

Want Young Readers? All it takes is Money, Time, Staff and Space : a Resource-Based View of Newspapers' Strategies For Luring Kids and Teens to News

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Abstract: The newspaper industry has long expressed a desire to attract more children and teenagers to their products. Attracting young readers, however, requires strategic decisions and resource allocation. The Resource-Based View (RBV) of strategic management suggests that newspapers must devote unique resources to creating or acquiring content that will attract young people. Using the RBV as a theoretical framework, this study surveys U.S.

daily newspaper publishers about what resources (time, money and people) they are devoting to attract young readers. The study finds that few newspapers have truly made a full-time commitment to attracting young readers. Increasing resources should lead to increased performance in trying to reach young audiences.

Keywords: newspaper industry, young readers, strategic management

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Voulez-vous des jeunes lecteurs ? Tout ce qu'il vous faut, c'est de l'argent, du temps, du personnel et de l'espace : une approche centrée sur les ressources du management stratégique des journaux pour séduire les enfants et les adolescents aux nouvelles

Résumé : L'industrie de la presse écrite s'est proposée depuis longtemps d'attirer plus d'enfants et d'adolescents à utiliser ses produits. Attirer les jeunes lecteurs, quand même, demande des décisions stratégiques et une allocation des ressources intelligente. L'approche centrée sur les ressources (*Resource-Based View*) du management stratégique suggère que les journaux doivent allouer des ressources uniques à la création d'un contenu qui puisse attirer des jeunes gens. En utilisant l'approche centrée sur les ressources comme cadre théorique,

l'article interroge les éditeurs des quotidiens des Etats-Unis sur les ressources (temps, argent, ressources humaines) qu'ils ont l'intention d'utiliser pour attirer les jeunes gens. La recherche montre que peu de journaux ont vraiment essayé d'attirer les jeunes lecteurs. Des ressources supplémentaires devraient apporter plus de chances dans la tentative d'attirer de jeunes audiences

Mots-clés : industrie de la presse écrite, jeunes lecteurs, management stratégique

Introduction

Many U.S. newspaper companies have tried, and failed, to produce financially viable products aimed at attracting young readers, particularly teenagers and young adults. Other newspaper companies and syndicates, meanwhile, *have* managed to create successful youth products. From Betty Debnam's nearly three decades of success with the syndicated *The Mini Page* to the Charleston (W.Va.) *Gazette's* 18-year-old youth product *Flipside*, others have at least drawn readers, if not advertisers, to their pages and products for more than a decade. The study will examine whether U.S. daily newspapers are willing to devote resources to attracting young readers. For this research, "The 2008 National Newspaper Youth Content Survey" was developed to directly ask U.S. daily newspaper publishers what they are doing at their newspapers to attract young readers.

Almost two decades ago, journalism professor Gerald Stone declared that the decline in reading among youth is the “single-most compelling issue this industry faces” (Fitzgerald, 1990). Stone & Stone found in their 1990 article, “Lurking in the Literature: Another Look at Mass Media Habits,” that there is a good possibility that teenagers who are not reading in their early years will not develop a newspaper readership habit later. By their late teens, youngsters’ interests and reading patterns are set for life and their news habits have formed before taking on adult responsibilities (Mindich, 2005; Stone, 1987).

Media use is a learned response that develops in the very young, and once the habit is obtained it is relatively stable over an individual’s life-cycle, (Burgoon, Gaudino, Atkin, & Burgoon, 1983). Children’s reading levels can be influenced by the content of a newspaper (Burgoon et al., 1983). Newspaper reading also changes with age (Bogart, 1989), but since the 1920s, each generation has read less than before, a readership pattern that holds throughout cohorts (Mindich, 2005).

Literature Review

Recognizing declines in readership result from failed “cohort replacement,” newspapers decided to take defensive action to try to stop the losses. Newspapers in the 1970s began target marketing in response to declines in circulation and readership among young adults (Fink, 1996; Howe, 1995). Newspapers started specifically targeting the youth audience in the 1980s and 1990s (Hemlinger, 1997).

The teens of today, however, are what Pew Internet and American Life Project Director Lee Rainie calls “digital natives” (Rainie, 2006). Digital Natives, those born in 1985 or later, have spent their entire lives connected to new media technologies. Newspapers are still grappling with where, and how, they can fit into this digital media landscape, and must revisit, redesign, rethink and reposition to develop the right strategies to draw younger readers who have grown up in this digital environment, says John Sturm, president and CEO of the Newspaper Association of America. Losing young readers means losing a generation of readers, Sturm (2007) writes.

