Rise of the Audience: News, Public Affairs, and the Public Sphere in a Digital Nation

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This dissertation titled
Rise of the Audience: News, Public Affairs, and the Public Sphere in a Digital Nation

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Abstract

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Rise of the Audience: News, Public Affairs, and the Public Sphere in a Digital Nation

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Professional daily journalism is contracting nationwide as metro newspapers withdraw from their suburbs, reduce zoned editions, and even cut back from printing seven days a week. Smaller dailies and community newspapers also are downsizing and closing their doors. Neither broadcast television nor radio nor Web start-ups have replaced the displaced journalism, creating what the Federal Communications Commission calls a “media deficit” in many communities. This dissertation seeks to explore what this trend means for public affairs information entering the public sphere by examining two live news environments, one with a daily newspaper (Wood County, Ohio) and one where a newspaper had closed (Geauga County, Ohio). Methods used were textual analysis of media texts and audience contributions including those associated with print reports, television, social media, and start-up Websites. In-depth interviews were conducted with journalists, citizens, and public officials. A survey polled opinion leaders in both counties about their assessment and use of the media in their areas. Two focus groups were conducted. Overall, this study found that daily professional journalism makes a significant difference not just in the amount of public affairs information available to a community, but also in the amount and type of conversations that take place in the digital world. In the community without daily professional journalism, residents were forced to craft their own news feeds through cobbling together social media, digital, and the less regular print reports from weekly news operations and...
those outside the county. The implications for representative democracy in the face of a
daily professional journalism in retreat are clear: If the U.S. system is to thrive, more
resources, at the community level, must be marshaled to support journalism. Further, the
citizens will have to become increasingly sophisticated in understanding the type of
content they are consuming to inform their worlds and, more importantly, what
information are they not consuming.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Michael S. Sweeney

Professor of Journalism
For Mom
(1937-2011)
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Space prohibits thanking each of the journalists, public officials, agency managers, citizens, Web entrepreneurs, and so many others who contributed to this study. This project could not have happened without hundreds of people giving of themselves to provide their perspective and experience about the fate of journalism. I would like to make special acknowledgement of those who took the time to answer the questionnaire and take part in an online focus group in the wake of the school shooting in Chardon, Ohio. This event deeply affected the community, and their willingness to talk about media coverage, which must have seemed so mundane in comparison to the deaths of three young people, is deeply appreciated.

This project, too, could not have happened without the support of the staff at the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism and its director, Dr. Robert Stewart, who provided a grant to help complete the survey. The future of journalism always will be in good hands as long as schools such as Scripps exist and dedicated, curious, and energetic professors like Dr. Stewart continue to direct them.
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Chapter 1: Rise of the audience

‘Talk to your children today, hug them. Don’t text them, Facebook them - hug them.’ Chardon, OH, schools Superintendent Joe Bergant II at a news conference the day after three students were killed and two others were injured in a shooting in the school’s cafeteria.

Fewer than twenty minutes after a slim young man wearing a gray sweatshirt and wielding a hand gun opened fire amid the normal burble of pre-school chat in the sparkling Chardon (Ohio) High School cafeteria, Fox8 television in Cleveland broke the news on February 27, 2012, to its audience with a plea for help. “We have reports that Chardon High School is on lockdown,” the station posted on its Facebook page. “We have multiple crews headed to the scene. What have you heard?”¹ The audience obliged. “Shooting,” Melissa Nicholson replied with a one-word response within seconds.¹ “Same,” Amanda Ames confirmed cryptically. “Heard two students were shot and the shooter is still being sought out,” John Myers wrote. Eric Hanson reported on what he had heard over a police scanner through a Website called Radioreference.com. “Listening to the radio feed.. they just called for another squad and said, ‘we have another one down in the cafeteria.’ It sounds like they are following tracks/footprints -- http://www.radioreference.com/apps/audio/?feedId=5785.” Sara Bennett Smith noted simply, “School shooting. Heard it on 19 action news.” Dolly Wesley Stefancic blanched: “OMG my daughter is there.” A minute later she posted again, “More news NOW

¹ These quotes are reproduced exactly as they appeared in the Facebook stream attached to Fox8’s posting. Throughout this dissertation, similar quotes have been pulled from social media, Website commentary, and the printed page. They are meant to be used as illustrations and examples to explore wider issues. The quotes are reproduced as faithfully as possible in order to maintain the authenticity and integrity of the commentator’s intent.
please!!!” Sabrina Eppich responded: “Listen to rovers morning glory they new about it first And let 19 know about it. Firefighters are looking for hurt victims now in hallways.”

While Fox8 likely was preparing its Facebook posting, a Geauga County 911 dispatcher was finishing up a seven-minute conversation with a student, believed to be the second call taken reporting the incident. The caller, who identified himself as a male senior at Chardon High School, calmly answered the dispatcher’s questions as he stood within feet of the high school, saying he and those closest to him fled the building after he “saw a couple students get hit … I saw him take out two and then I was gone.” He correctly stated there was one shooter, and accurately described the boy’s dress, his identity, the apparent randomness of the attack, the fact the gun used was a .22-caliber pistol, and that he previously knew the boy as quiet but not in any way threatening.

This information would not be relayed to an anxious public for three hours, and in the case of the apparent randomness, for more than eight. In the meantime, the audience was busy crafting its own narrative with the help of the increasing swarm of reporters, most of whom were from Cleveland, descending on Chardon. They raced thirty-one miles southwest to the city of 5,000, best known for its annual maple syrup festival where community elders ceremoniously tap the aging and massive maple trees on the town square several blocks from the high school. The themes built quickly, fueled by various reports. “DAG GONE BULLYING BET YAH,” wrote Eva-Cox-Gibbs in response to Cleveland’s Channel 19 Facebook posting about an hour after the first reports. “I and my prayer warriors praying!;-((((” Sean Wahl replied in the same string, “People need to take kids these days alot more serious. This loser was Tweeting that he was going to do this
and no one reported him. Hope those four kids pull through. Thoughts and prays.”

Both streams – that the student was bullied and that he had forecast his intentions on social media – remained a part of the community dialogue, no doubt aided by two television stations reporting, erroneously it would turn out, the student may have posted to Twitter photos of himself in a trenchcoat brandishing automatic weapons. Other persistent audience streams, though never repeated in the media nor confirmed by law enforcement, included allegations the shooter was upset over being sold fake drugs and that one of the victims was dating his ex-girlfriend. At the same time the audience wrestled with the facts, they engaged in the overarching issues of gun control, parenting, metal detectors in schools, and a key theme – that the white, upper-class city was NOT Cleveland. The Geauga County prosecutor and schools Superintendent Joseph Bergant, in the days after the shooting, would take great care to address all of these issues. The shooting resulted in the death of three students and injuries to two others.

The audience, in other words, was an intimate partner in the coverage of arguably the biggest news event in Geauga County in many years, perhaps ever. At times, this was an uneasy partnership, as facts, non-facts, non-sequiturs, rumors, lies, opinion, vitriol, angst, fear, anger, betrayal, compassion, love, and hate collided in a burgeoning cloud of interaction. At the center of this enormous energy was the media, at times leading the conversation, at times following.

The throws into stark relief many of the central issues that will be examined in the coming chapters. Among them is the increasing role of the audience, in aggregate, as imperfect and often reluctant contributors to their own news, a situation not unnoticed. Wrote Amber Bowns in response to Fox8’s request for help: “Lmao (laughing my ass
Further, the incident casts light on the increasingly important issue of the changing nature of journalism, itself, and the diminishing levels of community coverage, or non-coverage. Though Geauga County is in the Cleveland metro market, the vast majority of reporters rarely ventured past the quaint Amish tourist destinations that make up the western portion of the county and were nearly as unfamiliar with the community and its power structure as the national journalists flooding the town. The thin line, in fact, of professional journalism in the area were the three journalists and the owner of the weekly newspaper, the *Geauga County Maple Leaf*, which was the first to Tweet that the shooter had fired ten shots and had used a .22-caliber pistol.

Looking on the outside into the coverage, it was apparent that the Cleveland market media, including The *Plain Dealer* - one of the largest newspapers in the country, a 2005 Pulitzer Prize winner, and up until late 2010 the producer of a regional edition that included Geauga County public affairs news – were covering the tragedy in a sort of hybrid fashion, as both a national story and a local story. An editorial two days after the shooting, for instance, was oddly distant: “And residents of a community perhaps thought by most to be the last place where such a terrible thing could happen now find their town on the growing list of places where it has, in fact, happened.” Plain Dealer reader advocate Ted Diadun, in a column a week after the shooting, attempted to bring the newspaper closer to home, praising reporter John Horton and photographer Thomas Ondrey, both of whom dashed from their homes just a few blocks from Chardon High School to kick off the paper’s coverage. Horton, in particular, Diadun noted, “has strong connections to the town and the school.”
Issues of geography, technology, and – perhaps most importantly – routine public affairs journalism that connects citizens with their cultural, government, and education institutions all were on display during coverage of the tragedy. Some of these were evident in searing relief, such as the role and influence of omnipresent social media. Others – such as the increasing distance between daily professional journalism and suburban communities where the majority of U.S. citizens live – could only be seen in the shadows, by examining what journalism provides in the absence of such titanic news.

This study seeks to do just that, to shine a light into the shifting news landscape, and to, ultimately, make the argument that daily professional journalism is essential to representative democracy. The audience, true, is now unquestionably both contributor to and consumer of its news, as this study confirms. But this examination also reveals that this is a process that takes place within the shifting confines of a journalism struggling to find its place in a new digital order where economics, law, ethics, First Amendment responsibilities, historical forces, fear, and hope live side by side with the first and most crushing of duties: deadline. Without journalism, which will be defined and explored throughout this examination, the audience has no starting point, no signposts, no map for its meandering search for meaning, and often no place in which to explore its significant issues. This is particularly true, as this study reveals, on the community level, where journalism provides the essential functions of translating national and state issues to community pertinence, highlighting important local issues, and serving as the watchdog – though often sleepy mutts rather than fierce-eyed mastiffs – on the local power structure.

Geauga County, a normally bucolic but energetic place of 100,000 residents, is central to this examination. The county, selected for this examination after a nationwide
search, lost its locally-based daily newspaper in 1992 (the Chardon Municipal Court is now housed where the newspaper was) when Thomson Newspapers decided the *Geauga Times-Leader* could not attract enough profit. In its final moments, its editors issued a passionate plea to the audience: “Demand the best coverage you can from the papers vying for your readership with their ‘Geauga’ editions. Demand an editorial voice. Now that we’re gone, don’t let them take your patronage for granted. Don’t let them forget.”

The rise of digital technology has detached American journalism from its industrial roots, breaking down the historic model of news as a manufactured commodity shipped to a largely passive audience. This has been heralded by some and derided by others. Optimists and advocates of the audience-oriented journalism movement argue the longheld criticisms of the nation’s press as corporate-controlled, Western-focused, and white male-dominated finally have been cracked, leading to a more egalitarian production of the news. Others suggest the breakdown of the legacy media has imperiled journalism as the cornerstone of representative democracy. Scholarly advocates for this argument largely agree with the historical criticism and the need for media reform. However, they find the answers not in a citizenry who are unlikely to produce their own news but in a public-support model for professional journalism.

This introductory chapter puts these issues in context, first discussing the historical role of journalism and its intersection with the First Amendment and then outlining the theoretical perspectives used to examine the news landscape. It then addresses the variety of methods used, and finally outlines the chapters that come next.

Few have suggested some sort of journalism is not needed in a political system where the people are tasked with hiring their own managers. Journalism long has been
seen as the watchdog and informer, the architect of a public sphere where issues are raised, debated, eventually settled, however uneasily and for however short a time span, and then put into practice. For the first 150 years of the nation’s existence, the structural elements of the public sphere were largely formed by the nation’s print media. Beginning with the invention of the telegraph in the 1840s, an escalating network of electronic information sources has both aided and challenged the dominance of the daily printed page. Each stage of technological evolution, radio, television, and now the Internet, brought unique threats and opportunities to the status quo, yet the current digital tsunami, coupled with historic economic conditions, has shaken the foundations of the industrial news system, challenging everything from basic economic models to the very definition of journalist and audience.

This debate has raged since the mid-1990s, when newspaper circulation began to fall precipitously, about 3 percent to 4 percent a year, after reaching its peak in 1989. While printed newspapers now are read by just 50 percent of the population, they continue to provide the bulk of the nation’s local journalism. A Federal Communications Commission report in 2010 noted that declining newspaper staffs have resulted in “media deficits in many communities.” Neither television nor Web start-ups have replaced the laid-off newspaper journalist:

Many local TV news broadcasts remain excellent, and, on average, they actually produce more hours of news than a few years ago—but too few are investing in more reporting on critical local issues and some have cut back staff. Beyond that, a minority are exhibiting alarming tendencies to allow advertisers to dictate content. In most communities, commercial radio, cable, and satellite play a small role in reporting local news. Public TV does little local programming; public radio makes an effort to contribute but has limited resources. Most important, too few Internet-
native local news operations have so far gained sufficient traction financially to make enough of an impact.  

This is the most vital and significant issue of the age: Can a representative democracy exist in the absence of daily professional journalism that addresses a wide audience, to as Alexis de Tocqueville noted, “dump a single idea into a thousand minds at once?” A wide swath of scholarship exists addressing the vexing philosophical and theoretical issues associated with the obvious decline of traditional news outlets. In Can Journalism Be Saved?, for instance, Rachel Davis Mercy suggests the answer is no, at least journalism as it has been known. The answer is to reject long-held ideas of journalism as a mass, public service medium and tailor production of the news to the individual. Alex S. Jones, a longtime journalist himself, argues in favor of a vibrant commercial press buoyed by more compelling stories and intriguing headlines, both in print and online, produced by paid journalists. Robert Entman argues the citizens do not know enough to demand more from their news outlets, and it is up to the journalists to focus on democracy, not profits. In other words, how can the audience debate something they don’t know needs debating? 

Yet, few studies have attempted to excavate the contours of a live news landscape, and therefore the public sphere, by examining what does and does not enter the sphere through both legacy and digital means, as well as how it gets there. This dissertation attempts to help bridge that gap by examining the status of the public sphere in two separate geographical communities, one with a daily newspaper and one without. By doing so, implications can be drawn and inferences made about journalism’s current
state, its possible future, and the eventual potential impact on self-governance. This study incorporates several concepts:

1) Representative democracy, in which legal voters install their own managers, depends upon on an informed citizenry.\(^{24}\)

2) The First Amendment forms the structural outlines of a public sphere.\(^{25}\)

3) There is an inherent and significant difference between “news” and “information” and that that difference is vital to a functioning citizenry.\(^{26}\)

4) Journalism is a specific act resulting in texts that are distinct in a variety of ways from communication generally.\(^{27}\)

5) Technology is a means of producing and disseminating journalism, not journalism, itself.\(^{28}\)

This study addresses these core concepts from several angles: the legacy media, digital media, social media, the fluctuating role of the audience as both consumers and contributors, the influence of economic factors in shaping the public sphere, where issues are raised and debated, and key stakeholders with interests in both the formation and vitality of the public sphere. This chapter first addresses the theoretical and conceptual underpinning of the study. It then goes through the geographical communities selected for the study – Geauga and Wood counties in Ohio – and the methods used to address the main issues. Finally, this chapter gives an overview of the major findings and the context in which they were found.

This study, in essence, seeks to define and explore the contours of the public sphere through identifying the various streams of news available in each community, the types of news that are and are not present, what outlets provide those streams, how the
audience interacts with those streams. This will be done within the context of broadly
defined public affairs information.

*Public affairs and the Public Sphere*

*First Amendment*

Federalist Papers LXXXIV, which made the case in 1788 for a strong central
government through a written constitution, connected the process of how public opinion
is formed with the fate of representative democracy: “Whatever fine declarations may be
inserted in any constitution respecting it, it must altogether depend on public opinion, and
on the general spirit of the people and the government.”29 The concepts of an independent
press, free to train its rhetorical cannons at whatever target it desires, and an independent
people tasked with governing themselves have been entwined since before the
Enlightenment.30 Subsequent philosophers such as Rosseau, Locke, and Hobbs connected
the freedom to think, study, and communicate to a society ever-evolving from a more
brutal state of nature.31 British philosopher John Milton issued the most forceful
argument for a free press, within the context of books and the crown’s insistence on
licensing publications, in 1644 in his speech called the Areopagitica. It is only through
reading all perspectives, he argued, that truth is revealed.32 De Tocqueville, widely
quoted for his observations linking the press, the public, and democracy, argued in the
mid 1830s that newspapers served as the means for tying together a nation no longer
bound by a central village commons: “This can be habitually and conveniently effected
only by means of a newspaper.”33

How the First Amendment was put to the ground, so to speak, was through the
idea of the “marketplace of ideas,” which uses a metaphor of economics as expressed by
Adam Smith’s invisible hand. Smith argued that the economy was guided by the immutable law of supply and demand. Natural regulation is assured by a free marketplace in which companies and their managers followed practices that produce the most profits. Those who abused the system eventually would fail and, thus, the market would be self-correcting. British philosopher John Stuart Mill articulated this concept in terms of free expression in his 1859 famous On Liberty, in which he suggested the “individual as sovereign.” Mill and others argued that the competition of ideas, as embodied in the marketplace metaphor, would ensure that the best would rise and become part of public discourse while others would sink into obscurity. U.S. Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes advanced the metaphor in his dissent in the 1919 sedition case in Abrams vs. United States:

… When men have realized that time has upset many fighting faiths, they may come to believe even more than they believe the very foundations of their own conduct that the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas . . . that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market, and that truth is the only ground upon which their wishes safely can be carried out. That at any rate is the theory of our Constitution.

In other words, the First Amendment outlines the parameters of a public sphere where citizens debate and meaning is derived. In purpose as opposed to practice, the First Amendment guarantees the U.S. citizen the right to associate with others (the public space/assembly); consume public information unfettered by formal censorship except in times of war when dissemination of such constitutes a threat to national security (the free press delivering matters of general interest); discuss and critique this information at will (free speech); define the goodness or morality of the various sides of a given issue (religion), and then to take action on that information if so moved (petition).
Jürgen Habermas, in critiquing the political situation in post-World War II Germany, built on this concept of citizen involvement in public affairs when he outlined his theory of the public sphere. He concluded that in order to exist, a true public sphere must have several elements present: a public space in which citizens may engage; topics of discussion that must be of general interest to all (or nearly all) citizens; an opportunity for feedback, and – above all, in Habermas’ view – rational discourse that ultimately seeks consensus toward meaning. He argued that the creation and energetic use of the public sphere are vital for any democracy. The public sphere is the mechanism by which public opinion is formed and changed, and by which the public influences the direction of policy through mediated agreement, or at least acknowledgement and eventual acquiescence, of definitions and outcomes, which are then carried out by political actors dependent on the public will.

Habermas used the notion of the public sphere to articulate his “theory of communicative action.” In essence, he suggested that citizen actors come together to discuss issues important to the commonweal, and that those discussions then result in meaning that is “communicated” in a variety of ways to political actors, who then influence and direct public policy. Habermas’ ideas have been evoked in scholarship from everything on a study of bumper stickers in an Israeli election to discourse on the Jerry Springer show.

As a metaphor to explain his theories, Habermas used the image of pubs and coffeehouses in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in which independent thinkers intellectually shaped the issues of the day through debate and discussion, all
while sharing a pint. The debate was informed by a reinvigorated European press, largely freed from shackles imposed by king and church. He has been widely criticized for romanticizing the era as a utopian example of the public sphere in action, without taking into consideration that only white, middle- to upper-class males were likely to take part in such a sphere.\(^{42}\)

Other criticisms have centered on Habermas’ overly optimistic view of the public sphere and his explication of how it should work, not necessarily how it really works. Many scholars, as in critiques of the First Amendment, have pointed out that Habermas’ theory demands equal access to a debate of political equals. As political theorist Iris Young notes, this is an impossible situation.\(^{43}\) A society built on the ideals of free markets and individual merit, both in theory and practice, must necessarily provide more freedom for some than for others. For instance, scholars Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Hernan Galperin have argued for governmental regulation of the American newspaper based on Habermas’ ideas of equal access to public debate. They note that the newspaper owner has no legal requirement to permit voices into her publication other than those with which she agrees. The result, they contend, is a stunted debate without real alternatives.\(^{44}\) Media scholar James Curran issued a particularly withering critique of Habermas’ prescriptive ideas, arguing he failed to take into account how power moves through institutions and societies, particularly what he termed the apparent collusion between government and industrial interests.\(^{45}\) Theorist Danielle S. Allen While suggested this inequity plays out in terms of race and class and the ultimate solution is a re-envisioning of “political friendship” that demands face-to-face interaction and the sharing of experiences apart from media filters.\(^{46}\) Habermas later acknowledged the
shortcomings of the metaphor, but he has continued to argue in favor of the structural and theoretical elements of the public sphere as the preferred arena for determining meaning and therefore influencing public policy.\textsuperscript{47}

\textit{Definition of public affairs}

Solid journalism leading to “democratic rationality”\textsuperscript{48} that flows to a “higher quality of life and the public good”\textsuperscript{49} long has been a concern for both the news industry and government leaders.\textsuperscript{50} But settling on a definition of public affairs that goes beyond high-flown rhetoric is more difficult. Many scholars have taken a relatively narrow stand on defining public affairs reporting, suggesting the definition should include primarily politics, government institutions, and international affairs associated with public policy.\textsuperscript{51}

Journalism historian David Paul Nord takes a much broader view. In examining four episodes of what he called public affairs reporting in Boston in the 1730s and 1740s, he connected the process of reporting and content, noting that early American newspapers often are mischaracterized as being little more than a compendium of reprints from London. He called reporting “the gathering of information of current public interest in a more or less formal, systematic way.” Public affairs reporting could be defined simply as applying those techniques to matters of “public interest.”\textsuperscript{52}

Nord’s definition, however, allows wide latitude for what many scholars and critics have lamented as sensational, often misleading, coverage to count as public affairs.\textsuperscript{53} But there is a fine line between sensationalism and sparking debate about important issues. Did intense coverage of the O.J. Simpson trial, for instance, mislead the public about what is normal jurisprudence in the United States or help frame deep discussions about law enforcement, court procedure, even race? Scholar Herbert Gans,
though writing before the O.J. Simpson example, has argued that what some decry as overly sensational coverage of the criminal, nefarious, and errant celebrities actually serves to help communities explore and renegotiate their moral boundaries. 

This examination defines public affairs broadly, as information that intersects the public interest and public institutions, government, education, charitable, business, religious, and non-profit. This was done in order to capture as much local information as possible and to examine it through a lens consistent with the basic boundaries of professional journalism. In doing so, the author has borrowed heavily from journalism professor Theodore Glasser’s explanation of public journalism, a far different concept than simple public affairs reporting, but nonetheless instructive. Glasser suggests public journalism is journalism that seeks to achieve three things: Address community residents as participants in governing their communities, not as spectators; help communities act upon problems by identifying and quantifying them, and spur discussion. Further, the author borrowed equally from David Merritt and Maxwell McCombs who, in gazing across the news landscape at the turn of the 21st century, concluded more emphasis must be placed in journalism schools and in newsrooms on helping news outlets understand their central role in helping their audiences to make sense of an increasingly complex world and to aid in what they called “answering the fundamental question of democracy: ‘What shall we do?’”

Role of journalism

The role of journalism in this process of representative democracy has often been assumed as a given and has rarely been challenged. What has been widely debated is the quality of that journalism. This began long before the advent of electronic media that
altered the historic news landscape. In 1922, Walter Lippmann, foreshadowing Entman’s arguments nearly 100 years later, decried the rising influence of the audience through their economic power on news values and argued for a cadre of experts to interpret and lead public discussion. John Dewey, with shades of Mersey’s suggestions for a new personal journalism, responded to Lippmann by arguing the audience was not as passive, distracted, or unintelligent as Lippmann portrayed. What was needed was the artist to become involved in the dissemination of news, people who could make issues come alive for the average reader. Both Dewey and Lippmann addressed the core idea that public affairs journalism was separate and apart from the entertainment aspects of the popular press, what Silas Bent bitingly called “ballyhoo.”

Subsequent media scholars moved beyond normative debates and sought to explore how information was used and passed along in a given community as well as the potential impact of that process on representative democracy. In 1940, Paul Lazarsfeld et al. examined the information flow in Erie County, Ohio, during the presidential election. In what he described as the “two-step flow” model of communication, he found that news did, indeed, affect how people behaved in the voting booth but that this was often the result of opinion leaders passing along their interpretation of information gleaned from news sources. As part of his study, he examined the news landscape in Erie County, analyzing election news from local newspapers, magazines that came into the market, and radio broadcasts. This study borrows heavily from some of the concepts developed by Lazarsfeld. In the 1970s, Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw developed their agenda-setting theory by tracing the flow of information through Chapel Hill, North Carolina, concluding there was a nuanced relationship between what journalists provided to their
consumers and the agenda adopted by the audience and in turn adopted by policymakers.\textsuperscript{61}

The rise of the World Wide Web as an adjunct to the mainstream commercial press in the mid-1990s at first was greeted with wide enthusiasm by mass communication commentators and scholars, many of whom expressed hope that the new technology would open the public sphere and allow for unrestricted speech that would overcome the traditional walls erected by the commercial press.\textsuperscript{62} Initially, the new technology was seen as a way to circumvent the press by creating new channels of communication.\textsuperscript{63} This optimism was tempered by ongoing critical analysis that revealed a “digital divide” between those in wealthier urban and poorer rural areas that included not just availability of technology, but several other factors. Those included knowledge barriers about how to use the new technology; the cost of computers and digital connections; the rapid commercialization of the new medium; and increasing calls by industrial and government concerns for rules guiding Internet content.\textsuperscript{64} Lawrence Dahlberg notably pointed out that digital communication could potentially lead to an even higher wall – creating an audience of sufficient mass to count as part of the public sphere. In other words, the rise of thousands of new channels of information allowed both participation and fragmentation, with people self-selecting themselves into smaller and smaller groups of like-minded individuals.\textsuperscript{65}

Such cautions have led to renewed thinking about theories associated with digital news consumption. Much of the thinking has focused on the nature of the Internet as a personal experience, with elements of both mass and interpersonal communication. Mersey, for instance, has suggested the best way to examine digital consumption is
through the lens of uses and gratifications and theories of self-identity. Uses and gratifications outlines needs users employ when they seek out information, while self-identity explores how that information is incorporated to create a sense of self. Other scholars have suggested that social media, in particular, can best be viewed by thinking of digital communications as a virtual network of friends and associates with various strengths of influence.

While this study borrows heavily from concepts developed by Lazarsfeld et al. and McCombs and Shaw in that it seeks to explore specific news landscapes and the interaction between the information flow and the audience, this exploration does not intend to divine whether that news landscape has any impact on voter attention or action. This study seeks, rather, to address the antecedent to the ideas of the two-step flow and agenda-setting by examining the public sphere, itself, and the role of professional journalism in forming and energizing the sphere. The argument contained in that statement is that the two-step flow, agenda-setting, and framing are vital subsets of a structural public sphere, without which news matters little.

The communities

The national landscape

Between 1999 and 2009, the number of news workers as defined by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics declined from 225,870 to 196,570, or just more than 13 percent, with nearly half of those losses coming from newspapers. When viewed as a percentage of population, however, the decline is far steeper. In 1999, there was one news worker per 1,207 of U.S. population. By 2009, there was 1 traditional news worker per 1,561 of U.S. population, a fall of 28.7 percent. Beginning in the mid-2000s, the Bureau
of Labor Statistics began attempting to track Web-only news employees. In 2009, the bureau listed 7,600 of these workers. When included in the total, the news worker-per-thousand figure climbs to one per 1,503 U.S. population, or a decline of 19.7 percent.69

From 2001 to 2010, eighty-three daily newspapers closed, a decline of 5.7 percent, leaving 1,397. Daily circulation dropped from 55.7 million to 46.2 million, a dip of about 13 percent, or nearly exactly the decline in the number of news workers in traditional outlets. Traditionally defined community newspapers have fared worse, with 608 weekly newspapers closing over the same time frame, leaving 5,970, a drop of just more than 9 percent and decline in circulation of about 12.2 percent. Further, some daily newspapers have dropped print days, including the metropolitan dailies in Detroit and New Orleans going to three-day-a-week publishing schedules.70

At the same time, the use of Internet sites has soared, with nearly three-quarters of adult Americans reporting they use the Web on a regular basis. In 2011, the number of adults reporting the use of Internet sites for national and international news surpassed that of television for the first time. Conversely, the majority of television and Internet users say they continue to get most of their local news and information from local print newspapers.71

This has been accompanied by a vast upsurge in what has been called citizen-journalism, defined as those producing information for others but without formal training or necessarily being paid to do it.72 For instance, Technorati.com, the leading search engine for blogging sites, not surprisingly perhaps, glowed about the prospects of the digital purveyor in its 2010 State of the Blogosphere report: “Since 2004 we’ve seen explosive growth and maturing of this new arm of the fourth estate.”73 Yet, elsewhere in
its report, Technorati reported that a survey sample of its more than nine million registered bloggers revealed that 64 percent received no income at all from their blogs. Noted Technorati: “Very few bloggers are making a living in the industry, but may instead view it as a slightly subsidized hobby.”

As noted above, the majority of the nation’s journalism, especially that on the state, regional, and local level, is performed by newspaper workers. In order to measure the effect of these journalists and their work in the public sphere, it was decided to compare two communities: one with a daily newspaper and one that had lost its daily newspaper within the last twenty years. This time frame was chosen because it provided a long enough interval to allow communities to adjust to the absence of a daily newspaper, while at the same time covering the rapid period of growth in digital communication. As a first step toward defining potential areas, the author compiled a list of all daily newspapers in the country that have closed since 1990. This yielded 92. In about half the cases, the newspapers were the second newspaper in a two-daily newspaper town, such as Denver’s Rocky Mountain News. In many others, the closings were the smaller paper in a county with a larger daily. For instance, Gatehouse’s The Derby (Kansas) Reporter closed with a circulation of 898 daily when the Sedgewick County Commission decided to pull its legal advertising. The paper operated in the same county as the Wichita Eagle, and the county advertising accounted for 20 percent of the newspaper’s revenue.

