1-1-2002

Perceptions of quality: The Gap model meets gatekeeping

Karen Renee Roybal

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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PERCEPTIONS OF QUALITY:
THE GAP MODEL MEETS GATEKEEPING

by

Karen Roybal

Bachelor of Arts
University of New Mexico
2000

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Arts Degree in Communication Studies
Hank Greenspun School of Communication
Greenspun School of Urban Affairs

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
August 2002
The Thesis prepared by

Karen Roybal

Entitled

Perceptions of Quality: The Gap Model Meets Gatekeeping

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Communication

Examination Committee Chair

Dean of the Graduate College

Examination Committee Member

Examination Committee Member

Graduate College Faculty Representative
ABSTRACT

Perceptions of Quality:
The Gap Model Meets
Gatekeeping

by

Karen Roybal

Dr. Gary Larson, Examination Committee Chair
Professor of Communication Studies
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

The main purpose of this study was to test an adaptation of the Service Quality
Gap Model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry in an atypical service
industry—the media—in order to determine whether gaps exist between consumer
perceptions of news quality and news directors’ perceptions of news quality. Interviews
were conducted with Las Vegas local television news directors. In addition, surveys were
distributed to local news consumers. A case study approach of local Las Vegas Valley
television stations was used to test whether gatekeeping plays a part in the news
selection/decision process of what constitutes as “quality news.”

The study consists of an analysis of: (1) The Service Quality Gap Model as it
applies to a non-traditional service industry, (2) The influence of corporate ideologies on
local television newscasts, and the role, if any, news directors play as gatekeepers, and
(3) A case study of Las Vegas’ local television stations.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the help of many people. First, I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Gary W. Larson for his continued support throughout the process of completing this research project. The thesis went through many revisions and different directions, but Dr. Larson always kept me on task and encouraged me to avoid getting frustrated.

I would also like to thank Dr. Anthony Ferri for all of the time he dedicated to helping me with my research. Dr. Ferri also provided me with helpful information regarding the completion of my thesis, and I will always be grateful for the assistance.

Equally important are Dr. Thomas R. Burkholder and Dr. Richard Lapidus, who served as part of my thesis committee. Dr. Burkholder and Dr. Lapidus gave insightful feedback and helped me to construct a very interesting study.

Others who assisted me on a more personal level are my mother, my boyfriend, and my fellow graduate students and friends. Thank you to my mother, Delfinia Roybal for a lifetime of educational encouragement and support. Thank you to Eli Valdez, for supporting my academic goals despite the stress those goals placed on our relationship. Thank you to Rebecca Moldenhauer, who understood the stress and pressure graduate school placed on me. Her friendship and support made my two years of graduate study at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas a little less stressful. An extra special thank you to Bill Belk for all of his help with my formatting problems and for going that extra mile.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

News of various forms has a significant impact on our daily lives as citizens in a democratic society. Each day millions of Americans rely on a newspaper, radio, or television broadcast to bring them their "daily dose" of current events (McManus, 1994; Klite & Bardwell, 1997). In particular, television news may currently be the most dominant source of information received by the public at large (McManus, 1994; Klite & Bardnell, 1997). When thinking of television news, what comes to mind first are the faces Americans have come to love and hate—Tom Brokaw, Sam Donaldson, Peter Jennings, Dan Rather, etc. National news anchor people hold esteemed positions in the eyes of many Americans, but what isn't so commonly thought of as a main source of news, or as esteemed (White, 37A), is local television news.

Surprisingly, local television news is just as, if not more, popular than national newscasts. Despite its popularity, studies on local television news are scarce. According to media scholar John H. McManus, "local television news is the dominant force in the American news industry today," and "it is the least studied of the three major news media..." (9). Local television news resides at the heart of the shift in journalism from news-driven to profit-driven, or what media scholars call "market driven." According to Daniel Hallin and Craig Allen, local newscasts were not always that way. Local news went beyond the bounds of traditional news. "Stations were free to reinvent it (news)."
The result was a different kind of news, much more responsive to popular demand than the traditional journalism newspapers were peddling" (Hallin & Allen as quoted in McManus, 6). Local news was for the public, but it didn’t take long for media executives to realize its popularity and potential as a market-driven medium. The term “gatekeeping,” a widely used term in sociology, encapsulated this phenomenon of the deliberate “guiding” of the news by media executives who decided what would be delivered to the public, and what would not. Gatekeeping spread to other disciplines as well, such as journalism and communication, as a way to explain what was happening to the news industry. Images such as “Mr. Gates,” courtesy of David Manning White (1950), sprung up to make the point that gatekeeping was occurring in citizen’s lives everyday.

Previous research on gatekeeping has been done to assess the level of control media owners have over the networks they own. Most of the research has focused on the three major news networks—NBC, ABC, and CBS, and each station’s national news broadcast (Scott and Gobetz, 1990). Local news, on the other hand, has largely been ignored with regard to scholarly research. Studies that have focused on local television news and the processes involved in the selection of news have largely been quantitative (Berkowitz, 1989b; Berkowitz, 1990; Consortium on Local Television Surveys (COLTS), 1997; Carroll & Tuggle, et al, 1997; Gant and Dimmick, 2000), focusing on content analysis as a means of measuring newsgathering techniques, and news quality, control, and content. In contrast, we see very little, if any, critical research on the social aspects of news selection. Specifically, perceived quality of local television news in terms of consumer expectations and how media executives perceive those expectations.
America is built around a social contract, the Constitution. Included in the Constitution is the First Amendment, which includes a free press clause, intended to protect the press and ensuring the press a right to inform the public. The press is often considered the fourth estate, intended to keep the public’s best interest in mind. According to historian Leonard W. Levy in his book *Emergence of a Free Press*, “Freedom of the press also meant that the press has achieved a special status as an unofficial fourth branch of government, ‘the Fourth Estate,’ whose function was to check the three official branches by exposing misdeeds and policies contrary to the public interest” (xii). Although this watchdog role is expected of the press, it may not always be fulfilled. With the rise of corporate conglomeration of the media, journalism has shifted in a new direction. Media critics such as Ben Bagdikian, see the shift from hard-driven journalism to market-driven journalism as detrimental to the public because the end result is the production of “more trivialized and self-serving commercialized news” (Bagdikian, xi, 2000).

**Thesis Purpose and Scope**

The main purpose of this thesis was to analyze and examine the quality of local television news to both consumers and news directors in the Las Vegas Valley. This task was completed by adapting the methodology of a service quality model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985), as it applies to a non-traditional service industry. In addition, the data collected was examined and used to construct a critical analysis of local television news gatekeepers. Both interviews and surveys were used to garner consumer perceptions and news director’s perceptions of quality in local television news.
The study intended to answer the following research questions: (1) Do gaps in perceptions of news quality exist between news directors and news consumers? (2) Do news directors serve as the gatekeepers within the news organization?

The results will be discussed and summarized later in the study. The next section is a literature review, which will define concepts and provide a theoretical background.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review will be broken down into sub-points to clearly distinguish each component of the review. The first section discusses the key players in the news selection/decision-making process—news directors. The second section discusses the gap model of service quality, a marketing-based approach that will be adapted and used in the current study. Next, the news production process will briefly be explained, followed by an in-depth discussion of gatekeeping theory. Finally, a theoretical background of gatekeeping in media research will be provided.

Key Individuals: News Directors

Traditionally, news directors are viewed as being in touch with consumer needs, giving the public what it ought to know. Pamela J. Shoemaker says in her book, *Gatekeeping*:

> When studying individual gatekeepers, we need to look at theories of thinking, that is, how gatekeepers evaluate and interpret messages; theories of decision making; and characteristics of the individual gatekeeper’s personality, background, values, role conceptions, and experiences (34).
In addition, according to Professor Richard J. Goedkoop, “the key individual at the head of any local news operation is the news director” (27). News directors play significant roles in the news selection process and final decisions. Goedkoop also says that there is never any question as to who is in charge of these major news decisions. News directors, along with the executive producer, assignment editor, and producers of the station’s daily newscast meet to discuss relevant news items at daily meetings, but as Goedkoop points out: “When there is a difference of opinion on coverage or the angle that story would take that could not be resolved by the disputants, the news director would listen to all sides and then make his decision, which would then be carried out” (80).

This statement assumes that it is the news director’s ideologies and perceptions that help form the final decision, but whether those perceptions coincide with what news consumers actually perceive as “quality” news will be discussed later in the thesis. Gaps in perception of news quality between consumers and media executives in Las Vegas will also be discussed later in the thesis. The part gatekeeping plays in the news selection/decision process of what constitutes as “quality news” from media executives’ perspectives will also be discussed in a later section.

The “Gap Model” – Service Quality Model

This thesis utilized an adaptation of the service quality model typically used in marketing studies. In particular, the study utilizes the “gap model,” developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985), which revealed:

A set of key discrepancies or gaps exists regarding executive perceptions of service quality and the tasks associated with service delivery to consumers. These
gaps can be major hurdles in attempting to deliver a service which consumers would perceive as being of high quality (407).

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (hereafter referred to as PZB) developed the gap model in the mid-80s partly because "few academic researchers have attempted to define and model quality because of the difficulties involved in delimiting and measuring the construct" (403). In addition, at the time, few studies had focused on service quality. PZB faced difficulty in defining "quality." Definitions that were available included: "zero defects—doing it right the first time" (Japanese philosophy as quoted in Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, 1985, 204), and "conformance to requirements" (Crosby, 1979 as quoted in Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, 1985, 204), but these definitions described goods quality rather than service quality. In addition, PZB found that service quality literature was scarce, but of the service quality literature that did exist, each suggested three underlying themes:

1. service quality is more difficult for the consumer to evaluate than goods quality,

2. service quality perceptions result from a comparison of consumer expectations with actual performance, and

3. quality evaluations are not made solely on the outcome of a service; they also involve evaluations of the process (italicized in original) of service delivery (404).

The process and final outcome will be of importance to the current study. PZB also confirm the importance of expectations and performance with regard to service quality. Earlier studies described how service quality serves as a measure of how well a service is
delivered in comparison to consumer expectations (Lewis and Booms, 1983; Gronroos, 1982; Smith and Houston, 1982; Churchill and Suprenaut, 1982).

