Introduction

The Crises Facing Newspapers

Newspapers have been frequently portrayed as dinosaurs on the verge of extinction. . . . [M]any people assume they will be unable to compete with new forms of electronic media and therefore will eventually die out. That assumption, however, underestimates the adaptability of newspapers and their importance in both contemporary and future societies. (Fidler 1997, 251)

Media scholar Roger Fidler’s assessment of the future of newspapers, in his seminal book, *Mediamorphosis* (1997), is still true more than twenty years later. Despite competition from the Internet and steep recessionary declines in revenue, U.S. newspapers have survived and are slowly adapting to new technologies and multiplatform content delivery. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, they still provide the majority of the country’s original reporting compared to online news sources (Barthel 2016; Brüggemann et al. 2016; Schizer 2011; Associated Press 2010; Pew 2010; Fritz 2010).

Nonetheless, newspapers are struggling as they face both a financial crisis due to decades of annually declining advertising revenue and decreasing circulation numbers and an identity
crisis as they continue to slowly transition from print-only to multiplatform and multimedia content delivery. Significantly, within the newspaper industry, metro dailies, with their high operating costs, have been hit hardest (Barthel 2015a, 2015b, 2016; Doctor 2015a). At the heart of the newspaper crisis is a flawed business model that relies on advertising rather than subscriptions or other forms of revenue (Barthel 2015b, 2016; Brady 2016; Doctor 2015a; Phillips 2014; Ryfe 2012). Because of the annual decreases in advertising revenue, especially the steep declines precipitated by the recession of 2007, many newspapers have been attempting to decrease their dependence on advertising and obtain more of their revenue from subscriptions and from non-news sources (Pew 2018).

The identity crisis facing newspapers involves adapting from text-based newsroom practices to multimedia practices that include video, audio, and still photography. These responsibilities are often expected of news staffs without the adequate training necessary for proficiency in visual journalism or increased salaries to compensate for greater workloads (Brüggemann et al. 2016; Ekdale et al. 2015; Phillips 2014; Lee-Wright, Phillips, and Witschge 2011; Witschge and Nygren 2009). Significantly, this identity crisis is evident in a clash between traditional print journalism’s formality and emphasis on detail and digital journalism’s informality and brevity. The values and practices of print and online journalism also reflect this disparity. Traditional print journalism emphasizes a full vetting of sources before publishing a story, journalistic detachment, professional photojournalistic storytelling, and reporters as the authoritative voices of their newspapers. In contrast, digital journalism typically challenges these practices by emphasizing breaking news, using iterative reporting (or reporting in short posts as a story is developing), encouraging the personal involvement of journalists with their audiences, and inviting readers to contribute comments, stories, and photographs (Phillips 2014; Lee-Wright, Phillips, and Witschge 2011; Witschge and Nygren 2009).

Traditionally, print journalism has emphasized journalistic autonomy from government and commercial influences and the
maintenance of separate roles for reporters and photojournalists under the protection of newspaper guilds as well as autonomy in news practices that includes resistance to corporate quotas for daily story and multimedia postings. In contrast, digital journalism reflects a different perspective on journalistic autonomy, often equating it with spatial independence from the newsroom, and some Digital-First operations hire nonunion backpack journalists who are required to not only report from the field but also produce photos and videos (Phillips 2014; Shister 2010). Reporters in these positions often face quotas for daily online postings.

Overall, despite the fact that newspapers have survived and many are still marginally profitable, the debate persists about whether or not the crises are so severe that newspapers are dying. This debate has intensified since the recession of 2007, which substantially accelerated annual declines in advertising and circulation. The losses also forced many newspapers to close or eliminate their print editions and become digital-only publications (Edge 2014a; Waldman 2011). One of the most widely publicized narratives about the death of newspapers was issued in 2011 by the University of Southern California’s Annenberg Center for the Digital Future, which predicted that most print newspapers would be gone by 2016, leaving only four major daily newspapers: the New York Times, USA Today, the Washington Post, and the Wall Street Journal (Romero 2011; Sonderman 2011). Although in 2019 this prediction was far from materializing, newspapers are in crisis nonetheless (Brüggemann et al. 2016; Barthel 2016; Doctor 2016a; Edmonds 2016c; Chyi 2013; Edge 2014a, 2014b).

Former USA Today columnist and former editor of the American Journalism Review Rem Rieder agreed with the assessment that newspapers are not necessarily on the verge of extinction and that many are still profitable.