There were five cases where entire counties were left without a daily newspaper: Burley, Idaho (Cassia and Miniodoka counties); Ann Arbor, Michigan (Washtenaw County); Chardon, Ohio (Geauga County); Da Queen, Arkansas (Sevier County), and Fulton, Kentucky (Fulton County). These were the counties selected for further examination as
possible candidates for the study. Counties were selected because they form the basis for
most market reports and are their own political subdivisions, generally including courts,
health departments, and a wide variety of public services. For instance, SRDS Circulation
reports newspaper penetration (the number of newspapers sold divided by the number of
households) by county. Further, Designated Market Areas (or DMAs) as used by the
television industry are broken down by counties. Counties also are the primary
subdivision used in tracking political election results.

Local communities

After compiling the list, the author then did initial demographic and news
information searches on each community to determine whether unusual factors would
likely confound the study. This was the case in two instances, Ann Arbor, Michigan, and
Fulton, Kentucky. Though interesting and likely an excellent candidate for a case study,
the media landscape in Ann Arbor, Michigan, was seen as too unusual with too many
variables for it to be a proper candidate. The Ann Arbor News closed in 2009 with a
reported circulation of more than 50,000 daily serving a county with 346,792, likely
making Washtenaw the largest county in the United States without a daily newspaper.
The Ann Arbor News continues to operate, though with a much smaller staff, as a Web-
only operation. Ann Arbor also is home to the University of Michigan, which has a large
cadre of student journalists putting out a daily newspaper that covers both the county and
city. In addition, the university has its own television network that delivers programming
on campus. Fulton, like Ann Arbor, would make an interesting case study in itself, but it
was deemed too unusual to be the best candidate for this study. The county is isolated
from a bigger metropolitan area, and its population has a per capita income approximately two-thirds of the national average.

Da Queen and Burley both offered excellent opportunities. However, they ultimately were rejected for the study for several reasons. Da Queen, though larger than Fulton County, Kentucky, at more than 16,000 population, still represents a more rural, poorer population than would be typical across much of the country, based on national demographic averages. In addition, Da Queen has a strong weekly newspaper that is older and more widely circulated than the daily was. While more typical, Burley, Idaho, straddles two counties, which would expand the amount of research required to determine the presence or absence of public affairs information reaching the public sphere. Further, the newspaper was purchased by the neighboring Twin Falls, Idaho, newspaper, which maintains a bureau in the community. While not uncommon, this is not typical in communities that have lost their daily newspapers.

Geauga County was selected as the target for this study for several reasons. The county is only slightly wealthier on a per capita basis than the national average and has a population of 98,143, which makes it more typical of suburban areas in the country. Geauga County also is in the shadow of the Cleveland Metropolitan Area, which is more typical of communities that have lost their newspaper in the last twenty years. For instance, three of the 92 daily newspapers that have folded in the last twenty years occurred in a single county, Ventura, California. Between 1992 and 1994, daily newspapers folded in Oxnard, Camarillo, and Santa Paula. The Ventura County Star remains in operation, with more than 75,000 daily circulation. Further, researching communities from a distance, such as those in Idaho or Burley, would be more difficult,
time consuming, and likely provide less texture and depth than could be accomplished in communities closer to me. The author also has significant experience as a journalist in Ohio, as metro editor and then managing editor-content for a 40,000-circulation daily newspaper in Northeast Ohio.

Comparisons

After choosing Geauga County, Ohio, the search began for potential comparison communities. Two main criteria were used: The comparison community must have a daily newspaper and the demographics should match Geauga County as closely as possible. This yielded several possibilities with the proposed community of comparison being Bowling Green, Ohio. While impossible to identify perfectly matched communities, numerous similarities were found between the communities. Both are in the shadows of major metropolitan areas, Cleveland and Toledo. Both have similar, suburban populations, 98,000 for Geauga and 124,000 for Wood. Though Wood is poorer than Geauga on a per capita income basis, the local wealth is similar to the national average. Table No. 1 breaks down the five main demographic characteristics of each community along with the national averages.
Table No. 1.1 – Comparison of Geauga and Wood counties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Geauga County</th>
<th>Wood County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median household income</td>
<td>$51,425</td>
<td>$67,596</td>
<td>$52,818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean family income</td>
<td>$62,362</td>
<td>$91,099</td>
<td>$66,689</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per capita income</td>
<td>$27,041</td>
<td>$32,554</td>
<td>$25,897</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*= Source: U.S. Census Bureau, available at www.factfinder.census.gov

News landscape

As suburbs, each county also has similar news landscapes, with the exception of the daily newspaper in Bowling Green, though the mass of the landscape is different. Each, for instance, has substantial broadcast networks coming into their counties. Each has identical penetration, 30 percent, of the nearby metro daily newspaper, *The Toledo Blade* in the case of Wood County and the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* in the case of Geauga. Table No. 2 breaks down the legacy media identified in each county. Each county also is rated at 100 percent for broadband Internet access by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration.
### Table No. 1.2. - Legacy media in Designated Market Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Print</th>
<th>Television</th>
<th>Radio</th>
<th>Cable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geauga</td>
<td>five community-centric weeklies; two out-of-county dailies</td>
<td>14 commercial stations/3 public stations</td>
<td>99 stations</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>Three community-centric weeklies; one county-based daily; one out-of-county daily</td>
<td>4 commercial stations/1 public station</td>
<td>43 stations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sources: Standard Rate & Data Source (2010), TV & Cable; SRDS (2010), Radio Advertising; International Editor & Publisher Yearbook – Weeklies (2010); E&P Yearbook – Dailies (2010).

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**Methods**

Professor Joseph Bernt, usually with a sigh and a tug of his graying beard, would often urge his graduate students at Ohio University to “just go look.” This usually came in response to unsure, fledging researchers wanting reassurance that their efforts would result in acceptable scholarship. In other words, even experienced scholars could not guarantee the worthiness of an idea or divine a potential dataset from mere mental exercise. However, by exploring what is there, and often what is not there, ideas and hypotheses can be generated. In many ways, this study follows Dr. Bernt’s stricture of “just looking.” The author spent more than ten months during the course of this study consuming daily feeds from the primary outlets in both counties and made four visits to each county under examination. The goal was to gather specifics and data but also to get
a feel for the communities and to try to better understand the dynamics of routine journalism in each location. The result is a qualitative analysis of a live news landscape that includes goes in-depth into some examples, such as the Chardon shooting, which is explored in Chapter 6, that also relies on some quantitative data for confirmation and parameters. Various methods were deployed in an attempt to examine and, in some cases, quantify, the news being produced as well as how that information was being used by the audience. The goal was to translate the national journalism discussion to what was actually happening on the ground, so to speak. In effect, this effort amounts to a case study, comparing and contrasting two communities, one which has more journalistic resources at its disposal than the other. Case studies, social science scholars Alexander George and Andrew Bennett argue, are interested in teasing out the general from the specific.  

These methods included in-depth interview, focus groups, Internet-based surveys, and discourse and textual analysis. Two main streams of information were examined, text and people.

The text was studied to determine what types of information were and were not available through specific media. In the case of digital and social media, in particular, the audience interaction attached to those texts also was examined. Though elements of content analysis were used, the primary method for looking at the texts, both journalist-produced and audience response, was discourse analysis. Scholars Chris Barker and Dariusz Galasinski suggest discourse analysis is “interested in real-world data which has not been edited or sanitized and which can be studied in a way that comes as close as is possible to their actually occurring forms” and is interested in “naturally occurring discourse (as) a form of social practice within a socio-cultural context.” Zizi
Papacharissi and Susana M. Sotillo and Dana Starace-Nastasi used discourse analysis by breaking content into general themes as a way of examining Web content. Papacharissi used a coding procedure and then reported overall results in percentages. Portions of her procedure were borrowed for this study. Tamara Witschge noted: “It is important to realize that discourse is not constructed in a vacuum: in addition to the text, there is the environment in which the text is produced and consumed as well as the wider social practice to which it belongs.”

In order to put parameters on the definition of public affairs news and information, two primary sources were used to develop coding sheets for the text. The first is the list developed by Guido Stempel in his 1985 gatekeeping study, in which he developed twelve categories of news. This was modified to better accommodate the purpose of the study and to better capture the local focus of the inquiry. The coding is further explained in Chapter Two. The second is the workbook put out by the Missouri Group on “convergence journalism” that updated journalistic procedures, as well as the “elements in each potential story.” They are: impact, conflict, novelty, prominence, proximity, and timeliness.

*Types of text*

The legacy, or traditional, media that either were based in the two counties or reached into the counties were examined for public affairs news. Three primary streams were examined, news-oriented Websites, newspapers, and social media. Sampling periods were developed for each stream. For daily newspapers, the sampling consisted of a constructed two weeks in 2011, containing two randomly selected Mondays, Tuesdays, and so-on. For weeklies, a sample month was constructed, with four randomly selected
dates. In the case of broadcasters, both radio and television, an initial examination pared the stations to those that provided local or regional coverage. For instance, though some radio stations continue to provide news headlines, the all-talk stations in each market were primarily the main radio sources of local or regional news, with the exception of the Dave Horger Report on the local public broadcasting station in Bowling Green, which will be examined in more depth in Chapter 2. It was not possible to obtain sufficient samples of what the television and radio stations aired. However, their Websites and social media streams were examined. This provided an adequate representation of their overall news offerings in the counties but did not necessarily reveal the content of their morning shows, which likely included guests and segments that were not reflected on their Websites. Since this inquiry primarily deals with the digital offerings of the legacy media and the role of the audience, the actual broadcasts were deemed outside the scope of the present study.

The Websites of each of the legacy media that were determined to provide local or regional news reports were examined both for their Wood or Geauga public affairs content as well as evidence of convergence. Convergence is the concept of the various types of media coming together in their online editions, such as newspapers using video to tell stories and television stations posting newspaper-style stories rather than their broadcast scripts. In addition, two news-oriented Websites that are digital-only were identified, one in each county. Where possible and practicable, the study looked at the entirety of four consecutive weeks of coverage. This was possible in all but a few cases. Where it was not, it is noted in Chapter 3, which explores in-depth the digital landscape.
Further, the Websites were examined for audience interaction with the news reports, primarily comments associated with the stories.

The primary social media stream examined was Facebook. After an initial look and the gathering of “click stream” information from Web traffic watcher alexa.com, it was determined Facebook was by far the dominant social media stream being used in the two counties, which followed the national trend, as the intersection between news and the public. Twitter, for instance, did not rise to the top 10 referral sites for any of the media examined, meaning less than 2 percent of all referrals came from Twitter. While the author consumed more than twenty social media streams on a daily basis, a specific examination period of seven days was selected in order to put some measure of the routine on the issue. A coding sheet was developed looking at the type of posting, such as promotion, news or news update, a contest, or a call for comment. The posts also were examined for geographic orientation, such as whether the post, regardless of type, focused on one of the two counties being examined. The coding and method is further explained in Chapter 5, which explores social media in-depth. (Coding instruments are collected in Appendix A).

In addition to the texts, thirty-seven interviews were conducted. The interviews helped to inform the overall direction of this study, but only the results of fifteen are specifically cited in this study. Two focus groups were conducted and a digital questionnaire was used, which dealt with the Chardon shooting. The in-depth interview is designed to explore ideas and provide verification for more quantitative information, as well as specific background information and perspective. Interviews were conducted with journalists, media managers and owners, as well as major stakeholders, including
community political leaders, agency managers, and non-profit volunteers. These were chosen because it was perceived they have a specific interest in public affairs and the public sphere. The focus groups were designed to get behind the numbers and explore issues of access, with a particular emphasis on discussions about what happens next to the news. Focus groups are designed to gather perspective on the “why” and “how” of a particular issue or movement. Though often associated with consumer behavior research, focus groups have been used in a variety of social science settings. The online questionnaire was designed to gather perspective on media use from those most directly affected by the school shooting. Such a method has been used in a wide array of social science research.

In addition to examining the news texts and talking with people, this study includes an Internet-based, county-specific survey of opinion leaders, defined as those who hold positions of responsibility, with a particular emphasis on communication duties, in government, business, religious, or non-profit groups. The survey was designed to gauge the use and perceptions of the legacy media, digital media, and social media. In other words, from the perspective of traditional sources, has the news landscape changed? And, if so, how, and what effect has that had on the opinion leaders’ willingness/desire/ability to reach the public? The results of the survey, which had 174 respondents, are reported throughout this study. A total of 554 traditionally defined opinion leaders were approached, through e-mail and telephone requests by the author and two survey assistants, for a response rate of 31 percent. An emphasis was put on those responsible for directing the communications efforts of their organizations. These
included managers or high-level staff at government agencies, non-profit groups, businesses, churches, and civic organizations.

Limitations

This project was designed to move beyond emotional and anecdotal reportage on the state of journalism and put the issues into a concrete context through the theoretical prism of the structural elements of the public sphere. The goal was to define the contours of the public sphere as represented by the news landscape in each community by triangulating what is available, what could be available, and the human interaction that creates or ignores those streams of information. The end result was a snapshot of the intersection with the legacy media, newer forms of digital channels, and the audience. Further, by comparing two communities, one with more traditional journalistic resources at its disposal than the other, the study was designed to help provide clarity on the implications for current industry and journalistic trends, including the potential impact on the public sphere and what could be possible points for discussing solutions.

Like all such studies, this one is imperfect. The audience, for instance, was primarily studied through its efforts to break into the public sphere through the various channels. While this provided needed insight into what was happening, it reveals only by implication what could be happening with those who do not attempt to take part in the public sphere. This is an important issue, but considered outside the scope of the current project. In addition, time was a significant factor in shaping this study. While all such examinations are, by definition, snapshots in time, the swift currents of the digital torrent made this an even more pressing issue for this project. For instance, during the course of this study two major players, the Toledo Blade and the Sentinel-Tribune, changed their
Website comment policies. Also during the course of this study, the Blade launched its own attempt at a hyper-local news Website, OurTown Sylvania. If the site proves successful, it could have wide implications for public affairs news in the more fetching targets of the larger communities in Wood County, such as Bowling Green and Perrysburg. Moreover, the comparison between Geauga and Wood counties, while apt, are imperfect. Wood County is a more significant part of the Toledo metro market than Geauga County is to the Cleveland market, though both are contiguous. Bowling Green, with the overshadowing presence of a major state university, is a true economic center, providing a more substantial base for daily, local journalism. Geauga County looks much like a quilt, a patchwork of communities with divergent economic and, especially for the large Amish community, cultural differences. While the different natures of the counties may help partially explain why the Sentinel-Tribune continues and the Geauga Times-Leader doesn’t (ownership, as discussed in Chapter 2, is a more powerful explanation), the similarities far outweigh the differences.

The news divide paradoxes

Overall, this examination revealed a news divide paradox. At the same time the audience has demonstrated an increasing desire to consume, react, and contribute to the news, the primary providers are withdrawing, staying the same, or making only timid steps toward inflating a more robust public sphere where their communities can engage. While there are small signs of convergence and an evident groping toward a broader fulfillment of the promise of digital delivery, the genetics of each media stream are on powerful display. Television, overall, remains confined largely within the historical boundaries of its medium, focusing on the immediate and the visual, while weekly,
community papers, again overall, have failed to significantly take part in either the Web or social media platforms. The two market leaders in terms of audience, the Toledo Blade and the Plain Dealer, are withdrawing further into their metro cores, creating another paradox, increasing their overall audience while at the same time abandoning significant portions of their suburban readers and viewers. This is particularly true of the Plain Dealer. The digital-only entrants to the landscape are either replicating news available elsewhere in a battle for audience or deciding not to engage as both a philosophical and economic decision.

This has fostered a situation where the local news landscape, as defined by county geographical borders, is left to the audience to create, or not create, by cobbling together a myriad stream of reports from various sources and outlets, largely through social media and Websites. While these paradoxes are evident in both counties, there is a measurable difference between Geauga County, which has only a thin veneer of daily professional journalism, and Wood County, where the daily Sentinel-Tribune operates.

The following seven chapters examine these paradoxes from a variety of angles and viewpoints. In Chapter 2, the news landscapes in each county are put in national and historical context. The legacy media that lives or reaches in to Wood and Geauga counties are examined, revealing a widening gap between the local public affairs information available and what could or should be available. Chapter 3 examines the digital landscape, including new entrants, such as www.NBnewsxpress.com and www.geauganews.com. The digital offerings, with some relatively minor exceptions, tend to mirror the traditional, meaning technology may have served to broaden the audience but has not significantly enriched the types of public affairs news.
The role of the audience is brought more into focus in Chapter 4, where a particular episode involving a television report and an Eggnog Challenge at Chardon High School served to shine a light on the role of the audience as both contributor and consumer of the news. The chapter explores the news Websites as extensions of the public sphere, including the limitations imposed by policy and the DNA of the outlets. This theme, the audience as both contributor and consumer, is picked up in Chapter 5, which examines social media streams and reveals that television reigns as king of Facebook. The chapter also addresses the nature of social media as a single “feed” made up of multiple and widely divergent sources, as well as what that means for public affairs news and potential ethical implications for news providers. Social media, too, illustrate the economic forces shaping the news landscape, creating yet another paradox. As the power of the audience rises in aggregate, individuals are becoming more and more of a commodity, parsed, traded, and auctioned in the digital stream like bushels of corn on the NASDAQ. Chapter 6 explores what happens in the news landscape when big news hits. In the case of Geauga County, the tragic Chardon school shooting is explored from a variety of angles, but most particularly how journalism, whether done well or not so well, shapes the resulting dialogue. The incident throws into sharp relief the difference between normal public affairs coverage and the extraordinary change in the roles of journalist and audience when shocking events occur.

Chapter 7 looks at so-called citizen journalism, including the cases of a professional mom whose blog appears on Cleveland.com, the regional Lake County News-Herald’s efforts at a media lab and ongoing training for citizen-bloggers, and the definitions and distinctions of journalist and citizen. If citizens will not pay for their
news, they are unlikely – as this study reveals – to make the enormous investment to produce their own. Citizens will contribute, react, and opine, but they will not routinely discover or produce, and it is folly to expect the average citizen to develop the skills, tenacity, and personality needed to inform their fellows on a regular basis of the public affairs in their communities.

The final chapter knits together these issues and concludes journalism remains an extraordinarily vital force whose presence and quality is not disappearing but becoming opaque, under constant threat from a variety of forces, which raises the final paradox. The audience for public affairs news, the grist for the mill of democracy, has never been larger. The tools for both delivering and telling that type of news have never been better. Yet, journalism has never been more threatened. An industrial institution genetically coded to act as gatekeepers and the producers of a deliverable product is finding it difficult to make the transition to conversation starters and shapers of the public sphere rather than pronouncers of a given truth. The final chapter puts this core paradox in perspective and offers talking points for dialogue about the future of local journalism and the rising role of the audience. The chapter makes three key points: First, while the audience cannot and should not be expected to produce its own news, the shifting nature of journalism from pronouncement to conversation, which must be viewed overall as a good thing, does require the audience to take more responsibility for how it consumes the news and what it consumes. In other words, concepts contained in the field of information literacy are vital. Second, deeper and more specific discussions must be held on marshaling community resources, such as local cable television franchise fees, to maintain and expand journalism (expansion being an important concept). Third, federal
and state policies and regulations, such as requirements for the dissemination and publication of legal ads, have a vital role to play, as they always have, in fostering journalism.

The fact the audience has risen, as starkly illustrated by the Chardon shooting, does not imply journalists and their news outlets are free to report whatever crosses their minds or their desks as news without performing their traditional functions of verification, accuracy, fairness, and context. Far from it. Such standards, or the lack of standards, as this study shows, set the boundaries for the conversation. This is true for both intensely local media as well as when metro outlets, such as Cleveland’s WKYC television, decide on the occasional sojourn outside the city. Without such standards, communities, for instance, are left on their own to decipher such odd and intriguing issues as whether Geauga County’s Munson Township should hold an “Egg Hunt” or an “Easter Egg Hunt.”
Notes


2 Ibid. The replies to the posting were all copied live and are available from the author.


4 Ibid.


7 A search of the national database Lexis-Nexus for Chardon, OH, and national broadcast network coverage prior to the Chardon school shooting revealed a single story, on an unusually large snowfall in the late 1970s.

8 Facebook posting, Fox8 News, available from the author.


10 Ibid.


13 Dan Gillmore, We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People, (Sebastopol, CA: O’Reilly Media, 2004), 14-16.


Ibid., 5.


Pamela J. Shoemaker, “News and Newsworthiness: A commentary,” *Communications: The European Journal of Communications Research* 31 (October 2006):105-111. Noted Shoemaker: “In a democratic society, the role of the news media is not to mirror the world as it is, but rather to spotlight and draw public attention to problems and situations that need solutions and repair.”


J. Herbert Altschull, *From Milton to McLuhan: The ideas Behind American Journalism*, (New York: Longman, 1990): 16-18. Altschull traces the philosophical roots of the First Amendment through the writings of Rousseau, Locke, Hume, and others, all of whom suggested in one form or another that free thinking required free access to new information and ideas.


Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*.


Simpson, *Expanding the Public Sphere*

39 Ibid., 12.


42 Outhwaite, 13.


45 James Curran, J. “Rethinking the Media as the Public Sphere,” in *Communication and Citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere*, eds. Peter Dalhgren and Colin Sparks (New York: Routledge, 1997).


66 Mersey, *Can Journalism Be Saved?*, 23.


69 Bureau of Justice Statistics, “Law enforcement management and administrative statistics: data for individual state and local agencies with 100 or more officers,” U.S. Department of Justice, bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=dcdetail&iid=248 (accessed Sept. 21, 2011). Periodically, the bureau puts out a report tracking the number of sworn officers per-thousand population in communities. Nationally, the report says there 2.5 sworn officers per 1,000 population. The report cautions local authorities against using the per-thousand figure as a basis for law enforcement budget increases or decreases. The newspaper industry historically has used a newsroom staffing of 1.1 per thousand paid circulation as a “benchmark.” See, Inland Press Association, “Traditional Wisdom vs. 2009 Facts,” http://www.inlandpress.org/content/current/pdf/tradwis-inland.pdf (accessed Sept. 22, 2011).


The list was compiled using twenty editions of *International Editor & Publisher Yearbook: Dailies*, which publishes a list of U.S. newspapers that have closed and U.S. newspapers that have started in the previous year. The lists were checked through a variety of Internet searches and by comparing the lists of existing papers with Standard Rate and Data Service Circulation.


Joseph Bernt, observation by the author, fall 2009, Athens, OH.


The Missouri Group, *Telling the Story*.

See, http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo. Clickstream is the term Alexa uses to describe the paths users take to reach a site. For instance, a user going from a Google search to the Plain Dealer’s Cleveland.com is said to have been referred there by Google.


89 Ibid., 7.


91 The concept of paradox and the current news landscape was introduced by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, a part of the Pew Research Center. While this study departs considerably from those ideas, Pew introduced the idea of an audience dramatically increased in size yet at the whim of an increasingly erratic and diffuse information landscape in 2010. See [http://www.slideshare.net/PewInternet/how-media-consumption-has-changed-since-2000](http://www.slideshare.net/PewInternet/how-media-consumption-has-changed-since-2000) for a full explanation.

92 *The News-Herald*, in fact, is an important player in the Geauga County news landscape, as the only daily journalism outlet that routinely pays attention to the county. This is explored in chapters 2, 3, 4 and 7.

93 News as conversation as a concept was fully developed in the public journalism movement of the 1980s, but became a much deeper part of the dialogue with the advent of the Web as a commercial medium for delivering news and its nature as a two-way (or multi-way) communication system. For some founding principles on the ideas of the intersection between journalism, conversation, and democracy, see Rob Anderson, Robert Dardenne, and George M. Killenberg, *The Conversation of Journalism*, (Wesport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1994): I-VII.
Chapter 2: The shifting news landscape

“It [Geauga County] might as well be Toledo now – you parachute in and blow it up.” – John Horton, the Plain Dealer’s former (and last) Geauga County reporter.

By the time of the April 5, 2011, meeting, Munson Township Trustee Irene McMullen was chastened as she stood before a crowd of thirty residents, three print reporters, a television station camera, and her fellow trustees. It was a highly unusual event for the normally placid, rural community of 6,500 in Geauga County. She announced she planned to introduce a formal resolution naming an event three weeks hence as the “Easter Egg Hunt.”¹ The mostly silent audience nodded, but Mike Petruziello, a resident of nearby Chester Township, was not satisfied. “Where did we get off-beat?” he asked. “We are a nation founded with God in it. Under God. How did religion get involved? Easter is Easter. It’s a holiday, just like Christmas. How did I get a call saying we made national television? How did that get leaked to the media?”²

Petruziello was referring to the national attention focused on the township after Cleveland’s WKYC television station aired a remarkably inaccurate report labeled “Hunting for Easter” on March 30.³ The story, quoting no trustees or Munson residents, reported that local leaders had agreed to take the word “Easter” out of the title of its traditional egg hunt, comparing the event to the annual White House Easter Egg Roll, which has been held since 1878. The problems were that this was the first such event for the township, and Easter had never been part of the title.

The report in various incarnations rolled through the nation on a sweeping digital tide, hitting conservative blogs and television stations in numerous markets before
landing on Sean Hannity’s segment on the FoxNews cable network as part of his evidence for “The War on Easter.” The “leak” had been earlier referenced by the liberal Thinkpress.org in a biting rebuke to Hannity and a column by the Catholic League’s Bill Donohue. The leak, it turned out, likely can be traced to a routine meeting story printed in the *Geauga County Maple Leaf* a week before the television report. Josh Echt, a stringer for the weekly newspaper, had written a detailed story, noting trustees had discussed the name of the event at a previous meeting and though no formal vote was taken, agreed “Egg Hunt” was a more inclusive name for the first-ever event than “Easter Egg Hunt.” “There was no issue at the meeting,” Trustee Andy Bushman told Echt, “as residents understood.” The WKYC report made no mention of the *Maple Leaf* report.

That a printed newspaper story could be referred to as a “leak” with no apparent challenge or irony is reflective of the changing news landscape in a digital nation where daily professional journalism is on the wane. The egg hunt episode illustrates the inherent difference between the media streams, both traditional and digital. Broadcast television, as the Federal Communications Commission has noted and as this examination confirms, has remained trapped in its historical confines, neither equipped nor inclined to routinely cover public affairs, as will be more deeply explored later in this chapter. Print journalism has been and continues to be the primary provider of routine public affairs news. As daily journalism, at one time embodied in Geauga County by the defunct *Geauga Times-Leader* and then by the *Plain Dealer* and the *News-Herald*, has retreated, the majority of public affairs reporting has been left to weekly operations. Though their accuracy and professionalism is on par with historical standards of community journalism, as this examination shows, they do not currently, in general, have the presence or resources to be
the driver of public affairs news. This issue, the genetic variance between daily and weekly journalism, is on particular display in Wood County, where the daily Sentinel-Tribune fills the gap between the weekly operations in the county and the major metro operation of the Blade, which does not ignore its neighboring county as the Plain Dealer does, but carefully chooses what to cover and when.

This chapter outlines the news landscape in each county, discussing the ongoing role of geography as a key structural element in the formation of a public sphere, placing the journalism that inflates the sphere in historical and national context, and what it means that the daily press is in retreat even as their total audiences grow. This chapter also reports the results of an examination of the content of the printed news outlets in the counties, revealing the stark difference between the public affairs information available to a community with daily journalism and one without. The chapter then returns to the egg hunt episode, discussing the role of the traditional broadcast media in each market, including the efforts of two entrepreneurs, one in each county, to keep public affairs news on the radio and on local television sets. Finally, the chapter concludes with results from the poll of opinion leaders in each county, revealing that newspapers, more than television or social media, affect their perceived communications with the audience.

*Place, space, and journalism*

A Cambridge futurist once famously declared that the unstoppable forces of technology and globalization had killed geography. Some economists have suggested physical geography, long viewed as determinant in establishing local financial ecosystems, is becoming increasingly irrelevant to the global “knowledge economy” as workers, employers, and customers unite and collaborate through ever-spiraling digital

Since then, a wide range of scholars in a variety of disciplines has rushed to the defense of the power of borders. At the same time, those scholars have largely acknowledged the impact of a digitally connected world that transcends physical boundaries. Urban scholars have suggested the best discussion is centered not on the death of geography, which remains an extraordinarily vital force in shaping community, but on the definitions of “space” and “place.” In this view, Bowling Green, for instance, is both a concrete entity, a place, made up of buildings, schools, parks, and people, as well as a space where people both physically in the city and those from around the world with an economic, cultural, or familial connection gather through technology.

Geography as a physical place and journalism always have been intimately tied, economically and through their content. Indeed, famed sociologist Robert Park once argued newspaper circulation could be used as an accurate measure of whether a particular locale could be labeled as urban. Communications scholar Keith Stamm, picking up themes heard since the Colonial press, suggested newspapers serve a function well beyond the content they provide, as – de Tocqueville observed – a unifying element for citizens. Through their reporting and close connection and occasional opposition to local power structures, newspapers knit together disparate groups and present common issues and problems that need to be addressed, either through societal action or political process. Newspapers, aside from a few national operations, such as *USA Today* and the *Wall Street Journal*, often are seen as synonymous with the communities they cover. Many newspaper owners argue their operations are papers of record for a given
geographic area, which in some cases is more than a marketing slogan since lucrative legal ads can be tied to the designation. While there is no quantifiable definition of “paper of record,” it is widely taken to mean that a newspaper regularly publishes, distributes to a general audience in a specific area, and provides news of some sort on that community.

Public affairs journalism, in particular, is anchored in physical geography, with political subdivisions neatly sliced by legal borders, from nation, state, county, city, village, to township. Each subdivision, though there are many variations across the country, has its own budget, procedures, policies, and issues. Each, generally, is run by elected representatives. Law enforcement and the courts also are divided geographically, with agencies covering specified jurisdictions that, overall, tend to follow specific boundaries. Cultural, business, and charitable organizations are less bound by legal borders, but many – particularly smaller, locally focused groups – are intricately linked to their geographic communities. Newspapers, historically, have been tasked with watching these groups and political subdivisions and making regular reports about what they are doing to and for the citizens.