Young people, including teenagers, are estranged from the daily newspaper, consume much less news, and do not make news a routine part of their day (Patterson, 2007; Mindich, 2005; Harrison Group, 2007). Meanwhile, the Internet has started to displace news from traditional media because it allows greater choice and more control over content than traditional media, which allows users to obtain greater opportunities for satisfaction (Dimmick, Chen, & Li, 2004).

The daily newspaper is at the bottom of the list for young adults and teens for their news source (Brown, 2005; Frola, 2006; John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, 2006; Patterson, 2007). Youth, both in the United States and United Kingdom, use the media for about 6.5 hours per day (multitasking youth are said to be exposed to 8.5 hours worth of media during that same 6.5 hour period of daily use) (Livingstone & Bovill, 2001; Roberts, Foehr, & Rideout, 2005). Television is the primary media for the young, who watch an average of three hours a day. Yet, according to a March 2005 Kaiser Family Foundation survey only 6% of that time was devoted to news, and much less time was spent with print news sources (Frola, 2006).

How much teens follow the news online and in different platforms is hotly debated among academics (*Youth indifference to news summary*, 2006). Lack of youth readership is also a problem newspapers share around the world. Around one-third of United Kingdom children over the age of 8 read a newspaper, and teens 15-17 are twice as likely as younger children to read a newspaper (Livingstone, 2002, p. 61-62).

Recognizing that youth attracted to mainstream newspaper, the International Newspaper Marketing Association recommends that newspapers “treat ‘youth’ as a current market with unique products and market pitches” (Mindich, 2005, p. 113). Industry associations have long recognized that advertiser interest in young people offers an opportunity for newspapers to help meet this demand. Some industry associations have staffers dedicated to supporting such efforts. There is also anecdotal evidence that individual newspapers and syndicates are offering youth content. However, there are questions about the extent and success of these efforts.

At many professional newspapers, youth sections for decades were either written by adult newspaper staffers for a teen audience or consisted of a “school page” where local high schools printed their school newspapers. A new model, in which a newspaper staff member directs and edits content created mostly by students, became prevalent in the 1990s (Hemlinger, 1997). Two journalism professors, Robert G. Picard and Jeffrey H. Brody, criticized newspapers’ move to this new model as abandoning “hard” news for “soft” news and a “dumbing down” of the product (Hemlinger, 1997). Newspaper editors, however, based their decisions on a 1995 Poynter Institute report that recommended newspapers attract readers by increasing coverage of teens and teen activities (Hemlinger, 1997).

The Youth Editors Association of America began in 1996 with 11 people. After a name change, the organization is now called the Youth Editorial Alliance, and is coordinated by the Newspaper Association of America Foundation. The youth association supports editors and reporters who work with youth. An adult ‘youth editor,’ is typically responsible for filling one or two pages with content aimed at

attracting teenagers. Youth editors work with teens on creating story ideas and stories within the sections (Weston, 1998).

By 1997, the typical youth section was a one-page, weekly, broadsheet printed on the pages of a newspaper with a target audience of high school and middle school students (Hemlinger, 1997). These publications had been in operation for fewer than three years, and employed one, full-time adult while most of the teen staffers were compensated with premiums and parties, although some were paid for each article published (Hemlinger, 1997). Most newspapers that look to capture young readers target two segments of the youth market: (a) children and preadolescents from 6 to 12 with a “kids” page, and (b) teens from 13 to 18 with several pages or larger sections (Howe, 1995).

Still, the number of student efforts at professional newspapers appears to be declining, according to Sandy Woodcock of the Newspaper Association of America Foundation. Resources have often been cited for the demise of youth products, even critically acclaimed, award-winning products that were deemed a success at attracting young readers.

Young readers have been operationally defined differently. Historically, childhood and youth have been theorized separately by distinct research literatures, (Livingstone, 2002) but there are examples of surveys that examined both age spans. For example, the London-based *Young People New Media* project looked at an age range of 6-17 (Livingstone, 2002). Studies often consider people 18-25 “young adults,” while studies on children usually set 12 or 13 as the age limit (Weston, 1998). Teenagers caught in between are often overlooked.

Industry studies are largely descriptive, and they show that youth interest in newspapers continues to drop while the Internet has had greater success capturing youth interest and attention. (Brown, 2005; Carpini, 2000; *The Digital Family*, 2007; Frola, 2006; John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, 2006; Lenhart et al., 2005; Patterson, 2007). Two recent industry studies examined how many American newspapers publish youth content. A 2002 American Society of Newspaper Editors survey found that 37% of newspaper editors said they sponsor teen pages. The ASNE survey identified 217 teen publications (Krayeske, 2006). Just three years earlier, a 1999 *American Journalism Review* article reported an estimated 370 U.S. newspapers that regularly published content locally produced by teens for teens. (Gusenburger, 1999).