They are still here. Battered, beleaguered, but still here. Which is hardly to say that they aren’t endangered. The advent of the digital age has thoroughly disrupted the
industry, dramatically shrinking ad revenue and making the days of eye-popping profits a distant memory. The newspaper business is in a desperate struggle to reinvent itself for the digital world. (2016a)

While the industry’s financial crisis has typically been attributed to technological change (the Internet and digitization) and the recession of 2007–2009, some argue that newspaper management missteps should not be neglected. Stephen Lacy, Michael Stamm, and Hugh Martin contend that cost-containment policies are major factors that are often overlooked in accounts of the crisis. Their research showed that “managerial short-run decisions from 1985–2005 contributed greatly to the current crisis” (Lacy, Stamm, and Martin 2014, 6). These decisions included “creating clusters of commonly owned newspapers, eliminating high-cost circulation at the edges of local markets and cutting newsroom costs by reducing newsroom staffs. All of these measures resulted in declining circulation and market penetration” (Lacy, Stamm, and Martin 2014, 7).

Generally, staff reductions have been implemented through layoffs, buyouts, and attrition. In fact, according to a 2016 Pew Research report, in the past twenty years, “the newspaper workforce has shrunk by about 20,000 positions, or 39%” (Barthel 2016). In 2018, Pew reported that between 2007 and 2017 newspaper newsrooms had shrunk by almost half, or 45 percent (Grieco 2018). Some particularly drastic cuts included the New Orleans Times-Picayune, which in 2012 lost nearly one-third its newsroom staff, and the Cleveland Plain Dealer, which in 2013 lost nearly one-third of its news staff, as detailed in Chapter 3 of this volume (Edge 2014a, 2014b; Clark 2013; White 2012). Lacy and his colleagues noted that several studies indicated the connection between divestment in print operations and declines in circulation (Lacy, Stamm, and Martin 2014). Nonetheless, despite criticism from analysts and scholars on the pressure of newsroom reductions on surviving staffs, many managers continue to rationalize the cutbacks by contending their staffs can “do more with
Refuting this contention is Scott Reinardy’s powerful ethnographic study, *Journalism’s Lost Generation*, which presents an inside perspective on how increased workloads and the accelerated pace of the 24/7 news cycle have affected news staffs. Reinardy’s research clearly documents the destruction of newsroom morale and the widespread burnout of newspapers’ “most valuable resources”—their staffs (2016, 101).

Similarly, *Tales from the Great Disruption: Insights and Lessons from Journalism’s Technological Transformation*, by Michael Shapiro, Anna Hiatt, and Mike Hoyt, details the diminished aspects of newspapers (Shapiro, Hiatt, and Hoyt 2015). They contend that short-term efforts such as periodic layoffs are obstacles to producing quality content and incorporating innovation into news practices and that this basically amounts to “eating your seed corn” (Shapiro, Hiatt, and Hoyt 2015, 199).

**The Digital-First Debate**

Media scholars Iris Chyi and Ori Tenenboim have also criticized many newspaper owners and executives for adopting the “Digital-First” (or reverse publication) approach that prioritizes and invests in online platforms at the expense of print (Chyi and Tenenboim 2017; Doctor 2015b). In this essay and in Chyi’s 2013 book, *Trial and Error*, owners and managers are criticized for ignoring scholarly research and relying on the advice of consultants such as Harvard professor Clayton Christensen. Christensen’s disruptive innovation theory is the basis for the Digital-First approach, which asserts that new technologies will open up new markets that will disrupt and eventually displace older markets (Christensen 1997). In the case of newspapers, print is assumed to be dying, and the future is assumed to be all digital. In light of this theory, Christensen advised newspaper corporations to de-emphasize their print operations, invest in online operations, separate online from print operations, and be willing to tolerate
lower online profit margins in the short term until the new online markets have developed (Christensen 1997; Edmonds 2014b).

Debunking the Digital-First approach, Chyi and Tenenboim argue that the results of twenty years of online experiments have been “underwhelming” (Chyi and Tenenboim 2017, 2). In their quantitative study of more than fifty metro dailies between the years 2007 and 2015, they concluded that print continues to be the “core product” in local markets, with online readership showing “little or no growth during that period” (14). In addition, they found print “surpassed online reach by a wide margin across all age groups” (11). On average, the websites they studied attained only about a 10 percent market penetration. Their research was reinforced in 2018 by an American Press Institute finding that 71 percent of newspaper subscribers “prefer or only use the print paper, 26% prefer or only use digital content, and 3% do not have a preference” (Media Insight Project, 2018).

In 2017, the publication of Chyi and Tenenboim’s study sparked an online debate between scholars and media analysts defending the Digital-First strategy and those who envision print as a viable platform within an array of platforms for delivering news content (Buttry 2016; Brown-Smith and Groves 2016; Shafer 2016). The most caustic attack came from scholar and newspaper veteran Steve Buttry, who calls their findings “B.S.” and criticizes them for overemphasizing the prevalence of the Digital-First strategy. He argues:

Well, I used to work for a company called Digital First Media and at a newspaper-industry think tank, and I’ve visited more than 100 newsrooms and spoken at more than 100 newspaper-industry conferences and seminars, and I can flatly say that the industry never, ever adopted anything close to a digital-first strategy. . . . When I worked at Digital First, I described our company’s name as an aspiration, rather than an achievement. (Buttry 2016)

While acknowledging that newspapers have been doing “a lousy job of generating digital revenue,” Buttry argues that this
was only because they did not use more aggressive online strategies (2016; Brown-Smith and Groves 2016). But Chyi and Tenenboim, as well as media scholar Marc Edge, maintain that online advertising is not very lucrative for newspaper sites not only because the Internet is so competitive in terms of news outlets but also because studies show that the aggregators and social media sites, not newspaper sites, gain the largest share of online advertising profits (Chyi and Tenenboim 2017; Edge 2014a, 2014b; Chyi 2013).

