OCCUPATIONAL CULTURE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON STRATEGIC CHANGE IN REGIONAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to understand organisational culture within local newspaper organisations and to consider how cultural beliefs shape strategic decisions. The study argues that an organisation’s culture shapes its day-to-day management and future strategies. The research seeks to contribute to the study of local press organisations, an area currently under researched in the relevant literature.

The methodological approach is the use of case study analysis across two newspaper organisations in the county of Kent in the southeast of the United Kingdom; using three different research methods; employee interviews, company data and observational insight. The case study analysis shows how cultural paradigms shape organisational culture and the development of future strategies.

Key findings from the research is that micro cultures and the ownership model shape organisational culture; affecting both the adoption of new working practices and the cohesiveness of corporate vision and strategy. The study also found that local newspapers organisations show many of the challenges common across all media organisations but their role within local communities adds another dimension to their cultural attributes. For many local media organisations digitalisation is a core part of future strategy, yet web has no local footprint and organisations must balance the challenge between developing digital revenues whilst still maintaining their local mission and values. The notion of what is local news is changing; both in terms of the type of news reported and the way reporting formats are used.

The thesis provides empirical evidence of the importance of organisational culture in media industries and the results contribute further to the application of organisational culture as a key concept in media economics and management research.
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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis considers organisational culture within local newspaper companies and how their culture differentiates organisations. Hofstede (1991, p. 262) defines organisational culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one organisation from another”. The research questions consider how cultural beliefs influence an organisation’s strategy; based on the theory that the culture of an organisation shapes its strategies (Schein 2004). The basis of the study is to understand an organisation’s culture and how it is shaped by unconscious beliefs and how this in turn influences the digitalisation strategy (Schein 2004). The justification for the thesis is that culture is a fundamental factor in framing and influencing an organisation. There is limited academic research into how culture influences media organisations and this study aims to address a gap in the literature, looking at how companies develop and support the corporate change required to adapt to an increasingly challenging environment.

Changes to the media landscape in the period from 2006 to 2016 have been dramatic. Economic, technological and social changes have converged to create a period of fast-paced change and for many organisations a period of profound uncertainty. Much of the research on media organisational change focuses on the impact of external factors (Picard 2011, Doyle 2013) with limited insight on how the organisation’s own internal make up and culture influences strategic change and development. Local newspaper groups have restructured their organisations to remove costs, resorting to closing or merging editions, removing local news desks and centralising sub-editing, advertisement production and sports desks. Changes have been multiple, in many towns and communities ‘citizen’ journalists or hyperlocal publications are covering the gap in local news provision. The ‘jobbing court reporter’ has been replaced by the multimedia journalist who writes copy, takes photographs, shoots the video and then uploads the story onto numerous digital platforms whilst tweeting updates. (See example recruitment advertisement in appendix 7)

There has been much research over the last decade on the challenges faced by media organisations with a focus on the external factors driving the change. Recent research has focused on media economics (Doyle, 2013), the financing of media companies (Picard, 2011) and the management of media companies (Aris and Bughin, 2009). One piece of research that considers organisational culture in the context of national media organisations is Küng’s (1997) study into the BBC and CNN. In this work, Küng introduces the concept of cultural paradigms in broadcast organisations in the UK, using the Schein Model (2004) as a way of understanding organisational culture. Küng’s research illustrates that organisational culture
influences strategic change in both the BBC and CNN, using an analysis of cultural layers in both organisations. This thesis builds on Küng’s and Schein’s work applying the concept of cultural layers and paradigms to further develop our understanding of how media organisations adapt to fast changing and turbulent market environments.

The decision to focus this study on local newspaper organisations was based, on the knowledge that much of the current research into media organisations (Picard, 2011; Doyle, 2013) focuses on national media with limited insight into the particular workings of local newspapers. Yet, many academics (Mair et al, 2012; Nielsen) that local media is the foundation and cornerstone of the media business in the UK. “Local newspapers carry out a vital role in this country.” (Mair et al, 2012 p.10). “This [local media] is not a sexy topic. But it is an important topic, one that is intellectually interesting, often overlooked and deserves more attention” (Nielsen 2015 p. xi). Local media is the largest employer of media jobs (NUJ 2016) and is crucial in holding local politics to count.

This thesis seeks to understand how organisational culture influences local press companies and how this in turn affects corporate adoption of digitalisation. The two research questions are: (1) how does organisational culture influence local newspaper organisations and (2) how organisational culture affects the way organisations respond to changes in the digital age?

The thesis has nine parts; introductory chapter, literature review in chapter 2, chapter 3 covers the methodological approach with a review of the regional press industry in chapter 4. Chapters 5 and 6 look at case studies of two organisations; the KM Group and Kent Regional News organisations respectively with the research conclusions covered in chapter 7.

To understand the environment in which these press organisations currently operate the thesis considers both academic literature and an analysis of the media industry. The literature review gives an overview of the current research available and is split into four core areas: (1) local newspapers (2) changes in the external environment of media organisations (3) organisational culture and its influence upon strategy and (4) applying Schein’s model of organisational cultural in the media industry. The literature review introduces key academic theories and highlights the current gaps in the knowledge discussed earlier.

The methodology chapter discusses the methodological approach used linking the chosen research methods to the theoretical knowledge discussed in the literature review. The methodology chapter also discusses the relevance of using and presenting the data in the form of case studies overlaid with the need to use different qualitative research methods to develop insight into different cultural layers. To allow for a manageable dataset two companies within Kent were chosen between the years of 2006 and 2016. The county of Kent offers
several key advantages as a location. Kent could be considered as a county of two halves; on the one hand the affluent London commuter belt of West Kent with communities such as Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks; and on the other hand, the more impoverished areas in East Kent with wards such as Thanet, being the most deprived in the county (Kent Count Council 2016). Local press coverage is strong in Kent and has a long history; indeed, the Canterbury newspaper, the Kentish Gazette (initially known as the Kentish Post) is one of the country’s oldest newspapers founded in 1717. At the time of writing regional media companies using a variety of different management models serve Kent. For the purposes of this study, two organisations were researched - The Kent Messenger Group and Kent Regional News and Media. The research approach is discussed in more depth in the methodology chapter. For part of the period of study, from 2007 to 2013, I worked within local media in Kent and as such have insider knowledge of both the organisations and the challenges faced during this period. The role of the insider-outsider researcher offers key research advantages, such as established insight into the companies, a network of contacts giving easier access to interviewees and background knowledge on the challenges facing the organisations. The quid pro quo is the perceived bias, as the researcher starts from a base of preconceived opinions and beliefs. Within any study, focusing on culture there will be a degree of subjectivity in analysing the data and the assumed beliefs and unconscious bias associated to the position of an insider-researcher could add to this bias.

The industry analysis chapter looks at the challenges and changes faced by the media industry in the ten years between 2006 and 2016. The chapter aims to give an analysis of the context and the general environment in which the case study companies are currently operating. The two case study chapters present the research findings and discuss the emerging cultural themes. The case study analysis links together several data sets: background company information, employee interviews, observed behaviours, and corporate values to map a cultural paradigm for each organisation.

The concluding chapter draws together findings from the data chapters and identifies the key findings and limitations of the study.
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the literature focusing on local newspapers, challenges faced by media organisations and organisational culture. Four areas of literature have been identified and reviewed in order to explore and investigate the research questions (1) local newspapers (2) changes in the external environment of media organisations (3) organisational culture and its influence upon strategy and (4) applying Schein’s model of organisational cultural in the media industry.

2.1 LOCAL NEWSPAPERS

What do we mean by local media and how does this differ from the definition of regional media? In terms of the literature the terms are interchangeable. For the purposes of this thesis a local newspaper could be defined as one that reports on one geographical area or patch, whereas an organisation that owns a number of papers across different local areas is called a regional media organisation.

The relevant literature concerned with local newspapers and local news organisations looks at three core themes. One theme that the literature focuses on is the political, cultural and social role that local news organisations play in their local communities and the historical background of local media, a second important area of research is the role that local newspapers play within the media ecology. The final theme discussed is the impact of digitalisation on local media and the repercussions of this upon the way these local news organisations now serve their local communities.

In relation to the first theme, the literature examines different ways in which local media play a role within their community. Nielsen (2015) argues that local newspapers are the backbone of the local community; from the provincial town’s weeklies to the daily or evening titles in the large cities and towns, most community in the UK in the 1900s used to have a newspaper that covered news relevant and local to their area. Many journalists secured their first junior reporter job on regional or local newspapers covering local council meetings, court reports or village fetes (Franklin 2005; Nielsen 2015; McNair 2009).

Local newspapers were traditionally an integral part of the local community, offering opinion and debate on matters of local importance pulling together local communities, defined geographically or by council administrative boundaries. Yet though local newspaper accounts for most of the journalistic profession, less attention has been paid to how contemporary
changes are affecting local, grass roots journalism. Aldridge (2007) argues that whilst academics focus on national or even international trends the majority of people still live within a local community. Research commissioned by the Local Media Works into how readers live their lives and how they use local media supports this argument. The Consumer Catalyst (Newspaper Society 2014 p.67) research was based on 2,232 reader interviews, representing 53 newspapers in 12 regions and reports that 87% of respondents say they were well integrated into their local community. Further evidence of the value of local media in the research is the claim that 93% of respondents spend more than half their time within 10 miles of their home and 83% with five miles of their home (The Consumer Catalyst 2004 p.68). The economic value of the local spend is reinforced when you see that 92% spend half or more of their money within 10 miles of their home. The Consumer Catalyst (2014) research argues that the local newspaper is still a trusted source of information; 50% of respondents see local media (newspapers) as the most trusted source of local information with 51% saying local media ‘does the best job of standing up for people in their local area’. Local newspapers are not only perceived important, but local media consumption is also relatively high. For example Local newspaper brands (print and online) are the most popular medium reaching 73% of the population weekly (JICREG 2014).

The second important area of research is the role that local newspapers play within the media ecology and the belief that local news matters (Franklin 2005; Aldridge 2007; Nielsen et al 2015) is supported by the NUJ (National Union of Journalists) who in 2014 launched the Local News Matters campaign. There is further discussion on this campaign and the role the NUJ play in the following industry analysis chapter. Local journalism is the backbone of the UK’s media industry (Nielsen 2016; Mair 2012; National Union of Journalists 2014). There has been research into the making of local news and the organisation of the local media organisations themselves (Franklin 2006; Mair 2012; Aldridge 2007) and technological, economic and social changes and the perceived crisis faced by local news journalism (Franklin 2006; National Union of Journalist 2014).

There is some argument that we have seen a decline in the importance of newspapers and the rise of digital media. There is no doubt that the challenges faced by the sector has seen a decline in the distribution of newsprint and in advertising revenue figures. The repercussions of this has been seen in the reduction in the number of local news journalists and the centralisation of local news desks to regional news hubs, with less reporting on patch (National Union of Journalists 2014; Greenslade 2014). As well as a decline in the number of journalists working in local media there is a growing feeling in the literature that the type of local news reporting is also changing. Franklin (2015) argues that there are fewer local journalists
engaged in investigative journalism with many local newspapers now leading on human-interest stories, entertainment, consumer ideas and reports.

The literature shows the importance of local media and there is little dispute that regional press organisations in the UK enjoyed a golden era throughout the second half of the twentieth century. There is some discussion on how proactive regional news organisations have been at reacting to recent changes. During the period of prosperity in the 1980s, Oakley argues, shareholders took profits from organisations rather than being invested in the future (Oakley 2014). The literature suggests that local media organisations have been slow to recognise the impact of the internet or recognise the threat of new web competitors such as property and recruitment aggregated sites. (Oakley 2014, Aldridge 2007 and Nielsen 2015). The literature suggests that regional press organisations could have been more proactive in adopting a strategy, which could have counteracted the damage the new competitors made to the regional press industry sooner. Oakley (2014) argues that had these organisations protected revenue streams and been more proactive in the use of online tools they could have ‘ring fenced’ revenues earlier.

2.2 CHANGES IN THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT OF MEDIA ORGANISATIONS

Another part of the literature that is relevant to this study is about media organisations and their strategies. Much of this part of the literature examines the changes in the last decade to the external environment, how these changes have affected media organisations and how these organisations have adapted accordingly. Research has identified three key changes in this regard: the impact of platform convergence and digitalisation of traditional media platform; changes to audience interaction and purchasing behaviours; and legislative change, including the changes to public service broadcaster funding and the resulting economic pressures. There is an agreement in the literature that these changes have led to organisational restructures and the impact of these changes has been organisational restructuring and wide scale change to the working practices for many media employees. The media industry continues to face fundamental challenges from these factors and needs to adapt and become adept at managing change (Aris and Bughin 2009; Picard 2011; Küng 2013). Hesmondhalgh (2013) argues that the media industry should be adept at change. He claims that media organisations rely on the generation of new ideas and the constant flow of content to survive. Without constant innovation and creativity, media companies stagnate. Hesmondhalgh (2013) also argues that change is therefore fundamental within the industry. Compared to other industry sectors such as retail or manufacturing, the lifeblood of media organisations is new
content, product development and change. However, adoption of change through the core divisions and management of media organisations varies. Hesmondhalgh (2013) maintains that organisations need to be flexible to manage this change and Picard (2005) stresses the importance of adopting change to maintain survival. There is some academic insight (Lee-Wright et al., 2012; Levy and Nielsen, 2015) covering aspects of the local media, but this area of the literature mainly focuses on key external influences such as digitalisation, economics, financing and social change. The literature has explored and documented these areas thoroughly (Picard, 2011; Doyle, 2013 and Küng, 2008) and much of the current research focuses on larger broadcast and national press organisations, including The Guardian, New York Times, The Vine and The Buzz (Küng 2015).

A number of factors influences how media organisations adapt to changes. Picard (2005) identifies the type of media product as a key factor; making a distinction between those organisations that develop single use and continuous creation products. Picard (2005) defines single creation products as ideas driven products, which focus on individual media content such as books, films and games. These types of media companies invest in strong sales and marketing support, are driven by an organisational culture used to the higher risk associated to the launch of one off products. Organisations producing single creation products, Picard (2005) argues, are used to dealing with failure and react quickly to challenges by launching new products to offset potential losses. In contrast, organisations that produce continuous creation products such as newspapers and magazines have an established product, such as a weekly newspaper or monthly magazine, where only the content within the established product framework changes. These types of media organisations are not used to failure and do not manage risk in the same proactive way (Picard 2005).

Through this differentiation, Picard seeks to understand the different characteristics and dynamics of organisations and, in turn its underlying logics and strategies. So, whilst creativity and change drive regular content, medium to long term change is more difficult to manage. For these organisations operate from a product rather than project management base and do not have project skills embedded in their business. Traditionally failure rates within these organisations have been low and the core skills within the organisation focus on the regular content creation of the product rather than new product development (Picard 2005). This means that managers within press organisations act as product or brand managers set on improving the product and audience figures; and they are not portfolio managers used to manage and offsetting risks. Understanding the level of risk taking which is acceptable for product management allows us to see how organisational culture within legacy press groups
has evolved. Oakley (2014) points out that the culture within local press organisations is not one of risk taking but rather one of complacency.

Another relevant area from the literature is media economics, which has seen some increased interest in the last decades (Doyle, 2013). Research in this area has largely focused on the external economic factors influencing media organisational change and the erosion of traditional revenue streams across both advertising and copy sales revenues. Doyle (2013, p.19) claims, “Digitization and convergence have had a significant and ongoing impact on production, distribution and consumption of media over recent years”. The literature agrees that free online news has eroded newspaper readership figures with the resulting effect of declining copy sales revenue (Picard 2011; Küng 2008; Doyle 2013). Traditional press advertisers have migrated to new digital media platforms. Year on year revenues continue to decline with revenue figures never likely to return to the heyday of high profit margins (Picard 2011; Küng 2008; Doyle 2013). Doyle (2013) argues that it is the advances in technology, which have also removed the traditional barriers to entry. There is an argument in the literature that the internet has opened up the means to publish online at minimal costs using techniques such as user-generated content. Traditional media organisations face new competitors eroding traditional audiences and revenues.

2.3 ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AND ITS INFLUENCE UPON STRATEGY

To gain an understanding of how media organisations manage and develop strategy and how this influences organisational culture, one needs to step outside the media industry and look more generically at the elements and value of culture in organisations. A key theorist of organisational culture is Edgar H. Schein. Schein (2004) argues that to understand an organisations culture we must understand its cultural paradigms; an interrelated set of deeply held beliefs. Another key contributor in this field Hofstede, (2001) also uses case studies to map cultural values and behaviours.

Schein observes that culture is both a “here and now dynamic phenomenon and a coercive background structure” (2010 p.6) evolving and changing constantly. An individual’s role within an organisation can shape the behaviour and values of others, and the leadership of the owners, executives or major stakeholders can mould or change the internal culture. How an organisation reacts to change is, Schein argues, largely determined by the internal culture. “Culture is to the organisation what character is to the individual” (2010 p.3).
In an attempt to uncover and establish the make-up of an organisation Schein (2004) lays out different categories of culture, indicating that there is often a subculture or micro culture within an organisation, with its own values and attributes, values that can be different and even contradictory to those held by a core mission of vision of the organisation itself. Schein’s Categories of Culture (2010 p.2) are laid out as: (1) macro cultures which consist of nations, ethics and religious groups, occupations that exist globally; (2) organisational cultures which consist of private, public, non-profit, government organisations; (3) subcultures which consist of occupational groups within organisations and (4) micro cultures which consist of microsystems within or outside organisations. As an example of subcultures Schein (2004) lists occupations such as medicine, law and engineering which transcend organisations.

Schein (2004) explores in detail the concept of organisational culture and argues that, even though understanding organisational culture is difficult - culture is abstract, yet it drives both social and organisational situations - the study of culture offers the researcher an opportunity to develop new concepts. It is the evolving field of organisations and occupational groups, which has ‘spawned new theory’ (2010 p.5). Schein (2004 p.3) links culture to three levels within an organisation: artefacts, espoused values and underlying assumptions: (1) artefacts seen through visible and feel able structures and processes and observed behaviour; (2) espoused beliefs and values seen through ideals, goals, values, aspirations, ideologies and rationalisations; (3) basic underlying assumptions through unconscious, taken for granted beliefs and values.

Schein’s model works to understand culture by identifying the hidden beliefs first, rather than looking at the more obvious signs of cultural belief. The establishment of organisational culture is through the examination of the more overt symbols such as dress code, style of corporate communications, company logo, and the type and location of their office. Others, such as Bolman and Deal (1991), argue that an organisation’s culture is notoriously difficult to define encompassing distinctive beliefs and patterns that develop over time. An organisation’s beliefs are uncovered through a variety of symbolic forms, such as myths, fairy stories, or even ceremonies. The symbolic beliefs held by an organisation are often hard to define yet shape how it reacts to external factors and how it manages its internal structure.

Schein uses case studies to understand culture within the companies to demonstrate the influence that they have on strategic change. This approach allows Schein (2010) to map the organisation’s cultural paradigm - to understand how the implications of values relate to overt behaviours. The use of paradigms as an analysis tool of an organisation illustrates how companies evolve by the virtue of an interlocking, coordinated set of assumptions. An understanding of the different layers leads Schein to state that culture is “deep, pervasive,
complex, patterned and morally neutral” (Schein 2004 p.5). Cultural assumptions, he believes, are rooted in early experiences and in the pattern of success and failure by these organisations. The idea of how a company sees failure and risk-taking mirrors Picard’s (2010) argument regarding job roles and responsibilities within media organisations producing continuous versus single use content. By the nature of newspapers being continuous use producers, Picard’s (2010) argues that attitudes of failure and risk-taking are not part of the culture within these types of organisations. The make-up of an organisation is one of the more obvious artefacts within a company that highlights how innovative a company might be.

2.4 APPLYING SCHEIN’S ORGANISATIONAL MODEL IN THE MEDIA INDUSTRY

One of the more extensive study into media organisational culture is Küng’s (2000) work on broadcast media, in which she adopted Schein’s model when investigating the BBC and CNN. Using the three levels of artefacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions, Küng used the model to investigate the culture of the organisations. Through this framework, Küng was able to link the strategies adopted by the BBC and CNN directly to the cultural paradigm within each company. Küng’s research was not a like for like comparison, but on how two fundamentally distinct organisations with “different organisational value orientations create different strategic responses to fundamentally similar environmental contexts” (2000 p20). This discussion works on the assumption that at the centre of every organisation there is a “paradigm or interrelated and unconscious shared assumptions which directs members to think, feel and act,” Küng (2000) argues that the mapping of cultural paradigm helps with the understanding of the logic of organisational strategy.

Küng’s use of Schein’s model works on the assumption that corporate culture is a key determining factor for a company’s fiscal success, and that culture can directly influence an organisations ability to manage change. The use of case studies does pose some challenges for whilst they offer a rich insight into the culture within an organisation, there is some concern that there may be some interpretative biases. Küng (2015) argues that in today’s current climate, “industry is ahead of theory” (2015 p.10) and case studies offers the researcher a narrative explanation, are accessible, offering a general introduction and overview whilst still showing differences in individual organisations (2015 p.5.) In her earlier career, Küng had worked within the broadcast industry at the BBC prior to moving to academia, positioning her as an insider/outsider researcher (Brown 1996). This internal knowledge gave Küng useful insight into the workings and structure of the organisation.
Küng’s study concluded that BBC’s cultural paradigm has four assumptions:

1. That public funding makes the BBC different,
2. The BBC is part of the British way of life,
3. That the BBC is the best in the business,
4. BBC is defending a great heritage.

These principles are based on key themes such as a sense of higher purpose, anti-commercialism, pride, insularity, a disdain for management, a culture of questioning, self-importance, responsibility to the UK licence fee payer, motivation and pride and resistance to change. The themes discussed were diverse and somewhat conflicting, which reinforces Schein’s (2004) theory that organisational culture is complex and layered and micro cultures within organisations can develop layers underneath a corporate culture.

In comparison, Küng concluded that CNN’s cultural paradigm has four different assumptions:

5. News lies at the heart of CNN – CNN is the news,
6. CNN the pioneer – the dissident – the iconoclast,
7. CNN understand the realities,
8. CNN are the underdogs and outsiders of UK broadcasting and proud of it.

These assumptions were based on key themes, whilst CNN shares a sense of higher purpose with the BBC the other themes highlighted are very different in many cases the opposite to the BBC. Küng (2000) lists key themes such as global outlook, pragmatic understanding of their role as a broadcaster, cost awareness, opportunistic style of decision-making, confidence, ‘can do’ mentality, fighting spirit and tolerance for risk.

Küng’s later work (2008) goes on to develop further the idea of cognitive psychology and its links to organisational culture and beliefs. Küng (2008) discusses in detail cognition, culture and strategy, to understand more the interpretive school of strategy. Küng argues that there is a split in the interpretative school of strategy between cognitions and cultural assumptions. The cognitive school follows a cognitive psychology, founded on the assumption that an individual’s behaviour is ‘guided by a set of governing beliefs’ (2008 p.166). Linking this theory to the current challenges faced by the media industry (Picard 2010, Doyle 2013) interpretative strategy makes the assumption that the greater the environmental instability, the greater the
likelihood that cognitive structures will introduce inflexibility and flawed judgement. Relating this specifically to the media industry, Küng (2008) argues that cognitions established during the legacy period, during a different strategic environment or business model, have affected the industry speed of change. She blames the newspaper industry’s “institutional memory” and mentality of ‘we have always done it that way and always will’ culture as being the reason it has been reluctant to adopt new models or processes proactively (2008 p.30). Küng develops the cognitive structures to include cognitive maps, schemas or schemata, mental models and frames alongside paradigms. Küng argues that for many years press legacy brands saw success as the norm with a culture built upon profits and ongoing success; organisations were not accustomed to failure so in turn have not developed the cognitive skills to adapt to external pressure and make the rapid changes required. This is mirrored by Singer (2010 p.91) who argues that as newsrooms are being dramatically resized and reconfigured, and roles within them rethought.

“Traditional ethical guidelines for "making news" are being reconsidered. Relationship structure is changing. Relationships between journalists and "the people formerly known as the audience" are evolving to accommodate the increasingly open and fluid construction of meaning”.

In summary, this chapter reviewed the relevant literature to contextualise the study. It discussed four key areas of research: local newspaper, changes to the external environment of media organisations, organisational culture and its influence upon strategy and applying Schein’s organisational model in media organisations.
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the methodological approach of this thesis and provides a justification for the chosen research methods and the tools selected to address the core research questions. The main basis of the research will be the use of the Schein model as the core model to understand organisational culture using case studies. Schein approach was selected as he remains one of the main researchers in the area of organisational culture (Hofstede, 2001) and his model allows for both hidden and overt signs of organisational culture to be mapped.

Schein’s (1980) method relies on data collated from case study organisations to give insight and understanding of three tiers of artefacts, espoused values and underlying assumptions. Artefacts are visible, feel able structures and processes, and observed behaviour. Espoused beliefs and values give an understanding ideals, goals, values, aspirations and secondly ideologies and rationalisations. Basic underlying assumptions show unconscious, taken for granted beliefs and values (Schein 2004 p.10). By using Schein’s model and collecting insight into the three tiers, the researcher is able to map and establish a culture paradigm for the organisations to show direct links with organisational strategy. The importance of the case study approach is explored by Yin (2003) as the “lessons from the case study will more likely advance knowledge and understanding of a given topic” (p.3).