A Belgian researcher found evidence “that a strategy designed to attract young readers by publishing special inserts pages seems unlikely to be effective” (Raeymaeckers, 2004, p. 231). But this author notes that Belgian youngsters do not

have examples of good youth inserts since newspapers were using “entertainment-only” sections directed at them.

“The problem remains that editors are not integrating attempts to attract young readers in a long-term policy, which limits their effectiveness,” Raeymaeckers writes. “Moreover, it implies that when editors cancel successful inserts, young readers feel frustrated and neglected” (Raeymaeckers, 2004, p. 231).

A 1995 study by Dorothea Howe found that the top reason newspapers do not publish content for youth, according to editors, was that the paper does not have the resources (time, money and people) to focus on the youth reader. More than half (58%) of respondents cited resources as the reason for not publishing youth content. (Howe, 1995).

An online proliferation has taken place since Howe’s study. At the time of Howe’s survey, only five newspapers had online services targeted toward youth, although some respondents wrote “soon” or “we’re working on this” (Howe, 1995, p. 75).

Theoretical Perspective: Resource-Based View of Strategic Management

Basic newspaper economics state that content is used to attract readers, and the newspaper sells advertisers access to those readers (Martin, 1998). Newspapers must therefore devote resources to creating or acquiring content that will attract young people. The Resource-Based View of strategic management builds on the assumption that each firm is a collection of unique resources that are used to conceive and implement strategies (Barney & Hesterly, 1996, as cited in Chan-Olmstead, 2006). Resource-based strategies suggest that firms create competitive advantages by combining skills and other resources in ways that are unique and cannot be imitated, which in turn protect the organization. The resource view is not limited to knowledge, the firm can also have physical or financial resources, for example (Barney & Clark, 2007; Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney & Hesterly, 1996).

Wernerfelt (1984) was the first to use the term Resource-Based View, and he called it a “view” because he was viewing the same competitive problem as Michael Porter. However, Wernerfelt examined resources instead of market position (Barney & Clark, 2007; Wernerfelt, 1984).

The basic assertions of the RBV are that “firms often possess different resources and capabilities, that these different resources and capabilities enable some firms to implement valuable strategies that other firms will find too costly to implement, and that these differences among firms can be long lasting” (Barney & Clark, 2007, p.

247). The strategic management field is largely built around the question of why some firms outperform others. The RBV, and parallel streams of research, suggests that a firm's distinctive competencies enable it to pursue a strategy more efficiently and effectively than other firms (Barney & Clark, 2007).

Some researchers claim knowledge is the most important source of sustainable competitive advantage (McEvily & Chakravarthy, 2002). Youth content can be viewed as a knowledge-based resource since it involves human capital and knowledge in its construction. Youth content creation incorporates all four resources — activities, skills, routines and external assets — described by Porter (1991). The activities and skills have to be applied in ways that result in the creation of unique assets, in this instance content, to be valuable. Valuable resources are hard to imitate, difficult to replace and more valuable within the firm than outside (Porter, 1991). Therefore, the resource-based view suggests youth content must be tied to the newspaper to provide a sustainable competitive advantage.

Customers are considered a firm resource, albeit one which is socially complex (Barney & Clark, 2007, p. 64, Klein and Lefler, 1981). In the case of newspapers, customers are advertisers and readers. Therefore, young readers can be viewed as a socially complex resource.

As discussed previously, newspapers and other media outlets have also come to view youth as a "market." The RBV suggests that firms will not enter markets if they do not understand the underlying strategic advantage available from competing in that market (Barney & Clark, 2007). Newspapers that acquire young audiences may differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive environment. The RBV suggests young audiences, which are unique and not easily imitated, can be viewed as a valuable resource for newspaper companies.

Chan-Olmstead has extended the RBV to media firms. Strategic management in a media context is defined by the analysis, decisions and actions an organization uses to get an advantage (Chan-Olmstead, 2006a, p. 14). The RBV examines the relationship between a firm's strategic posture and superior performance (Chan-Olmstead, 2006a). This is consistent with "strategic management's" focus on how media firms align resources with the changing media environment (Chan-Olmstead, 2006).

However, media products have unique characteristics that require revision of the generic business concepts used in the RBV. Media firms offer consumers a dual product of "content" and "distribution" (Chan-Olmstead, 2006a).