Laws in each state, and numerous federal statutes and regulation, acknowledge the intimacy between the function of journalism to inform the citizenry about their government and the act of voting, or the process of choosing their representatives by judging past performance and potential performance. Since this can only be done – as James Madison noted with “popular information” – these range from Shield Laws designed to the protect journalists from overzealous prosecutors to public meeting notice requirements to the odd case in Ohio where only “employed journalists” can
view sheriff-issued permits to carry concealed handguns. This issue is more closely examined in Chapter 7, which focuses on citizen journalism.

While public affairs reporting, the laws specifying the role of journalism (and in some cases rewarding it with legal and public advertising), news routines, and traditional distribution all tie newspapers to bounded place, the advent of the Internet has challenged the concept of journalism as geographically centered. Scholars have given wide attention to newspaper Websites as a way of separating place and space. Iris Chyi, for instance, found that only about 50 percent of visitors to a newspaper website were likely to live in the circulation area of the print version. Yet she and fellow scholar George Sylvie also found that even in an online environment geography is an essential element to building audience since visitors tend to have some connection to the area being covered by the newspaper. Other researchers have reached similar conclusions, ranging from small community newspapers using the Web to expand their audiences to newspaper Websites offering expanded versions of their print operations as a competitive business edge. The digital landscape is explored much more deeply in Chapter 3.

In many ways, journalism history can be viewed as a battle for both place and space, with the winners getting larger and expanding their territories over time while the losers either fade away or are subsumed. The number of daily newspapers peaked in 1916 at 2,461 titles, with more than 630 U.S. cities hosting competing dailies. Commercial radio in the early 1920s and then television in the late 1940s and 1950s ruffled the newspaper markets, along with numerous other factors, spawning waves of closures, consolidations, and cementing the rise of corporate ownership. Ostensibly concerned with the lack of varying editorial voices and the potential impact on a public sphere
concerned with public affairs, the United States Congress approved the Newspaper Preservation Act in 1970, which allowed competing newspapers to enter Joint Operating Agreements. This sent the liberal Nation magazine into apoplexy, declaring in a headline, “Farewell, free enterprise.” The act, which will be discussed in Chapter 8 as an example of government’s willingness to intervene in the business of journalism, has been widely criticized as both a failure and as corporate welfare. By 2010, only twelve cities had competing dailies owned by different companies. By 2010, only twelve cities had competing dailies owned by different companies.

As business pressures on print journalism increased in the 1970s, 1980s, and through to the 1990s, coinciding with the explosion of cable television, satellite television, and upstart networks such as Fox, those concerned with public affairs journalism noticed another trend. Not only were metropolitan areas being left with a single print outlet responsible for the majority of reporting, the remaining outlets were increasingly withdrawing into their cores, leaving outlying areas without delivery and without coverage. This was a reversal from earlier periods, when newspapers sought to expand circulation as a fundamental business concept. Though occasionally mentioned earlier, the issue of metro newspapers contracting to their core markets came under more intense scrutiny with the Des Moines Register acknowledging in 1997 it was concentrating on a “Golden Circle” within an hour’s drive from Des Moines and would no longer service outlying areas. The move meant thousands of subscribers were dropped. The shock was not that newspapers were under pressure to save money, which was well-known, but how the Register had chosen to deal with it. The newspaper and Iowa were perceived as one. Many critics accused the paper’s owner, the Gannett Corporation, of abandoning its readers and its mission. “Nowhere, with the exception,
maybe, of Providence in Rhode Island, is there the sense of what the Register is as a unifying force in the state of Iowa,” noted Michael Gartner, the owner of the Ames (Iowa) Tribune and a former Gannet executive. “It was in its coverage of day-to-day life, the day-in, day-out rhythm of life, that the Register distinguished itself.”

Since then, a number of metropolitan newspapers have announced contractions, including the Denver Post, the Atlanta-Journal Constitution, Dallas Morning News, the Tennessean, Charlotte Observer, Kansas City Star, San Antonio Express-News, and the Tampa Tribune. The impact can be seen in the content, as this examination will demonstrate and which has been seen in other areas. In a study of rural vs. urban coverage in the Atlanta Journal Constitution and the Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch, for instance, researcher Michael Carey found that outlying coverage between 2006 and 2010 declined for both newspapers.

Metro newspapers withdrawing coverage has been accompanied, as noted in Chapter 1, with the closing of newspapers not just in the same cities but in the broader geography of counties and designated market areas. This has resulted in a thinning of public affairs journalism. The way urban planners, broadcast media buyers, and the U.S. Census tracks population tends to obscure how people actually live within these large areas. The Census reports that 80 percent of Americans live in a metropolitan statistical area, which seems to indicate the majority of citizens likely could be served by an increasingly complex mix of news media. Yet, a closer look shows more than 50 percent of residents actually live in towns under 25,000 that are within driving distance of core metropolitan areas. Wrote author and geography professor Wendell Cox: “In reality their local governments are located not in the great City Hall downtown but in a
usually quite modest nearby building. This large number of governments horrifies some organizations and people."

Public affairs journalism, as Maxwell McCombs pointed out, is primarily concerned with asking the question, “What shall we do?” While certainly those who work in urban areas, as do the majority of Geauga County residents, are concerned with streets, crime, and taxes that may affect their employment and the quality of the environment during their working hours, they also are in charge of the communities where they spend the majority of their time, send their children to school, and where they are eligible to vote. As daily professional journalism has withdrawn, the task of finding out what is going on in their home communities has become increasingly difficult. The result for these abandoned areas such as Geauga County has been a dramatically altered news landscape, where both daily print and broadcast reporters zip in not from Washington, D.C. or New York, but from a few miles away. For Geauga County residents, this was a recent development. In Wood County, the change, while present, is far more subtle.
The rumor mill had been working at full steam for months preceding a meeting on November 6, 1992, called by Geauga Times-Leader Publisher Pam Strickler. The forty-four full- and part-time newspaper workers, including twelve journalists, shuffled together, murmuring quietly. What she said came as no surprise. As she stood next to executives from Thomson Newspapers, the paper’s parent company, she announced the
paper was closing. The edition of November 8 would be the last. Thomson Chief Executive Officer Michael W. Johnston said the issue was money, not circulation:

“Unfortunately, despite gains in readership by the paper, poor financial success and limited prospect for improvement have forced the decision to close.” Strickler noted the paper was the county’s “only daily newspaper and its only local editorial voice.” In its final edition, the newspaper told readers that Bill Clinton’s election likely would have no immediate effect on local schools, an insurance company’s cut in coverage would hurt local patients, and that a local high school football team had “played with poise, strength and aggressiveness that belied their tender years.” Readers also learned that 87-year-old Michael Szollosy of Geauga County had died and that the former horse jockey “loved woodworking, having made special gavels and enjoyed giving them as gifts to newly installed masters of Masonic lodges.”
A newspaper closing was not new to Geauga County. Part of the sprawling Connecticut Western Reserve that included all of Northeast Ohio, Geauga became a county in 1805.\textsuperscript{47} It maintained its largely rural nature for more than a century before becoming a bedroom community to Greater Cleveland. It continues to be known for its quaint town squares typically found in New England, a nod to its roots as part of Connecticut. As in many areas of the country, journalism was an early part of its history.
The first newspaper of which copies exist, the *Geauga Gazette*, was launched in 1833. Editor/owner Alfred Phelps, in a letter to readers written in the third person, noted “he has no practical knowledge of the duties he has undertaken upon himself; but is deeply impressed with a just sense of their importance.” He continued:

In recording the passing events of the world, the chief object will be to arrive at the truth, to give place to nothing unless it seems well authenticated as fact, and worth of being remembered.

It is entirely unpledged to the support of any of the dogmas of any party, and is and shall continue to be, while under his guidance, what the press ever ought to be – free and independent.

That first issue focused mainly on a hodgepodge of national and international issues, including the full transcript of a Pittsburgh speech given by famed orator and U.S. senator Daniel Webster. But, the newspaper also reported on local public affairs, such as printing the full ordinance passed by Chardon town council prohibiting swine, sheep or geese from running at large and a rule mandating that “traveling circuses and side shows” get a permit from the mayor before setting up shop.

The newspaper closed two years later, perhaps as the result of no “practical knowledge” of the printing business. Phelps’ operation was followed by numerous other printers, though these often were less concerned with independence and more with pushing a particular political agenda. At one point in the 1880s, the county had three viable newspapers putting out regular editions, the *Geauga Leader, Geauga Democratic Record*, and the *Geauga Republican*.

Just as the closing of early newspapers created opportunities for others, the closing of the *Times-Leader* nearly 150 years later in 1992, though painful for some, represented an opportunity. From a distance, Geauga County looked like rich hunting
grounds for nearby daily newspapers eager to increase sagging circulation. The county was bucking the regional trend, increasing population while its neighbors lost. Between 1990 and 2000, Cuyahoga County, with Cleveland as its seat, lost 18,162 residents, while Geauga gained nearly 10,000, an increase of 12 percent. The county is largely white, with a less than 2 percent minority population, and wealthier than the average American county. The population includes more than 6,500 Amish residents, known collectively as “the Geauga Settlement.”

The Plain Dealer, the News-Herald in Lake County, and the Tribune-Chronicle out of nearby Warren, Ohio, all increased their presence in Geauga County in bids to pick up some of the 9,000 subscribers abandoned as well as persuade some of the new residents moving in to buy their papers. At one point in the months after the Times-Leader’s demise, more than eight print reporters showed up to cover a routine Geauga County Commission meeting, outnumbering the combined audience and public officials. “It was a little wacky,” recalled Michael Scott, now a reporter for the Plain Dealer who attended the meeting as the newly installed “Geauga County bureau chief” for the Tribune-Chronicle.53

The battle for Geauga County

The public affairs news landscape at the time was extraordinarily robust in comparison to what it became later. The News-Herald, based in contiguous Lake County, had three full-time reporters covering the county, with the goal of producing two front-page stories a day and an inside page of county coverage for a Geauga edition. The Plain Dealer had four people in the county, three based in a Chester Township bureau on the west side of the county and one based in Chardon, all contributing to a regional edition
delivered to residents in Geauga, Portage, and Lake counties. The Tribune-Chronicle had a single reporter, Scott, working out of the county, usually from his car, a wheezing 1985 Dodge Omni. John Horton worked for six years in the News-Herald Geauga bureau, starting in May 1993, or just months after the Times-Leader closed. He pumped out an average of three stories a day. “We only had one murder, but it was a good one,” Horton recalled.54

Even as the area daily papers rushed to fill the void left by the Times-Leader, the absence of the county-based print operation was noticed immediately. Don and Carol Buchanan, a local couple, launched the Geauga County Maple Leaf as a weekly print operation within months of the closing, quickly zooming to 9,000 circulation. At first, the paper was warmly received, but it relatively quickly became apparent the Maple Leaf was not the Times-Leader. “It was over the top sometimes and came across a bit goofy; it had credibility problems,” said Horton, who read the paper religiously as both a reporter and resident of the county.55 The owners were not news professionals by trade and were perhaps, like Phelps, bereft of “practical knowledge.” Burdened by business loans, a circulation that had fallen to 5,000, and a seemingly quirky editorial slant, the paper landed in bankruptcy court in 2001. John Karlovec, a Cleveland lawyer and a member of the family that publishes the highly successful Daily Legal News in Cuyahoga County, noticed the court filing. After a bit of research, he concluded the paper continued to qualify for legal advertising. He purchased the title, the diminishing circulation list, and a hodgepodge of office equipment for $25,000.56

After hiring a staff and finding an office, the Maple Leaf lived once again. Incensed at the selling price, amounting to five dollars per subscriber, the Buchanans
launched a new paper, the *Leaf*, with a torrid editorial campaign against Karloviec, painting the new owner as an interloper from Cleveland. The campaign worked well enough for the Buchanans to wrest legal advertising from their former paper, which in turn incensed Karloviec, who filed suit alleging they had reneged on their bankruptcy agreement. After $150,000 in legal fees, they settled out of court. Karloviec agreed to buy the *Leaf*. He promptly shut it down, ending an eighteen-month newspaper war in the middle of a digital revolution.57

Karlovec understood that replacing the six-day-a-week *Times-Leader* was impossible without an enormous investment of people, money, and equipment. The odds of succeeding where Thomson had failed, even with his considerable advantages, were unlikely.58 Yet, without the local daily, there was no monopoly on local news. The *Times-Leader* saw its mission as countywide, with its seven news reporters each responsible for three daily stories and two Sunday stories. “We were a county paper, not a Chardon paper,” says Scott, who spent two years as a reporter at the *Times-Leader* before being promoted to city editor in 1990. “We were really attempting to be a paper of record.”59

As city editor, he kept a list of 100-year-old residents in his desk drawer, ready at a moment’s notice to assign an obit. He did relent a bit on the insistence for daily production, relating a disagreement with his former boss:

The city editor at the time came to me one day, it was a long day, and said I needed a third story. I thought really hard and I looked through my notebook. The only thing I had was Burton Township buying a front-end loader; I think it was used. He (his boss) said, ‘That’s news. Give it to me.’ So, I did, but I wasn’t happy about it. We were local, local, local. But I thought there should be some standard about what news is.60
If Karlovec could not profitably replace the publication cycle, he figured he could replicate the countywide mission. He studied the other weeklies in the county, concluding they were largely specific to the communities in which they were based, with the exception of the Geauga Times-Courier, which did cover much more of the county but was slanted toward the western end, where more than half of the population lives. He hired another news reporter, beefed up the stringer ranks, acquired a sports editor, and ramped up the number of pages.

Retrenching

As Karlovec was rebuilding the Maple Leaf, the battle for circulation among the daily papers continued for more than a decade, though never at the frenzy of the first year after the Times-Leader’s demise. The Tribune-Chronicle dropped out early, recalling Scott, who had left the Times-Leader for the Warren paper in late 1990, after only eight months. The Plain Dealer and the News-Herald fought from opposite ends of the county, though often crisscrossed on the big stories.

The Plain Dealer was never particularly interested in the minutiae of government or petty crime, preferring to highlight one or two big stories a day. Especially if those stories were broken by its own reporters. In late 2003, Horton received a call from a regular source, a trustee for Chester Township. He told Horton that he and fellow trustees were going to confront then-Clerk Michael Spellman about some suspected financial irregularities. Horton readily agreed to attend, figuring it would be an easy byline. It wasn’t. Numerous stories later, Spellman pleaded guilty to stealing $4.3 million in township funds over an eight-year period, funneling the money through a group called Hollywood Charities. After the plea, Horton scored a rare interview with him. They had
known each other for years and the interview was more of a chat: “I asked him, ‘Mike, when did you know it was over, that you were cooked? He said, ‘When you showed up at that first meeting.’”

Horton related the anecdote in late 2011, more than a year after the *Plain Dealer* ended its regional edition and closed its Geauga County bureaus. The *News-Herald* already had left, closing its Geauga bureaus and having a reporter cover the county from its Willoughby office, fifteen miles away. Horton worked a deal with his editors to continue covering Geauga County from his home in Chardon as the last reporter on the beat. They readily agreed, but said he would have to continue writing his increasingly popular “Road Rants” column, which had grown to three times a week. At the time of the interview, he had not written a Geauga County story for more than three months. “It might as well be Toledo now,” he said, “you parachute in and blow it up. That bothers me. We pulled a lot of loose threads. There is nobody really doing that now.”

Asked whether a source had a chance of getting through to the *Plain Dealer* in the new landscape, Horton paused and looked out the large picture window of the pub where he was being interviewed. The Chardon Town Square was in full view. “The Spellman story makes you realize, it looks all hometown, but stuff happens here. Could a source get through? I don’t know who would do it. If there’s no proof … well, I still get called to shake things. Maybe, I guess.”
Wood County landscape

Jan Larson McLaughlin, a twenty-seven year journalist for the six-day-a-week Sentinel-Tribune in Wood County, was the only reporter at the county commission meeting on a cold morning in February 2012. She arrived shortly after the meeting began at 10 a.m. in a small conference room off the main corridor that houses the commissioners’ offices. She and the author were the only people present not employed by the county or a local government. The room has a pleasant view overlooking downtown Bowling Green and is not too difficult to for the newcomer to find. That is, once visitors clear the metal detector in the airy, sparkling lobby of the courthouse and explain to a
smiling deputy why they are in the building. McLaughlin sat patiently through a lengthy agenda, but perked up when Jerry Greiner, executive director of the Northwestern Water and Sewer District, gave his report. The district serves most of Wood County and had recently picked up 7,000 customers from neighboring Toledo. Water and sewer had been a hot topic in the area, with the *Blade* reporting that thousands of customers were being inaccurately billed. The new customers, he told the commissioners, were happy to be out from under Toledo’s oppressive thumb. “Everything you see in the paper,” he told them, “involves Toledo. They [the *Blade*] don’t talk to us because we are the good example, not the bad. Water is science, not politics.” When he finished his report, he left the meeting. Larson quickly packed up her notebook and followed. This left the commission without a journalist watching them and, apparently, an opportunity.

Commissioner Tim Brown, who was running for state representative at the time, asked his colleagues to go off the agenda. They agreed. He related a letter he had received from the Ohio Area Agency on Aging, chastising District Seven, which includes Wood County, for failing to properly report expenses. These included the purchase and distribution of more than a thousand miniature football helmets as a marketing device. “I’m not happy about getting bitch-slapped by the state,” he said. “If they are not reporting, then they need to report.” The other commissioners nodded solemnly. Brown noted District Seven ranked last in the state’s most recent audit among the aging districts, which supplies services to the elderly. “A year is plenty of time to get their act together,” he said. More nods.

As Brown finished his screed, McLaughlin was in the hallway getting some fresh quotes from Greiner for an update on the water and sewer situation. When told what she
had missed, she looked intrigued but not surprised. “Really?” she said. McLaughlin, in fact, is frequently the only reporter to attend county agency meetings, and she is used to having to backtrack to get a story. *The Blade* has a regional reporter who reports regularly on Wood County matters, but has not routinely attended local meetings. Television reporters rarely attend, but do occasionally dip into the county. The District Seven issue never made it into print.

McLaughlin is part of a long history of the press in Wood County, which was formed on February 12, 1820, as part of a batch of fourteen counties created by the Ohio Legislature. In the 1830s and 1840s seven newspapers were available in the general area, a surge historian M.A. Leeson attributed to a fight over where to locate the county seat, Bowling Green or Perrysburg. The front page of the first newspaper of which there is a record, *Miami of the Lake*, consisted of the entire minutes of the “proceedings of the young men’s Harrison convention” in Columbus, Ohio, a reference to the ultimately doomed attempt by the Whig Party in 1836 to elect William Henry Harrison as president. Inside the edition was a letter to the editor, signed only “citizen,” suggesting trees should be planted in Perrysburg. Another item noted that a stray horse had been found and gave the location where it could be picked up.

The roots of the *Sentinel-Tribune* can be traced to the *Wood County Sentinel*, which first offered daily publication as a publicity stunt during the 1882 county fair. The paper published from a booth on the midway, though “daily” was a bit of an exaggeration. The paper promised editions on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. The schedule was not permanent, but would “come again,” the paper promised. Alongside a lengthy list of individual fair booths – “Charley McCauley has a fine display of marble
goods” — was a detailed report reprinted from the Cleveland Herald on a trip to Cuyahoga County by the Wood County sheriff. The sheriff was investigating the best way to hang a man. The sheriff wanted to borrow the rope “and other mechanical contrivances” from Cuyahoga as well as get advice. Rural Wood County resident Carl Bach had murdered his wife with a corn cutter. Four severed fingers, the Sentinel noted, remained “preserved and on display in the Wood County courthouse (in Bowling Green).” The hanging was scheduled for October 13, 1882. The execution was delayed when Bach’s lawyers successfully appealed to the Ohio governor for a stay, causing a rural Wood County man to bitterly complain to the Sentinel editor. He relied on the newspaper for news, he wrote, and had brought his family to town with the intention of attending the hanging only to be told it had been put off. The Sentinel responded, defending its report on October 5 as accurate and said it had no control over the governor. Still, the editor urged readers to fear not, Bach remained “comfortably nestled” in the arms of the state and the paper was confident “justice would be served.”

The Sentinel came to the Haswell family in 1899, when Alfred Haswell purchased a one-third interest in the paper, which had fulfilled its pledge of becoming a daily eight years after the 1882 fair. The paper merged with the daily Tribune in 1906. It has remained in the family since, a situation some on the paper contend is responsible for it not sharing the same fate as the corporate-owned Geauga Times-Leader, which was a similarly sized six-day-a-week operation. Whispers swirled several years ago that Publisher Thomas Haswell was ready to retire and planned to sell. “When we thought we might be owned by a chain, we said, ‘Noooo!!!,’” recalled longtime editor Dave Miller. “There was a collective sigh of relief when Tom Haswell announced his daughter was
coming back. She was the third generation, and that was the end of that [rumors of selling].” Assistant Publisher Karmen Concannon, the daughter, had heard it before, that the small daily faced constant threats of being eaten or extinguished by corporations. The family has had numerous opportunities to sell, she said, though she would not be specific, and even now gets the occasional inquiry from brokers. Locally owned newspapers have variously been lauded for being kinder to employees and giving publishers and editors more power to make decisions that put journalism ahead of profits.

As a longtime operation as well as being family owned with no other significant business interests, the Sentinel-Tribune has some advantages over many corporate-owned newspapers, the most important being the lack of debt created in the purchase that caused them to be corporate-owned. The Sentinel-Tribune has no appreciable debt, owning outright both its cement-block building less than a mile from Bowling Green State University and its presses. Of course, the Sentinel-Tribune also does not have the advantages of being part of a corporation, including bulk purchases of paper and technology. “My (great-grandfather) was extremely frugal and because he was, we are still here,” Concannon said. “I credit my dad and our generation with being financially responsible and that means sometimes we can’t go cover what we like.” The Sentinel-Tribune is further aided by the more tight-knit nature of the county, with Bowling Green and its cadre of spending students as its financial epicenter. The county also has larger commercial and industrial bases than does Geauga, even though the average household in Geauga pays nearly $1,000 more a year in state taxes than does the average Wood County family.
The paper has not been without its financial difficulties. McLaughlin, for instance, took a 19 percent pay cut a few years ago and has since regained about 9 percent. The paper has had no interns for several years and though it has not laid off any full-time staff, it has let go some part-timers and allowed a few jobs to go unfilled. Still, the ripples in Wood County pale to the waves that have engulfed Geauga County. In addition to the Sentinel-Tribune, three weekly newspapers are published in the county, all owned by small corporations. The Perrysburg and Rossford newspapers are the largest, each serving primarily readers in their home communities, though they occasionally report on county matters. The Blade continues to cover the county as it has in the recent past, though not at the same depth as earlier when news print and personnel were more abundant. The Blade, however, is reaching out in new ways with its digital operations, as will be more explored in Chapters 3, 4, and 7, with hyper-local sites focused on Sylvania and Perryburg, both of which were launched during the course of this study.

Escalating and overlapping public spheres

The varying histories, missions, and personnel of the outlets are apparent in the content they provide. Overall, this study revealed the extraordinary strength of geography-driven content and the spirals as described above, showing a particularly wide news divide in Geauga County, which lacks a home-county daily newspaper and where the regional and metro dailies have retreated. Wood County, in fact, resembles what news industry professionals and watchers have traditionally seen in non-rural areas, an escalating spiral of geographically centered news, with outlet size and type largely determining types and amount of content. While certainly difficult to generalize since each area of the country has its own unique qualities and each news outlet has its own
particular history and mission, the journalism industry traditionally has been classified by size and reach. The metro operation hangs over a large area, covering its home community in some depth, knitting the region together with in-depth issue reporting, the occasional investigative effort, and hitting the high points of its broader areas, often with zoned editions. The metros tend to offer more state, national, and international reports, fulfilling historical missions of being what media economist Robert Picard called the “all-you-can-eat buffet” of news. Underneath the metro operation is the more locally oriented daily newspaper, most often covering a county or perhaps two or three in a relatively tight culturally and economically cohesive unit. The smaller dailies tend to focus more on local news, though usually offer some state and national and more rarely international reports. The final turn in the spiral is the weekly, which is most concerned with intensely local news focused on government, school, service organizations, charitable happenings, and the like.

The news organizations also have tended to be classified not just by types of content, but also quality, with the spirals largely assumed to mirror size and reach. The larger the operation, it generally is assumed, the higher the quality. Quality, like happiness, however, is an elusive concept, and size and reach does not always translate. The most obvious example is the difference between the Wall Street Journal and the National Enquirer. Both are large national operations and both are considered newspapers, but few would argue their news quality is comparable. The illustration also serves to point out how different missions and target audiences result in vastly different content. But, generally, most scholars tend to agree that quality can be viewed as an extension of journalism ethics and best practices. Researchers Richard van der Wurff and
La us Sch nba ch synthesized a list of core journalism standards. Among their standards, along with separating editorial from commercial content and gathering different perspectives on an issue, were “full disclosure of sources” and “transparency: showing how news coverage is produced.”

Content in Geauga and Wood counties

As a way of better empirically defining the outlines of the public sphere, or the information available to talk about, the author examined constructed samples of the primary print outlets in each county. This decision was made because it was clear the newspapers, as was found by both the FCC and Pew Research, provided the vast majority of public affairs reporting. Broadcast and Internet-only operations, with a few notable exceptions that are examined in Chapter 3, were relatively minor providers of routine coverage in either county. Content provided by the commercial broadcast stations as revealed in examinations of their Web sites also is reported in Chapter 3, as are findings related to the newspaper’s Web operations. Overall, this study found the Web sites mirrored their traditional outlets, especially in terms of public affairs reporting involving Geauga and Wood counties.

Daily newspapers were examined with a randomly constructed two-week sample while a constructed month was used for the weeklies. This created a rather awkward sample, since the two timeframes are not equitable. Four editions of a weekly constitute 7.6 percent of yearly production, while fourteen days for a 365-day daily make up 3.6 percent of yearly production. While not equitable, the sample was deemed comparable, since any fewer editions of either could fail to adequately reveal routine coverage. News-editorial content was examined for each publication. Readily discernible advertising, both
display and classified, was outside the scope of this study. Each publication was studied for headlined articles in any section. This definition included “briefs” run as part of a round-up. For example, the Plain Dealer routinely runs a column of short international stories inside the first section. Each brief was counted as a separate article. Listings, such as real estate, entertainment venues, and sports agate, were counted as one article, though at times there may have been multiple mentions of the target counties. The content was coded for five major categories: geographic origin, topic, sourcing, length, and letters to the editor. Coding sheets are attached as Appendix A. Since this study is primarily concerned with public affairs coverage in Wood and Geauga counties, only articles originated in or directed at those geographic areas were further examined for topic.

Geography

Overall, this study found daily professional journalism in retreat, especially in terms of the amount of journalism produced and the number and type of sources used. The Plain Dealer, for instance, published ten items out of Geauga County while during the sample period printing 380 items from its geographical base of Cuyahoga County. Of those from Geauga, only one fell into the traditional definition of public affairs. The rest were either entertainment (2); sports (2), or other (5), which primarily consisted of listings such as bars and real estate sales. By contrast, the Blade reported forty-eight items out of Wood County during the sample period and 272 out of Lucas County. In other words, the Blade’s Wood County coverage was just more than 17 percent of its home-county coverage, while Geauga represented just more than 2 percent of the Plain Dealer’s home-county coverage. However, if sports were excluded from the Blade total,
the number would fall to thirty and the percentage would decline to 11 percent. Table No. 2.1 breaks down the geography for each outlet.

**Table No. 2.1.** Breakdown of article geographic origin – Geauga County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outlet</th>
<th>International</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Cuyahoga/Lake*</th>
<th>Geauga</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Plain Dealer</em></td>
<td>82</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>News-Herald</em></td>
<td>57</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Maple Leaf</em></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Times-Courier</em></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*=The News-Herald is based in Lake County.

Breakdown of article geographic origin – Wood County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outlet</th>
<th>International</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Lucas</th>
<th>Wood</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Blade</em></td>
<td>104</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sentinel-Tribune</em></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Rossford Journal</em></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Perrysburg</em></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Topics of content**

Each publication was coded for thirteen categories of news. They were government proceedings, economic activity, agriculture, transportation and travel, crime, public moral problems, accidents and natural disasters, public health and welfare, education/schools, entertainment, sports, and other. In order to keep the results consistent,
the same categories were used for both weekly and daily operations. An initial inspection revealed how difficult this would be and the coding categories were revisited several times as the different nature of the operations quickly became apparent. For instance, all the weekly operations printed reports on social organizations, such as Kiwanis clubs. These were coded as “other.” Schools were added to the education category in order to capture the number of submitted reports to the weeklies from local school districts. Though these sometimes contained issue information, such as tax levies and complying with state requirements, they more frequently reflected internal matters such as new teachers, children’s programs such as school plays, and so on. In addition, court and crime were separated in order to capture distinctions between routine crime briefs and court actions such as civil suits and trials. Government was turned into “government proceedings” in order to reflect the nature of many of the items. For instance, the smaller papers, both daily and weekly, routinely report on the operations of government as an organization, such as addressing personnel, pay, etc., rather than covering government as the intersection between the public and public issues. Table No. 2.2 breaks down the major content categories.
**Table No. 2.2. Breakdown of content topics – Geauga County**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outlet</th>
<th>Gov’t</th>
<th>Court</th>
<th>Bus.</th>
<th>Crime</th>
<th>Accidents</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Edu.</th>
<th>Ent.</th>
<th>Sports</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plain Dealer</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>News-Herald</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maple Leaf</strong></td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3*</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Times-Courier</strong></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The low number of sports stories is likely an artifact of both the sampling and coding. The Maple Leaf does extensive sports roundups, often covering numerous schools and teams, which were counted as one for this study.

