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CHAIN OWNERSHIP AND HOMOGENEITY  
OF KANSAS NEWSPAPER EDITORIAL PAGES

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts

By  
Brent Bates

PITTSBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

Pittsburg, Kansas

June 1991

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# CHAIN OWNERSHIP AND HOMOGENEITY OF KANSAS NEWSPAPER EDITORIAL PAGES

An Abstract of the Thesis by  
Brent Bates

Since individuals and companies began buying independent newspapers and forming newspaper groups or chains, critics have feared the actions would have negative effects on the industry and on the nation. They feared homogeneity of content and, therefore, a reduction in the diversity of ideas. This study, a content analysis of five newspapers from the Harris Newspaper Group, a small chain based in Kansas, and one non-Harris owned control newspaper, examined whether homogeneity existed on the editorial pages of Harris newspapers. Specifically, it looked at whether group newspapers published the same syndicated columnists and same syndicated columns, and whether the chain newspapers published editorials on the same topic, or with the same treatment. Results of the study suggest that chain ownership does not result in homogeneity in the use of syndicated columns. Most syndicated columnists and columns were unique to one paper, although some newspapers had more of a propensity than others to run content common to at least one other sample newspaper. Treatment of editorials, in terms of editorial topic, locus and slant, tended to be similar; however, the study suggested that the Harris newspapers varied in degree of vigor with local and state editorials. The study also suggested that circulation influences editorial page content more than chain ownership.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
I. Introduction	6
Purpose of the Study	8
II. Review of the Literature	9
Group Ownership	9
Group Ownership and Editorial Pages	13
III. Research Question and Hypotheses	23
Methodology	23
Content	24
Operational Definitions	24
Coding Procedure	27
Limitations of Study	28
IV. Results	29
V. Conclusions, Recommendations	45
IX. Bibliography	49
X. Appendix	54

## LIST OF TABLES

	<u>Title</u>	<u>Page</u>
Table I	Common syndicated columnists in sample newspapers	30
Table II	Harris Newspaper Group Columnists	32
Table III	Common columns compared to syndicated columns	34
Table IV	Common editorial topics	36
Table V	Editorial locus	37
Table VI	Editorial Slant of National, International Editorials	39
Table VII	Vigor of Local, State Editorials	40
Table VIII	Controversial Editorials	41
Table IX	Argumentative Editorials	42
Table X	Mobilizing Information	43

## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

At the inception of the United States of America, its founding fathers believed freedom of the press should be guaranteed to ensure that a diversity of opinion and a marketplace of ideas would be available to all citizens, an idea vital to an informed democracy. But today, this diversity may be threatened by a changing pattern of media ownership: group or chain ownership, according to critics such as professors Ben Bagdikian (1980, 1977) and David Coulson (1986), newspaper reporter Bob Porterfield ("An in depth look at chain ownership," 1984), and publishers and corporate chairmen Eugene C. Patterson; Alfred T. Fritts, and K. Prescott Low, (Anderson, 1987).

The trend toward group ownership of U.S. newspapers is well documented. Chains or groups -- the standard definition being the same principle ownership or control of two or more daily newspapers in different cities (Thrift, 1977) -- are buying more and more newspapers as the number of independently owned newspapers declines. The statistics speak for themselves: In 1960, 30% of the newspapers in the nation were controlled by chains, accounting for 46% of the daily circulation (Bagdikian, 1977). In 1981, just more than 20 years later, chains owned 66% of the nation's 1,730 daily newspapers and distributed 72% of the newspapers printed on weekdays ("Morning circulation," 1981). By 1987, 73% of the newspapers in

the United States were chain owned, and these newspapers controlled 81% of the total daily newspaper circulation in the United States (Department of Commerce, 1988).

In 27 years, the proportion of chain-owned newspapers in the U.S. has increased 43 percentage points, and the chain control of newspaper circulation has grown 35 percentage points. In just six years, chain ownership compared to independent ownership increased seven percentage points and the number of newspapers distributed by chains grew nine percentage points. According to a special report in Presstime (Anderson, 1987), independent and group newspaper executives, analysts and brokers predict the trend will continue and estimate that anywhere from a handful to 250 independent dailies will remain in the U.S. by the year 2000.

Coulson (1986, p.36) pointed out that the trend toward group ownership, in which hundreds of different ideas and opinions have in some cases been reduced to a handful, is "irreconcilable with a democratic society." Bagdikian (1977), in a commentary in the Columbia Journalism Review, said the concentration of power over ideas, information and values in the mass media is dangerous. In written testimony to the U.S. Senate's communications subcommittee of the committee on commerce, science, and transportation (1989), Bagdikian said 14 companies in the entire U.S. control half or more of the nation's almost 63 million average daily circulation, representing tremendous power concentrated in the hands of the few. He argues that this concentration of ownership potentially reduces the spread of diverse ideas, and that these corporations that own and control the media have the power to affect attitudes.



### Purpose of study

The purpose of this study is to determine if homogeneity exists on the editorial pages of newspapers owned by the Harris Group, a Hutchinson, Kansas, based chain with three newspapers in California, one in Iowa, eight in Kansas; three radio stations; a job printing company, and a group wire news service. The study attempts to determine, through content analysis, whether the same columnists and the same columns appear on editorial pages of Harris, group-owned, Kansas newspapers that have available to them syndicated columns from the group's wire service. It also examines whether these newspapers editorialize about the same topics, and whether they treat the topics in the same manner. Finally, if similarities are found, it compares these group newspapers with a non-Harris chain newspaper, the Manhattan Mercury.

## CHAPTER II

### Review of the Literature

Researchers as early as 1956 (Borstel) have been examining newspapers to determine if chain ownership had some effect. A wide range of variables, from news content (Browning, Grierson and Howard, 1985) to management and business (Demers and Wachman, 1988) have been included in these studies. This section examines research involving possible effects of group ownership, and then specifically examines group ownership research involving variables directly related to editorial page content.

#### Group Ownership

This section reviews 12 studies that have analyzed the influence, of chain ownership on variables other than editorial page content. These 12 studies are arranged in two categories, studies which do not suggest influence and studies which suggest influence.

Drew and Wilhoit (1976), surveyed managing editors from a stratified sample of newspapers and found few statistically significant differences between group owned and independent owned newspapers in amount of space devoted to news (newshole), proportion of paper devoted to news, type of news selected to fill the newshole and method of determining newshole.

Grotta (1971) examined economic implications of consolidated ownership on newspapers that changed ownership between 1950 and 1969, and newspapers that remained chain or independently owned throughout that time period. Grotta could not find significant differences involving chain ownership in any of the variables, which ranged from size of the editorial page to advertising space price.

No evidence was found by Demers and Wackman (1988), in an analysis of questionnaires mailed to publishers, advertising managers and editors at 900 U.S. dailies, that indicated that chains are less concerned than independent newspapers about quality. However, chain editors were more likely to say profit was a goal motivating their organization, and were significantly less likely than independent newspaper editors to list community service as a goal.

Demers (1988) studied opinion-polling practices at chain-owned newspapers and independent newspapers, and found no significant differences between the groups in the use of opinion polls; and Browning, Grierson and Howard (1985) discovered no differences in the coverage of one event by the Knoxville Journal, formerly an independent morning newspaper now owned by a chain, after it was purchased by the chain, in comparison with the same city's afternoon newspaper.