Based on this information, PZB conducted exploratory research on service quality. Their approach was as follows: "specifically, focus group interviews with consumers and in-depth interviews with executives were conducted to develop a conceptual model of service quality" (405). During the in-depth interviews, open-ended questions were presented to fourteen executives. Twelve focus group interviews were conducted with consumers, and the answers from both groups (executives and consumers) were compared. PZB found that gaps existed in the perceptions of executives and consumers when determining service quality. With this information, PZB developed a service quality model. The foundation of the model resulted from the gaps in perceptions of executives and consumers. The ten determinants of service quality found by PZB were:

1. "Reliability," which "involves consistency of performance and dependability," (412)
2. "Responsiveness," which "concerns the willingness or readiness of employees to provide service. It involves timeliness of service," (412)
3. "Competence," which means "possession of the required skills and knowledge to perform the service," (412),
4. "Access," which "involves approachability and ease of contact," (412)
5. "Courtesy," which "involves politeness, respect, consideration, and friendliness of contact personnel," (412)
6. "Communication," which "means keeping customers informed in language they can understand and listening to them," (413)
(7) “Credibility,” which “involves trustworthiness, believability, honesty. It involves having the customer’s best interest at heart,” (413)
(8) “Security,” which “is the freedom from danger, risk, or doubt,” (413)
(9) “Understanding/Knowing the Customer,” which “involves making the effort to understand the customer’s needs,” (413)
(10) “Tangibles,” which “include the physical evidence of the service” (413).

After analyzing the determinants, it becomes evident how some of them might also be applied to local television news and consumer satisfaction.

PZB developed a framework for studying service quality, an area that at the time was underdeveloped. PZB suggested the need “to develop a standard instrument to measure consumer’s service quality perceptions” (415). PZB actually later developed that instrument. In 1988, PZB developed a 22-item instrument called SERVQUAL based on the Gap Model for measuring service quality (Frost and Kumar, 362). SERVQUAL has been utilized to study various services: libraries (Quinn, 1997), airlines (Frost and Kumar, 2000), human services (Selber and Streeter, 2000), and atypical services: assessing an academic major (Krehbiel, McClure, and Pratsini, 1998). Some studies have also used adaptations of the SERVQUAL instrument (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, 1991; Carman, 1990) in which questions were slightly reworded (negative to positive wording of questions), or new items were added. The current study does not utilize the actual SERVQUAL instrument, but rather, adopts the basic procedure of both the original PZB study on service quality (1985) by using in-depth interviews, but rather than utilize focus groups, the current study uses a survey, similar to, but not identical to SERVQUAL.
One of the main reasons the PZB study and an adaptation of the approach was taken in the current study was because of its focus on "quality," a term that is difficult to define. Selber and Streeter point out the importance of this construct to research when they say, "...defining quality based on customer information is critical since the central principle of the quality paradigm is the importance of understanding and utilizing customer data to drive operational and strategic decisions" (2). Quality, as used in this study, is meant to imply a "well-rounded" newscast. More specifically, the Project for Excellence in Journalism says, "A quality newscast covers a wide range of topics while closely reflecting the community, containing balanced stories, focusing on significant issues and ideas, citing multiple sources and quoting authoritative sources," (Project for Excellence in Journalism as cited in the Las Vegas Review Journal, February, 2002).

The importance of using an adaptation of the service quality model is also to show the need for communication between the service provider (each local news station), and the news consumer. The service quality model helps show that importance. Selber and Streeter lend support to the former argument by saying, "Instead of a linear, unidirectional communication process from employee to patient (in the current case news station to news consumer) seeing clients as customers implies that an interactive feedback loop exists linking the customer and the employee together" (3).

The current study attempted to determine the truthfulness of that statement through the research methodology. Selber and Streeter explain how the gap model of service quality is beneficial for research purposes: "First, frameworks that focus on quality provide a holistic view of the organization" (4). By examining both the organization as a whole, and consumers of that organization's product (the nightly..."
newscast), one can determine whether gaps do indeed exist between news directors’ perceptions and consumers’ perceptions of quality newscasts.

The instrument used by PZB and numerous other scholars and organizations is SERVQUAL. SERVQUAL is supposed to measure both customer expectations and customer perceptions of quality (Selber and Streeter, 5). Even though the current study does not utilize the exact SERVQUAL instrument, the same basic procedure used with SERVQUAL research is followed, where the study tests for gaps in perceptions of quality between news directors and news consumers. PZB describe how SERVQUAL’s high reliabilities provide support for its validity. They also say, “The basic conceptual criterion the scale must satisfy is ‘face’ or ‘content’ validity; i.e. Does the scale appear to measure what it is supposed to? Do the scale items capture key facets of the unobservable construct being measured?” (PZB, 1986, 19). For this particular study, the question is “does the survey measure news consumer’s perceptions of quality adequately?” This question is discussed and answered in the methodology section of the study.

The SERVQUAL instrument developed by PZB, while deemed reliable for this study, has also encountered some criticism. Taken from an article written in 1994 by PZB (PZB, 1994, 4), some of the items called to attention regarding SERVQUAL’s use were:

1. “SERVQUAL’s expectations component” (Babakus and Mangold, 1992; Cronin and Taylor, 1992, 1994)
3. “The reliability and validity of SERVQUAL’s difference-score formulation” (Babakus and Boller, 1992; Brown, Churchill, and Peter, 1993)
Item one brought up by Cronin and Taylor concerned the measurement of consumer expectations. Cronin and Taylor believed that it was unnecessary to measure customer expectations in service quality research because service quality does not affect purchase intentions (Cronin and Taylor, 1992). Item two, brought up by Teas, concerned the "operationalization of the service expectation (E) concept" (Teas, 1993). Teas believed the definitions for consumers were ambiguous. Item four, brought up by Carman, concerned the "validity of the expectations measure when consumers do not have 'well-formed' expectations" (Teas, 1993).

In an attempt to respond to some of the issues raised regarding SERVQUAL’s utility, PZB issued an argument in their article “Moving Forward in Service Quality Research: Measuring Different Customer-Expectation Levels, Comparing Alternative Scales, and Examining the Performance-Behavioral Intentions Link” to refute claims made and to “reaffirm the instrument’s psychometric soundness and practical value” (PZB, 1994, 5). This article is in addition to various “response” articles between PZB and some of the researchers listed previously. PZB replicated and refined the SERVQUAL instrument. They changed the original instrument which included two sections—“a 22-item section to measure customers’ service expectations of companies within a specific sector, and a 22-item section to measure customers’ perceptions of a particular company in that sector” (PZB, 1991, 421). They also reworded survey items (negatively worded to positively worded items).

For the purposes of this study, SERVQUAL’s practical value is of most concern. The actual SERVQUAL instrument is not used, but the method is—distributing a survey questionnaire and comparing consumer responses to executive’s interview responses.
Describing the procedures taken by PZB to improve the SERVQUAL instrument aids in showing the confidence PZB have in their instrument and the care with which they guarantee its validity and reliability. PZB’s first step was gathering “advice from a panel of five leading academics with expertise in measurement/scale development” (PZB, 1994, 8). Second, PZB developed three alternative service quality measurement formats (1994, 8). Finally, PZB conducted pretests and refined the questionnaires, increasing the questionnaire’s reliability and validity.

With that in mind, this study proceeds with using the basic concepts of PZB’s research to see whether gaps exist between news directors and news consumers. One of the main reasons the actual SERVQUAL instrument was not used was because as Brian Quinn points out, “The model was originally developed in a commercial environment and may require some adaptation to the non-commercial environment…” (359).

SERVQUAL and service quality are generally used to measure customers’ perceptions of services rendered (Zeithaml et. al, 1990). News production and consumption is not necessarily a service-based industry and may not fall into a strict “service-rendered” type approach. Therefore, an adaptation of SERVQUAL was used. Other non-commercial environments have been studied using an adaptation of this model (libraries—Quinn, 1997; academic majors—Krehbiel, McClure, and Pratsini, 1998), and the reliability and validity of the studies was not affected.

Selber and Streeter say, “The Customer Information Gap may be caused by a number of factors such as: lack of research on customer’s perceptions and expectations; failure to identify multiple customer groups with competing priorities; and professional staff who pay closer attention to professional standards of quality rather than customer-
focused quality standards” (9). Although Selber and Streeter are referring to human services, the same gaps may be caused and exist within news organizations.

Although not traditionally thought of as a “service industry,” news organizations have a daily responsibility to the public of delivering a quality news package to consumers. Shoemaker says, “Gatekeeping is similar to the consumer decision-making process because gatekeepers may be consumers, producers, distributors of messages. They “buy” some messages and reject others; also, some of the bought messages will later be ‘sold!’” (40). Despite the fact that the delivery of news is an atypical service industry process, the marketing methodology is a useful tool to prove that news quality in terms of delivery and story content is of importance to consumers who deserve a “quality” product.

The service quality model is beneficial in discovering consumer perceptions, and according to Christian Gronroos, its utility includes the ability to: “1) define how service quality is perceived by the consumers; and 2) determine in what way service quality is influenced” (36). The latter reason stated by Gronroos is applicable to the gatekeeping portion of the study because the gap model and interviews should provide insight into how news quality is determined by news directors, and influenced by their larger parent corporations. In order to understand the applicability of the marketing-based methodology selected for this study, each step, as well as the hierarchy within a news organization and gatekeeping theory must be clearly defined. The following literature review is divided into sub-sections addressing these theories and ideas.

News Production Process

First, it is important to explain the process news must go through in order to be received by the public. To begin, news production is based on a hierarchy of economic
standing. Based on Joseph Turow's theory of "resource dependence," the premise of which is that "parties seek to avoid depending on other actors while increasing other's reliance upon themselves," John H. McManus developed his own theory of the news production environment. McManus' theory places investors/owners at the top of the hierarchy, followed by the parent corporation. The media firms who deal directly with advertisers for funding are on the next level of the hierarchy, followed by the news department who battles between journalism norms and market norms. The next few tiers of the hierarchy are the organizational culture, the news workers, and the news decisions where the organizational culture integrates the journalism and market norms, to the final participants in the hierarchy—news consumers and the general public (McManus, 22-26).

What occurs as a result of this hierarchy is "news organizations must constantly consider how their reporting will be perceived by their owners and audiences alike" (Levy & Bonilla, 1, 1999). This could lead to biased news reporting to the unsuspecting public, which would then undermine the concept of a democracy. The chain of events that occurs as a result of the hierarchy shapes the final news product to "fit through the gate" created by media corporations.

