The Newshouse design research

# COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

## The Newshouse

### Audience

* Students
* Parents
* University faculty and staff
* Syracuse community
* Prospective employers

### Strengths

* Student journalists guided by experienced professors
* Connection to the Newhouse school
* Only digital, allowing them to specialize
  + Most students don’t read print newspapers that often
* Free of advertisements and no subscription

### Weaknesses

* Little professional guidance
  + Limited by the knowledge of students
* No interactive content
* Lack of independence from Syracuse University
* Not as well known as the Daily Orange
* Doesn’t release as many stories as other news organizations

### Unique features

* Student journalists with expert guidance
  + Best of both worlds between The Daily Orange and The New York Times

### Mission and value

“The purpose of the website is to deliver informative and entertaining content to the Syracuse University community. It focuses on campus news, off-campus news, sports, life and style, and entertainment news, which are the realms of interest to the students in the university. It also serves as an outlet where the students can learn the many facets of digital production.” - source: Jon Glass, Executive Producer of the NewsHouse

## The Daily Orange

### Audience

* Students
* Parents
* University faculty and staff
* Syracuse community

### Strengths

* Student-run
  + Creates connection to student readers
* Independent from Syracuse University
* Trusted
* Print and digital
* Variety of media content
  + Print, digital, photo, video, social media, podcasts, news, editorial
* Well-known on and off campus

### Weaknesses

* Ads
  + The site is littered with ads, which can sometimes be a little intrusive
* Little professional guidance
  + Limited by the knowledge of students
* Need to produce print and digital content
  + Instead of focusing their efforts on print or digital, they have to divide it between both

### Unique features

* Has the benefit of being a part of the SU campus community, without being constrained by the bureaucracy and limitations of being an actual student organization
* Large alumni network to guide current student journalists
  + Also a source of funding

### Reviews

* Has many top rankings by student journalism organizations
* Has operated for over 100 years, so students must like them

### Mission and value

* “The Daily Orange exists to serve our readers by gathering and sharing factual, relevant information with diligence and care. Through independent student journalism, we strive to share truthful, accurate and fair stories from the Syracuse and Syracuse University community, with a focus on amplifying the voices of community members. As an entirely student-run newsroom, The D.O. also aims to be a place where students can learn and gain experience in reporting, editing and telling stories across textual, visual and audio platforms.” - source: <https://dailyorange.com/about/>

## The New York Times

### Audience

* 61% of audience is gen z or millennials (source: <https://advertising.nytimes.com/audience-and-insights/>)
* There might be an abnormally high readership at Syracuse University due to its reputation for being a media and journalism school

### Strengths

* Large, well established, and trusted
* Print and digital
* On the cutting edge in terms of innovation and technology
* Global news coverage
* Many journalists who specialize in different areas
* Can produce many different articles per day
* Can deliver breaking news to audience as it is happening
* Subscription model allows it to have fewer advertisements (and less intrusive ones) than free news sites

### Weaknesses

* Requires subscription
  + Syracuse university students can get a free subscription, but some students might not know this
* Disconnected from local communities
  + It doesn’t cover the Syracuse University community very often unless there is a national news story

### Unique features

* Wide reach of coverage
* Many types of content
* Exploring new interactive content

### Reviews

* Received over 100 pulitzers
* Widely trusted

### Mission and value

* “The New York Times is dedicated to helping people understand the world through on-the-ground, expert and deeply reported independent journalism.” - source: <https://www.nytco.com/company/>