Schein’s model (1980) pulls evidence from both historical and phenomenology methodology. The use of historical data develops an understanding of espoused values held by an organisation seen through the public facing messages produced by an organisation. An examination of historical primary sources produced and written by an organisation will deliver this insight and it will be largely through the examination of publicly available company documents, web sites, company statements and press releases that this additional data will be gained. The phenomenology approach values an individual’s subjective experience, emotions, feelings, beliefs and perceptions (Cottrell, 2014). Lindlof & Taylor (2011) go further in understanding these values in their discussion of Schutz stocks of knowledge. “Stocks include all the facts, beliefs, desires, prejudices, and rules we have learned from personal experience” (p.34) these facts, beliefs and rules are key factors in the establishment and understanding of company artefacts and espoused values. This knowledge allows the researcher to establish the day-to-day behaviours of the individuals or the “intersubjectivity…produced in the relationships that we develop with others” (Lindlof & Taylor 2011 p.35). Through observation of this language and dress styles the researcher can gain an understanding of the stories, myths and anecdotes from within the organisation. Thus, the
words of the interviewees only act as part of the researcher’s insight with the company data and observational data building the complete picture.

This mixed method approach yields the rich data needed to understand the cultural layers of the organisations. The interview approach does however mean that the researcher’s understanding of the organisational culture could be prone to bias, as it is reliant on individual experience. Using unstructured interviews gives a good insight into the workings of an organisation through individual experience with the associated bias. In addition to interviews the research included observed behaviours, visiting Interviewees in their workplace surrounded by their working environment give more clues to the organisation’s culture. Underpinning this is the use of company data to help the researcher to understand and explore the extent to which these personally held beliefs and values are seen. A company’s mission statements and corporate values shown on the website maybe be different to the values shown within an organisation; for example some employees may not even know what the mission statements and corporate visions are.

My own background as an insider/outsider researcher gave easier access to interviewees, company data as well as an understanding of organisational challenges. Researcher insight can affect data interpretation and subjectivity (Rubin & Rubin 1995, Brinkmann & Kvale 2015 and Lindlof & Taylor 2011) and the role as an insider/outsider researcher (Brown 1995) compounds ethical issues. However Brown argues that a researcher with some academic training, with ‘insider’ knowledge gives the researcher the ability to observe, analyse and recount the activities within an organisation for academic purposes. The major advantage of having worked within the local press industry was the valuable access to interviewees as well as a strong understanding of both the industry and industry terminology, and insider knowledge of the beliefs and assumptions of the organisations. Lindlof & Taylor (2011) explore this further for ‘cross-cultural encounters (where) the interviewer should be a fluent speaker of local languages and a sensitive traveller across cultural borders’ (p.171) There is of course the associated disadvantage of subjectivity and bias being a potential risk with the interpretation of results and to counteract any potential bias you had mixed methods research design and triangulated the data collected.

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The media organisations chosen were located in the county of Kent, in the south east of the United Kingdom. There is of course the advantage of Kent being local to the researcher and therefore easier for contacts and networks but the county also acts as an interesting study area. The county has no large conurbations with the population living in rural communities or
smaller county towns, each served by their own local press edition and this pattern of population has resulted in a complex publishing map. The organisations, Kent Messenger Group and Kent Regional News and Media were selected, as they are the largest regional media companies in the area, their publishing footprint is similar with both publishing newspapers in the same areas of Kent.

Three types of data was collected to build the different tiers of organisational culture for the organisations’ case study.

1) Publicly available date about the organisation sourced from websites, industry publications and company publications.

2) Observational data about the organisation that were collected as part of the fieldwork, including dress code of the organisation, location of the offices and use of branding.

3) Semi-structured interviews with employees using an interview guide.

The use of qualitative methods such as interviews and observation research methods have both advantages and disadvantages. Cottrell (2014) stresses the advantages as being the ‘open-ended’ nature of the data allowing for a greater set of responses, useful for in-depth analysis of individual people with a great ecological validity.

3.1.1 COMPANY DATA

The importance of gaining insight into the company allows the researcher to understand how the organisation works and to gain the trust of the interviewees Lindlof & Taylor (2011). Publicly available data about the organisations was collected several sources; information released by the organisations themselves through corporate statements and websites and from industry bodies such as the News Media Association (formerly known as the Newspaper Society), the National Union of Journalists (NUJ). In addition, industry research conducted by publications such as Hold the Front Page and The Press Gazette was reviewed. Information sources included websites, industry reports, archival material, and the newspaper themselves and materials displayed in offices.
3.1.2 Observational Data

The second area of data was observational data. Observational data allows the researcher to develop the study and analysis of espoused values and to gather key elements of the organisation. Researchers as observers look at places and people in their natural settings. (Lindlof & Taylor (2011); McCracken (1988); Thomas (2011)). Observational analysis included data gathered during the visits to the organisations over the research period and well as insight gained from insider knowledge e.g. customers and things that happened when I worked there. In addition to observations during the interviewee visits, general observations about the organisations within their local publishing areas were also considered for the period under analysis. As part of the interview preparation (Lindlof & Taylor 2011) a checklist was compiled which included office locations physical appearance of the office, signage and branding. The internal appearance of the offices and the formality of the working environment including working practices within offices; for example, was the working environment hot desks or open plan working. A website review was carried out that examined information on the pages about office location and the ease of access to contact details. Branding within towns, on company cars and on other printed partnership collateral was also gathered. Where there was a presence of company branding within towns, its location and its positioning were observed. Branding of newsagents windows, the use of billboards and newssheets has been common practice for newspaper brands and this was included as part of the observational data.

3.1.3 Interviews

The final area of research data was semi-structured interviews with seven stakeholders in total. Respondents were recruited to take into account the following areas: occupational area of employment, longevity of employment, seniority of role and geographical location of the role, so that interviewee insight was a varied as possible. (Lindlof & Taylor 2011; Yin 2003)

Occupational areas of employment were considered and respondents were recruited from editorial, advertising sales, newspaper sales and promotional roles. Initially there was going to be six interviews one from each area in each organisation but as one of the interviewees left the organisation during the research period I conducted an extra interview in this organisation. These departments were chosen as they have the largest number of employees within local newspaper organisations and are key areas of organisational structure within newspapers companies. Interviews did not include employees from the ‘back office’ roles such as human resources, IT support or finance, as these departments are not unique to media
organisations. In addition these departments are small and their significance on the culture of media organisations you are examining have not been great.

Longevity of employment was another factor when selecting respondents. Longevity of employment could show whether there is an established embedded culture within an organisation. To compare and contrast the culture held by employees with a long period of service versus those who are relatively new starters to the organisation who might have less corporate ‘baggage’. One interviewee had nearly 20 years of service in comparison with a new employee with only four months’ service.

Consideration of seniority level of the interviewee role should show how well an organisation’s strategic aims are developed and delegated through the management tiers and levels. Interviewees held different levels of seniority. Respondents included heads of department, editors and directors through to junior staff members within both organisations. The objective of this was to establish a full picture of whether there is transparency and openness of organisational culture and how it is interpreted throughout the organisation.

Consideration of the geographical region in which the role was located was also considered. Whether respondents were physically located within the publishing area of their newspaper or in a central or regional office. Respondents were selected to include those with a hyperlocal role (one or two towns or communities), a regional role (an editorial region i.e. town council region) or a countywide role (the whole county). By selecting Interviewees with different locational responsibilities, the aim was to establish how local the community was and whether perceptions about organisational culture varied depending on how geographically focused the job role was.

Social media platforms including LinkedIn and Twitter were used to recruit some interviewees, whilst other interviewees were recruited through previous colleagues. This made the initial approach easier, though it did not always prove to be successful; two respondents declined to take part, another showed initial interest but did not respond to follow up emails. One respondent recruited on my behalf another interviewee; someone “who knows the business inside out and you need to talk to them” (Interviewee 6). This reinforces the positive role of the gatekeeper in recruiting interviewees (Lindlof & Taylor 2011). All Interviewees were shown the participant information sheet (Appendix 14). Each participant was taken through the aims of the study and the research ethics in full prior to the interview. Each interviewee then signed a consent form (Appendix 13).

Seven interviews were completed and the interviewee job titles were:
Interview themes were developed considering the research questions and the key issues that emerged from the literature and were used as a basis for the discussion rather than relying on scripted questions to develop both the interviewee/interviewer relationship and to develop more organisational insight (McCraken 1998; Yin 2003 and Lindlof & Taylor 2011). Interview themes were:

1) The organisation and its stakeholders (key influencers in the business);
2) Community interest of the organisation;
3) Company mission and core function;
4) The most important strategic changes in the company in the last ten years;
5) Audience;
6) The role local media plays in the local community;
7) External influences;
8) Current strategy and development of the organisation’s strategy;
9) The future.

The use of themes as discussion areas allowed respondents to include personal reflections and observations and examples to illustrate a point. All respondents volunteered information freely, offering anecdotes and stories to back up their points. The richness of the interview meant that a large volume of data was gathered.

During the interviews, there was some evidence of bias from the respondents with a couple of disenchanted employees being quite forthright in their views. One respondent did not want to
meet in the workplace, preferring instead to meet on neutral ground away. This meant the full observational data was not gathered as their usual working pattern and dress code was not seen. My own background was also a challenge for some interviews. Some Interviewees knew of my previous employment and therefore made assumptions about my knowledge and insight.

One challenge of the research methods used was the issue of access to company data and insight following the buyout of one of the organisations, some of the company information and freely available data has been lost or removed from websites with less data analysis available for KRN in comparison to the KM Group.
CHAPTER 4 INDUSTRY ANALYSIS

This chapter provides an analysis of the local newspaper sector in the UK by investigating the key changes in the industry and the strategies of the media organisations. By establishing, the backdrop of changes currently faced by the press industry the research questions is considered within the context of the current economic and environment situation. The analysis covers three core, interlinking areas: (1) legacy culture in local newspapers; (2) digitalisation and revenues in local newspapers and (3) changes to organisational structure.

4.1 LEGACY CULTURE IN LOCAL NEWSPAPER

Legacy organisations continue to dominate the local newspaper sector in the UK, which has important implications on the changes in the industry and how organisations have adopted to the new digital environment. Legacy culture is significant for the organisation and operation of local newspapers in a number of ways including the ethos of the journalists and the geographical spread of the titles. One of the key ways legacy culture influences local newspapers is in relation to the particular ethos and beliefs of journalists. Local newspapers are the traditional “training ground for new reporters” (Nielsen 2015) and some local reporters being NUJ members tied by NUJ values and code of conducts. Within some local press organisations, the culture has developed and been established by the nature of their position within the local community. Many of the early papers were owned/edited with stories gathered, written and edited by the owner. The KM Group’s founder Pratt Boorman, was for example, was the editor in chief. In many regional media organisations today, the Managing Director or CEO has an editorial background with journalistic ethics influencing the organisational culture.

Data collected for this study as well as other research (Mair 2014) indicate that two types of ownership models: Large media organisations owning a chain of newspapers and other media outlets such as Johnson, Trinity Mirror and Local World and family owned media groups such as CN Group, Tindle Newspapers and the Kent based KM Group.
The larger organisations run the local papers in a formatted way using centralised systems, with template pages, centralised production; these organisations often drive revenues from models based on publishing through economies of scale publishing regionalised editions. In comparison, the smaller family run organisations rely on using local knowledge, local interest stories and local revenues to secure revenues and sufficient yields.

Another way legacy culture influences local newspapers are their geographical spread. For many local media companies, the publishing footprint is by parish or council boundaries rather than how “people live their lives”

1). Local newspapers were seen as more than just news providers; many played the role of public service providers within their communities publishing planning notices, road closures, sports, society and school updates (Nielsen 2015). Local newspaper owners were as powerful members of their local communities; their branding dominated local towns and newsprint branding is seen on high streets across newsagent canopies and windows, billboards at sports stadiums and at county show grounds. Legacy media culture was linked to the community, with family owners becoming press barons at a local level holding a prestigious position within the community. The current Chairman of The KM Group, Geraldine Allison, is for example a Kent Ambassador and her father, Edwin Boorman, was Lord Lieutenant of Kent.
4.2 DIGITALISATION AND REVENUES IN LOCAL NEWSPAPERS

The decade from 2006 to 2016 was a time of rapid change within the media industry; social and digital changes were accelerated by the economic downturn in 2008, advertisers who had previously been loyal to local newspapers have new digital choice and social media drove the readers to online platforms away from the paid for sale (Nielsen 2015). Many local press organisations were slow to react to the change driven by digitalisation (Oakley 2015) and failed to recognise the threat of new entrants to market using digital publishing platforms.

A finding that has emerged is that as the recession of 2008 hit organisations took radical actions rather than proactively managing the opportunities. Dramatic revenue falls forced media organisations to make overnight decisions to increase cash flow and balance sheet forecasts. At times, companies were in a “burning platform” (Interviewee 5) situation. Sometimes these decisions appeared to be contrary to company ethos and missions. In some cases, economic pressures forced organisations to make ‘overnight decisions’ on newspaper closures, merging editions or moving to different publishing models (Newspaper Society 2014). Since 2005, there has been an estimated net reduction of 181 local newspapers in the UK (Journalism Today). Over 242 newspapers closed between 2005 and 2011 with only 70 new launches. Job losses during this period were high, with huge changes to working conditions through the demands of digital media and the centralising of teams. (NUJ 2015)

The digital transformation has seen new competitors entering the market who have undermined the core classified advertising revenue streams. Higher yielding rates from property, motors and jobs advertising had been the cornerstone for local press companies. It is these areas that are threatened most by the new entrants such as Monster.com, eBay and Rightmove.co.uk (Ofcom Report 2012). The digital platforms offered cheaper advertising, flexible copy deadlines and 24/7 access. In addition to revenue loss, local newspaper groups have also lost audiences to new digital platforms (Ofcom 2012). For many local newspapers, readers traditionally purchased their weekly paper for special sections rather than just for the news content. In Kent, the weekly ‘What’s On’ sections for example had a higher readership figure than the news section of the paper (JICREG Kent 2005). Readers purchased the local newspaper to look for a new, home, job or car and all areas that have been replaced with online products.

The adoption of digital practices varies across media companies; the data analysis shows that some newspaper groups have brought in external products to provide sales platforms for
property, jobs and motors sharing the development costs across a number of local media companies. Other local media companies such as the Cumbria Newspaper Group and the KM Group built, developed and managed web based platform content at a local level. All the major local newspaper groups now have online news platforms, the majority of whom offer free to view news content with only Johnson and Tindle Newspaper using a paywall on some of their sites. My findings show that regional press organisations were established on the financial model of paid for newspaper sales therefore free to view news is a revenue threat. Some publishers such as the KM Group include an overview of news online but still try to drive the online reader to buy the paper for more details. An example of this can be seen by online promotions seeking to drive interest in and sales of the paid for paper such as the banner advertisement in figure 2.

Figure 2 Screen grab promoting online subscription (kentonline.co.uk)

This advertisement does not actually hyperlink through or allow the reader to access the newspaper, it links instead to a subscription site allowing the reader to access copies of the paid for newspapers online.

Another finding that emerged from the data analysis is that the balance of free versus paid for news content is a challenge for media owners, as is the balance between regional and local news. For the KM Group, the strategy has been to deliver online news via a countywide platform www.kentonline.co.uk supplemented by locally branded newspaper sites. Other local media providers have focused on local or hyperlocal websites serviced with aggregated digital advertisements. Kent Regional News, for example, has local news sites and at one point in 2015 even renamed, their papers after the website with the masthead for the Folkestone Express renamed as the folkestoneexpress.co.uk. Data from the case studies show that newspaper editors face the weekly challenge of whether to save their big story for the page news or to post online. One of the Interviewees admitted to
“sitting on a story to try and keep it back for the weekly print deadline” (Interviewee 2).

Data from both case studies, as well as for the industry, show that social media is playing an increasingly important role in local newspaper organisations. These organisations have now embraced the use of social media to drive audiences, gain stories or to pre-promote stories. Journalists now tweet headlines and stories regularly throughout the day to drive website traffic.

Both the editors interviewed (Interviewees 1 and 2) check website traffic stats frequently, often hourly. For all news media owners, the hope is that due to

“their investment in news, more than any other media outlet, local newspapers still occupy a unique space in the marketplace, providing the highly trusted news and information which their readers reply upon” (Tilbian 2015).

Tilbian also predicts that newspapers will move from a free ad-funded online module

“...towards a diverse range of online business models appropriate to the publisher’s readership base. Digital revenue expansion could include “online advertising, paid content subscription/pay-per-view, enterprise, user data/market research and licensing content and technology” (Tilbian 2015)

Within the two case studies in this thesis, native online advertising is a core revenue stream and both organisations have added aggregated content to their sites working with digital sales houses to take national advertising at CPT (cost per thousand hits) rate. Many local media organisations are diversifying their portfolio to include digital sales and creative design consultancy services for clients. The KM Group, for example, have launched KMcreate and KM Digital Services in the last three years. The changing portfolio and the impact of the online environment mean that the occupational skill sets required have had to change too.

“My team are no longer order takers, out collecting cheques for order the day before deadline. Now they are territory managers offering a consultancy service. They now advise clients on their whole communications package, we offer social media campaigns, website design as well as a 3X1 in your local paper” (Interviewee 4).

The effect of this has been a change in working patterns and working conditions. Journalists at Trinity Mirror’s restructured Midlands’ newsrooms are now being measured personally for growing online audience, moving from journalists to “content curator” roles (interviewee 3).
For the journalists the need to report and monitor stories has shifted from a weekly deadline to a 24/7 business (NUJ). The need to be digitally ambidextrous, and adapt quickly to using digital tools, is now considered the norm with today’s journalism graduates being trained in multimedia practices including video, audio and content management skills. However, the degree of ambidexterity differs by occupational group; the collective values of NUJ members are very different, for example, from the commercial team that has no code of conduct or formalised career path. Yet there is still no clear industry wide strategy of digitalisation with different media organisations trialling different approaches (*The Guardian*).

The industry remains divided over whether online content can be monetarised and this uncertainty about revenue streams and business models emerged as a finding from the data analysis. Picard (2011) debates the future financing model of the online audience and the disadvantages and advantages of paywall usage... An early pioneer of paywall strategy was News International who implemented paywalls across their publications with mixed levels of success, as the audience did not pay in sufficient quantities. In comparison, the newspaper group Daily Mail and General Trust (DMGT) have rejected the use of paywalls and have driven revenue through developing online advertising revenue through increasing its online audience. Subsequently *The Daily Mail’s* online counterpart, *MailOnline*, became the second most popular English speaking newspaper (ABCe 2015). Importantly, research also shows that the *MailOnline* attracts a different, younger audience that the usual readers of *The Daily Mail*. In 2011 the 15-34 age group made up 14% of the print circulation versus 42% of the weekly online circulation (ComScore 2012). The *MailOnline* has achieved this by adopting a policy of loading news stories online constantly and increasing the level of celebrity news on the website to try to drive a new audience to its online proposition. This large online audience is now successfully developing a digital revenue through banner and online advertising. The Guardian is using another digital strategy to monetarise online audiences drawing in an international audience and packaging the audience across several platforms, using specialist reporting and advertising *Guardian* memberships and affiliate programmes. One of my findings is that local newspaper companies are trailing a mixture of strategies with mixed success.

There is an ongoing debate in the academic literature as well as in industry circles about which of the above strategies provides the most sustainable business model. There is currently limited research into who drives these strategies within the organisations; the difference in the adoption of digital transformation strategies could be attributed to the differences in the leadership or management within the organisations. Rupert Murdoch for example pushed the drive for paywalls within News International himself, driving this strategy from top down.
In addition to declining advertising revenues, audience’s changes have had an effect on press revenues. Audience figures have declined dramatically during the period from 2006 to 2016. JICREG figures suggest that between 2009 and 2015 the circulation of the Kent Messenger Series fell from 44,492 (JICREG 2009) to 29,412 (JICREG 2015). Average issue reader (AIR) per copy has also declined so that readership as well as copy sales have changed. Between 2009 and 2015, for example, the AIR for the Kent Messenger Series declined from 189,762 (JICREG 2009) to 85,764 (JICREG 2015). However, care needs to be taken when considering these figures as local media owners have moved towards modelled data rather than commissioning expensive fieldwork to understand the real readership figures. This has resulted in decline of 4.3 to 2.9 reader per copy (RPC) figure for the Kent Messenger Series from 2009 to 2015 (JICREG actual 2005 v JICREG modelled 2015). Therefore, reducing advertiser reach and increasing cost per thousand.

Publishers have tried to offset the revenue loss from declining copy sales by increasing the copy price. Between the periods of 2006 to 2016, the KM Group for example, increased the average paid for price from 80p to £1.10 making three cover price increases in 18 months. Newsagents argue that price increases are affecting the newspaper sale. (Hold the Front Page September 2015). Yet as the readership figures continue to decline research by the News Media Association (2016) maintains that people still live their lives locally, which could perhaps explain growth in hyperlocal online news providers. Studies by Williams et al (Community Journalism) show that readers still want local information but the newspaper sales decline would suggest that they no longer want to pay for it.

4.3 CHANGES TO ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

As mentioned earlier there are different types of ownership models in local newspaper; large chains of media organisations and family run newspaper groups. Local media ownership changed dramatically over the period 2006 to 2016. The Press Gazette estimates that between 2005 and 2016 there has been an “estimated net reduction of 181 local newspapers in the UK” (Press Gazette). In addition to newspaper closures, groups have merged and changed owners across the UK. In Kent for example, The KRN has changed ownership four times in that period and the Kent on Sunday, the third largest local media group in the county, was brought out and merged with another regional newspaper group, Archant. Changes to local media ownership have had a major impact on how ‘local’ the local news is in many communities. Mergers of smaller titles saw local high street offices close and be replaced by out of town media centres.
With changes to ownership, many of the traditional roles seen within media organisations have been outsourced or centralised. In 2008, for example, Northcliffe set up an editing hub in Essex to edit papers across Kent, Sussex and Medway. My industry data shows that local print and production centres were closed with local companies outsourcing digital printing to centralised printing plans in Wapping. Trinity Mirror introduced the use of template news pages for their newspapers; this effectively removed the need for page planners.

4.4 SUMMARY

Three key areas of the changes at industry level have emerged from the data analysis: (1) legacy culture; (2) digitalisation and the impact of the online environment; (3) organisational structure and ownership. Each of these three areas have had a direct influence and impact upon the local press industry. Data gather from both the case study organisations clearly show the influence of these three areas and how both the organisational and micro cultures within the organisations have adapted as well as influenced these changes.
CHAPTER 5 THE KENT MESSENGER GROUP

This chapter provides a case study analysis of the Kent Messenger Group (now referred to as the KM Media Group). The collected data is analysed in the following three sections: (1) key organisational features and strategic decisions of the KM Group; (2) key factors that influence organisational culture; and (3) cultural paradigm of the KM Group.

5.1 KEY ORGANISATIONAL FEATURES AND STRATEGIC DECISIONS OF THE KM GROUP

Established in the 1880s the KM Group is a family owned, Kent based media organisation. By 2016, the company was managed by the fourth generation of the Boorman family, with three members of the family on the company board, two of whom are actively involved in the day-to-day running of the organisation. A key characteristic of the organisation is a diversified portfolio; in 2016, the group publishes 17 local papers across Kent producing both paid for and free papers and a number of specialised supplements and magazines. In addition, the group owns www.Kentononline.co.uk a news website; specialist sector websites such as jobs, motors and property sites; kmfm; a countywide radio station and kmtv a local TV station for the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells area (KM Group).

Another characteristic of the organisation that emerged from the data is that its size and structure has often changed throughout its history, suggesting it has gone through periods of adaptation to new environments followed by consolidation. The company established in 1859, in Maidstone to the west of the county, its expanded has been through merger, and acquisition of other Kent based newspapers and radio stations. In 1980, the group bought Kent County Newspapers, expanding coverage into East Kent acquiring the Herne Bay Gazette, the East Kent Mercury and the Kentish Gazette. This pattern of expansion through acquisition rather than through new product development has in part shaped the organisational culture today. The analysis of the collected data suggests that for some areas of the portfolio this has resulted in some brand confusion with both the company branding and the local brand appearing on the masthead. In Canterbury and Deal, for example, the editor refers to the paper as the ‘Gazette’ or the ‘Mercury’, with the KM corporate logo of the yellow and black box sitting alongside the name of the mastheads (See figure 3 below). The KM yellow box therefore becomes a side brand, sometimes referred to as the ‘watermark’ within the organisation, whereas in Maidstone, the Kent Messenger is the name of the newspaper and the company brand and the yellow and black box is the newspaper brand.
Regional weekly editions are published, under the original local brand names; the Kentish Gazette covers the Canterbury area, the Sheerness Times Guardian covers; the Isle of Sheppey, the East Kent Mercury covers Deal and the Kent Express covers Ashford, whereas The Kent Messenger is the publication title for Maidstone. One theme that emerged from the data is that the corporate brand means different things in different parts of the county and there is still the perception within the company of the organisation having a west Kent bias compounded by the fact that head office is based in the west of the county.

There have been, however, restrictions where and to what extent the company could expand, which has had an impact on its strategies and structure. The most notable example of policy restriction occurred in 2011 when the group launched a bid to acquire seven paid for papers from their main competitor, KRN (then under the ownership of Northcliffe Newspapers). The KM Group hoped this acquisition would add core paid for papers in the regions where the group did not have strong readership penetration, most notably in Folkestone, Dover and Sittingbourne (Interviewee 7). These towns had traditionally been KRN publishing regions and the KM Group had tried to take some of the market share of the advertising revenue in these areas through the launch of free papers in these areas.

“We tried to take the Folkestone revenue but we never succeeded” (Interviewee 7).