Gatekeeping Theory

The theory of gatekeeping can be traced back more than 50 years to Kurt Lewin, who coined the term and used it to describe the process involved in decision-making within social groups. Although Lewin's original mention of a "gatekeeper" was in reference to who made the food choice and selection decisions in a population, his concept can be applied to other social situations requiring decision-making. Lewin pointed out the applicability to utilize the gate concept elsewhere: "This holds not only
for food channels but also for the traveling of a news item through certain communication channels in a group...” (Lewin, 145). Lewin’s theory can then be applied to news organizations, consisting of various decision-makers, including corporate owners/investors, editors, and journalists, who make up a hierarchy of power and representation who ultimately decide what news will be disseminated to the public. Those who hold the position of “decision-maker” in an organizational environment are called “gate keepers” (Lewin, 145). Lewin saw gatekeeping as a way to focus on social interactions among groups, specifically studying the gatekeeper’s psychology and ideology in order to recognize the hierarchy that is created.

The hierarchy created within the news production environment is a direct result of gatekeeping. Gatekeeping, according to Pamela J. Shoemaker, “is the process by which the billions of messages that are available in the world get cut down and transformed into the hundreds of messages that reach a given person on a given day” (1). In addition, Shoemaker says gatekeeping can be examined more closely “as the process of reconstructing the essential framework of an event and turning it into news” (1). The gatekeeping process does not involve a single “gatekeeper” as David Manning White’s “The Gate Keeper” suggests (384). Clayman and Reisner say, “Gatekeeping is often a group effort, negotiated via specific discursive and interactional practices by participants who are accountable to collegial or social relationships” (197). Shoemaker claims, “Gatekeeping also can be affected by the ideology of the social system in which the gatekeepers exist” (69). That social system consists of elites who control the media, or what has led to corporate conglomeration.

Local television stations are enmeshed in group ownerships, or have corporate parents. According to Richard J. Goedkoop, the larger group or corporation offers great
economies to local stations, but at the same time, group ownership presents a potential problem of more control, or gatekeeping. "Major decisions cannot be made by the station alone; they have to be approved by the group. This expansion of ownership may possibly mean a greater standardization of the format and style of a newscast within a particular group" (16). If corporate parents hold control over their local news station's news decisions, that may become apparent during interviews to be conducted with news directors. According to Margaret D. LeCompte and Jean J. Schensul, "What individuals or organizations say, do, or believe can never be understood completely without understanding the social, political, cultural, economic kinship, and even personal matrices in which they are embedded" (19).

Gatekeeping and the process involved in the selection of news have been debated for many years. Media critics and scholars such as Ben Bagdikian, Noam Chomsky, and Edward Herman argue that the selection process is largely based on corporate funding and interests (Bagdikian, 16-17, 39,42,45; Herman &Chomsky, 1, 4-5, 12-14, 16-18). Stanley Cohen and Jock Young, editors of The Manufacture of News (17), define two models describing the selection process of news. The first model is a "Market Model" of the media, which "is between on one hand a social responsibility school of thought, which sees the roles of the professional journalist and the 'quality' media as public educators and, on the other, the 'libertarians,' who would give the public what it is supposed to want" (17). The other, the "Manipulative Model," portrays what most critics consider closer to the truth: "Here the media and journalists are seen as acting directly in the interest of the owners, whose interests in turn are quite opposed to the public at large and to any true presentation of events in the world" (Cohen and Young, 17).
The thought of media concerned only with informing the public through the delivery of quality news is utopian. This study may actually reveal that the Manipulative Model is used as a basis in the construction of local television news rather than the Market Model, which focuses on the quality of news delivered to the public.

Theoretical Background

Gatekeeping research has evolved throughout the years from David Manning Whites' sole "Mr. Gates" to a myriad of individuals involved in the gatekeeping process. According to Pamela Shoemaker, "The expansion of gatekeeping studies to multiple levels of analysis has opened the door for the study of the most interesting of Lewin's concepts—the forces surrounding each gate" (Shoemaker in Media Gatekeeping, 86). Although it is difficult to determine what research method will best get at the heart of what, who, and how news is selected, a combination of methods was regarded as the best way to gather pertinent data.

For example, a survey conducted of American newspaper editors by Chang and Lee (1992) revealed that "the important forces around the gates were the characteristics of the gatekeepers themselves" (Shoemaker in Media Gatekeeping, 86). Similarly, Shoemaker says, in a study conducted by Berkowitz, interviews and observation revealed that "television gatekeepers claimed to make selection decisions based on their 'instincts' about what makes a good news program" (Shoemaker in Media Gatekeeping, 86). This study had the potential to reveal the same characteristics through the interviews with news directors, but also to reveal, through surveys, that news directors' decisions and "instincts" may not always coincide with what consumers consider quality news. In fact,
the study had the potential to reveal that perceptions and expectations of both news
directors and news consumers are substantially different.

The Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry model of service quality was an effective
model of analysis to study news quality perceptions. The use of a case study to
demonstrate the applicability of this particular methodology as it applies to gatekeeping
research also added a new perspective to past gatekeeping research and methods of doing
so. In addition, the service quality model helped reveal the importance of consumer
expectations and the outcomes of those expectations after the news selection process by
news directors has taken place. According to Christian Gronroos, “the consumer is
interested not only in what he receives as an outcome of the production process, but in
the process itself” (38). This type of quality dimension can be called “functional quality”
(Gronroos, 38). Various methods were used to assess perceptions of quality, and in the
next section, each method will be explained.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

"Multiple methods help ensure a valid and reliable study" (Zimmerman and Muraski, 199). Therefore, this study utilized various methods of data generation, including surveys and interviews to test practical theories, to ensure a reliable outcome and strong validity. A multiple case study approach was followed, which, according to Zimmerman and Muraski, is one which "explores two or more similar individuals, units, organizations, or groups" (197). Las Vegas Valley local television news organizations served as the case study sample. According to Jacques Hamel, "The case study takes shape as part of an inductive approach. In this approach, the empirical details that constitute the object under study are considered in the light of the remarks made in context" (16). It is then up to the researcher to determine what those remarks mean, or symbolize, with regard to the research questions. Hamel says, "This will provide an understanding of the personal experiences of these actors" (17). Through those personal experiences, this study intended to discover the ideologies followed by news directors in order to assess the level of gatekeeping followed by each news organization.

Based on Yin's description of general analytic strategies for data analysis— theoretical and descriptive approaches—the theoretical approach was chosen for this study (Yin, 1989, as cited in Zimmerman and Muraski, 200). The theoretical approach
was selected because, as Yin points out, "the theory helps you develop your research question, and the research question clearly directs the data analysis and interpretation—i.e., it puts limits on the data and subsequent interpretation" (Yin as cited in Zimmerman and Muraski, 200)

The approach or theory for this thesis is similar to the PZB study discussed earlier, which investigated service quality assessed through focus groups and in-depth interviews. This study utilized both surveys and interviews to assess quality, but rather than looking at service quality in the service industry, the study looked at the quality of news as perceived by consumers and news directors in the Las Vegas valley. The PZB study discovered a "gap model of service quality" in which consumers and executives of various service industries held differing perceptions of what constituted as "quality service." In an attempt to construct a general model of service quality, the study revealed "A set of key discrepancies or gaps exist regarding executive perceptions of service quality and the tasks associated with service delivery to consumers" (407).

These same types of gaps could also exist in perceptions of news quality. As a way to test perception differences among news directors and the public, the study utilized a similar, but not identical version of the service quality gap model to reveal its applicability to a different type of "service"—the delivery of news. No past gatekeeping research has been done using a marketing or service quality model. This study will open doors for future research, utilizing an atypical model to study communication and gatekeeping within organizations. Previous research has mainly focused on content analysis, specifically focusing on story type, rather than consumer perceptions of quality as a measure.
Instrument

Fifteen-minute telephone interviews were conducted with news directors. Approximately thirteen questions were presented to the news directors (see Appendices III-V). The primary researcher and an additional analyst developed the interview questions. The questions attempted to discover a definition of a "quality" newscast from news directors, as a way to compare what news consumers consider to be a "quality" newscast. After the interviews were conducted and the surveys distributed, the responses were used to determine whether gaps in perceptions of quality exist.

Respondents were selected from the population of students attending the University of Nevada, Las Vegas based on age. Respondents who participated in the surveys were between the ages of 18 and 34. Respondents completed a 16-question survey to gauge their perceptions of quality. Respondents were asked to select the response that best described their opinion (see Appendix I). Respondents rated their selections along a Likert-like scale, using the following continuum: strongly agree (=5), agree (=4), undecided (=3), disagree (=2), strongly disagree (=1). One question (10) asked respondents to rate the biggest/smallest challenges faced by local television stations when developing a newscast. The last four questions of the survey asked respondents to complete demographic information such as age, major, and rank in school.

All data was collected within a two-week period. The data was first checked for inaccuracies in responses. Inappropriately answered questions were eliminated, and undetermined responses were entered as (=9). The mean and standard deviation were used as guides to "score" respondent's responses, and also to compare news consumer responses to news director responses. The reliability of the survey instrument (questions 1-9) was .5452 (Cronbach's Alpha). This researcher realized that the reliability of the
survey instrument was low, but because this is exploratory research, it was deemed acceptable for this study. The measurement issue will be discussed further in the limitations section of the study.

By using interviews and surveys this thesis tested whether the conceptual model of service quality applied in the PZB study could be projected to an atypical service industry—the media, and its product—news quality.

Data

The public relies on news organizations to keep them updated on events occurring around the world, meaning the media plays an important role in establishing public opinion. In addition, corporate and government leaders rely on the media to serve the public as well. Sherry Devereaux Ferguson, says in her book, Mastering the Public Opinion Challenge, “leaders seek out the best prophets” (239) to learn what the public wants and needs. Among those prophets, she says, are “journalists who appear to be acting as opinion leaders for the pack” (239). The “prophets” in this study are the various news directors in the Las Vegas Valley.

Interviews were conducted with news directors in order to gain information regarding the news organizations’ news selection decisions based upon news quality as defined by news directors (See Appendix II). The study had the potential to show that news directors’ news decisions on the quality of news disbursed to the public are affected by decisions made at the corporate level, rather than through an assessment of what news consumers consider to be “quality” news. The news hierarchy discussed earlier stems from corporate conglomeration, and directly promotes gatekeeping as a basis for news decisions. According to Paul M. Hirsch in Studying Elites Using Qualitative Methods,
“Reports from different levels of organization and society regularly find differences in
the attitudes, understandings, and experiences of respondents occupying positions at each
of these (respective) levels” (75).