# Heuristic Analysis

## Life and Style section front

### Summary:

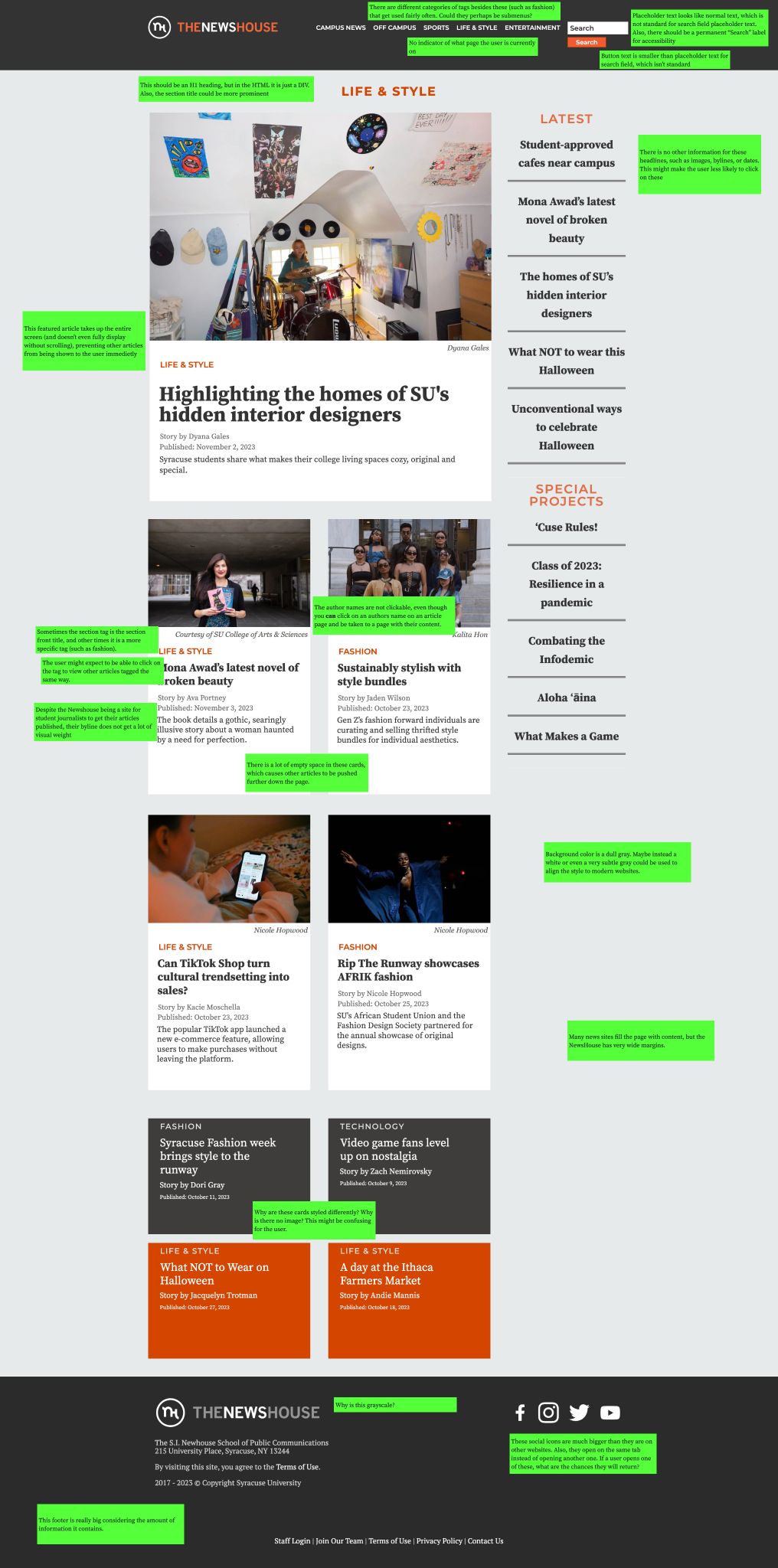
The section fronts have various usability and design issues that prevent the user from finding articles they want to read. For example, the information architecture of the navigation bar only includes the five main section fronts, even though there are additional article categories that are often used. Additionally, the desktop layout has a lot of empty space in the margins that other news sites typically make use of. As a result, the only article card that is visible without scrolling down is the featured article, and even that is not fully visible.

### Key problems and solutions:

* There are only five navigation links, but there are even more tags. This makes it confusing as to which articles correspond to certain categories. Could subcategories be shown when hovering over a navigation link?
* The HTML heading hierarchy isn’t being used correctly. The H1 tag should be for the main page title (such as “Life & Style"), while the article titles themselves should be H2’s.
* When a user arrives at a section front, they can only see the featured article card because it is so big it pushes the other article cards down. Additionally, the entire featured article card isn’t even fully visible unless the user scrolls. If the user is not interested in the featured article, they might just leave the site.
  + Other news sites have multiple articles visible when the user first loads the page. The NewsHouse could make use of a grid layout to display multiple articles while still having a larger featured article
* The “Latest” and “Special projects” sidebar only has article titles. Adding images, bylines, dates, and/or article descriptions could improve clickthrough rate.
* There are very wide margins on the page, which limit the space available for articles. Other news sites make better use of the available space. If a grid layout was used to display articles, this space could be filled while still leaving ample whitespace so it is not too overwhelming.
* The bylines are really de-emphasized due to their size and styling, even though one of the main purposes of the NewsHouse is to give student journalists exposure. The bylines could be given a little more visual weight while not overpowering the other content.