**Breakdown of content topics – Wood County**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outlet</th>
<th>Gov’t</th>
<th>Court</th>
<th>Bus.</th>
<th>Crime</th>
<th>Accidents</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Edu.</th>
<th>Ent.</th>
<th>Sports</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blade</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sentinel-Tribune</strong></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rossford Journal</strong></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perrysburg</strong></td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sourcing**

Part of the coding of each publication sought to identify sourcing, which was defined for the purpose of this study as information being attributed to a readily identifiable person, organization, or agency. This was interpreted rather broadly. Most sourcing studies have focused on the diversity or variety of sources, such as male versus female or African-American versus Caucasian, with the underlying assumption that there would be sources. This study, after an initial sampling, determined an equally valuable perspective would be whether an article was sourced at all or simply appeared. For
instance, if a superintendent wrote a school district update, as was the case for some of the weeklies, and the article was published under the superintendent’s name, the report was coded as having a government source. Sources were broken down into six categories: government, which was widely interpreted to include school board members, public agency representatives, politicians, and so on; residents, defined as anyone without a title; experts; business owners or managers; other, which largely included sources such as coaches of sporting teams, ministers, and representatives of charitable groups, and none. Each individual source was counted.

The last category does not necessarily imply it was not possible to glean from where the information came in many cases. Longtime readers likely understand that when an article “announces” an event or meeting will be held or that a business has closed or opened, the information likely came from the organization being discussed. Sports also frequently had no sourcing, which is not uncommon. In many cases, however, when an article was coded as “none,” the information was presented in what literature studies refers to as the omnipotent voice. For instance, a 200-word report about kindergarten screening in the Rossford Journal, with no byline or other attributable information, told readers: “While learning about getting along well with others and discovering ways to be more independent are still significant learning targets in kindergarten, so are writing sentences and counting to 100.”

In a surprising finding, for two dailies – the News-Herald and the Sentinel-Tribune – “none” was the most common source, reflecting 45 percent and 52 percent respectively of all sourcing for those publications during the sample period. This reflects the nature of the items and how news is presented in their publications. The Sentinel-
Tribune publishes a large number of government meeting briefs, announcements, social organization reports, small sports updates, and crime briefs, tending to give each small headlines. Few of those items contain sourcing. For instance, a report on the “Middleton Township Homemakers” group in the Sentinel-Tribune noted “club members enjoyed a Polish meal for their annual International Dinner,”92 while the News-Herald told readers they are “encouraged to attend meetings to share any issues, concerns, or suggestions, to ask questions of the mayor [Chardon Mayor Phillip G. King].”93 Sentinel-Tribune Editor Miller noted the changing nature of the news in his newspaper, the result he said of declining resources. “We are heavier on one-source stories than we used to be,” he said. “Part-timers used to cover meeting stories, now the full-time writers cover the meetings.”94 Table No. 2.3 breaks down the sourcing found in the samples.
Table No. 2.3. Breakdown of sourcing – Geauga County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outlet</th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Expert</th>
<th>Resident</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plain Dealer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News-Herald</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maple Leaf</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Times-Courier</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Breakdown of sourcing – Wood County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outlet</th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Expert</th>
<th>Resident</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blade</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentinel-Tribune</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perrysburg</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Length

Unlike sourcing, length was found in this study not to be an indicator of the nature of the kind of journalism being performed. Length and sourcing have been used as benchmarks for overall quality. In a particularly intriguing study, researcher Joshua Blumenstock successfully used word count to predict whether an entry in the online encyclopedia, Wikipedia, would be classified as “featured,” which carries the imprimatur of its paid editors and is presumed to be the best the site has to offer. Others have included article length in overall discussions of the type and quality of journalism, such as use of the inverted pyramid, the news-writing technique meant to deliver the most important information quickly and concisely.
In this examination, length was parsed into four categories: 100 words or less (short); 101 to 250 words (brief); 251 to 500 words (middle); more than 500 words (long). Counter intuitively, except perhaps for those journalists who have spent their careers feeding the newsholes of weekly newspapers, this examination revealed length of article was not indicative of the type of outlet. For instance, the *Blade* was just as likely to do an article of more than 500 words on a Wood County subject or issue (18) as it was to do a short of 100 words or less (16), as were the weeklies. Table No. 2.3 breaks down article length.

**Table No. 2.4.** Breakdown of article length – Geauga County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outlet</th>
<th>Short</th>
<th>Brief</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>Long</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Plain Dealer</em></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>News-Herald</em></td>
<td>44</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Maple Leaf</em></td>
<td>48</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Times-Courier</em></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Breakdown of article length – Wood County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outlet</th>
<th>Short</th>
<th>Brief</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>Long</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Blade</em></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sentinel-Tribune</em></td>
<td>112</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Rossford Journal</em></td>
<td>59</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Perrysburg Journal</em></td>
<td>93</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Letters to the editor

As noted in Chapter 1, the nation’s editorial pages long have been seen as evidence of the public sphere, with readers weighing in on issues, local, national, and international, of pertinence to them. Letters, at least in modern times, mostly have been run on editorial pages and opposite editorial pages as part of a newspaper’s mix of opinion. Of the eight newspapers examined in this study, five have regular editorial pages: the Plain Dealer, Blade, Sentinel-Tribune, News-Herald, and Times-Courier. However, of the five, only three, the Blade, Plain Dealer, and News-Herald, offer regular editorials. The Sentinel-Tribune batches letters to the editor, running them one day a week. The weeklies routinely run letters, which most often – but not always – are packaged on the same page. The letters were examined for community of origin. Table No. 2.5 breaks down letters to the editor.

**Table No. 2.5. Breakdown of letters to the editor – Geauga County**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outlet</th>
<th>Cuyahoga/Lake</th>
<th>Geauga</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plain Dealer</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News-Herald</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maple Leaf</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Times-Courier</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Breakdown of letters to the editor – Wood County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outlet</th>
<th>Lucas County</th>
<th>Wood</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blade</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentinel-Tribune</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perrysburg Journal</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rossvard Journal</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The disparity in letter count among the outlets reflects several factors. The *Blade* devotes much of its editorial space, which is comparable to the *Plain Dealer*’s, to community comment rather than syndicated columns. The opposite is revealed on their Websites, with the *Plain Dealer* putting an increased focus on comment, as will be discussed in the coming chapter. The numbers also reveal how the various operations choose to present submitted items. For instance, four of five letters on a single day in the *News-Herald* (accounting for nearly all of the Geauga County presence in the study), came from Geauga County government leaders or organizers for charity events thanking the community. Wrote the Bainbridge road superintendent: “I would like to express my thanks and appreciation from the Road Department staff to all of the voters who supported the Bainbridge Township Road Renewal Levy on Nov. 8. Your support will allow the Road Department to continue to maintain its services to the residents.”

Though such public thank-you notes are not uncommon, several of the weekly operations would be likely to run such submissions as news rather than letters. It also is likely such letters were run in place of coverage, or even advertising. One of the letters in the *News-Herald* came from the Geauga County United Way announcing the winner of a “lucky duck” contest and another came from the Geauga chapter president of the Blue nights of Ohio thanking the community for supporting a motorcycle rally. By contrast, the *Maple Leaf* ran thirteen letters in a single edition, all dealing with an upcoming election. The letters represented a wide discussion on local issues, including a Chardon school levy and the election of a municipal judge. Wrote David Peltier, a Chardon resident: “It’s fourth down and the powerful team of economic recession, short-sighted politicians and personal selfishness has the Chardon community pinned back to its one-yard line.”
While the raw numbers reveal an overall picture, they are only a bare outline of the range of both quality and type of local coverage readers encounter. For instance, the *Blade* is just as likely to do a feature story on a family in Rossford who watches Ohio State University football games with a cardboard cutout of their son who was serving in the military,\(^{101}\) as to offer a 200-word, non-bylined report on Rossford City Council in which it notes that ten residents attended a meeting on whether to withdraw from the regional bus service but quoted only the mayor.\(^ {102}\) The numbers also fail to reveal the essential difference between daily public affairs coverage interested in expanding the public sphere with the core question of “what shall we do” and typical weekly coverage, which is hampered by a time-lagged publishing schedule and scarce journalistic resources.

An episode involving the *Sentinel-Tribune*’s McLaughlin serves as an illustration of the issue. She had been following with interest the fate of an abandoned school building, the former Lark Elementary School, in the small community of Northwood. She knew the matter was to come up at during a meeting of the Building Committee for the Wood County Board of Health, and she decided to attend. The committee was told the board could buy the building for ten dollars but that $170,000 would have to be spent on renovations to make it useable. Board member Dallas Zeigler demanded to see a business plan. Health Department Administrator Bill Ault replied the county had several likely tenants and urged passage of the resolution to buy the building. Wrote McLaughlin: “The debate between Zeigler and Ault got so heated at one point that (the committee chairman) banged his gavel to stop the shouting.”\(^ {103}\) Still, the committee voted
7-1 in favor of buying the building and agreed to put it on the full board’s agenda two nights hence. McLaughlin churned out a 690-word story with seven sources. The story quoted Zeigler extensively but also included the representative of a local church saying that part of the county would benefit from the purchase. The next day, she chugged through the county government telephone directory, contacting the administrators of the agencies that Ault reported wanted to rent space from the county. Not only had no agencies committed to renting, but several said they had no interest in doing so and never had.104 In the same edition, a letter from reader M.N. “Mick” Torok cited her first story and noted it was part of a string of bad decisions made by a “dysfunctional” board dominated by the medical profession and those from Bowling Green. “Your bosses are watching,” he wrote.105

On the third day, McLaughlin reported the health board had delayed the vote:
“(Board President Ted) Bowlus assured Thursday after the meeting that the board is now committed to researching the expenses involved and meeting with potential renters to hammer out contract specifics prior to moving ahead with the purchase.”106 Miller smiled when asked about the episode and shook his head. “Jan gets upset when they don’t do things the way they are supposed to do things,” he said. The dust up was relatively minor in the scheme of things. “It’s what we do,” he said. “I don’t really care if one councilmember yells at another one or makes an offensive comment. It should be in there [the story], but unless it costs money it’s probably not your lead.”107

Such reporting efforts, however, are increasingly difficult to manage. McLaughlin, in addition to covering the county, helps put the newspaper together each morning. At the time she spoke with a researcher, she had just lost an adjunct position as
a newswriting instructor at BGSU. “I love what I do,” she said. “I want to keep doing it. I hope I can.”

*Daily circulation decline*

As journalism has thinned, so, too, has circulation and the percentage of penetration in each county by the daily newspapers. Correlation, of course, does not mean causation. While certainly it is possible to argue less journalism means less value for the reader and therefore less circulation, many other factors are at play. This has been widely debated in the industry and in academia. Why newspaper circulation continues in free fall is outside the scope of this examination, which is concerned with circulation and penetration (defined as the number of papers sold as a percentage of households in the county) only in terms of the impact the business side of journalism has on public affairs information available. Clearly, it has a substantial if not determining impact. Coverage, in many ways, can be viewed as a reflection of circulation and vice versa. The *Plain Dealer*, as noted earlier, offers its Geauga County readers just more than 2 percent of the county coverage it offers its home county readers in Cuyahoga. The question arises – are Geauga residents getting what they paid for? Or, more importantly, are they getting what they need? The short answer: No. The longer answer: Almost. As a percentage of total circulation, Geauga residents make up just 3.3 percent of the *Plain Dealer’s* total Monday-through-Saturday numbers. The reverse is true of the *Blade*, which has had a steeper decline in Wood County than the *Plain Dealer* has had in Geauga but offers a higher percentage of coverage. Table 2.6 breaks down this relationship.
Table No. 2.6. Daily newspaper circulation and penetration decline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Total Circ.</th>
<th>Target County Circ. 2000/2012</th>
<th>Penetration 2000/2012</th>
<th>Percent total 2012 circ.</th>
<th>Percent Coverage*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Geauga</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plain Dealer</td>
<td>238,261</td>
<td>9,375/7,940</td>
<td>32%/22.2%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News-Herald</td>
<td>33,340</td>
<td>5,432/4,938</td>
<td>17.9%/13.8%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wood</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toledo Blade</td>
<td>113,786</td>
<td>16,492/11,819</td>
<td>38%/24.2%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentinel-Tribune</td>
<td>12,226**</td>
<td>10,284</td>
<td>28.2%/21.8%</td>
<td>100%***</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This is the percentage as determined by the above examination. The percent is given as the difference between local coverage offered to the target county and what is offered in the home county.

** The Sentinel-Tribune is not audited by the Audit Bureau of Circulations. The number is an estimated based on county-by-county reports of Standard Rate and Data Service (SRDS Circulation).

*** The Sentinel-Tribune, like most newspapers, has some mail subscriptions, but has no appreciable circulation outside the county.

Broadcast and public affairs

While the newspapers are appearing to retreat or at best maintain their public affairs coverage, broadcast television and radio, generally, are seen as episodic contributors to public affairs rather than routine observers or gatherers. The outlets tend to focus on their core metropolitan areas with an emphasis on crime, the unusual human interest, and scandal or potential scandal. This is much more the case in Geauga County, where the stations offer even less routine coverage than does the Plain Dealer. In Wood County, the stations’ coverage is similar to the Blade’s, with one station – market leader WTOL – actually providing more stories, on average, than the metro newspaper.
Though the Cleveland market contains several more stations than the Toledo market, this is largely a function of having more population within the designated market area. Of the stations in the Cleveland DMA, four occasionally dip into Geauga County for news coverage. The stations include CBS affiliate WOIO, which spurred a national journalistic ethics debate when it began offering “Puppets Court” coverage of the Jimmy Dimora corruption trial. Dimora is a former Cuyahoga County commissioner convicted of running a criminal enterprise from his county office, including soliciting and accepting bribes from companies seeking business from the county. The Internal Revenue Service estimated the total value of the scams at $1 million, or less than a quarter of what ex-Chester Township Clerk Spellman admitted to funneling into his own accounts.\textsuperscript{111} The trial consumed metro news coverage for months. The \textit{Plain Dealer}, alone, did fifty-nine stories on the trial. The judge barred cameras from the courtroom. WOIO, in addition to relatively straightforward news coverage, began airing a series of segments it called the “Puppets Court,” literal re-enactments of trial exchanges using puppets similar to those on Sesame Street. News Director Dan Salamone told the Associated Press it was no different than a humorous story chosen to end most newscasts: “It’s a satirical look at the trial and, again, I think we have it appropriately placed at the end of the newscast.”\textsuperscript{112} The other market stations routinely led their newscasts with the story and all four major stations went live with the verdict.

The sole regular broadcast contributor in Geauga County is G-TV, a non-profit cable television operation founded and run by David Jevnikar, a lawyer by education but a cable broadcaster by profession. Jevnikar started G-TV in 1994, aided by a run into the Ohio state high school football playoffs by Chardon High School, which spurred an
increased community interest in seeing the games. The cable channel is run out of a fiber-optic center in Chardon owned by Time-Warner Cablevision.

The network reaches 12,000 homes in the county, though Jevnikar has no mechanism for tracking the number of viewers. It airs about 200 “video events” a year, about a quarter of which are government and school board meetings. The rest are community events, such as the crowning of the annual Maple Queen in Chardon, and sporting events ranging from high school baseball games to Powder Puff football. Six communities and school districts in the county, out of twenty-three communities and ten school districts, take part in the community channel. The business model is based on G-TV collecting the fees negotiated by the local governments, which range from 3 percent to 5 percent of the total cable revenue pulled from a community. G-TV’s annual revenue is $140,000, of which Jevnikar collects $50,000 as executive director of the non-profit agency and its sole full-time employee. Before digital switching became available and he could manage the programming from a remote computer, Jevnikar was tied to short distances from the cable center since he had to dash in each day to change out video cassettes.

The system does provide “gavel-to-gavel” airing of meetings, but at the request of the members, Jevnikar said. The system routinely airs full meetings of Chardon City Council and the Chardon school board, but much more rarely the other government proceedings, such as Chardon and Burton township trustees. “We occasionally do those (township) meetings, but mostly when they want a levy passed,” he said. “My dream at one point was to have a countywide channel, to provide a programming service for all these communities. That hasn’t happened.” The main issue: Most community
governments prefer to take cable franchise fees for their general revenue fund budgets. Cable franchise fees are explored more in-depth in Chapter 8 as part of the discussion of gathering community resources to preserve and expand journalism.

Jevnikar primarily uses the Web as a promotional tool for the network, rather than as a way of expanding coverage. A brief experiment with pay-per-view streaming on the Internet ended when it became clear the cost to provide the service was more than most people were willing to pay.115

While the Wood County broadcast news landscape is much richer, in relative terms, than in Geauga County, with Toledo stations reaching in deeper and more frequently, the sole geographically based contributor is Dave Horger, a longtime radio personality in the area who created his own job. He worked from 1979 until 2002 for WFOB radio out of nearby Fosteria, doing regional news and the play-by-play for Bowling Green State University football games. The station lost the rights when Clear Channel, a national media company focusing on radio and billboards, offered BGSU a statewide audience and more money.116

By then, Horger had been broadcasting out of a makeshift studio at the Bowling Green Chamber of Commerce. He was in mid-fifties, with deep ties to the community, and facing an uncertain future. “I was out of work and scared to death,” he said.117 After many discussions with friends, he created his own job with the aptly named Dave Horger Report, two hours of weekday news and sports programming on WBGU 88.1. FM, the Bowling Green public radio station operated by the university.118 The chamber sponsors the program and Horger sells ads, keeping whatever he sells. In 2011, he collected about $50,000. “The goal of the program is to present as much local news and sports as we can
– that is getting lost what with Clear Channel coming in,” Horger said. “We have a lock
on that … solely doing local news.”

‘War on Easter’

Though Jevnikar and Horger offer vastly different services (Jevnikar, for instance,
does not see himself as a journalist or even a broadcaster except in the technical sense),
both share commitments to geographically based public affairs information and deep ties
to the counties in which they operate. This translates into intensely local information,
though neither sees his mission as challenging the local power structure. “Our deal is that
we video gavel to gavel, nothing more and nothing less,” Jevnikar said. “I don’t edit
meetings; when we start doing that, the viewer will wonder what they didn’t see.” The
gavel rule can be quite literal, which doesn’t necessarily stop the viewers from
questioning what happened. “There was a school board meeting a while ago that got quite
heated and one of the members got up and walked out. The [school board] president hit
the gavel and ended the meeting, but the rest of the board kept talking. I got calls about
not airing the rest of it. But, our rule is gavel to gavel.”

Commercial broadcast stations have no such restrictions and, in fact, are highly
unlikely to even attend a meeting, unless there is sufficient public interest. In extreme
cases, the station starts the controversy, as in Geauga County’s Munson Township egg
hunt. In its initial March 2011 report, NBC affiliate WKYC quoted no township officials
or even residents, choosing instead to interview a Chardon dance choreographer and one
of his clients. Chardon is 5.8 miles from Munson proper, a pastoral dogleg down State
Route 44 to U.S. 322. “It’s traditionally been called an Easter egg hunt for years and
years and people are a little bit too touchy,” the station quoted the client as saying.
Munson, however, had not had an egg hunt for “years and years” and its title, as reported in the township’s monthly newsletter, News Notes, which was printed before the television story aired, was the optimistically named “1st Annual Spring Egg Hunt.”123 A rewrite of the story six days later by WNWO out of Toledo advanced the premise, and in the process mangled the few correct facts in the initial report:

MUNSON TWP., OHIO - A Northeast Ohio town is creating some controversy in an apparent effort to be politically-correct. At issue is the word ‘Easter’ in Munson Township’s annual egg hunt. Township trustees tell NBC affiliate WKYC that a government sponsored egg hunt should not include a religious holiday in its name. But many residents believe its much ado about nothing.

Others still have offered to pay for the egg hunt themselves. Township leaders have agreed the event may include the word ‘Easter’ if is privately sponsored and not paid for by taxpayers dollars.124

The report swirled through the traditional and digital public sphere, igniting conversation as far away as Hawaii, where the Website Honolulu Notes declared “the anti-holiday whackos are at it again.”125 By the time the story reached the conservative blogging site, The Blaze, which linked to yet another NBC affiliate rewrite, township trustees had formally agreed to drop Easter from its traditional title and there was no mention that neither source included in the WKYC story was from Munson.126 The liberal Thinkprogress.org Website, weighing in nearly three weeks after the initial controversy, linked extensively to a report by the Geauga Times-Courier.127 Though subtle, the Thinkprogress report, by relying on a single news report, missed the only real tension, tepid as it was, in the entire episode.128 The Times-Courier, in a rather ambiguous context, stated as fact that Trustee Irene McMullen “originally expressed concerns” about use of the word Easter during an earlier parks committee planning meeting. Thinkprogress.org repeated that statement. Yet, the Maple Leaf”’s more
extensive story on March 23, far in advance of the national reports, quoted Trustee Andy Bushman as saying McMullen had insisted the word Easter not be used. McMullen replied that Bushman had misunderstood. Both, however, agreed there was no argument or debate at the planning meeting.129

Despite the intensity of such episodes as the Munson egg hunt story and the Chardon cross country team egg nog challenge, which will be explored in Chapter 4 within the context of the audience building its own narrative, television remains less feared or sought by opinion leaders in both counties. The opinion leaders, defined as those with responsibility for at least some aspects of their government, charitable, or business operations, were surveyed in late January, February, and March 2011. Those with responsibility for their organization’s external communications were particularly sought. When asked which news medium is most likely to have the greatest impact on their agency or organization, either positive or negative, the printed local newspaper was named as most effective, with an average response of 2.03 on a scale of one to seven, with one being the most effective (n=119). Television was ranked second, at 2.67. Of note, is that a printed letter to the editor was just behind a television story, at 3.04. Also of note, is that the responses varied little between counties, despite one having a locally based daily newspaper. Table No. 2.6 displays the results to the question in aggregate, as well as broken down by county.
Table No. 2.7 - Perceived impact of different media

**The question:** Information about your organization might also come from sources other than you or your designated communications person. Which of the following method of delivery is likely to have the most impact (either positive or negative) on your organization?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Combined Average</th>
<th>Wood</th>
<th>Geauga</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper story</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television news story</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>2.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter to editor</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>3.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tweet or Facebook post</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>3.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comment on local news Website</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>3.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A caller to a radio station</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>4.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>5.69</td>
<td>6.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Total responses on the question were 119, (n for Wood=75; n for Geauga=44). The responses are scores based on a scale of 1 to 7, with one being the most effective and 7 the least.

The results can be explained by several factors. The most likely respondents in both counties were those who described themselves as managers with more than ten years at their agencies or organizations. This likely indicates they have longstanding relationships with local media and since newspapers routinely cover their groups, print remains a key outlet. In addition, the survey was not designed to measure actual impact but perceived impact. The two could be quite different, as Trustee McMullen experienced and as she expressed during the meeting at which the Munson trustees formally adopted the word “Easter.” “You wouldn’t believe the vile phone calls I got the past few days. I hope everyone in this room will keep in mind none of this misinformation reflects the kind community this has been. When the reporters move on to another story, what we
hope remains is the Munson Township we all know and love and that it’s our home.”

Further, the survey results nod toward longheld credibility debates over digital versus legacy media and citizen comment versus journalistic reports. Since contributions by the audience are seen as less credible, they are deemed to have less impact within the public sphere. It is interesting to note that the distance between the perceived impact between a television news story and a printed letter to the editor is less than that between a printed news story and a televised report.

The survey findings are counter to what is actually happening in the news landscape, as the traditional media put more emphasis on their digital offerings and less and less on public affairs and as the power of the audience becomes more and more apparent. There are, of course, exceptions. Such as when the newest entrant to the news landscape in Wood County, a former seismologist and furniture dealer who launched a Website as a make-work project for himself, successfully gathered nineteen local, county, and state political hopefuls on a frigid Saturday morning in Wood County’s North Baltimore.
Notes


2 Ibid.


15 Ibid., XII

16 Ibid., XIII.


20 Ohio Revised Code Annotated § 2923.13(A).


25 Martin and Hansen, “Newspapers of Record…,” 32.


33 Ibid.


35 Ibid.


38 Ibid.

39 “Report to the Community,” Geauga County Impact, June 2005, available at http://www.211cleveland.org/pdfs/gcireport.pdf. The report, partially sponsored by the county-centered United Way and led by a group of business, academic, and chartable volunteers, found that 46 percent of residents actually worked in the county. The others traveled to larger nearby areas for their jobs.

40 Joseph Koziol Jr., interview by the author, Chagrin Falls, OH, December 28, 2011. Koziol was a reporter for the *Times-Leader*. In anticipation of the closing and
coming layoffs, he accepted a position at the weekly *Geauga Times-Courier*, which he still holds.


42 Ibid.


49 Ibid.


51 The Historical Society of Geauga County, *Pioneer and General History of Geauga County*, (Mt. Vernon, NJ: Windmill Publications). The publication is the remarkable product of the local historical society, which solicited contributions from its members of amateur historians. In the section on newspapering, the book noted that in the mid 1800s 5,367 periodicals were in circulation among 14,168 residents.

52 “Report to the Community…” Between 2000 and 2004, Geauga County picked up another 4 percent, crossing 100,000 for the first time. During the same time period, the report notes, Cleveland lost an additional 40,000 residents.

53 Michael Scott, interview by the author, December 28, 2011, Chardon, OH.

54 John Horton, interview by the author, December 28, 2011, Chardon, OH.

55 Ibid.

56 John Karlovec, interview by the author, December 8, 2011.

57 Ibid.
Karlovec, interview. The Maple Leaf piggybacks on the much larger and wealthier Daily Legal News, benefiting from bulk purchases of paper and ink, as well as use of the larger paper’s press, and production staff.

Scott, interview.

Ibid.

Karlovec, interview. The paper now averages 44 pages a week, with a news-to-advertising ratio of about 70 percent.

Hornto, interview.


Horton, interview.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Observation by the author, December 15, 2011, Bowling Green, OH.

Ibid.

Jan Larson McLaughlin, Sentinel-Tribune county editor, interview by the author, December 15, 2011, Bowling Green, OH.

James Carter, Wood County commissioner, interview by the author, December 15, 2011, Bowling Green, OH. The commission does not keep attendance records, but several others, including commission Clerk Sandy Long confirmed routine attendance.


“Harrison convention,” Miami of the Lake, October 5, 1836.

“Fair reports,” Wood County Sentinel, October 5, 1882.

Ibid., 3.

76 “Execution,” Wood County Sentinel, October 28, 1882.

77 Dave Miller, editor of the Sentinel-Tribune, interview by the author, February 24, 2012, Bowling Green, OH.

78 Karmen Concannon, assistant publisher, the Sentinel-Tribune, interview by the author, February 24, 2012, Bowling Green, OH.


81 Ibid.


83 Ibid. For a comparison, see http://www.development.ohio.gov/research/files/s0/Geauga.pdf

84 McLaughlin, interview.

85 The Perrysburg and Rossford papers are owned and run by Welch Publishing, a family corporation that also owns and operates two other weeklies outside the county. The North Baltimore News is owned by the Bluffton News Publishing Co., which also puts out a newspaper in Bluffton, Ohio.


Richard van der Wurff and Las Schnech, “Between profession and audience: Codes of conduct and transparency as quality instruments for off- and online journalism,” *Journalism Studies*, 12 no. 4 (2011): 407-422.


Miller, interview.


Ibid.

Letters to the editor, *Geauga Maple Leaf*, April 21, 2011.


“Rossford puts TARTA referendum on hold,” the *Toledo Blade*, December 6, 2011.


Jan Larson McLaughlin, “No deals in place for Lark,” the *Sentinel-Tribune*, December 8, 2011.

106 Jan Larson McLaughlin, “Vote on Lark is delayed: Health board decides to do more homework,” the Sentinel-Tribune, December 9, 2011.

107 Miller, interview.

108 McLaughlin, interview.


113 David Jevnikar, owner/operator, G-TV, interview by the author, February 18, 2012, Chardon, OH.

114 Ibid.

115 Ibid.


117 Ibid.


119 Ibid.
120 Jevnikar, interview.

121 Ibid.

122 Summers, “Hunting for Easter…”

123 “1st Annual Spring Egg Hunt,” Munson Township News Notes, 12 no. 1 (March 2012).


129 Echt, “It’s official…”

130 Ibid.
Chapter Three: Pixels, posts, and producers

“I hate news. I hate stereotypical news. I don’t particularly care who murdered who.”
Gabe Arnold, founder of geauganews.com

Nineteen local, county, and state candidates for public office gathered on a frigid late February morning in the community room of the spacious North Baltimore, Ohio, library. It was a typical meet-the-candidates forum like thousands held across the country every election cycle. Also like many such gatherings, the candidates and their aides outnumbered potential voters. What was not typical, was the organizer, www.NBnewsxpress.com and its sole owner, photographer, editor, and reporter, Jeff “JP” Miklovec.

Terry Krukemyer, a Republican running for Wood County commissioner, surveyed the small crowd milling around the free coffee just after 8:30 a.m. “What do you think of the Website, do you ever look at it?” he was asked. The question seemed to make him a bit uncomfortable. “I never heard of it before this,” he said, and quickly disengaged in search of people who actually were eligible to vote.¹

Miklovec, a tall, gregarious man in his early 60s, has spent his entire life in North Baltimore in Wood County, a hard-scrabble railroad town of 3,400 without the neo-New England charm of town squares in Geauga County.² Laid off in 2009 from a Findlay, Ohio, company where he served as a seismologist, he began casting about for a new job. He had owned several businesses in North Baltimore, including a pizza shop and appliance store, and had served as editor of the local weekly newspaper, the North Baltimore News, between 1998 and 2000, a job he acquired primarily through virtue of
“knowing everybody in town.” He launched www.NBnewsxpress.com in late 2010. The idea was to create a job for himself while at the same time poking his former newspaper employer, which he felt had not moved into the digital age and was not covering the community well enough. “I’m not a writer by trade,” he said, “but I’ve had a computer since 1984. I thought about starting an online newspaper. I prayed about it and one thing led to another.”

The North Baltimore News had rejected his recommendation in 2000 to start a Website, and it has yet to do so. Miklovec sees his site as both news and promotion for the small Wood County town, largely ignored even by the Bowling Green daily. The local weekly, he notes, has no physical presence in town, except a Post Office box number, and rarely reaches out to engage the community in public affairs. He attends most local meetings, but does not always post a report from them, though he usually gets minutes when they are produced and puts them in their entirety on his site.

