the community. As one veteran reporter described it, “maybe they’re a marathoner, and they write about how to train for a marathon, or coaching their kid’s t-ball team, or those sorts of things.” He added, “I think any community involvement is probably a good sign.” However, when it

came to community members reporting on more serious issues, support from newswriters often waned as they wondered whether “citizen journalists” had the knowledge and skills to cover the story appropriately. As one reporter noted:

I think the whole focus on bringing people from the community and assuming they can do journalism is not well regarded among the reporting ranks. It’s one thing to have sources and people that you get feedback from, but just because you’re a teacher doesn’t mean you can be an education reporter necessarily.

A questionnaire respondent similarly wrote, “It is rare to find a community member who is going to give serious, thoughtful and most importantly consistent and dependable content. If they were that useful, they would be doing this for a living.” Others cited the incompleteness of user reports. “The stories have holes in them, and it’s a deterioration of quality,” a veteran writer said. So while newswriters were often comfortable inviting some forms of community contribution and feedback, they viewed community participation in matters of civic importance as incompatible with the mission of journalism.

One of the biggest changes involved the creation of a new position in the newsroom – the Community Builder. The first Community Builder was from the education sector and was tasked with working with journalists and the community to foster engagement on education and education reform. This attempt to bring a non-journalist into the newsroom was met with mixed reaction – and puzzlement: “I have to tell you, I don’t know what [the Community Builder] does,” an editor told us. “I met him. I talked to him. He’s a really nice guy. I don’t know what he does day to day in this building.” For many in the newsroom, the Community Builder position is highly incompatible with their values, experiences, and needs. Additionally, this bold innovation has no degree of trialability, is complex or difficult to understand, and is not something reporters

have observed in the industry. In short, from many newswriters' perspective, the adoption of such a newsroom role offered no discernable relative advantage.

Some newswriters also felt that they had more questions than answers about what was expected of them when it came to changing their relationship with the community. "A lot of the rhetoric can be interpreted in multiple ways and lacks specifics for outcomes," one editor wrote. "'Members of the community should be part of the news teams.' In what capacity, and how much control are they given? Where is the line for partisan input? Where's the good journalism if we turn over full control of the message?"

Attempting to clarify how community involvement actually works in practice remained a challenge for many participants in our study. Others interpreted the change in ways that were generally compatible with their existing understanding of their jobs without much attempt to alter their norms or innovate their practices.

Cultural change: While the technological and relational innovations discussed above contribute to a change in professional culture, the company's leadership, led by the CEO, seeks to change more substantially and directly perceptions about what journalism is and how it is – or ought to be – done. The CEO believes the company is doing a poor job of fulfilling its mission to "connect, inform and engage" by failing to foster productive conversations in the community about local problems. "We've been around for 130 years, and for 130 years we've had the same business model. Something happened yesterday. Something happened today. Something's going to happen next week," the CEO said. "We are not helping people construct nuanced discussions over issues for which there are no correct answers. ... If we can actually develop collaborative co-creation of reliable local information, then we're all better off. That's the theory."

Organization leaders laid out this theory in a company mission statement, one that positions newswriters at the forefront of promoting civic engagement and community building.

Yet, as demonstrated in **Table 3**, this cultural change faces significant opposition in the newsroom. Although two-thirds of respondents agreed with the statement, “a journalist’s job is to foster community engagement in civic matters” (mean = 4.65), greater agreement went to a direct expression of the sentiment the CEO sought to change, that “a journalist’s job is to reflect what is happening in the community” (mean = 5.54).

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

In interviews, newswriters repeatedly said they viewed this new vision as incompatible with their understanding of journalism. For example, a reporter expressed concern about engaging community members rather than informing them. “We’re all supposed to create these experiences. That’s what we get from higher up,” she said. “But as a journalist, you are supposed to stand back and report on what’s happening, not create it.” Another reporter likened her role as a journalist to being a sponge. “You get all the information in, and someone squeezes you, and you let it out,” she said. “It’s not my job to have an opinion. It’s my job to present the story.”