Information products also have unique economic characteristics, such as time-constrained consumption, relevance, non-depletability and high investment to

reproduction cost ratios (Priest, 1994). Consumers limit the time spent with information products. Products, such as a news article, are not “used up” when they are consumed. The first copy of an information product also requires a substantial investment. The cost of allotting resources such as labor and capital to create a teen section, for example, do not change in relation to reproduction costs. The initial investment remains the same whether the section is seen by one reader or 10,000 readers. These characteristics are relevant to the discussion of newspaper resources being used to develop youth content.

According to the RBV, four attributes of a firm’s resources — value, rareness, nonsubstitutability and inimitability — must work in tandem to increase performance (Chan-Olmstead, 2006b). Resources must be valuable to the firm and its customers. Resources must also be rare, or other firms can acquire them. Resources must be unique, so other firms cannot develop substitutes. Resources must also have imperfect imitability, which can result from social complexity, ambiguity or unique historical conditions (Barney, 1991). When all of these characteristics are combined, the firm gains a competitive advantage.

However, changes in technology, consumer demand, and the firm’s operations can diminish the value of a source of sustained competitive advantage. These changes have been called “Schumpeterian Shocks” (Schumpeter, 1934, Barney, 1986; Barney & Clark, 2007, p. 53). Some shocks redefine which firm resources are valuable and which are not. Some resources may be weaknesses or irrelevant in new settings. The Internet and other technological advances created a “Schumpeterian Shock” to the newspaper industry.

As Chan-Olmstead notes, “not only are there more media and media outlets, there are more ways to package and present media products. Not only have the geographical boundaries and media expanded, the boundaries between different media have become blurry.” (Chan-Olmstead, 2006a, p. 4).

Some resource categories that are germane to the development of youth content include financial, physical, human, technological (Chan-Olmstead, 2006). The financial allotment determines what types of youth products, if any, a newspaper implements. Physical assets, such as a printing press, create the product. Human resources, such as youth editors and correspondents, produce the youth content. The RBV also suggests that individual employees with unique skills can potentially be leveraged for a competitive advantage (Wright, McMahan and McWilliams, 1994). While all of the firm’s people are important, some provide greater leverage for competitive advantage (Barney and Clark, 2007). Newspapers should try to figure out which employees offer a competitive advantage in the youth market and leverage them to appeal to youth.

Hypotheses

The literature review suggests a newspapers' strategy in the youth market will be influenced by manager perceptions of the potential to attract readers and advertising, and their priorities for allocating resources. Strategy in turn will determine the allocation of resources to development of youth content.

The following hypotheses are stated:

H1: Newspapers with youth content will have more growth in young readers than newspapers without youth content.

H2: Newspapers that invest more resources in attracting young readers will have higher quality youth content than newspapers that invest fewer resources in attracting young readers.

Methods

The population for the study was all daily newspapers in the United States. A survey of publishers was used to gather data about each paper's efforts to attract young readers and the results of those efforts.

Publishers were identified from listings in the 2008 *Bacon's Newspaper Directory*. Specialized dailies such as those targeting ethnic, religious, alternative or financial and business audiences were excluded from the study. Complete contact information for publishers at all other daily newspapers was entered into a database. However, publishers who lacked an email address were also excluded from the survey because the questionnaire was posted on the Internet. This resulted in a total of 1,396 daily newspapers whose publishers were eligible for the survey. Publishers of multiple newspapers were only contacted once. Among this list, there were 263 "undeliverable" emails and an additional 8 publishers from the sample who either left the newspaper or changed jobs. The result was a total of 1,125 daily newspapers whose publishers were contacted for the survey.

Publishers are the executives most likely to know the answers to all of a broad range of questions about strategies for attracting young readers, and the results. Publishers are likely to play a key role in setting a newspaper's strategy, allocating its resources, monitoring news and advertising content, and tracking readership and financial data.

In some instances, publishers chose to delegate another staff member, such as an editor or circulation manager, to complete the survey.

The questionnaire and research plan were approved by the University's Institutional Review Board (Project Number 2008-10535-0).

After testing a pilot survey, an Internet-based electronic questionnaire was used to gather information from publishers. Each publisher received an advance letter through the U.S mail inviting them to participate in the survey. The letter told the publisher when to expect an email with a link to the questionnaire. However, the letter also included the link with a unique identifier for each publisher in the survey. Thirty-nine publishers took advantage of the letter to complete the questionnaire before e-mails were sent out. The questionnaire consisted of six sections with a total of 32 questions and an estimated completion time of 10 minutes. The first section asked if a newspaper published content to attract young readers, who were defined as children 12 and under and teenagers between the ages of 13 to 17. Publishers who answered yes were directed to 10 questions about the types of content for children and teenagers offered in print or on the newspaper's Web site. These questions measured the variety of content for young readers published by the newspaper. Other sections measured staff and financial resources and demographic measures, including the publisher's gender and the circulation of the newspaper.