Northcliffe Newspapers welcomed the sale, as they were keen to sell some of their local assets having already sold off other regional editions in across the country. The two companies maintained that traditional media spend was being diluted and reduced by spend migrating online and there was only room for one newspaper group in the county. The Monopolies and Mergers Commission aborted the sale when the Office of Fair Trading to the Competition Commission referred the acquisition on the basis that the Kent Messenger would have monopolised media in Kent (Hold the Front Page 2011). The KM Group pulled out of the sale citing the associated costs attached to an Office of Fair Trading ruling and the sale collapsed. KM Group Chairman Geraldine Allinson, was critical of this decision, saying that at the time:

"For an organisation of our size the cost is prohibitive to go to the Competition Commission. It would cost us over £500,000. We had to withdraw. We told the Office of Fair Trading at the very beginning when we first went to them that if they were going to refer this to the Competition Commission the deal would end up being dead because
of the costs associated with it. I fundamentally believe, and I think the industry does, that those titles would have been better off in our ownership because we would be able to provide a better service through better journalists, better quality of service to those communities for longer, including investigative journalism and things like that.” (The Guardian)

Ofcom warned that Kent newspapers faced closure if mergers in regional press were blocked (Ofcom 2011) and following the collapse of the sale, Northcliffe Newspapers did in fact close three of the seven papers. The KM Group responded to these closures by opening a new paid for paper in the Sittingbourne area, the Sittingbourne News Extra and relaunched the free paper in the Folkestone area - the Folkestone Extra.

Another key characteristic of the KM Group that emerged from the data is the undermining of the traditional business model and revenue streams because of the changes in the digital age. As discussed earlier in the literature review digital convergence, the recession and social change have combined to make the ‘perfect storm’ resulting in a large financial downturn for the group. The classified advertising area, the cornerstone of local media revenue, has seen fundamental change due to digital convergence (Oakley 2011). New entrants into the online market saw traditional newspaper advertising revenues from the property, jobs and motors sections migrate to new competitors. In Kent, a new regional competitor www.jobsinkent.co.uk took a large share of the local recruitment advertising market offering a local online advertising platform for companies and recruitment agencies who had traditionally advertised in paper.

The KM Group had established an early online news presence launching Kentonline.co.uk in 1998 but had not successfully built an online revenue stream from digital advertising. The group had also established product specific solutions such as Kentjobs.co.uk, kenthomes.co.uk and kentmotors.co.uk, but the data suggests that the organisation lacked the fiscal backing and knowledge to develop the online platforms and were saddled with the systems and costs associated to an established legacy brand.

The decline in revenues has led to significant changes in the organisation; in 2006, the KM Group produced their newspapers from 15 local offices across the county with two news-subbing hubs based in Canterbury and Larkfield in the west of the county. The company had a presence in nearly every high street in every small town in the county with local reporters and sales representatives based on patch. The group’s head office was located in Larkfield with full newspaper production, print and distribution managed in house. The company even printed papers for other newspaper companies such as The London Metro. The company were asset heavy and cash flow light, they owned offices and industrial units across the county.
as well as a fleet of company cars, vans and an expensive printing press. Following the economic crisis in 2008, the group faced deep financial problems.

“We had to pay off debts, cut costs, cope with the economic down turn and embrace the digital revolution. And we were losing £500,000 a month” Allison (The Guardian).

This resulted in major changes in September 2008 with the closure of six of the local offices. The following year the company closed its printing press and outsourced print, production and distribution. In this period, the total workforce dropped from 700 to 300 employees (Interviewee 5). The group however continued to produce all the existing papers printing all paid and free editions and unlike other newspaper groups in the UK they did not close or merge any editions.

5.2 KEY FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE ORGANISATIONS

CULTURE

An important finding of the data analysis is that strategic decisions has influenced by the company’s culture and history. The period from 2006 to 2016 was a time of major change, economic pressures and technological demands. It is against this backdrop that the interviews were completed. Schein believes that to understand an organisation’s culture and its effect on strategic decisions, the cultural layers need to be analysed. In the course of the interviews, three key cultural layers started to arise in relation to the key factors that influence organisational culture in the KM Group: the influence of the ownership type on the culture, the occupational (micro) cultures within the organisation and the physical location with different cultures revealed in different local offices. These three themes will be revisited to build a cultural paradigm for the organisation.

5.2.1 INFLUENCE OF OWNERSHIP

The KM Media Group is one of the UK’s largest family owned regional media organisations owning 1.16% of the total turnover market share of regional media share in the UK (see figure 3 on page 48). The data suggests that the company is held in high esteem by its peers in the regional media industry sitting alongside larger organisations on industry bodies and associations. Both the current Chairman, Geraldine Allinson, and the previous, Edwin Boorman, served as Presidents of the Newspaper Society and Allinson currently sits as a non-executive director on the Press Association Board. More recently, Geraldine Allinson appeared before a 2015 Parliament Select Committee to discuss the future of local media in the UK. The 135 years of publishing history in the county has resulted in the family’s name and the influence of the company’s role being significant in the region. Edwin Boorman held
the position of Lord Lieutenant of Kent and was awarded an OBE for charitable deeds in the county (KM Group History, 2015) and the current Chairman and family board members have connections across many organisations and committees across the county with strong brand association established through media partnerships and sponsorships.

During the course of the interviews, all respondents named the family or the Chairman as the main stakeholder. Schein (2004) believes that to understand the culture of an organisation you need to understand the hidden layers often seen through organisational ‘myths or legends’. One such myth within the KM Group is that it is part of the Kent community. Interviewee 1 mentioned that some of the signs as you entered the county used to say ‘Welcome to Kent – the KM County’ and this myth is upheld on the corporate section of the website where it reads, “…because the KM became so deeply rooted in Kent, parts of the county were dubbed "KM Country". The website goes on to state “The family value their role and position within the county they even used to produce road signs saying welcome to KM County” (KM Group History, 2015). There is no photographic evidence of this nor explanation as to why the county signs would say this.

Another company myth is that in the early 1990s KM Group branding was so prevalent at the county show that the showground was a ‘wash of yellow and black’ with banners along all the main roads leading to the showground, so it appeared as if the show was managed and hosted by the KM Group. Company branding is seen in sport grounds across the county, with prominent pitch boards at the Kent County Cricket grounds and at Gillingham and Charlton football stadiums. Newsagents across the county had yellow and black canopies outside the shops with vinyl branding in the windows and prior to 2008, the KM Group even sponsored a hot air balloon, a branded bouncy castle and a fleet of branded promotional vehicles. These promotional vehicles included a mobile events unit and a mobile advertising display trailer, towed around the county on publication day. The family still drive cars with personalised number plates KM1, KM2 and KM3 as if to symbolise the company has a need to maintain a standing in the county.

The group’s website quite clearly positions the company as a major player in the county using language such as

“Kent’s leading multimedia company and one of the most recognised brands in the South East, the KM Group believes its employees should lead both consumers and suppliers by example. KM Group’s core values of ‘exceeding expectations’ and ‘belief in the individual’ characterise the company” (KM Group 2015)
The company’s vision statement positions the group as trustworthy and crucial in connecting communities in the county.

“Media You Can Trust. KM Media Group is a trusted voice in Kent, connecting communities for over 150 years. Committed to entertaining, informing and interacting with the people of Kent. The leading multimedia company in the county, KM Media Group's portfolio of brands play a vital part of life in the Garden of England”. (KM Group 2015)

Family ownership gives a distinctive character to the organisation’s culture where employees were seen as being part of the wider family. Employees include whole families including couples; two of those interviewed, for example, met their partners (Interviewees 1 and 8) whist employed by the company. The group also employs different generations of the same family; one Interviewee (7) had employed her own children in the past. The family continues to award staff loyalty with long service awards with some employees working for the company for 40 plus years and one of the interviewees had over 20 years’ service within the company. Some Interviewees, however, felt that this longevity resulted in a resistance to change and influenced the way change was adopted

“The SMT (senior management team) have no external experience, they don’t know how other organisations do this, change and adapt, they are not fleet afoot” (Interviewee 7).

The literature suggests (Picard, 2011; Küng, 2015) that organisations that have been proactive and valued the importance of flexibility and change have been more successful to adapting to the current media environment. All the Interviewees saw the core stakeholder within the organisation as the Chairman and family rather than the reader and advertisers. Observations like this would imply that the culture is inwardly facing, more focused on delivering the wants and needs of the owners rather than the consumers and advertisers.

5.2.2 INFLUENCE OF LOCATION

The data suggest that the location of offices and workplaces have had an important influence on organisational culture in the KM Group. Prior to the company’s restructuring in 2008 the company published the local newspapers from within their reporting patch. The KM Group had 15 town centre offices across the county. Each local office had an editor, a team of reporters including their own sports reporters, with the commercial sales teams based in local offices. The company believed that the high street location encouraged an interaction with the local community. Receptionists ran front counters selling both copies of the newspaper and
classified advertisements; taking bookings for birth, marriage and death notices. The relationship between the receptionist and both the reporters and the commercial team was strong. Receptionists fed reporters potential stories from death notices and developed leads for the commercial team from information they heard from the local community.

In 2008, many local offices closed and the teams were centralised into out of town industry estates. This was followed in 2010 by introduction of an online advertisement booking system, which saw the drive to encourage smaller advertisers and readers to use ‘self-service’ advertisement booking services and online photography orders, rather than through face to face selling (Appendix 1). This change saw many receptionist roles become redundant resulting in some of the larger out of town offices reception desks being set up to be unmanned. (Appendix 2). Initially the receptionist role disappeared totally and where the receptionist role does now remain, there was a change in their line management with a centralisation of responsibility.

“I now manage all the receptionists from here (head office).” (Interviewee 5)

In 2008 when the first round of redundancies was implemented the company reduced staff numbers by moving to a more centralised structure across many areas, during this period the group closed the free papers in the Bexley and Bromley area and closed some of the smaller offices consolidating the editorial teams A further round of redundancies followed the next year with more offices closing. For those staff that remained there was a fundamental change to their working environment. Shifts were introduced for both prepress and subbing teams; many staff who had been in local offices were relocated and now faced long commutes.

“New combined editorial production desks will operate from Larkfield, near Maidstone, and Wraik Hill in north-east Kent. They will include all the production work of group features. A new ‘county news desk’ combined with the content side of group features will also operate from Medway while the group sports desk will work from the Wraik Hill office.” (Hold the Front Page 2015)

Some journalists and sales staff now managed larger patches with their offices based off patch and the Folkestone team for example moved to the Ashford office. Throughout 2008 and 2009 there was a period of rapid change for the company as they sold off assets quickly at auction including real estate such as offices and warehouses. The printing press at the main head office was closed and for the next three years’ staff worked in a half empty building before the site was sold to property developers.
“The Larkfield building served us well when we were purely a newspaper publisher, but KM Group has evolved into a multimedia company and we need a headquarters that reflects our current needs.” He added large parts of the current site have been left vacant since the KM Group restructured its business, including the former press hall, as Trinity Mirror now prints its titles. No newspapers are based at the site, with it instead housing departments such as HR, pre-press and telesales.” Richard Elliott KM Group MD (Hold the Front Page 2015)

The company maintained a presence in some of the local towns, and in many cases it was the local community and the local team that lobbied the Executive team to maintain the high street presence. When for example, the offices of Deal and Thanet were faced with closure it was the local editor and sales manager who fought to keep the High Street position. The editor of the East Kent Mercury in Deal worked with local councillors and business owners to maintain the Deal office and in Thanet, local property owners purchased the buildings in April 2010 when they were sold at auction. Both of these buildings were then, leased back to the KM Group on a long-term rental term thus ensuring the newspaper were still produced on patch. In contrast, the Canterbury newspaper office was sold to a developer in 2011 and after over 150 years publishing in the city it moved to an out of town estate in Whitstable over 10 miles away from the city centre.

The differences between the local cultures are seen in the different use of reception areas. The offices in Deal, Sheppey, Maidstone and Thanet high streets have seemingly ignored the new structure of moving to an unmanned reception and receptionist are still selling newspapers and taking orders for copies of the photos and bookings for small classified advertisements such as birth, marriage and death notices. The signage and branding on the high street offices actively encourages readers and advertisers to visit the office. The receptionist is a part of the core team within the local office, ‘the eyes and ears’ of the local community. For the out of town offices the role of the receptionist has all but disappeared with the role moved into back office data entries roles and the receptionist desk is unmanned see photos illustrating this in appendix. When visiting one of these offices, as part of the study, one of the editors was covering the front desk over the lunch period, working on tasks on the front counter so the reception area are manned for visitors. In the centralised out of town offices in Whitstable and Medway the office front counters remain unmanned. The two different types of office clearly show the cultural divide between locations with the in-town offices actively encouraging interaction with their advertisers and readers and welcoming two-way dialogue, whereas the out of town offices do not encourage visitors or interaction. Signs push visitors to online booking platforms rather than encouraging face-to-face dialogue.
The galvanising and strength of this localised culture has been fundamental in shaping and influencing the development of the future organisational strategy. Corporate decisions were not always implemented at a local level. The Deal office are known within the company as ‘Team Deal’ (Interviewee 1) with the town being referred to as ‘Mercury Land’ and the Thanet office are referred to by others in the organisation as being in ‘Planet Thanet’. Research commissioned whilst employed by The KM Group in 2007, to understand the distinctiveness of the local towns, showed that within the local town, there is very little knowledge or understanding of the paper being part of a larger media group and the readers and advertisers are loyal to local brand first and foremost. The centralised management team see the smaller town editions of the newspapers as being quite parochial, slower to adopt new practices and not adapting easily to change. Yet these newspaper editions have maintained a good newspaper sale and have not suffered the sharp decrease in sales figures seen in other publishing areas (JIGREG). Local advertisers too have remained loyal and revenue decline has not been as marked as seen in the larger editions. This small town effect is evident in the coastal towns with stronger links between reporters and the community. Schein (2004) talks of traditions and myths within organisations being an invisible sign of a company’s culture. These traditions can be seen clearly in the smaller coastal offices where the office is much more embedded in the community and within the traditions of its local town. In these offices the local teamwork together, they support and attend local events, entering floats into local carnivals, operating stands at local events and supporting local fundraising causes. The company has a centralised promotions and events team employing seasonal and temporary members of staff who attend events across the county (KM Group) yet in the smaller coastal offices it will be the local editor and sales manager driving the vehicle in the town carnival.

With the closure of local offices, one could argue that the KM Group is no longer actively encouraging dialogue with the local audience. Whilst no newspapers have closed in the last 10 years, the group have moved more and more towards regionalising of news. They continue to maintain a localised presence within smaller towns by using change pages from larger editions; in these hyperlocal editions, there is only local news reported on the first four pages of the edition and the remainder of the paper includes news from a wider location. The main edition for the Canterbury area is theKentish Gazettewith Canterbury specific news and information; the bulk of the content of this edition is then used in the Faversham Times, Whitstable Gazette and Herne Bay Gazette papers. This publishing pattern is replicated in the Ashford, Maidstone and Medway areas. Using the publishing model of shared content, the group has maintained the number of editions published through centralising editorial costs such as editing, subbing and sports and business desks, servicing the community with one local news reporter. There is no countywide paper with very little Kent-wide news being
published in local editions. The group supports the local news portfolio with countywide specialists’ supplements such as Kent Business, covering business news and what is on covering events and activities across the region. This publishing pattern means that the local publishing footprint is supplemented with regional and countywide information. The online model reflects the paper model with news published on a locally branded web portal as well as countywide web portal www.Kentonline.co.uk. The web content for the main news website is managed centrally with a web news team based in one of the main regional offices responsible for online new content, though the local reporters have a ‘dotted line’ responsibility to the web editor so that large local stories run on the country-wide site as well. This means that the ring of locational culture overlaps with local offices responsible for in-paper stories at a local level extending into online stories across the county.

5.2.3 Influence of Occupational Culture

The influence of employee occupation emerged as a key factor in the data analysis of the KM Group creating pockets of subcultures within the company. As discussed earlier in both the literature review and the industry analysis, digitalisation has had a major impact on all media organisations. Digital adoption, within the organisation, is crucial yet adoption has been inconsistent across the organisation. This adoption of digital working practices clearly illustrates the sense of difference between occupational groups. The commercial and journalist teams behave differently and show different levels of adapting to and adopting new skills. In common with many legacy media organisations, (Oakley 2012) the KM Group’s commercial team has been slow to adopt digital working practice (Interviewee 6) and to understand how the digital audience can be monetarised.

“Content curators or managers, that’s a big hurdle, They are writing stories in a different way but so much of the stuff they could be making money from they are being targeted by the wrong things browser or viewers, which is wrong. To the point where now 1.6 million browsers in Kent so we have the captive audience but how can we manipulate that audience to serve our advertisers differently.” (Interviewee 7)

The sales team are still not truly multimedia, shown most evidently by the role of the specialist digital sales team that sits alongside the commercial team ‘dual-calling’ on advertisers to help sell the digital portfolio.

“If they [the commercial team] really embraced and understood digital they wouldn’t need this team [central digital sales team]” (Interviewee 7).
The reduction in staff numbers and the increasing importance of the digital platform has seen the group try to upskill employees, in try and drive the adoption of multimedia skills. In some cases, for the journalists, this has changed the working patterns.

“I tweet in the early evening from home and my news editor takes over late evening” (Interviewee 1).

However, adoption of multi-media skills differs from office to office from occupational group to occupational group. The degree of digital ambidexterity varies enormously across employees with the commercial team are still adapting to the multimedia sale rather than behaving as digital natives.

“The commercial staffs are beginning to get the digital sale – they need to if that’s the future of this business” (Interviewee 5).

Another area where occupational differences were evident in the data analysis was in relation to how they value online news stories. To drive business forward the need to grow the online audience is crucial (Interviewees 1 and 5). The newspaper industry reporting figures (ABCe) has moved to reporting a combined online and newspaper circulation figure so that the increased online audience counteracts the decline in newspaper readership figures (ABC 2016). This means that for some journalists within the organisation the drive to build an online audience comes at a cost, undermining the main principles of local news (Interviewee 5). The organisational strategy is to develop the online audience, with number of browsers and unique users now being key performance indicators for the journalists. However, editorial integrity and core regional news values contradict this ‘click bait’ mentality, as the use of sensational stories being contradictory to the role of local media as the fourth estate (Hold the Front Page 2015).

The ‘Crabzilla’ story is an example of the dichotomy faced by the KM Group. The Whitstable Gazette ran a story see copy in appendix 3 in which a large sandbank appeared to look like a monster crab. Several of the interviewees mentioned the story as a sign of how the company is changing. On one hand, the editor was pleased that this one story had driven his monthly hits

“Crabzilla was the biggest thing to happen to us” (Interviewee 1)

This interviewee cited this story as an example of how web hits and online audience figure increased with the right story; as this story had more hits that month than any other. The same
story was quoted, by another interviewee as an example of what was wrong with some of the online stories now being used in the organisation.

“The editorial director hated that story [Crabzilla], it had nothing to do with local news and community and everything to do with getting web hits” (Interviewee 5).

The comments on the story online also showed that the readers did not appreciate this ‘click bait’ style commenting the ‘Crabzilla’ story was ‘sensationalised’ and ‘trashy’ and would seem to contradict the company’s core value of being ‘the voice of Kent’. Many of the website hits were from overseas away from the KM Group’s core local publishing area.

“That story had loads of hits from all over; Thailand, America and it got picked up by the nationals [newspapers]” (Interviewee 1).

Therefore, for one interviewee success was now measured in web hits and the coverage of an online story whilst for others there was quiet disdain over ‘click bait’ stories. The editorial KPIs were driven by an organisational strategy to drive the digital audience as an additional revenue stream (Interviewee 4). Yet this strategy was undermined further by the apparent ‘lethargy’ towards the digital sale by the commercial team who were not monetarising this online audience fully (Interviewee 7). The journalists were posting stories online and driving the online audience and yet the sales team were still not building sales revenue from the increased online audience.

“Digital sales revenue is still a small part of the overall revenue of the whole group” (Interviewee 5).

Occupational discord amongst journalists was common as commercial targets and objectives often challenged their professional integrity, with sales teams asking journalists to run or not run a story due to commercial pressures.

“I was asked not to run that story because they are one of our main advertisers…I went straight to the editorial director who said run it you’re the editor it’s your paper” (subsequent discussion with Interviewee 1).

The digital transformation of regional newspapers further fuelled this tension as the drive to increase online audiences required certain type and style of stories to be covered. Both observational and interviewee data revealed that the editor’s role is not as defined with a website as it is with a newspaper. Traditionally the editor in the KM Group had the ultimate decision as to what ran in his paper when it came to unusual advertisement placements. The data suggests however that the same principles are not as defined with online advertisements,
such as pop-ups, screen pulls and rotating banners, which interrupt the web content and the impact of the story. Yet these intrusive digital advertisements are often carried without the editor’s knowledge and are outside of his control with the website design managed by a centralised design team. Thus digitalisation within the KM Group has undermined the traditional role of the editor in the organisation. Editors for example now access real-time web audience figures as well as weekly newspaper sales figures. In addition digitalisation has affect job roles, and working patterns. The data also shows that all the journalists are now multimedia focused, targeted on online stories as well as paper stories. with the role of the journalists within the KM Group being multi-tasking multimedia practitioners As seen in a cartoon run in The Kentish Gazette in figure 4). This finding corresponds to the results of other studies. (Nielsen 2015)

Figure 4 the modern journalist credit: Royston Robertson

In contrast to this, many of the interviewees saw the commercial team as still being too newspaper focused, which was largely due to the largest commission revenues continuing to be based on newspaper advertising revenues. Digital sale became crucial in the new business model but it was still a small part of the combined advertising revenue for the group. Some of the interviewees saw the commercial team’s limited digital skills as an inhibiting factor in relation to this:

“They [the commercial team] are beginning to get it but the [digital revenue] money is still not making up for the loss we have made in other areas” (Interviewee 5)
The evidence of subcultural change in the organisation is most obvious in the slow adoption of digital ambidexterity across the organisation. This attitude to digitalisation in a number of company ‘artefacts’ (Schein); such as company reports and in the branding of cars, offices and buildings. Newly branded company cars for example have no reference to the digital portfolio. (See photos in appendix 4).

However other parts of the data shows that the KM Group could be considered a visionary within regional publishing with its early adoption of website technology. The previous Chairman, Edwin Boorman, launched the online platform kentonline.co.uk in 1998 (KM Group 2015) earlier than many regional and even national publishers. kentonline.co.uk was, for example, live a year before the guardian.co.uk in 1999. According to Küng (2015 p.11) this early website launch should be a sign of the organisation being an ‘early adopter’ of technology and should have started the company’s digital transformation. For The Guardian the earl” adoption of news website “helped to limit cultural resistance, or perhaps, speed the cultural shift” Küng (2015 p.12). The KM Group, however, does not show the same cultural shift towards digital innovation as The Guardian Media Group. For some of the interviewees this may have been in part due to the company structure and tensions between local offices and central departments and the silo management of specialist areas. The company’s web portal kentonline.co.uk, for example, was managed centrally and separately from the local editions. Local offices wrote and contributed to online stories but the central team managed the web content, both editorially and commercially. This web team was another sub-occupational group, online journalists, with a countywide rather than local remit. The local news journalists were not early-adopters of digital tools in fact, for some interviewees the journalists were pushed into digital practices by the audience rather than through corporate strategy.

“We [the journalists] get it - we had to, our readers were driving us to [all the journalists are multi-media publishing stories across numerous platforms] (Interviewee 1).

The data also revealed that for the commercial team the digital adoption was linked to revenue and the structure of the commercial targets set for the sales teams. For example supplements such as; motors, property and the ‘What’s on’ sections and local advertising teams were still focused predominantly on the paper-advertising sale. This focus is largely down to the differing values within the organisation and the perceived value of the audience.

“On the rep side due to our history rep’s targets are still traditionally press so if you target someone heavily on press they will do their upmost to hit target. Which is bizarre you sell more you don’t make more as you need to produce 10 pages more whereas online you can increase in size without incurring extra costs”. (Interviewee 7)
During the economic downturn, advertising rates have continued to rise annually but the reader’s numbers have declined, every year (JIGREG 2009 v 2015). Paper advertising was sold by space size with a rate per SCC (single column centimetre) or per quarter, half or full page. In contrast to this, other media such as broadcast TV and radio advertising was sold by audience reach or CPT (cost per thousand). Classified advertising such as property, jobs and motors sections have the highest yield (KM Group Media Pack 2015). This legacy revenue model has not been changed to reflect the evolving audience patterns. This model has in part shaped the culture and working practices of the commercial teams. Sales teams were paid a relatively low annual wage so were therefore reliant upon the sales commission to add to their basic salary, and this commission was based on a percentage of the revenue of the cost of space sold. Therefore, the higher yielding space produced more revenue for the individual sales person. This, in turn, means that the adoption of digital media platforms has been slow as web advertising was cheaper than paper advertisements, which yielded higher commission.

Both the observation and interview data indicate that within the KM Group, the digital sell was still seen as ‘add-on’ to the paper sell and to the organisation’s structure, so there was a specialist digital sales team that covered the entire country rather than individual local sales teams having the digital sales knowledge. The centralised digital sales team were

“Supporting the sales team rather than sales team being digital natives. [...] there to educate the sales people and customers” (Interviewee 7)

This lack of digital focus meant that new entrants to the market such as www.jobsinkent.co.uk were able to take a large amount of market share from the KM Group by purely focusing on digital revenue. This new entrant also demonstrates how slow the company was to recognise new entrants to the marketplace. In 2006, the market share measures were based on advertisements running in competitive papers, with the sales support team measuring and collating advertisements in competing papers to estimate client total advertisement spend in the county. The digital revenues were not monitored or collated by the commercial team at all.