Further complicating the diffusion of this change was confusion in the newsroom about what exactly this new approach entailed. One editor said he solicited responses from a variety of people in the newsroom after the mission statement was circulated. “They said many different things, but universally what they said was ‘Huh? What does this make you do?’” He continued:

There’s a lot of discussion about community engagement and being part of the community, not we observe and then we tell you what happened, but more being a part of the thought process. Should we be doing that? I don’t know... I don’t know if that’s what we should be doing, but we should probably decide that.

Another editor agreed that company leadership had failed to provide “clear direction” on how to put the ideas expressed in the mission statement into practice: “I just wish the leadership could be a little more succinct about some of these crucial points.” A third editor added that the CEO was great at pushing boundaries and challenging assumptions, but he was less interested in turning those ideas into concrete steps that made sense to everyone in the newsroom: “The vision was outpacing what the operationalizing was doing.” As these editors are those tasked with translating the vision into journalistic practice and encouraging rank-and-file journalists to adopt cultural change, their confusion contributes to a broader lack of clarity in the newsroom.

The complexity of this change in professional culture was evident among participants in our study. Only 25% of questionnaire respondents agreed that company management effectively communicates its goals to the staff (mean = 3.20). We also asked respondents how well certain key ideas from the mission statement had been defined by company management. As shown in **Table 4**, respondents generally felt all five ideas had been communicated poorly. In particular, “actionable information and context” and “caring contributors” – referring to content that allows community members to make informed decisions and community-building collaborations between the public and journalists, respectively – received the worst ratings. This lack of understanding about the leadership’s vision for a new kind of journalism speaks to complexity of this change; participants were unsure what was being asked of them. These changes also have low trialability, as journalists are hesitant to put their reputations on the line for innovations they view as incompatible with their understanding of journalism.

As part of this change to professional culture, the CEO espouses a culture of experimentation, seeking to encourage journalists to become more nimble and open to trying new things, not least because the exact parameters of success are unclear. Yet many journalists

view experimentation as a lack of long-term adherence to any one strategy, a concern related to inadequate observability and trialability of each successive innovation. Two-thirds of respondents felt there had been too many changes at the company, and only 30% said that changes were given adequate time for evaluation of their success or failure (mean = 3.80). Sizable minorities did not believe the combined changes resulted in better journalism in general or a higher-quality product in particular. There was also widespread disagreement about whether the changes were the best ones the company could be making (mean = 4.00).

While some journalists said in their interviews that they admired the ongoing search for optimal solutions – “if you stay stagnant and don’t change, you’re going to die,” one editor said – most said the “flavor-of-the-month” approach had long since grown old. “It’s like running across hot coals,” another editor said. “You can’t stop in the middle of it and figure out what the hell you’re doing. You have to wait to get to the other end. I don’t know where the other end is. But we have to keep running, don’t we?” Several expressed concern that the frequency of change was emblematic of a lack of planning by company leadership. “To be honest, I really don’t know what the company’s focus is on right now,” one frustrated reporter said. “We tend to hear the same message every six months but presented in a different way or [with] different titles. I now just tune it out. You can’t get upset if you don’t pay attention.”

Responses to open-ended questions echoed these sentiments: “It’s a challenge to embrace anything other than the status quo,” one reporter wrote. “Why? Because you know it all will change in six months anyway.” Another expressed frustration that “too many new strategies have been rolled out too quickly and without much forethought. These strategies are then revoked soon after, leaving the majority of the newsroom feeling confused, exhausted and nervously awaiting the next ‘change’ to surface.” This sense of change fatigue speaks to the complexity of

a culture of experimentation. At this news organization, the leadership is asking journalists and editors to be amenable to changes that no one can anticipate and that few understand.