While five studies found indications that chain ownership has no effect, results of seven studies suggested that chain ownership may influence newspapers.

Research by Litman and Bridges (1986) indicated that chain newspapers may indeed sacrifice quality, specifically in the number of weekday lines of news, perhaps with profits in mind. The authors discovered weak or no relationship between staff size, newspaper

ownership and competition and full-time news-editorial staff size, and between chain ownership and number of news service subscriptions. However, there was a weak negative relationship between the number of papers in the chain and staff size, and a significantly negative relationship between the number of newspapers in a chain and the number of weekday lines of news; for each additional newspaper in the chain about 43,000 to 45,000 fewer lines of weekday news per year than the average independent newspaper.

Lacy (1988) found indications that group ownership affected variables such as content and staff size, with group papers exhibiting larger staffs. Lacy's study suggested staff size had a negative effect on the number of stories a reporter wrote for each day's newspaper, known as story load, and the greater the story load, the less likely the story was to represent both sides of a controversial issue. The more imbalanced a story, the more likely it was to contain defamatory statements. Therefore, Lacy concluded that his findings suggest ownership influences content indirectly through story load, with chain newspaper reporters reporting lighter story loads, and therefore more likely to represent both sides of controversial issues and to exclude defamatory statements.

Glasser (1988) examined a more subtle influence of chain ownership on the news content of Knight-Ridder newspapers. Glasser investigated how Knight-Ridder newspapers and other newspapers utilized the Gary Hart affair story which was broke by the Miami Herald, one of the chain's most prestigious newspapers. Results of the study indicated that Knight-Ridder newspapers played the story higher (placing it in a more prominent position on the page with larger headlines) than a matched sample of Knight-Ridder news service subscribers, which in turn played the story

higher than a matched sample of non-chain, non-subscribers. Glasser said the study implies a subtle influence exerted by “an organizational arrangement that impinges on the news judgements of individual editors” (Glasser 1988, p. 14). The researcher said at chain-owned newspapers “autonomy is more difficult to maintain and, therefore, more likely to be diminished” (Glasser 1988, p. 16).

Donohue, Olien and Tichenor (1985) found indications of substantially less reporting of local conflict, which they considered an element of newspaper quality, in newspapers with chain ownership headquartered outside of the state compared with newspapers with ownership within Minnesota.

Several researchers have attempted to determine the economic consequences of chain ownership. Hale (1984) examined 54 independent variables, and 21 of these were significantly correlated with large-chain ownership. Chain newspapers published on average one more issue a month, had 14% higher subscription rates and 23% higher advertising rates, were four times more likely to subscribe to Parade, the Sunday supplement, and were less likely to subscribe to another Sunday supplement, Family Weekly. The higher advertising prices were consistent with larger circulations of these newspapers, which were published in more populous, urban, more affluent counties, the study suggested.

With an eye to the bottom line, chain newspapers may have superior management ability to increase these profits, according to research by Blackenburg (1982). In monopoly markets, maximum sales of newspapers may not mean maximum profits, Blackenburg said, and his study found

indications that Gannett may be limiting circulation to increase profits, a practice non-Gannett newspapers may not be attempting.

Busterna (1988) argued that chains should be able to charge lower prices for advertising space because of economies of scale and lower costs in obtaining management, financing, promotion, advertising content and non-advertising content. But because the four largest chains control circulation to more than one-quarter U.S. newspaper household, these chains could force national advertisers to meet their higher prices, he predicted. Busterna's study found Gannett papers charged more than 50% higher prices for the same product offered by the independents.

Based on results from the above studies, no overwhelming conclusion can be suggested involving the affect of ownership type on variables other than editorial page content. While Drew and Wilhoit (1976), Grotta (1971), and Demers and Wackman (1988) and Demers (1988) found no indications that ownership affected the quality of newspapers, Litman and Bridges (1986), Lacy (1988), Glasser (1988), and Donohue, Olien and Tichenor (1985) found indications that ownership did indeed affect quality. There was even disagreement in the relationship between ownership and economic issues such as rates and attention to profits (Grotta , 1971; Hale, 1984; Blackenburg, 1982; Busterna 1988). While no clear trends can be suggested involving the affects of group ownership on variables other than editorial page content, the following section examines literature on the relationship between group ownership and newspaper editorial pages.

#### Group Ownership and Editorial Pages

Thrift (1977) argued that the editorial page is the most important section of the newspaper and that any study of the effects of chain ownership should start with an examination of what happens to editorials

when a newspaper is purchased by a chain. This section reviews nine studies that have examined the influence of chain ownership on editorial page content. This section is further divided by the four studies that suggest no effect of chain ownership on editorial page content, and the five studies that suggest chain ownership has an affect on editorial page content.

In 1956, research by Borstel indicated that there was little difference in content on editorial pages of small, daily, chain newspapers and of small, daily, independent newspapers. Borstel selected and analyzed the content of 20 daily newspapers in cities of less than 25,000 people. For a one-week period, the proportion of comment (editorials, columns, editorials columns, letters and cartoons) to total content excluding advertising, was recorded, as was indigenous comment (which represented opinions, views or observations of persons within the home city or county of the newspaper) to total comment. Borstel (1956, p. 221) found “no consistent differences in comment” according to ownership type or competitive status.

Hale (1988) examined editorial pages of independent newspapers the year before the newspapers were sold to a chain, and the year after they were purchased by a chain. According to this study, the change in ownership from independent to chain produced only modest change and only slight improvement or deterioration. Hale found there were no statistically significant differences in number of editorial pages, editorials, syndicated columns and cartoons, letters to the editor, local columns and cartoons, local art and advertisements when the newspapers were independent as compared to when the newspapers were chain owned.

Hale’s study found no evidence that chain newspapers had less commitment to editorial pages than independent newspaper owners. The researcher proposed several explanations as to why newspapers do not

change under chain ownership. He suggested that chain newspapers may be no different than independent newspapers, that chains make changes, but not on editorial pages, and that changes may be made in less noticeable areas, such as the size of the reporting staff, the size of the local news hole, salaries of news staff or amount of coverage of local controversy or conflict.

Media critic Bagdikian (1977) fears that through concentration of ownership one person or group could espouse certain ideals and support specific candidates, parties or projects. Two Canadian researchers, Wagenberg and Soderlund (1975), set out to find whether these predicted effects of chain ownership actually exist by comparing editorials of chain and independent newspapers in Canada during the 1972 Canadian federal elections. In this study, four newspapers were selected from the Free Press group, two from independent papers, and one newspaper that was recently acquired by the Southam chain. Editorials from the papers prior to the election and following the election were coded for themes such as economics, political leaders, foreign policy, nationalism, environmental, miscellaneous, political institutions, partisanship and socio-culture.

Results of the Canadian researchers' study indicated that there was "no consistent pattern which unites the papers within the Free Press chain, nor is there a persistent difference between them and the control group" (Wagenberg & Soderlund 1975, p. 94). The researchers concluded that the newspaper's region and local interests influenced themes more than ownership. Contrary to the fears of critics, it did not appear that members of the Free Press chain, during this specific election year, pushed any certain ideal, issue, leader or party, the study's authors suggested. However, this does not mean that another chain or even the Free Press



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chain might push certain issues or candidates at a different place or even a different time, they cautioned.