While the debate continues over Digital First Media’s strategies, there can be no doubt that “Digital First” characterizes those strategies implemented by Advance Publications, particularly at the New Orleans Times-Picayune and at the Cleveland Plain Dealer (detailed in Chapter 3 of this volume). Despite protests from readers and advertisers in both cities and harsh criticism from industry analysts, in 2012 and 2013 Advance reduced publication days and home-delivery days in New Orleans and home-delivery days in Cleveland. At both papers, Advance separated the print and online operations and drastically reduced the print staffs (McQuaid 2012; Edge 2014a; Theim 2013a, 2013b, 2015; Clark 2013; Sterne 2013; Edmonds 2014a). The company’s Digital-First policies were also criticized for their emphasis on rapid and frequent postings of stories-in-progress at the expense of accuracy and balance and for their preoccupation with posting stories that generate clicks rather than stories based on quality journalism and public service (Beaujon et al. 2014; Clark 2014b, 2014c; see also Chapter 3 herein).

Newspapers Are Still Viable

The in-depth interviews conducted for this book and my examination of the scholarly and industry research have convinced me that there is a future for newspapers as they continue to transition into multiplatform content delivery. Metro dailies, in particular, can continue to survive if companies are willing to integrate their print and online operations, are committed to visual journalism, and retain staff sizes substantial enough to allow for
quality content. It should be noted that visual journalism is an essential piece of this argument, given the powerful attraction of images in print and digital layouts (S. Quinn 2015; Walker 2012; Bucher and Schumacher 2006). Significantly, as detailed in this book’s case studies, newspapers have the best chance for success when owners allow journalists to manage their newspapers to ensure production of quality journalism under the protection of newspaper guilds. This is evident at the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, where the owner, a civic benefactor, refrains from interfering in its daily operations.

Unfortunately, the current trend of hedge fund and corporate ownership preoccupied with quarterly profits has been particularly devastating to newspapers, as detailed in Chapters 3 and 5. These chapters focus on the layoffs and resource cutbacks that have jeopardized quality standards at the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and the diminished staff and coverage area of the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*. As media scholar Angela Phillips argues, journalistic autonomy, or “freedom from direct commercial or political constraints,” can be ensured only with “some degree of editorial independence from the influence of companies that own them” (2014, 79). This autonomy has been safeguarded by newspaper guild representation, which is also under siege as some corporate owners use the industry’s crisis as an opportunity to disable or eliminate unions, also discussed in Chapters 3 and 5.

The purpose of this book is to detail how five metro dailies and their staffs are adapting to the transition from print-only to multiplatform content delivery and how newsroom practices are evolving to address this change. Central themes throughout this book include what is lost when fewer journalists are expected to do more with less time and fewer resources and how metro dailies are experimenting with measures to generate profits and attract readers.

Overall, a key argument in *Metro Dailies* is that newspapers are still important within the contemporary multimedia landscape not only because they generate most of the revenue compared to their websites and readers prefer print to online platforms but also because newspapers provide more original
reporting than online news operations and original reporting is crucial in a democracy for keeping the electorate informed (Mitchell and Holcomb 2016; Phillips 2014; Schizer 2011; Fritz 2010; Cardin 2009).

Significantly, Metro Dailies argues for an integrated multi-platform approach to content delivery in which print and online platforms are considered complementary and in which visual journalism is emphasized across platforms. This argument rejects both the Digital-First and the printcentric approaches to content delivery, instead advocating for an approach that journalists at the St. Paul Pioneer Press call “Digital Right.” This approach involves debuting content on the platform most appropriate to the complexity of the story and having the ability to reach the largest number of readers via the platform on a particular day (e.g., Sunday versus a weekday) or at a particular time of day. In addition, to deal with the difficulty of integrating the practices of print and digital journalism, this book recommends adopting a hybrid approach to content delivery similar to that of the Minneapolis Star Tribune. This newspaper established a Quick Strike Team, a unit dedicated to fast-breaking news that updates the website frequently with brief stories in the iterative style that keeps readers up-to-date with breaking news. Other multimedia reporting teams and beat reporters concentrate on detailed and more analytical content across platforms that preserves print journalism’s values of verification, balance, and in-depth coverage.

The integrated multiplatform approach advocated in this book is illuminated in the following brief case studies of metro dailies: the Rocky Mountain News, which neglected its digital operations, and the New Orleans Times-Picayune, which was converted to a Digital-First operation.