Overall, the major obstacle to cultural change as promoted by the CEO was the belief that the changes were not in sync with the creation of quality journalism. “It’s a pity to go through changes for the sake of change and not for the improvement of journalism and reporting,” one reporter wrote. When we asked another interviewee who broadly supported the company’s efforts if he thought the changes had resulted in better journalism, he paused and then said no. “As a journalist, you have to see your number one thing is to tell a good story. [With] the time commitments, there have been sacrifices made on doing good journalism.” With no perceived relative advantage and such significant compatibility issues, the changes to professional culture advocated by company leadership faced a difficult path to further diffusion in this newsroom.

Stages of implementation. All three changes described above are authority innovation-decisions, adopted and promoted by company leadership, placing each on the implementation side of the innovation process (Rogers, 2003). Our findings demonstrate that technological change has reached the routinizing stage; it has become incorporated into regular activities in the newsroom. This change benefits from innovation attributes that encourage adoption: relative advantage of cross-platform storytelling; compatibility with journalistic goals; and the trialability, observability, and low complexity of social media platforms such as Twitter. The use of digital and social media still faces some resistance in terms of time and training, but this change has several champions in the newsroom and increasingly is engrained into routine journalistic practices.

Relational change, which faces more resistance in the newsroom, is in the clarifying stage of the adoption process. Certain aspects of this change are present – community members are

producing content and having greater input in coverage decisions, and several newswriters are practicing and championing a conversational approach to journalism. At the same time, questions remain about the appropriate place for greater community participation. Participants expressed comfort with community contributions to certain areas such as sports, but questioned whether non-professional journalists are knowledgeable and dispassionate enough to contribute content to sections such as business and politics. In principle, many support the idea of community members having a larger role in coverage decisions and content creation, but they are fuzzy on the details. As one editor said, “the creative tension then comes from what your community says they want and what our journalistic principles say we should do.” As Rogers (2003, p. 428) notes, such questions are common during the clarifying stage: “How does [the change] work? What does it do? Who in the organization will be affected by it? Will it affect me?” While the diffusion of relational change is moving forward, questions remain concerning its details and implications and how the change can become routinized.

Changes to the professional culture of journalism have diffused the least of these three innovations. Newswriters believe management has communicated its mission statement poorly, implemented too many changes, and not allowed enough time for evaluation of the success or failure of initiatives. This has left journalists confused about how to understand this cultural change, what the relative advantages are, and how to reconcile the incompatibility of this change with preexisting beliefs about the goals and practices of journalism. Thus, cultural change at this news organization remains in the redefining/restructuring stage. The issues surrounding this innovation require more than clarification; they require interpretation, negotiation, and consent. As one editor explained, the company needs someone who can translate the new mission into language and practices that newsroom employees can understand and agree with – “[we need]

anyone who would operationalize or really sweat the details, because this will all be won or lost in how the details are executed.” The cultural changes advocated by the CEO are reminiscent of those promoted by editors in newsroom studies by Ryfe (2009) and Gade and Perry (2003). Newswriters in our study similarly perceive these changes to professional culture as radical innovations. This management-driven innovation risks discontinuance or disenchantment unless those in the newsroom are willing to adopt changes to professional culture at the individual level (Rogers, 2003). But acceptance is unlikely unless newswriters come to understand this set of innovations as compatible with deeply held convictions about the role of journalism in society or come to believe this change will result in better journalism. Previous scholarship suggests management at this company faces an uphill battle in moving beyond the redefining/restructuring stage (Gade & Perry, 2003; Ryfe, 2009).

Discussion

In discussing technology clusters, Rogers (2003, p. 249) notes “the boundaries around any given innovation are often not clear cut or distinct,” as potential adopters may not fully discriminate between different types of change. Similarly, the three sets of change diffusing at the news organization discussed here are interwoven and interdependent. The adoption of social media technologies such as Twitter changes newsgathering and reporting, yet it also affects the relationship between journalists and their communities. Journalists can use new technologies to interact directly with members of the community, and community members, in turn, use social media as a new way to suggest, correct, praise, complain, and otherwise try to influence coverage decisions. In fact, statements related to social media received greater support than any other statement about changes to audience relationships (**Table 2**). Also, the urgency many news

organizations feel to incorporate the voices of non-journalists coincides with the growing ethos of participation that is central to digital culture (Deuze, 2006).