While Miklovec focuses on the typical offerings of a small weekly, Geauga County’s Gabe Arnold and Rachel Hunziker take a different approach. They wanted to meet the author in the quiet, wood-trimmed restaurant/bar on the square in Burton, a hidden gem of gentility in the midst of the Amish community. There was no irony in the conversation, a deep discussion about news and the Internet near a place where many of the residents live off the grid and rely on printed newspapers for much of their news. Arnold and Hunziker became acquainted four months before, when Hunziker responded to Arnold’s tweet asking for help in starting a new website centered on Geauga County news.
Arnold, a slim 29 and a former construction manager, discovered the power of digital through his self-taught efforts to gather leads for his business. A native of Burton, he moved to Chicago when he was 23 and moved back to Geauga County in the summer of 2011, after starting several successful Internet-based businesses. Hunziker, also an area native, began work at 18 as a corrections officer at the Geauga County Sheriff’s Department, moved on to neighboring Cuyahoga County as a probation employee, and decided to leave corrections work for a human relations position at Punderson State Park, in Geauga County.

After linking up through social media, they found a common interest in attacking what they perceived as a common problem: the extraordinary difficulty in finding out what is going on in Geauga County. Arnold had become accustomed to a vast network of digital information, both Website- and social media-based, in Chicago. A new place to eat? A quick search on his smart phone revealed dozens of choices. Movies, plays, charitable functions, all were available, without seeming effort. When he moved back to Geauga County, he easily found information about Cleveland events and doings, but almost nothing on his renewed home without what he felt was enormous work. “I get here and I wanted to find out what was happening and I couldn’t. I did a proximity search on Twitter for Geauga County and I found something like 189 users. I knew the newspapers were dying, and I just bought the domain name and I loaded the site that night.”

The idea was to create a “connecting point to find out what is here.” He and Hunziker, who now owns a portion of www.geauganews.com, decided they needed a mission statement, a declaration of principles that would guide the site’s development.
They agreed to attempt to fill what they perceived as the open space in the market: an “online publication that supports and provides positive local news in Geauga County.”

Asked about the logic behind the mission, Arnold paused for a moment and then leaned forward. “I hate news,” he said. “I hate stereotypical news. I don’t particularly care who murdered who.”

The result is a Website of relentless, upbeat chirpiness focusing on new business, cultural institutions such as local parks and historical sites, and a lack of any information that could fit into anything other than a broad definition of public affairs. It is, in fact, remarkably similar to the Middlefield Post, a local weekly that relies mostly on submitted material and focuses coverage on local events. It was eight days, for instance, before geauganews.com recognized the Chardon school shooting. When it did so, through a column written by Arnold, it deplored the media swarm that blanketed the community.

If Arnold and Miklovec represent the two demographic extremes of news-oriented Web entrepreneurs, Karmen Concannon represents the middle. The assistant publisher of the Sentinel-Tribune in Bowling Green, she is the third-generation of the Haswell family to take part in both owning and managing the daily newspaper. Now 42, she worked part-time through high school in the newspaper’s telemarketing department and spent five years selling display advertising, honing her pitch to local businesses against the wasteful deviltry of the Yellow Pages. After spending several years selling copiers and fax machines in Arizona and real estate in Philadelphia, she returned home. She now spends most of her time developing the business and content models for the newspaper’s Website and social media. She hired a full-time Web sales person, got the newspaper involved in Facebook, and proudly stated Website traffic has doubled in the last two
years. “I like change,” she said. “I like to move things forward. But I don’t see newsprint going away; we are not going to go away, we are going to evolve.”

Michael Scott understands the process of evolution. He has spent his entire adult life in journalism in Northeast Ohio. He wrote sports stories for the Geauga Times-Leader while in high school and was a reporter and then city editor for the newspaper before spending nearly a decade at the Tribune-Chronicle, a daily newspaper in Warren 36 miles south of Chardon. He is now the sole online-only reporter for the Plain Dealer, a job he crafted himself after spending several months warming his editors to the idea. He is, in fact, a reporter among reporters, partly responsible for pushing the concept of Web-first. He shoots videos, jumps into big stories by tracking social media trends, and routinely uses “storify,” a Web-based service that compiles news reports and audience commentary on a given event to provide perspective. At 47, he is mid-career and a hardened veteran of lay-offs and industry chatter about the changing nature of journalism and the news. “I just want to hang on. I really enjoy what I’m doing,” he said. “But, it’s hard to get excited. There’s a big cloud hanging over the newsroom. It’s frustrating.”

The “big cloud” is the ongoing growth of digital news consumption and what it means for the future of journalism and public affairs. Geauga and Wood counties exhibit all the signs of national trends, from the span of Web entrepreneur to hopeful but wary local news outlet owners to major metro news operations struggling to find their way. This chapter examines the digital news landscape, first outlining the national picture and news consumption trends, then exploring the metro markets anchored by Cleveland and Toledo and what is happening in Wood and Geauga counties, and finally discussing the impact on public affairs information. Among the most significant findings is that while
all but a few of the studied news outlets are using digital technology to expand their
audiences, they are not using it to broaden their coverage. Further, the initial promise of
digital technology to inspire new entrants into the news landscape, from either concerned
citizens or journalists looking for new opportunities, has yet to happen, or only in the
most limited sense. (The reasons for this are discussed further in Chapter 7). In other
words, Geauga County, without daily professional journalism, sits in the digital shadows,
with new start-ups like Arnold’s and Hunziker’s recognizing an opening in the digital
landscape but choosing not to cover public affairs in any practical sense. North
Baltimore’s Miklovec certainly represents what many had hoped would be the result of
better, cheaper technology for news creation and delivery but as the only such operation
in either target county his efforts can hardly be classified as an expansion.

**Digital extensions**

News outlets began reaching toward digital audiences with the advent of the desk
top computer, including failed experiments by Knight Ridder and *The Los Angeles Times*
with videotext in the early and mid-1980s. The commercial portion of the Internet, the
World Wide Web, began to take off in the early 1990s with the mass distribution of the
first browser, Mosiac, and the launch of America Online. The *Chicago Tribune* is largely
regarded as the first major news operation to make daily digital offerings routine, through
a partnership with AOL. Though slow to adapt, the newspaper industry roared into the
digital landscape in the mid- to late 1990s. An interesting exception was the *Sentinel-
Tribune* in Bowling Green, which did not launch its Website until 2007, as compared to
the *Plain Dealer*, for instance, which launched its site in 1996. “We were told – perhaps
it’s urban legend – that we were the last daily newspaper in Ohio to get a Website. I
wouldn’t be surprised,” said Sentinel-Tribune Editor Dave Miller. Television stations entered the digital landscape at much the same time as the Plain Dealer, but have not received near the amount of industry or scholarly attention, likely because they attract relatively smaller audiences in relation to their metro print-based counterparts and because their overall news content is substantially thinner, though that is changing for many outlets.

The news Websites quickly became among the largest, in terms of traffic, for most communities, with many experiencing double-digit increases year to year. From 2010 to 2011, for instance, U.S. news sites overall saw an increase of 17 percent in the number of unique monthly visitors, to 342 million (compared, for example, to the just more than the 40 million daily newspapers sold). Of the top twenty-five national news Websites in 2011, seventeen were newspapers, network news, and cable news outlets. The other eight were stand-alone digital operations, primarily aggregators such as Yahoo! and Google News. Seventy-nine percent of adult Americans say they routinely go to the Internet, with an increasing portion saying they are going there for news. In late 2010, the Internet surpassed newspapers for the first time as the primary source of national and international news.

Web strength becomes murkier when it comes to geographically centered public affairs information. The Pew Center’s annual State of the Media Report 2012 notes that when combined with their web traffic, newspapers are the top source for eleven of sixteen topics typically associated with civic involvement, including taxes, zoning and development, and local government. Television newscasts, though not necessarily the stations’ Websites, are by far the preferable choice for weather, breaking news, and
traffic, which are historical strengths for the broadcast medium. Noted Pew in its annual report: “In other words, local TV draws a mass audience largely around a few popular subjects; local newspapers attract a smaller cohort of citizens but for a wider range of civically oriented subjects.” These findings are not surprising. As this examination shows, few to no outlets other than those historically print-based routinely cover local government and other civic issues.

Converging the streams

The Pew findings also nod to the ongoing issue of convergence, the idea that the various media streams – broadcast and print – are combining through technology. In looking at the news audience, the annual report suggests news consumers are not necessarily abandoning print-style journalism or the nightly newscast for the Web, but rather mixing media depending on their wants and needs. Noted the Pew Report: “Contrary to much of the conventional understanding of how people learn about their communities, Americans turn to a wide range of platforms to get local news and information, and where they turn varies considerably depending on the subject matter and their age.”

Traditional news media have been engaged for more than a decade in moving to multiple delivery platforms, a process that routinely has been described as media convergence. Convergence has been defined and examined in various ways. In some cases, convergence has been defined as partnerships between traditional print and electronic outlets, such as newspapers teaming up with or starting their own broadcast operations. These can operate out of “merged” newsrooms that present information in both traditional formats as well as online. In other cases, convergence has been studied
as a melding of streams of information on Internet Websites, such as video, text, photos, sound, interactive graphics, and other elements being displayed digitally through the same news outlet, with individual journalists producing all or most of the elements.

In both cases, though approached from different perspectives, convergence has been viewed as an economic marriage, however uneasy for some, between the legacy media of print and broadcast. In some cases, the economic forces driving convergence have been seen as threats, such as declining newspaper readership or television viewership because of rising Web use. In other cases, the same forces energizing convergence efforts have been viewed as opportunities to gain new readers or viewers and offered exciting new ways to tell compelling stories.

In a recent example of convergence, News Corporation Chief Executive Rupert Murdoch combined the ideas of threat and opportunity in announcing the company’s “Daily,” a digital-only news publication designed specifically for Apple’s iPad. Murdoch, during the news conference, said, “We can and we must make the business of news gathering and editing viable again. . . . We have license to experiment, a commitment to innovate and an ability to evolve and respond to our customers’ needs.” The “Daily” is based on convergence themes of combining the elements of traditional print and broadcast, including “360-degree video,” written news reports, and interactive features such as viewer comment, puzzles, and games. In addressing questions two years before the launch of Murdoch’s Daily experiment, former New York Times Editor Bill Keller noted traditional media outlets, including his own, were under increasing pressure from Web-based competition. But, he said he was confident “the market would find a way” for strong journalism to continue.
Convergence can loosely be defined as “some combination of technologies, staffs and geography, among the previously distinct provinces of print, television and online media.” Convergence, at its core, is the combination of media or methods “to develop a new, but different method of news distribution.” Several studies have used this definition to examine how convergence has been used to form partnerships between print and broadcast news entities. Interestingly, this is evident only in Wood County, with the *Sentinel-Tribune* reaching an agreement with a television partner. No such partnerships were identified with Geauga County outlets, though Cleveland.com does have both television and radio partners based in Cleveland. How journalists and newsrooms have adapted to convergence is beyond the scope of this study, but this examination does provide insight into what the issues of convergence mean to news presented to the audience.

The demand for online news means the number of newspapers that also publish an online edition has grown exponentially in the past two decades. Likewise, nearly every U.S. commercial television station has a website. For newspapers, online editions often include features beyond the print stories and pictures in the paper edition. Researchers Pablo Boczkowski and Martin De Santos found that the online sites influenced the print version, discovering homogenization between the print and online versions of two Argentine newspapers. In other words, the location of stories and the way stories were covered tended to mirror each other from the print to online versions. The changes for newspaper and broadcast news Internet editions, however, go beyond the interactivity of the content. Eugenia Mitchelstein and Boczokski declared in 2009 that online news sites are now “between tradition and change.” They found the principles
behind newsgathering have remained the same, but the line between what is considered broadcast and print styles have blurred online. Scholars and media consumers expect this type of convergence “to create a new world of hybrid media content encompassing e-commerce, information, games, music, movies, and advertising.” Beyond the redefinition of what news organizations are expected to provide, journalists working in converged newsrooms on converged content must re-evaluate how they report and even learn new terminology for the reporting that they do. Further, journalists can no longer be specialists in one type of medium; each must be able to gather content, edit pictures and video, and “deliver the news via several platforms.” The ideas of convergence are particularly seen in social media, where there is no practical difference between the Tweets or Facebook postings of a newspaper, broadcast station, or audience member, other than in the content conveyed.

The digital landscape in Geauga and Wood counties

All of these issues are taking place to one degree or another in the news landscapes in Wood and Geauga. Communications researchers Louisa Ha and Ling Fang found in surveying Northwest Ohio residents that as Internet users became more experienced (and therefore more comfortable) with the medium, the amount of time they spent with traditional media dropped, meaning the digital streams had a displacement effect. In other words, because time remains the one commodity that is an absolute, finite resource, those with access, skills, and inclination were consuming numerous news outlets, print, broadcast, and online, with attention to some likely coming at a cost to the attention of others. This phenomenon is evident in both the Pew research and the Northwest Ohio study.
What the national numbers do not reflect without significant parsing, nor do Ha and Fang, is the extraordinary size of the audience attracted by both the Toledo Blade and the Plain Dealer for their digital operations and what this means in terms of the public sphere and the economic viability of public affairs information. Both operations straddle their markets, amassing astonishing amounts of traffic. For instance, in the Cleveland market, the top four commercial television stations combined attract just more than half of the audience of Cleveland.com, 2.59 million estimated unique monthly visitors to the Plain Dealer’s Cleveland.com’s 4.3 million visitors. The actual numbers of visitors to the sites are much higher. Unique monthly visitors are defined as those who visit the site once during a month. Many, obviously, go the site multiple times during a month or even several times a day. But, for the purpose of Web analytics, which are widely used to determine advertising rates, a site’s audience often is measured by unique monthly visitors. Newspapers nationwide have been, in relative terms, wildly successful in using digital technology to expand their traditional reach, in some ways much more so than their broadcast brethren.

Why then is there – as has been questioned by no one and raised by nearly everyone interested in journalism – an economic crisis in the newspaper industry, with shuttered plants, laid-off journalists, and as Plain Dealer reporter Scott notes, a “cloud hanging over” the medium? This is an economic question that will be addressed in more depth later, but this chapter does provide some insight into the thin relationship between much of the audience and their news Websites, which can be partially explained by the fact that with only a few exceptions, the sites, as other researchers have found, tend to mirror their traditional antecedents rather than broaden or deepen them.
Table No. 3.1 breaks down the news Websites for each market. The chart includes numbers for site referrals. This is defined by alexa.com, the site tracking service used as the base source for the numbers, as the Website immediately visited by users going to the Website being tracked. For instance, a viewer who clicks on a headline on a Facebook post is said to have been “referred” to the site by Facebook. As the table reveals, broadcast stations overall are getting a far higher percentage of referrals from Facebook than from the Google search engine. Print-based news outlets continue to get the vast majority of their referrals from Google. Pew’s State of the Media addressed this trend only from a high level, noting that social media were becoming an increasingly important part of the matrix of how news outlets get their traffic.\(^{47}\) There are two reasons for this disparity between broadcast-based Websites and print-based: first, almost without exception, the broadcast outlets are using Facebook much more than their print counterparts, and, in the inverse of Website traffic, broadcast outlets, overall, have far more Facebook followers. The impact of social media on the public sphere and its potential and pitfalls associated with public affairs journalism is discussed in Chapter 5.
Table No. 3.1. Website leaders in Geauga and Wood counties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Visitors¹</th>
<th>Pay Wall</th>
<th>Rank² (referrals)</th>
<th>Facebook³ (referrals)</th>
<th>Google³ (referrals)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cleveland Metro Market</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Geauga County)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cleveland.com</td>
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<td>937</td>
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<td>NA</td>
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<td><strong>Toledo Metro Market</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Wood County)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

¹ = The numbers are given in unique monthly visitors and are either self-reported, as is the case of Cleveland.com, or derived from a matrix based on the rankings reported by alexa.com.

² = Rank is the listing order of overall popularity of the Web site as determined by alexa.com, which uses a formula of overall traffic counts as well as average page views per day over the past three months. Cleveland.com, for instance, on the day these figures were taken was the 937th most popular Website in the United States. By comparison, www.nytimes.com, was the 32nd most popular in the United States. The rankings, as a reflection of rolling snap shots of Web traffic, change routinely depending on the news and other factors, which draws higher audience, but the order of rankings within the market are remarkably stable.

³ = The numbers are percentages of what alexa.com refers to as the “Clickstream,” which is defined as the site visitors were on immediately preceding the site being measured. For instance, visitors clicking on a search result in Google that took them to Cleveland.com, would be counted as referrals. The percentage does not measure all traffic, but only those who came to the site from somewhere else.

*=Not Available.

**= The site is unusual in that it gets little traffic outside the United States. While its U.S. ranking on alexa.com puts the site higher than Foxtoledo, its overall global ranking is far below that of the television station. The traffic figure is a self-reported number from the sent-trib manager, which was confirmed by controlling for the disparity between domestic and global rankings on alexa.com.
**Geauga County websites**

The content of the websites was examined, where possible, for the four weeks prior to the school shooting in Chardon. This was done in an attempt to determine public affairs coverage in a more routine period and to determine whether technology expanded, restricted, or had little impact on public affairs information available. Overall, this examination revealed that the Websites, despite some signs of convergence, largely reflect the content offered through their traditional counterparts and that, in Geauga County in particular, the digital landscape, in fact, offered less local public affairs information than the traditional media mix. This is largely because the main providers of county coverage, the geographically based weeklies, are not as digitally robust as their daily print and broadcast brethren.

**Cleveland.com**

The *Plain Dealer* provides the majority of content for Cleveland.com, though the site is operated as a nominally separate business and includes content from another subsidiary, Sun News, a string of community newspapers in suburbs surrounding Cleveland. The site offers both locally produced videos as well as those from the Associated Press.

Despite its top 1,000 ranking in the United States and wide reach, the Website does little more than reflect its print offerings when it comes to regional coverage. For instance, prior to the shooting, Chardon rarely made Cleveland.com. Aside from a few community event announcements and high school sports scores and short game reports supplied by its weekly subsidiary, the most recent mention of Chardon was in November 2011 about the reopening of the Chardon Wal-Mart after a bomb threat. This came from
the newspaper’s metro desk, not the weekly operation. The Sun News operations, through its *Chagrin Solon Sun* weekly, do offer some coverage of three communities in Geauga County, Bainbridge, Russell, and South Russell Township. The weekly does not have its own Web presence but is nested under the umbrella Cleveland.com in a “West Geauga” section.

The majority of the coverage consists of community announcements and the occasional feature, though these sometimes deal with traditional public affairs topics such as political races. For instance, in the month of February 2012, nineteen items were posted in the local news section of West Geauga. Of these, twelve could be classified as community announcements dealing with either local institutions or businesses. Typical headlines read: “Aileen Gips of Chagrin Falls to present herb program at Bainbridge Library,” and “West Geauga Library in Chester to hold program on chocolate, including samples.”

Yet, there are some postings that would fall into the general category of public affairs reporting. For instance, on February 2, an intriguing headline announced that “Bainbridge residents teed off with Tanglewood Lake Association.” The story, itself, however, was far more sedate, with reporting standards below that of the *Plain Dealer*. The association and the residents, it turns out, are one and the same. The group of homeowners had voted two years before to buy an adjacent golf course for $1 million, requiring a special yearly assessment of $300. Some residents were now circulating a petition challenging the assessment. The story quoted one source, the association president, and had this as its second, unattributed, paragraph: “The board’s goal is to carry out the wishes of the 573 residential units that voted to purchase the property when
the former golf course owner had financial problems in July 2009. The story did not quote any association members but did cite a letter of protest that had been signed by some of them.

*News-herald.com*

The *News-Herald* print staff provides the majority of content for the Website, which largely is a version of the print editions. The site is updated after its print offerings hit the street, except for breaking news considered of area-wide importance. The Website includes videos, both locally produced and from the Associated Press.

The site offers much deeper and broader coverage of its southern neighboring county than any of the media based in Cleveland, though it does not divide coverage into individual communities, as does Cleveland.com. For the four weeks prior to the Chardon shooting, news-herald.com posted 104 items that could be at least nominally seen as related to Geauga County. Of those, fifty-one were sports, the vast majority of which were scores and game summaries, and twenty-four were community announcements. Typical announcements included an informational meeting aimed at attracting vendors for the Chardon Square Farmers Market and a round-up of local pancake breakfasts that included some Geauga County venues. Sixteen stories could be broadly classified as public affairs-oriented. These mostly consisted of meeting coverage of county boards and agencies and Chardon schools or government. For instance, the newspaper provided a report from a meeting in Chardon City Hall to discuss the formation of the Geauga County Opiate Task Force.
Cleveland market broadcast

Geauga County hosts no television stations. None of the Cleveland stations routinely cover public affairs in the county, though all occasionally venture into the area when they perceive the news is of sufficient area-wide interest. This almost always involves crime or human interest. The main radio news player in the market, all-talk WTAM, posts little local coverage on its Website, tending to mirror what the television stations cover and dipping into Geauga County only for stories that attract wide regional or national attention.

Fox8, which holds a slim lead in the digital broadcast market, has a rich Website, updated frequently and featuring a variety of both locally produced videos and those supplied by the CNN news service. The station does almost no public affairs coverage, with the exception of the occasional court, accident, or crime story. Neither does the station provide high school or local college sports coverage, concentrating its digital presence almost exclusively on local and national professional sports. In the four weeks before the Chardon shooting, the station posted one Geauga County-centered news story, the sentencing of a county woman in the drunken driving death of a popular Geauga County judge who had been struck while bicycling. Two postings in its community-oriented, My Town section, which primarily consists of short announcements of community events, dealt with events in Geauga County towns, both supplied by a former reporter for the station, Jacqui Smith Jovic, who started a non-profit consulting group. She launched the Women Empowerment Board, she said on her Website, after “covering negative stories motivated her to try and make a positive impact on the community.”
Like Fox8, ABC affiliate WEWS offers a rich Website, with its homepage focusing mostly on Cleveland news and events. The site breaks down news by county, including Geauga County. Prior to the Chardon shooting, the station posted three stories out of the county: the sentencing of the woman charged in the drunken driving death of the local judge; an Amish teen-ager abandoning “Wally the horse” at the Wal-Mart in Middlefield, and a fire in Russell Township that damaged a two-story home.

WOIO has the smallest digital presence of any of the Cleveland metro news outlets and its Web presence appears to be an afterthought, reflecting but not wholly supporting its newscasts. Many of the Web reports are thin summaries of news items, many not accompanied by photos or videos. The station categorizes its coverage into geographical groups by city and town, rather than county. The offered list includes no Geauga County communities. Like the other broadcast operations, WOIO rarely reports on Geauga County and when it does it tends to focus on the odd and the criminal. Prior to the Chardon shooting, WOIO posted two stories during the study period stemming from Geauga County: the sentencing of the woman in the judge’s death and the strange appearance of Wally the horse at the Chardon Wal-Mart. For instance, on November 3, 2011, the station ran this report under the headline: “Issue 2 sign scandal in Geauga County:”

GEAUGA COUNTY, OH (WOIO) - A scandal over Issue 2 signs in Geauga County.

As Tuesday’s election draws near, Issue 2 remains controversial. The issue deals with collective bargaining rights and the possible repealing of what was once called Senate Bill 5.

On Route 422 in Parkman, someone has been taking down the Vote No on Issue 2 signs and replacing them with Vote Yes on Issues 2 and 3.
WKYC’s Website content primarily comes from its newscasts, including posting stories that were used on air, rather than re-editing video for Web stories. It breaks “local news” into two broad categories, Greater Cleveland and Akron/Canton. The station has a partnership for video production with WOIO and a local news partnership with the Plain Dealer, though the latter was not in evidence during the study period. The station nearly exactly mirrored the other stations in the market for coverage of the county, including the woman sentenced in the drunken driving death of the local judge.

*Geauga County print weeklies*

As noted in Chapter 2, the weekly newspapers based in the county provide the bulk of public affairs journalism. The weeklies have widely divergent uses for the Web. The Chesterland News, for instance, has no Website, and the Geauga Times-Courier uses the Internet as a promotional tool. The Times-Courier posts three headlines a week, which are nested with two other weeklies run by the same company under the domain name of www.chagrinvalleytimes.com. The Maple Leaf, however, has a deep, rich Website, including staff-produced videos, spaces for comment (which are not routinely used, as will be discussed in the following chapter), and coverage between print cycles of breaking news, including extensive reports on the Chardon shooting, the sentencing of the woman in the drunken driving death, and other stories. The Website was named the top independent site in 2012 by the Ohio Newspaper Association.

The site is the only news outlet in either county to have a pay wall, though much of the content is available through a sign-in process. It also is, perhaps, the best example of convergence in either market, with each of its three full-time journalists expected to contribute in some fashion to the Website. Cassandra Shofar, an energetic 28, is a
journalism graduate of Bowling Green State University who worked two years for the 
News-Herald. Like the Plain Dealer’s Scott, she felt a cloud hanging over the newsroom, 
and she started looking around for other opportunities. She briefly considered public 
relations. “Things did not look like they were going well; it was just depressing,” she 
said. “I thought about PR, but that’s going over to the dark side for journalists – it would 
have to be a really good job.”62 In addition to content-editing stories and covering her 
own community beat, she does most of the Maple Leaf’s social media and stars with 
Sports Editor Jamie Ward in a weekly Web video promoting the stories coming up in that 
week’s print edition.

Owner/Editor John Karlovek said he has “not experienced any issues” with a pay 
site, noting that officially the site has 6,000 or so paid subscribers. However, only 
between 400 and 500 of those are Web-only subscribers. Access to the Website comes as 
part of the print subscription. Karlovek launched the site in 2009, both in hopes of 
capturing some advertising revenue and in response to protests from those who had 
moved from the area but wanted the newspaper. Out-of-county mailing costs, he said, are 
“outrageous.”63

Wood County websites

It is easier to get public affairs information by ambling through the digital 
landscape in Wood County than in Geauga. This is for two reasons: The six-day-a-week 
Sentinel-Tribune posts most, but not all, of its local offerings and the Toledo Blade 
provides much deeper coverage of its neighbor than does the Plain Dealer. Further, the 
television stations in the Toledo market do more coverage in the county than do their 
Cleveland counterparts in Geauga County. Like the Plain Dealer, the Blade sits atop the
digital metro market but without the overwhelming numbers. In fact, the four commercial television stations combined easily outdistance the Blade in terms of total audience, 2.36 million unique visitors to just more than 1 million.

Websites in Wood County, where possible, were examined for Wood County public affairs information for the four weeks prior to a highway accident March 1, 2012, that resulted in the death of three Bowling Green State University sorority sisters. Like the Chardon school shooting, the incident was widely covered by all the metro outlets as well as many national news operations.

Toledoblade.com

The Blade site, like Cleveland.com, generally reflects its print edition on its Website, though it offers expanded Associated Press headlines, an “Around the Web” section with links to a variety of other news sites, as well as AP and locally produced videos. Unlike the Plain Dealer, the Blade offers no community forums, and does not attempt to parse its stories into community sections. The Blade, however, did launch during the course of this study an experiment in “hyper-local” coverage with back-to-back launches of “Our Town Sylvania,” a community located in Lucas County, which has Toledo as its seat and is home to the Blade.\

The Blade offers significantly more coverage of its suburb than does the Plain Dealer, largely reflecting its print edition. For instance in the month of February 2012, which avoided the March primary election coverage in Ohio as well as a the student deaths, the Website posted forty-two stories, an average of 1.4 stories or briefs a day, that could broadly be classified as public affairs, the vast majority dealing with Wood County crime and court proceedings. For instance, the Blade’s regional reporter, Jennifer Feehan,
provided an extensive report on two unrelated deaths on the same night in a Perrysburg motel. The Website also hosted sixty-one Wood County-related sports stories, an average of 2.1 per day for the month. The sports average was aided by Bowling Green State University’s 9-0 men’s basketball run during the examination period.

Sent-trib.com

The Sentinel-Tribune was nearly a decade behind many daily newspapers, launching its Website in 2007. The site mirrors its print offerings, with sections on lifestyles, letters to the editor, sports, news, and the like. Overall, the site hosts between thirty-five and forty-five items daily, though only a small portion of those, an average of 6.7, could be classified as news or public affairs. The remainder are sports briefs, community announcements, obituaries, letters to the editor, lifestyle stories such as recipes, and the like. The site is notable for not having either locally or nationally produced videos, despite a news partnership with television station Foxtoldeo. The partnership is not without worth, Editor Miller notes, but added, “They steal more from us than we steal from them.” The site, however, does host the only locally produced news radio show, the Dave Horger Report, which is chunked into five to six sections and posted daily as audio files.

Assistant Publisher Concannon said the newspaper’s Web strategy is to leverage the technology where it helps to build audience and advertising. She meets weekly with the Internet team, consisting of the city editor, a sports writer who believes in tweeting regularly, and the newspaper’s sole Web-only advertising representative. Miller remains steadfastly in charge of the news operation, and Concannon said she rarely meddles in what the newsroom decides to post to the Website and when. Most of her initiatives deal
with ongoing digital programs, such as “Sports Zone,” which collects local community league reports and an interactive mapping program connected to the annual garage sale weekend. “We want to be in the digital world as appropriate to help communicate with the community and the community with us,” she said.  

Toledo market broadcast

Like Geauga County, Wood has no television station licensed within its geographical borders. Yet, public affairs coverage on station websites is much deeper, in relative terms, than in Geauga County. Radio, as in Cleveland, with the exception of the Dave Horger Report, remains a distant digital player, with market leader all-talk WSPD-AM1370 posting one to two local stories a day, most focusing on Toledo. The station, however, like its television counterpart, does appear to dip into Bowling Green and Wood County more often than the Cleveland all-talk station reaches into Geauga County. For instance, the top story on April 3, 2012, was a report of a new partnership between the BGSU criminal justice program and the Ohio Attorney General’s Office.

WTOL, the broadcast digital Toledgo market leader, offers a rich Web presence, both reflecting what it presents on the air and going beyond through posting full press releases in some cases and stories from its media partner, the Blade. Unlike the other stations in this study, for instance, WTOL routinely posts snippets from its morning shows featuring interviews from local segments, including the director of a Wood County junior high school launching its spring musical. The station also uses its Web presence to advance its regional coverage, again unlike the other stations in either market. Between March 13, 2012, and February 21, 2012, the period which could be covered by the site’s search function, the station posted at least thirty-nine items that could be classified as
public affairs information connected to Wood County, an average of 1.8 items a day, or more than the Blade. The count did not include coverage of the highway deaths of the three BGSU students but did include several items connected to Wood County visits by Republican presidential candidates. Only five sports items, however, were posted during the same period, reflecting the station’s overall concentration on news rather than sports.