Interviews helped establish the ideologies followed by news directors and
determined whether gatekeeping processes exist or occur within news production and
selection at local television stations. Discussing news quality decisions with news
directors also provided the opportunity to understand what relationships exist within the
news production hierarchy, and how those relationships function to ultimately shape the
news in terms of quality control.

Interviews can be a valuable source of information gathering. According to
Donald E. Zimmerman and Michel Lynn Muraski, the interviewer must begin by
developing “a working knowledge” of the topic being studied (93) and “develop a
questioning attitude” (94). Interviews are intended to make people’s experiences a reality
to those who may not otherwise have the opportunity to experience a certain situation.
Professor Irving Seidman, in his book Interviewing as Qualitative Research says,
“Interviewing provides access to the context of people’s behavior and thereby provides a
way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior” (4). The interviews for
this thesis provided insight into whether news decisions are as objective as they are
supposed to be. The interviews also revealed whether quality is defined by subjective
decisions, and whether those subjective decisions are based upon the news director’s
standards, or corporate standards.

Seidman says that a researcher can examine peoples’ experiences through
observation, experimentation, or questionnaires, but “if the researcher’s goal, however, is
to understand the meaning people involved in education (for example) make of their
experience, then interviewing provides a necessary, if not always completely sufficient, avenue of inquiry" (5). The deciding factor for using interviewing as a research technique is ultimately what the researcher's purpose is. In this particular case, the goal was to discover how news directors assess quality, and the most appropriate method of achieving an answer was through interviews (See Appendix II). The data collection also involves a second procedure—survey distribution.

Surveys were selected primarily because of their ability to obtain large amounts of data from a small sample, although small amounts of data can also be collected from a large sample (Alreck and Settle, 1985). In addition, when using surveys, it is the researcher is who is held responsible for the reliability and validity of the study. The researcher constructs questions for the study that fit the specific criteria of the area being studied. Alreck and Settle say, "The reliability and validity of survey results depend on the way that every aspect of the survey is planned and executed, but the questions that are addressed to the respondents are the most essential component" (97). This would mean that all the questions must be formulated in a manner that is clear, specific, and that gets to the point of the main research objectives.

Don A. Dillman says "the first step in writing a question is to identify exactly what kind of information is desired from survey respondents" (80). In addition, Dillman says there are different types of information that may be gathered through survey questions:

1. What people say they want: their attitudes
2. What people think is true: their beliefs
3. What people do: their behavior
4. What people are: their attributes
The survey developed for this study utilized questions about subject’s attitudes toward the role of local television stations, questions about subject’s beliefs concerning the challenges facing local news stations, questions about subject’s behavior (i.e. what local television station they predominantly watch), and questions about subject’s attributes (i.e. age, gender, class rank) (See Appendix I). Dillman says while all four question types are not always necessary, it is important to ensure that questions do actually measure the information sought (Dillman, 86).

Another important decision that must be made regarding the construction of survey questions is the question structure. Four main structure types have been identified: (1) Open-ended, which means no answer choices are provided, (2) Close-ended, which means answers are provided, but placed on a continuum or scale, (3) Close-ended with unordered response choices, meaning answers are provided, but not on a continuum or gradation, and (4) Partially close-ended, meaning answer choices are provided, but respondents are given the opportunity to provide an answer of their own (Dillman, 1978, 87). For this particular study, the majority of the survey questions were close-ended with ordered responses. However, three of the survey questions were close-ended with nonordered responses, two questions were open-ended, and one question was partially close-ended. The majority of questions were close-ended with ordered responses because as Dillman points out, “Questions with ordered choices tend to be quite specific, restricting respondents to thinking about a very limited aspect of life in a very limited way” (89). This coincides with what Alreck and Settle say is appropriate. This question structure also avoids relying on respondent’s recall skills, which can sometimes be a difficult procedure. In addition, Dillman says a close-ended question
with ordered answer choices “uses the information supplied by respondents to determine the extent to which each respondent differs from every other one. Thus responses to such questions are well suited for many forms of sophisticated analyses (e.g. regression analysis)” (89).

The questions for this particular survey were generated after analyzing the news director’s responses to interview questions concerning news quality. Each answer from the interview portion of the research was studied to reveal commonalities between news director responses. From those responses, survey questions were generated to gauge news consumer’s perceptions on the same issues presented to news directors. The questions developed and included in the survey met Alreck and Settle’s criteria for survey construction: focus, brevity, and clarity (Alreck and Settles, 98-100). They say, “Every question on a questionnaire should focus directly on a single, specific issue or topic” (98). This was performed in the current study by having the researcher develop the questions and then discussing the questions with experts of survey research to ensure that each question dealt only with a single topic and avoided abstractions. This process helped develop both face and content validity. The survey questions measured concepts the researcher deemed relevant because they essentially arose from the news directors who were interviewed. Although the questions hold more face than content validity, both types of validity applied to the survey.

Floyd J. Fowler Jr. says in his book, Survey Research Methods, “How well a sample represents a population depends on the sample frame, the sample size, and the specific design of the selection procedures” (10). The sample for this particular study consisted of approximately 235 University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) students between the ages of 18 and 34. The target sample for this study was news consumers of
Las Vegas local television news, which means the sample of UNLV students may accurately define what is meant as a “local news consumer” for this study. Fowler also says the sample frame allows “some individuals a chance to be included in the sample while excluding others” (11). The responses of those participants who either do not watch local television news, or who do not select a predominant local television station, were set aside and will not be compared to a particular news director’s responses.

One of the questions on the survey determined the subject’s ability to participate (See Appendix I). The list for this study was developed by examining the UNLV course catalog as a way to reach a variety of course subjects, and in turn, a variety of students. Fowler says, “Sampling and analyzing data from a sample can be fairly straightforward if a good list is used as a sampling frame, if a simple random or systematic sampling scheme is used, and if all respondents are selected at the same rate” (37). The limitation of the sample selection will be discussed in the limitations section of the study.

Human Subjects Considerations

Both survey research and interviewing implicate human subjects who must be taken into consideration through a Human Subjects Protocol. This study was approved by the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects before the study began. No subject involved in the study was subjected to physical, psychological, social, or legal risks. The subjects consisted of adults (18 and above), including news directors of various news organizations, and selected students attending the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. All subjects were asked to sign an informed consent (See Appendix VI) acknowledging their participation in either survey research or interviews.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Subjects

Two hundred thirty-five subjects completed the surveys distributed. Of the respondents surveyed, 85 (36.2%) were male, and 149 (63.4%) were female (see Appendix XI). The average age of the respondents surveyed was 24.60 years (SD = 7.39). Of those surveyed, 53.9% of subjects were Communication majors, 21.5% were Business and Hotel majors, 11.5% were Engineering, Biological, and Health science majors, 8.3% were social science majors, 2.9% were Education majors, 1.6% were undecided, and .4% were not seeking a degree. According to rank in class demographics, 2.6% of the respondents were Freshman, 16.6% were Sophomores, 25.1% were Juniors, 48.9% were Seniors, 6.4% were Graduate students, and .4% listed no rank (see Appendix XII). Demographic variables were cross-tabulated with the survey items. No significant associations were found between demographic characteristics of subjects and the survey.

Response Comparison Between All Stations, All Consumers

Next, responses of news consumers to survey questions were compared with the responses of news directors to interview questions. Station C’s news director refused to participate in the study, therefore responses from news directors of Station A, B, and D
will be discussed. Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of each question for all respondents. Appendices III-V show the responses news directors gave to the interview questions that were used to formulate the survey questionnaire. News director responses were not subject to quantitative analysis. Therefore, the comparison between news consumer responses and news director responses was made critically.

Table 1  News consumer responses to survey questions (Mean and Std. Deviation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) local news should inform</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>.598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) stations should improve community</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>.853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) local news should educate</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>.986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) news directors have the final say about content of broadcast</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>.917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) advertisers have control over what gets broadcast</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) local news provides fair news summary</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) tv stations have accurate sense of community needs</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>.926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) tv news stations use careful judgement in inclusion of stories</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>.962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) local news is well-researched</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10) which local tv news do usually watch?</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When news directors were asked the question: “At the end of a 30-minute newscast, what do you expect your viewers to walk away with?” all news directors responded by saying new information about what is going on their community/town (see
Appendices III-V). The mean response to the question "local news should inform," (derived from news director's responses to the former question) posed to consumers had a mean of 4.61 (SD = .598), showing that news consumers generally agree that news stations should inform their audiences about occurrences in their communities.

When asked whether news stations should improve the community, the mean for news consumer's responses was 4.23 (SD = .853). This question was developed when news directors were asked about the mission statement of their news organization. News directors varied slightly in responses. News Director B directly mentioned that the mission statement reflected what stories are best suited for the community (see Appendix VIII for mission statement). News Director A mentioned quality customer service being an important part of the mission statement (see Appendix VII for mission statement). News Director D responded by saying the mission statement for that news organization was to be a prime news and information source (see Appendix X for mission statement). News Director B's response seemed to be the only major commitment to community.

When asked whether local news should educate the public, news consumers responded with a mean of 3.96 (SD = .986). Respondents were undecided about TV stations educating the public. This particular question was developed from the response gained from question five posed to news directors: "At the end of a 30-minute newscast, what do you expect your viewers to walk away with?" News Director B said, "Here's what's happening in our town today..." News director D said, "It differs by newscast..." News Director A responded by saying, "One piece of information they didn't know..." News Directors A and B seemed to agree with the educational role of local TV news. News Director D was not as clear in the response given.
When asked whether they thought news directors have the final say about the content of the broadcast, news consumers responded with a mean of 3.49 (SD = .917), showing that they were undecided about this issue. All news directors responded similarly to this question—news directors have the final say about what gets broadcast. Due to the unexpected departure of one news director from Station A, the acting news director (executive producer) completed the interview questions, and as such, the response to that particular question was the executive producer.

When subjects were asked whether they thought advertisers had control over what gets broadcast, a mean of 3.31 (SD = 1.05) was the result. News consumers felt unsure about whether advertisers had control over news content. When news directors were asked whether advertisers had control over the broadcast, the response was unanimous—advertisers have no control over what gets broadcast.