Any innovation that alters journalists' norms and practices also can be understood as a change to professional culture. In this study, we focused on specific changes to professional culture spearheaded by the CEO's efforts to create a newsroom of community builders who are open to experimentation. At the same time, we recognize that the professional culture of journalism is much more vast, something we addressed by including multiple questionnaire and interview questions that assessed newswriters reactions to "change" writ large, offering newswriters the opportunity to articulate their feelings on the diverse changes being diffused in the newsroom. It is also worth noting that the entrenchment of professional culture impacts the diffusion of other innovations in the newsroom (Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Lewis, 2012; Ryfe, 2012). Just as the adoption of new technologies alters journalism practice, allowing members of the community to influence coverage decisions challenges journalism norms. The durability of professional culture is a mediating factor in any newsroom innovation. Yet despite the blurred boundaries between innovations in a technology cluster, our findings demonstrate the value of recognizing both the tree and the forest.

Although our findings demonstrate that many respondents are broadly accepting of all three types of innovation, responses to changes in professional culture are generally more tepid than responses to changing community relationships and the adoption of new technologies. Overall, reaction to change hinges greatly on issues of relative advantage, compatibility, and complexity. Changes that newswriters see as beneficial to the news product and consistent with their understanding of journalism are viewed favorably, while journalists are resistant to adopt changes that they believe challenge journalistic autonomy and judgment, hurt the quality of the

news product, and/or have been communicated poorly by the company's leadership. To say that journalists are Luddites or opposed to change is to miss the point. As our findings demonstrate, they are open to a variety of changes that they view as compatible with their work and as better than the status quo, but are particularly against changes that have been articulated unclearly, lack specific directives, and disrupt their professional values, autonomy, and work.

This study bears the usual limitations of any case study, notably a lack of generalizability. Yet it also provides insights well-supported by diffusion theory and earlier studies that considered each type of change individually. Further, responding to Rogers' call for more holistic research that examines technology clusters, this study approaches the many changes facing news organizations as a cluster of distinct yet interdependent innovations. Our research suggests that newsroom studies should consider how newswriters respond to the interplay of various changes to journalistic practice, audience relationships, and professional culture. Doing so provides a more nuanced and complete set of findings than those derived through an undifferentiated conceptualization of newsroom change. Additional work is always needed, not least to understand other approaches to dealing with issues faced by virtually every traditional news organization in today's rapidly changing and hyper-mediated society. This study has suggested that the most fruitful places to look will be at the attributes of the innovations under consideration, as well as the implementation stages of innovation decisions. Similar work with chain-owned newspapers and national news outlets would enrich our understanding of what works, what doesn't, and why.

Table 1: Technological Change

Respondents were asked to respond to each statement on a seven-point scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Question	All Disagree	Neutral	All Agree	Mean
<i>I enjoy learning new technologies that I can use in my work.</i>	- (N=0)	2.9% (N=1)	97.1% (N=34)	6.11
<i>In general, I am comfortable working with digital media technologies.</i>	2.9% (N=1)	5.7% (N=2)	91.4% (N=32)	5.80
<i>The more tools I know how to use well, the better the journalism I can do.</i>	- (N=0)	2.9% (N=1)	97.1% (N=34)	5.77
<i>A “digital-first” news strategy is the right way for us to go.</i>	7.9% (N=3)	5.2% (N=2)	86.9% (N=33)	5.61
<i>Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, are important tools in my work.</i>	11.4% (N=4)	8.6% (N=3)	80% (N=28)	5.31
<i>Time using social media is time well-spent for me as a journalist.</i>	5.7% (N=2)	17.1% (N=6)	77.1% (N=27)	5.26
<i>[My company] has given me the training I need to work with digital media technologies.</i>	42.9% (N=15)	11.4% (N=4)	45.7% (N=16)	4.03
<i>I have the time I need to keep up with new social media options.</i>	42.9% (N=15)	17.1% (N=6)	40% (N=14)	3.91

NOTE: Not all respondents answered every question.