St. Dizier (1986) found results similar to the Canadian researchers' in a study of the influence of chain ownership on endorsements during the 1984 U.S. election campaigns. St. Dizier surveyed a randomly selected group of editorial page editors at U.S. daily newspapers with circulations greater than 50,000. The survey asked questions about social, economic, foreign policy, environmental and defense issues in which the 1984 Republican and Democratic platform or candidates had taken opposite stands.

Results of St. Dizier's study indicated that there were more similarities than differences between independent and chain papers in editorial positions taken on these issues. A similar percentage of chain-newspaper respondents (61%) and independent newspaper respondents (64%) indicated that publishers consulted with the editorial staffs to determine whom to endorse, and respondents from both groups also indicated they were satisfied with the way endorsements were made (66% and 64%). However, results of the survey suggested that chain editors tended to be more independent and less Democratic than their counterparts. At independent papers, publishers tended to be a more diverse group, with just more than one-third reported as Republicans, one-third as independents and slightly less than one-third as Democrats. More than half of the chain-newspaper publishers were reported as Republicans, with 40% independents and only 4% Democrats. These results were evident in endorsements, where chain newspapers in the study endorsed Reagan over Mondale by a 65% to 25% margin, while independent newspapers were equally split between Reagan and Mondale. While these groups were

dissimilar in their endorsements, they were similar in their stands taken on issues in the campaign, the survey results suggested.

Although the four studies presented above suggested that chain newspapers have no impact on editorial pages, five other studies have found indications that chains may influence editorial page content.

Thrift (1977) examined editorial vigor of 24 west coast newspapers between 1960 and 1975, studying how editorials changed in newspapers purchased by chains, and the differences between chain newspaper editorials and independent newspaper editorials. Editorial vigor consisted of four variables: local editorial topics, editorials written in the argumentative form, controversial rather than non-controversial topics, and mobilizing information. Results of the study suggested that independently owned newspapers became less vigorous after being purchased by chains, while editorial vigor in newspapers that remained independent actually increased during the same time period. Independent newspapers showed an increase in the use of local, argumentative editorials on controversial subjects, while those newspapers bought by chains had fewer of these editorials. Similarly, newspapers that had been purchased by chains used a smaller proportion of argumentative editorials on local matters after the newspapers had been purchased by chains, and a smaller proportion of local editorials on controversial topics.

Addressing the fear of critics that chain newspapers would espouse the same ideas and endorse the same candidates and issues, Rystrom (1986) tabulated endorsement of 51 California papers for 25 statewide candidate races and 158 ballot propositions during elections of 1970, 1972, 1974, 1976, 1978 and 1980. Each endorsement was coded with one point for a liberal stand on a candidate or issue, minus one point for a conservative stand on a

candidate or issue, and no points for a neutral stand. When ratings of newspapers after they were sold to newspaper chains were compared with ratings of the newspapers before they were sold to the chain, 11 of the 13 had moved toward the liberal end of the spectrum and two toward the conservative. So newspapers in this study tended to become more liberal after they were sold to newspaper groups. Also, group newspapers as a whole tended to take more liberal stands on the issues than independent newspapers.

Rystrom (1986) also attempted to determine the impact of the endorsements by comparing the election results in the circulation areas of the newspapers with statewide results. Rystrom said the study suggested that independent newspapers had more of an impact with their endorsements than did chain newspapers, although neither group of newspapers as a whole made much apparent difference in the overall outcome of the statewide elections. Rystrom suggested that voters were more familiar with owners of independent newspapers and respected their opinions more than opinions of owners of chain newspapers. He said as readers become more accustomed to the group newspaper owners, this difference might disappear. He suggested that the findings might "help allay fears about possible control of elections by continuously expanding groups" (p.12), at least until the time people become accustomed to the group owners.

In another study of political endorsements, Wachman, Gillmor, Gaziano and Dennis (1975) examined whether individual chains were homogeneous or heterogeneous in their endorsements in 1960, 1964, 1968 and 1972 presidential elections. Homogeneous chains were defined as those in which 85% or more of the newspapers endorsed the same candidate.

Chains also were classified as high endorsers, in which 75% or more of the newspapers endorsed candidates; or moderate endorsers, in which 74% or fewer endorsed a candidate. In general, the study suggested that the chains were homogeneous in endorsements. Only in 1964 were more than one-quarter of the chains heterogeneous, and most of the chains were high endorsers in every election, according to the study.

Wackman, Gillmor, Gaziano and Dennis' study indicates that chain newspapers may not be independent in their editorial decisions, and it tends to support the fears of critics who believe that chain ownership will inhibit diversity of ideas. The researchers point out that chain ownership may not overtly influence endorsements, but other factors such as hiring practices, management procedure and peer pressure may push chain newspapers toward uniform of editorial positions. "Perhaps the natural selection of staff, especially those entrusted to editorial pages, militates against the editorial diversity that chains loudly proclaim they have" (Wackman, Gillmore, Gazian & Dennis 1975, p. 420).

Pilegge (1981) examined the role of the press in deep south states by analyzing endorsements of political candidates by Alabama's daily newspapers from 1962 to 1978. One of Pilegge's hypotheses was that an increase of chain owned newspapers in the state might insert a Republican influence into a largely Democratic region, as indicated by a higher proportion of GOP candidate endorsements by the chain-owned press than by the local press. Pilegge looked for endorsements for president, U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, and governor on editorial pages. Of the 121 endorsements found by the researcher, 52.1% were for Republican candidates. Broken down by ownership type, the results revealed that chain-owned newspapers gave 60% of their endorsements to Republicans,

while the locally owned newspapers gave 33% of their support to the GOP. So during that 17-year period, it appeared that more Republican endorsements came from chain newspapers, while locally owned newspapers tended to stick with Democratic candidates in the tradition of the state. While in this instance chain ownership may be increasing the diversity of ideas, this research tends to support the contention that chain management might control content in favor of the group ownership's own political leanings.

While several studies have examined chain ownership influence on endorsements, few studies have examined the effect ownership has on specific content areas such as syndicated columns. One such study involving participant observation of a chain-owned newspaper conducted by Soloski (1979), suggested that one of the more subtle, yet important, forms of influence chains might have on newspapers was the use of a chain's wire service. Soloski said chain wire services could lead to homogeneity among chain newspapers, especially on editorial pages. Syndicated columns are usually distributed to the small and medium-sized newspapers through the mail, Soloski said. However, many groups through their wires make available to their newspapers a choice of several syndicated columns. If newspapers have subscribed to these columns, they are free to pull them off the group wire and publish them, saving the time, expense and risk of error in typesetting the columns themselves. Soloski pointed out that members of chains who have syndicated columns available to them on the group wires rarely run columns that are not available on the wire, and he cautioned that this reliance on group wires could lead to homogeneity on chain newspaper editorial pages. He suggested additional research on homogeneity in the use of syndicated columnists and columns.