The Untimely Demise of the Rocky Mountain News

On February 27, 2009, the Rocky Mountain News, Colorado’s oldest newspaper, published its last issue, leaving the Denver Post as the city’s only metro daily. The recipient of four Pulitzer Prizes, the Rocky Mountain News built its reputation on stories
on crime and corruption in Denver. During most of its lifespan, the newspaper competed intensely with the *Denver Post* for the metro audience, but by 2001 it was considered a failing newspaper, prompting analysts to declare that Denver, like so many other metro areas across the country, could no longer sustain two dailies (Frank 2009; Dealbook 2009).

Although the E. W. Scripps Company’s ownership was “on a relatively healthy financial footing,” the newspaper’s losses in 2008 climbed to $16 million; consequently, it was put up for sale (Adams, Ovide, and Simon 2009). Despite the fact that the *Rocky Mountain News* “still managed a profit margin close to the industry average for the year: 10 percent,” it was unable to find a buyer and was closed in 2009, leaving more than two hundred staff members without jobs (Frank 2009; Perez-Pena 2009; Kurtz 2009). Although its average weekday circulation of 210,281 was close to the *Denver Post*’s 210,585, the recession had triggered a steep drop in advertising revenue, while circulation had fallen by more than 50 percent, down from 446,000 in 2001. Rich Boehne, Scripps’s chief executive, called the *Rocky Mountain News* “a victim of changing times in our industry and huge economic challenges” (Dealbook 2009).

But some found this uncomplicated rationale unconvincing because it neglected management’s role in the paper’s demise. Sportswriter Dave Krieger’s perspective, written for the newspaper’s last edition, was quoted in a *Time* article:

> I still don’t get how a newspaper with 200,000 paying subscribers and hundreds of thousands more readers on the Web cannot make a go of it. . . . “Not our fault,” the suits say. “[It’s the] business model’s fault.” So who came up with the business model? (Diddlebock 2009)

While the recession and the Internet were certainly factors leading to the demise of the *Rocky Mountain News*, a column by *Time* writer Bob Diddlebock also blamed “Scripps’s newspaper executives[,] whose ineptitude over the past 25 years fumbled
away a prime market to a competitor they should have killed off two decades ago” (2009).

Reinforcing this position, former publisher, president, and editor of the Rocky Mountain News John Temple tied the paper’s demise to several management missteps that failed to integrate its print and online operations. These included initially separating print and online operations, the neglect of strategies to engage online readers, and the general perception that the website was merely a supplement to the print platform (Temple 2009).

You can see from this introduction to our first electronic service that we thought of ourselves as newspaper companies right from the start. We wrote that the goal of the new edition was “ultimately to strengthen and preserve the printed daily newspaper.” (Temple 2009)

To succeed in today’s media environment, Temple advised newspaper management to take advantage of digital technology opportunities, to experiment with different profit-generating strategies, and to build “many niches and many audiences.” He explained that “newspaper companies have to look for ways to answer the needs of the people in their communities,” yet they must stop thinking about a monolithic audience limited to a specific geographic market (Temple 2009).

The New Orleans Times-Picayune and the Shift to Digital First

The New Orleans Times-Picayune began publishing in 1837 under the name the Picayune. The name refers to a Spanish coin that was initially the price set for this newspaper. It became the Times-Picayune in 1914 after merging with its competitor, the New Orleans Times-Democrat. In 1962 it was purchased by the Newhouse Family, owners of the New York–based Advance Publications (McQuaid 2012; Edge 2014a; Theim 2013b, 2015).

The Times-Picayune is well known for its community cov-
verage, most notably in 2005 in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, when many staff members chose to remain in the newsroom to publish the newspaper and post news and community listings on the paper’s website instead of evacuating to safety. The community listings included forums and blogs to provide citizens with resources and to assist first responders. This work was acknowledged by a Pulitzer Prize for Public Service as well as individual Pulitzer Prizes for four of the paper’s staff members (Farhi 2015; Theim 2013b; Yu 2014).

In 2012 the Times-Picayune’s parent company, Advance Publications, established a Digital-First strategy to reduce print publications to three days a week. Because more than one-third of New Orleans residents did not have high-speed Internet and “the seven-day-a-week reading habit” was engrained in readers whose paper had one of the highest metro daily penetration rates in the United States, Advance’s strategy caused an uproar (Farhi 2015; Hamm 2013a). Rebecca Theim, a former Times-Picayune reporter, described the reaction of readers and businesses to Advance’s plans:

Almost immediately, the community went berserk. A grassroots campaign included dedicated Facebook pages and Twitter accounts with thousands of followers, an online petition that eventually garnered close to 10,000 signatures, 1,500 yard signs supporting a daily newspaper, and public protests. (2015)

In addition, a number of national celebrities such as professional athlete Archie Manning and jazz musician Winton Marsalis, representing the Times-Picayune Citizens Group, sent an open letter to the New York–based Newhouse family requesting they sell the newspaper to local owners (Edge 2014a; Theim 2013b). However, Advance refused to sell and went ahead with its Digital-First initiative, which resulted in laying off nearly one-third of the newsroom. Advance also restructured the newsroom, creating separate staffs and separate newsrooms for print and for the website, nola.com (Doctor 2013a). Despite
their separation, the Digital-First policy required both staffs to contribute first to the website, after which the print staff would repurpose online content for the paper (Doctor 2012). Theim noted one staff member’s description of the change: “We’ve gone from being a newspaper that posted some of our content online to being an online operation whose material is put into print” (Theim 2015).