“A customer might be sending £5000 a month on google AdWords and be booking a 5x1 with us and the rep wouldn’t be any the wiser” (Interviewee 7).

The digital adoption within the group quite clearly shows the occupational split. Multimedia working practices have clearly been adopted by all journalists and editorial teams. Journalists now have access to Twitter and other social media platforms for gathering stories and broadcasting stories and prompts for web stories. Journalists in turn access and live tweet to
the company’s twitter feed. However, as an organisation adoption of social media was quite late I know from working within the company that the organisation did not for example, have a social media staff policy until 2011. Now local journalists have access to twitter feed that represent their newspapers as well as personal accounts with reference to KM in the title. In contrast to this the social media platform for the commercial departments are managed centrally and used to broadcast sales messages rather than interacting with the community (Appendix 5 shows an example of these Tweets).

Part of the observational analysis included a review of the use of open plan offices in some of the buildings and the interaction between journalists and commercial teams. At a local level there was evidence of cross-occupational interaction, the Deal office for example worked together producing the East Kent Mercury. However, the same cross-occupational interaction was not seen for the digital platforms; the online web development team were managed centrally and based physically in a different location than the centralised digital sales team. The data suggested that central website policy was driven from the top-down rather than at a local level and ideas were not seen as being ‘home grown’ by the commercial team, another factor, which contributes to their resistance to change. The company branded itself as a media group, rather than press-based company, seen clearly in the branding at the head office building (See example of branding in Appendix 6).

The final point to make about occupational difference within the organisation refers to the way in which the group recruit, as well as the turnover of staff within the occupational groups. Trainee reporters were only recruited if they had multimedia experience or skills. In recent years’ junior journalists have left the organisation to join companies such as the BBC, Channel 4, the Daily Mirror and the Daily Telegraph showing the skills developed in the KM Group were highly desirable in national media organisations. In comparison, the commercial team had a longevity of service with many individuals having long periods of service, compared to their journalist peers and there was no prerequisite to have digital skills and experience when they were recruited, as evidenced in the recruitment advertisements, which ran the paper (Appendix 7 shows an example recruitment advertisement).

5.3 CULTURAL PARADIGM OF KM GROUP

Schein’s (2004) model assumes that an organisation’s cultural paradigm comes from inter-related assumptions of hidden actions and beliefs. The data analysis revealed four main assumptions that are influenced by the factors discussed in the previous section that form the cultural paradigm of the KM Group: (1) the KM Group - the best in the county, (2) family is at the core of our organisation, (3) embedded in the Kent community and (4) digitalisation
is difficult. The KM Group case study data revealed many of the espoused beliefs and values, which can be used to build a cultural paradigm (figure 5 below). Values and beliefs, are often difficult to uncover or measure (Schein 2004), yet these assumptions were evident in much of the data gathered. Figure 5 illustrates the cultural paradigm of the KM Group summarising the key assumptions and its features.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KM Group – the best in the county</th>
<th>Family is at the core of our organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kent = KM County</td>
<td>Chairman is the main stakeholder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The voice of Kent</td>
<td>Inwardly looking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Largest multimedia organisation in the county</td>
<td>Family focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth through acquisition has led to complacency about competitors</td>
<td>Longevity of service – employee part of the family and loyalty is rewarded</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Digitalisation is difficult</th>
<th>Embedded in the Kent community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Digital is global, we are local</td>
<td>Corporate statement is “Together we make a difference”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low adoption of online self-service methods</td>
<td>Maintaining local offices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centralised digital teams are not embedded locally</td>
<td>Editors’ role in the local area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some occupational resistance to digital change</td>
<td>County wide events and sponsorships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commission model still reflects a press business</td>
<td>Maintaining free paper distribution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5 Cultural paradigm of the KM Group

5.3.1 KM GROUP – THE BEST IN THE COUNTY

There is an assumption held within the KM Group that through its heritage and history it holds an important and unique position in the county. This belief of self-importance runs through the organisational culture in many occupational areas and locations. Another manifestation of this key cultural assumption is that the company is the ‘voice of Kent’ (KM Group); because of its heritage and historical background, there is a sense of self-importance within the company,
somehow speaking on behalf of the community. This comes through in corporate visions and communication including purporting to being the ‘largest multimedia company in Kent’ (KM Group 2015) and in reports about the group’s quarterly ABCe figures presented as news stories (kentonline.co.uk). Some of the myths emerged from the data reveal the various nicknames and label given to local offices such as; ‘Team Deal’ ‘Planet Thanet’ and ‘Gazette Land’ implying that organisation somehow ‘owns’ the local communities and publishing areas. The data also suggests that countywide presence and branding enforces the message of the organisation being the biggest and the best media company in the county. The data gathered also suggests that the group places major importance on maintaining its presence in the county, evidenced through its continued branding and sponsorship of county sport grounds and their annual presence at the Kent County Show. The interview data revealed that even during periods of economic downturn and financial trouble the need to paint the county ‘yellow and black’ (Interviewee 4) remained even when offices were closing and employees were made redundant.

The legacy of growth through acquisition rather than through innovation has led to a culture of being complacent about competitors. In the past smaller newspaper groups, were bought out and merged into the KM Group portfolio. More recently, new online competitors such as job web portals were ignored and not monitored with little understanding of the revenue lost to new market entrants (Interviewee 7).

5.3.2 DIGITALISATION IS DIFFICULT

As established earlier, digitalisation is a core corporate strategy for the KM Group (Interviewees 1, 4, and 7). However, the drive for digitalisation is a challenge for local newspaper groups; digital is global yet the organisation’s foundations are local publishing for distinct small local audiences. The company maintained local offices managed by separate local teams, yet the digital teams were centrally managed located away from the local offices. The lack of embedded digital skills within the commercial team is compounded by the existence of this centralised digital sales team. The team was there to “educate the local sales team” (Interviewee 7). They ‘dual call’ on clients with the local teams to sell the digital portfolio, emphasising the ‘specialist’ nature of the digital sale. The current revenue model seen within the KM Group compounds the resistance to the multimedia sale. The commission paid on press revenues remains higher than on the digital sale therefore the digital sales comes second for many of the sales reps.
“On the rep side due to our history rep’s targets are still traditionally press so if you target someone heavily on press they do their upmost to hit target”. (Interviewee 7)

“Millennials audience are different they are happy to read content that’s sponsored as long as they see that is it relevant to them so that means a commercial model can be different. We are trying to shoe horn our commercial model into one which is traditionally old school” (Interviewee 7)

The observation and interview data also revealed that there was an assumption in the company that digital adoption has been more successful amongst the editorial team, with all journalists now having multimedia skills but here too there is a challenge. Online platforms give the reader more of a voice and feedback is more transparent.

“So traditionally the editor would have had a comment in press, (like) comment of the week (but) online everything is more transparent. Every story has an option to comment so you get feedback from the community, which reflects the KM in a different light than it may have been seen 6-7 years ago. So that perceived view can be quite harsh, editorial teams have to do things differently. Readers have more of a say.” (Interviewee 7)

In addition, the central digital team have different roles from the local teams and this is blurring the traditional boundaries for the editors. The editor’s key performance indicators were to increase online hits this often meant attracting a national or even global audience, contrary to the traditional local publishing patch for their newspaper. Another result of the centralisation of the digital portfolio is that the local editor has no veto over the advertising carried on his website in the same way he does in his newspaper, thus the local online product is no longer managed locally.

The countywide portal kentonline.co.uk is edited and managed centrally with local teams feeding stories to the central team. This has breed a culture of competition amongst the local editors to get the most web hits and to have their story top on kentonline.co.uk, which deflects from the centralised corporate model. These features indicate an inward facing organisation, in which there are tensions between local and central teams reinforcing several of the assumptions.

5.3.3 THE FAMILY IS AT THE CORE OF OUR ORGANISATIONS

The importance of the owner’s family within the organisation is evident in all areas of the data. The Chairman and the family are the main stakeholders (Interviewees 1, 4 and &). The beliefs
and aspirations of the family are important and this effects the organisational culture. The role of the family on the Board brings stability and continuity of management, but this does not necessarily always encourage change or dynamism.

“Newspapers in Kent have been around for 100 or 150 years and publishers knew how to make money and that model continued on and on over the years and the Chairman sat in clover as the money rolled in” (Interviewee 7)

Both the observational and interview data suggests that the historical background and reputation of the Chairman and family were more important than how the organisation was adapting to the digital age.

“There was no strategy the readership took care of itself so long as you had a good editor the papers sold. Strategy has become more important and the incumbent people in the job have been unable to make proper decisive changes. So subsequently they tend to follow industry trends rather than making strategic decisions.” (Interviewee 7)

The family at the core of the business influences the other assumptions particularly the organisation’s role in the county and the vision of being the best in the county.
5.3.4 Embedded in the Kent Community

The assumption that the organisation is embedded in and part of the Kent community is a cultural value seen throughout the organisation. One company ‘myth’ was that the county signs used to say ‘Welcome to Kent - KM County’ – there is no evidence this is true but the story is well rehearsed throughout the business; evidenced both in interviewee comments and on the website. The evidence clearly shows that there was a number of micro cultures within the organisation across both occupational and locational areas. Journalists remain loyal to their code of conduct with even the Editorial Director rejecting click bait stories (Interviewee 6) preferring instead to run Kent based stories. Local offices maintained an individual culture with editorial and commercial teams working alongside each other, with the high street presence and getting involved with the local community at events like carnivals and Christmas light switch on. Local editors ran local stories with no corporate influence on what content to run. They were under no pressure to run national or celebrity stories and where ‘click bait’ stories were used, they always had a local angle or story.

The KM Group positions itself as a customer focused organisation as the ‘voice of Kent’, yet the data shows that many of the new corporate practices contradict this belief. The structural changes within the organisation have resulted in unmanned receptions, online booking systems and the removal of personal contact details on the website; all signs that two-way dialogue is being discouraged. The corporate culture of “Together we make a difference” would appear to be undermined by the new organisational culture where costs savings drive restructuring which sits uncomfortably alongside the vision and values statements. Ultimately, the micro-cultures within the organisation continue to drive the community-based values.

The organisation is based on a countywide presence, and so far, they have resisted closing all the high street offices, which has affected the development of new teams with specialist areas of expertise. This local emphasis may remain in the newspaper titles but the entire specialist teams; digital development, supplements such as What’s On, Kent Business and Newspaper Sales and Promotions, and Marketing now have a countywide remit. The data does show that some micro cultures within the organisation have resisted these new working practices. This can be seen most strongly, as discussed, in smaller coastal towns local offices have maintained their community focused values. Here, in the smaller high street office the culture is different, loyalty to the local community comes before loyalty to the organisation.

The stated mission of the KM Group is that it makes a difference to the local community, working alongside the community “Together we make a difference”. The heritage of the organisation means that there is strong brand presence in areas where the newspaper
campaigns for local community groups. Analysis of the ownership model and heritage of the organisation shows the impact this micro culture has on the organisational strategy. The ways in which the organisation is structure means that at its core it remains a local newspaper company, to serve the local community with a continued focus still on the newspaper audience. There is still concentrated effort to maintain the paid for readership figures through community events and sponsorships. The group still publish free papers in all areas and the purpose of these remain as driver for the local paid for editions. The group has adopted some of the cost saving strategies from other local media companies such as moving away from door-to-door to pick up points, but the free papers still reported on community stories written by journalists rather than being reverse publishing models written by content curators.

The data reveals that the organisation key role of the KM Group is to serve and support their local community and these visions and values remain core in the organisation. This vision runs from the company mission statement online through to the local editors and to the coastal newspaper offices.

5.4 SUMMARY

This chapter provided an analysis of the KM Group case study, the findings revealed a number of key characteristics including the influence of micro cultures; the influence of the organisations and its place in the county; the cultural layers developed from years of family ownership and the difficulties around digitalisation.

The analysis of the KM Group’s cultural paradigm revealed four core assumptions linked to the heritage, structure and management of the organisation. The cultural values within the group show a struggle and some contradictions within the organisation. There are tensions between the commercial imperatives and the need to deliver good community news; and how to deliver an increase the online audience without undermining ethical journalistic standards. The financial pressure to change the organisation appears to divide occupational groups or micro cultures within the company. Some journalists are driven by the web hits for an online story whilst others continue to run local campaigns and to act as the fourth estate challenging local government.

This community value is however being undermined by the digital strategy; traditional publishing boundaries are being blurred with online traffic coming from a national and sometimes international audience. Organisational decisions are being made on a corporate level rather than a community level; the Deal office remains on the High Street because the local team fought for it, yet the Dover, Folkestone and Canterbury offices have disappeared.
How then can the KM Group make a difference to these communities when publishing patches have been merged and town editions are now covered by a few ‘change pages’?

The data shows that the different layers of cultural paradigm affect how strategy is adopted leading to inconsistency within the organisation. The corporate strategy is the adoption of multimedia working practices driving website audiences and online sale, yet the analysis revealed that the further away from the central base and more localised the office, the slower employees were to adopt the ambidextrous digital skills required in the digital age. As discussed in these local offices, the loyalty remains to the reader and local community over the organisation’s vision. The organisation as a whole has not managed to move away from the legacy press model and become fully multimedia, for some micro cultures the focus is still on the newspaper portfolio with the revenue from the paid for copy sale being on a par with the digital advertising revenue (Interviewee 4).
CHAPTER 6 KENT REGIONAL NEWS AND MEDIA

This chapter provides a case study analysis of the Kent Regional News and Media (now referred to as the KRN). The collected data is analysed in relation to the following sections: (1) key organisational features and strategic decisions of the KRN Group; (2) key factors that influence organisational culture; (3) cultural paradigm of the KRN Group.

6.1 KEY ORGANISATIONAL FEATURES AND STRATEGIC DECISIONS OF KRN

KRN is part of a larger media group that owns a chain of local newspapers and its ownership has changed four times during the research period between 2006 and 2016. Prior to 2006, the company was formed by a series of mergers and takeovers. The papers that are now the key outlets of the KRN Group were established during the course of 20th century. For most of the 20th century they were owned by small newspaper companies, some of which were family owned. The group was formed from the buyout of the family owned Adscene free newspaper group merging it with several smaller publishing groups, the Times Series in the Swale district (Sittingbourne, The Isle of Sheppey and Faversham) and the Folkestone Express Series. In 2001, the group was brought out by Trinity Mirror, in 2007 to Northcliffe, and then to Local World, which in turn was acquired by Trinity Mirror in 2015.

In 2016 Trinity Mirror now produced six paid for papers across Kent [including the Kent and Sussex Courier Group] and was running a portfolio of free papers, online news sites and digital products. Between 2006 and 2016 there were considerable changes in the portfolio of the KRN Group. In 2006 the group published 9 paid for papers; East Kent Gazette (Sittingbourne), the Faversham Times, the Herne Bay Times, the Whitstable Times, the Folkestone Herald, the Dover Express, the Shepway Gazette, the Medway Standard and the Medway News, and numerous free papers, the Adscene series, the Thanet Gazette and the Thanet Times. In the following 10 years the group had closed or merged all of the Times series; except the Faversham Times, and the Canterbury Times and Thanet Times which are now published as free ‘pick up’ papers. The only paid-for papers that remained were the Folkestone Herald, Dover Express and the Faversham Times. During the period, the paid for newspaper sales portfolio have shrunk from 15 paid for titles down to four titles.

“It has been a massive change, huge change, when I started I looked after 15 titles and now it is down to 4” (Interviewee 6).
Government policy and regulation of the local press industry had as an influence on the group during this period. In 2011, Northcliffe tried to sell KRN to the KM Group. As discussed in the previous chapter the sale collapsed after the Office of Fair Trading referred the case to the Competition Commission and the KM Group pulled out describing the large costs as prohibitive. (Hold the Front Page 2011). Northcliffe closed two of its seven papers East Kent Gazette and Sheppey Gazette and the Medway News within weeks of the sale collapsing). In 2012, the remainder of the group merged, alongside the remaining papers in the Northcliffe portfolio, into Local World, a new local media business formed between Northcliffe and Illife News. This new partnership did not trade for very long and in November 2015 Local World was acquired by Trinity Mirror.

By 2016, Trinity Mirror the largest regional publisher in the UK owned KRN. In 2016 the Trinity Mirror group published 150 titles across the UK and Ireland including the Daily Mirror, the Daily Record and the Sunday People. The group also published daily regional papers including the Manchester Evening News, Bristol Post, the Liverpool Echo and the Nottingham Post. The Trinity Mirror website lists a “network of more than 80 websites proving 24/7 coverage of the news, sport and showbiz stories” to more than ‘100m unique browsers every month’ (Trinity Mirror 2016). Therefore, by 2016 KRN was a small part of a much larger national newspaper organisation. The KRN brand still remains though and is still referred to as a separate publishing division both within and outside the organisation. Recent corporate statements announcing more restructuring and redundancies, for example, still referred to the KRN division:

“Kent Regional News and Media senior editor Rebecca Smith are all leaving the business”. (Hold the Front Page 2016).

Another example is that KRN employees have KRN in their email addresses (name@krn.co.uk) as the contact pages of the group’s websites reveal and have not been rebranded as Trinity Mirror.

Apart from recurrent ownership changes another key characteristic of the KRN Group another key characteristic of the KRN group has been the frequent restructuring of both its operation and its portfolio in the last 10 years. Following the KRN restructures and subsequent newspaper closures in 2009 and 2010 the group closed its offices in many of the local towns including Herne Bay, Whitstable and Canterbury. By 2012, it had closed its regional reporting and publishing hub in Medway, which had previously managed subbing, and editing for the southeast division. Job roles moved to Essex and Sussex and for a time the group tested outsourcing of prepress design to India. By 2016, the group only remaining offices were in
Folkestone and Margate serving the coastal communities and from these offices the group still published paid for, free weekly papers, and produced localised editions for the smaller communities such as Hythe and Romney Marsh. The company’s countywide online brand is www.thisiskent.co.uk, which is run as a template site and follows the same format as other website held by the groups across the country such as www.thisishampshire.co.uk. Within the online portfolio, there are also local editions such as www.folkestoneherald.co.uk, which provides news coverage for the Folkestone and surrounding areas delivering a hyperlocal online solution for both readers and advertisers. As part of the wider southeast division, the KRN publishing team work closely with sister organisations covering Essex and Surrey. The Commercial Director of the south east division covers a large patch across the three counties bringing a consistency and synergy across these different publishing areas (Interviewee 4). In May 2016, the company restructured again removing the role of the Regional Editors which covered the whole of the county. This flatter, matrix style of management was designed, the company argued, to open up dialogue and two-way communication the organisation, so reporting lines were simplified, encouraging a more transparent corporate culture these “newly-created ‘brands editor’ roles with responsibility for all print operations within their areas as well as the new county-wide websites” (Hold the Front Page November 2016).

Prior to the changes being implemented there were several tiers of management with a different structure for the commercial and journalist teams. The local journalists were managed by a local editor who reported into a regional editor who, in turn, reported to a South East Editor then into Editorial Director. This contrasted to the simplified structure on the commercial side where the management structure already followed a more matrix style with the sales teams or Regional Account Managers, as they were now called, reporting into the Regional Commercial Director who then reported to the National Commercial Director.

The background to KRN today shows how volatile the local newspaper media landscape has been and how the workforce needed to be resilient and used to continuous change.

6.2 KEY FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

An important finding of the KM Group case study was that strategic decision are heavily influenced by the company’s culture and history, and this is also a key finding in the KRN Group case. This reads cumbersome, maybe: Between 2006 and 2016 the organisation
experienced significant changes both in its external environment, as discussed in Chapter 4, as well as in its internal environment as shown in the previous section. The analysis of the data collected revealed that there were three key factors that influenced the organisational culture of the KRN Group during the period, and significantly there were the same factors as for the KM Group. The three factors are: ownership, location and occupation.

**6.2.1 Influence of Ownership**

The influence of ownership on the organisational culture is more difficult to establish than for the KM Group that seen in the previous case study, where a stable ownership has developed a distinct corporate culture. The recent buy-out and change of ownership means that within some of the local offices the new corporate culture is still being implemented. Trinity Mirror’s corporate website positions the company as a network of specialist businesses supporting the regional media brands and a separate division Trinity Mirror Solutions, which focuses solely on innovation and partnerships. Today KRN is a small division within a much larger organisation, which has been through major upheavals and changes in ownership styles and behaviours. In contrast to the KM Group, KRN is not as firmly embedded in its community and Kent is a very small part of its national portfolio. There are no Kent-based members of the executive or senior management team within Trinity Mirror. No members of staff hold high profile roles in the county like the KM Group. The interviews were conducted when the group was still owned by Local World and many of the comments made referred to the working practices then. Further observational data were collected following the interviews which showed that having revisited some of the local offices little has changed yet within the satellite offices. Local World was formed through a partnership between two organisations two organisations and were run by highly experienced regional media managers. The Local World organisation was formed as the solution for the failing Northcliffe regional papers at a time when no buyer could be found for the press portfolio. In the period prior to the sale to Trinity Mirror, Interviewee 6 commented, it was like the “good old days”, with money invested at a local level to drive the newspaper sales. The KRN group were attending local events, with a weekly presence on the high street and they even purchased a company mascot, Scribble, to attend local events. For the Newspaper Sales team there was an increased budget with more money to spend on promotions than they had for many years.

The Trinity Mirror acquisition in November 2015 saw another change in management and culture. KRN has no key prominence on their corporate website and it is part of a larger
portfolio of regional media. The observational and interviewee data showed that Trinity Mirror there is no deep embedded culture in Kent nor any desire to be seen as a major player in the county. For example, there was no stand at the 2016 county show when all other Kent media companies had a presence there, the KRN group focus instead on the local brands rather than the corporate brand. However the data showed that employees still feel there is still the need for community engagement.

“Engagement is key; as publishers of news we have to have complete engagement with the local populace” (Interviewee 4).

Through the ownership changes, local brands have merged and papers have closed and, as such, there is little local newspaper brand presence across the county or knowledge that Trinity Mirror owns the KRN papers. There is no reference on the buildings nor on the local websites to the owner and there is only a small subscript in the KRN newspapers. Within the county, there is no one figurehead for the KRN Group and as the observation and interview data revealed the main stakeholders for the newspapers are the shareholders, as well as, importantly the readers and advertisers. The focus on readers and advertisers is culturally a positive thing; the organisation is not an inward-facing culture spending time servicing non-commercial partnerships in order to protect the local brand, but is instead focused on the reader and advertiser.

Trinity Mirror are focused on the financial return and, being part of a large media group with many regional titles gives the group the economies of scale and the power to work with big brands this is evidenced through their corporate website. The data shows that for some national advertisers Kent was used as a local test area with the newspaper added into the London/South East national sale as part of a package. The central sales teams for Trinity Mirror will sell space in the KRN papers to national advertisers for localised campaigns bringing in higher associated revenues of national advertisers. This innovation has in turn added to the portfolio of products that can be sold in the county including online and social media campaigns.

“We have a myriad of products that have come on board to generate sales now” (Interviewee 4).

The Trinity Mirror company website provides information about the size and shape of the organisation with no details about of corporate values or visions. Yet interviewees talked of the core function of the business to be digital whilst “still protecting the heritage press brands” and it was evident from the data that there was still pride in this heritage.
“We are successful because of our brand, we are over 100+ years old and you couldn’t get that success from scratch” (Interviewee 4).

The need to balance these heritage brands with the local audience was a difficult one for some of the interviewees (2 and 5). Protecting the newspaper sale meant that stories were held back from going live online, and there was resistance in local offices to run celebrity based stories without any relevant local connection.

The collected data indicated that constant change within the organisation encouraged innovation and fluid culture, but the data also suggests that this is driven by the corporate head office away from the local publishing area. For some of the interviewees the distance between the owners and the local patch meant the corporate message is diluted.

Some employees have seen four different owners since they have joined the organisation and seem accustomed to the corporate changes that they cannot influence. One interviewee commented how newspapers are closed without any local consultation:

“They closed the papers overnight there was no consultation with us” (Interviewee 6).

Communication with the senior team is via a chain of daily email dialogues and alerts, and the Trinity Mirror central team suggest relevant news items and advertorial pieces that could be localised for each office. This could see the same stories running across different local papers that have no local connection or geographical focus. But the observational and interview data suggested that these content ideas were not always welcomed or used at a local level. This top down management of editorial content is a key example of how the corporate culture is managed and is contradictory to a traditional local media model. In contrast to editorial content, advertising ideas, which seem to be more focused on driving the online audience and the digital footprint, were managed at a local level. Provided they yielded good revenues, the local sales teams working with the Regional Commercial Director were empowered to devise local supplements and advertising campaigns (Interviewee 4).

The influence of the owner is very different from that seen in the previous case study. There was no loyalty to the county and there were no links between the movers and shakers of the Kent community and the senior management of the organisation. Decisions to change and alter the publishing pattern have been far more radical and centred on financial considerations with little reference to, or consultation with the local community. The company have made some far-reaching and fundamental changes to its portfolio between 2006 and 2016. Offices and editions have been closed and through the ten years, there have been major changes to the publishing portfolio. At one point during the Northcliffe ownership, the group changed the
publishing model bringing strategies seen outside the county and tested in larger conurbations but not replicated anywhere else in local media. The Northcliffe group used the Kent area to trial a new business model, changing the publishing model of the established paid for papers in Herne Bay and Whitstable into a hybrid paid/free model. This model had not previously been seen in regional weekly papers and was launched as a reaction to falling audience figures and the need to maintain a minimum audience size for advertisers, demonstrating a corporate culture focused on proactively servicing the advertiser.