Reviewing the studies that examine ownership influence on editorial pages, again there does not appear to be clear evidence to suggest influence. Although Wagenberg and Soderlund (1975) and St. Dizier (1986) suggested no influence of chain ownership, the samples of both studies could limit any generalizations drawn from these studies. Wagenberg and Soderlund's sample included newspapers from just two chains and just two independent newspapers, and both studies were limited to endorsements during just one election campaign.

Conversely, however, three other studies suggested that chain ownership may influence newspapers, and all three studies of these studies were conducted over a period that included several elections and included examination of more than one chain. Review of the literature suggests that differences in endorsements may be found during any single election campaigns or among newspapers of a single chain. However, homogeneity in endorsements of chain newspapers may be suggested when the examination includes a more enduring time period and more than one chain.

A similar trend could be suggested after reviewing the literature involving ownership effects on editorial page content. While Borstel (1956) found indications that ownership had no influence on editorial page content, his sample was limited to 20 daily newspapers in cities of less than 25,000 people. Thrift (1977), in his study of editorial vigor, did not limit the sample to small-city newspapers, and he found differences in the way chain newspapers treated editorial topics when they were compared with independent newspapers and the way they treat editorial topics. Additionally, Borstel describes the limitation of generalizability which is indigenous to much of the research into the effects of chain ownership:

“The data compiled and any conclusions drawn herefrom apply only to these twenty newspapers; at most they hint at what other newspapers in cities of less than 25,000 population are like” (Borstel 1956, p. 221).

Although 21 studies have been presented in this section examining possible relationships between chain ownership and many variables, there clearly is a void in the research and a need for additional study. None of the studies presented in this paper specifically address Bagdikian’s fear (1980) that chain ownership leads to a reduction in diversity of ideas on the editorial page or homogeneity of editorial page content. To determine the validity of Bagdikian’s and other critic’s fears, it would be important to know whether or not newspapers within a chain look and sound alike, especially on the editorial pages. Yet, none of the studies presented above suggest whether or not chain newspapers publish both the same syndicated columns and columnists and the same editorials concerning the same topics.



## CHAPTER III

### Research Question and Hypotheses

A question which arises out of the above literature is whether newspapers belonging to the same newspaper chain will be similar in editorial page content. Specifically, will they use the same columns and columnists, and will they have similar editorials? Based on the review of the literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H:1 There will be differences among Harris-owned newspapers in the use of syndicated columnists on the editorial pages.

H:2 There will be differences among Harris-owned newspapers in the content of columns that appear on the editorial pages.

H:3 There will be differences among Harris-owned newspapers in content and treatment of editorials.

### Methodology

Five of the eight Harris newspapers from Kansas were chosen for this content analysis: the Garden City Telegram, The Hays Daily News, The Hutchinson News, The Ottawa Herald, and The Parsons Sun. The Kansas newspapers were chosen because they all have available to them syndicated columns from the Harris News Service, a wire service operated by the chain. The non-Harris newspaper chosen for analysis was the Manhattan

Mercury, selected because it is of similar size to the Harris newspapers (See Appendix A). The study examined newspapers from a randomly selected, two-week period, from May 31 through June 13, 1990.

## Content

Editorial pages of each newspaper were examined for each day of the two-week period. The following items were coded for each page: Newspaper, date, name of syndicated columnists appearing on page, topic of columns appearing on page, length of columns, name of local or guest columnist, topic of local or guest columnist, length of local or guest column, editorial type (local or guest) editorial topic, editorial length, editorial position, editorial topic origin, editorial slant, editorial vigor, number and length of letters to the editor, name of syndicated editorial cartoonist, space devoted to syndicated editorial cartoon, topic of syndicated editorial cartoon, name of local editorial cartoonist, space devoted to local editorial cartoon, topic of local editorial cartoon, and miscellaneous items, coded by type and length. Appendix B shows a breakdown of the number of items in each category. Newspaper editorials were coded by two coders; the author and another person trained by the author. A third coder, also trained by the author, coded editorials where disagreement existed; the answer chosen by two of the three coders was included for analysis. Intercoder reliability, tested utilizing Scott's pi index (Wimmer and Dominick, 1987) for editorial position, argumentation and locus was .89, for slant was .85, for mobilizing information was .90 and for controversy was .79. According to Wimmer and Dominick, .75 is a common minimum reliability coefficient when using Scott's pi (p. 186).

Operational definitions:

The following operational definitions were used to code the newspapers:

Syndicated Columns. Any bylined opinion article, except editorials, appearing on the editorial page or pages that did not originate at the local newspaper. This definition included columns written by employees of other Harris chain newspapers, the Harris News Service or the Harris Newspaper Group.

Local and Guest Columns: Any bylined opinion article, except editorials, appearing on the editorial page or pages that originated at local newspapers or from a non-syndicated source.

Editorials: Any opinion article appearing on the editorial page or pages that reflected the opinion of the local newspaper, rather than that of an individual person.

Guest Editorials: Any opinion article appearing on the editorial page or pages that reflected the opinion of any other newspaper other than the local newspaper. Typically, the guest editorial is labeled as such, with a line crediting the source newspaper.

Letters to the Editor: Any article that appeared on the editorial page or pages that reflected the opinion of a letter writer who is not a member of the newspaper staff, any other newspaper staff or any syndicating service.

Syndicated Editorial Cartoons: Artwork, usually original line drawings, that appeared on the editorial page or pages, illustrated an opinion and that originated from a syndication source, dealing with non-local topics. Definition does not include photographs.

Local Editorial Cartoons: Artwork, usually original line drawings, that appeared on the editorial page or pages, illustrated an opinion and that

originated from a local source, dealing with local topics. Definition does not include photographs.

Topic of syndicated, guest and local columns, local editorials, guest editorials, syndicated editorial cartoons and local editorial cartoon: Each item was read to determine topics, which were summed up in one or two words and recorded.

Length of syndicated columns, guest and local columns, local editorials, guest editorials, letters to the editor, syndicated cartoons, local cartoons and miscellaneous items: Length was measured from top of the headline to the bottom of the item using a pica inch measurement. This measurement systems allowed researchers to account for different column widths, and to allow photographs and illustrations to be included in the study. The pica inch measurement was determined by measuring the width of the column in picas, the length in inches and multiplying the numbers.

Editorial position: Editorial position was recorded numerically with one recorded as being as a positive position or a position favorable toward a specific topic, two for a negative stand or one presenting arguments against the specific topic, and zero for a neutral position taken on the specific topic.

Editorial locus: Editorial topics also were coded as addressing international, national, state or local issues. Local issues were defined as those originating in the circulation area of the newspaper being studied.

Editorial slant: Editorial topics dealing with national or international issues were also coded for editorial slant as liberal, conservative or neutral. Using a system developed by Rystrom (1986), endorsement of issues that supported civil and individual rights, increased taxes and expanded

government programs were considered to be liberal, while endorsements of stands opposite of the liberal issues were considered to be conservative.

Editorial vigor: Thrift's (1977) editorial vigor classification was used to determine uses of editorials. Even though Thrift applied his classification to only local editorials, both local and state editorials were classified according to editorial vigor. Three criteria of editorial vigor include:

*Purpose of editorial*, classified as argumentative or non-argumentative. An argumentative editorial was classified as one in which a position was presented, either for or against an issue.