Although for a short time in 2012 New Orleans was the largest U.S. city without a daily newspaper, the Times-Picayune returned to a seven-day-a-week publication schedule shortly after The Advocate, a Baton Rouge newspaper, launched its daily New Orleans edition (Farhi 2015; New Orleans Magazine 2016; Chittum 2013b; Yu 2014). Despite the Times-Picayune’s resuming a daily publication schedule, it reduced home deliveries to three days a week, with papers published on nondelivery days available only at newsstands (Myers 2012). Over time, The Advocate increased its circulation, until in 2015 it surpassed that of the Times-Picayune, making it Louisiana’s largest newspaper (Griggs 2015).

Because Advance’s Digital-First strategy focused on cost reduction rather than meeting the needs of the city’s residents for print, an upstart daily was able to fulfill reader preferences and build a readership at the Times-Picayune’s expense. An article in the Washington Post quoted a reader who blamed Advance for the loss of so many Times-Picayune subscribers: “They chose to decimate their publication. . . . News is important to a community especially this one. And they made the decision not to be a viable newspaper.” In the same article, a seventy-five-year-old civic activist and philanthropist described the loss to the community: “The Times-Picayune set the tone of civic discussion [about] politics, about rebuilding, the educational system, you name it. You need that common voice. A web site isn’t the same thing.” In addition, Ricky Mathews, the president of the website, was asked whether or not Advance’s Digital-First approach had been a success in New Orleans. To this he replied: “I don’t think you can say that. . . . There’s not a finish line that any of us see in the near future” (Farhi 2015).
Literature and Theoretical Foundations for Metro Dailies

Overall, the closing of the *Rocky Mountain News* after 150 years and the Digital-First conversion of the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* underscore the need for integrated multiplatform approaches for metro dailies and foreground the complicated challenges that persist as the newspaper industry faces crises both financially and existentially. Both newspapers highlight policy problems that result when owners or managers see profit as the mission of newspapers instead of serving communities and acting as watchdogs over government.

My argument that newspapers should adopt an integrated multiplatform approach with an emphasis on visual journalism stems from my interpretation of convergent media theory. As articulated by Henry Jenkins in his seminal book, *Convergence Culture*, this theory describes an ongoing process that is characterized by “the flow of content across multiple platforms” in which previously distinct media forms and platforms interact and complement each other (2006, 3).

In terms of the relationship between traditional media and new media platforms, Jenkins explains that “old media are not being displaced. Rather, their functions and status are shifted by the introduction of new technologies” and “the migratory behavior of media audiences” that use different media platforms for different needs and interests (2006, 14, 2). This contrasts with Christensen's technologically deterministic theory of disruptive innovation in which new media displace traditional media platforms (1997). Instead, by taking a social constructivist approach, Jenkins details the actual process of adapting to new technologies and the social, cultural, and economic factors relating to this process (2006). Consequently, Jenkins’s convergence theory challenges extreme approaches such as Digital First, which envision an all-digital future, or other approaches in which one delivery method is privileged over others.

Roger Fidler’s *Mediamorphosis* situates media within an interdependent system, arguing against media displacement
Theories such as Digital First. He contends that “new media are not widely adapted on the merits of technology alone” but are dependent on social, political, and/or economic factors (1997, 29). Additionally, Fidler describes the contemporary media landscape as one in which “new media do not arise spontaneously and independently—they emerge gradually from the metamorphosis of old media. . . . [W]hen newer forms of communication emerge, the older forms usually do not die—they continue to evolve and adapt” (23).

In 2013 Iris Chyi’s book on U.S. newspapers, *Trial and Error*, also debunked many of the myths underlying the Digital-First initiatives, including the myth that print is dying and that it is being displaced by online platforms. She contends that news executives have been misled by the disruptive innovation theory of Christensen and the advice of others who envision an all-digital future. Her research findings indicate that print “still outperforms the (supposedly hopeful) digital product by almost every standard, be it readership, engagement, advertising revenue, or paying intent” (10). In addition, the expectation that online advertising will be lucrative ignores the reality of the highly competitive online environment that includes free advertising on sites such as Craigslist and the vast array of news sources, including radio and television news sites, social media sites, and news aggregator sites.