These hybrid weekly editions were sold via newsagents on the first day of publishing and then, two days later were distributed free of charge to selected household via door-to-door distribution. This is an expensive distribution model due to the costs of distribution. However, these costs would be mitigated by the increase in advertising revenues resulting from the higher readership figures the copies were distributed to selected households, selected based on the household profile targeted by national advertisers. Copy sales falls are bolstered by free circulation. The introduction of this new model illustrates shows the power of the national advertiser versus the previous case study where the local and smaller advertiser remains a key revenue stream. It also demonstrated that the introduction of this hybrid model demonstrates how innovative and fast moving the organisation is, implementing fundamental business changes from a corporate to local level. Proactive and innovative management, such as this, has rarely been seen in local is rarely seen in local press organisations (Picard 2005) requiring different skills than those for product management within traditional press organisations. In Whitstable and Herne Bay the newspaper distribution as door-to-door distribution had proved to be too costly and the titles became free papers with the main distribution model being pick up in supermarkets. For a period in 2010, pick up distribution was supported by ‘brand to hand’ distribution using promotional staff to distribute the paper in high footfall areas, such as high streets, on publishing day. This was an experimental way of trying to maintain the readership figure whilst maintaining the profile of the paper. The use of ‘brand to hand’ brought the local titles newspaper brand into the town centres where high street presence has disappeared as the signage associated with paid for papers had been stripped from the newsagent windows.

Both of these publishing examples were new business models for the regional media and the company worked in association with The Newspaper Society and the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) to ensure that readership figures were audited and recognised for the national sales. The pick-up model was typically deployed in high footfall commuter areas such as practiced by The Metro in London and contrasts with the traditional distribution models of paid and free door-to-door distribution models traditionally used by local newspaper groups.
The data revealed that there was little or no local newspaper brand presence in the county and many newspaper and media partnerships ended including long established relationships with local sports teams such as Kent Rugby Club in 2008. The need to be seen to be supporting local companies, events and stakeholders became less important for Northcliffe than delivery a better revenue return for the shareholders. Alongside this the paper’s role changed as well, since 2011 the free paper was no longer used to promote the paid for paper but as a promotional tool for the website. The working relationship with local newsagents in the KRN publishing areas disappeared as the paid for sale disappeared (Interviewee 6). The interview data suggests that new paid/free publishing portfolio had a major influence on the culture within the organisation and on the values held by some individuals within different offices and roles. For some people the change in the group’s values was too much and one of the interviewees has now left the organisation, as the digitally centric culture was alien to her values as a local reporter.

“They no longer take on NUJ journalists but employ content curators for the website” (Interviewee 3).

For a local newspaper that is managed at a national level, there will be ideas and concepts implemented centrally that seem to contradict the embedded local culture. The organisational culture was focused on raising the online audience numbers and the page impressions rather than reporting on local stories. For both the editorial and newspaper sales teams this policy was undermining the newspaper sales and the long-standing relationships with local newsagents.

“We’ve rebranded the paper to folkestoneherald.co.uk but it was too much to ask them [the newsagents] to rebrand their windows, we’ve taken away money from them by driving the free paper we can’t ask them to promote the website as well” (Interviewee 6)

The data also revealed that training, change and implementation of new ideas were being managed through a chain of delegated responsibility in local offices. This can be seen in the centralised training and technological support both the commercial and sales team receive. Journalists were now trained in search engine optimisation so their stories worked online, and headline writing has been usurped by the central drive to write good copy for the web (Interviewee 2). This training was undertaken by a trainer managed centrally, visiting the local offices to develop core digital skills. For the commercial team this centralised management meant that they were empowered and equipped to work remotely. On the three occasions I visited the KRN offices, there were no Account Managers present as they were able to work
remotely to enable efficient management of their sales patch. When the sales team do visit
the office they work from hot desks and come into the office for sales meetings and exchange
of ideas with their team. When trying to arrange interviews it became obvious that the Account
Managers covered a large patch and the Sales Director travelled cross county on a daily basis.

The top-down management and constant change in ownership have resulted in a culture of
compliance and a recognition and acceptance of change. One Interviewee (2) felt that the
model of web management was not as efficient nor as relevant as The KM Group’s website
www.kentonline.co.uk, but this was the template model being used nationally by the group so
this was the format they had to follow. Since the takeover by Trinity Mirror, new techniques
and tests have been rolled out including the recent trial to monetarise website hits through
data collection and using pop up surveys, as can be seen in the screen grab in figure 7.

![Figure 6 Monetarising web traffic - pop up surveys.](image)

The ownership culture is felt throughout the organisation as the company faces a period of
restructure again. In May 2016, the group announced the redundancies of the regional news
editors and the company faced more change and revisions of working practices.

6.2.2 INFLUENCE OF LOCATION

The changes in ownership have had a major impact on KRN’s portfolio which transformed
over the period from 2006 to 2016. A number of papers closed and localised editions have
been merged or moved from a paid paper to a free pick up edition. The group has followed a
similar pattern to the KM Group in relation to, closing many of the smaller offices. In 2006, there were offices in Dover, Folkestone Canterbury, Herne Bay, Whitstable, Thanet, Sittingbourne, Faversham and Medway, and by 2016, there was only one high street office in Folkestone, which serves Dover and Folkestone and a regional news hub in Thanet. In the interim, the group tried to maintain its presence in some of the towns. In 2008, for example, a local reporter was positioned in a newsagent one day a week to encourage readers to talk to the paper and the commercial team was based in hot desks in libraries to try to maintain the face-to-face dialogue with the local community. In addition to the offices closing, the newspaper brands has disappeared from the local communities. In 2007 the countywide free Adscence portfolio which in its heyday distributed 100,000 copies was rebranded to become part of the Times series (The Press Gazette 2007). This brand was then rolled out across the county with the aim to position the Times Series as a heritage paid-for title to areas of the county where the group had less market share. However, by 2016, many of these papers have been closed or moved from paid to free papers.

The local brand has become less prominent in many areas of the county with a gradual removal of company branding in local towns. Newspaper hoardings have been removed and local media partnerships have not been renewed so there are few hoardings or billboards in sports grounds, at the county showground or on the high streets. This increasing withdrawal from the local community can be seen clearly in the town of Whitstable. The Whitstable Times was founded in 1863 as a paid for paper covering the town of Whitstable and had for a long time its own town offices, community journalist, editor and sales team. In 2009, the newspaper merged with the Canterbury Adscene and the distribution model changed so that the paper was delivered free to homes in the area as well as being available for sale in newsagents for the normal price of 45p. In 2010 the hybrid/paid for model was replaced by a free paper version, and by 2016, the Whitstable Times has disappeared as a separate edition and become a part of the masthead on the Canterbury Times free paper. Figure 7 illustrates how the importance of the Whitstable brand has now disappeared.

Figure 7 Sample mastheads showing merged town editions

The local news editor was moved to a different location and eventually made redundant. The town reporter became a ‘content curator’ managing ‘videos of fluffy kittens’ (Interviewee 3).
Meanwhile the Adscene head offices remained empty waiting for a developer to buy them. (Appendix 8 shows the building as it currently looks.)

After years of working with the local community to maintain the brand and to develop commercial partnerships, the paper is now a free pick up edition covering a much wider area.

“Dumped in supermarkets pick up bins, the free paper sale looks after itself” (Interviewee 6)

“It did not look acceptable to attend local council meetings and to report on the things that local newspaper needed to report. Now I was expected to post videos of fluffy kittens” (Interviewee 3).

The analysis of the collected data shows that the free papers have become a model of reverse publishing for the websites. The titles no longer drive the paid for sale; but the web traffic drives which stories are published in that week’s free paper. The story with the highest audience hits on the website is then published as the front-page story on that week’s paper (Interviewee 3). This model has also been tried in the paid for papers with mixed results.

“Sometimes editorial will say the splash will be this story, because it has done many hits on the web, but weirdly, what people look at online doesn’t always transfers in a good sale” (Interviewee 6)

The data analysis also indicates that where the local titles had been merged, the identity of the local brand was lost. This has resulted in the confused messages on the website as to how readers and potential advertisers should contact the company. There is a mixed messages on whether readers or advertisers should write a generic email address when contacting the paper rather than a personalised one, and the email addresses provided have different ending such as @krnmedia.co.uk, @localworld.co.uk and @trinitymirror.co.uk. The positioning of the offices through the county shows a similar pattern to the KM Group with regional news hubs in Thanet replacing the high street presence. Unlike the KM Group KRN did not sell some of these properties and the buildings still laid branded with old newspaper titles?

However, both the observational and interview data revealed that the Folkestone office, whose title had not been merged with other areas, continued to have a strong local brand identity. The office actively encouraged dialogue with readers, as clear signage director visitors to the front door (Photos of the office can be seen in appendix 9). The reception desk was manned selling papers and taking advertising orders.
“She is crucial [the receptionist] she knows what’s going on locally and soon tells me if I’ve got it wrong” (Interviewee 2)

The organisational culture of the KRN Group culture that has evolved through the regular changes in ownership has been one of innovation, acceptance of change and the focus on financial considerations. The data revealed that a key corporate aim is to drive and promote the digital provisions, and in the areas where the free papers were published this seems to have diluted the community focus and the two-way dialogue with the readers of the paper. Analysis of the collected data shows that the culture within the different types of offices varied enormously. Interviews were conducted with staff members who worked within the regional hubs and within the local offices. The difference between the two was quite marked. Within the local office, the need to serve and support the local community was very clear and interviewees reiterated this. However within the regionalised offices, the work was more corporate and the culture more centralised.

6.2.3 INFLUENCE OF OCCUPATIONAL CULTURE

The collected data showed that culture amongst the journalists was similar than in the previous case study and formed a distinct occupational micro culture. Within the local offices, the allegiances and working practices tend to be closer to their reader. However the commercial team were managed centrally and the technological support had meant that they were mobile based rather than being attached to one office. This method of working meant there was less cross-occupational culture at a local level for this group. The adoption of new working practices and the uncertainty from the ownership changes has meant that there had been a high turnover of commercial staff during this period, though this does now seem to be stabilising as observed by one of the interviewees. The job titles in the commercial team have been renamed and they were no longer Sales Representatives covering a patch but, Regional Account Managers “selling communication solutions” (Interviewee 4). This has seen a change in attitude and behaviour.

“If they don’t get it they go, if they still want to go out and collect cheques on a weekly basis they have left and gone to work with the others [the KM Group]” (Interviewee 4).

The data revealed that there was an assumption in the local offices that there is a culture within the office of the commercial team was a mover and shakers within the company. During one office visit one of the journalists paid homage to how quickly one of the commercial teams’ careers was moving
“He’s on his way up, he’s seen a high flier within the company” (Interviewee 2).

There was also a perception within the editorial team that the commercial team was pushing the editorial team to change and evolve.

“The journalists are driven by the audience and monetarising this audience is crucial. We [the commercial team] were selling more that the website could deliver. If we can get the money on the table and we can’t deliver the audience, then we need to change the website so we have more inventory to sell” (Interview 4).

Comments like this show that there is a strong culture within the commercial team to drive digitalisation, they are equipped with the hardware and sales tools to deliver the digital sales, and is the sales team who are driving the journalists at a local level to adapt and to develop new digital opportunities. There was a regular sharing of ideas, the micro culture within the commercial team is one of empowerment, and self-management, with good ideas shared within the team and further afield across the group.

However, the data analysis shows that this pattern and sharing of best practice is not the same on the editorial side.

“I work closer with the other editor who shares this office but I never see or even meet with the editors of papers just down the road. After the election I suggested it would be good to get together to share what we’d done but we never managed to pull off the meeting” (Interviewee 2).

The data revealed that the publishing model varied across the county and the free papers were produced very differently. In these offices the working practices were managed and ruled by the need to increase and maintain the online ‘eyeballs’ with journalists following the corporate guidelines to build an online audience via social media. Journalist had to tweet at regular times of the day whether

“the content was ‘relevant or not’ and use pre-timed tweets to broadcast messages at the weekend” (Interviewee 3).

Yet, whilst digitalisation is crucial at a corporate level, at a local level the paper sale remains important. The data suggests that for some paid-for papers like the Folkestone Herald and the Dover Express the paid for readership figure has stabilised after 2007 year on year sales figures being maintained (JIGREG 2016). The local editorial team listened to and worked with the local reader to continue to deliver what they want.
“They soon tell us if we get it wrong” (Interviewee 2).

One of the core stakeholders for some interviewees was the Newspaper Sales Manager who was seen as the

“Eyes and ears of the community […] she soon tells us if we’ve got it wrong” (Interviewee 2).

The Newspaper Sales Manager has worked in the group through all the ownership changes but at a local level, her job remained the same. In towns with paid for paper the working relationships with newsagents was strong with a new brief to develop and re-establish newspaper sales at events across the county.

“I have more promotional money now than I have ever had; we’ve even gone out and brought a mascot, Scribble.” (Interviewee 6).

The collected data showed that at a local level, grassroots community reporting exists and continues in the same way as it has done for decades. There is loyalty to the local news brand at a local level, with the journalists working for the local community rather than for the corporate shareholder. The journalists showed the same principles conforming to NUJ ethics and rituals. Stories were withheld from the website if at all possible, held back for release as close to publication day as possible so that the paid for sale was not cannibalised by online news.

However, the editorial team at a local level has been slow to adopt the digital changes, and some of this resistance to change was the challenge of the working tools and the publishing platforms themselves.

“They didn’t get it at first but they are now. They are starting to put stuff online and then copy and paste it to put in paper” (Interviewee 2).

However, journalists only seemed to adapt digital practices if that worked with their local readers. When they do continue to listen to the local reader. When discussing the use of daily corporate listicles suggestions with one of the interviewees commented

“We tried that in paper it didn’t work and our readers soon told us so!” (Interviewee 2).

This local disregard for corporate digital strategy means they are rejecting click bait stories, automated tweets and videos of kittens in some offices, but 20 miles down the road, in the larger regional offices colleagues working on the free paper have to use these tools and methods.
One core theme that emerged through talking to the journalists within the organisation was the ongoing challenge between delivering the local version of a national story, which leads to a feeling of lack of empowerment for taking publishing decisions at a local level, if they are forced to run non-area specific stories. For some of the journalists the shift to the majority of the papers being free rather than paid for has seen their role change. One interviewee implied that the free papers were left to self-manage

“once we set up the distribution points and the collection bins we didn’t need to get involved, it now takes care of itself” (Interviewee 6).

The focus of the free paper is now about driving the digital audience and to maintain some of the advertiser revenues in those areas. These papers no longer challenging the local council, running campaigns nor supporting local community events.

“I was told not to bother attending local council meeting anymore. Kittens, fluffy kittens that’s what we need to drive audience” (Interviewee 3).

Occupational culture is crucial within the KRN Group as it is driving, or in some scenarios, stifling the change being pushed corporately. The occupational ethics and code of conduct for NUJ member were still evident, but some of the traditional journalist roles are now conducted by content curators with no formal journalist training. In contrast to this, the occupational culture was stronger in the commercial team than seen in the previous case study. The decision to rename the role to Account Managers and to upskill has driven a strong cultural identity within the team. There are competing mind-sets between sales teams and journalists, as well as between local, regional and corporate levels.

6.3 CULTURAL PARADIGM OF KRN

Following the same method of analysis as the previous case study, four main assumptions have been identified from the analysis of the KRN data that underpins the organisation’s cultural paradigm. These four assumptions are; (1) change is at the heart of the organisation, (2) local news brand is a key driver (3) digitalisation is managed corporately and (4) commercial focus first.
6.3.1 Change is at the heart of the organisation

The data suggests that for KRN Group the constant changes in ownership has resulted in an organisational culture of acceptance of change. The influence of this change in ownership does mean that at a local level there is a degree of fragmentation of organisational culture. The interviewees, for example, could not quote the same corporate values and visions.

The ownership changes have meant a constant reviewing and renewing of employees’ roles and positions. The renaming and repositioning of the sales team from Sales Reps to Account Managers and the resulting training and hardware support have been successful in changing the culture of this team. The sales team had the tools to be manage their accounts in an efficient way; they were equipped and trained to cover their areas working remotely out of office. Those that struggled with the change and the new commercial working practices have left the business (Interviewee 4).
The organisation has evolved through testing and trialling new publishing models; the first in the county to try 'brand-to-hand', free pick-ups and the paid free hybrid. They have closed and changed products in a proactive dynamic way to support the future commerce of the organisation resulting in a forward thinking culture. For the commercial teams this has resulted in the development of new skills to sell new products and manage a large portfolio than just the traditional newspaper sale. They are now account managers managing client’s communications needs rather than selling ‘5 x 1s’ spaces in newspapers (Interviewee 4)

The editorial team too were supported with SEO (search engine optimisation) training to change the skill sets from newspaper writing to online writing. Some journalists (Interviewee 3) were resisting the move to content curation but the organisation is increasingly recruiting and employing content curators. Recent redundancies signalled the organisation’s commitment to the digital platforms with regional editors being replaced by with online brand managers.

Change has been constant within KRN over the ten year period of the analysis; changes in ownership, organisational culture as well as in reporting lines have been fundamental. This has led to an acceptance of change within the employees’ team, and an acknowledgement that the group had been through a difficult time but that the employees are now open and accepting of new working practices (Interviewee 4).

6.3.2 COMMERCIAL FOCUS FIRST

The collected data showed that the CEO and management team focused on the financial position of the company first, as evidenced by the daily emails to every employee, giving targets, forecasts and sales figures. This focus on the financial returns from the corporate centre and best practice is shared amongst the commercial team. The commercial teams were encouraged and empowered to try novel revenue models and products such as supplements and feature ideas

The data also suggested that the newspaper copy sale was commercially focused with stabilising revenue figures. The commercial team have larger sales territories and regular meeting with regional counterparts, which meant that ideas were shared and revenues from paper sales maximised. There was no corporate head in the county and the company had little local corporate presence. The community events they attended had a commercial focus; used to sell newspapers, there was no desire to support countywide branding or sponsorships
and the group’s owners appeared to place no importance on their corporate standing in the county.

Organisational decisions were made from a basis of financial return with little loyalty to the local community. Many of the established county brands in the county have disappeared or been merged with others, and replaced with free pick up papers. The company has invested in technology, training and upskilling in the commercial team first with commission revenues reflecting the new product portfolio.

6.3.3 DIGITALISATION IS MANAGED AT THE CORPORATE CENTRE

The data shows that KRN has seen the commercial teams become digital natives adopting multimedia practices

“[We’ve] moved on from the mentality of just selling a ‘5x1’ advertisement in the paper” (Interviewee 6).

This could be partly due to the changes made to their sales territories, their commission structure as well as the management of the team with one Regional Commercial Director covering the south east division. The commercial team were supported with hardware and have been trained so they could work remotely, and this did have a bearing on the cultural values and beliefs they held. They had no particular loyalty to their local area and yet, ironically, they had influence on the local editions through their involvement with commercial based editorial and supplements. Due to the ownership model, being part of a much larger media organisation, the team had access to tools and centralised training, which has been crucial at driving this change.

However, within the editorial team adoption of digital technologies has been slower; the technology is still complicated with articles having to re-typed depending on the platform, there is no simple ‘copy and paste’ publishing solution. For those journalists working on the paid for papers they continued to listen to their reader and resist the ‘nationalisation’ of the story (Interviewee 2). The journalists on the free papers have seen more fundamental change in their reporting and for some the move towards ‘content curation’ has been too much and they have left the organisation. In the papers and their websites corporate digitalisation strategy is followed, click bait videos, celebrity stories and pre-timed tweets are all used to drive the web audience, many with little or no local connection.
6.3.4 LOCAL PAID FOR NEWS BRAND IS STILL IMPORTANT

The analysis has shown already that the organisation has a local newspaper focus rather than a countrywide brand focus. KRN is still very active in supporting the paid for sale, in the areas where the local news brand remains and at a local level the Newspaper Sales Manager is seen as a keen stakeholder in the content. She is still consulted, for example about the tone of the weekly ‘splash’ on the front cover. The company continues to support newspaper sales events; such as selling newspaper from a marquee on the high streets and attending at least two events every week. The events selected are very focused on the local towns and in particular, the coastal towns and it is the local news brand rather than the media organisation that is promoted. The organisation continues to brand newsagents and sponsor local sports grounds, to ensure the brand is core to the local community.

The newspaper sale is still very important in the areas in which they remain publishing the paid for sale; as it is an important revenue stream. In some local publishing areas newspaper sales revenue is larger than the monies made from digital advertising. Within the local offices the paid for paper is supported and managed by the local team. They are empowered to manage the newspaper without central corporate involvement. The team listen to the local community and deliver the kind of paper they want. The data suggests that the local team realise that the audience is different for the newspaper from the online and social media audience, and they still work with the local reader. Local journalists strive to maintain the paid for readership for as long as they can and do not follow corporate suggestions to carry national or celebrity based stories, staying loyal instead to the local community.

6.4 SUMMARY

This chapter provided an analysis of the KRN case study. The findings revealed a number of characteristics including the influence of micro and occupational cultures, the influence of owners, the keenness towards digital adoption in some locations and occupations. The analysis of KRN’s cultural paradigm revealed four assumptions 1) change is at the heart of the organisation, (2) local news brand is a key driver (3) digitalisation is managed corporately and (4) commercial focus first, all of which linked to the heritage, current structure and management of the organisation today. The cultural insight within KRN shows there are some challenges within the organisation; including delivering the online audience to grow the digital brand and the need to maintain good ethical journalistic standards, as well as retaining maintaining the paid for sale and supporting the local community. The new owners are bringing in more change to the organisation and this constant change means that organisational culture is less defined and more fluid in its approach.
CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

This study considered organisational culture within local newspaper companies and how culture differentiates organisations. The two research questions considered were: (1) how does organisational culture influence local newspaper organisations and (2) how organisational culture affects the way organisations respond to changes in the digital age? The study examined the general issues and key trends in the local newspaper sector and then provided two case study analysis. For both of these case studies an analysis of key organisational features and the strategic decisions that have been made during the period between 2006 and 2016 have been considered. Within the case studies there has been an analysis of the key factors that have influenced the organisational culture which allowed for the cultural paradigms of each organisation to be identified. Overall, the study has found that the key features of organisational culture of local newspaper companies vary and the case studies revealed different cultural assumptions and values which have in turn impacted on the organisation’s response to digitalisation.

Research into local media and its adoption of digitalisation is particularly pertinent in the current environment in which media organisations are facing a period of upheaval as part of a digital transformation (Picard 2015, Franklin 2014, and Doyle 2013). Digitalisation is driving the need for legacy media organisations to adopt new strategies to survive. Over the last decade, regional media has seen a period of ongoing uncertainty and turbulence, with the closure of some titles, company restructuring and many redundancies (Nielsen 2015, Franklin 2014, NUJ 2015). The study of this turbulent period is a challenging one and some authors argue that academic theory cannot move quickly enough to keep up with the pace of change within the industry (Küng 2015, Picard 2011). This research approached the study of this contemporary era by providing case study analysis of the internal environment of media organisations. The use of case studies offers a way of gaining up to date industry insight that can be used to inform new theory (Lindlof & Taylor 2011, Küng 2015). Much of the current academic literature on the topic focuses on macro or external factors affecting media organisations (Picard 2011, Doyle 2013). This study seeks to address Picard (2015) and others argument that to understand the future of media organisations, researchers need to look inside companies to understand how adept they are at managing change.

This research demonstrated that organisational culture does affect how local newspaper organisations react to external challenges. There are three key findings (1) organisational culture within local media companies is defined by different sub and micro cultures; (2) ownership model is a major influencer on organisational culture in local media and (3) the
cultural adoption of digital practices in local media organisations means the notion of local news is changing.

The study showed that organisational culture does affect how local newspaper organisations react to external challenges. The use of paradigms as an organisational analysis tool illustrates how culture is founded on an interrelated set of assumptions based on hidden values (Schein 2004, Küng 2000). Only by understanding this culture can we understand how organisations respond to change. The analysis of the cultural paradigms of both organisations revealed four core assumptions for each organisation. These paradigms show that organisational cultures do vary between local media organisations, but the key factors that influence cultural assumptions and values in both organisations are heritage, organisational structure and type of management. The hidden cultural values and beliefs within both organisations show a struggle with change and inconsistencies in the management of digitalisation. Similar to other research (Levy & Nielsen 2010, Mair, Keeble & Fowler 2013, and Gurun & Butler 2012) this study found that there are tensions between the commercial imperative of growing the digital audience and revenues versus the need to deliver locally based community news.

For both case studies culture, with its embedded values and assumptions, has played a key part in the strategies the organisations have adopted in response to digitalisation. Organisational culture has also determined whether these strategies were implemented successfully or not. The assumptions reveal the importance of the organisations’ position and standing within their local communities and the value they place on this. Both organisations were established as local newspaper groups serving the towns of Kent acting as a voice for the local community and stakeholders and some of these core values remain today. For the KM Group the beliefs and values are built on an assumption that the family owner is at the centre of the organisation and the owners are a central part of the Kent community. In contrast to this the KRN cultural paradigm is based on an assumption that whilst local community is important, commercial focus comes first with little importance placed on the organisation’s standing in the county.
7.1 ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE WITHIN LOCAL MEDIA COMPANIES IS DEFINED BY DIFFERENT SUB AND MICRO CULTURES

The importance of sub and micro cultures is evident in both organisations and many of the assumptions are linked to this: (1) KM Groups’ centralised digital team not being embedded locally (2) the occupational resistance to digital change and (3) the importance of the local paid for news brand. Occupational and locational influences mean that different beliefs and values are held within different micro (locational) or occupational groups at a sub cultural level (Schein 2004). The importance of the ethical code of conduct amongst the local journalists drives the ongoing support of traditional local news values. This theme supports Schein (2004) theory that categories of culture, such as subculture or micro culture within an organisation, have their own values and attributes, values that can be different and even contradictory to those held by a core mission of vision of the organisation itself. Both case studies show that that both micro and sub cultures have a major influence on the acceptance of, or resistance to, organisational change. Much of the research on media (Aldridge & Evetts 2003, Franklin 2014, and Singer 2010) focuses on journalists and ignore the influence of other occupational groups in the organisation. This study shows the need to analyse media organisations culture cross departmental rather than just focusing on the journalists to understand more about corporate strategy.