*Topic Context*, classified as controversial or non-controversial.

Controversial topics were defined as "an editorial written on a subject or topic about which there were or could have been significant differences of opinion within a newspaper's primary circulation area" (Thrift 1977, p. 329).

*Mobilizing information* as defined by Lemert in Thrift (1977 p. 329):

"information which can be used by mass media audiences to act on attitudes they already have." Mobilizing information includes items such as addresses, telephone numbers, methods which could be used to react and others.

Miscellaneous items: Any items other than those listed above appearing on the editorial page, including photographs, non-opinion articles, masthead, etc.

#### Coding procedure

After the newspapers were coded, Harris newspapers were compared across all above categories to test for homogeneity. Frequency distributions were conducted to determine if the newspapers were using the same

syndicated columnists, the same syndicated columns, and to determine if they were editorializing about the same topics. The rank order correlation, Spearman's rho, and chi squares were used to measure homogeneity, if any. If similarities existed, the Harris newspapers also were compared to the non-Harris newspaper, the Manhattan Mercury, using the same statistical procedures.

#### Limitations of the study

Susan E. Tifft, a Time magazine writer who wrote a book about issues of family ownership, is quoted in Presstime (Anderson, 1987) as saying: "One of the things I have discovered: It's very hard to make generalizations with any accuracy because there are many kinds of newspaper owners out there, both among the chains and the individuals." As pointed out by Tifft, it is difficult to make generalizations about the effects of ownership on any aspect of the newspaper.

This study examines one small Kansas newspaper chain. It may or may not apply to other newspapers or other newspaper chains. At most, this study provides insight as to how chain ownership reflects homogeneity of newspaper editorial pages. Further, this study is descriptive, rather than experimental, and therefore excludes conclusions regarding cause and effect relationships.

## CHAPTER IV

### Results

H:1 predicted there would be differences among Harris-owned newspapers in the use of syndicated columnists on the editorial pages. The null hypothesis used to test the research hypothesis was that there would be no differences among Harris-owned newspapers in the use of syndicated columnists on the editorial pages.

Frequency distributions of columnists (see Appendix A) who appeared in Harris newspapers indicated that of the 30 different columnists who appeared in the five Harris newspapers included in the sample, six (20%) appeared in more than one Harris newspaper. Unique to one Harris newspaper were 24 of the columnists (80%).

Frequency distributions of columnists by individual newspapers indicated that appearing in at least one other Harris newspaper in the sample were seven of nine (78%) columnists in the Parsons Sun, six of eight (75%) columnists in the Hays Daily News , and five of eight (63%) columnists in the Garden City Telegram. At Hutchinson, 2 of 13 columnists (15%) appeared in other Harris newspapers (see Table I). Frequency distributions of syndicated columnists appearing in the Manhattan Mercury indicated that 5 of 12 (42%) columnists also appeared in at least one of the Harris newspapers included in the sample.

**Table I**

<sup>a</sup>Common syndicated columnists in sample newspapers

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Newspaper	<u>Common Columnists</u>		<u>Unique Columnists</u>		<u>Total Columnists</u>	
	Freq. (%)	Space (%)	Freq. (%)	Space (%)	Freq.	Space
Parsons	7 (78)	5799 (70)	2 (22)	2513 (30)	9	8312
Hays	6 (75)	5024 (57)	2 (25)	3778 (43)	8	8802
Garden City	5 (63)	4206 (61)	3 (38)	2718 (39)	8	6924
Ottawa	4 (44)	2675 (45)	5 (55)	3225 (55)	9	5900
Hutchinson	2 (15)	1276 (26)	11 (85)	3588 (74)	13	4864
TOTALS	24	18980	23	15822	59	34802
Manhattan	5 (42)	4915 (32)	7 (58)	10527 (68)	12	15442

---

$\chi^2=11.34$ , d.f.=4,  $p<0.05$

Note. Space Measured in Pica Inches. One pica inch equals one pica in width by one inch in depth.

<sup>a</sup>Columnist appearing in more than one sample Harris newspaper during the period studied.



The results, based on a chi square analysis of the distributions of syndicated columns at the 0.05 level of significance, suggest that some Harris newspapers are associated with greater or fewer common columnists, thus rejecting the null hypothesis  $H:0_1$  and supporting the research hypothesis,  $H:1$  ( $\chi^2=11.34$ , d.f.=4,  $p<0.05$ ).

A breakdown of common columnists reveals that only two columnists, John McCormally and John Marshall, both columnists for the Harris chain, appeared in all five Harris newspapers (see Appendix C). Neither of these columnists appeared in the Manhattan newspaper. These two columnists, Marshall and McCormally, accounted for 34% of the space devoted to syndicated columnists in the Hutchinson News, 20% in Ottawa, and 18% in Parsons and Garden City (see Table II). An examination of the amount of space, measured in pica inches, devoted to columnists common to other Harris newspapers (see Table I) indicated that at Parsons, of the 8312.5 pica inches devoted to syndicated columnists during the two-week period, 70%, or 5799.5 pica inches, was taken up by columnists who also appeared in at least one other Harris newspaper, yet 26%, or 1276 pica inches, of the space at Hutchinson was taken up by columnists that were common to at least one other Harris newspaper.

$H:2$  predicted there would be differences among Harris-owned newspapers in the content of columns that appear on the editorial pages. The null hypothesis used to test the research hypothesis was that there would be no differences among Harris-owned newspapers in the content of columns that appear on the editorial pages.

Frequency distributions of the 143 separate syndicated columns that appeared in Harris newspapers indicated that 72 (50%) were unique to one Harris newspaper. Frequency distributions of syndicated columns by

**Table II**  
Harris Newspaper Group Columnists

---

Newspaper	Space/ Harris Columns (%)	Space/ Syndicated Columns
Parsons	1537.5 (18)	8312
Hays	907.5 (10)	8802
Garden City	1218 (18)	6924
Ottawa	1152 (20)	5900
Hutchinson	1635.5 (34)	4864
TOTALS	6450	34812

---

Note. Space measured in pica inches.

newspaper (see Table III) indicated that in the Parsons Sun, of the 33 syndicated columns that appeared during the time period studied, 22 (67%) were common to at least one other Harris newspaper, as were 16 of the 26 (61%) syndicated columns in the Garden City Telegram. At Hutchinson, 5 of 20 (25%) were common to other Harris newspapers, and at the control newspaper, the Manhattan Mercury, 13 of 40 (32.5%) were common to another Harris newspaper.

Results of the frequency distributions of syndicated columns, based on a chi square analysis significant at the 0.05 level of certainty, suggest that some newspapers are associated with greater or fewer common columns, thus rejecting the null hypothesis in favor of the research hypothesis, which states differences will exist in the use of syndicated columns.

Again, columns by Harris Newspaper Group columnists appeared in the most Harris newspapers. Two columns by Marshall, one about state spending and another about state politics, appeared in all five Harris newspapers that were studied. Two columns by Harris' McCormally, as well as two columns by Royko, appeared in four of the five Harris newspapers. Frequency distributions by newspaper also indicated that of the 23 syndicated columns that appeared in more than one Harris newspaper, 22 appeared in the Parsons Sun (96%), 19 appeared in the Hays Daily News (83%) and 16 appeared in the Garden City Telegram (70%).