Chyi also debunks the myth that it is not necessary for newspapers to do market research because the all-digital future will involve a new market consisting mostly of younger readers. Her findings indicate that online audiences are typically print subscribers who go online for breaking news, using newspaper websites as complements to print editions rather than as substitutes for print. Additionally, Chyi’s readership research indicates audiences consider online platforms inferior to print because of factors such as eyestrain, intrusive advertising, and lower-quality content because the speed of posting content has taken priority over accuracy and balanced sourcing. Chyi advises the management of metro dailies to acknowledge that print does not have to die if they are willing to invest in it and to develop long-
term strategies emphasizing content exclusivity and quality local coverage across platforms (2013). Chyi and Tenenboim’s 2017 article reinforces this research with its study of more than fifty metro dailies (detailed previously). It provides evidence that newspaper penetration is still much greater than online penetration across local markets and that print readers are more likely to use newspaper sites than digital-only readers.

Scholar and former Canadian journalist Marc Edge also exposes myths about the demise of newspapers in his book *Greatly Exaggerated: The Myth of the Death of Newspapers* (2014a). Edge questions the assumption that newspapers are no longer profitable, a common rationale for staff reductions. Utilizing the 2006–2013 annual reports of several publicly traded U.S. and Canadian newspapers, Edge argues that, despite their financial losses and the widespread perception that they are on the verge of extinction, all of the newspapers in his study continued to make profits annually even when they were under Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. Edge argues that, even during the recession, “newspapers weren’t dying. Newspaper competition was. It was a trend that had been seen for decades and the financial crisis and high-speed Internet simply accelerated the trend” (9). In fact, he found that during the recession, newspapers were still profitable, and, since that time, they have averaged double-digit profits, a percentage that supersedes the 4.7 percent profit margin that Fortune 500 companies typically average (Edge 2014b, 70).

Despite this research to the contrary, the myth persists that newspapers are dying, which Edge attributes to both “historical amnesia” and a lack of understanding of financial analysis (2014a, 224–225). Edge cites several examples of newspaper death narratives that appeared when new technologies emerged, starting with radio, then television, and then the Internet. Edge’s book indicates newspapers were profitable, and although the recession accelerated declines in advertising and circulation that had begun decades earlier, “no major U.S. daily newspaper has closed since 2009” (Edge 2014a, 224–225). Further, those that
closed were typically struggling second-place dailies in metro markets that could no longer sustain more than one daily (Edge 2014a, 2014b).

Edge’s research complements that of Stephen Lacy, Michael Stamm, and Hugh Martin, who also criticize newspaper management for their cost-containment policies for short-term profitability. These policies, and the resulting increases in advertising prices as circulation continued to decline, “and expansion strategies all played significant roles in the creation of the current crisis” (Lacy, Stamm, and Martin 2014).

This criticism of newspapers for emphasizing profit over quality journalism was echoed in Philip Meyer’s 2009 book, *The Vanishing Newspaper: Saving Journalism in the Information Age*. Meyer’s research provides solid evidence of the correlation between quality journalism and newspaper profits and the need to reverse the deterioration of newspaper content due to divestment in print operations (2009). His work explains the historical context for the “easy-money culture” of the newspaper industry in the late 1990s, which saw average profit margins of 20 percent to 40 percent (Meyer 1995). These high margins enticed corporations to embark on acquisition sprees that eventually led to the overwhelming debt loads contributing to the industry’s current crisis (Meyer 2009).

Although not specifically dedicated to metro dailies or the newspaper industry in general, Angela Phillips’s 2014 book, *Journalism in Context*, elaborates on the crises facing not only newspapers but also journalism in general. It provides insight into the U.S. and European newspaper industries and their slow transition to multiplatform delivery. Phillips highlights the toll this process has taken on reduced newsroom staffs, not only in personal terms but also in terms of journalistic autonomy. Multiplatform delivery means less time and fewer resources for investigative and public service journalism as imperatives for continuous postings online, the emphasis on metrics (or audience clicks), and the time-consuming multimedia demands of the Internet take precedence.
Case Studies and Ethnographies

Often utilizing case studies and ethnographies to explain why the transition to multiplatform delivery has been so gradual, a number of journal articles have detailed the challenges of continually integrating new newsroom practices with traditional practices (Singer 2004; Avilés and Carvajal 2008; Carvajal and Avilés 2008; O’Sullivan and Heinonen 2008; Domingo 2008a; Paterson and Domingo 2008; Domingo and Paterson 2011). Among the common obstacles are the lack of time and resources for multimedia training, the rigidity and habitual nature of news routines, the lack of integration of online and print operations, and the lack of integration between editorial and information technology staffs (Deuze 2004; Domingo, 2008a, 2008b; Avilés and Carvajal 2008; Carvajal and Avilés 2008; Witschge and Nygren 2009; Robinson 2011; Ryfe 2012; Phillips 2014; Doyle 2015; Lischka 2015).