Foxtoledo also has a deep site that goes beyond what it offers in its normal broadcasting, small evidence toward a convergence of another type – collecting the kinds of content traditionally produced by the different media. For instance, the site includes a full community calendar and area obituaries that are part of a national site called tributes.com. The station also offers “Fox Fugitives,” a listing of area suspects wanted by the U.S. Marshal’s Service. Foxtoledo, however, offers significantly less Wood County coverage than the two digital market leaders. Between February 21, 2012, and March 13, 2012, the station posted twelve public affairs-related items and eleven sports items relating to Wood County and its communities.

NBC affiliate WNWO is the only station in either market to prominently feature viewer involvement, including top reader comments and submitted videos and photos on its home page. The site, however, makes surprisingly little use of images. Home page headlines provide no indication of whether stories are attached to videos or other art. The site is on par with Foxtoledo in terms of Wood County coverage. Between March 13, 2012, and February 21, 2012, the site posted twenty-one public affairs items and twelve sports items. The station is the only news outlet in the market to nest its coverage of BGSU under a separate category.
Unlike WNWO, 13ABC heavily emphasizes video and minimizes viewer interaction. Headlines on the homepage carry icons indicating whether there is accompanying video. News is categorized only into the broad areas of local, regional, and national. Wood and surrounding counties are considered local, and regional consists primarily of state news. The station’s Web postings are remarkably similar to Fox and WNWO, posting nineteen public affairs-related stories between March 13, 2012, and February 21, 2012. 13ABC, however, posted nearly double the number of sports stories, twenty-two.

Wood County print weeklies

For Deb Buker, the editor of the weekly Perrysburg Journal, the Web is a relatively minor adjunct to her weekly dash to publication. She uses technology mostly to get information from a few freelancers and local agencies. “People still like the hard copy,” she said. Perrysburg and the Rossford Record Journal are nested under a single site with links to all four weekly publications, two of which are in a different county, run by the same family-owned company. The weeklies rarely post breaking news to the Web, though occasionally post updates on Facebook. The site has no space for comments or user-submitted information. Viewers are invited to “press your refresh/reload button” if they go to the Website and see “last week’s information.” The North Baltimore News has no Website.

Digital-only news outlets

Digital-only news providers have been part of the information landscape since the Internet went commercial, with most of the attention paid to large aggregators rather than individual producers. Yahoo! and Google News, for instance, create little of their own
content but have remained consistently in the top 20 United States news sites. The relative success of a few digital-only operations, such as Politico.com, which has been in existence for more than a decade, was a source of initial optimism for many who looked toward the medium as the panacea for a revived public sphere and an unhitching of journalism from its corporate yoke.

The national digital-only news operations, including the Drudge Report and The Huffington Post aside from politico.com, spurred some attempts at more local sites. Patch.com, for instance, an America Online subsidiary, was designed to cover smaller communities (and rescue the ailing giant’s fortunes) by offering local audiences to national advertisers as well as procure a portion of the estimated $100 billion-a-year local advertising spend. Patch.com has seventeen sites operating in Ohio, of which seven are located near Cleveland, in such communities as Cleveland Heights and Cuyahoga Falls. None are in Geauga County. America Online lost $11.8 million in 2011, mostly through supporting Patch.

Small, locally oriented sites are tending to aggregate together, partly in response to Patch. Authenticallylocal.com, for instance, is a conglomeration of fifty-seven independently owned sites across the nation, ranging from Santa Barbara, California, to Galion, Ohio. The umbrella group combines efforts on technology and other issues. None of them is in Wood or Geauga counties.

It is, in fact, extraordinarily difficult to identify non-traditional information sites for either county. For instance, www.geauganews.com, was the eighteenth result returned in a Google search for the term “Geauga County news,” behind the Maple Leaf, three stories from Cleveland market television stations (one from June 9, 2011), the
News-Herald, and a variety of government and national sites that mention the word “Geauga.” Notably absent from the list was Cleveland.com. A similar search for Wood County news on Google returned the Sentinel-Tribune as the No. 2 result, behind only the national aggregator, topix.com.

Geauganews founder Arnold recognized the digital shadow hanging over his native county, and his Website is designed to help brighten the landscape by creating a central gathering place for Geauga County residents. He purposefully chose to avoid the types of information that traditionally would be classified as public affairs news. He actively opposes crime and court stories, and the site carries no routine government, school, or agency updates. Yet, he routinely refers to his digital publication as a newspaper. “I won’t read my own paper,” he said, “if the main headline is, ‘10 people died in a fire.’”

The site has no paid staff, and both Arnold and Hunziker say they had yet to pull significant money from the site, with most revenue from advertising going to overhead. Arnold’s mother is the official editor. Aside from the Website founders, the main contributors are local enthusiasts in a variety of categories such as pets, food, and recreation. The site averages one to two new posts a day, most dealing with upcoming charitable and community events. Though primarily locally focused, the site also includes a variety of self-help columns and one-off ramblings. For instance, Patty Arnold, Arnold’s mother and site editor, posted a column about watching the Super Bowl. Here is a listing under the “latest news” category, which gives a sense of both the frequency of updating the site and the type of content. The posting date is given in parenthesis:

- Ride on at Fieldstone Farm Therapeutic Riding Center (April 3).
• Today is World Autism Awareness Day (April 2).
• Walking: Stay Fit and Improve Your Health (April 1).
• This Week’s Top 3 Posts (March 31).
• Meet the Team (March 31).
• 3 New Geauga News Features You Should Try Out (March 30).
• 5 Incredible Local Food Sources You Might Not Know About (March 30).
• Fan of the Week: Roberta Stealey (March 29).
• Blue Ribbons and Balloon Launch in Burton (March 29).
• Lake-Geauga County Young Democrats (March 28).
• Easter Day Buffet and Horse Drawn Carriage Rides (March 28).
• The 5 Pillars of Burgerdom (March 27).

Of the twelve postings, five were produced by Hunziker or Arnold. Of those five, three could be classified as promotions for the site. Arnold acknowledged the site is a work in progress. He launched it, he says, in a single night, buying the domain name (he was mildly shocked geauganews.com was available) and working from a Wordpress template. Since then, he has added comment, search, and archiving capabilities. The site introduced its first video – the launching of white and blue balloons during a World Autism Day event in Burton, Ohio – on April 3, 2012. He was explaining his “total disdain for traditional news” when Hunziker gently interrupted. 81 Though a Geauga County native, she was not aware the Geauga Times-Leader daily newspaper existed, and she believes the county is adequately covered for traditional news by the Maple Leaf and the News-Herald. “We are not so anti-news, but who wants to read another newspaper? The more positive we are, the more people will connect with that. We just want to be the source for positive information – to feel good about doing business and living in Geauga County.” 82

The battle for North Baltimore

North Baltimore’s Miklovec has a different philosophy, though he says he does try to put “a positive spin on things.” 83 He sees his site as a true alternative to the printed
North Baltimore News, the longtime weekly delivered in the area. He runs a regular route through town, both driving and walking, a digital camera either around his neck or in the seat beside him. His site is operated with proprietary software and hosting that he contracts from an out-of-state provider for 600 dollars a month. While the site has options for posting in categories, such as sports, news, and letters, he prefers to post everything on the home page as a running stream of headlines with links to the full stories. This gives viewers an experience much like that of early newspaper readers, where they saw items of various types on a page next to each other, often without attribution or explanation. For instance, viewers on April 5, 2012, to Miklovec’s Website would have seen an announcement of a new historic photo exhibit at the local historical society sitting on top of a posting headlined, “All is Forgiven,” which was a column submitted by a local pastor.

Unlike Arnold and Hunziker, he strives for a traditional mix of content normally found in a community newspaper. In March 2012, for instance, he posted 112 items, or an average of 3.61 items a day. By contrast, a random sampling of four issues of the weekly North Baltimore News contained 116 items. When comparing the content, Miklovec and the News were comparable. Both provided information almost exclusively on North Baltimore and the neighboring township of Henry. Table No. 3.2 breaks down the content.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Community(^{\dagger}) announcements</th>
<th>Sports</th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Columns</th>
<th>other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NBnewsxpress</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{\dagger}\) = The definitions for each category:

**Community announcements**: Short event, fundraising, or other information from business, church, community service, or charitable groups.

**Sports**: Reports from school or community teams or leagues.

**Government**: Actions, issues, or meetings associated with law enforcement, schools, or government units such as township trustees or village council.

**Columns**: Either submitted or staff-produced opinion or lifestyle articles.

**Other**: Items that defied placement in the above categories. Examples include a variety of promotional items for the Website or news outlet.

The striking similarity between the newspaper and the Website is no accident.

Miklovec and the News often share freelancers, such as those submitting sports reports.

Milovec has made a concerted effort to reconnect to the local power structure. The North Baltimore Public Library, for instance, carries this advertisement on its home page: “Get Local news fast with North Baltimore’s very own Internet news service. TheNBXpress.com.\(^{\dagger}\) If you have items for the TheNBXpress, you can drop those off here at the Main Desk.”\(^{87}\) While the homepage makes no mention of the local printed weekly, the library does carry the News, as well as archives back issues.

Other institutions in town have been highly accommodating but continue to insist on sending information to both him and the News at the same time. “They don’t want to see the local paper go away,” he said.\(^{88}\) Both are similarly staffed. The sole employee for the News is Bonnie Nagy, a former North Baltimore school teacher.\(^{89}\) The News has an estimated 850 subscribers. Based on industry pass-along readership standards, it is

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\(^{\dagger}\) Miklovec cringes when asked about the exact domain name for his Website. After some initial waffling, he eventually decided on www.NBnewsxpress.com as the permanent domain, but reluctant to give up any potential traffic he redirected all traffic from the several permutations of that address the main site.
reasonable to estimate the total readership of the weekly at about 1,912, or akin to Miklovec’s estimated 1,800 monthly unique visitors. The Web operator’s efforts have not gone unnoticed. In the four-week sample of the News, Nbnewsxpress.com was mentioned three times, including this item in the April 7, 2011, edition: “CORRECTION – The North Baltimore News would like to extend a ‘Thanks’ to the NBXPRESS for the photo of the protesters (during the Governors visit) in last week’s N.B. News. We regret this error.”

The candidates’ forum in February 2012 was designed as a promotion for the Website (a large television screen hooked up to a computer constantly displayed the site during the event), a public affairs event for the community, and a dig at the North Baltimore News. “They never do anything for the community,” Miklovec said. If commissioner candidate Krukemyer seemed discomfited by its unusual sponsor, incumbent Republican Ohio state Representative Randy Gardner was not. During his allotted five minutes to speak, he began by praising the Website. “The North Baltimore Express calls and people come,” he told the crowd. “This shows small towns matter and clearly the North Baltimore Express matters.”

The digital landscape and the public sphere

The digital extensions of the legacy, or traditional, media have dramatically expanded audiences but not necessarily broadened or deepened the amount or type of public affairs information available to an increasingly digitally minded public. The Websites largely follow the lead of their media bases. Hence, the Plain Dealer’s flight from Geauga County is reflected equally in both its digital and print products. This is not surprising. Both television and print are using, mostly, the same resources to support both
overlapping worlds, traditional and digital. Yet, this is not to say the Websites and other
digital offerings of public affairs information have not expanded the availability of the
information. Clearly, they have. The Sentinel-Tribune, for instance, by making most of its
offerings available online has built a substantial following for its geographically centered,
public affairs-oriented type of journalism, providing a one-stop space for all things Wood
County. In addition, there is some evidence of convergence happening in both markets,
with traditional broadcast stations adopting some print techniques and print picking up
some elements historically seen only in broadcasting, such as video and breaking news.
Further, as seen in the Pew research, the audience is merging as well, using the streams of
information available to it to gather what it wants and needs at any given moment.

Traditional opinion leaders appear to be doing the same, though perhaps on a
subconscious level. As noted in Chapter 1, when asked to evaluate the perceived impact
of the media, traditionally defined opinion leaders in both counties privileged print
operations. This was not the case when asked about the most effective means of
communicating with both their existing constituencies as well as reaching out to new
potential members of their groups. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of respondents (85
percent) labeled communicating to potential customers, members or constituents as
important or very important. Yet, when asked to define the best way to achieve that goal,
a majority of respondents said the most effective means of doing that was direct
communication, through their own Websites (49.3 percent), e-mails or newsletters (35.6
percent), and in a somewhat surprising finding, through in-person contact, such as
meetings and community gatherings (60.1 percent).
The new entrants to the digital landscape, www.nbexpressnews.com and www.geauganews.com, are attempting to build audiences with different approaches and philosophies. It is interesting to note that where daily journalism is weakest, Geauga County, the only digital-entrant to the news landscape has chosen to, for all intents and purposes, not cover traditionally defined news at all but provide local “positive” information. As will be discussed in more depth in chapters 7 and 8, this is likely for three reasons: news coverage is difficult work, best and most easily accomplished with a specific set of skills and a certain mindset; the economics of journalism is a largely unseen but predominant force guiding coverage, and the make-up, personalities, and motivations of Web entrepreneurs defy generalization. They each have their own reasons for doing what they are doing, and this translates into the type of sites they are offering to their communities. Hence, Miklovec perceives he is both helping his community by providing news and thumbing his nose at a former employer, while Arnold and Hunziker are filling what they perceive as a need to provide information on community institutions beyond the governing agencies. Both, however, are doing so, while undoubtedly sincere in their higher motives, for economic purposes. They want to make money.

From a high view, the trend is clear. Digital will continue to grow, creating an increasingly vexing paradox for representative democracy. The overwhelming amount of public affairs coverage in both counties is being done by the newspapers. Even as their audience grows online, their print circulation drops or stagnates, continuing to threaten their ongoing existence. Television, with traditional audience numbers that stabilized and even grew a bit in 2011, is well-positioned to build its digital offerings to broaden and deepen public affairs information through digital, social, and mobile media, but seems
reluctant to do so. The astonishing size of the digital news audience, however, likely will continue to attract new entrants, even if the current landscape offers few examples. When, how, and to what extent this will occur, of course, remains unclear.

What is clear, is the tremendous role the digital landscape has played in expanding the public sphere. The Websites have created a space where issues are discussed, debated, and where insults, jokes, and jibes are exchanged. In the process, new meaning is created from the fires of discourse. This is an imperfect and often ugly process, as revealed by the odd case of Chardon cross country runners and their contest to see who could chug the most eggnog.
Notes

1. Terry Krukemyer, interview and observation by the author, February 26, 2012, North Baltimore, OH.


5. Ibid.


7. Arnold, interview.

8. Ibid.


10. Arnold, interview.


12. Karmen Concannon, assistant publisher, the Sentinel-Tribune, interview by the author, February 24, 2012, Bowling Green, OH.

13. Michael Scott, Web report, the Cleveland Plain Dealer, interview by the author, December 8, 2011, Chardon, OH.


15. Ibid., 5.

17 Dave Miller, interview by the author, February 24, 2012, Bowling Green, OH.

18 Eugenia Siapera, “From couch potatoes to cybernaughts? The expanding notion of the audience on TV channels’ websites,” *New Media & Society* 6 no. 2 (2004): 155-172.


21 Ibid.


23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.


32 Ibid.


41 Ha and Chan-Olmsted, 621.

42 Silcock and Keith, 623.


52 Ibid.


Cassandra Shofar, news editor, *Geauga Maple Leaf*, interview by the author, February 26, 2012, Chardon, OH.

Karlovek, interview. An out-of-county subscription for the *Maple Leaf* is forty-eight-dollars a year, compared to thirty dollars for an in-county subscription. An online-only subscription is twenty dollars a year.

See http://www.ourtownsylngonia.com/


Miller, interview.


Concannon, interview.

Deb Buker, interview by the author, December 14, 2011, Perrysburg, OH.


www.patch.com. The Website’s main home page is a map of the United States with states shaded where Patch sites exist. Clicking on Ohio yields the communities where Patch sites are operating.


See, Elad Segev and Niv Ahituv, Popular Searches in Google and Yahoo!: A ‘Digital Divide’ in Information Uses?” Information Society 26, no. 1 (2010): 17-37 for an explanation of how Google and other search engines set up their matrixes for returning results. Google has become so ubiquitous in the information landscape that entire companies and careers are based on expertise dealing with search engine optimization.

Search results are notoriously fickle, yielding slightly different results on different days and even at different computers. The general trend, however, is usually remarkably stable since Google uses in its matrix not just key word matches but a variety of factors, including overall site traffic, headlines, and meta information.

Arnold, interview.


Arnold, interview.

Hunziker, interview.

Miklovec, interview.
84 Ibid.


86 Pastor Ralph J. Mineo, “All is Forgiven,” www.nbnewsxpress.com, http://www.nbnewsxpress.com/viewnews.php?newsid=5696&id=1. The posting is recitation of his sermon from the previous Sunday. The site has two or three local pastors who do this on a routine basis, as does the North Baltimore News.


88 Ibid.

89 Attempts to reach Nagy were unsuccessful. Multiple inquires with local officials and townspeople, including Miklovec and the reference librarian, produced an e-mail. Requests for a time to chat about the News were not answered.

90 Newspaper Association of America, “Trends and Numbers,” www.naa.org. Pass-along readership is designed to capture readers not counted as paid subscribers. For instance, a single subscription may be coming into a home with four residents, or a barbershop may subscribe and leave the paper out for customers. This concept is further examined in Chapter 7.

91 “Correction,” North Baltimore News, page 3, April 7, 2012. The correction, presumably, was the paper’s failure to get permission to use the photograph. Noted Miklovec: “They steal my stuff all the time. That one made me upset.”

92 Miklovec, interview.

93 Quote from Ohio state Representative Randy Gardner, from observation by the author, February 26, North Baltimore, OH.

Chapter 4: Building their own narrative

“The absurdity of the notion THIS event is newsworthy is beyond comprehension. It is EGGNOG for goodness sake.” Comment on WKYC.com

“Put somebody in charge, of watching whoever is in charge ... and at Chardon, you need someone in charge of watching whoever is in charge of watching who is in charge.” Comment on News-Herald.com

Past and current cross country runners for Chardon High School gathered on a frosty New Year’s Eve 2011 at the high school track field to take the Eggnog Challenge, an odd contest in which the athletes drank a cup of the holiday treat, ran, drank again, and then ran more. The winner was the last to vomit. Assistant Coach Mary Pat Martin captured the event on camera and produced a 16-minute video, which she posted to YouTube and provided a link from her Facebook page. Six days later, an aunt of one of the runners, a woman from Findlay, about 150 miles from Chardon, sent Martin’s Facebook post to WKYC television station in Cleveland and Chardon schools Superintendent Joe Bergant. The resulting story touched off a digital firestorm of commentary, throwing into stark relief a number of issues associated with an audience encountering the forces of journalism through time, space, and each other to create new narratives in reaction to but separate from what had been presented to them.

Participants in the event (people who traditionally are seen as sources for journalists), stakeholders in the Chardon community, and – for want of a better term – outsiders collided in an unfettered and relatively unmediated digital environment to compete over meaning. For the purpose of this study, outsiders are defined as those with no identifiable link to the community, those who either live there or who used to live
there. Was the so-called nog jog a noxious hazing? Or, was it a bit of fun, routine to the running culture? Or, was the whole thing manufactured by the technology that allowed it to be so publicly visible?

Traditional media in Geauga and Wood counties, as in the rest of the nation, have become through their digital extensions gathering places for community interaction and commentary. And it is here where the impact of daily, geographically centered, public affairs journalism is most vividly seen. This chapter examines commentary on Websites in Geauga and Wood counties, placing the issue in national context, addressing the legal and ethical issues associated with Web comment, the genetic difference between print-based Web operations as a space for comment and commercial broadcast Websites. The chapter concludes with where the future of digital commentary may lie and introduces the enormous energy being created by social media.

Audience commentary historically has been the province of the nation’s newspapers, with editors carefully selecting voices from their communities, confirming their identity, and smoothing rough linguistic edges before opening the gate to allow the citizen voice to be heard. This evolved into a genteel, thoughtful process that lagged in both time and space, separating the reaction from the event that initiated the response in the first place. A letter requires its own production on the part of the writer, requiring at least some thought to craft a coherent statement in addition to the mechanical process of putting words together on paper or computer screen. That is a process that takes time. Once the letter reaches an editor, the prose must persuade someone at the newspaper that it has some value, both in terms of idea and quality of writing. This is often a competition, since many newspapers receive more letters than they have space to present.
The inherent biases toward skill with the language, the process, itself, and limits on the number that can be printed served to quiet many dissenting and disparate voices, with the average letter writer tending to be white, male, over 50, and making an income of more than $80,000 a year.³

As noted in Chapter 2, letters remain a key part of both metro and community print operations. Few doubt the quality of individual comment is higher when it has been subjected to a professional editing process. Quality, however, is a highly subjective term. The nicety of the language is a separate issue from the quality of information imparted. The issues surrounding individual comment also are separate from the issues of mass comment. The digital landscape has created a space where the audience not only reacts to news and events, but also contributes to the narrative by providing new information, different perspectives, and a mass spectrum of judgment.⁴ This is largely in the form of conversation, with individuals both introducing their own messages and reacting to what others have posted. No question, this is a far uglier environment than the sedate, modular op-ed page. Fact, myth, stereotype, and cultural leanings are dumped into a bubbling stew without a chef.⁵

Yet, the evidence is overwhelming that the digital space has dramatically expanded the public sphere, a process not necessarily tied to a specific medium but to instances where the public wants or needs to redefine concepts. Journalism creates this opportunity, however imperfectly, and technology permits a dialogue apart from the more formal process of printed letters, public meetings, or the more undulating feedback of community members discussing issues in the grocery line and at the local pub. As noted previously, the Cleveland metro outlets have all but abandoned routine coverage of
Geauga County, preferring to parachute in to cover extraordinary news or – as in the Munson Township Egg Hunt and the eggnog episode – to create cultural narratives. Marjie Lundstrom, writing for the Poynter Institute, a journalism think tank, defines parachute journalism “as sending the dispatching of globe-trotting reporters and camera crews to the likes of Sandpoint, Idaho, and Kearney, Neb., and Union, S.C., to cover the latest breaking news.” She was writing in the context of The Economist magazine, based in Great Britain, sending a team to write a cover story on California and somehow connecting the divorce of Tom Cruise and Nichole Kidman with the state’s energy crisis. Writing in 2002, she did not envision parachute journalists dropping in from one side of a single designated market to the other. One result of this has been a digital dearth of public debate and commentary on local public affairs issues in Geauga County. Interaction does not happen spontaneously. The public sphere must be ignited by a spark, something to talk and argue about. This is the news story.

The spark, as will be seen in the eggnog affair, creates the outlines or shape of the public sphere. As a result, geography-based public affairs, as in local news involving local issues, is essential to starting the conversation, though not necessarily determinate of where the conversation ultimately will lead. While the overall amount of conversation on blade.com is far greater than on either the television outlets or sent-trib.com, only the Bowling Green daily newspaper Website showed evidence of any type of routine discussion about Wood County public affairs. In other words, coverage leads to dialogue.

Commercial broadcast Websites in both markets rarely serve as the main gathering point to discuss issues. Neither do the weekly or digital-only news outlets serve as centers for public debate. This is largely the province of daily newspapers in both
markets. The eggnog episode was, in fact, a rare uprising for Geauga County residents, serving to illustrate the effects of time, space, audience, and spark in creating the public sphere. Conversely, the eggnog story illustrates what doesn’t happen in the absence of such a spark. Indeed, an examination of the episode reveals that the station, itself, was the center of debate on its own Website while the regional daily newspaper served as the main gathering point for discussing the issue.

This examination revealed at least four conditions in order for robust debate to occur on a routine basis: A spark, something around which an audience can coalesce; a place where such conversation is expected; policies that allow relatively unfettered communication, and a sufficient mass of audience and participants to keep the sphere inflated and energized. These conditions were developed as variations suggested by Lawrence Dahlberg, who examined public discourse in online forums. This is best seen through the weekly *Geauga County Maple Leaf*, which has a robust Website though comments are rare. “Agreed,” said John a rlovich, editor and owner of the *Maple Leaf*. “I don’t know why that is. I don’t know if people don’t know how to do that. We want to encourage it.” This is likely for several reasons. The site requires registration to get beyond the home page and demands payment for some of its content. Traffic to the site is small compared with other news sites in the region, and commentators must enter a unique code to comment. Time is also a likely factor. The weekly provides wide coverage of the county but updates its Website between print cycles infrequently and on no discernible schedule. The result is that the stories posted are frequently of events that happened several days earlier. In other words, despite the *Maple Leaf*’s attention to its digital offerings, it has not developed a culture of comment on its Website.
Website commentary

Website commentary has been an issue since the advent of the World Wide Web. Spurred by a 1995 lawsuit that centered on whether Internet service providers were legally liable for comment made on their Websites by viewers, Congress sought to protect the traditional editorial function of moderating debate by crafting the Good Samaritan Clause of the 1996 Telecommunications Act.\(^9\) Lawmakers cited the potential of the web, as the content portion of the rapidly growing Internet, in expanding public debate as part of a reinvigorated public sphere. As newspapers rushed to the Web to meet ongoing market and readership challenges, they sought to incorporate the interactive nature of the medium into their news reports.\(^10\) While the Good Samaritan Clause shielded digital publishers from defamation suits sparked by third-party comment, the debate over the role of the audience and what individuals should be allowed to contribute has roared through the news industry. Rem Rieder touched a nerve with readers of *American Journalism Review* in 2010 when he suggested that newspaper publishers banish anonymous comments from their Websites, calling it “one of those beautiful times when doing the smart thing is also doing the right thing.”\(^11\) Journalists applauded his call in subsequent letters to the editor. A Philadelphia columnist bemoaned www.philly.com’s policy of allowing “itself to be used as a vehicle for anonymous haters to attack the credibility, ethics, morals and professionalism of journalists,”\(^12\) while an Athens, Georgia, writer said his newspaper’s Website comment section was “often a catalog of cowardice and contumely as people used the anonymity of cyberspace to take puerile potshots with no responsibility, substantiation or accountability.”\(^13\)

Yet, Gene Weingarten, in a vivid Pulitzer Prize-winning feature story on infant
deaths, suggested anonymous Website comments were valuable as representative of broader public opinion. He quoted several online comments associated with a *Washington Post* story about a father charged with his son’s death after forgetting the infant in a locked car on a hot summer day. One comment suggested the man “deserved the death penalty” and another “wondered whether this was the man’s way of telling his wife he didn’t really want a child.”¹⁴ Wrote Weingarten: “These comments were typical of many others, and they are typical of what happens again and again, year after year in community after community, when these cases arise.”¹⁵

These extremes – comments as a window to community thought and comments as at best judgmental diatribes and at worst hate speech – are illustrative of the debate that has taken place in the news industry after passage of the Telecommunications Act, which included the Good Samaritan clause aimed at protecting third party Internet comment. The discussion in the American news industry has involved several aspects of online comment, including whether posters should be allowed to remain anonymous; who should be allowed to post at all, and how much editing should or – legally – can be done without voiding the protection of the Samaritan clause. This debate has taken two primary paths: issues of legality and ethics. The legal issues include whether the news outlet can be held liable for defamation, copyright infringement, and whether the news outlet must turn over identifying information to law enforcement and those seeking to sue commentators.¹⁶ The ethical issue has centered on whether Internet comments should be treated the same as letters to the editor, which typically involve printing names and communities of residence after the letters have been verified and edited.¹⁷
Protecting the editorial function

The roots of the Good Samaritan clause can be traced to a New York lawsuit in which Internet pioneer Prodigy Services, Inc., was sued by a company upset with an anonymous post left on one of its bulletin boards.\(^\text{18}\) Prodigy advertised itself as a “family service” that protected members from unfettered content\(^\text{19}\) by employing moderators and using an automated filtering system. A New York court found that Prodigy was liable for the content of what users posted on its site because it exercised an editorial function similar to a newspaper. The decision sent shockwaves through the emerging Internet industry by presenting online services with a stark choice: either allow completely uncensored content or thoroughly edit content in ways similar to a newspaper editor.\(^\text{20}\) The latter was seen as an impossible task given the rising volume of Internet discussion.

Congress responded by crafting the “Good Samaritan” clause of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, part of the first major overhaul of the nation’s technologically centered communications regulations since 1934. The stated purpose of the law was to protect “a forum for a true diversity of political discourse, unique opportunities for cultural development, and myriad avenues for intellectual activity.”\(^\text{21}\) Under the law, those who maintain an Internet interactive service (such as Facebook, America Online, etc.) and those who use an interactive service to provide content to an audience but allow the audience to take part in the content through comments and other postings (such as the Plain Dealer) are presumptively protected from libel if they had no part in creating the content. Website editors may edit comments, for instance, for “material that is obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy, excessively violent, harassing, or otherwise objectionable, whether or not such material is constitutionally protected.”\(^\text{22}\)
United States Senator Ron Wyden, an Oregon Democrat, made clear policymakers’ intent of protecting the editorial function as part of the public sphere during a hearing held as part of congressional efforts to craft the Child Online Protection Act. The legislation was in response to a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that declared most of the Communications Decency Act (a portion of the Telecommunications Act) as unconstitutional under the First Amendment. During the hearing, Wyden noted:

These are new terms and the last time the Congress dealt with this issue, when the Supreme Court was done, the only thing that was left standing of that congressional effort, was the part of the law that Chris Cox and I wrote that essentially removed the risk from the good Samaritan, the person who was actually trying to do the right thing.

Comments associated with stories posted on newspaper Websites, in particular, have come under wide scrutiny. In examining comments left on the Websites of elite American newspapers, one researcher concluded they formed a new type, however disheveled, of political discourse, while another reached the same conclusion in examining more than 4,800 comments left on the Website of Scotland’s largest newspaper during the 2007 election cycle. Other scholars have suggested comments can be viewed as a new way of looking at negotiated expertise in relation to technical topics such as healthcare, as well as examining public views on corporate responsibility.