H:3 suggested there would be significant differences among Harris newspapers in content and treatment of editorials. Content was examined by analyzing editorial topics, and treatment was analyzed through examination of editorial local, slant and/or vigor. Frequency distributions

**Table III**<sup>a</sup>Common columns compared to syndicated columns

---

Newspaper	Common Columns		Unique Columns		Total Columns
	Freq.	(%)	Freq.	(%)	
Parsons	22	(67)	11	(33)	33
Hays	19	(54)	16	(46)	35
Garden City	16	(61)	10	(38)	26
Ottawa	9	(45)	20	(69)	29
Hutchinson	5	(25)	15	(75)	20
TOTALS	71	(50)	72	(50)	143
Manhattan	13	(32.5)	27	(67.5)	40

---

$\chi^2=14.405$ , d.f.=4,  $p<0.05$

<sup>a</sup>Column appearing in more than one sample Harris newspaper during the period studied.

Note: Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

of editorials that appeared in the sample's Harris newspapers indicated that of the 89 editorials that appeared in Harris newspapers, 22 or 25% pertained to topics that appeared in more than one Harris newspaper. In the Harris newspapers, 74 different topics were editorialized upon during the two-week period. Of these 74 topics, nine topics (12%) were subjects of editorials in more than one Harris newspapers. No editorial topics appeared in all five, or even four of the Harris newspapers during the period studied. Three topics were subjects of editorials in three of the five Harris newspapers: Congressional honorarium addressed by Parsons, Garden City and Hutchinson, a Supreme Court decision allowing church groups to meet in public schools, editorialized by Hays, Hutchinson and Ottawa, and a fight between two county commissioners, which was editorialized by Parsons, Hays and Hutchinson. Six topics were common to two newspapers.

Frequency distributions by newspaper (see Table IV) indicated that 7 of 14 editorial topics in the Parsons Sun (50%) also were topics of editorials at at least one other Harris newspaper, and at Hays, 5 of 13 topics (46%) were common to other Harris newspapers. At Ottawa, 1 of 12 editorials (8%) pertained to a topic common to other Harris papers. However, a chi square test on the frequency distributions was not significant at the 0.05 level. As indicated in Table IV, when Manhattan is included in the sample, the chi square still is not significant at the 0.05 level.

A chi square analysis of frequency distributions of editorial locus for Harris newspapers also was not significant at .05 level (see Table V). When the Manhattan paper is included in the sample for chi square analysis, the results still are not significant ( $\chi^2=14.13$ , d.f.=15,  $p>0.05$ ).

**Table IV**  
<sup>a</sup>Common editorial topics

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<u>Newspaper</u>	<u>Editorials/ Common Topics</u>		<u>Editorials/ Unique Topics</u>		<u>Total Editorials</u>
	<u>Freq.</u>	<u>(%)</u>	<u>Freq.</u>	<u>(%)</u>	
Parsons	7	(50)	7	(50)	14
Hays	5	(38)	8	(62)	13
Garden City	2	(17)	10	(83)	12
Ottawa	1	(8)	11	(92)	12
Hutchinson	7	(18)	31	(82)	38
TOTALS	<u>22</u>	<u>(25)</u>	<u>67</u>	<u>(75)</u>	<u>89</u>
Manhattan	1	(11)	8	(88)	9

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<sup>a</sup>Editorial appearing in more than one sample Harris newspaper during the period studied.

$\chi^2=8.91$ , d.f.=4,  $p>0.05$

With Manhattan Included:  $\chi^2=10.2$ , d.f.=5,  $p>0.05$

**Table V**  
Editorial Locus

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Newspaper	<u>Local</u>		<u>State</u>		<u>National</u>		<u>Intern'l</u>		<u>Total</u>
	<u>Freq.</u>	<u>(%)</u>	<u>Freq.</u>	<u>(%)</u>	<u>Freq.</u>	<u>(%)</u>	<u>Freq.</u>	<u>(%)</u>	
Parsons	6	(42)	4	(29)	4	(29)	0	(0)	14
Hays	2	(15)	3	(23)	7	(54)	1	(8)	13
Garden City	4	(33)	3	(25)	5	(42)	0	(0)	12
Ottawa	2	(17)	2	(17)	7	(58)	1	(8)	12
Hutchinson	8	(21)	7	(18)	23	(60)	0	(0)	38
TOTALS	22	(25)	19	(21)	46	(52)	2	(2)	89
Manhattan	4	(44)	1	(11)	3	(33)	1	(11)	9

---

$\chi^2=10.84$ , d.f.=12,  $p>0.05$

With Manhattan included:  $\chi^2=14.13$ , d.f.=15,  $p>0.05$

A frequency distribution analysis of editorial slant of editorials on national and international topics indicated that at Garden City, four of the five editorials (80%) were liberal, while at Ottawa, two of eight (25%) were liberal (see Table VI). However, again, the chi square test was not significant at the 0.05 level ( $\chi^2=7.98$ , d.f.=8,  $p>0.05$ ). Adding Manhattan to the sample did not cause the chi square to become significant ( $\chi^2=11.29$ , d.f.=10,  $p>0.05$ ).

A chi square test on the frequency distributions of vigorous editorials (see Table VII) was significant at the 0.05 level ( $\chi^2=9.717$ , d.f.=4,  $p<0.05$ ), suggesting that some Harris newspapers may publish fewer or greater numbers of vigorous editorials than others. However, significant chi square tests were not found on frequency distributions of individual elements of vigor, including controversy (see Table VIII), argumentation (see Table IX), and mobilizing information (see Table X). However, the chi squares remain insignificant at the 0.05 level when Manhattan is included.

Based on the above data, it appears that Harris newspapers may be similar in editorial content, as measured by topics, and in treatment, as measured by locus, slant and individual elements of vigor. However, when the elements of editorial vigor are tested as a whole, it appears the Harris newspapers have varying degrees of editorial vigor. Therefore, the  $H:3$ , which predicted there would be differences in content and treatment of editorials, is supported, and the null hypothesis,  $H_0:3$ , is rejected.

In an attempt to determine if factors other than ownership affect editorial page content, a Spearman's rho correlation was used to examine the relationship between factors such as circulation and editorial page content. The correlational analysis was not significant in only one category, number



**Table VI**  
**Editorial Slant**  
**of National, International Editorials**

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<u>Newspaper</u>	<u>Liberal</u>		<u>Conserv.</u>		<u>Neutral</u>		<u>Total</u>
	<u>Freq. (%)</u>		<u>Freq. (%)</u>		<u>Freq. (%)</u>		
Parsons	3	(75)	0	(0)	1	(25)	4
Hays	5	(63)	2	(25)	1	(13)	8
Garden City	4	(80)	0	(0)	1	(20)	5
Ottawa	2	(25)	1	(13)	5	(63)	8
Hutchinson	13	(57)	3	(13)	7	(30)	23
TOTALS	27	(56)	6	(13)	15	(31)	48
Manhattan	4	(100)	0	(0)	0	(0)	4

---

$\chi^2=10.84$ , d.f.=12,  $p>0.05$

With Manhattan included:  $\chi^2=11.29$ , d.f.=10,  $p>0.05$

**Table VII**  
<sup>a</sup>Vigor of Local, State Editorials

---

Newspaper	<u>Vigor</u>		<u>Non-Vigor</u>		Total
	Freq.	(%)	Freq.	(%)	
Parsons	6	(60)	4	(40)	10
Hays	2	(40)	3	(60)	5
Garden City	1	(14)	6	(86)	7
Ottawa	1	(25)	3	(75)	4
Hutchinson	1	(7)	14	(93)	15
TOTALS	11	(27)	30	(73)	41
Manhattan	1	(20)	4	(80)	5

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<sup>a</sup>Vigor defined as editorial on controversial topic, written in argumentative form with mobilizing information.