### Full heuristic analysis:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NsI4Wc2E-YE2yUxISBgFTY3kfsj58CKs/view?usp=sharing>



## Story page

### Summary

The individual story pages have the same very wide margins that the section fronts do. This forces most content into a one column layout, which can get repetitive, especially in longer stories. Additionally, the layout of the elements that make up the image components is misaligned, making image-heavy stories more difficult for a reader to parse. Also, there is no funnel to help the reader view more articles after finishing a story, making it more likely that they just leave the site after finishing an article.

### Key problems and solutions

* The article title is the same size on mobile and desktop, meaning that it is huge on mobile and pushes other content down. This means that, currently, the editor has to shorten the headline on mobile.
  + A better (and easier) solution could be to just reduce the size of the title on mobile.
* Links are not styled differently than normal text unless hovered over. This is an accessibility issue and a design issue. While links are bolded in body text, someone could misinterpret that as emphasizing that text instead of making it a link.
  + Just add a permanent underline to all links, as that is the traditional way of communicating to the user that an element is a link.
* Heading elements are center-aligned, which makes it a little harder to read and scan.
* The elements that make up the image block (which contains an image, photographer credit, and caption) are misaligned with each other, making it more difficult to easily interpret that information. That is an even bigger problem in an image-heavy article.
  + Adjusting the layout and styling of this component could go a long way in making stories look cleaner, more professional, and easier to read and scan.
* The layout of story pages is fairly formulaic, leaving little room to surprise or delight the reader through intentional layout changes that support the story.
  + There is a lot of empty space in the margins where the layout could shift to be more than one column on desktop. This could also reduce scrolling distance for the reader, as they wouldn’t have to scroll past a very large image that takes up the entire viewport by itself.
* There is no funnel at the end of the story page to take the reader to a new article, meaning that the user is more likely to just leave the site. And since the navbar is not sticky, the user would either 1. scroll all the way up to click on a navigation link or the newshouse logo; 2. click the newshouse logo in the footer; or 3. hit the back button on their browser to read another article.
  + A “related stories” section at the bottom of the page could allow the reader to view more articles of interest. There are already tags in the backend, so this feature could be feasible to implement.

### Full heuristic analysis

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EOu20EzByVhuNHs-KEE-73UFkYMWYk_P/view?usp=sharing>

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# Interviews

## Student journalists: ANNA

1. After you have written a story for the Newshouse website, what work goes into producing a story for the newshouse website?
2. Are there any projects or types of stories that you would like to be able to do (or would like to do more of), but, because of the limitations of the Newshouse website, are currently difficult, time-consuming, or not feasible to do?
   1. Podcasts with transcripts, timeline bar, tabs, description, etc.
      1. There is a whole class (MND 305) that create podcasts (Takahashi’s class only)
3. What do you want the people reading your stories to learn, understand, and/or feel?
4. What features do you wish the Newshouse website had?
5. How does the type of story or content you are writing about affect how you layout your story
6. What kinds of content do you feel should be emphasized on the newshouse?
7. Do you feel that content on pages besides the main home page gets ignored?
8. How much of the design do you control? Would you like predefined templates that you could pick and choose from?
9. Can you give me 5 names and contact info of people I should talk to about the newhouse?
10. What do you feel is most important to highlight on a story card?