Additionally, the literature on newspapers depicts a disrupted media landscape in which there is less time for in-depth and investigative work and in which journalists increasingly lack autonomy as they are constantly pressured to post stories online as well as create videos, photo galleries, and slideshows (Gade and Perry 2003; Singer 2004; Avilés and Carvajal 2008; O’Sullivan and Heinonen 2008; Paterson and Domingo 2008; Witschge and Nygren 2009; Domingo and Paterson 2011; Lee-Wright, Phillips, and Witschge 2011; Ryfe 2012; M. Anderson 2013; Phillips 2014; Doyle 2015; Lischka 2015).

Although some early studies of newsrooms have taken a technologically deterministic approach by emphasizing the effects of technological innovation, this book takes a social-constructivist approach (or socially driven approach) to innovation utilized by several scholars detailed in Making Online News (Paterson and Domingo 2008; Domingo and Paterson 2011). This approach examines the actual process of adopting new technologies while addressing the distinctive social structures of different newsrooms (Paterson and Domingo 2008; Domingo and Paterson 2011; Ryfe 2012; Phillips 2014; Chyi 2013).

Case studies and ethnographic studies have been invalu-
able for providing insight into changing newsroom practices and newsroom culture. David Ryfe’s 2012 book, *Can Journalism Survive?*, which utilizes ethnographies of three mid-sized regional daily newspapers in the early phase of their transitions to multiplatform news work, is particularly valuable. This study foregrounds many obstacles to changing newsroom practices, including the lack of training for multiplatform delivery, journalistic bias against online delivery, and the general print-centric journalistic culture that has dominated their norms and work routines. Ryfe finds that many staff members were unable to accord complementary status to both print and online news work. At one daily, he notes that the Internet was “still perceived as a ‘black hole,’ a place where quality journalism went to die” (2012, 103).

Sociologist Pablo Boczkowski also utilizes case studies and ethnographic methods to analyze U.S. online news operations and several South American newspapers as they transitioned to multiplatform delivery. His research describes the difficulty in integrating innovations into news practices, their loss of content diversity, and their reduced watchdog role over government (2004, 2010).

Nikki Usher’s *Making News at The New York Times* is a contemporary history of the world-famous daily and its evolving newsroom, and the story of how journalists were caught “between tradition and change” in 2010 (2014a, 5). Although the layoffs and buyouts at the Times were relatively small compared to those at the average metro daily, its staff faced similar challenges in integrating print and online practices and in incorporating traditional and new media values (Walters 2017). Significantly, this book documents the print-centric biases that persisted even after the newsroom unified the print and online operations as well as the loss of institutional memory caused by newsroom buyouts in 2013.

Another valuable ethnography-based contribution to metro daily literature is C. W. Anderson’s 2013 book, *Rebuilding the News*. It focuses on the Philadelphia news “ecosystem” in 2008 and details the relationships between the city’s metro dailies,
blogs, and independent media operations. This study is significant in foregrounding the growth of metrics (the measurement of reader preferences through mouse clicks) as they gained influence over story assignments and page layouts (C. Anderson 2011, 2013).

Overall, *Metro Dailies in the Age of Multimedia Journalism* is aimed at building on the small body of literature on metro dailies by examining a variety of metro dailies at a later and more advanced phase of their multiplatform transition. This current phase is characterized by practices and routines that are more established than in earlier newspaper research studies yet are still marked by experimentation and continual challenges in integrating print and online practices.

**Methodology**

The questions driving this study include the following: How and why are newspapers surviving despite so many being endangered and the predictions that they are on the verge of extinction? How have they transitioned from print only to both print and online/multimedia? What are metro dailies doing to reverse their declines in readership and profits?

In order to address these questions, I have relied on in-depth interviews, the interpretation of both scholarly and industry literature, and analyses of a variety of metro dailies and their news sites. A substantial portion of this book is based on the case studies of five metro newsrooms in five cities. This study was undertaken because in the last decade between twenty-five and thirty metro dailies have been periodically listed as endangered in news articles and in blogs by media analysts. I contacted ten of those metro dailies, and five agreed to participate in this project: the *Buffalo News*, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, and the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*.

Two of the cases in this book—the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*—are dailies that appeared on *Time* magazine’s “10 Endangered Newspapers” list in 2009.
The Crises Facing Newspapers (McIntyre 2009), and one, the St. Paul Pioneer Press, appeared on the 2014 “Top 10 Newspapers in Trouble” list (Real Clear Politics 2014). Much of the material that forms the book’s newsroom narratives was drawn from ongoing in-depth interviews with more than forty experienced professionals beginning in 2013. The professionals were contacted via the snowball sampling method in which interviewees recommend future interview subjects. The interviews were conducted on the telephone and sometimes during newsroom visits. Most of them were digitally recorded. I had the opportunity to spend a day at each of the newsrooms, during which time I met with staff members, observed their interactions, attended meetings, conducted interviews, and documented their operations in still photography.

The material from the in-depth interviews provides a great deal of insight into the effects of the industry’s changes on professionals currently working at metro dailies. Despite the fact that the industry is in flux and that the newspapers in this book each have distinctive histories, with each utilizing a variety of survival strategies, their case studies can provide an understanding of challenges and opportunities emerging in the age of multimedia journalism.