$\chi^2=9.717$ , d.f.=4,  $p<0.05$

**Table VIII**  
Controversial Editorials

---

Newspaper	<u>Controversial</u>		<u>Non-Controversial</u>		Total
	Freq.	(%)	Freq.	(%)	
Parsons	9	(90)	1	(10)	10
Hays	3	(60)	2	(40)	5
Garden City	5	(71)	2	(29)	7
Ottawa	4	(100)	0	(0)	4
Hutchinson	6	(40)	9	(60)	15
TOTALS	27	(66)	14	(34)	41
Manhattan	3	(60)	2	(40)	5

---

$\chi^2=9.29$ , d.f.=4,  $p>0.05$

With Manhattan Included:  $\chi^2=9.32$ , d.f.=5,  $p>0.05$

**Table IX**  
Argumentative Editorials

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Newspaper	<u>Argumentative</u>		<u>Non-Argumentative</u>		Total
	Freq.	(%)	Freq.	(%)	
Parsons	8	(80)	2	(20)	10
Hays	3	(60)	2	(40)	5
Garden City	4	(57)	3	(43)	7
Ottawa	4	(100)	0	(0)	4
Hutchinson	13	(86)	2	(13)	15
TOTALS	32	(78)	9	(22)	41
Manhattan	4	(80)	1	(20)	5

---

$\chi^2=4.525$ , d.f.=4,  $p>0.05$

With Manhattan Included:  $\chi^2=4.573$ , d.f.=5,  $p>0.05$

**Table X**  
Mobilizing Information

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<u>Newspaper</u>	<u>Mobilizing Info.</u>		<u>No Mobilizing Info.</u>		<u>Total</u>
	Freq.	(%)	Freq.	(%)	
Parsons	6	(60)	4	(40)	10
Hays	2	(40)	3	(60)	5
Garden City	1	(14)	6	(86)	7
Ottawa	1	(25)	3	(75)	4
Hutchinson	2	(13)	13	(87)	15
TOTALS	12	(29)	29	(71)	41
Manhattan	1	(20)	4	(80)	5

---

$\chi^2=7.74$ , d.f.=4,  $p>0.05$

With Manhattan Included:  $\chi^2=7.82$ , d.f.=5,  $p>0.05$

of guest editorials, at the 0.05 level of significance ( $r=.7488$ ,  $t=2.269$ ,  $d.f.=4$ ). In all other categories, there seemed to be a high correlation between circulation and numbers of editorial page items; the higher circulation papers published more items.

The highest correlation was between circulation and total editorial page space. The Spearman's rho test showed a very dependable relationship between the two variables. ( $r=.99$ ,  $t=14.033$ ,  $d.f.=4$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). A very high correlation also existed between numbers of letters to the editor and circulation ( $r=.93$ ,  $t=5.2670$ ,  $d.f.=4$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), and there also was a dependable, positive relationship between number of editorial cartoons, both syndicated and local, and circulation ( $r=.93$ ,  $t=4.978$ ,  $d.f.=4$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). A strong positive relationship existed between circulation and the number of columns, both syndicated and local, and the number of editorials. Spearman's rho for the number of columns was  $.89$  ( $t=3.9186$ ,  $d.f.=4$ ,  $p<0.02$ ), and for the number of editorials it was  $.88$  ( $t=3.7756$ ,  $d.f.=4$ ,  $p<0.02$ ). The high correlation remained when columns were broken down into syndicated columns ( $r=.8767$ ,  $t=3.645$ ,  $d.f.=4$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and local columns ( $r=.8512$ ,  $t=3.24$ ,  $d.f.=4$ ,  $p<0.05$ ).

Correlations also were significant between circulation and the percentage of space devoted to unique columnists among Harris newspapers only ( $r=.884$ ,  $d.f.=3$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), and with the Manhattan paper included ( $r=.944$ ,  $d.f.=4$ ,  $p<0.05$ ); between circulation and the percentage of space devoted to Harris Group columnists ( $r=.88$ ,  $d.f.=3$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), and between circulation and a ranking of percentage of space devoted to unique columns among Harris newspapers only ( $r=.884$ ,  $d.f.=3$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and with the Manhattan paper included ( $r=.893$ ,  $d.f.=4$ ,  $p<0.05$ ).

Among Harris newspapers, no significant correlation was found between circulation and a ranking of percentage of number of columns unique to Harris newspapers ( $r=.865$ ,  $d.f.=3$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). However, the correlation became significant when Manhattan was included in the sample ( $r=.935$ ,  $d.f.=4$ ,  $p<0.05$ ).

Among Harris newspapers, no significant correlation was found between circulation and percentage of unique editorial topics ( $r=.748$ ,  $d.f.=3$ ,  $p>0.05$ ), percentage of local editorials ( $r=.613$ ,  $d.f.=3$ ,  $p>0.05$ ), liberal editorials ( $r=.826$ ,  $d.f.=3$ ,  $p>0.05$ ), and argumentative editorials ( $r=.748$ ,  $d.f.=3$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). Each of these correlations, unique editorial topics ( $r=.814$ ,  $d.f.=4$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), local editorials ( $r=.846$ ,  $d.f.=4$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), liberal editorials ( $r=.879$ ,  $d.f.=4$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), and argumentative editorials ( $r=.821$ ,  $d.f.=4$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), become significant when Manhattan was included in the sample.

No significant correlation was found between circulation and percentage of editorials with vigor among Harris newspapers ( $r=.71$ ,  $d.f.=3$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) and among Harris and the Manhattan newspaper ( $r=.74$ ,  $d.f.=4$ ,  $p>0.05$ ); between circulation and percentage of editorials on controversial topics among Harris newspapers ( $r=.613$ ,  $d.f.=3$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) and among Harris and the Manhattan newspaper ( $r=.681$ ,  $d.f.=4$ ,  $p>0.05$ ), and between circulation and percentage of editorials with mobilizing information among Harris newspapers ( $r=.71$ ,  $d.f.=3$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) and among Harris and the Manhattan newspapers ( $r=.74$ ,  $d.f.=4$ ,  $p>0.05$ ).