When asked whether they felt local news provided a fair summary of news, subjects responded with a mean of 3.21 (SD = 1.08). Again, news consumers were uncertain. This particular survey question arose from the interview question “What percentage of stories are eliminated from the nightly newscast?” posed to news directors. News Directors D and B both said it depends on time constraints. News Director A said, “More than you think.”

When asked whether news directors have an accurate sense of the community’s needs, respondents provided a mean of 3.05 (SD = .926), meaning they were unsure about whether local television stations have an accurate sense of the community’s needs. According to the responses news directors provided for the question “What steps are taken to ensure that the needs of news consumers are met by your nightly newscast?” upon which the survey question was based, News Directors A and B said every member
of the news team is involved in the selection process. News Director D said doing research to reaffirm the audiences' concerns is one of the main steps taken by that particular news organization.

When respondents were asked whether TV stations used careful judgement about what stories to include/exclude, respondents provided a mean of 2.99 (SD = 9.62), showing they disagreed. When news directors were asked “How is the decision of what stories to include/exclude made?” News Directors A and B said it was through a communication process with members of the news organization. News Director D said the selection was based on newsworthiness.

When asked whether they thought local television news stories were well researched, news consumers provided a mean of 2.95 (SD = 1.02) showing that news consumers generally disagreed with this statement. This survey question was developed when news directors provided a response to the question “What steps are taken to ensure that the needs of news consumers are met by your nightly newscast?” News Directors A and B said one of the main steps is through an open dialogue with members of the news organization. News Director D said research of stories by members of the news staff was the main step taken to ensure the audience that the station is doing its job (see Appendices III-V).

When asked to rank on a scale of 1-4 the biggest/smallest challenges in putting together a newscast, respondents provided a mean of 1.53 (SD = .847) for the challenge of “enough time to prepare a newscast” (see Table 6). News directors did not mention time as a being a major barrier/challenge to their newscast. When asked about “supportive management” being a challenge to newscasts, respondents provided a mean of 2.44 (SD = .958) (see Table 6), ranking supportive management as a big challenge to
newscasts. News directors did not mention supportive/unsupportive management as a barrier or challenge to their newscast. News consumers provided a mean of 2.93 (SD = .984) for the challenge response “number of newscasts” (see Table 6). The news directors did not mention “number of newscasts” as one of their major barriers/challenges to accomplishing their goals with their newscasts. When asked to rank the challenge response “not enough staff” respondents provided a mean of 3.06 (SD = .996) (see Table 6). News Directors B and D said staff challenges were the number one barrier in preparing a newscast. News Director A said the focus rests on getting the product out.

Table 6  News consumer responses to challenge question

*Ranked from biggest challenge (1) to smallest challenge (4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>challenge of time</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>.847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>getting supportive management</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>.958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of newscasts as a challenge</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>importance of having enough staff</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>.996</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Station A Consumer Responses

Table 2 lists the responses of news consumers who predominantly watch Station A. The table is organized to show the responses with the highest mean, showing that subjects either highly agreed or agreed to that particular survey question. Of importance to this study are the top three rated responses (the most agreeable), and the bottom three
responses (the most disagreeable). The responses provided by Station A news consumers were then compared with News Director A's responses to test for gaps in perceptions.

According to news consumers who predominantly watch Station A, "local news should inform," (MEAN = 4.48, SD = .731) "local television stations should improve the community," (MEAN = 4.07, SD = .873) and "local news should educate" (MEAN = 3.77, SD = 1.03) were rated as the most agreeable responses to what news stations should do or provide. According to the same respondents, the questions "TV stations have an accurate sense of the community’s needs" (MEAN = 3.09, SD = .884), "TV news stations use careful judgement in the inclusion of stories" (MEAN = 2.98, SD = .849), and "local news is well-researched," (MEAN = 2.84, SD = .939) were the three questions respondents either disagreed with, or were undecided about.
Table 2  Station A news consumer responses to survey questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) local news should inform</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>.731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) stations should improve community</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>.873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) local news should educate</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) news directors have the final say about content of broadcast</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>.902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) advertisers have control over what gets broadcast</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>.831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) local news provides fair news summary</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) tv stations have accurate sense of community needs</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>.884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) tv news stations use careful judgement in inclusion of stories</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>.849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) local news is well-researched</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>.939</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the responses provided by News Director A, both news consumers of Station A and the News Director of Station A agree that local TV news should inform, educate, and improve the community. News Director A felt strongly about Station A’s community-mindedness, whereas Station A news consumers generally felt undecided about their station having an accurate sense of the community’s needs. News Director A’s response to question ten of the interview questions (see Appendix III) signified the importance of open lines of communication and discussion when deciding what to include/exclude in stories. News consumers of Station A were either undecided or disagreed that news stations use careful judgement in the selection process (See Table 2). News Director A’s response to question eight of the interview questions (see Appendix
C) again mentioned open communication lines and getting the entire staff involved in order to meet consumer needs. Station A news consumers generally disagreed with the statement “local news is well researched” (see Table 2).

When asked to rank the biggest challenges and smallest challenges (1 being the biggest, 4 being the smallest) to local television news stations, Station A news consumers responded by saying “time constraints” are the biggest challenges faced by news stations (see Table 7). The second biggest challenge, according to news consumers was “supportive management,” or lack thereof (see Table 7). The third biggest challenge, according to news consumers was the “number of newscasts” a station has (see Table 7), and the smallest challenge, according to news consumers was the “importance of having enough staff” (see Table 7). News Director A did not cite lack of staff as the main challenge facing Station A (see Appendix III), but did list the internalization of the newsroom as the biggest challenge to Station A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>challenge of time</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>.966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>getting supportive management</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>.969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of newscasts as a challenge</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>importance of having enough staff</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7  Station A News consumer responses to challenge question

*Ranked by biggest challenge (1) to smallest challenge (4)
Station B Consumer Responses

Table 3 lists the responses provided by news consumers of Station B, arranged similarly to Table 2, placing the highest means at the top of the table, and the lowest means at the bottom of the table. The order of the questions changed, as would be expected, because these are different consumers who hold different opinions than those who watch Station A. According to Station B news consumers, the top three rated responses were “local news should inform,” (MEAN = 4.56, SD = .547) “stations should improve the community,” (MEAN = 4.18, SD = .833), and “local news should educate” (MEAN = 3.90, SD = .964) (see Table 3). These responses follow in accordance with Station A news consumers. Station B news consumers rated the bottom three responses as “local news is well-researched,” (MEAN = 3.13, SD = .953) “TV stations have an accurate sense of the community’s needs,” (MEAN = 3.11, SD = .832) and “TV news stations use careful judgement in inclusion of stories” (MEAN = 2.99, SD = .951) (see Table 3). These responses are again similar to Station A news consumer’s responses, but the order of importance is ranked differently.

According to News Director B, when asked question six of the interview questions (see Appendix IV), the response was to “have all the stories of the day in a way the viewer can understand.” This response parallels with Station B news consumer responses. When asked question one during the interview, News Director B responded by saying “Stories that are best for the community” (see Appendix IV). This response also coincides with Station B news consumer responses. When asked question five, News Director B responded by saying, “Here’s what’s happening in our town today.” This response also coincides with Station B news consumer responses.
Table 3  Station B news consumer responses to survey questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) local news should inform</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>.547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) stations should improve community</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>.833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) local news should educate</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>.964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) news directors have the final say about content of broadcast</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>.863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) advertisers have control over what gets broadcast</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>.948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) local news provides fair news summary</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>.963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) local news is well-researched</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>.953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) TV stations have accurate sense of community needs</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>.832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) TV news stations use careful judgement in inclusion of stories</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>.936</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked question eight, News Director B did not mention “research,” but did mention editorial meetings as a way to narrow down potential stories (see Appendix IV). Station B news consumers were generally undecided about the question “local television news is well-researched” (MEAN = 3.13, SD = .953) (see Table 3). Station B news consumers were also generally undecided about the question “TV news stations have an accurate sense of community needs” (MEAN = 3.11, SD = .832) (see Table 3). The lowest ranked response by Station B news consumers was “TV news stations use careful judgement in the inclusion of stories” (MEAN = 2.99, SD = .936) (see Table 3). News Director B said the decision of what to include/exclude in the newscast is the result of an
editorial meeting (see Appendix IV). News consumers disagreed that careful judgement was used in this process (see Table 3).

When asked to rank the biggest and smallest challenges faced by local television news stations on a scale of 1-4 (1 being the biggest challenge, 4 the smallest), Station B news consumers ranked the challenge of "time" as the biggest challenge facing local TV stations (MEAN = 1.40, SD = .769) (see Table 8). News consumers ranked "getting supportive management" (MEAN = 2.60, SD = .873) as the second largest challenge to local news stations, the "number of newscasts" (MEAN = 2.88, SD = 1.02) as the third largest challenge, and "the importance of having enough staff" (MEAN = 3.09, SD = .930) as the smallest challenge facing local television stations (see Table 8). News Director B cited "not enough staff" as the main challenge facing Station B (see Appendix IV).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>challenge of time</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>.769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>getting supportive management</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>.873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of newscasts as a challenge</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>importance of having enough staff</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>.930</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Station C Consumer Responses

Table 4 provides the responses from news consumers of Station C.

Unfortunately, due to the unwillingness of News Director C to participate in the interview portion of the research, there is no way to compare Station C’s news consumer responses to that particular news director’s responses. An examination of the top three rated responses showed that the same issues are as important to news consumers of Station C as the other three station’s news consumers. They said: “local news should inform” (MEAN = 4.74, SD = .446), “local news should educate” (MEAN = 4.21, SD = .935), and “stations should improve the community” (MEAN = 4.13, SD = 1.09).

Table 4  Station C news consumer responses to survey questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) local news should inform</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>.446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) local news should educate</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>.935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) stations should improve community</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) news directors have the final say about content of broadcast</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>.904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) advertisers have control over what gets broadcast</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) local news provides fair news summary</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) local news is well-researched</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) tv stations have accurate sense of community needs</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>.956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) tv news stations use careful judgement in inclusion of stories</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>.959</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An examination of the lowest ranked responses provided by news consumers of Station C shows that they are also undecided or disagree on the same issues as the other news station consumers (see Table 4). The bottom three responses were: “local news is well researched” (MEAN = 3.03, SD = 1.10), “TV stations have an accurate sense of community needs” (MEAN = 3.00, SD = .956), and “TV news stations use careful judgement in the inclusion of stories” (MEAN = 3.00, SD = .959).