The same behaviours of sub culture were not seen in both case studies, digital beliefs and values differed within the journalism groups between the two companies. In the KM Group, journalists’ performance is measured by the web hits generated from each online story resulting in editors checking web hits hourly, in contrast to this in KRN some journalists continue to put the paper first, holding back online stories to save them for the front-page splash. This finding supports research which shows that local journalists continue to maintain their loyalty to their local community. This loyalty can be seen further in the growth of community and hyper local publishers which are often founded and managed by ex-local press journalist (Williams, Wardle & Wahl-Jorgensen 2011, Baines 2012, Williams, Harte & Turner 2015).

The strength of occupational sub culture amongst the commercial teams is not as strong as that seen within the journalists. There has for example been a difference in the adoption of digitalisation within the commercial teams. Within the KM Group, the revenue models and
working patterns of the sales teams have not changed significantly enough to reflect its position as a multimedia company with the culture of the sales team still being focused on the legacy print model. In contrast to this, the analysis shows that within KRN it is the commercial team that are driving the use of digital platforms. Within this team their roles have changed from Sales Representation to Territory Account Managers and the sales team had now moved to

“Managing portfolios rather than selling advertising spaces” (Interviewee 5).

The behaviours seen within KRN are linked to the ownership type, the size of the company and management of local media organisation by a national media owner. In both case studies high street offices have closed but both organisations still maintain a strong commitment to local paid for that newspapers. This finding appears to counter other research who reports that local news brands are declining in importance (Nielsen 2015). The analysis found that much of the survival of remaining local offices is reliant on the strength of the micro culture of the local office. Amongst these local offices, the speed of digital adoption is impacted by the desire to continue to serve the local community first. The future of local printed newspapers could therefore depend on how embedded the media organisation is within their local community, both physically and culturally. This finding needs further investigation to understand its influence on local media and goes some way to explaining the success of the Tindle Group who maintain a local high street presence for many of their papers.

Clearly, micro culture does affect strategy in the way it is adopted and the way it is implemented (Schein 2004). However, organisational culture can be changed and, where this is the case the micro and sub cultures adapt quickly. An example of this can be seen within the KM Group. Here the sub cultural journalists group have driven the change in company working patterns through their adoption of digital media practices. The journalists in this scenario [the KM Group] tweet in their own time in contrast to KRN where journalists are instructed to compose pre-timed tweets. This has resulted in the adapting and developing of their working practices with the change being driven by the micro culture within the organisation rather than driven by economic (Doyle 2013) or news values (Franklin 2015). The resulting impact on working conditions and practices for local journalists has been studied before (Singer 1998) but it continues to change.
7.2 OWNERSHIP MODEL IS A MAJOR INFLUENCER IN ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE IN LOCAL MEDIA

The second significant finding from the study showed that as well as micro and sub cultures the ownership type shapes organisational culture. The cultural paradigms showed for example, that the family owned KM Group has a more stable but inwardly facing culture with the core stakeholders being the owner’s family. For this organisation, digitalisation is difficult, corporate online strategies are contrary to the heritage of a local media group firmly embedded in its community. The KM Group’s corporate vision is to make a difference to Kent’s communities with a county-centric focus but the drive to maximise digital audience brings national and international web traffic. The paradigms developed reveal that this inwardly focused culture has resulted in the organisation being reactive, rather than proactive, in addressing the challenges of digitalisation. This mirrors Oakley (2011) research that argues that regional media were complacent to the effect of digitalisation avoiding rather than being proactive in embracing the opportunities it brings.

In contrast to this, the turbulence faced by KRN employees through the constant changes in ownership has resulted in an acceptance of change.

“We’ve been through a journey that was turbulent but we got there” (Interviewee 4)

Numerous ownership changes over the last decade, means KRN brands have merged, mastheads have changed and papers have closed. The current owners Trinity Mirror now have no connection nor position within the county and there is little importance placed on brand presence within the county. The management structure and fiscal model means that organisation’s culture is not inwardly facing, they do not, for example, spend time servicing non-commercial partnerships. The organisations’ focus is on maximising the audience and the resulting advertising revenues, driven through the opportunities from the new digital platforms. This organisation appears to contradict Oakley’s (2011) view the local media organisations had become complacent in their adoption of digitalisation. However one could argue that now KRN are owned by Trinity Mirror, they are a national rather than a local media organisation adopting the digital practices of a national daily paper.
The final key theme that has emerged from the study is that the notion of local news is changing. The study found there were two strands to this theme; (1) the online platform means that both the news reported and the audience are increasingly no longer local and (2) traditional formats of local news are going through a transformation. Both case studies show that a core cultural challenge for both organisations is the digitalisation of local news. Local newspapers were established as the voice of the local community, as the fourth estate to challenge local councils and stakeholders (Aldridge 2007) as well as a commercial enterprise for their founders. Migrating this news model online is problematic; local news websites need high web traffic yet local stories do not always generate web hits.

“You could spend 3 hours in a council meeting, spend an hour writing it up and get 35 clicks or you could put up videos of kittens and get 300 clicks.” (interviewee 4).

Stories like the KM's ‘Crabzilla’ might drive huge spikes in web traffic bringing national and international readers but these readers are of little or no value to local advertisers. The drive for increased web traffic has resulted in a challenge between the traditional culture of investigative journalism versus the human interest story (Lewis, Williams and Franklin 2008). For both organisations, in some areas, the remaining paid for news brand remains strong and copy sale revenues is important and they face an internal struggle to balance this with online stories. Editors face a challenge of whether to hold the story for the weekly newspaper or release the story online; balancing copy sales against online web hits. The editor has to balance the role of a traditional newspaper editor along the local news websites trying to maintain and migrate the audiences between the platforms. The pressure to maintain web hits mean that some local news stories are no longer covered hence the rise in the citizen journalist in local areas (Lewis, Kaufhold & Lasorsa 2009)

To some extent the notion of local news remains the same for the printed paper. The KM Group do still maintain a belief in traditional local newspapers, with the publishing model of the free papers remaining relatively unchanged (though distribution models have altered). Weekly printed newspapers are produced and sold locally, covering council meetings and local campaigns. The study does however show that within both case studies the role and accountability of the local editor has changed. He is no longer responsible for the content for
all his news platforms with web content often being managed centrally. This means that the local editor no longer has veto on all local content, there is no clear definition of who ‘owns’ the local news patch and there is in effect no longer control from within the local publishing patch. This challenges the traditional editorial role with the implication that web editors and content curators are controlling elements of local media. These new job roles are not as clearly established nor defined with the same code of conduct and ethics.

For KRN the online platform means that both the news reported and the audience are increasingly no longer local and the notion of local news has changed more dramatically for this organisation. Trinity Mirror have pushed a more centralised strategy of digitalisation and have transformed the way the free papers are managed. The role of the free papers is no longer to secure local advertising spend and to pre-promote the paid for paper, now the free papers drive web traffic and stories are reverse published from the website content. The front-page splash of the free papers is the web story with the highest hits that week. The website strategy is to drive traffic by using national stories and online listicles are used as ‘click-bait’ with little or no local relevance (Wahl-Jorgensen, Williams, et al 2016, Hindman 2017). Free papers have in effect ceased to be local newspapers reporting on local news, these local free papers are no longer serving the local community, are no longer local news providers and are in effect printed version of the website.

7.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are some limitations to the findings of this study. Some are due to the challenges around mapping an organisations culture, as culture constantly flexes and evolves (Schein 2004) but the main limitations are due to the methodology chosen. The limitations include (1) using only two organisational case studies; (2) the reliance on qualitative data which meant that though useful insight was gained findings cannot be generalised; (3) the number of interviews was limited but this was compensated with collecting other type of data including observational, secondary as well as insider knowledge; (4) insider knowledge might have caused researcher bias but this was addressed by focusing the analysis on additional empirical data gathered.

The methodology could have been expanded to include a review of the news content. Content analysis might have offered a different dimension to the study to see whether the tone of voice within their publications reflects the organisational culture. This insight would show whether organisations show their corporate values and visions through the stories they run or the campaigns they lead. This analysis in addition to the physical observations would have
developed more insight into the hidden values of the organisation. Further studies could also include audience insight to add an understanding of what the audience wants from local media and how affected they are by the cultural values and beliefs held by the organisations. By understanding, the reader’s view of the organisation we could see whether is at odds with the organisation’s own internal values and culture.

In conclusion, the study illustrates the value of placing the organisation at the centre of analysis, and the findings make a contribution to our understanding of the transformation of regional media organisations in the digital age. The study gives empirical evidence that organisational culture in media industries is important and is a key concept in media economics and management research. An understanding of local cultures and their impact on strategy needs further investigation across a wider base of regional newspaper group both within the UK and internationally to develop this concept further.
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APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1 ONLINE BOOKING ENGINE
APPENDIX 2 SIGNAGE AT UNMANNED KM GROUP OFFICE
APPENDIX 3 READER COMMENTS AGAINST CLICK BAIT STORIES — CRABZILLA (KENTONLINE)

pearly wrote:
Fed up with this silly story on the home page time for a change km

noneforit wrote:
I could have photoshopped that fairly easily...

djne wrote:
This used to be a news website, but appears now to be turning into Viz magazine. Maybe some proper journalism would turn up some real local interest stories and issues, rather than this nonsense?
APPENDIX 4 NEW COMPANY CAR BRANDING
APPENDIX 5 COMPARISON BETWEEN COMMERCIAL AND JOURNALIST TWITTER feeds (https://twitter.com/)
APPENDIX 6 KM MEDIA GROUP BUILDING BRANDING
APPENDIX 7 JOB ADVERTISEMENTS

Field Sales Executives

Recruiter: Hill Media Group Limited
Location: Next
Salary: On Application
Period: 23 Aug 2006
Class: 25 Roy 2006
Source: Hill Media Group Limited
Contact Name: Renee
Hours: Full Time

Hill Media Group is an experienced, exciting and progressive multimedia business. We are always on the look out for talented field sales executives - we believe they exist, to join our sales team around the country.

You will be someone who...

- has a consultative approach to selling
- is super organised
- can build strong relationships with clients and colleagues
- has a strong desire to exceed your monthly targets

In return we will provide you with a competitive salary, bonus potential and all the tools and support you need to do your job successfully. If you’d like a challenging and exciting role in a fast-paced, supportive environment, we’d love to hear from you.

(No multimedia skill requirement for commercial staff.)
Job Introduction

Trinity Mirror plc are looking for a Community Content Curator (Sport) to join our team in either Essex, Kent or Croydon. This is an ideal role for an experienced administrator able to demonstrate excellent admin and interpersonal skills with a proven ability to prioritise and manage multiple tasks.

Our Business: Trinity Mirror plc

Trinity Mirror plc, with an award winning portfolio of newspapers, websites and digital products, is one of the UK’s largest multimedia companies employing over six thousand people across more than sixty locations around the country.

You

We are looking for an enthusiastic administrator who has previous experience of working in a media or fast-paced environment. You will support ongoing editorial projects across all publishing platforms by researching, curating, sourcing, organising, formatting and inputting content.

We are looking for a candidate who is highly organised, has proven literacy & administration skills and possess excellent attention to detail. Ideally, you will have a good understanding of the digital landscape, social media and be able to post content online.

This is not a role that is suitable for someone who has preliminary journalism qualifications or ambitions to be a journalist.

What you’ll be doing

In order to succeed in this role you will:

✓ Provide support to editorial teams for both print and digital admin tasks, e.g. data entry, organising content, sourcing photos, editorial promotions, general admin duties

✓ Provide feedback and suggest new ideas for user-generated content

✓ Input and process content accurately and to deadline into a format suitable for publication online or print

✓ Establish, maintain and develop relationships with content suppliers in the community

✓ Maintain an up to date database of all content providers

✓ Use and contribute to the editorial forward planning calendar to ensure user-generated content opportunities are maximised and delivered on schedule

✓ Undertake company/editorial projects and any other duties from time to time as reasonably requested by management

Trinity Mirror Content Curator Role
Multimedia Journalism Trainee - Opportunities in Tunbridge Wells & Guildford

Trinity Mirror plc is looking for Trainee Multimedia Journalists to generate story ideas, write them with our digital audience in mind, create and curate further multi-media content and put together total content packages that work brilliantly on all of our platforms.

Using channels such as social media to get our stories to as many people as possible and engage with them; you will help increase our audience reach.

It will require considerable flexibility and agility, if this sounds like you, then read on...

Our Business: Trinity Mirror plc

Local World part of the Trinity Mirror Group, with an award winning portfolio of newspapers, websites and digital products, is one of the UKs largest multimedia companies employing over six thousand people across more than sixty locations around the country.

You

You will create compelling, targeted content that drives outstanding digital engagement and plays a full part in growing our audiences online and in print.

You will hold a NCTJ journalism pre-entry qualification (or equivalent) and use your advanced digital skills and analytics to win new audiences and explore opportunism for growth.

You will be responsible for helping the editorial team and the whole business to continuously innovate and change to be a successful media business.

What you'll be doing

In order to succeed in this role you will:

✓ Deliver high quality, thoroughly researched, accurate and well-written multimedia content packages on a daily basis to agreed deadlines

✓ Write content in a way which engages and drives digital audience

✓ Have advanced knowledge of social media and searching tools (i.e. Tweet deck, Geofeedia etc) to dig out stories

✓ Have a knowledge of shareable content, audience behaviour and advanced digital storytelling skills - using third party tools

✓ Have an established presence on social media with a proven track record of running professional/brand accounts to a high standard

✓ Have advanced live blogging skills, knowledge of best practice for live coverage and a good understanding and proven track record of what makes a live blog stand out

✓ Know how to shoot video, audio and pictures and edit where necessary
APPENDIX 8 EMPTY OFFICE BUILDING WITH OLD NEWSPAPER BRANDING
APPENDIX 9 KRN OFFICE SIGNAGE IN FOLKESTONE OFFICE
APPENDIX 10 NEWSAGENT BRANDING IN FOLKESTONE FOR KRN
APPENDIX 11 INTERVIEW THEMES

The Organisation and its Stakeholders – (key influencers in the business)

Who are the main stakeholders in the Group?

Who do you consider to be the most influential stakeholder?

Mission

What is the core function of the company?

What is the company’s mission statement?

What were the most important strategic changes in the company in the last 7-8 years?

How do you rank the importance of these changes?

Audience

How do you see your readers?

How would you define the local community?

What role does, local media play in the local community?

External Influences

Which local media organisations do you think have developed strong strategies and why?

If you were to establish a new regional media organisation how would you do it?

Current strategy

What are the organisations current strategic priorities?

How is strategy developed?

The Future

How do you think the regional media business will change in the next decade?
APPENDIX 12 ETHICS REVIEW CHECKLIST

ETHICS REVIEW CHECKLIST

Sections A and B of this checklist must be completed for every research or knowledge transfer project that involves human or animal participants. These sections serve as a toolkit that will identify whether a full application for ethics approval needs to be submitted.

If the toolkit shows that there is no need for a full ethical review, Sections D, E and F should be completed and the checklist forwarded to the Research Governance Manager as described in Section C.

If the toolkit shows that a full application is required, this checklist should be set aside and an Application for Faculty Research Ethics Committee Approval Form - or an appropriate external application form - should be completed and submitted. There is no need to complete both documents.

Before completing this checklist, please refer to Ethics Policy for Research Involving Human Participants in the University Research Governance Handbook.

The principal researcher/project leader (or, where the principal researcher/project leader is a student, their supervisor) is responsible for exercising appropriate professional judgement in this review.

N.B. This checklist must be completed – and any resulting follow-up action taken - before potential participants are approached to take part in any study.

Type of Project - please mark (x) as appropriate
### Section A: Applicant Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A1. Name of applicant:</th>
<th>Sarah O’Hara</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A2. Status (please underline):</td>
<td>Undergraduate Student / Postgraduate Student / Staff Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3. Email address:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Sarah.ohara@canterbury.ac.uk">Sarah.ohara@canterbury.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| A4. Contact address: | North Holmes Road  
                Canterbury  
                CT1 1QU |
| A5. Telephone number | Ex 2794 |

1 Sentient animals, generally all vertebrates and certain invertebrates such as cephalopods and crustaceans
Section B: Ethics Checklist

Please answer each question by marking (X) in the appropriate box:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Does the study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent (e.g. children, people with learning disabilities), or in unequal relationships (e.g. people in prison, your own staff or students)?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Will the study require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access to the vulnerable groups or individuals to be recruited (e.g. students at school, members of self-help groups, residents of nursing home)?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without usual informed consent procedures having been implemented in advance (e.g. covert observation, certain ethnographic studies)?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Will the study use deliberate deception (this does not include randomly assigning participants to groups in an experimental design)?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Will the study involve discussion of, or collection of information on, sensitive topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use)?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Are drugs, placebos or other substances (e.g. food substances, vitamins) to be administered to human or animal participants?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Does the study involve invasive or intrusive procedures such as blood taking or muscle biopsy from human or animal participants?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Is physiological stress, pain, or more than mild discomfort to humans or animals likely to result from the study?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences in humans (including the researcher) or animals beyond the risks encountered in normal life?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Will the study involve interaction with animals? (If you are simply observing them - e.g. in a zoo or in their natural habitat - without having any contact at all, you can answer “No”)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Is the study a survey that involves University-wide recruitment of students from Canterbury Christ Church University?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Will the study involve recruitment of adult participants (aged 16 and over) who are unable to make decisions for themselves, i.e. lack capacity, and come under the jurisdiction of the Mental Capacity Act (2005)?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Will the study involve recruitment of participants <strong>excluding staff</strong> through the NHS or the <strong>Department of Social Services</strong> of a Local Authority (e.g. Kent County Council)?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now please assess outcomes and actions by referring to Section C 🔄
Section C: How to Proceed

C1. If you have answered ‘NO’ to all the questions in Section B, you should complete Sections D–F as appropriate and send the completed and signed Checklist to the Research Governance Manager in the Research Office for the record. **That is all you need to do. You will receive a letter confirming compliance with University Research Governance procedures.**

[Master’s students should retain copies of the form and letter; the letter should be submitted with their research report or dissertation (bound in at the beginning). Work that is submitted without this document will be returned un-assessed.]

C2. If you have answered ‘YES’ to any of the questions in Section B, you will need to describe more fully how you plan to deal with the ethical issues raised by your project. This does not mean that you cannot do the study, only that your proposal will need to be approved by a Research Ethics Committee. **Depending upon which questions you answered ‘YES’ to, you should proceed as follows**

(a) If you answered ‘YES’ to any of questions 1 – 12 ONLY (i.e. not questions 13, 14 or 15), you will have to submit an application to your Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) using your Faculty’s version of the Application for Faculty Research Ethics Committee Approval Form. This should be submitted as directed on the form. The Application for Faculty Research Ethics Committee Approval Form can be obtained from the Governance and Ethics pages of the Research section on the University web site.

(b) If you answered ‘YES’ to question 13 you have two options:

   (i) If you answered ‘YES’ to question 13 ONLY you must send copies of this checklist to the Student Survey Unit. Subject to their approval you may then proceed as at C1 above.

   (ii) If you answered ‘YES’ to question 13 PLUS any other of questions 1 – 12, you must proceed as at C2(b)(i) above and then submit an application to your Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) as at C2(a).

(c) If you answered ‘YES’ to question 14 you do not need to submit an application to your Faculty Research Ethics Committee. **INSTEAD, you must submit an application to the appropriate external NHS Research Ethics Committee [see C2(d) below].**

(d) If you answered ‘YES’ to question 15 you do not need to submit an application to your Faculty Research Ethics Committee. **INSTEAD, you must submit an application to the appropriate external NHS Research Ethics Committee (REC) or Local Authority REC, after your proposal has received a satisfactory Peer Review (see Research Governance**
Applications to an NHS REC or a Local Authority REC must be signed by the appropriate Faculty Director of Research or Faculty representative before they are submitted.

IMPORTANT

Please note that it is your responsibility in the conduct of your study to follow the policies and procedures set out in the University’s Research Governance Handbook, and any relevant academic or professional guidelines. This includes providing appropriate information sheets and consent forms, and ensuring confidentiality in the storage and use of data. Any significant change in the question, design or conduct over the course of the study should be notified to the Faculty and/or other Research Ethics Committee that received your original proposal. Depending on the nature of the changes, a new application for ethics approval may be required.
Section D: Project Details

D1. Project title: Masters by Research – Organisational Culture and its influence in strategy in local media
D2. Start date: Oct 2014
D3. End date: Oct 2016
D4. Lay summary (max 300 words which must include a brief description of the methodology to be used for gathering your data):

This study seeks to understand the effect organisational culture has had on UK local media in the last 8 years (from 2007 to 2015). The study will consider whether the unconscious beliefs held within companies shape strategic decisions and how the organisations react to external environmental change. Methodology will include interviews with people working within the local media, case study of company information and observational data collected from company buildings and artefacts.

Section E1: For Students Only

E1. Module name and number or course and Department:
E2. Name of Supervisor or module leader:
E3. Email address of Supervisor or Module leader:
E4. Contact address:

Section E2: For Supervisors
Please tick the appropriate boxes. The study should not begin until all boxes are ticked:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The student has read the relevant sections of the University's Research Governance Handbook, available on University Research web pages at:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/research/governance/index.asp">http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/research/governance/index.asp</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The topic merits further investigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student has the skills to carry out the study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The participant information sheet or leaflet is appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The procedures for recruitment and obtaining informed consent are appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If a CRB/VBS check is required, this has been carried out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments from supervisor:

none

Section F: Signatures

- I certify that the information in this form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief and I take full responsibility for it.
- I certify that a risk assessment for this study has been carried out in compliance with the University’s Health and Safety policy.
- I certify that any required CRB/VBS check has been carried out.
- I undertake to carry out this project under the terms specified in the Canterbury Christ Church University Research Governance Handbook.
- I undertake to inform the relevant Faculty Research Ethics Committee of any significant change in the question, design or conduct of the study over the course of the study. I understand that such changes may require a new application for ethics approval.
- I undertake to inform the Research Governance Manager in the Graduate School and Research Office when the proposed study has been completed.
- I am aware of my responsibility to comply with the requirements of the law and appropriate University guidelines relating to the security and confidentiality of participant or other personal data.

- I understand that project records/data may be subject to inspection for audit purposes if required in future and that project records should be kept securely for five years or other specified period.

- I understand that the personal data about me contained in this application will be held by the Research Office and that this will be managed according to the principles established in the Data Protection Act.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Investigator</th>
<th>Supervisor or module leader (as appropriate)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name: Sarah O’Hara</td>
<td>Name: Dr Agnes Gulyas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date: 07/05/2015</td>
<td>Date: 07/05/2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section G: Submission

This form should be returned, as an attachment to a covering email, to the Research Governance Manager at roger.bone@canterbury.ac.uk

N.B. YOU MUST include copies of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form that you will be using in your study (Model versions on which to base these are appended to this checklist for your convenience). Also copies of any data gathering tools such as questionnaires.

Providing the covering email is from a verifiable address, there is no longer a need to submit a signed hard copy version.
APPENDIX 13  SAMPLE CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Masters by Research – Organisational Culture and its influence in strategy in local media

Name of Researcher: Sarah O’Hara

Contact details:

Address: Canterbury Christ Church University
North Holmes Road
Canterbury
CT1 1QU

Tel: 01227 762974

Email: Sarah.ohara@canterbury.ac.uk

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

3. I understand that any personal information that I provide to the researchers will be kept strictly confidential.

4. I agree to take part in the above study.

________________________  ________________            ____________________
Name of Participant  Date  Signature

_________________________  ________________            ____________________
Name of Person taking consent  Date  Signature
(if different from researcher)

___________________________  ________________             ____________________
Researcher  Date  Signature

Copies:  1 for participant

1 for researcher
APPENDIX 14 PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

A research study is being conducted at Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) by Sarah O’Hara

Background

This study seeks to understand the effect organisational culture has had on UK local media in the last 10 years (from 2006 to 2016). The study will consider whether the unconscious beliefs held within companies shape strategic decisions and how the organisations react to external environmental change.

What will you be required to do?

Participants in this study will be required to be interviewed.

To participate in this research you must:

Be currently or have been previously employed in local media in Kent

Procedures

You will be asked to take part in a one to one interview.

Feedback

I will share my interview transcript with you prior to analysis.

Confidentiality

All data and personal information will be stored securely within CCCU premises in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the University’s own data protection requirements. Data can only be accessed by Sarah O’Hara. After completion of the study, all data will be made anonymous.

Dissemination of results

Results will be published as part of a Masters by Research thesis.
**Deciding whether to participate**

If you have any questions or concerns about the nature, procedures or requirements for participation do not hesitate to contact me. Should you decide to participate, you will be free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason.