The Cox Institute for Newspaper Management Studies funded the research.

The advance letter was sent to 1,125 newspaper publishers on May 16, 2008. The first e-mail was sent to publishers on May 28, 2008. The follow-up e-mail was sent to publishers who had not responded on June 11, 2008.

The letter and first e-mail resulted in responses from 101 publishers, or 8.9% of potential respondents. The second e-mail added another 33 responses, bringing the total to 134 for an initial response rate to 11.9%. However, only 101 respondents completed the entire questionnaire. This resulted in an effective response rate of 8.9%.

This is not sufficient to generalize results to the entire population of dailies. Therefore, data will be interpreted as applying only to newspapers whose publishers responded to the survey.

Of the 99 respondents who provided demographic data, 83 were male, while 16 were female. The average age of respondents was 54, with a standard deviation of 8.5. The youngest respondent was 24, while the oldest respondent was 71.

After removing an outlier that listed average daily paid circulation as 18, the average daily paid circulation of the remaining 98 newspapers in the sample was 26,201, with a standard deviation of 26,580. The largest newspaper circulation was 160,000, while the smallest average daily paid circulation was 3,142.

Findings

The basic research question asks about the current extent of efforts to target young readers, and whether those efforts work. Descriptive results provide a partial answer. Some questions were not answered by every respondent.

Results for 126 respondents show that most of the newspapers (88%) are publishing content for children and/or teenagers. A majority (57%) of these newspaper publishers also reported they are targeting both children and teenagers. One out of five newspapers responding target only children 12 and under, while slightly fewer target only teenagers.

All 98 newspaper publishers who answered a question asking if comic strips and funnies regularly appear in their newspapers said they do. Eighty publishers (82%) included comic strips and funnies among types of content used to attract young readers. Only 10 publishers (10%) reported that comic strips and funnies are not important for attracting young readers. Only two publishers, or 2%, said funnies and comics are the primary type of content used to attract young readers, while the remaining six publishers responded that they did not know how important funnies and comic strips are for attracting children and teenagers to the newspaper.

However, the questionnaire also specified respondents should exclude comic strips and funnies when responding to other questions about content. Since all newspapers surveyed reported having comic strips and funnies, they would not necessarily be a unique, unimitable resource.

Newspapers in the survey are spending very little to attract children and teenagers. There were 84-86 respondents who answered questions about the amount of space and financial resources devoted to content for young readers. Of 86 newspapers publishing in print, 75 newspapers, or 87%, said they devote 10% or less of non-advertising space to content for youth. Of 81 newspapers publishing online, 72 newspapers, or 90%, of respondents devote 10% or less of their non-advertising space each week to content for young readers. A vast majority of respondents – 76 of 84- also said they devote 10% or less of their newsroom financial budget, their non-newsroom financial budget, and their total financial budget to producing youth content in print and online.

Some newspaper publishers say they have fewer resources to devote to efforts to attract young readers.

“Recent cutbacks have forced painful choices,” one publisher wrote in response to an open ended question. “One is that we have no one who has their total focus on

driving youth readership. It is part of a myriad of duties and so it gets the partial attention consistent with this scenario.”

Another publisher cited “dwindling total resources and the need to try and serve our core (older) readers while still providing something compelling to young, increasingly, web-oriented news and information consumers” as the “single most important issue” newspapers face attracting young readers to the print and online editions.

A third newspaper publisher has decided to focus the print newspaper on readers ages 50 to 90 rather than devote “much time and space” to attracting young readers.

“We no longer have the budget, staff or newsprint to try and be all things to all people in print,” the publisher wrote. “We have made some meager attempts at reaching young readers online, but that is mosting (sic) in the area of prep sports and photo galleries.”

Respondents cited top management as having the most influence shaping their strategy to attract young readers. Of the 81 respondents to this question, more than half, 53, stated the managing editor, editor or publisher had the most influence over strategy.

Questions about staffing revealed that the average newsroom staff, including employees who do not produce youth content, was 32 fulltime employees and 4 part time employees. On any given week, newspapers use a variety of staff to produce content targeting young readers, including editors, reporters, copy editors, and paid and unpaid stringers. The newspapers that use stringers 17 or younger on average used about 3 unpaid stringers. When these stringers were paid, newspapers used an average of 2. Newspapers don’t have any clear preference for paid or unpaid part timers, except when it comes to the young stringers. Young stringers are on average more likely to be unpaid than paid for covering youth topics. However, the large standard deviations indicate considerable variation around these means (See Table 1).