## Student journalist: Julia (executive producer)

### Process:

* Ideal is to have assets taken and articles written before uploading
  + A lot of times they are waiting for photos
* Can’t upload photos from harddrive, needs to be from media library in wordpress
* Add story into the story calendar first
  + Usually schedule stories a week in advance, unless it is a big planned event
* Slug and category first when added in story calendar, and then when the story is actually being uploaded they fill in other information
* Uploading story
  + Switch to block editor
  + Go to outlines and then patterns, and then NH design elements
  + Different patterns, such as normal size photo, or a jumbo photo
  + Photos need to be 3:2 (3000 px by 2000px)
  + Photos need to be cropped to fit that
  + If vertical images, multiple are lined up
  + Try to avoid taking vertical photos
  + Sometimes cropping photos can be a pain, and some photos can’t be used
  + Sometimes add photos within the story
  + Sometimes add subheadings in the story
  + The wordpress backend is slow
  + Bylines are added to the bottom of their contributions when there are multiple authors
    - Doesn’t like that b/c makes it seem less important
  + Before publishing, need to complete checklist
    - Checklist is really useful because it prevents you from forgetting anything in the article
  + Copy and paste from the document the author sent
  + Wordpress is clunky to use
  + A lot of little bugs with wordpress
  + DIdn’t know how to fix bug that was happening, so she said she would have to ask professor glass
    - Once a week
    - Sometimes affects posting schedule
  + Most people are contributors, but Julia is a producer so she should have permission. If she wanted to add a user, she would need to message Professor Glass or Gitner, which can delay posting
  + Sometimes they will have a really good headline, but it will be too long so they have to shorten it
  + Mobile headlines should always be different
    - Two different fields (one for mobile, one for desktop)
    - Sometimes constricted with mobile headlines b/c they are so short
    - She doesn’t think the mobile headline should take up the whole screen and be so big
    - The headline is so big that you don’t see the photo and byline
  + Need to go through and add hyperlinks
  + Need to hide slug
  + Ensure right categories are selected and add tags
    - Have 5 tags minimum
    - Don’t usually use tags like “Syracuse University”
    - Tags should be SEO friendly
  + Usually the excerpt is the dek
* SEO checks
  + It tells them how SEO friendly the content is
  + Things entered in the SEO checker is separate from what the user sees (only for backend)
* Hit publish and a secondary menu appears
* Can preview what the page will look like, which is especially helpful for images
* Isn’t sure that she likes the hyperlinks being black and not being underlined
* Rarely use side by side images
* Would like there to be other social media integration blocks
* The settings of wordpress can be overwhelming
* Other websites make it easier to embed
* There is a way to embed embeds other than tik tok or youtube, but it is complicated and she has to go to professor glass
  + For a lot of life and style links, like to use social links
  + Or instagram posts for fashion of clothing being worn
  + Don’t use them a ton because it is complicated to work with

1. After you have written a story for the Newshouse website, what work goes into producing a story for the newshouse website?
2. Are there any projects or types of stories that you would like to be able to do (or would like to do more of), but, because of the limitations of the Newshouse website, are currently difficult, time-consuming, or not feasible to do?
   1. A separate tab or page for multi-media content, or even a separate page for podcasts
   2. Wished they dabbled in commentary or op-eds
      1. Think a lot of students would be more intrigued about writing an op-ed
      2. Don’t have an op-ed section, so they are just tagged as commentaries
3. What do you want the people reading your stories to learn, understand, and/or feel?
   1. Want users to feel like the newshouse is a platform that cares about students and covers issues students care about
   2. Makes it feel like the things students are doing is important
   3. Assumes students don’t read the decks
4. What features do you wish the Newshouse website had?
5. How does the type of story or content you are writing about affect how you layout your story
   1. Photo essays are where a lot of bigger images would be used
      1. More visual heavy
   2. The longer the content, the more headings
      1. Easier to read and more SEO friendly
   3. Listicles have headings
   4. Feels like multimedia could be used more
6. What kinds of content do you feel should be emphasized on the newshouse?
   1. Currently really sports heavy, so people may think they are a sports publication
      1. A lot of people want to write sports
   2. The off campus section feels like it is less important
      1. Feels like the off campus page front could be different
         1. Different organization of the section
            1. Maybe style and entertainment section in the off campus section
7. How do you feel about the information architecture:
   1. Thinks the categories make sense
   2. Some people don’t realize there is other stuff on the website
8. Do you feel that content on pages besides the main home page gets ignored?
   1. Probably
   2. Depending on the size of the recent story headlines, there might not be many displayed
   3. Doesn’t like the empty space
      1. Doesn’t see a lot of news sites with these wide of margins
9. How much of the design do you control? Would you like predefined templates that you could pick and choose from?
10. Can you give me 5 names and contact info of people I should talk to about the newhouse?
11. What do you feel is most important to highlight on a story card?
    1. Whatever has been published latest, but balanced with the importance/significance of a piece
    2. Lead editors don’t often update fronts
    3. New articles need to be published, but editors are still hung up on little edits
    4. Need to manually update fronts
    5. Maybe the main byline could be a little bigger, but not bigger than the date or the excerpt
12. Anything else
    1. Don’t like the recent stories column
       1. Definitely need recent stories section, but doesn’t like that it is just headlines
    2. Could be more user friendly and designed more clearly
    3. Most used categories are the ones in the nav, but movies and music, and fashion are used a lot
    4. Savannah Bananas baseball team article is a good one for us to reference as we are redesigning
       1. Having some of the media so big might be a problem