**Any questions?**

Please contact Sarah O’Hara, School of Media Art and Design, Canterbury Christchurch University via sarah.ohara@canterbury.ac.uk
APPENDIX 14 INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTIONS

Interviewee 1

**Who are the main stakeholders (influencers’) in the KM Group?**

The owners – the family, Geraldine, Libby and to some extent Henry, the executive team, middle management, editors like me, our audience, people in our community and the ‘great and the good’ of our community and in our world.

**Who do you consider to be the most influential stakeholder?**

For me in my job, day to day, my line manager the editorial director.

**Who do you consider to be the most influential stakeholder in the business?**

The Chairman – Geraldine she is still very involved in the business.

**How important is community interest for the organisation?**

That’s our audience that’s who we tap into, that’s where revenues come from, our editorial, our readers, if our readers don’t like what we do then it’s a load of cobblers, that’s where we get our website hits from and our interaction. If there are areas my readers don’t like, if they don’t interact with what we put out there then its cobblers, that’s where we’re at.

**That’s interesting that you talk about your website, is that what you are driving, is that where you get your audience from where you drive it from?**

I am in a period where I would say we would probably say my focus as an editor is to interpret the signals so as an industry we struggle to understand this platform. So it’s my role to watch this audience so whether that’s comments on the website, interaction on social media, copy sales or revenue. To be honest we are still at a stage of trying to find our feet. We talk to the people to Kent and watch this platform. Less of a challenge to us than for some as we are so embedded in our community and we did know our community. Less of a challenge for us is quality of journalism as we have always been good quality journalist.

**Can Community interest work alongside the need to be a profitable organisation?**

It has to. We have to make money, it a structural shift and it still not really happening but it has to happen the revenue shift to online has to happen we dependent upon doing that as a company.
How would you define your local community?

It’s that geographical thing – I want to tap into everyone on my local patch. We limit ourselves geographically as a company being only based in Kent but the web opens that all up. Think about Crabzilla we had national and international hits on that story. We have to tap into and deliver what our community wants that’s what they expect of us and that is what we have always delivered. You know it was a photo shopped sandbank we picked it up from the Mirror but it was I highest hitting story we have browsers from all over the world driving massive volumes of traffic

What is the core function of the company?

What is the company’s mission statement?

Its Kent the chairman is Kent through and through.

What were the most important strategic changes in the company in the last 7-8 years?

The biggest change has to be digital the business was in a lot of trouble so it had to change. But for an example I used to get my sales figures a fortnight after I published, now I can check and get my online figures here and now, I can log on and see who reading what. We’ve never had so much data and insight to help drive what we do so we can see how effective we are.

How do you rank the importance of these changes?

The economic have driven the structure but that just accelerated it, it had to happen but the economics made people in the business finally realise they had to change. We’d been playing catch up for a while, for too long, we’ve been playing catch up with the audience.

Audience

How do you see your readers?

Well their not just readers, they are our audience and they are diverse, they come to us in some many different ways, online via social media. They are so much more active, interactive in so many different ways. They are more connected with us, we have less reporters but we have so many more platforms for them to interactive, via our Facebook pages, on twitter. We’ve never been so accountable; people are not scared anymore. We had 12 reporters now we’ve got 5 that’s in less than five years.
We understand our audience but it different by departments all the time there is a digital sales department the sales teams don’t have to or want to understand or know the digital figures. All our journalists are multimedia journalist they self-publish online. They break stories online, their on social media even though that have been there for 30 years are working that way. The commercial team are driving it via a digital team so they are still not multimedia. The journalists have adopted it they realised they have to the commercial team are future down the line with adopting it. We’ve use social media to make things go viral we make it happen.

**How would you define the local community?**

Well down in Thanet it’s great for a journalist at the moment. There’s conflict there change, we’re still putting out thousands of copies we’re still driving the community and pushing for change. During the election we were there, we were there for the count and people do still turn to us, we are the voice that people trust and listen to.

**What role does, local media play in the local community?**

**Which local media organisations do you think have developed strong strategies and why?**

We are up there with the big players we are punching above our weight there is no one out there with a better strategy. The others out there have got a different strategy they are driven centrally, their focus is no longer local, they are told they need to do a story on XYZ because that’s what’s happening nationally. We are still embedded in our community, take me as an editor for my patch I’m not interested even in what’s going on 20 miles up the road, that’s not my local area, that’s not what my readers are interested in. It’s a two-way thing we are embedded in our community but we need our community. I cover two patches so now I have a split personality of what I need to cover and how it needs to be different for each area. We have less people on the ground but social media helps, we can fish for stories that way. We use social media to drive traffic to our site, but we find stories that way, we have conversations via social media to get the information. We’ve had to change our working pattern we are now restructuring so we can monitor and us social media 24/7. We’re not there yet but we need to be a 24/67 news organisation we run currently on the basis of peoples good will, my reporters tweet in their own time in the evenings, weekends. Cover from 7 in the morning to 1 in the morning, we’re working in geographical silos we’ve gone form departmental silos to geographical silos now. We report the area we want to report not how people live their lives. We’ve nearly won the fight. The fight to deliver what our audiences want rather than how they
wanted to structure the company. We haven’t gone a local as we could and we should and we still need to justify the £1.10 price. The price increase was driven centrally, the recession has made us do things like that but it wasn’t considered locally and no one locally was consulted. Lot of stuff was centralised, sport subs and other stuff and done very quickly. There’s a split between central decision and local decision, even with a company as small as us there is tension between the way strategies are driven.

If you were to establish a new regional media organisation how would you do it?

I’d just do it online but local, hyperlocal. We’ve taken on TV; we probably didn’t want it but we had to strategically we had to do it. The chairman wanted to do it.

What are the organisations current strategic priorities?

Um I don’t know I should know…I know what my priority is. I guess its audience and to drive the audience onto the internet. There looking at driving the business via data now, I don’t know whose idea that was or what it’s based on but that’s what we’re doing. March last year our audience peaked we have a tipping point and we now have the data to justify changes and make differences. I’m not at that level as an organisation they don’t share that stuff. I do know what’s going on via my Director but that’s down to personalities and individuals other Directors don’t share as much and keep it closer to their chests. The whole culture is about people it’s all about people and some of them don’t want to share information or delegate knowledge. It’s down to people. It is changing.

Ties in the office?

It’s changing I still come in with tie on but I’ve lost it by 11.00am. WE need to for door knocks but it is changing outside for now the tie comes on and off. It varies though, there is a difference by department.

How is strategy developed?

Well as is the KM way sometimes it incidental, we had websites very early because we wanted to be seen to have them but we didn’t really know what to do with them. We chopped and changed our strategy we thought we needed this digital thing but we weren’t sure why or how we were going to use it.

How do you think the regional media business will change in the next decade?
We’ve survived the recession but we need a period or financial stability to get back onto a proper strategy. We don’t have a centre anymore we don’t really have a head office and the exec team move around but that’s not down to culture that’s down to personalities. I can go straight to my Director there are no layers but in commercial they can’t there are more layers of management.
Who are the main stakeholders in KRN/Local World?

Stakeholders, are newspaper readers which we now call print rather hilariously and our online audience. They are the key people we do it for. Within the organisation online the interesting thing there is very little drive for print because there is a given that as a journalist we kind of know what we are doing. In print my main source is still newspaper sales who will advise what will sell now – that is the biggest change, I will have my newspaper sales manager over on a Weds to say ‘what do you think out the front page?’ and she will say yeah that’s great or not ‘Can you change that headline?’. Because sales are going down so drastically we’ve got to use all the expertise that’s available to us and I think that great actually. So they will still very much out there on the streets and know what sells, we’re talking 20 -30 years’ experiences, their merchandises are very important coming back say Hythe really wasn’t very happy. In fact, yesterday was a good example there was a stabbing in Hythe over the weekend really unusual but had we had what a Hythe edition we’d have run with it, but our paper says FolkestoneHerald.co.uk so we wouldn’t have run with that story. So the merchandisers came back and said Hythe are really upset because you didn’t run the stabbing on the front page so we had that conversation with newspaper sales. So really yes it newspaper sales manager, merchandisers, sometimes the competition department to talk about promotions and also advertising department as well. We had a big discussion this week about the size of the newspaper and that balance between whether having five open pages is commercially viable, understanding that if you’ve got a newspaper that cost 85p you’ve got to have value for money and meantime you’ve got two reporters and an editor flogging themselves to death trying to sell that space, to fill these massive pages. So that’s in terms of print, online it’s a massive wonderful machine, where I think the biggest challenge is that everyone is learning and everyone is trying things out. We have a massive line of people who look at every single movement of page impressions, doing all those numbers. It will come down, every morning we will get a national list which will be key things we might want to include in our newspaper generally little Folkestone Herald and little Dover Express these are little local papers and there are generally national stories so we wouldn’t use them but if we do we’d say this is what people are talking about. So yes online stakeholders are generally the national digital team, the national digital team who trained us who every day give us a little tip “remember SEO headlines” “remember this works well” and of course the other big stakeholder is the MD who looks at our targets every day because we have an online target and will send out a report every day with a commentary with other local world figures for the south east for online.

Does his report ever include any print figures?
No it’s purely online focused.

**So out of that whole mix who do you see as the most influential stakeholder?**

Internally that’s tricky there are my reporters who are very important who have a big learning curve but there is them and their ideas. The pressure is the national group; the drive is digital first we’ve got to get our numbers up to make sure you are doing it?

**How important is community interest for the organisation? It feels like its two businesses so is it different for both?**

Yes, is a way but at the heart of the every is local news and that has always been the same. I made the mistake very early on of putting Madonna falling off the stage because the argument was that was a big national story that’s what everyone was talking about ‘my god’ I’ve never done that again. What’s Madonna even got to do with it? Is she local? So the community wants local news. Either in print or online or both. Our reader is still good and healthy between 7-7500 print copies some of those readers will see the website and join our Facebook community. “Join the conversation on Facebook”. Our FB community is very interesting so they will immediately say ‘quiet news day at the Herald’. We know straight away whether a story will be successful or not so there are things which we think this is just going to die a death and you just say wow. The type of local news is different online and in print, so I would say we still try to cover the traditional subjects of council, what’s going on. We had two pages every week of local election campaign but then online what we did online we did polls which we then ‘reverse published’. One of the interesting things is on the election count we had one of our photographers there at both local and national election counts and they do the most beautiful photos and I did think it’s quite’ indulgent’ to have photographers at an election count. We weren’t one of the exciting areas Folkestone was not like Thanet or Dover actually but Andy took the most beautiful photos at the count and we put them up online and it was a highest seller, I mean our highest views online the next day. So people are still interested in that people still want the news but you can get away with some quirky things.

**Can Community interest work alongside the need to be a profitable organisation?**

We only make money if we readers what they want and if they want local news that’s what we’ll give them. If we give people a good motors section for example that’s important that part of the mix and our homes supplement is very important that’s part of the mix too. So but well not but commercially getting those web figures up is a drive forward which will eventually make money. It seems incredible that 15 to 10 years ago people were talking in board meetings
about the internet and it’s taken us this long to actually put it at the centre of what we do. I think the KM were much cuter with www.kentononline.co.uk than we were.

**What is the core function of the company?**

The digital thing is at the centre but alongside but a little bit down is to protect those heritage titles.

Does the company have a mission statement?

Don’t know ‘digital first’ that’s what we know. I don’t know what it is I don’t think that’s it but when I came back in February I had two lovely reporter’s lovely boys but they said we are traditionalists and what does that mean? We don’t get the online now I’ve completely brain washed them in three months, so now they say well you have to change. So they were saying we have to do everything twice so one online and once in paper but actually what we’re doing now is we are publishing first and republishing. So now we are copying and pasting from online updating where necessary and using comments from Facebook so now they are calming down a bit and saying it’s not actually that much more work. Because you’re publishing first time, ideally what we want is one button that go you publish it here now send it to the newspaper, but we haven’t got there yet. So it goes online first generally and the judgement goes do we hold it? We did this with Sean Heslop who was Executive Head of the Academies plus who was suspended, so we had that at the weekend, got a tip off on Facebook and both me and my colleague in Thanet were both working on this story and we managed to contain it until Tuesday. So our deadline is Wednesday morning and we had the conversation do we put it online? It was all over Facebook and in the end we did put it online about 5.00pm and it made no difference to our sales so it was huge learning curve. The whole thing about it is if we publish online first we are going to stop people buying the newspaper and we have to refrain – out big thing on the desk now is remember because it’s been the talk of the web and Facebook loads of people have seen it but not always those who read the paper or seen how we report it. We’ve got to remember them. So we didn’t realise that. I don’t think we put the fact that Sandgate Road was closed yesterday – I keep on thinking because we’ve done it online we’ve immediately got to ‘copy and paste’ it for the print because so many people who buy the newspaper don’t see online.

I know you’ve been out the business and come back but what do you see as the most important strategic changes in the company in the last 7-8 years?
That’s the online, the drive for online, it’s like a game ‘what are they going to be interested in?’ so there’s that and obviously the sad decline in newspaper sales but the joy that if you’ve got a good editor giving the readers what they want then you are going to protect that.

**How do you see your readers/audience?**

I try and use the word reader but we do have a Facebook audience they are quite different they don’t read the paper but they see our website as the paper there is no difference in their mind ‘this paper used to be really good? What paper? It’s a website’ so in their minds we are the Herald so if we put a story about, so yesterday we put a story up about killer hornets because they are a real story about them ‘typical Herald is it April Fool’s Day’ so they think silly, but it’s not if we put that story in the newspaper. In fact, we’ve got to remember to put that story in the newspaper ‘note to self’ because it’s part of the news of the week.

**So there’s the paper and the website and they are separate audiences? Do you know the duplication?**

Yes, there is a % there is a Venn diagram bit I couldn’t tell you off the top of your head. The Facebook audience do support they love good news stories they love stories about schools, vicious about criminal ‘lock ‘em up and throw away the key’ so we get an instant hit. What we’ve got to remember that they are not our typical audience. We got more feedback from social media than our own website. This is another thing we are aiming at kentonline get all those comments and we don’t we get feedback via social media.

**How would you define the local community?**

People, locally Folkestone, Hythe and Romney Marsh, but anywhere we got a letter from Bexley last week. Online we don’t know whether they are liking us because they know someone in Folkestone or what?

**What role does, local media play in the local community?**

To represent the stories and the views that matter, I don’t think that’s ever changed.

**Which local media organisations do you think have developed strong/different strategies?**

Well News Internationals paywall is very interesting we should have all been doing that way back, it would have been a different story if we had way back. I have no idea what their figures are, The Guardian is good I think the website looks better than the newspaper and I think it
does sometimes look like and after thought and I think that really dangerous. That’s where you can take your eye off the ball and its failed. I think the Mailonline is so successful whatever you think of it as a paper it is hugely successful and knows it identity and knows it place.

If you were to establish a new regional media organisation how would you do it?

I would start do you know Downs Mail it’s fantastic, I live on its patch and they don’t get it. Totally local.

Printed?

Yeah I would but I would also have, you got to have a website as well.

What are the organisations current strategic priorities?

What we’ve got to do is build a platform that is going to support the commercial interests of the business we’ve got to support the business. We’ve got to make money, I don’t think they ever will like the old days but we’ve got to they are still commercial products and this is where we are. I think we are looking at 20% penetration I don’t know when that target is but that would be considered a healthy penetration that advertising could sell to.

How is strategy developed? Is it being developed at a higher level?

Yes, so there is a massive, national department who is looking right the way across at all the different expertise, that is pulled together and we get that email every day, it is in our faces, it is the MDs email and it is editors saying to their reporters what have you got online and they know. They are ahead of me, they get their press releases, it goes up online and we’ve got a board and we are constantly checking. We had training last week as an office about what’s working well and what we should be doing. Online is the hardest thing to do as everybody is still learning. Everybody gets the email, ten top ideas. This comes from a guy called Steve and then all the HoDs will have a conference call with David Montgomery every morning. We all got a personal email from David Montgomery over Easter saying everybody’s on holiday don’t put your usual gloomy news up. What we are trying to do is map what our readers are doing, so what do they do at weekends? Go out to the supermarket come back, do something else, garden centre, so we try to match what our readers do.

So you have autonomy at a local level?

Yes it comes back to local community news all the time, there is a degree of local judgement there.
How does your reporting line work?

I report to Rebecca who covers the whole of Kent, Rebecca reports to Richard Karn the Regional MD. Richard represents KRN, West Kent and Essex and he represents us on the board.

Who do you talk to/brainstorm with – do you have the editor in Sevenoaks on fast dial?

No it’s bad enough to brainstorm with people in Thanet – it was ever thus. When I was editor in chief in Kent I had 7 editors and I brought them all together and it was the first time we all met! We were just talking about that and Rebecca has asked us to reflect on the election and what worked well and we said it would be nice to have a face to face meeting about how we going to run the election campaign because then we can share the knowledge, we’ve all got bits of knowledge about technology and what works but we don’t share it. So if I’m brainstorming it’s with reporters first, my belief is you empower your staff, with Phil whose editor of Dover and with the other editors and with Rebecca.

How do you think the regional media business will change in the next decade?

I’d like to think there will still be newspapers, I think we will see more hyperlocal papers, we’ve got the Times of Tunbridge Wells which is run by my husband as the editor which is a brilliant thing., It is hugely encouraging, I think people will always want local news and it is dangerous to think they won’t be newspapers. I think there will be some hyperlocal papers and people serve up things in different ways – I don’t know if there is a new technology which hasn’t been invented yet?
Interviewee 3

Who are the main stakeholders in KRN?

They are very interested in their online community, it all about whose clicking and how many, that’s what drives them, that’s how the day is organised, that’s how the agenda is set so they are very interested in that. That doesn’t necessarily reflect community in a locational sense.

If it’s the online community that driving it when did that shift happen?

That was when Local world took over which as 18 months ago, their own vision is to conquer the world online.

How has that affected what the core function of the company became?

I wouldn’t call it a news organisation anymore it’s not like the job or the role I trained for. In fact, they don’t call their news journalists, journalists anymore they call them Content Curators. Their function is no longer to tell people stories, to find out what’s happening to report on what’s happening it is to source content which will do well on the web. That drives the print agenda particular Canterbury, Herne Bay and Whitstable as there is a free edition. They are using this a new model to do the content as print edition. So it’s down to what go down well online. The front page is literal the story that has done best online.

That’s a massive 18 months ago – did it happen overnight?

Yes – there were two stages to it. The first stage was to get people to focus more on web content so every week there had to be some related web content whether there was a picture gallery or a timeline. So web content backed up your news content at which stage print was still important. So I don’t go to a council meeting I’d right up the story for the paper and then I’d have to think of something that could be put on the website, so if it was planning application then it would like say to the history of the site. Pictures or photos of the carnival and then online there would be video of the carnival and maybe a look back at carnivals gone by. So that was the first stage and then after about 6 months it became web first, and I don’t just mean in terms of breaking news (which I don’t think is right away) but in terms of everything. So we weren’t working for a weekly local newspaper we were working for a website. They no longer take on NUJ journalists but employ content curators for the website.

What role as local media did it play in the local community?
So before a paper like the Whitstable Times which was so old established was a watch dog, it was part of the local community, it was everything you wanted a local paper to be. The previous editor John Nurden had a very clear vision for the paper it was that we should performing and entertaining with a mix of stories including what he called ‘The Pub Factor’ so you would go to the pub and tell that story that you’d seen in the paper. That was before and after it really is not so much about local issues, it was about stories that would get a click and the local angle was an afterthought they were too busy writing lists of gardens you could take your dog to or ‘100 things you didn’t know about Faversham’. That’s the kind of thing they are spending their time doing so I was told in my last appraisal that we discussed issues and I said one of the challenges I faced as increasing workloads and she said you need to look at your time and how you using it. So you could spend 3 hours in a council meeting spend an hour writing it up and get 35 clicks or you could put up videos of kittens and 300 clicks. People like videos of kittens but they fail to recognise there is two audiences the online audience who does like kittens and the core paper audience – let’s call them Doris who doesn’t care kittens she probably uses the internet in the library but she does want to know about planning applications, when the carnival is and that is what they are neglecting.

So how do they appeal to that community of readers now?
They don’t!

What’s driving the strategy?

Well print figures are dropping off but its cause and effect if the paper is rubbish then readership will drop. So a couple of weeks ago the front page for Canterbury, Whitstable, Herne Bay and Faversham was about a disease affecting dogs, its wasn’t a local story there was a quote from a local trainer that they had text me for in a total panic. So they see they need change and their way of changing it is to drive it all online, their ultimate vision was (I don’t know if it still is) to create an online local community so right at the beginning they had ‘our tube’ where people would share this local video and family book where people would keep up to date, those have dropped out but they are keen for people to upload their own content onto the website so the police, the health service do quite a lot. Other bodies and individuals so rather than contact them with a story you go online and you write it yourself and upload it.

Do you think there are other organisations that still give a local community what they want?
It’s hard to say but I think Tindle does some good work but then people who work there are also not happy, but some could say the Kent Messenger do it right as they have retained their
focus on the local community, they have supported their print product, they are not web based at all they’ll keep their exclusives for the paper rather than online.

**If you were to establish a new regional media organisation how would you do it?**

I would have a Whitstable Imp, glossy local magazine, hyperlocal just Whitstable one for Herne Bay not shared content not change pages. Backed up by a website with the hard breaking news with lots of pictures in print.

**Do local media still challenge?**

Not by the local media, individuals lobby now they go online and do a campaign. It’s harder to get the local media interested and get that translated to the people. So media tend to carry what organisation write, KRN don’t have time to rewrite so they just print press releases rather than investigating. The jobbing reporter has gone.

**How do you think the regional media business will change in the next decade?**

It has to come back to hyperlocal it’s supposed to be a local paper. The Kent on Sunday do good stuff but no one reads it. There will be less groups than there are now – KM/KRN merger should have happened, I don’t think there will be more than one print edition in one town. I just don’t see KRN having much print at all.

**So are you thinking of leaving now the type of journalism is changing in local media organisations.**

The culture of journalism has gone, they don’t stay the longest running journalist at the main office in Thanet has only been there for just over a year and she’s not qualified. Journalism is not fun, its 24/7 is reprint press releases, why would you do it? Journalism as a lifestyle chose, as a culture is disappearing. You have to line up and time your tweets and run something whether they are newsworthy or not.
Interviewee 4

Who are the main stakeholders in KRN?

The person who shapes it is the commercial director, although we are part of a national business and there is a group theme we are very much trusted with what we do locally. The majority of what happens locally is directed by us, and we influence this locally. The commercial director sits above the region, Kent, Sussex and Surrey. At a local level there are no other major stakeholders at a group level the hierarchy is fairly small between us and the MD of the business. The messages are clear but it's driven at a local level, we know our local area and what we are doing. Within my market place me and my reps are important. My reps drive the business they are out there they know the territory we trust them to come up with ideas. Territory knowledge about local businesses.

Who do you consider to be the most influential stakeholder? How important is community interest for the organisation?

Massively, engagement is key, as published of news we have complete engagement with the local populace.

Can Community interest work alongside the need to be a profitable organisation?

They are as important as each other, local communities are still individuals. Engagement good or bad without audience is engagement which is core.

What is the core function of the company?

Core role from my role, to create the revenues, the overall role is local news. So we need to be at the forefront of local news, local community and having the insight. They need to understand who we are and that they can talk to us.

What is the company’s mission statement?

Making local matter more – that's the mission statement. Really simple we want to be as local as we can be in all our regions.

I think all my staff know this it can get blurred however everyone understands this and knows we do well. Local is on the rise and we need to make it the forefront.

Businesses particularly see more value in their local market place is and people are suave. The marketplace has fragmented 10 years ago we knew what we were doing however we
knew the advertisers would come to us without even trying. They’d do yellow pages and us. Now the advertising market is fragmented local has become the most important because they need to know they are reaching that local audience first and foremost before anything else, people are coming away from the nationals to come back local particularly online.

What were the most important strategic changes in the company in the last 7-8 years?

Digital by a country mile, from a business change we are looking at it most of all. We know print will die we know that if it died tomorrow I’d lose my job but how I consume the media wouldn’t change. As I consumer online, the focus on hyperlocal online elements is growing by the day.

How do you see your readers?

Obviously if I look 6 years ago it was just print so now we’ve got a larger audience substantially larger online the print audience is nowhere in the decline we had fearer. That’s a trend for all my papers which is good for me. Digital increasing by the day at a minute by minute level, we don’t wait for news now you see it as it happens is substantially more now.

How would you define the local community?

We define it by area, each town has its own message. its own opinion there is no blanket cover or you wouldn’t survive as a business. The communities are all hugely different. TW is succeeding because we run village by village papers, we have gone very local. Some towns we cover as a town other break down even more.

What role does, local media play in the local community?

Really important role, we are the bridge between hyperlocal and national. The celebrity culture has exploded look at the Daily Mail they ask you do you just want to see the celebrity news. We are now the bridge in between that and that, we get knocked when we put a celebrity news story up. People are very open and honest now they sit behind a keyboard so they will say that’s not local news. We need to know everything that happens in our local area.

Which local media organisations do you think have developed strong strategies and why?

Locally from a digital point of view locally we are leading the way because online we are hyperlocal. Folkestoneherald.co.uk. So news is hyperlocal not county wide, the audience hasn’t plateaued yet so we can always do more. I think we can always do more with the print
element it does what it does we do need to revitalise it. Every quarter we look at it – why isn’t leisure doing what it could. We do have different audiences for online and paper so they will always be in that camp. We need to reinvigorate regularly.

The team are split by category, retail property, motors and territory thereafter. Selling across both platforms, at this stage anyway –I’m not going to say anymore at this stage.