## CHAPTER V

### Conclusions, Recommendations

When examining editorial content of newspapers belonging to the Harris Group, there does not appear to be homogeneity of content. This study specifically examined two areas of newspaper editorial content, syndicated columns/columnists, and editorials, and found more variance than similarity. The results of the study of H:1 and H:2 suggest that some Harris newspapers publish a greater number of common syndicated columnists and syndicated column topics than other newspapers, thus the null hypothesis is rejected while retaining the research hypothesis, which stated that there would be differences in the use of syndicated columnists and syndicated columns. There is little evidence among the Harris newspapers studied during this two-week period that, as Soloski (1979) observed, chain newspapers consistently rely heavily on the group wire, using the same syndicated columnists and columns. Only 20% of the 30 different columnists appearing in Harris newspapers were published in more than one Harris newspaper. And while more than half of the columns ran in three individual Harris newspapers (Parsons, 70%, Hays, 57%, and Garden City, 61%) also appeared in other Harris newspapers studied, less than half of the columns were common at two newspapers (Ottawa, 45%, Hutchinson, 26%). When the control newspaper was included in the study, it consistently placed in the middle of rankings of all the newspapers in the study.

This study illustrates that chain ownership may influence some Harris newspapers in the use of syndicated columnists and columns, but it suggests



the influence is not consistent across the chain. Therefore, this study suggests that, at least in the Harris chain during this specific time period, chain ownership does not lead to homogeneity in the use of syndicated columnists and columns.

This study does point to one possible effect of chain ownership in relationship to use of columns. The study suggests that Harris newspapers commonly publish columns written by Harris Newspaper Group columnists, especially Marshall and McCormally. Although these columns reflect an overall small percentage of columns appearing in these newspapers, they occupy from 34% of the space devoted to syndicated columns at Hutchinson to 10% of the space devoted to syndicated columns at Hays. Critics of chain ownership fear a decrease in diversity of ideas, a claim that could be valid when looking at publishing chain-sponsored columns like Marshall's and McCormally's. Use of these columns could be the result of some pressure exerted by group executives to publish the Harris columnists, or could be influenced by some other variable. Additional study is recommended to determine why the newspapers carried different amounts of Harris group columns.

While it appears that chain owned newspapers do not consistently carry the same syndicated columnists and columns, this study does suggest a factor that influences selection of these editorial page items. Borstel (1956) suggested circulation was a factor more important than ownership, and results of this study suggest support for his assertion. In this study, results of Spearman's rho, a rank-order correlation, suggested that circulation is a factor in the amount of space devoted to unique syndicated columns and columnists, and well as the space devoted to and the number of other editorial page elements. These results suggest as circulation increases, a newspaper

can publish more items and devote more space to the editorial page. It also suggests that as circulation increases, a newspaper can publish a wider variety of syndicated columnists and syndicated columns. So it appears that circulation, rather than ownership, may be an important factor in editorial page diversity. In addition, other characteristics such as level of profit or even the editorial page gatekeeper's political ideology may also be important factors number and selection of syndicated columnists, and these factors were not included in this study. Additional research should be directed toward these areas.

When examining Harris chain newspaper editorials, there also appears to be differences, supporting H:3, which predicted that there would be differences in content and treatment of editorials. However, while variances exist, there appears to be more similarities.

Content was examined in the context of editorial topics, and editorial topics were common to at least two Harris newspapers in 22 of the 89 (25%) editorials. No editorial topics appeared in all five, or even four of the Harris newspapers during the period studied. An examination of position in the 24 editorials on topics common to at least two Harris newspapers indicated that the Harris newspapers took the same stand every time. In the only editorial topic that appeared in both the Manhattan Mercury and at least one other Harris newspaper, Congressional honorarium, the Mercury took the same stand as the Harris newspapers.

Treatment of editorials was studied in the context of locus, and slant or vigor. In locus and slant, and in the individual elements of vigor, argumentation, controversy and mobilizing information, the Harris newspapers appeared to be similar. Interestingly, when the Mercury was included in the study, it appeared to be similar to the Harris newspapers as

well, indicating chain ownership may or may not be contributing to this similarity. However, when all the elements of editorial vigor were combined, the Harris newspaper appeared to have varying degrees of vigor. The range in vigor included a high of 60% of the local and state editorials in the Parsons Sun meeting Thrift's standards of editorial vigor, to a low of 7% in the Hutchinson News. This research does not reveal the influences other than vigor on content and treatment. Further research is recommend in these areas.

In this particular study on this one small chain at this specific point in time, it appears chain ownership does not lead to homogeneity in newspaper editorial page content. It would be difficult to make generalizations or to apply the results of this study to other chains. At best, it gives us a glimpse of how chain ownership affects editorial page homogeneity of Harris Newspaper Group newspapers. As pointed out earlier, there is much room for additional study, specifically, work that could help determine factors that influence selection of syndicated columns and columnists at chain newspapers, study of the influence of group columnists on chain newspapers, and examination of influences on editorial slant and topic selection, and a study examining why some chain newspapers use more common material than others.

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## APPENDIX

## Appendix A

### Newspapers by circulation, size of home city

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	Circulation	Home City Population
Manhattan	15,000	32,644
Parsons	7,513	12,898
Hays	14,500	16,301
Garden City	11,000	18,256
Hutchinson	40,434	40,284
Ottawa	6,023	11,016

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Spearman rank order rho = .99

**Appendix B**  
 Breakdown of editorial page content  
 number/percentage by column

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Type	Manhattan	Parsons	Garden	Ottawa	Hutchin.	Hays
<b>Syn.col</b>	40/31	33/39	26/27	20/23	20/16	35/32
<b>Local col</b>	9/7	5/6	14/15	9/10	9/7	3/3
<b>Editorials</b>	10/8	14/17	12/13	12/14	38/31	13/12
<b>Guest edits</b>	5/4	3/4	1/1	12/14	0/0	12/11
<b>Letters</b>	25/20	13/15	14/15	12/14	24/19	5/5
<b>Cartoons</b>	8/6	12/14	9/9	4/5	24/19	28/25
<b>Loc. cartoon</b>	4/3	1/1	3/3	0/0	0/0	0/0
<b>Misc. items</b>	26/20	3/4	17/18	19/22	9/7	14/13

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Note: percentages rounded to the nearest whole number

O'Brien  
 Mangel  
 Lecher  
 Maslin  
 Colton  
 Elliot  
 Kristol

**Appendix C**  
List of syndicated columnists by newspaper

<b>Man.</b>	<b>Parsons</b>	<b>Hays</b>	<b>Garden</b>	<b>Ottawa</b>	<b>Hutch</b>
Kilpatrick	Kilpatrick	Kilpatrick	Kilpatrick		
Royko	Royko	Royko	Royko	Royko	
	Marshall	Marshall	Marshall	Marshall	Marshall
Goodman			Goodman		
	McCorm	McCorm	McCorm	McCorm	McCorm
Will		Will	Will		
Rensul					Rensul
	Raum			Raum	
	Broder	Broder	Broder		
	Mears	Mears			
	Smale				
	Cunnif				
		Anderson			
			Rowen		
			Buchanan		
				Sweet	
				Rooney	
				Verdon	
				Buchan.	
Dionne					
Summers					
Baker					
Johnson					
Marsh					
Gottlieb					
Rosenthal					
Kleinb					
Glass					
Quindlin					
Safire					
Evans					
Wicker					
Lewis					
Mitchell					
Gewax					
					Taylor
					Landrey
					Buchwald
					Manuel
					Cowherd
					Chisolm
					Collin
					Elliot
					Kristol