When asked to rank the biggest/smallest challenges faced by local news stations, Station C consumers ranked the biggest challenge as “challenge of time” (MEAN = 1.60, SD = .774), “getting supportive management” next (MEAN = 2.14, SD = .990), then “importance of having enough staff” (MEAN = 3.03, SD = 1.11), and finally, “number of newscasts as a challenge” (MEAN = 3.24, SD = .902) (see Table 9).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>challenge of time</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>.774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>getting supportive management</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>.990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>importance of having enough staff</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of newscasts as a challenge</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>.902</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9 Station C news consumer responses to challenge question

*Ranked from biggest challenge (1) to smallest challenge (4)
Station D Consumer Responses

Table 5 provides the responses from news consumers of Station D. According to Station D news consumers, the top three rated responses came from the following questions: "local news should inform," (MEAN = 4.69, SD = .668), "stations should improve the community," (MEAN = 4.44, SD = .691), and "local news should educate" (MEAN = 4.00, SD = 1.06) (see Table 5). These results are identical to Stations A and B news consumer responses, and slightly different in terms of order, from Station C news consumer responses (see Tables 2, 3, 4).

When asked question six of the interview questions, News Director D responded by saying a quality newscast is "one that deals with all of the issues" (see Appendix V). This is in accordance with Station D news consumer responses. When asked question one of the interview questions, ("What is the mission statement for your television station?") News Director D did not respond similarly to news consumers of Station D (see Appendix V). When asked question five of the interview questions, News Director D responded by saying "we want to make sure they’ve (viewers) received a newscast with high standards that covers all the news" (see Appendix V). This response is in accordance with news consumer’s responses to a similar question. News Director D’s response to question eight indicated that one of the steps taken to ensure consumer needs are being met is through the research of stories by news staff (see Appendix V). News consumers of Station D were generally undecided about whether or not TV stations have an accurate sense of the community’s needs, and disagreed that local TV news is well-researched (see Table 5).
Table 5  Station D news consumer responses to survey questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) local news should inform</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>.668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) stations should improve community</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>.691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) local news should educate</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) news directors have the final say about content of broadcast</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>.966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) advertisers have control over what gets broadcast</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) local news provides fair news summary</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>.899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) tv stations have accurate sense of community needs</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) tv news stations use careful judgement in inclusion of stories</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>.984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) local news is well-researched</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These responses show a difference in perception between the news director and news consumer. When asked question ten of the interview questions, News Director D responded by saying “Newsworthiness” was the deciding factor in what stories to include/exclude in a newscast (see Appendix V). News consumers of Station D were undecided about whether news stations use careful judgement in the inclusion of news stories (MEAN = 3.11, SD = .984) (see Table 5).

When asked to rank the biggest and smallest challenges facing local television stations (1-4), Station D news consumers ranked the “challenge of time” (MEAN = 1.46, SD = .706) as the biggest challenge facing local television stations (see Table 10). News consumers ranked “getting supportive management” (MEAN = 2.34, SD = .981) as the
second largest challenge, "the importance of having enough staff" (MEAN = 3.04, SD = .999) as the third largest challenge, and the "number of newscasts" (MEAN = 3.06, SD = .947) as the smallest challenge facing local television stations (see Table 10). According to News Director D, the biggest challenge facing Station D is "not enough staff" (see Appendix V).

Table 10  Station D news consumer responses to challenge question

*Ranked from biggest challenge (1) to smallest challenge (4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>challenge of time</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>.706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>getting supportive management</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>.981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>importance of having enough staff</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>.999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of newscasts as a challenge</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>.947</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Although the results of this study are preliminary, given the small sample size (235 subjects), some general conclusions can be made. The first research question "Do gaps in perceptions of quality exist between news directors and news consumers" can be answered absolutely. Gaps in perceptions of news quality do exist between news directors and news consumers. There is strong agreement between news directors and news consumers that local television news "should inform, educate, and improve the community." However, major gaps exist between the perceptions of quality of local news as defined by consumers and news directors.

Generally speaking, when examining the responses of all news consumers, the three major responses with which news consumers disagreed were: "TV stations have an accurate sense of community needs," "TV news stations use careful judgement in the inclusion of stories," and "local news is well-researched" (see Table 1). While respondents were undecided about local news stations having an accurate sense of the community's needs, news directors felt that their stations had a keen sense of the needs of the community. Hence, the first gap in perceptions emerges: "New directors feel they possess a strong sense of the community's needs, but news consumers do not agree that news directors have an accurate sense of the community's needs." Two of the news directors suggested editorial meetings as a method of developing story ideas. This response signifies that the ideologies of those within the news organization are being
followed, but perhaps a true sense of community needs is lacking and consumer needs are not being met. Since respondents are undecided about this question, perhaps news stations need to make clearer attempts to discover what the needs of consumers really are.

The second major discrepancy between news consumer responses and news director responses was the response to the question "TV news stations use careful judgement in the inclusion of stories." Two of the news directors responded by saying it was editorial meetings, and finally the news director who made the final decisions about what to include/exclude in a newscast. The third news director indicated that discussing potential items with fellow employees made the final decision. News consumers disagreed when presented with the same statement. Again, another gap in perceptions of news quality exists: "News directors believe careful judgement is used when deciding what to include/exclude in newscasts, but news consumers do not agree."

The third major discrepancy between news consumers and news directors was the response to the question "local news is well researched." News consumers disagreed that local news is well researched. One news director directly mentioned research of stories by news staff as a step taken to ensure that consumer needs are met. A third gap emerges as a result of these responses: "News directors believe their newscasts are well-researched, but news consumers do not agree that local news is well-researched."

When examining responses of individual stations and their respective viewers, the same themes emerged. Each of the three issues which raised the most disagreement for all consumers were the three issues consumers of each individual station (Station A, B, C, D) were concerned with. The only difference was the order of the responses. News Stations A and D consumers both responded to the question "local news is well-researched" as the most disagreeable statement presented. Stations B and C consumers
responded to the question "TV stations use careful judgement in the inclusion of stories" as the most disagreeable statement presented. Similarly, news consumers of Stations A and D ranked the second most disagreeable response as "TV stations use careful judgement in the inclusion of stories," whereas news consumers of Stations B and C ranked the response "TV stations have an accurate sense of the community needs" as the second most disagreeable response. News consumers of Stations A and D ranked the third most disagreeable response as "TV stations have an accurate sense of community needs." News consumers of Stations B and C ranked "local news is well researched" as the third most disagreeable response.

Originally this researcher thought that the differences/similarities in order of responses between news station consumers could have been related to the age of viewers. After cross-tabulating demographics with responses, that was not the case. Station A consumers and Station D consumers responded similarly, but the average age of Station A consumers was 22.3 years (SD = 3.82), whereas the average age of Station D consumers was 25.3 years (SD = 9.97). The same comparison was made between Station B and Station C consumers, who also had similar responses. Again, age seemed to play no part in the selection of responses. The average age of Station B consumers was 24.0 years (SD = 5.92), whereas the average age of Station C consumers was 27.1 years (SD = 8.99).

Next, the variable "gender" was analyzed to determine whether any relationship existed between news consumers. After cross-tabulating "gender" with responses, there was no association. According to the results, 34.1% of Station A's viewers were males, and 65.9% were female. Station D's consumers were 44.4% male and 55.6% female. No relationship between gender and responses is evident. According to the results, 28.0% of...
Station B's consumers were male, and 70.7% were female. Station C's consumers were 42.1% male, and 57.9% female. Again, no significant relationship between gender and response is evident.

Gatekeeping Results

One of the main items of analysis in this study was the issue of gatekeeping within local television news organizations. Research question two was developed to test for gatekeeping practices within news organizations: “Do news directors serve as the gatekeepers within the news organizations?” Before the study began, this researcher believed that high levels of gatekeeping occurred through parent corporations and their relationship to what actually gets disseminated to the public. Although this researcher still believes that to be true, no significant evidence in this study proved the point that corporate parents have control over what gets broadcast. The information received from the analysis indicated that news directors do hold the gatekeeping power within local television news organizations.

News directors may not have wanted to divulge that information, or wanted to signify a lack of control over their newsrooms. Despite the fact that the mission statements (see Appendices VII-X) from every single station mentioned "providing advertisers" with something, whether that be the delivery of their products, space/time to get their advertising message(s) across, each news director claimed advertisers played no significant role in deciding what gets broadcast (see Appendices III-V).

This discrepancy could mean that news directors are not admitting the significance of the role advertisers play in the selection of what gets broadcast. It may also mean that all of the news organizations in the Las Vegas Valley need to revamp and reword their mission statements to coincide with their actual beliefs and actions. When
news consumers were asked whether they felt advertisers had control over what gets broadcast, they said they were undecided (mean 3.31, SD = 1.05). News directors stated that the final decision-makers of what gets broadcast to the public are the news directors themselves. According to their responses, this would mean that the response to research question two was yes, suggesting that news directors serve as the gatekeepers within local television news organizations. News directors stated the importance of their role, and as Goedkoop points out—news directors are the key individuals in a news organization who are in charge of major news decisions (27).

When news consumers were asked about whether they thought news directors have the final say about the content of news broadcasts, consumers were also undecided (mean 3.49, SD = .917). The indecisive responses provided by news consumers may have been due to their lack of knowledge of the process news goes through before it is actually broadcast to the public.

A possible limitation in the gatekeeping portion of this research project was that conducting interviews with news directors might not have been the best way to learn about the gatekeeping practices within news organizations. News directors may not have felt safe giving that type of information, or they may have felt that they do have complete control over their newsrooms. Observational research may have been a more suitable approach to experience gatekeeping practices first-hand.

Limitations and Possible Threats to Validity

One limitation of the current study was that the research was conducted during a summer session. As a result, the courses surveyed were mainly communication courses. In addition to limited course differentiation and offerings, many unsuccessful attempts
were made to survey the variety of courses that did exist. There was either a lack of
instructor/professor response, or instructors could not fit the survey distribution into their
courses due to the time constraints placed during summer session. A more positive
response may have been received had the research been conducted during a regular 15-
week semester. Most of the subjects were Communication majors, which was also an
additional limitation. Even though Communication majors might have been more
familiar with news organizations, a more varied and random sample would have
increased the reliability of the study. The majority of respondents who participated in the
survey questionnaires were female, and the majority of respondents were seniors, which
may have also been a limitation to the study. According to a student profile on the
University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) web site, the majority of students attending
UNLV are female (55.2% females v. 44.8% males). In addition, according to the same
student profile, the majority of students attending UNLV are seniors (UNLV official web
site, 2002).