**If you were to establish a new regional media organisation how would you do it?**

I would keep the same model and make it more local, digital element would be invested in easier to create from scratch a website from scratch. We are successful because of our brand we are a 100+ years old you could get that success from scratch.

**What are the organisations current strategic priorities?**

To increase digital audience, we have our circulation for the papers but the online audience is our focus. The journalists are driven by the audience and monetarising the digital audience is crucial. In this are we are very successful in digital revenue – top 2 or 3 nationally on a month to month basis. We were selling more that the website could deliver but its caught up now we have the inventory now. It’s showing change across the board, in this are commercial has driven the web to get more inventory. If I’ve got money on the table and we can’t deliver the audience, then we need to change the web to get that money I’ve got on the table. That’s my job, we’ve been through that journal it’s been a turbulent one but we’ve got there. The majority of my websites are better than their competitors are we are delivering far superior audience than they ever have before.

**How is strategy developed?**

From a commercial area from what we do a product, we were just print then digital advertising therefore we are having myriad of products that have come on board to help generate the digital revenue. One stop shops for local business we can develop websites, social media plans, videos we can do any number of things now digitally. That’s been the major change we were publishers of news but now we manage all that as consultants and that is all managed at a hub with a number of people who do that. But all managed at a local level they are territory managers, or account managers. The vision of the rep delivering papers and collecting cheques that’s not allowed here anymore, they are the face of this business. Considering the turnover of sales staff my team have been here a while they are the face of the business. Huge skill set jump since I’ve been here they now have a bagful of products they can sell.

**How do you think the regional media business will change in the next decade?**
The papers will still be around they may look different they may look more magaziney, their maybe another method in the way they are delivered or circulate. Digital is the way the generation below this one certainly won't be growing up with papers they won't be picking up the paper as it breaks online. Local digital will be huge paper may still be around but I think it will look different. I feel optimistic and people have opinions good and bad but I'm not being realistic for my own career I didn't see a future in this business.
Who are the main stakeholders (influencers') in the KM Group?

The Board, the media board – because at the end of the day it’s a commercial organisation and what they say goes. It’s family business so what they say happens. We haven’t really in the past been interested in what the middle management say or thought.

Who do you consider to be the most influential stakeholder?

It’s got to be who acts the company banker, so the Managing Director and the Finance Director, more and more they are influencing this business. The Managing Director has a finance background, before in this company and across the industry it is more usual for the Managing Director to have come from an editorial background to have worked their way up the editorial career path. So it would have been an editorial influence, now more and more it’s a financial influence on the business.

How important is community interest for the organisation?

From the Chairman’s perspective that is the one – the number one thing. We work with the local community we provide a local community value service that provides the community with what they need. That’s what we do – no one else can do that, no one else can talk about local council to the offerings of the local WI and anything in between. So anything that falls within those two parameters is what we do what this business does. That is what is important – that is driven by the Chairman and that is a separate thing that the business which is driven by the finance.

So how do the two elements work together? How does the community interest work alongside the need to be a profitable business?

Because I think where that has changed and where is has begun to work is where the local economy, has found its feet and come out of the recession, that we have been able to focus not so much on cost savings and commercial base, we have been able to find ourselves back to where we were which was as a local community news provider. So I think that while we have one hand on the bank balance and one hand on this community which does actually fuel this bank balance that influence has been able to come to the fore whereas the focus in the past was always on getting us commercially stable. There is now a profitable way of doing this, it was in the background but it was never in this company to go down the route of not having quality journalism. That is what we have stuck with ‘local quality journalism’.
What is the core function of the company?

To provide a local community service, local news right down to what I said earlier the WI right down to your local garden fetes then right up to what the local council or Kent County Council are proposing to do. The impact to Kent and I don’t think there is any other local service that can do it to that level. Be it online or on radio to a certain extend but print will give it to you in that in-depth, listings of what’s on in your area so on and so forth. It’s a proper service, we offer a proper service.

What is the company’s mission statement?

‘Together we make a difference’. I think! I think personally ‘together we make a difference’ is joining up everything. From my own perspective we are a ‘trusted’ media and in the future that is going to be ‘super-duper’ important. That people trust the media that comes from our group. So Together we make a difference is nice warm and fluffy but the trust of the community, the business community, the readers – the people of Kent is more important.

SO: What were the most important strategic changes in the company in the last 7-8 years?

The most important there’s been too many! The speed of change has been horrendously fast, but it needed to be fast because if it hadn’t had happened there would have been terrible consequences. If you talk about the company and just its print products the biggest strategic change was the decision as a family business not to print its products in Kent and to lose our distribution network that was at a massive cost that made a difference. If you are talking about strategy about investing in other media other than print then we have definitely made big in waves into that with regard to online or on the radio, joining the medias together. Joining them all together and doing the multimedia sale is key to us – it is the silver bullet. However, that still not quite there yet but we are on the journey, we are on the way stopping the ‘siloe sell’. We’ve got an audience that we can sell you we’ve moved more from numbers to audience and that has been quite strategic as well. WE used to send people out with a rate card, that’s the number of copies to sell it, now it’s the number of people on our platforms. So platform selling on us of media is the way forward.

How do you rank the importance of these changes?

Commercially or strategically? Because we wouldn’t be here if we hadn’t closed out print facilities, outsourced our distribution network and done all the things we had to do, however the silver bullet will be the multimedia sale. That is very important and along the way as the print revenue declines but will happen is we will monetarise that into the online and radio
revenue. It was really important that those two streams were in the background waiting and that we developed them and developed the audience so we can shift when it is time away from print. I don’t know if anybody knows when that time is but they need to let somebody know.

**How do you see your readers now?**

I still see our readers the same, because with the decline in print we are now getting to the stage when they are buying our products every week, they are our core readership, they are our core demographic, our print figures, readership figures have slipped by double figures in the last four years. However, the revenue we make from that copy sale is quite important to us that is a revenue stream which is the total opposite, pre-2008 nobody would have thought about it, that revenue stream. It used to be how many copies can we get out there irrespective of the revenues we could get from those copies. So we may be doing 20/30% less copies that we did in 2006 but we are making £15,000 or 15% more revenue so that’s a new revenue stream that supports itself. That wasn’t considered part of the strategy 5 or 6 years ago. But it is now.

**How would you define the local community?**

Kent, all of Kent, every corner of it. We try to serve the local community with a printed product and with our online offering. A lot of what comes online comes from Facebook media but we have bucked the trend and launched new local editions – one in Folkestone, one in Hythe, one in Sandwich now so we are trying to serve all the local communities.

**What role does, local media play in the local community?**

We are the first group, the first touch point for media for the community other than your ‘googles’ well they are our biggest competitor now aren’t they? Google and BBC, I’m not counting the national press. Our role is to be trusted and to support that local community to be in and be part of that local community. So we are part of the community rather than a commercial hard-nosed organisation that just wants to make money from the community. I don’t know how a media business can do that you have to have an interest in the community and show that interest.

**Which local media organisations do you think have developed strong strategies and why?**

Not stronger but different strategies, all online. All their investment has been online they haven’t invested in their paid for titles they’ve paid their paid for titles free. There are totally
different strategies out there we have tended to follow we have tended to react to whatever has happened on our patch. Our one strong element that has stayed true through everything is that we have always invested and we have continued to invest in our paid for titles. We have still invested our papers in Kent our competitors haven’t done that, they haven’t been allowed to do that. We have still maintained our quality journalism in Kent, that hasn’t happened for other organisations so you’ve got traditional media papers like the Kent and Sussex Courier which still exist which is still a good read. It is still pertinent to its area but then you’ve got other titles who have closed who couldn’t find their way, they went free to destroy our paid for sale. That was there strategy very different from ours we’ve not taken that strategy. We have just continued to pump our paid for titles into retail in Kent.

If online had been monetarised quicker then I think other groups would have got there quicker than us as we didn’t have the audience and we weren’t quick enough to recognise it. But in some respects building the audience slowly has done us a favour, whereas as other groups, as I know this as a fact, groups like Local World, there everything is about building that number about building that audience be it through sensationalising the stories more. They will do anything like the ‘Ten Top Chip Shops in Kent’, that is not necessarily quality journalism but it will get the hits and that’s what they want they want the hits. That is not our strategy in our papers or online.

What are the organisations current strategic priorities?

Our current strategy priority is audience, measuring audience and to be the leading provider of news in Kent.

How do you think the regional media business will change in the next decade?

Need to sort out the BBC as BBC are going for love local so they are a big competitor I think we need to work with them. We need to beat the beast and they are the beast so that’s one part that needs to be attended to. I would have said some independents, not this independent will have been eaten up by the bigger groups. There will be consolidation and you will see people who were enemies talking to each other, because that will be the only way to survive. But I still think newspapers have got a place in their local community for maybe another 10-20 years and then maybe even after then.

If you were to establish a new regional media organisation how would you do it?

Hyperlocal, embedded in its local community web based but I would still like to see some printed support for it.
I joined in 1996 and I have seen some fantastic changes who knows what will happen next?
Interviewee 6

I’ve been with the company for 15 years I started off as a merchandiser with visits to retailers to make sure they have supplies, point of sales and make sure they were happy. My boss left so I applied for the job then it was called Circulation Manager. I’ve had loads of titles sales manager and now I’m sales relationship manager.

My patch just East Kent that’s Canterbury over to Thanet, Folkestone and Dover.

Who are the main stakeholders in KRN?

The CEO – definitely. It’s changed dramatically I’ve been through four take overs. We were Adsence, Trinity Mirror, Northcliffe and now Local world and this had been the biggest change. Digital and web are the biggest change online that’s what is most important. My job is to sell as many newspapers as possible but when they are ‘whopping’ everything up online it’s a hard, it’s a struggle.

It’s difficult to think back we were more laid back we were chasing year in year increase for ABC we were always chasing an increase. Now we are ‘just managing the decline’ if I’m honest across the board. Physically we are doing the same thing, selling as many papers as possible via promotions, by awareness by speaking to retailers. Making sure we are prominent in retailer over and above competitors. Things have to progress things change but predominately my thing is still the same.

How important is community interest for the organisation?

Very for a community newspaper you’ve got to know your audience you’ve got to know your retailers. whether that smaller newsagent or convenience stores or even larger supermarkets you’ve to get them on-board because everyone is fighting for space. You need to get in there to do promotions we want to be the ones they allow in.

Can community interest work alongside the need to be a profitable organisation?

I don’t know really. To be honest the worse off we were the more money we had to push, when we were doing fine and dandy they were like why do you want more money to do promotions? What do you need anything for?

With the change to digital they are still investing, I have a budget for promotions and giveaways and pitches. I have budget to brand a lot of shop fronts and all branded point of sale. It costs a lot of money. We’ve just finished our last shop we had to rebrand them all –
prior to was all about the newspaper but now we have rebranded to incorporate the website. We have actually found a couple of retailers refusing to change over because they don’t like the fact that it’s about the website. The independent local newsagent won’t have that on their shop front they say it’s about local not about the website or the internet.

They see that the internet threatens them they are seeing a decline in their sales, local nations and magazines.

**How do you see your audience?**

I still see them as readers, we’ve got a hard-core reader audience, sadly the churn means we are losing them. That’s the biggest battle the younger generation are not interested in newspapers they get all their information off the internet. That’s a challenge.

**How would you define the local community? What role does, local media play in the local community?**

We are very involved; local newspapers want to be part of the community to be seen as part of the community. We are winning some areas the KM are winning others – if you asked people in Folkestone they would say it’s the Folkestone Herald we are the local newspaper. We want to be involved and to turned to. We get a lot of people involved they will just walk in and tell us they’ve tripped over a pavement and been to the council and no one listening and I’ve come to you. And that’s we’re here we can help and be involved.

The Herald sponsors and support football clubs in Folkestone and Hythe we are looking to do community boards anywhere we can help. They haven’t always been the vase we are trying to get our brand out there. That is one thing that has happened over the last 6 years have increased. Ironically as the sales have gone down we are trying to increase our brand awareness. To get people to buy whereas before people were happy we were getting a 10% year on year increase we own the local community. Whereas now we’ve got to work hard for every single sale and it’s tough.

**Current strategy**

My planner is 3 months ahead. If there a difficult area we work ahead whether its promotions or looking for new shops to brand, community boards or attending outside events. I manage all that locally no one above me looks over me. I have my pot and I can spend what I want where. I’m one of 5 newspaper sales managers in SE, Kent Surrey, Essex Hertfordshire and we report into the Newspaper Sales Director.
We swap ideas all the time we meet quarterly to discuss ideas but if something has worked we’ll all share that anyway. I talk to editorial constantly I need to know what’s planned what they’re up to. I’m in charge of the supplies so I need to order manage and control the stock levels. Every week I have to let the wholesalers know to manage supply areas. If the front page is I don’t know a hit and run in an area, I will increase the supply areas there.

Sometimes I think don’t put that on the web I'll lose stories that’s old news. IF there is a choice of stories they could run as splash they’ll ask me to look at old sales figures so I can advise them about what might have worked in the past.

**How is strategy developed?**

I get the daily updates – it keeps me informed but it doesn’t have any affect. Sometimes editorial will say they splash will be this story because we had so many hits on line but weirdly it doesn’t always transfer, what people are looking at online doesn’t always transfer into a good sale.

I know what is going to work as a splash and sometimes I will tell them that’s not going to work. These guys (editorial) work hard and they want the best sales figures so I will help them.

I only get involved with free papers when there are problems. There have been a lot of changes you know, we were hybrid in some areas and when we went finally free and settled down. I manage the point of sale me and my team set up Canterbury Herne Bay and Whitstable when it all went free we set all that up all the pickup bins. If there are problems, they will come to me – otherwise it’s not touched. The supplies stay the same I don’t get involved in the front page or content. Quite frankly the supply is whatever and if it gets picked up it does.

It’s been a massive change, huge change, when I started I looked after 15 titles and now it’s 4. Collapsing of editions, closures and frees. Hythe and Romney went into the Herald for example, it’s not an easier job though as I am chasing the sale. Everyone is still on my neck chasing the sales figure. The sales reflect revenue, circulate is 20% of the revenue we put 20% of the overall money into the pot. Everyone is interested if we don’t get the figures they are not get their money and advertising want to keep the sale up.

**Whose got their strategy sorted?**

No one not even the nationals they are still dabbling they are not sure. I went to a presentation and the nationals don’t know what they are doing trying this and that, selling a package. No one’s got a good strategy. Someone got a formula tell me!
Sales strategy is targeting where needed we will target a post code where sales are dropping we need to be out there at local event where ever we can be.

The big strategy comes from above it just happens. The four papers have stabilised over the last 18 months it just ticking along. No major plans to change the portfolio that I’m am aware of. I am always the last to know.

What’s the future?

I’ve no idea! I don’t know. Everybody tried it all – hybrid, free, now hyper local, Metro style in Tunbridge Wells is it working who knows. Things pop up all the time nice glossy Weld area magazine. The KM are always launching new editions in our as we do tit for tat.

You will always have newspapers, we will continue to manage the decline and the decline will grow. At some point will we lose newspapers? I don’t think, so I think there will always been people reading papers. Possible in a decade online will grow and faster, quicker interact but will today’s kids want papers? I don’t know.

The decline has stabilised it is pretty steady we have roughly the same ABC figures for the last three years so the heavy decline has stopped. It’s the churn if they keep dying we have problems. People by the paper week in week out and pass it on but the younger generation don’t do that anymore.

I only buy the papers on a Sunday my 23-year-old son isn’t interested. But we’ll keep doing everything we can.

My personally I don’t think digital is a bad thing – it’s the CEO dream that’s the way it will go it’s not negative but for me it affects me and my sales which is slightly depressing but here is nothing I can do – accept and embrace it. I’ve got more money and more flexibility to do what I want ironically I have more chance to do things than I’ve ever done before, free chocolate bar with a paper. Over the last two years we do two or three promotions a week it’s always a giveaway with the paper it’s in store it’s our merchandisers doing it. So we set up a stand pull up banners we’re in Folkestone high street with a marquee on sat we’re in Tesco Manston. We’ll set with the marquee – we’ve had the marquee for the last three years.

All our papers are coastal editions so we attend a lot of events, we attend fairs, fetes country fairs Dover regattas selling papers with a giveaway. We have a dog outfit called Scribble we brought it two years ago. The kids love it so we can engage with the audiences. Its old fashioned but it works.
We've gone back to where we were when I first started. We are embracing the community to be part of the community. I have three staff, they're not casual staff and they do all these events.

They are branded with the web address as well but they’re there to sell papers. We don’t do the country show that is not local, enough for us. We’re local every week, it gets us out and about. The editorial people come out with us to speak to their public. Advertising never come with us though.

At the core is a local media organisation being run in East Kent for the people of East Kent. We are all still in the same pot but we are really only the ones who don’t get involved in the web. Our merchandisers do feedback stories when they’re out and about send back photos for online etc. But our job is to sell newspapers and they may call me Sales Relationship Manager but I am really still just the Newspaper Sales Manager!
Interviewee 7

**Who are the main stakeholders in KM?**

The family, they remain the main stakeholders. The ethos digital is slightly different we are trying to be stakeholders we are almost a subsidiary because our approach is so alien in the company. We have to run it as a company within a company. So individually in the digital team we think of ourselves as being stakeholders but overview it’s still very much the family and the board.

**Who do you consider to be the most influential stakeholder?**

When it comes to crunch the family and the board and the exec as well I suppose. From my level I see them being both the same.

**How important is community interest for the organisation?**

Not very, from a KM community not a lot. It’s changed a lot in the last 7 years. As Edwin died and now Geraldine is there. I think Geraldine started with a community ethos, so people started and stayed there until they retired. But society has changed and so has the KM. There isn’t the internal community approach anymore.

The KM community is seen as a USP and it was always the case with press. They’ve been a bit waylaid with digital geographical boundaries aren’t there so if they’ve got their eyes open they can see the potential. Digital world can’t be confined.

**Can Community interest work alongside the need to be a profitable organisation?**

There’s also the community interest of Kent, they trying to look at profitable aspect of an organisation and finances have taken a great role because they haven’t been making a profit. When money was easy to come by they could be magnanimous in their community approach and now they are not able to.

**What is the core function of the company? What is the company’s mission statement?**

Do you know what they used to have one but it disappeared about 4 years ago do you know I don’t know if they do. I don’t know what it is if they have one – I’d be surprised if anyone knows what it is. The executive might have one but they don’t tell us.

The core function is local news for local people. That still remain, but now with financial restraints, it has been affected.
What were the most important strategic changes in the company in the last 7-8 years?

We’re not quite there yet – I think everyone realises it but there are incapacitated to make that decision and that decision is that the future is digital and purely digital. Part of that goes back to the community approach. I know online is the way forward but I don’t know how that works with our community and culturally we can’t make it work. So for now they’ve just put that to one side to see how it goes. So strategically they haven’t made a decision, so that’s down to management. So newspapers in Kent have been around for 100 or 150 years and publishers knew how to make money and that model continued on and on over the year and Chairman and chairman sat in clover as he money rolled in. They advertising increased in the 60s in its hay day and they never had to look at changing the business model, so strategy was very basic and very straight forward. So probably up to 2008/9 there wasn’t any strategy it was all very tactical some new publications and some opening of papers. But there was no strategy the readership took care of itself so long as you had a good editor the papers sold. Strategy has become more important and because the incumbent people in the job they have been unable to make proper decisive changes. So subsequently they tend to follow industry trends rather than making strategic decisions, whether right or wrong in the long term in relation to the company. So it’s down to the people that those decisions haven’t been made. The internal culture of the business partly as a family and partly because you joined as an apprentice and then stayed there for 30 years hasn’t enabled the senior management team with the right tools/people to make strategic decisions which is now much wider than just newspapers. So for instance to my previous roles prior to KM management changed and if there was a need they would bring people in. One of the most surprising things is they don’t have a graduate scheme they don’t have movement between department so everything is very much silo. Even within the context of where people were there a long time it wasn’t a company where people could grow or develop their own skills so obviously then when you get a senior management with little knowledge outside they are ‘blinded like rabbits’ when it comes to strategic decisions that actually affect people’s lives.

How do you rank the importance of these changes? How do you see the audience?

From my perspective we’ve got readers and browser s and listeners. Two of them consumer news and gossip and the other music. They are not readers people consume media differently. They read the paper and discard it. They go online and read for 10 seconds maybe. They read in a different way so content needs to be presented differently and they may come back 2 o 3 times a day. So they are consumers of news and local stories.

How would you define the local community?
Its self-defining by geography but it could be self-defining by anyway you wish to look. From a digital perspective, it’s different. So we’ve had some made stories online – stories which would just have had a nib in the paper have ballooned online they were just curious stories – Crabzilla for example, those stories go outside Kent. 20-30,000 browsers from America for example. In general terms the website is self-targeting so people choose where they live so that’s one way of getting in. Another way is through social media, particularly via people they know but the likelihood is there is some geographical influence amongst the audience but they are far more dispersed than via the audience for a local paper.

**What role does local media play in the local community?**

It plays quite a strong role, its role becoming a bit more transparent. So traditionally the editor would have had a comment in press, comment of the week online everything is more transparent. Every story has an option to comment so you get feedback from a community which reflects the KM in a different light than it may have been seen 6-7 years ago. So that perceived view can be quite harsh, editorial teams have to do things differently. Readers have more of a say. Browsers will have viewpoints contra dictionary to what the paper says. So that position of perceived power from 8-10 years ago is not quite there as much now. The local community is now thinking is the KM now just profit driven, is it still got a community base. So they’re thinking the same question.

**Which local media organisations do you think have developed strong strategies and why?**

If there are a local media organisation as an offshoot of an established organisation there are examples in the niche area because online you can target a niche area easily, without needing to build up brand and reputation. There is no right or wrong at the moment there is no route map to follow and that be why the management aren’t making the decisions they need to. There isn’t a best practice to follow. There are some successes, Huffington post was a local regional somewhere. Some in London which are hyperlocal are successful but it’s not scalable.

**If you were to establish a new regional media organisation how would you do it?**

Millennials audience are different they are happy to read content that’s sponsored as long as they see that is it relevant to them so that means a commercial model can be different. We are trying to shoe horn our commercial model into one which is traditionally old but if you look at it with a broader commercial brush with a lot less cost, so you not paying to write it. You could also give me a community aspect without going down the whole hog of getting random
people writing stuff which has pitfalls of quality but there is a balance in between where because you keep costs low as no one is prepared to pay for news they don’t need to so you are dependent upon people who see your audience as valuable, brands advertisers. Far removed from where are now.

**What are the organisations current strategic priorities?**

Yes, sort of…they are not hugely clear, sometimes when are clear they are not supported by the structure or incentives.

**How is strategy developed?**

I’m sure there is strategy there somewhere but I’m not privy to it. I try to get involved in digital strategy but that’s hard work as you have to explain it and the ideas behind it to people who don’t always understand. You need to put together a convoluted business case to get a case forward. Under you’ve got quasi roles Head of Digital, two tiers above me before the Chairman. As I see it third person down the chain, the stumbling blocks are does it cost money? As a family firm the strategy sits with the accountant, in corporate strategy would be developed then presented to the accountant. Within the KM there are two accountants on the board so they aren’t that ability to think outside the box, to brainstorm to generate strategic ideas as the level of creativity just isn’t there.

**How do you think the regional media business will change in the next decade?**

I can see how it needs to change whether it will or not is another matter. There will always be a paper but they will look different, quality of news and comment will always have a place in a community. So newspapers will see readership drop so they will become more journalistic, do we need 18/20 probably not in the county? Through press you can reach influencers cover price will change, it won’t make huge money in the way it used to. Online you have flexibility on size of product the internet is everything and capitalising on that. Disrupts in the business are good and they need to experiment with new avenues to take a risk, those that have tried things are starting to make money those that are doing things the way they have always done it are losing money. So do you want to slowly make everyone redundant in 10 years or do you want to have a real go at changing within 2? The potential is online but from a monetary perspective it’s not rocket science. People say the figures don’t add up but potentially there is a lot of cost saving still need to happen. Writers and journalists need to write for a changing audience and media. Perhaps journalists will have their ethics head and also have their commercial head. Content curators or managers, that’s a big hurdle. They are writing stories in a different way but so much of the stuff they could be making money from they are being
targeted by the wrong things browser or viewers, which is wrong. To the point where now 1.6 million browsers in Kent so we have the captive audience but how can we manipulate that audience to serve our advertisers differently. They started to look at that but they need to do more. There are opportunities, we closed the London office but now we have an offering which could be national, there are packages we can turn on overnight, but the stakeholders don’t understand it and they are unwilling to have someone who is not financially involved to make a decision on their behalf, they prefer to just balance the books than grasp the opportunities there.

I can sell stuff but I don’t there is a lot of education needed, client, sales people and stakeholders and that’s what I do. We’ll go out with sales rep I do sell to some customers, the whole sales process has evolved, 10 years ago you didn’t need to be a good sales person, customers understood readers, what an add was. Similarly, reps could canvass the opposition, pick up a paper and see who was advertising so they knew who they were competing with market share etc. Customers don’t talk about online as they are behind or because they are ahead of the rep they are spending £5 on google ad words and now they’ll just have a 5 x 2 in paper for £30 this week. The rep with never know as its invisible spend, they may be advertising in niche spend. On the rep side due to our history rep’s targets are still traditionally press so if you target someone heavily on press they will do their upmost to hit target. Which is bizarre you sell more you don’t make more as you need to produce 10 pages more whereas online you can increase in size without incurring extra costs. So I am an educator in an environment which isn’t pro – talks the talk but doesn’t walk the walk.