Although the emphasis in this Introduction thus far has been the newspaper crisis, this research also begs the question of why the industry has survived. One reason is that more readers still prefer print, despite the fact that a growing number of people are consuming news online (Barthel 2016). As previously detailed, the American Press Institute reported 71 percent of newspaper subscribers prefer print (Media Insight Project 2018).

Another reason for the survival of newspapers is the resiliency of their staffs in accommodating multiplatform delivery (Edge 2014a, 2014b; Phillips 2014; Doyle 2013). In addition, Edge attributes the survival of many newspapers to a “loyal readership that is highly prized by advertisers because it’s educated, affluent and engaged” (2014a, 233). In light of this resiliency, Metro Dailies examines the strategies of several newspapers as they explore ways to engage these readers while experimenting with new revenue streams to face the current industry crisis.
Chapter Summaries

With the goal of presenting a contemporary history of several metro dailies, this book also aims to provide an inside perspective on newsroom changes, as professionals face not only financial challenges but also adaptation to the demands of multimedia and multiple platforms with fewer resources. Among the most salient challenges addressed in this book are continually changing technology and evolving practices, journalistic autonomy, union representation, monetizing online advertising, metrics, newsroom configurations, social media, and citizen journalism. This book also emphasizes the visual aspects of multimedia journalism, since photojournalism is central to both online and traditional newspapers yet often receives only cursory attention in most accounts of the newspaper industry.

In order to focus on the centrality of visual journalism to multimedia journalism, *Metro Dailies* begins with two overview chapters on how multimedia journalism and technological innovations have changed the newspaper industry. They underscore my key argument that a commitment to visual journalism across all platforms is necessary for a successful multiplatform approach to content delivery. These chapters also accentuate the necessity of retraining staffs in multimedia skills for online delivery and integrating new and established practices as well as highlighting issues such the blurring of the lines between professionals and nonprofessionals in the wake of citizen journalism, the Internet, and smartphone technology. Despite new online opportunities for professionals that include photo galleries, videos, and slide-shows, the number of photojournalists who have been laid off has been much greater than the layoffs of reporters and editors. And while a common rationale is that photojournalists can be replaced by reporters with iPhones and citizen journalists, Chapter 2 contends that a commitment to professional photojournalism is still essential to multimedia journalism and that amateur photography cannot provide an adequate substitute for professional work.

The next three chapters present case studies of metro dailies. Chapter 3 focuses on the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*’s rapid imple-
mentation of the Digital-First strategy by the newspaper’s parent corporation, Advance Publications. This involved massive layoffs and the division of the staff into three separate newsrooms as digital journalism was given priority over print. It also foregrounds the tension that erupted as the newsroom’s culture dissolved and a greatly reduced staff struggled to maintain quality standards. This chapter argues that such Digital-First strategies devalue the print product by envisioning an all-digital future.

Chapter 4, on two metro dailies, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and the Buffalo News, examines more moderate yet differing approaches to multiplatform delivery. The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette has gradually implemented an integrated multiplatform approach, while the Buffalo News has moved from a print-centric approach to a Digital-First, print-secondary approach. Chapter 5, on the Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, newspapers, highlights the Twin Cities, one of the few metro areas still served by two metro dailies. It explains how the Minneapolis Star Tribune has emerged from bankruptcy and is thriving under the patronage of a civic benefactor. This newspaper exemplifies an integrated multiplatform delivery approach and a firm commitment to visual journalism across platforms. In contrast, this chapter also details how the St. Paul Pioneer Press is in decline, having been “harvested” or cost-cut by venture capitalist owners. The result has been a drastic reduction in not only its staff but also its coverage area, which no longer includes Minneapolis and is limited to a few counties in the St. Paul area.

The Conclusion presents some of the alternatives to corporate ownership, with examples of civic benefactors who have saved some newspapers on the brink of demise as well as examples of newspapers that have moved into the nonprofit sector. It looks at future directions for the newspaper industry as well as how some metro dailies are experimenting with nontraditional revenue-generating strategies that include utilizing their brands to provide marketing services and to sponsor events, and even offer novel services such as branded home cooking kits.

Overall these chapters are aimed at examining the status of some of the “endangered” metropolitan dailies during this
period of crisis and rapid change as they slowly transition to multiplatform delivery and adapt their newsroom cultures and profitability strategies to the twenty-first century’s dynamic media landscape. A key argument throughout is that there is a future for newspapers as long as newspaper companies are willing to integrate their print and online operations, make a commitment to visual journalism across platforms, make a commitment to journalistic integrity and autonomy, and retain staffs substantial enough to allow for quality content. At a time when the Trump administration has launched continuous assaults on media credibility and the media’s vital role in speaking truth to power, it is in our best interest to see that newspapers survive in order to continue their public service roles so critical to our democracy.