Yet, ethical issues associated with the comments have emerged as the main point of contention. Much of this debate has focused on allowing anonymous, ugly comments on news sites. Andy Schotz, chairman of the Ethics Committee for the Society of Professional Journalists, in arguing for ending the practice of anonymous comments, cited the “slime pit of prejudice” left on his newspaper’s Web site under a story about a missing seven-year-old girl. He suggested the same standard for publication on the Web.
site as the print edition. In examining print editorial sections, scholar Bill Reader noted that newspapers demanding full names and communities of origin before printing letters was a relatively new phenomenon, with the *New York Times*, for instance, accepting unsigned letters through the 1940s and other elite publications such as the *Chicago Tribune* and *Los Angeles Times* accepting initials or pseudonyms through the 1960s.\(^3^0\)

Editors began to see attributing letters as an ethical issue, arguing that comments only from those willing to be identified should be given any weight. Reader suggested this creates a “blind spot” for editors who are failing to take advantage of a practice that could build readership, circulation, and advance the cause of the public sphere.\(^3^1\)

Aside from ethical issues associated with anonymous comments, news Websites continue to face legal challenges. While protected as Good Samaritans from being sued as publishers, the legislation does not prevent them from being sued for the identities of original posters, who still are liable. Such cases have been seen in California,\(^3^2\) Delaware,\(^3^3\) Maryland,\(^3^4\) and New Hampshire.\(^3^5\) In those cases, either trial or appellant courts have sided with Website operators who deployed a variety of arguments against disclosure, including the case of a start-up Website in New Hampshire that successfully argued the state’s journalist Shield Law protected it from disclosing the identities of commentators, equating them with news sources.\(^3^6\)

Anonymous digital dialogue has been an issue since the early days of the Internet. A core argument was whether people would take part in what was seen as a brand new medium of communication if they had to provide their identities. In examining anonymous comment, researchers Stephen Rains and Craig Scott found that those who communicate anonymously do so for a variety of reasons and that many of them would
simply not take part if they had to reveal their identities. The American Association for the Advancement of Science studied anonymous communication on the Internet as early as 1997, concluding that its benefits were sufficient for policymakers to allow the majority of it to exist. The group outlined recommendations for anonymity on the Internet. They are: anonymous comment should be seen as morally neutral; that it should be considered a strong human and constitutional right; that online communities should be allowed to set their own policies on the use of anonymous communication, and that individuals should be informed about the extent to which their identity is disclosed online. The group suggested anonymous communications can be shaped by the law, education, and public awareness.

Newspapers have long wrestled with the tension between First Amendment mandates to provide the parameters of the public sphere, the business needs of their operations, and the ethical implications of unfettered comment with no allegiance to journalistic standards. Miglena Sternadori and Esther Thorson, for instance, found that anonymous comments associated with stories on a newspaper’s Website hurt the overall credibility of the newspaper. The Los Angeles Times, in a well-known experiment with reader involvement, quickly shut down its “wikitorial” attempt at having viewers craft editorials when the dialogue lapsed into profanity and name calling.

Website commentary in Wood and Geauga counties

These issues also have played out in the Cleveland and Toledo markets, with the biggest players – the Plain Dealer and the Toledo Blade – handling them differently. The overall king of comment in either market is Cleveland.com, which prominently promotes viewer involvement through a homepage list of “most commented” stories, which
routinely involve hundreds of viewers. For instance, on March 5, 2012, 244 viewers had commented on a story about a Cleveland Browns trade, and 106 viewers had commented on the Plain Dealer’s endorsement of Mitt Romney for the Republican presidential nomination. Each story, including those in the community sections, allows viewers to post comments. The site has minimal guidelines for commenting. Each comment section has buttons to “reply,” “post new [comment],” or “alert us” to inappropriate content. Viewers, however, must either create a Cleveland.com sign-in, which does not require real names, or sign in through Facebook or other social networking site.

The Blade does not feature comments on its home page, and its only recommendation engine, the name given to lists of top-used viewer items, is “most viewed.” The newspaper site changed its comment policy while this study was being conducted to allow comments only through a Facebook account, the sole news outlet in either county to choose a single social media service. “The change, aimed at improving the public discourse, will require readers to be Facebook members,” the Blade wrote in its announcement. The switch deleted previous comments associated with stories, though the change in policy, itself, ignited a long stream of protest from viewers, many of whom said they would be prefer not to comment rather than use a Facebook account.

“Epitoozy” illustrated why Internet comments have been debated and studied so long: “You mean I can’t make fun of Tex Lovera anymore? :( Seriously though it looks like I’ll be deserting the ship too. No way I’ll use my real name here. Anyway, it’s been fun. I’m going to miss almost all of you. Some of my favorite posters here are Hi-Level, Roscoe,
Dicazi, and BDM, but there are many others I will miss too." The Blade does not offer forums or other interaction on its site.

A textural analysis of the news Websites in each market reveals newspapers remain the cyber town squares, though – as will be discussed in the following chapter – this is being severely challenged by social media. Facebook postings by commercial broadcast stations are far outdistancing their print-based counterparts in terms of number of comments and interaction between commentators. This examination, where possible, looked at four consecutive weeks of Website commentary associated with coverage in Wood and Geauga counties. Two incidents were excluded from the examination – the school shooting in Chardon and the traffic deaths of three Bowling Green State University sorority sisters on their way to catch a spring break plane. Both incidents were widely covered by all the media in their respective markets and were not seen as typical. Both are addressed in Chapter 5.

Despite its overwhelming audience size and prominent attention to viewer comments, Cleveland.com is not the place where Geauga County residents converse about their own public affairs, though certainly they may be as likely as others in the market to comment on the Browns and other items of regional or national interest. During the study period, of the nineteen items posted in the “Geauga County” news category, only one had a comment associated with it. The comment was left by “Jdoe” and read: “Scott Rico and the TLA (Tanglewood Lake Association) are bullies! We were told there would be a $300.00 assessment twice. Now we learn the assessment is ongoing ... indefinitely! Homeowners/condo owners are NOT confused about which assessment they are paying! Do not insult our intelligence!” The site also has a forums feature, the only
one in either market, with more than one hundred categories, including more than fifty that are geographically based. The forums are designed to be stand-alone spaces for conversation between users, much like early electronic message boards, rather than host comments associated with a particular news story. Of the community-based forums, one is focused on Geauga County, inviting viewers to “Talk about the latest news in Geauga County, Ohio.” The forum was launched in 2005. Since then, ninety-eight threads had been started, only three of them in 2012 or 2011. The most recent post, for instance, at the time of the examination was on February 7, 2012, when “councilmike” called for a “fulltime ONLY fire dept in Russell,” contending that “our guys are too chubby and timid to effectively handle emergencies.” The only response came from momamba, “Yes Yes you are a correct very good man.”

Though not surprising, it is perhaps telling that as the Plain Dealer has withdrawn coverage from the county, the increasingly thin reporting has drawn increasingly thin commentary. The result is that many residents appear not to see Cleveland.com as a place to discuss their local public affairs. In Geauga County, this is left to the News-herald.com, the regional daily based in adjacent Lake County.

Yet, this is an anemic channel. Most of the posting entries examined during the four weeks prior to the Chardon shooting carried no comments, which was not surprising given their nature of listings and small community announcements. Some posts, however, did spur comment and debate. Among them was the story on the formation of the Geauga County Opiate Task force, which had nineteen comments, including one from “krk:” “Who cares about heroin users? You can’t stop a person’s self-destructive choices. When they overdose or get a bad fix they are just doing the rest of us the favor of ejecting
themselves from society. So heat up your spoons, fill your needles, and inject away!!!”

Seven viewers responded specifically to the comment, including four who agreed and three who sided with “smokey:” “Most people need help not jail or court fines, so you can make money off it.” The News-Herald does not require registration to comment and its policy simply says that “comments are screened for profanity, libel, threatening or otherwise abusive language.”

The Geauga Times-Courier provides no opportunity for digital commentary, and few go through the steps needed to comment on the Geauga Maple Leaf site. The sole digital-only site, Geauganews.com, does host more comments than the Maple Leaf, though the amount and type are significantly different than traditional news outlets. For instance, seventeen comments were associated with fifteen posts between March 8, 2012, and March 19, 2012. The highest was five for a post called “10 Reasons to Love the Geauga County Region,” with several posts getting no comments. Viewers can comment on Geauga News by providing a name and e-mail or signing in through Facebook. Its community rules are clear:

We at Geauga News work hard to share only positive news and information with you through our posts, ads, Facebook wall and Twitter. We will moderate and remove any items, or block such persons; that involve negative topics or comments. We understand that there are negative aspects of news that occur in the world in which we live, but we ask that you rely on other sources to report that information. Please keep any negative communication off of our digital landscape.

Wood County

None of the print-based weeklies in Wood County offers the ability to comment on its Website. The sole digital-only provider, nbnewsxpress.com, has a method for
“submitting your opinion” to a posting, but these are not routinely made available for others to see.

Sent-trib.com does not require a log-in to leave comments, but each is examined by an editor before being posted. Comments are common but not routine. For instance, on March 14, 2012, each of the five “most viewed” articles on the site, a listing that covers a week’s worth of postings, had at least one comment associated with it. The most was six comments. However, of the seven “local news headlines” posted that day, only one had a comment associated with it, a power outage in downtown Bowling Green the night before. Wrote Amy:

Awesome Night in Bowling Green! With no power on the west side, I set off for the dog’s nightly walk with a flash light in hand. The night time sky was absolutely beautiful. A complete viewing of Orion was possible. Venus, Jupiter and Mars were brilliant. Leo was truly visible with Regulus as bright as can be. The gentle flickering of candle light from houses was soothing. While I am very appreciative of the feverous response from the city workers to restore the power, I must say I truly enjoyed the tranquility of the evening.”

The site, however, frequently has running commentary that can go on for several days, and when the story is central to the community, it becomes the place for commentary. For instance, on February 4, 2012, the site posted a story about Cooper Standard Automotive closing its Bowling Green plant and moving the work to existing factories in Kentucky and Mexico. More than 200 workers were to be laid off. Seventeen comments over four days were left on the site, with the conversation covering issues ranging from the effects of the North American Free Trade Agreement to unions to city officials failing to give enough incentives for the company to keep the plant in the
city. By contrast, CBS affiliate WTOL, the television station with the largest Web presence in the market, had no comments associated with its story on the closing.

Sentinel-Tribune Editor Dave Miller, like many other longtime newspaper professionals, is uncomfortable with unmediated comment. “I don’t get involved at all with the Web; it’s not my thing. There are no ethics in the Websites that I have looked at.”

Television

Websites have allowed broadcast stations, traditionally the epitome of one-way, mass communication, to provide spaces for dialogue. All of them in this study do so, to one degree or another, but none has near the mass or energy as their metro, print-based counterparts. For instance, FOX8 in Cleveland has an option to comment, though viewers must sign in using one of several social media or blogging accounts, such as Facebook or Wordpress. Many of the stories carry comments, though far fewer than the station’s frequent Facebook postings. Seven comments, for example, were associated with the sentencing in the drunken driving death of a Geauga County judge, all in response to “Mike’s” brief post: “Shouldn’t be riding bicycles on busy roads.” Two posters agreed with him, while the other four pointed out the woman tested nearly three times the legal limit for driving drunk, left the scene, and had her two young children with her. A story covering the sentence on Cleveland.com had eighteen comments associated with it, while the story on the sentencing posted to the Geauga Maple Leaf posted six days after the hearing had no comments associated with it.

Of all the broadcast stations and perhaps next only to the Plain Dealer in this study, does Toledo’s WNWO make the most concerted effort to highlight user
interaction. The home page features lists of “most read” and “most commented” articles, a gallery of user submitted photos, and selected comments from viewers. Further, the station appears to be among the more attentive to their viewers leaving comments. For instance, here is an exchange between a station reporter and a Website viewer associated with an ongoing story about a teen-ager involved in the shooting death of another juvenile. The exchange also is evidence, as public use research by the Pew Center for Excellence in Journalism noted, of users toggling between news outlets:

**Edd Austin · Lawrence Technological University:** was found inside the house.. shooting victim died .. 2 teens in custody.

**WNWO:** Thanks for sharing, who did you speak with? Dispatch is telling us they can’t confirm shooting victim is dead

**Edd Austin · Lawrence Technological University:** It is on Fulton County Expositor’s facebook page and also in a video on another station’s website.

**Elizabeth Reed WNWO:** Thanks!

**Eggnog and community**

WKYC’s eggnog report was an aberration, sparked not by the event, itself, but rather the audience’s intensity in challenging the journalism behind it. Eighty-nine comments were associated with the story posted on WKYC’s site, the majority centered on the station’s reporting. By contrast, ninety-three comments were associated with a report about the event on News-Herald.com, representing a far different conversation about the event, itself, not the journalism behind it. Further, the eggnog affair demonstrates the continued intensity of the role of geography in shaping the public sphere. Many of the commentators on WKYC self-identified themselves as present or past Chardon community members. Few did so in the robust debate on News-Herald.com, though many clearly were familiar with the community. In other words,
perhaps paradoxically, the conversation on WKYC largely represented a debate within the Chardon community, while the News-Herald dialogue represented a debate between communities.

NBC affiliate WYKC aired a three-minute, 26-second spot, introducing the piece as an “exclusive” with the tagline “sick workout.” Reporter Tom Beres did a live shot from the darkened gazebo in the Chardon Courthouse Square. In his report, Beres had sound from Chardon Superintendent Bergant saying he was “appalled” that one of his employees was “encouraging this activity.” Beres later compared the so-called nog jog to college hazing. The story, which did not include quotes from parents, runners, or coaches, was posted to the station’s Website after the 6 p.m. newscast, sparking eighty-nine comments, many streaming in quickly after the story was posted online following the newscast, with the last coming the following afternoon.

Four days later, the News-Herald picked up the story, posting WKYC’s video report about the event. This story, too, launched a firestorm of comment on the regional newspaper’s Website. The two the streams were vastly different discussions. The station came under a torrent of criticism for sensational journalism and attacking a beloved coach. Those who followed the WKYC discussion were able to see a new story emerge as those directly involved in the event, community members, and those from outside the area heatedly discussed the nature of news and its impact on community. A commentator, for instance, who identified himself as Austin Arnold from Chardon, suggested the station lied about the event to boost ratings. A respondent, Seth Hughes, was puzzled: “I don’t understand. How are they lying?” Arnold came back:
They said we were forced by our coach to do this. They also said they tried to contact us but not a single one of us got a phone call from them. They said they couldn’t contact us because they couldn’t identify us when we were clearly introduced in the video, not try to be rude just stating the facts on how they lied.68

The WKYC story, in fact, had not said the runners were forced, but appeared to imply as much by comparing the event to hazing. Those following the *News-Herald* dialogue had a different experience. While some directly involved in the event did contribute new information in the form of comments on the site, the vast majority of the conversation centered on a debate over the appropriateness of the event, itself, and what should happen to the assistant coach. Noted one commenter: “This coach/teacher needs to be fired. End of story.”69

The two streams of dialogue represent competing narratives being constructed by three distinct groups: participants or observers to the event, community stakeholders, and – for want of a better term – outsiders, with no apparent geographical or emotional stake in how the event was interpreted. The comments illustrate technology creating a space, a public sphere, for the audience to craft their own meaning, intertwining bits of first-hand accounts, facts culled from the accompanying news reports, reports from other sources, and statements and opinions from other commenters. Table 4.1 breaks the dialogue into various components and compares the discussion streams on the television station and the newspaper.
While the conversations clearly served to create new and expanded storylines, they also were confined by and were in reaction to the forces of the medium in which they occurred, including the type of news outlet, varying comment policies, and the way the event was reported. Foremost among these was the framing of the story. WKYC’s news anchor introduced the story as an “exclusive” that contained “disturbing” video. Apparently, the disturbing part was the coach’s tight shots on vomiting runners, which were blurred by the station. Together with the reporter’s comparison to the event with college hazing and the superintendent’s dour comment, the implication of wrongdoing...
was clear. Many commentators argued the reporting was so far off the mark that commentators without specialized knowledge should be quiet. Those included Nick Laudato in a reply to one of the few suggesting the coach was responsible for encouraging the event:

**Nick Laudato**: Jodi Cusare I find it interesting that you can’t accept the fact that you are 100% wrong and ill-informed. You have yet to get the real story from anyone who attended the event, therefore you can’t possibly argue a valid point. Good try trying to get other parents into this false story, but for now stay out of this whole argument. You are by far outnumbered. 71

The *News-Herald* framed the story as a report on a television story, with its own reporting suggesting the issue was the appropriateness of the event, itself, and the fact school administrators were meeting to discuss the issue, not whether it had been videotaped and posted on social media or whether WKYC should have done the story at all. 72 The accompanying conversation appeared to pick up that theme. The lengthy and often heated dialogue included an odd discussion about permission slips, which was not included in any of the reporting nor brought up by those who self-identified as part of the event. The first mention of the permission slips appeared to come more than twenty-four hours after the *News-Herald* posted the story:

**to Chardon Charlatan wrote on Jan 11, 2012 4:02 PM:**
You are correct - nobody made the kids drink the egg nog but they needed a permission slip which I bet was printed on paper at the school to participate so this makes it a school function and I don’t think adding rum to the mix would make it any better.

**To to Chardon Charlatan wrote on Jan 11, 2012 5:55 PM:**
Who do you think you are? You weren’t even part of this event and you’re trying to say we needed a permission slip? Everyone on here who thinks they know something doesn’t. None of you participated.

**Permission Slips wrote on Jan 12, 2012 10:44 AM:**
Were the kids not asked/required to fill out a permission slip? Was that an official Chardon High School document with their logo or heading on it? Now, who sanctioned what?

**Back to Chardon Runner and Permission Slips wrote on Jan 12, 2012 12:31 PM:**
First, Chardon runner... I didn’t have to attend. To permission slips... my understanding is yes, permission slips were sent home. Did all the kids get them signed by their parents? Doesn’t sound that way from earlier posts but apparently it didn’t matter. If permission slips were printed and there was a requirement for a parent/guardian signature then this is considered a school function. Again, Ms. Martin should be out of a job.

**You Are Dumb wrote on Jan 12, 2012 6:48 PM:**
I don’t understand what you don’t get about the fact permission slips were not handed out. It was setup by us the runners. No one had anything signed.

**To You Are Dumb wrote on Jan 12, 2012 7:28 PM:**
Then why did the kids insist that they had permission slips signed by their parents when they were defending Mrs. Martin? Maybe you guys should get your stories straight before calling other people dumb.

**Youre still dumb wrote on Jan 12, 2012 9:54 PM:**
Maybe you should get your facts straight before commenting on this. No one that was in attendance has been interviewed or questioned... Good try though.⁷³

The two biggest players in the digital landscape, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and FOX8 television station, had different takes. FOX8 did a story two nights after the WKYC report, without mentioning its rival station and framing the story as a common, but unhealthy, practice for runners across the country.⁷⁴ *The Plain Dealer* only mentioned the story in its daily media blog, noting that both WKYC and the *News-Herald* had posted stories on the event and provided links to both of them.⁷⁵ The FOX story had one comment associated with it; the *Plain Dealer* blog had none.

In both the cases of WKYC and the *News-Herald*, the reporting appeared distant from the community and sources closest to the event. In the case of WKYC, no parents, runners, or coaches were included in the initial report, only an uncomfortable-looking superintendent who watched the coach’s video at the request of the station. The *News-
Herald article included quotes from an unnamed Chardon runner and the parent of a runner, both of whom supported the assistant coach. The news outlet closest to the community, the weekly Geauga County Maple Leaf, printed a lengthy story in its January 12, 2012, edition but did not appear to post the story online. The lengthy print report quoted parents and school officials extensively and became part of the conversation on the News Herald Website in which at least one commenter repeated the statements attributed by the Maple Leaf to the parent of a runner.76

What the commentary actually accomplished and whether and how much it was considered by the power structure is impossible to quantify, but it seems unlikely it had no effect. While not addressing the initial reporting, the tenor and tone of WKYC’s story changed. The posting was updated just before 11 a.m. the next morning, adding two paragraphs to the top indicating the event was not school-sanctioned and several parents had told the station they approved of their children taking part. Nine days later, when Bergant announced he had decided to suspend the teacher for a day without pay, all hint of controversy was gone. This was the entire report, which received no comments, on WKYC.com:

CHARDON - An assistant cross country coach will be suspended for one day without pay in connection with an ‘egg nog’ running challenge.

Coach Mary Pat Martin did not organize the event. The students did and said they had no idea the coach would show up.

Coach Martin videotaped the challenge and could be heard at times narrating events.

The video went viral after it was posted on Facebook.

The challenge stemmed from similar so called “nog jogs” posted on-line.77
Future of Web commentary

While neither broadcast Websites nor those of weekly print- or digital-only outlets are the preferred meeting ground for routine public discussion in either market, this does not suggest television, in particular, cannot engage (or enrage) their massive online audiences. It is reasonable to speculate that television is only in the nascent stages of developing an online community where discussion and dialogue are primary rather than secondary functions. As noted in this examination, four primary factors must exist in order for the public sphere to exist in digital space: A spark, something around which an audience can coalesce; a place where such conversation is expected; policies that allow relatively unfettered communication, and a sufficient mass of audience and participants to keep the sphere inflated and fueled.

The television industry does not have the historical or cultural genetics for dialogue, which is apparent in how many of the stations present their news online, most of them preferring to highlight non-interactive features such as video. Yet, broadcast stations have three of the four ingredients present and there is no reason they could not or will not continue to pursue viewer interaction on their Websites. The major barrier to expanding their routine contribution to public affairs dialogue in Wood and Geauga counties, in fact, is their lack of coverage, not audience or technology.

The weekly and digital-only news outlets are more puzzling. While the Maple Leaf is a leader in Ohio’s community newspapers for its digital delivery, its paucity of comment makes it a stretch to call its Website part of the public sphere. The other weeklies clearly see their Websites as more of a promotional tool for their print products rather than a community gathering place. Of all the weeklies in this study, only the Maple
Leaf, in fact, allows commentary. This likely stems from the nature of the community versus regional or metro news outlet. The community papers are closely tied to their local power structures, relying on them, in many cases, for supplying the information that fills their pages. Commentary, while not always so, is a thorny issue even in print, let alone adding another layer of trying to edit and deal with comments to a Website that may offend if not be linguistically offensive.

Jeff Miklovic, the founder and sole journalist for www.nbexpress.com, grimaced when asked about the scarcity of comments on his Website. He wants more comments but as a longtime North Baltimore resident whose business model includes doing occasional Web work for some of the local agencies, he is wary. “I try to focus on the positives,” he said. “I ran a story last year about our local high school coach – it wasn’t bad or anything – and people started getting on there ragging on the coach. I like to read the comments and I edit them, but I’ve gotten grief for that.”

A different environment has evolved in social media, where Facebook and commercial television have combined to create another type of public sphere.

A mean sphere.
Notes


4 John E. Richardson and James, James, “Reader opinion in the digital age: Tabloid and broadsheet newspaper websites and the exercise of political voice,” Journalism 12, no. 8 (2011): 983-1003.

5 Zizi Papacharissi, “Democracy online: Civility, politeness, and the democratic potential of online political discussion groups,” New Media & Society, 6 no. 2 (2004), 259-283.


8 John Karlovec, interview by author, Chardon, OH, December 8, 2011.


11 Rem Rieder, 2010), “No Comments: It’s time for news sites to stop allowing anonymous online comments,” American Journalism Review, no. 2 (Summer 2010).


15 Ibid.


20 Ibid., p. 235.


22 Ibid.


30 Reader, “An ethical ‘Blind Spot…”"

31 Ibid., p. 66.

32 Barrett v. Rosenthal (2006), 40 Cal. 4th 33; 146 P.3d 510. (Supreme Court of California).

33 John Doe No. 1 v. Patrick Cahill (2005) 884 A.2d 451 (Supreme Court of Delaware, Lexis Nexis, 2010).


36 Ibid.


39 Ibid.


43 Editorial Board, “The Plain Dealer endorses Mitt Romney for the Republican presidential nomination,” the Plain Dealer, March 5, 2012,


45 Ibid.

46 The dates for this examination were March 6, 2102, to February 6, 2012.

47 More details about the story are contained in Chapter 2. Some Tanglewood association members were upset with an assessment that allowed the group to buy an adjacent golf course.


51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 The site has no archive and the postings each stay available for various lengths of time.


58 Dave Miller, interview by the author, February 24, 2012, Bowling Green, OH.


65 Ibid.


67 Beres, “Chardon Schools investigate …”

68 Ibid. The comment is taken directly from the Website without editing.

69 Bonchak, “Chardon coach comes under fire …”
In this context, framing is the means by which journalists select the most vivid, or salient, details in order to craft a narrative of interest to their audience. See, Robert Entman, “How the Media Affect What People Think: An Information Processing Approach,” *Journal Of Politics* 51, no. 2 (1989): 347.

Beres, “Chardon Schools investigate…”

Bonchak, “Chardon coach comes under fire …”

Ibid.


Jeff “JP” Miklovic, interview by the author, February 14, 2012, North Baltimore, OH.
WTOL’s seventh Facebook post of the day repeated a variation of the phrase “10 students arrested” three times in a forty-nine word post. The item pointed to a story on the station’s Website that explained Toledo police were responding quicker and harsher to fights as part of a strategy to keep gang-related violence from being carried onto school grounds. Unless their Facebook users went to the Website, this is what the station’s followers learned: “Ten students are under arrest after a fight broke out on the second floor of Scott High School Tuesday morning, and police are saying it looks like it was gang-related.” The audience wasted no time or energy on such subtleties as an overall law enforcement plan, and immediately embarked on an argument over race that included forty-nine comments: “All that money to remodel thug central,” noted Gary Lemle. “Thugs!” screamed Justin o hensparger, “Toledo makes me sick anymore nuttin but hood rats so glad i moved to the south.” Taylor Meek agreed. “All full of thugs and they wasted all that money renovating that school. They don’t give a crap about their education. Just care about who they can beat the out of or rob next.” Willie Holmes rushed to Scott’s defense in a reply, likely written as a parody, that collected fifteen likes of its own: “Why do scott gotta b a thug school cuz its a majority all blk school in tha
inner city fights happen everywhere in public schools private schools in ur suburban schools so chill wit tha whole thug issue k!!” A man who identified himself as a Scott graduate, David Bryant Jr., tried to distance the issue of school fights from gangs. “Unless you went there you have no clue what its really like. Fights happen at all schools but because its Scott, people make a big deal of it.”

The fight at Scott High School was just one of nineteen posts made that day by WTOL, the Toledo market leader in social media with 36,423 followers. Those nineteen posts collected 612 “likes,” 261 comments, and 101 “shares.” None of the nineteen posts dealt with Wood County. Less than half, in fact, dealt with any local event or issue. The Sentinel-Tribune also used Facebook that day, including this post: “Rine will travel to Washington, D.C., to meet with legislators to advocate for children with medical issues.”

The item collected two likes, no comments, and no shares, perhaps because of the difficulty of finding out who Rine was and what medical issues were being discussed. The ambiguous Rine post was among six the newspaper made to Facebook during an extraordinarily busy day on the social media site for the Bowling Green newspaper. The total response from its 1,748 followers for all posts was fifteen likes and four comments, also an extraordinary day. The most likely response for a Sentinel-Tribune post, as will be discussed later in this chapter, is none. The response rate for that particular day, however, equated to 1.5 percent of its social media audience. WTOL collected a response rate of 2.7 percent, or nearly twice that of the newspaper.

While newspapers in the Toledo and Cleveland markets reign on the Web, in terms of both traffic and comment, commercial television has dominated Facebook. This is true across metro, small daily, and weekly operations. In fact, the weeklies, with the
exception of the *Geauga County Maple Leaf*, rarely engage in social media. Besides the *Maple Leaf*, Facebook accounts were identified only for the *West Geauga Sun* and the *Perrysburg Messenger Journal*. The result is that routine public affairs information that explores the key question of “what shall we do” is nearly non-existent on the planet’s busiest social network at a time when it represents the largest and most energetic channel for communication. Local commercial broadcast stations, though several in this study have chosen not to focus on social media, have largely replicated their brand of news, offering a regular diet of violent crime, traffic deaths, and dangerous weather, leavened by oddity, outrage, and the occasional public affairs issue. This is true for the stations that have captured the social media leads in both the Cleveland and Toledo markets. During a seven-day sample, for instance, WTOL posted sixty-five news items or updates, of which thirty-four dealt with crime. Cleveland leader WJW, a Fox station, posted seventy-nine news items or updates, of which twenty-six were focused on crime. Since the audience, as noted in the previous chapters, tends to respond within the parameters defined by the journalism it sees, this has created a fundamentally different public sphere than what is seen on the Websites of the news outlets. This is a mean sphere where racial tension, fear, and anger collide on a daily basis.

This is nearly an entirely urban-centric public sphere, with the audience struggling for the meaning of city life and a vision for the way forward. What is progress? Indeed, what is a school fight? Is it a presumptive gang activity? Or, is it something else? George Gerbner and Larry Gross first introduced the idea of cultivation theory in 1976, suggesting that steady television viewing, with its focus on crime and violence, created in the audience a sense of a “mean world” where the appropriate response was fear.⁵ Since
then, a variety of scholars have examined the concept and found no direct causal link between television and perceptions of the audience’s immediate neighborhoods. Yet, scholars have found that distance, or geography, was a key variable. Consuming television programming that streamed across borders to outlying areas could affect perceptions of the city by those who lived elsewhere.

Audience perception of what they consume and how it may or may not affect their ultimate judgment is beyond the scope of this inquiry. This examination is concerned, as with other structural elements of the public sphere, in the antecedent to those judgments. Since the newspapers, largely, have chosen to stand back from social media as a news delivery medium and since newspapers are responsible for the vast majority of public affairs journalism in both counties, the audience is left to respond to what they see: a dangerous, violent world.