## Key insights (STUDENT ARTICLE LEAD):

* The homepage only displays one article card
* Life and style is a little confusing
* The line differentiating what section an article is classified as can be blurry
* Make it easier to do SEO
* Allow for PDF display and podcasts
* Make it easier for subheadings

## Key insights (PROFESSOR GLASS):

* Most people only view one article
* Most traffic is referral or social media, so viewers find that the newshouse has written an article about a specific topic, so they read it, and then leave
  + Prof. Glass would like if they went to a section page or read more articles
* They have had a “similar articles” section for special projects, but never something sitewide
* Question for Prof. Gitner: What would a “similar articles” section entail? Would articles need to be tagged a certain way?

## Professor:

1. What kinds of content do you wish the newshouse had more of?
2. What do you want users to feel when they come to the newshouse website?
3. What type of readers come to the newshouse?
4. What kinds of information do you want to emphasize on the section heads?
5. What are the biggest challenges you have with the Newshouse website?
6. Who are the main stakeholders?
7. What separates the newshouse from the daily orange?
8. Who are the different users who come to the newshouse website and what are their goals?
9. The average views per session over the past year is under 2 pages, leading me to believe that people are only reading 1 article. Would you rather have people view more articles per visit?
10. What kinds of content do you wish the newshouse had more of?
11. Who are the different users who come to the newshouse website and what are their goals?
12. Who are the various stakeholders?
13. What kinds of content do you wish the newshouse had more of?
14. What separates (or what should separate) the newshouse from the daily orange?
15. What do you want users to feel when they come to the newshouse website?

## User: Jack (Junior BDJ major)

Observe:

* Skim past the intro
* Going through it fast
* Look through the subheading
* Since the event has passed, less inclined to read the article
* Clicked on first main article
* Saw same kind of articles in life and style that were on the homepage
* Didn’t read many articles because they had already past
* Left website when he saw no more new content
* Interested in special projects
* Didn’t see the other articles in special projects

1. How often do you read from student news outlets? Why or why not?
   1. As a bdj student, has to look for news stories for class
   2. A few days a week
   3. Looking for something to report on
   4. Relies on social media for news
   5. Get most of cultural/student life updates from social media
2. Was it easy to find an article you were interested in?
   1. Difficult to find article interested in
   2. Looking for headline, big takeaways first, then read if interested
   3. Skims top to bottom
   4. Looking for big bullet points
   5. Will read more in depth if the topic is more interesting and unique or new to him
3. What might make you more inclined to read more on the NewsHouse?
   1. If they had more output (daily articles)
4. What parts of your experience using the NewsHouse website did you not like?
   1. The UI was a little sterile and not engaging
   2. DIdn’t like the black and grays
   3. Not distinct from other news sites
   4. Saw same format in life and style as the homepage
   5. Not a lot of variety across tabs
5. How would you describe the visual aesthetics of the site? Did it affect your experience?
   1. The articles themselves are fine.
   2. Subheadings grab attention
6. Any other comments?
   1. If it was more timely, he would want to read it more
   2. First thing he looks at (outside of title), he looks at the date published. If it is more than a few days old, he is less likely to read.
   3. Junior

## Notes:

* Podcasts are currently made videos with a picture
  + Might be helpful to have podcasts be integrated into the website as more visually appealing
* Integrate PDFs into website
* News
  + Encompases on and off campus sections
  + A lot of whitespace on photojournalism pieces. Maybe they can be more blown up
  + Email link
  + No tag distinction between hard news and editorial
  + Not a lot of breaking news
  + Opportunity for students to get their name on a story
  + A lot of MMD students need published stories to get internships
  + Definitely could integrate subheadings
  + Less passive voice - more SEO friendly
  + Home page is very condensed in the center
  + **Newshouse only has central stream of images, but NYT has lots of content on the page**
  + Content can overlap
  + Blurry line between news and life and style
  + Life and style is also called arts and culture
  + Each nav section is associated with a lead producer
  + Is there a way to see how many tags there are?
  + Most people are freelancers
  + Every image needs to be 2:3, and if not it needs to be cropped to that size
  + Need to upload a story to each section of the website