Newspapers assign small numbers of full-time staffers to cover these topics, except for copy editing and reporters occasionally covering youth topics. This suggests that newspapers’ full-time staff produce content targeting young readers as part of, but not all of their responsibilities.

Strategy

One hundred and one respondents completed the entire questionnaire. For 99 of these newspaper publishers, the Web is the answer to attracting young readers. A majority of publishers consider it important to attract children and/or teenagers to the online edition of the newspaper. Respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 the importance of attracting young readers to their newspaper editions, with 1 representing “not important” and 5 representing “very important.” A Likert scale by definition is a summary measure. When all responses were summed, the average response was higher than 3, both in print and online (see Table 2). This suggests that publishers think it’s important to attract young readers. The closer the average is to 5, the more important they think it is. Publishers on average rated the importance of attracting young readers to the print edition a 3.76 on the 5-point Likert scale, with a standard deviation of 1.06. Publishers on average rated the importance of attracting young readers to the online edition a 4.21 on the 5-point Likert-scale, with a standard deviation of 1.008. The higher average on the online scale compared to the print scale indicates publishers consider it more important to attract young readers online than print. There is not a lot of variance, which indicates more consensus. When the variance is factored in, almost all of the publishers still consider attracting young readers to the online editions important, whereas some publishers consider attracting young readers to the print edition as unimportant (see Table 2).

These responses are consistent with responses showing newspaper publishers are investing more resources in producing youth content on the Web than in print. Publishers in the survey have seen results, but only online. A majority of respondents (56%) indicate that over the last five years the number of children and/or teenagers reading the online edition has grown. Another 19% say readership has stayed about the same. A significant number of publishers, 24%, did not know how their online readership has changed.

Only 8% of newspapers surveyed say that the number of children and/or teenagers reading the print edition has grown. Almost one third of publishers (32%) reported print readership among children and teenagers has declined over the past five years. However, almost half (46%) say it has stayed the same (see Table 3).

Again and again, publishers cited a need to increase their online presence and efforts to attract young readers on the Internet.

“Online areas certainly make more sense and should be explored further,” one publisher wrote. “Young readers go online much more than the print product,” wrote a second publisher. “Young readers are getting most of their news from the Internet,” wrote a third publisher.

“We are not making large efforts to attract young readers to our print titles,” wrote a fourth publisher. “We believe that younger consumers are more attracted to digital sites. We are investing in sites that enable readers to not just be passive consumers, but engage their participation.”

Hypotheses

The first hypothesis stated that newspapers with youth content will have more growth in young readers than newspapers without youth content. The descriptive results showed newspapers with youth content were growing in young readers online, which did support the hypothesis. To formally test this hypothesis, a crosstabulation was run between two questions. The first asked if the newspaper publishes content for children and/or teenagers. The second asked about changes in readership.

Results in Table 4 show 86 newspapers that publish youth content, and 9.3% reported growth in youth readership over the past five years. There were 13 newspapers that do not publish youth content, and none reported growth in youth readership. A smaller percentage of newspapers that publish youth content reported declines in readership (30.2%) than the percentage of newspapers that do not publish content for youth (46.2%). A standard Chi Square test of these differences could not be conducted because some cells have fewer than the minimum of 5 required cases.

Results in Table 5 show 87 newspapers published youth content online, and 53% reported growth in youth readership over the last five years. For the 13 newspapers that do not publish content online, 77% reported growth in youth readership. Newspapers with and without youth content reported basically no declines in youth readership online. A slightly higher percentage of newspapers with youth content (20%) reported youth readership online “stayed about the same” compared to newspapers without youth content (15%). A standard Chi Square test of these differences again could not be conducted because some cells have fewer than the minimum of 5 required cases.

The second hypothesis states newspapers that invest more resources in attracting young readers will have higher quality youth content than other newspapers that invest fewer resources. Measuring the quality of content, however, is beyond the scope of this research. Instead, amount of content was examined by creating a “high-low” matrix of youth content. To examine this relationship between resources and amount of content, a new variable was created based on respondents’ answers to all 4 questions pertaining to types of youth content offered – (1) in a print section, (2) integrated in print, (3) in a web section, and (4) integrated on the web.(With

subsections a total of 20 “clicks” was possible responding to these questions.) If respondents reported publishing a type of content, such as a staff-produced youth section, the answer was coded as a 1. If they did not report publishing that type of content, the answer was coded as 0.

Answers to the four content questions were summed for each respondent and divided by the number of questions to produce a mean. These individual means were then compared to the mean number of types of content for the entire sample, which was 4.

Newspapers that exceeded the sample mean were considered to have a “high” level of youth content, while newspapers at or below the mean were considered to have a “low” level of youth content. As a whole, 64, or 57% of the respondents had “low” levels of youth content, while 48, or 43% of respondents were considered to have “high” levels of youth content.