Another major limitation of the study was the lack of interest of one of the major
news directors in the Las Vegas Valley to participate in the interview portion of the
research. Numerous attempts were made to contact the news director for over a month,
but the researcher received no response. This lack of interest meant that only three news
directors were interviewed. Despite the fact that this was a case study of Las Vegas local
television stations, at least four news directors were expected to participate in the study,
and the absence of one news director was a definite limitation. Interviewing all four
news directors may have provided a more accurate forum for discussion of news director
responses and gatekeeping practices. In addition, at the time the interviews were
conducted, one of the news directors from one of the stations interviewed departed from

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the station unexpectedly. Due to this unexpected problem, the acting news director, who was also the executive producer, participated in the interview, which may or may not have skewed the results of the interview questions.

The classroom setting was the arena used to gather information about news consumer's perceptions of quality. Sampling the general public about their perceptions of news quality may have provided a more representative sample of local news consumers. In addition, the sample size was relatively small (235 subjects), which may have also been a limitation. Although college students may not represent the general population, they did represent a fair sample of UNLV students. This researcher believed that college students would provide a definite response due to the fact that each instructor scheduled the survey distribution time into his or her class schedules. There is no guarantee that the general population would have been as willing to participate in this type of research with no form of reimbursement.

Matching news director's responses to news consumer's responses may have posed a problem with validity. Since news director's responses were not subject to quantitative analysis, but were subject to a critical analysis, the bias or subjectivity of the researcher might be questioned. The researcher attempted to consider questions of validity by working with an additional analyst to "match" as best possible, news director responses to news consumer responses. Survey questions were also developed after careful scrutiny of news director's responses to interview questions to ensure that the same themes were being studied and analyzed. This researcher and an additional analyst looked for key words and used those key words to formulate survey questions. Gaps in perceptions of quality did emerge, therefore it is believed that the "matching" of responses was done correctly and with validity.
The main limitation of the study was the survey instrument itself. The reliability of the survey instrument was low (.5452 Cronbach’s Alpha). The low reliability signified the need for revisions to the survey instrument, such as the addition of more survey questions. The actual SERVQUAL survey questionnaire contains categories of questions to discover common themes among consumer responses. This approach may also increase the reliability of the survey instrument for future researchers.

Suggestions for Future Research

More research is necessary to determine whether gaps in perceptions of news quality are strongly evident when comparing news director’s responses with news consumer’s responses. This study was preliminary, given that the GAP model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry has never been used in a communication-related study. The GAP model could be applied to other areas of communication research. For example, the GAP model could be used to test perceptions of story content and types of stories in local television news among news consumers and media executives.

In addition, this research could be utilized by Las Vegas Valley news stations to improve and define their goals when considering what information should be disseminated to the public. News stations could also use the research to discover what the actual wants and needs of news consumers are. This and future studies of local television news could help news organizations improve their “product,” and the delivery of that “product.”

Gaps in perceptions may even exist among members of the news organization themselves. For example, there could be gaps in perceptions of what a news director considers a quality newscast, and what a news reporter considers to be a quality newscast.
These gaps could prove problematic in the formulation of the newscast that gets disseminated to the public, so the use of this type of research could help to determine what gaps, if any, exist, and if gaps do exist, ways to narrow the gaps could be sought.

The number of subjects and the variation of majors sought by the respondents limited this study. Future researchers should attempt to survey a larger sample and a more diverse population—most likely, the general public. Future research might also look at populations to test for differences in perceptions based on age (older v. younger viewers). Differences in news consumer responses may also vary by region. Future research should also consider region when studying differences in perceptions.

Conclusion

This study revealed the existence of “gaps” between consumer and media executive’s perceptions by testing the PZB methodology in an atypical service industry. Both surveys and interviews were the sources of data used to generate an analysis. A critical analysis was constructed, analyzing gatekeeping processes that occur in local news operations. Use of the PZB methodology provides various avenues for future researchers to pursue with regard to gatekeeping and communication research. The service quality model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry is a new stepping stone in gatekeeping research, and may be utilized as a tool for gaining perceptions on story content, news format, production procedures, and perhaps political stances held by various media organizations and news consumers.

Lewin’s terms “gatekeeping” and “gatekeeper,” originally used in sociology and later in communication, can now be applied to marketing-based research as well. This study also highlights the importance of using triangulation as a means of data gathering.
Perhaps future researchers will see the utility of employing various methods of data generation in a single study to ensure reliability and validity.
APPENDIX I

SURVEY QUESTIONS DISTRIBUTED TO NEWS CONSUMERS

On the following pages are a number of statements about which people have differing opinions. There are no right or wrong responses to any of these items. Please circle the letter which best describes your opinion.

1. TV stations should help improve the community they exist in.
   (a) strongly agree
   (b) agree
   (c) undecided
   (d) disagree
   (e) strongly disagree

2. The purpose of local television news is to educate the public.
   (a) strongly agree
   (b) agree
   (c) undecided
   (d) disagree
   (e) strongly disagree

3. The purpose of local television news is to inform the public.
   (a) strongly agree
   (b) agree
   (c) undecided
   (d) disagree
   (e) strongly disagree

4. Local television news is the result of well-researched stories.
   (a) strongly agree
   (b) agree
   (c) undecided
   (d) disagree
   (e) strongly disagree
5. Local television news stations provide a fair summary of the important events in the community.

(a) strongly agree
(b) agree
(c) undecided
(d) disagree
(e) strongly disagree

6. TV news stations use careful judgement about what stories to include/exclude in their newscasts.

(a) strongly agree
(b) agree
(c) undecided
(d) disagree
(e) strongly disagree

7. Advertisers have control over what gets broadcast during local television newscasts.

(a) strongly agree
(b) agree
(c) undecided
(d) disagree
(e) strongly disagree

8. Local television stations have an accurate sense of the community's needs.

(a) strongly agree
(b) agree
(c) undecided
(d) disagree
(e) strongly disagree

9. The news director has the final say about what ultimately gets broadcast during a newscast.

(a) strongly agree
(b) agree
(c) undecided
(d) disagree
(e) strongly disagree

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10. Which of the following do you think is the biggest challenge to local television newscasts? (Rank in order of importance: 1 being the biggest challenge, 4 being the smallest challenge)

(a) not enough staff 
(b) time constraints 
(c) supportive management 
(d) number of newscasts 

11. Which local television station do you predominantly watch to get your local news? (Please circle ONE response):

(a) STATION A 
(b) STATION B 
(c) STATION C 
(d) STATION D 
(e) Other: Please specify: 

12. What is your age? ______ years old

14. What is your gender?
   (a) male 
   (b) female 

15. What is your major? _______________

16. What is your rank in school?
   (a) Freshman 
   (b) Sophomore 
   (c) Junior 
   (d) Senior 
   (e) Graduate student
APPENDIX II

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS PRESENTED TO NEWS DIRECTORS

1. What is the mission statement for your television station?

2. How does your news "product" match up to the mission statement of the company?

3. What would you say is your main goal when preparing a newscast?

4. Are there any barriers to accomplishing that goal? If so, what types of barriers?

5. At the end of a 30-minute newscast, what do you expect your viewers to walk away with?

6. How would you define a "quality" newscast?

7. How synonymous do you think the words "quality" and "unbiased" are in terms of describing a newscast?

8. What steps are taken to ensure that the needs of news consumers are met by your nightly newscast?

9. What percentage of potential stories are eliminated from the nightly newscast?

10. How is the decision of what stories to include/exclude made?

11. Who is the final decision-maker when it comes to composing the final news product/newscast?

12. Your mission statement includes a statement about satisfying advertisers...What role, if any, do advertisers play in making the final decision of what gets broadcast?

13. Is there anything I should have asked that I haven't asked?
APPENDIX III

NEWS DIRECTOR A RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the mission statement for your television station?

   “Our cornerstone is knowledge and understanding of the local market. From that we have built our broadcast business which serves a well-defined viewing audience, delivering the messages of our advertisers. Our products and services distinguish themselves on the basis of quality customer service, and value that can be trusted” It’s on the back of our business cards, but it’s more for the corporation than the news department in general.

2. How does your news "product" match up to the mission statement of the company?

   We do a good job of covering the local market. We pride ourselves in doing the local segment. A lot of us have lived and worked in the Valley for a long period. That’s a major difference between us and other stations. They’re more transient.

3. What would you say is your main goal when preparing a newscast?

   To make sure whatever stories we do are relevant for the audience. We let them know that this is what you need to watch and pay attention to. Other stations present news in other ways.

4. Are there any barriers to accomplishing that goal? If so, what types of barriers?

   Newsrooms are so internalized so a lot of us are focused on putting out a good product. We’re not aware of what could be. We go to work, to home, back to work. (As a member of the news team) You need to participate in community events, watch local programs, and read local weekly papers to keep up with what’s happening around you.

5. At the end of a 30-minute newscast, what do you expect your viewers to walk away with?

   One piece of information they didn’t know. One story that changes their viewpoint on an issue. You want to connect with the viewer. Then you’ve done your job.
6. How would you define a "quality" newscast?

You need to make sure it’s relevant to the viewer. It should convey a sense of immediacy. You’re working to present breaking news, but also to advance stories from the past by doing updates, etc.

7. How synonymous do you think the words "quality" and "unbiased" are in terms of describing a newscast?

They’re not always on a similar path. Every news story will have elements of quality, but every story may not be completely unbiased. You almost always have some sort of bias. It should be minimized, though, and not change the story.

8. What steps are taken to ensure that the needs of news consumers are met by your nightly newscast?

You have to get the entire staff involved in story selection. You need open dialogue in the newsroom. The communication lines must be open.

9. What percentage of potential stories are eliminated from the nightly newscast?

More than you’d think. That’s because timing is restricted to a 30-minute newscast, with 8-10 minutes of commercials, plus weather and sports content. It’s up to the producer to decide what stories are most important. This is particular to our station because we have only one newscast at night.