Table 2: Relational Change

Respondents were asked to respond to each statement on a seven-point scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Question	All Disagree	Neutral	All Agree	Mean
<i>Social media help me get important information FROM members of the community.</i>	2.9% (N=1)	14.3% (N=5)	82.9% (N=29)	5.51
<i>Social media help me get important information TO members of the community.</i>	8.6% (N=3)	8.6% (N=3)	82.9% (N=29)	5.46
<i>I am comfortable interacting with community members through social media.</i>	8.6% (N=3)	25.7% (N=9)	65.7% (N=23)	5.23
<i>Members of the community should have input into our coverage decisions.</i>	20% (N=7)	5.7% (N=2)	74.3% (N=26)	4.80
<i>The proposed changes will enable us to better serve our community.</i>	23.5% (N=8)	23.5% (N=8)	52.9% (N=18)	4.35
<i>Members of the community should be part of our news team.</i>	57.1% (N=20)	28.6% (N=10)	14.3% (N=5)	3.17

NOTE: Not all respondents answered every question.

Table 3: Cultural Change

Respondents were asked to respond to each statement on a seven-point scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Question	All Disagree	Neutral	All Agree	Mean
<i>A journalist's job is to reflect what is happening in the community.</i>	5.7% (N=2)	5.7% (N=2)	88.6% (N=31)	5.54
<i>News organizations should help strengthen their communities.</i>	8.8% (N=3)	17.6% (N=6)	73.5% (N=25)	5.26
<i>A journalist's job is to foster community engagement in civic matters.</i>	20.6% (N=7)	11.8% (N=4)	67.6% (N=23)	4.65
<i>Overall, I support the proposed changes.</i>	26.3% (N=10)	7.9% (N=3)	65.8% (N=25)	4.58
<i>The changes will enhance the quality of our products.</i>	36.8% (N=14)	21.1% (N=8)	42.1% (N=16)	4.16
<i>In general, I feel that I understand the changes proposed by executives.</i>	39.5% (N=15)	7.9% (N=3)	52.6% (N=20)	4.11
<i>The changes will result in better journalism.</i>	28.9% (N=11)	28.9% (N=11)	42.1% (N=16)	4.08
<i>These changes are the best ones we could be making at this time.</i>	36.8% (N=14)	18.4% (N=7)	44.7% (N=17)	4.00
<i>**The changes are given adequate time for us to evaluate their success or failure.</i>	45.0% (N=9)	35.0% (N=5)	30.0% (N=6)	3.80
<i>**Management effectively communicates its goals to the staff.</i>	70.0% (N=14)	5.0% (N=1)	25.0% (N=5)	3.20

****Data from Q2, which is not factored in the reported alpha.**

NOTE: Not all respondents answered every question.

Table 4: Communicating the Mission

Respondents were asked, “In your opinion, how well have the following terms been defined by management” on a five-point scale, from 1 (very poorly) to 5 (very well).

Key phrase	Poorly	Average	Well	Mean
<i>Brand promises</i>	36.8% (N=22)	34.2% (N=11)	28.9% (N=20)	2.87
<i>Community building</i>	39.5% (N=15)	36.8% (N=14)	23.7% (N=9)	2.82
<i>Creative collaboration</i>	50.0% (N=19)	34.2% (N=13)	15.8% (N=6)	2.58
<i>Actionable information and context</i>	57.9% (N=18)	28.9% (N=8)	13.2% (N=5)	2.39
<i>Caring contributors</i>	71.1% (N=27)	18.4% (N=7)	10.5% (N=4)	2.29

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¹ We have used generic identifiers to preserve respondent confidentiality, in accordance with IRB requirements. We also have refrained from extensively citing such documents as the company mission statement, which would enable identification of the organization and thus its CEO.

² Cronbach's alpha increases to 0.74 with the removal of the item "Members of the community should have input into our coverage decisions." We elected to retain this item because it expresses a related, though more extreme, sentiment concerning the changing relationship between journalists and the community.