These categories were used to compare newspapers by answers to resource questions. The first resource question asked about the percentage of the newspaper’s budget spent on producing content for youth. This was a three part question, asking about newsroom, non-newsroom, and total spending. For each part respondents could select 0-5%, 6-10%, and so on. However, an overwhelming majority of respondents reported spending less than 10% in all three budget categories.

Therefore, the questions about staff resources were deemed to be a better measure of resources. These questions asked respondents for the total number of full or part-time staff producing youth content. There were 7 categories for full time, and 7 categories for part time.

Each response was classified based on the mean number of staff for all responses in each of the 14 categories. If a response was at or below the mean for that category, it was recoded as a “1” for “low” resource. If an item was above the mean it was recoded as a “2” for a “high” resource. The new measures were then summed and divided to create an overall mean. This overall mean was used to classify respondents as overall “high” staff resources and “low” staff resources. For the overall classifications, 64, or 69% of respondents had “low” staff resources, while 29, or 31% of respondents had “high” staff resources.

To test the hypothesis about resources and readers, the high-low content variable was crosstabulated with high-low staff resources. More newspapers that devoted a high level of resources to youth content had “high” levels of youth content (59%) than newspapers with “low” levels of youth resources (45%). Conversely, more newspapers that invested a “low” level of resources (55%) had a “low” level of

youth content than newspapers that invested a “high” level of resources (42%). (see Table 6).

Discussion

This study offers an initial foray into youth newspaper content using a management theory. The “2008 National Newspaper Youth Content Survey” is one of the first efforts at a theoretically-driven, nationwide survey examining newspapers’ efforts to attract young readers. The 134 newspaper publishers who responded represent a relatively small number of the more than 1,125 U.S. dailies contacted, but the study still yields important insights.

Like all surveys, there are limitations to this study. The small sample size means that the findings can not be generalized to the entire population of dailies. Also, the small numbers make it hard for any statistical test to indicate that differences are significant. There might be real differences, but the small groups are not large enough to reveal them. Because Chi-square tests require a minimum of five responses per cell, statistical tests could not be run on the crosstabulated data.

The pattern in most of the findings support the existing RBV theory. The pattern suggests higher percentages of surveyed newspapers that have printed youth content enjoy growth in youth readership than surveyed newspapers without youth content. Higher percentages of surveyed newspapers that invest more resources have more youth content than newspapers investing fewer resources. Statistical tests of these differences were not conducted, but the patterns in the data matched the researcher’s theory-based predictions. These results indicate only weak support for the hypotheses. Another study with a large enough sample is needed to see if the weak patterns can be supported.

The newspapers surveyed clearly are not allotting a lot of money or space to youth content now. Responses to staffing questions show newspaper publishers are willing, however, to allot personnel to create youth content. That’s a good first step. But it’s just that—a first step. Advertisers are demanding access to young consumers. But they’re not convinced that newspapers are providing that access. Newspaper staffs must create content that is exciting and enticing to young readers. Only then will young readers flock to the pages and websites of newspapers. And only then will newspapers be an attractive medium to advertisers.

Nevertheless newspaper publishers, particularly those who have published youth content for a decade or longer, obviously regard youth content as a valuable portion of the newspaper. Even if the youth content is not viewed as a profit center, newspapers with longstanding youth content have kept the ventures going.

However, responses to open ended questions show some publishers have watched more and more of their profit margins eaten away and said they are so constrained by the economic landscape they can't afford to develop efforts to attract new readers. This could be a mistake. Positive results are not likely to happen without action. Inaction, however, will likely lead to loss in readership among young readers, not gains.

The research also confirms that many newspaper publishers recognize the tough choices that are made in resource allocation and that most newspapers are only investing a small percentage, 10% or less, of their budgets toward youth. This seems unwise because attracting new readers may be the most important strategy for long-term sustainability.

Newspapers should view efforts to attract young readers as a long-term investment rather than a short-term one. Making a more substantial investment in youth now could pay dividends in the future.

The patterns in the research findings strongly suggest that children and teenagers themselves may be the most valuable resource that surveyed newspapers have for attracting young readers. Newspapers that use area children and teenagers to produce content tend to have more resources devoted to producing youth content. The knowledge and skills these young people have helps newspaper create a hard to imitate competitive advantage. After all, no one knows youth readers and youth audiences like the youth themselves. As already noted, newspapers that attract young readers have been successful at attracting local advertisers. Newspapers must devote resources to creating or acquiring content that will attract young people in order to create competitive advantages that are unique and cannot be imitated. Newspapers that acquire young audiences may differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive environment. The hard to imitate resources a newspaper can create are two-fold: content and audience. The research suggests that you can't have one without the other. If newspapers don't offer content for youth, youth simply will not read the newspaper. Newspapers that use their staffs, or local youth, to produce content offer a unique product that is difficult for competitors to imitate. Local youth content is unique, as opposed to syndicated features like comics and funnies that every newspaper across the country use.