10. How is the decision of what stories to include/exclude made?

It’s made between the producer and executive producer. They may ask each other, “Why are you going with this?” These lines of communication and discussion are important.

11. Who is the final decision-maker when it comes to composing the final news product/newscast?

Day to day…it’s the producer.

12. Your mission statement includes a statement about satisfying advertisers…What role, if any, do advertisers play in making the final decision of what gets broadcast?

None at all. In other shops they play a role, but a minor role. It’s important not to blur that role. Once an advertiser dictates what’s being broadcast, it’s not really news any more.
13. Is there anything I should have asked that I haven't asked?

Some of the shows (weekend/morning) don’t have the resource pool for discussion. They have a bigger load to carry on their shoulders because they don’t have the resources (like the GM). Those are the places you receive less notice and guidance.

*30-40 news staff *2 newscast
APPENDIX IV

NEWS DIRECTOR B RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the mission statement for your television station?

   Where news comes first. Stories that are best for the community. I don't know that we have a general mission statement.

2. How does your news "product" match up to the mission statement of the company?

   We work on it every single day. There was a time when News 3 did all feature stories (about bikini contests, etc.). Now we have a serious journalism approach where we try to stick to news comes first.

3. What would you say is your main goal when preparing a newscast?

   Our main goal is to take the news of the day to get stories to air. We want to get them out first and fast, but make sure they're factual and portrayed in a way that viewers can understand them. We place a strong emphasis on local news.

4. Are there any barriers to accomplishing that goal? If so, what types of barriers?

   There are always some barriers. There's breaking news that must be reported, and staff issues. Sometimes there aren't enough people to cover all the stories and we have issues with deadlines.

5. At the end of a 30-minute newscast, what do you expect your viewers to walk away with?

   "Here's what's happening in our town today." We want to give more perspective than other stations.

6. How would you define a "quality" newscast?

   Where we have all the stories of the day in a way the viewer can understand. We make sure it's editorially correct and we're happy with it production-wise.
7. How synonymous do you think the words "quality" and "unbiased" are in terms of describing a newscast?

There are 71 people here in the news department. We work as a team, but everyone has thoughts and opinions. We try and present different sides of a story so it’s not biased. We put checks and balances into place and that turns into quality news.

8. What steps are taken to ensure that the needs of news consumers are met by your nightly newscast?

Everyday we have a 9:00 editorial meeting. Everyone in the building is invited. We throw out ideas and use a process to narrow down what’s going to be covered. Another determining factor is e-mails and phone calls where viewers can contribute either on the web or by phone. “We had an incident the other night where during a newscast a guy sent an e-mail because he didn’t like a story and I called him during the newscast. He was very surprised and said he had just had a few margaritas and got riled up and called. That’s what we do. We really listen to our viewers because they sometimes have the best stories and want to know why this is happening in my neighborhood.”

9. What percentage of potential stories are eliminated from the nightly newscast?

It’s hard to give an actual percentage. We put potential stories on the board and assign them. We try to jam in as many stories as we can because we have so many news slots to fill throughout the day.

10. How is the decision of what stories to include/exclude made?

Through the editorial meeting. It’s a process of elimination. The news director makes the final decision if there are any problems. We go through all potential stories and discuss them, then we decide what’s going to be included.

11. Who is the final decision-maker when it comes to composing the final news product/newscast?

Me—the News Director

12. Your mission statement includes a statement about satisfying advertisers...What role, if any, do advertisers play in making the final decision of what gets broadcast?

Is that Channel ____’s mission statement? It sounds like their mission statement.....They don’t. They can complain to the GM (general manager), but I try to fight it as much as I can. I don’t want them to tell me what to put in my newscast.
13. Is there anything I should have asked that I haven't asked?

It’s a daily battle. You’re fighting how many people you have, etc. It’s a business. We have to put out a great product and at the same time make money to pay our salaries. TV sales and production are two totally different things. You have to fight for your product so it is a quality product.
APPENDIX V

NEWS DIRECTOR D RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the mission statement for your television station?

This response could not be published at the request of News Director D.

2. How does your news "product" match up to the mission statement of the company?

It's right there with it. It's the most important thing we do. It's the cornerstone of our station.

3. What would you say is your main goal when preparing a newscast?

To make sure it's a quality product that attracts viewers. To make sure it's worthy of that. To hang on to viewers. We get graded everyday.

4. Are there any barriers to accomplishing that goal? If so, what types of barriers?

Resources—there's a people problem. There aren't enough people (to cover all news).

5. At the end of a 30-minute newscast, what do you expect your viewers to walk away with?

It differs by newscast. We've got different newscasts at different times, plus weekends. In general, we want to make sure they've (viewers) received a newscast with high standards that covers all the news. Channel 8 stands for a certain quality of product. I'll use my McDonald's analogy: Whether you were at a McDonald's here or Boise, Idaho, you should get the quality of meal. It's the same idea here. All of our newscasts should have the same high quality, whether it's in the morning or evening.

6. How would you define a "quality" newscast?

One that deals with all of the issues. Reports should have a certain criteria and cover both sides of an issue, you know, the old journalism standards. It should show: How are they special? How do they stack up with the market and competition because it's a competitive business.
7. How synonymous do you think the words "quality" and "unbiased" are in terms of describing a newscast?

They can work hand in hand.

8. What steps are taken to ensure that the needs of news consumers are met by your nightly newscast?

We do research. We reaffirm the audience that we’re doing our job. It’s (whether those consumer needs are met) determined by our ratings.

9. What percentage of potential stories are eliminated from the nightly newscast?

It gets back to the resource issue. It depends on the number of people we have. Some things don’t get covered. But you need to make news special and cover the most important things.

10. How is the decision of what stories to include/exclude made?

Newsworthiness. We ask ourselves are they (the stories) what people want to hear? Do they affect people? You’ll see a lot about Nevada Power, for instance, because that directly affects people. Internal decisions are also made in editorial meetings, but I’m the final decision-maker.

11. Who is the final decision-maker when it comes to composing the final news product/newscast?

Me.

12. Your mission statement includes a statement about satisfying advertisers...What role, if any, do advertisers play in making the final decision of what gets broadcast?

Who gave you that? They don’t know what they’re talking about. It’s (News Director D requested that this mission statement not be published). There are a lot of different departments here—that’s our mission. ZERO.

13. Is there anything I should have asked that I haven't asked?

You got it there. You got everything. We could spend an hour talking about it, but we don’t have the time.
APPENDIX VI

INFORMED CONSENT

My name is Karen Roybal, and I am a graduate student in the Communication Department at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. I am conducting a study on perceptions of news quality in local Las Vegas television news and ask for your participation.

The study will consist of a 10-question survey that will be distributed during this course, as selected by your instructor. Surveys will be distributed to various University of Nevada, Las Vegas students to gauge their perceptions of news quality. In addition, news directors of local Las Vegas news organizations will participate in a one-time interview scheduled at your convenience, lasting approximately 15-20 minutes. The interviews will be conducted prior to the distribution of the survey. The purpose of the interviews is to gauge perceptions of quality in local television news according to news directors. Questions will be open-ended. All participants will remain anonymous, and identified only by "the respondent" for survey participants, or "news director A, B, C, etc." for interview participants in the final results section of the study. Only the primary researcher and one additional analyst will view all documents containing subject’s names. None of the information collected will be shown to, or discussed with any other party.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Your participation in this study will help define perceptions of news quality within local Las Vegas Valley television news organizations, as well as provide avenues for further media research regarding news quality in local television news, and the service quality model developed in marketing.

The records obtained during this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the Communication Department at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and be accessible only to the primary researcher. The records will be stored for at least a three-year period after the completion of the study.
If you have any questions about the research you have taken part in, please contact Karen Roybal at (702) 895-3474, or Dr. Gary W. Larson at (702) 895-3274. Any additional questions regarding the rights of research subjects should be directed to the UNLV Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at (702) 895-2794.

Signature of Participant

Date
APPENDIX VII

MISSION STATEMENT FOR STATION A

"We are ________________, a company founded on service to our customers and a wholly owned subsidiary of _________________."

➢ Our corner stone is knowledge and understanding of the local market.
➢ From that, we have built our broadcast business which serves as a well-defined viewing audience, delivering the messages of our advertisers. Our products and services distinguish themselves on the basis of quality, customer service, and value that can be trusted.
APPENDIX VIII

MISSION STATEMENT FOR STATION B

We are Channel ____.

Each person in every department works as a team member to serve the needs of our community.

We lead by providing viewers and advertisers with the highest quality news, information, entertainment and customer service.
APPENDIX IX

MISSION STATEMENT FOR STATION C

Mission:

The mission of the _______________________ is to provide growing audiences with excellent, relevant and targeted programming to create effective marketing opportunities for our advertisers, resulting in growing opportunities to our employee owners.

Values:

We will:

➢ Act with the highest ethical standards
➢ Respect individuals
➢ Achieve the highest standards of performance in products and services
➢ Lead in our industry and markets
➢ Emphasize teamwork and diversity
APPENDIX X

MISSION STATEMENT FOR STATION D

Our mission is:

To provide news, information, entertainment and advertising products and services that customers want and need.

To foster an exceptional work environment that encourages innovation and the pursuit of growth opportunities which provide superior operating results.

To be recognized as the community leader in serving the public interest.
APPENDIX XI

GENDER DEMOGRAPHICS

Gender of Consumers

- 63.4% Females
- 36.2% Males
APPENDIX XII

RANK IN CLASS DEMOGRAPHICS

Rank in Class Demographics

![Bar Chart]

- Seniors: 48.9%
- Juniors: 25.1%
- Sophomores: 16.6%
- Graduate Students: 6.4%
- Freshman: 2.6%

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VITA

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Karen Roybal

Local Address:
2180 E. Warm Springs Road #2134
Las Vegas, Nevada 89119

Home Address:
P.O. Box 363
Pecos, NM 87552

Degrees:
Bachelor of Arts, Journalism and Mass Communication, 2000
University of New Mexico

Thesis Title: Perceptions of Quality: The Gap Model Meets Gatekeeping

Thesis Examination Committee:
Chairperson, Dr. Gary W. Larson, Ph. D.
Committee Member, Dr. Anthony J. Ferri, Ph. D.
Committee Member, Dr. Thomas R. Burkholder, Ph. D.
Graduate Faculty Representative, Dr. Richard S. Lapidus, Ph. D.