Clearly, however, content creation requires a commitment, financially and strategically. Employing local youth can offer an affordable staffing option. More newspapers surveyed used unpaid youth to produce content than paid youth. Few newspapers have truly made a full-time commitment to attracting young readers, one that presumably requires more financial resources than using part-timers. Increasing resources should lead to increased performance in trying to reach young audiences.

Future areas for research

More empirical research is needed, however, from the academy as well as the industry. Now that some of the resource allocation and strategic goals of some newspaper managers are known, another research possibility is to ask teenagers their thoughts about these efforts to attract them. Another fruitful area of future research is to extend this study beyond the United States. Newspaper managers here and beyond grappling with efforts to attract young readers could benefit from insights from other countries which face similar declines in readerships.

Future research could also help tell whether abandoning print is the “right” move for newspaper managers. A useful study would compare newspapers that employ a variety of strategies (print-only youth strategy, web-only youth strategy and print-web youth strategy). Future studies that examine other benefits of having youth content and using youth to create content could also prove beneficial. Anecdotal evidence suggests newspapers gain some other forms of the “return on investment” in youth, such as developing future journalists, beyond gains in readers and advertisers.

Full Time Staff Position	Avg.	Part Time Staff Position	Avg.
Editors supervising lower level editors	1	Part-time editors working on youth content	1
Std. dev.	(1.064)		(.740)
Editors supervising reporters	1	Part-time reporters paid to cover youth topics	1
Std. dev.	(.913)		(2.383)
Editors supervising desk personnel	1	Paid adults such as school personnel or social workers covering youth topics	1
Std. dev.	(.754)		(1.078)
Copy editors	2	Unpaid adults such as school personnel or social workers covering youth topics	1
Std. dev.	(1.688)		(2.021)
Reporters covering youth topics fulltime	1	Paid stringers 17 or younger covering youth topics	2
Std. dev.	(1.557)		(5.897)
Reporters occasionally covering youth topics	2	Unpaid stringers 17 or younger covering youth topics	3
Std. dev.	(1.912)		(8.313)

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Other	3	Other	0
Std. dev.	(5.948)		(.267)
Total full-time newsroom staff ^a	32	Total part-time newsroom staff ^a	4
Std. dev.	(35.829)		(5.824)

^a Includes staff who do not produce youth content

Note. The averages of full time staff are based on 92 responses. The averages of part time staff is based on 86 responses.

Table 1 *Number of Staff Members Producing Content Targeting Young Readers*

1 = not important, 5 = very important			
Question	Average	Std. dev.	
Importance of attracting readers to print edition	3.76	1.060	
N = 99			
Importance of attracting readers to online edition	4.21	1.008	
N = 98			

Table 2 *Importance of attracting young readers to newspaper editions.*

Edition	Growing	Declining	About the same	Don't know	Total
Print	8%	32%	46%	14%	100%
N	8	32	45	14	99
Online	56%	1%	19%	24%	100%
N	56	2	19	24	100

Note. Publishers said their knowledge of readership came from circulation figures (21%), web use statistics (24%), newspaper demographic data (15%), readership surveys (17%) and personal knowledge (21%).

Table 3 *5-year changes in youth readership*

Publish Content	Growing	Declining	About the Same	Don't Know	Total
Yes	9%	30%	45%	16%	100%
N	8	26	39	13	86

No	0%	46%	46%	8%	100%
N	0	6	6	1	13
TOTAL	8%	32%	46%	14%	100%
N	8	32	45	14	99

Table 4 *Change in Youth Readership in the Print Edition over the Past 5 Years*

Publish Content	Growing	Declining	About the Same	Don't Know	Total
Yes	53%	1%	20%	26%	100%
N	46	1	17	23	87
No	77%	0%	15%	8%	100%
N	10	0	2	1	13
TOTAL	56%	1%	19%	24%	100%
N	56	1	19	24	100

Table 5 *Change in Youth Readership in the Online Edition over the Past 5 Years*

	Low Content	High Content	Total
Low Resources	55%	45%	100%
N	35	29	64
High Resources	42%	59%	101%
N	12	17	29
TOTAL	51%	50%	101%
N	47	46	93

Table 6 *Youth Content Level Crosstab with Level of Staff Resources*

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