This chapter explores the issue of social media and what it means for public affairs information, focusing primarily on Facebook, which is by far the largest and most energetic of a variety of sharing platforms. This chapter traces its rise, increasing presence in the news landscape, and its basic nature as a personal headline wire service, which creates an enormous responsibility on the part of the audience to understand what it is consuming and, more importantly, what it is not consuming. Further, the results of an examination of a selected sample of Facebook postings reveals the fundamental difference between Websites, as self-contained spaces, and a social media stream where the audience is more in control and where commercial television has staked an enormous beachhead. Social media also is explored as an extension of the shifting economic foundation of the news, transforming what has been an industrial institution of delivering
a product to an audience to the inverse, a platform for delivering audience to industry. In addition, this chapter reports survey results from traditionally defined opinion leaders in both counties which, as was seen previously in relation to traditional media and Websites, reflect the divide between intensely urban and suburban public affairs. The respondents are largely ignoring the current and potential impact of social media on the information that reaches the public and how that information is used. Finally, the chapter discusses the ethical implications of social media from the angles of journalism and audience.

The Facebook and the audience

Mark Zuckerberg launched The Facebook, a moniker borrowed from the name of annual paper profiles of freshmen compiled at Harvard University, in February 2004. Eighteen months later, one of the first Web operations designed solely to connect people to each other rather than to present information, had expanded to nearly all universities in the United States and Great Britain. In September 2006, facebook.com – a domain purchased for $200,000 – was made available to anyone with an e-mail address. By summer 2007, the site had 30 million registered users, and The Guardian newspaper noted it was now “the largest social-networking site with an education focus.” At the end of 2011, Facebook had surpassed 850 million registered users, with more than 130 million of them in the United States. The site had transformed from one centered on students to one encompassing all aspects of society.

In the process, Facebook created a new lexicon, with “friends,” “likes,” and “shares” taking on new meaning. In the digital world of Facebook, it is possible for individuals to amass hundreds, in some cases, thousands of “friends.” Use of this word and its potentially altered meaning came to the early attention of researchers, who noted
in 2008 the difference between “offline” and “online” relationships. As Facebook became more and more commercialized, with companies launching their own pages on the site and working to build their own network of friends/customers, “likes” became more common for the commercial side, with individuals continuing to “friend” each other and “liking” companies and organizations. A Facebook friend is a mutual relationship, with each, in general, being allowed to post to the other’s wall, or personal Web page. A Facebook user “liking” a page is a one-way relationship, with users receiving updates from the page and being permitted to comment on an item but not necessarily posting original content to the wall of the entity posting updates. The definition of “like,” however, is not firmly established. A federal judge in Virginia, for instance, ruled against six fired sheriff’s department employees, writing that clicking “like” on a Facebook page, which happened to belong to the opponent of the incumbent sheriff, was not protected speech. A Facebook “share” allows users to post shared items to their own pages as well as ship the information to someone else.

The interconnected and mutual nature of Facebook has captured most of the attention of scholarly researchers, with many concluding that the social media tsunami is too new to truly understand its ultimate impact on communication. Is social media somehow essentially different from Websites that allow one to many as well as many to many communication? Do social media represent a new public sphere, as one scholar speculates, or a corporate-controlled space with a misleading patina of free expression? This debate is seen in the emerging scholarship of the role of social media in the so-called Arab Spring of 2010, in which segments of populations in several Middle Eastern countries staged demonstrations against repressive governments. Networks such
as Facebook and Twitter were used by organizers to communicate with supporters and potential supporters. Researcher Badreya Al-Jenaibi, for instance, concluded that social media were enormously important for the movements that swept the region, while scholar Mike Gaworecki urged caution against unbridled optimism about Facebook-inspired democracy. He noted that in post-revolutionary Egypt many of the same issues remain, even as social media use climbs.

*Audience as gatekeeper*

For journalism and public affairs, which historically have served as the intersection of change and the status quo, historians decades from now may well conclude that Facebook choosing to label status updates from friends and liked organizations as “news feeds” could be as influential to the definition of news and how it is presented as the inverted pyramid. The nature of Facebook (and Twitter) is in the form of “updates” from those with connections to others. When a user “likes” a television station, for instance, that person then receives updates from the station in, basically, the same format and in the same string as those from a personal friend. Hence, an update from WTOL carries the same functionality, weight, and often the same presentation as an update from a best friend whose dog just had puppies. Both are news, some would argue, in the sense that they likely represent information that was not known before the post. Yet, one clearly has a greater potential to affect the public sphere, where issues are debated and meaning derived, than the other. When a “friend” “shares” a “news” story, from whatever source, it is presented in a string much like everything else. Unlike reading a magazine and then picking up a newspaper or sitting down to watch the evening news, which certainly are mashed together in the brain even though consumed
separately, the nature of social media puts the audience in charge of creating its own wire service, or as media economist Robert Piccard noted, a news buffet. This presents the audience with a dilemma it has never faced before: Each individual is a literal gatekeeper, selecting and making a judgment about each bit of information received rather than consuming a pre-packaged product. This is much like making dinner rather than eating out, with the home chef selecting each ingredient. When consuming information outside the environment of social media, a gatekeeper – or multiple gatekeepers – is in charge of what is presented. Someone picks what is defined as news and then packages it in a way that gives clues to the consumer about hierarchy. A story at the top of the front page of the newspaper with a larger headline than the others, for instance, is widely understood to be the most important, at least as selected by the newspaper’s editors, even though no explicit directions are given. Television always is more direct, frequently telling viewers, “This is our top story.”

Gatekeepers have been widely scrutinized (and criticized) since researcher Warren Breed, a former journalist, examined newsrooms in the 1950s as a social structure, attempting to explain why some issues and events became news and others didn’t. Researchers Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese expanded on the idea of influences outside the traditional definitions of news by explaining the complex interplay in the creation of journalism between not just those in the newsroom but also advertisers, sources, and the audience.

In addition to selecting the topics for news, gatekeepers also, in general, provide clues to their audiences about how to incorporate these new bits of information into the context of existing knowledge. This happens in a variety of ways, including the way a
story is written, the sources chosen to deliver information, the order of those sources in a story, the focus of headlines, whether a story is played early or late in a news cast, etc. This is the process of framing, which always has been more art than science and fraught with peril for the audience trying to make sense of their world. Communications scholar Robert Entman was among the first to use framing in a critical context. He found that American journalists, for instance, described the U.S. military’s downing of a Soviet Union commercial airliner as an accident while reporting that Soviet planes shooting down a U.S. airliner under similar circumstances was a deliberate act.²⁰

This process, as some researchers have noted, began to break down with Website interactivity that allowed viewers more control over what they consumed through features such as Real Simple Syndication (RSS) and customized presentation of the news.²¹ Viewers also could more heavily influence other viewers through News Recommendation Engines, such as most viewed, most commented, most shared, and the like.²² This is an important issue that certainly has lessened the influence of traditional gatekeepers. But customization and assembling lists of what other viewers have consumed still leaves the viewer in a news environment with clues and signposts. Certainly, all of these forces remain in place within the small confines of a Facebook posting. After all, a Facebook post from a news organization is still produced by journalists, with executive producers and editors leading reporters in the production of stories. Yet, there are several key differences for the audience between items presented in Facebook and news consumed through either traditional means or on a news outlet’s Website:
1) Acquiring the context for any given posting requires effort beyond the initial decision to consume the information. This is because of the nature of Facebook (even more so for Twitter and its 140-character limit) being designed to deliver short snippets of information. Most news outlets in this examination, for instance, choose to present their produced news with a headline, a short sentence, and either art or logo. To put that snippet into a larger context requires clicking through to the story, which as this study shows happens frequently but not always. To comment on a posting after consuming the context, users then must go back to Facebook.

2) The above only applies to news that already has been gathered and at least processed enough to be posted on a Website. In many cases, such as the shooting in Chardon, a post, itself, serves as the news. This creates a situation where the audience is left to either seek out its own context or craft an imagined narrative gleaned from previous knowledge. For instance, WTVG in Toledo announced a traffic death on Facebook with no link to a story with this: “Ohio Highway Patrol: fatal car crash northbound I-75 near MM 178 just south of SR 6.”23 Leigh Snyder struggled to find the context. Here was her conclusion: “Get over it I mean wood county just isn’t as safe as it used to be.”24 Stephanie Cox replied to Snyder, saying she was interpreting the news incorrectly. “How is wood county not safe car accidents happen everywhere what does the county have to do with it? Its not like getting shot,” she wrote. Andrea Rainell Harris sided with Snyder, writing that while Wood County may “not be like Toledo, it is still scary because (such traffic deaths show)
some people driving here in wood county are A) driving wrecklessly and
carelessly B) driving while being distracted by one or numerouse things C)
not paying attention to their surroundings D) road rage driving.”

3) The nature of Facebook invites comment without context, thereby generating
new content without context, unlike all other media. While it is possible,
indeed likely, that viewers of a news Website, for instance, merely scan
headlines and actually click on only a few that spark a more intense interest,
viewers still must make some effort to click through, scroll down, and
comment.

Facebook, itself, is its own environment, complete with its own policies,
regulations, advertising, mediators, and so on. This means the information presented in
Facebook is doubly processed and, in effect, lives in two environments at the same time,
that created by the news outlet doing the posting and Facebook, itself. The nature of
Facebook means the news outlets treat different types of posts the same, whether news,
advertising, promotion, or simply to start a conversation. For instance, as this study will
demonstrate, the News-Herald uses Facebook primarily to promote the bloggers it has
acquired through its Media Lab program. The vast majority of the bloggers are local
professionals who are promoting their own business or industry, yet the posts carry the
same logo and presentation as the newspaper’s news posts. This means the audience must
judge whether any individual post from the News-Herald is news, opinion, or promotion
since the newspaper has provided no guidance.

These issues are readily seen in an average string of updates. WEWS television in
Cleveland, for instance, posted the following: “There is no recall or ban on any baby
formula but a Dartmouth College study showed that some has arsenic in it.\textsuperscript{26} The nature of Facebook presents the audience with quite a bit of work to do before it can accurately process the information:

1) Assuming most people know of arsenic as a poison (existing knowledge), perhaps through a variety of televised police dramas if not freshman biology, immediate questions spring to mind in order to process this new tidbit: Which formulas are killing children, and why hasn’t the government done something?

2) How fearful should parents be? A foundation of previous knowledge suggests studies, especially academic ones, tend to be overturned, or at least debated. Where is this study within that process?

3) How is one to know whether a child is suffering from arsenic poisoning? What is the appropriate response to such information? In other words, what shall we do?

The audience dealt with each of these issues. Mandy McElroy, in a reasonable assumption that the actual story posted on the Website would identify the formulas, asked for help since she couldn’t “log on to news channel 5.” “Can anybody tell me what they are,” she wrote. Shae Eesmaaeel obliged, interpreting the story for her: “@Mandy no brands mentioned. Just advises that parents who are concerned should stay away from formulas that have brown rice syrup as the main ingredient.” Many of the comments (a total of twenty-three) turned to breast feeding as an alternative to formula, which ignited a frustrated Melody Apthorpe. “My milk dried up after only 6 weeks. … I am sickened that the alternative method of nourishing my baby is filled with poison!!!!!! What in the hell is going on?! Formula? Juices? Does the govt do this on purpose to be sure we all
always need DR’s and freaking insurance?????? Disgusting!” The paucity of context was not lost on some of the commenters. Wrote Amelia Patterson:

It’s insane to post stories like this when arsenic is a naturally occurring thing. Organic arsenic for the most part is not a huge problem, when you get to the man made arsenic then freak out because that is the stuff that is deadly. Yes there are several types of organically occurring arsenic and rarely are there any in food in any dangerous levels. Apples naturally have arsenic as do other things. You people really need to sort things out before you start spurting things or you will start sounding like Fox news and their scare tactic bull.27

In fact, none of the commenters got the story quite right. Bylined by a station producer, the story quoted Brian Jackson, listing him as a “PhD, who headed up the study.”28 The story noted seventeen baby formulas were tested for arsenic, of which two listed “organic brown rice syrup” as the primary ingredient. Of those two, one had elevated levels of arsenic. Researchers, the story noted, theorized the arsenic was residue from insecticides used on fields that now grow rice but were once used for cotton.

Social media in Wood and Geauga counties

Digital news consumers using social media as a starting point are a growing trend. In its State of the News Media 2012 report, the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism, noted that both Facebook and Twitter are now “pathways to news,” with Facebook being far the dominant source.29 Of those who say they get their news mostly from online sources, 52 percent report getting at least some of their news from Facebook and Twitter, though 92 percent say they also go directly to news Websites.30 American Journalism Review, in looking over the social media news landscape, noticed that local television stations have been particularly aggressive in pursuing Facebook fan bases. Cleveland station WJW made its list of successful
examples by noting that in fall 2010 the broadcaster hit 94,000 “likes” with a contest that promised to donate $2,500 to a local animal shelter in exchange for 50,000 new fans. Similar efforts were made across the country by local stations.

WJW, a Fox affiliate, serves as an illustration for both the extraordinary rate of growth in social media as well as how newspapers have, overall, chosen not to engage in social media. WJW, in February 2012, had 310,365 “likes,” or followers. In May, the station had 323,861 followers, a rate of growth of about 4,300 per month. By comparison, the Plain Dealer’s main news Facebook page had just more than 10,373 likes in February 2012. In May, the newspaper had 11,604 fans, a rate of growth of about 400 a month. The same situation is seen in the Toledo market, though no television station has come close to amassing WJW’s extraordinary Facebook audience. Table No. 5.1 shows the breakdown of social media in the two markets, revealing the dominance of commercial broadcast stations.
Table No. 5.1. Breakdown of Cleveland and Toledo media market social media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geauga County Social Media*</th>
<th>Outlet</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>Twitter</th>
<th>YouTube**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WJW FOX8 (FOX)</td>
<td>310,365</td>
<td>11,943</td>
<td>N***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WKYC (NBC)</td>
<td>46,076</td>
<td>3,356</td>
<td>124/952</td>
</tr>
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<td>37,971</td>
<td>8,556</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>11,655</td>
<td>189/4339</td>
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<td>1,720</td>
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<td>N</td>
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<td>Messenger</td>
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<td>N</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rossford Journal</td>
<td>703</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* = The numbers were pulled from the Facebook pages and main Twitter accounts of each outlet in the second week of February 2012.

** = YouTube is a video posting and sharing service. The numbers are given by the total number of videos posted/average view per video.

*** = N indicates the outlet has no YouTube account or it could not be located.

The YouTube numbers are given as perspective to illustrate two points. The first is the potentially ephemeral nature of various social media platforms as news delivery systems. With the exception of WUPW and the Maple Leaf, the media outlets have tended to stop using YouTube for news purposes after an initial surge. The second point
is that average per-video views, an indicator of the use of the platform as a potential driver for audience, is highly misleading. For instance, the Toledo Blade has the highest per-video average of all the outlets. But, 20 percent of the Blade’s total views come from its top six videos, all of which were posted more than two years ago. The only videos the Blade posted during the course of this study were promotion, such as one explaining how to use its e-reader. The reason for this is likely economic. YouTube is a self-contained medium, with many outlets, such as the Maple Leaf, using it to host videos to avoid the cost of acquiring the technology to host their own videos. The result is that outlets tend to send viewers to YouTube, rather than YouTube sending viewers to the outlets. This, and the fact some of the larger outlets have acquired their own video hosting capability, likely is the reason why the use of YouTube by some news outlets has dropped off.

The numbers also reveal the social media strategies deployed by the various outlets. The Plain Dealer encourages but does not require its employees to funnel their social media posts through central newspaper accounts. For instance, more than a dozen separate Twitter accounts were located for news reporters, but no separate Facebook pages were found during a test of bylines. This is the opposite strategy used by the top social media players in the markets. Several reporters and anchors for WTOL, for example, have their own Facebook brands, but channel their posts through the station’s main page, suggesting viewers click through to their own pages for further details on some stories. FOX8 in Cleveland, the most relentless user of Facebook in either market, rarely promotes individuals, unless it is an on-air event, focusing its posts nearly entirely on news updates as a station. These are economic strategies with historical roots that
dramatically affect the public affairs information entering the public sphere through social media.

*The economy of social media*

As noted in Chapter 3, Facebook has become a significant driver for Website traffic for commercial stations in both markets, far more so than for the print outlets. Twitter, as noted previously, does not rise to the top 10 referral sites for either print or broadcast sites. Websites are where the news outlets gain revenue from advertisers, and as such this is where the audience provides the most value to the outlet. Since the outlets do not own Facebook and do not get a cut of the advertising placed there, the economic reasons for taking part in social media come down to two: (1) branding and (2) capturing an audience that can be moved *from* the channel where they create value for someone else (i.e. Facebook) *to* the environment where they create value for the outlet, the Website.

This situation puts the news outlets in the interesting position of being both competitors and customers of Facebook at the same time. This is not unlike the battle between Google and the major news outlets, many of whom argued that the giant search engine, especially through such features as its Google News aggregator, built its business on theft by selling advertising space on free search pages that displayed the work paid for by others. Press baron Rupert Murdoch, before his uncomfortable days in front of a British parliamentary inquiry on his newspapers’ use of telephone hacking, was a particularly vocal critic of Google. He argued news organizations should enforce copyright law and sue Google into submission.33 Eric Schmidt, the former chief executive officer of Google, was conciliatory in a guest column in the *Wall Street Journal*. While
noting the enormous traffic Google generated for news sites, he suggested a happy medium could be found in partnerships, with news outlets signing on to Google’s new Fast Flip service and sharing the advertising revenue. The idea was to increase the speed at which viewers could browse the news, creating a better, more efficient system than the outlets’ own Websites, which he criticized as being too distant and too much like traditional media. Schmidt wrote the column in 2009. Google shut down the service in 2011.

The issue of free versus paid content has vexed the news industry since radio frequencies were deemed a public commodity in 1922. The First Amendment places journalism in the private sector, creating a constitutionally protected industry. If professional journalism, however imperfect, is to exist in the American system, reporters, editors, producers, and digital generators must be paid by someone. Since the Industrial Revolution, this has rested primarily with advertisers, with a little help from subscribers. Newspapers and other information providers such as commercial television stations can be viewed as network markets. One side is the reader/viewer. The other is the advertiser. The news outlet serves as the channel, or network, that brings them together. Historically, newspapers have charged both sides, while commercial broadcasting has never charged consumers directly. This resulted in media DNA where television is consumed with the idea of attracting audience, as seen in the industry’s sweeps periods when audience numbers are collected and advertising rates set. Newspapers, in turn, are consumed by paid circulation numbers. The two are surprisingly separate concepts, yet both are driven by the economics of advertising.
The newspaper advertising model rests on the concept of CPM (cost per thousand), or charging advertisers by the number of paid subscribers their messages reach. Yet, paid subscriptions are only a subset of actual audience and do not include pass-along readers, those who consume the news without paying for it, such as multiple people living in the same house with a single subscription, businesses such as doctor offices setting a paper out on a cluttered coffee table, and so on. The industry benchmark for pass-along readership is that 2.3 people read each copy. Television, of course, always has sold advertising based on total viewership. Gannett, the nation’s largest newspaper chain, is attempting to recast its business model through a convergence philosophy by separating itself from paid circulation as a measure of market strength. It is arguing to advertisers that the better model is reach, as measured by a matrix of circulation, readership, and digital traffic to its Websites. Gannett listed an example in its 2008 report:

The company considers the reach and coverage of multiple products in their communities in their totality – and measures the frequency with which consumers interact with each Gannett product. Results from 2008 studies indicate that many Gannett publications are reaching more people more often than ever. For example, in Honolulu, the combination of all Gannett products reach 83% of the adult population an average of 5.1 times a week for a total of 2.99 million impressions each week – a 23% increase since 2006.

The financial recession in late 2008 and on through most of 2011, which saw yearly declines in newspaper advertising, reignited earlier debates in the industry about charging for digital content as a way of maintaining the business model of unevenly distributing average costs between advertisers and subscribers. The New York Times, in particular, revived this discussion by beginning tiered pricing models for digital content.
in 2011.\textsuperscript{45} Less than a year later, the \textit{Times} announced paid circulation had climbed 73 percent year over year, due mostly to users paying for digital and mobile news packages.\textsuperscript{46} The \textit{Times} put in place an astonishingly complex system where viewers could continue to consume for free articles they clicked on through social media links and search engine results, but could only see ten articles a month for free if they went directly to the site.\textsuperscript{47} \textit{New York Times} Publisher Arthur Salzberger Jr., however, found himself defending the circulation strategy when analysts pointed out that digital advertising had declined 2.4 percent at a time when it was increasing elsewhere.\textsuperscript{48}

The \textit{Times} policy is a suitable example of the difference between newspapers and broadcasters. Newspapers, overall, are accustomed to selling their news as a routine, regularly delivered product apart from any particular news events. While certainly they historically have benefited from increased streets sales and overall readership during times of titanic news, their basic business models have relied on the audience buying their products in advance of the news through longterm subscriptions, on the assumption the newspaper would cover whatever came up. Television is much more genetically coded to understand it must earn its audience daily in a competitive environment that began in the 1950s with the build-out of three national broadcast networks to see multiple broadcast outlets in a single market. The \textit{Times} model, interestingly, seeks to split this difference by continuing to attract audience to its Website through offering free news of the day but also forcing their most ardent readers to pay for it.

This engrained philosophy has appeared to translate itself to social media. Newspapers are privileging Twitter, which serves more as a tip sheet for news rather than a delivery system and which sends users directly to Websites through links. Television, in
general, has chosen Facebook, which does refer viewers but also acts as its own medium. Many Facebook users, clearly, do not click through to a news Website and in many cases may find a headline and paragraph enough to satisfy their immediate needs. Pew Research notes that only 9 percent of digital news customers “very often” follow news recommendations on Facebook. Pew also found that Twitter followers and Facebook fans tend to be different. Facebook users track more closely to the general population while Twitter followers tend to be male, white, and with a college degree.49

Newspapers, again overall, do not want to give away their content without collecting something in return. Television is more interested in branding and amassing audience, even though it harvests the same value, in general terms, from a unique visitor as does the newspaper. Though outside the scope of this study, other factors besides basic business models likely are at play. In addition to amassing audience rather than circulation as an economic end, commercial television tends to rely on building relationships with their audiences through personality. Facebook is a much friendlier medium for this than Twitter, with its ability to post longer items easily with photos and its self-contained feedback of comments, likes, and shares.

The economic model for Facebook is essentially different than the models for print, broadcast, or even some Web-only operations. Television and newspapers, though starting to engage in micro-slicing of their viewers/readers, remain true mass media, with their main strengths being able to put an advertiser’s message in front of a sizable chunk of a geographically and demographically based audience. Though Facebook’s business model also is based on advertising, its strength is its ability to offer up to advertisers tiny
bits of its extraordinary worldwide membership, delivering only those viewers most likely to actually purchase something.

The news media always have treated their audiences as both commodities to be sold and communities to be served, which has presented a constitutional tension that has plagued journalism since Benjamin Harris’ *Publick Occurrences Both Foreign and Domestik* in 1690 was shut down by colonial authorities after a single issue. Facebook produces nothing and sells no product. As such, it exists as pure network and its users are pure commodity, a situation that has not gone unnoticed by regulators as they wrestle with how much individual information social media outlets should be able to gather and sell. Facebook, in addition to micro-bundling and selling users to advertisers, also is using them as endorsers for advertisers within their circle. Figure 5.1 is a sample from the author’s “sponsored stories” page, in which those in his circle of friends were used to endorse various products, stores, and services. The author asked one friend, a journalist in Missouri, whether he knew Amazon.com invoked his name in a “sponsored story” served up to the author after his purchase of a movie. “Heck no!” he replied. “Where’s my cut?”

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50 Facebook, in addition to micro-bundling and selling users to advertisers, also is using them as endorsers for advertisers within their circle. Figure 5.1 is a sample from the author’s “sponsored stories” page, in which those in his circle of friends were used to endorse various products, stores, and services. The author asked one friend, a journalist in Missouri, whether he knew Amazon.com invoked his name in a “sponsored story” served up to the author after his purchase of a movie. “Heck no!” he replied. “Where’s my cut?”

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As this study was undertaken, Facebook was preparing to go public, with an estimated high-end value of $96 billion on reported annual revenue of $3.7 billion, or about three times the annual revenue of a single national media company, for example, the Washington Post Co. The Post’s market capitalization was $2.3 billion in summer 2012, or about twice its annual revenue. Facebook’s anticipated market capitalization, at least at the high end, was nearly thirty times its annual revenue. How is this possible for a company that produces nothing? Potential investors are assuming an operation that reaches nearly one person in six in the world will be able to eventually turn that traffic
into enormous profit. While Facebook may not produce a product, it does provide what may be the most valuable of all commodities in a dangerous, complex world: a connection to friends, however distant.

*Economics and content*

Gabe Arnold and Rachel Hunziker, the founders of geauganews.com, are relying on the same concepts of hope and connection to create a company. Their business model makes Facebook an integral part of their plan. In their pitch to advertisers, Geauga News optimistically touts “reach,” with an advertiser potentially being able to get to 169,169 friends of the 1,122 fans of the operation’s Facebook page.\(^53\) (The advertising brochure was put together in December 2011; as of May 2012, the site’s fan base had grown to more than 3,000). How realistic is it to get a message in front of that many people through a Facebook page? Not very, though not impossible. Based on Pew research, it is much more likely that only a tiny fraction of the escalating circle of friends would ever see a Geauga News post. Using the most optimistic formula, something closer to 15,445 individuals might see a Geauga News posting, based on 9 percent of fans clicking any individual post multiplied by the average circle of friends. Based on a seven-day sampling of audience reaction, however, the actual result could be far less, closer to 337 (an average of 2.3 audience interactions per post multiplied by the average friend circle of 155).\(^54\) Still, Facebook is potentially a significant lever for expanding audience, and the Geauga News’s business plan illustrates how the various outlets are using Facebook in a variety of ways.

In the case of Geauga News, Arnold and Hunziker are pledging direct posting on their Facebook string for advertisers through “featured business stories” as well as
display advertising on the Website. Television, too, is offering Facebook postings directly to advertisers, in a way that makes it difficult to distinguish from news. For instance, under its normal “Fox8 News” logo, the station posted this: “Has your child been visited by the Tooth Fairy recently? We want to see their gummy grins :) Click the link to enter your child’s picture in the Hudec Dental Tooth Fairy contest. One lucky winner will win an at-home tooth whitening system and a $25 gift card.” Of course, the nature of Facebook as both a sharing and commenting medium, makes mingling advertising and news a risky venture, at least for the advertiser. “NEVER GO HERE!” Steve Varga replied to the Fox8 post. “They are the Jiffy Lube of dentists.” “Worst dentist ever,” Johsua Lacedup Howerton replied. The Plain Dealer, too, is experimenting with turning its Facebook stream over to an advertiser. Figure No. 5.2 shows examples.

**Source:** Screen shot by the author February 12 and February 18, 2012.

**Figure No. 5.2 – Plain Dealer example of monetizing Facebook**
Most outlets, in fact, that live or reach into Geauga and Wood counties mingle some type of promotion, news, news updates, and calls for comment. In this examination, the logos and presentation of the items from all outlets were identical across all types of posts. The *Plain Dealer* was the exception in noting when a posting was “sponsored” by using the word, as seen in Figure 5.2, as a prefix before a paragraph of text. That the other outlets do not leaves the audience in charge of determining whether any individual post is a paid advertisement, an outlet contest or event, actual news, or simply an attempt to start a conversation.

*Social media and the Public Sphere*

In order to put some context on how Facebook is used in the two markets and to gauge potential effects on the public sphere and public affairs information, postings were tracked for a consecutive seven days and were coded by type of post, geography, content, and audience interaction. The coding sheet is attached as Appendix B. Overall, this textual examination revealed that newspapers were not only less likely to use Facebook for news updates than the market leaders, they also were less likely to get reaction from the audience when they did so. This is the opposite of what was seen on the media websites, where newspapers reigned. This difference is readily discernible. For instance, the *Blade* published an extensive investigation on the influx of Chinese investors into the community. The Facebook posting touting the investigation collected four “likes” and no comments. The package posted to the Website garnered numerous forwards and twenty-six comments. As noted earlier, commercial broadcast stations in each market were the leaders, across all categories, including number of posts and audience reaction. The exception is the *News-Herald*, which uses its Facebook stream to
promote its Media Lab bloggers, a cadre of local residents and organizations recruited by the newspaper to provide blogs. The newspaper, however, despite its number of posts (a total of 118 for the seven-day period) got fewer audience reactions in total than nearly all other outlets.

A key finding of the examination is the extraordinary lack of postings, public affairs or otherwise, directed at either Geauga or Wood counties. As found in the previous examinations of print outlets and Websites, local newspapers – the weeklies in Geauga and the Bowling Green daily in Wood – were responsible for the few items that were available. In addition, state and international news, also unlike the print versions of the dailies that report a significant amount of such news, rarely are used for Facebook postings. Table 5.2 breaks down the type of post per outlet and geography, which was defined as the area where the content of the post originated, such as a traffic accident, or the location of the population at whom the content was directed. A posting promoting an event in Bowling Green, for instance, was coded as Wood County. Home County is defined as the county where the media is geographically based. The Target Counties are Geauga and Wood. In the case of the media based in those two counties, the home and target are the same and their numbers are listed under Target County.
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<th>State</th>
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Table No. 5.2. – Breakdown of Facebook post type and geography
Content of Facebook postings

In addition to frequency, geography, and type of posting, the varying philosophies for using Facebook among the outlets also are seen in the content being posted. The Plain Dealer, which has the most reporting resources at its disposal of any of the outlets in either designated market area, used the social media site for news three times during the sample seven days, twice for updates on court stories and once for entertainment. As perspective, the Cleveland market leader, Fox station WJW, peppered its fans with all manner and mode of content, ranging from thirteen economic reports to twenty-six crime items (an average of 3.71 a day for just crime). Table 5.3 breaks down the categories of content, using the same coding sheet as for the examination of the print content. The table does not display results for the category of moral issues for the sake of space and because few instances for that category were found.
**Table No. 5.3 – Breakdown of content categories on Facebook**

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<td>1</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WJW</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>Geauga Sun</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Audience reaction**

Not surprisingly, perhaps, audience reaction appears to be a function of size and content. WJW, which far outdistances any outlet in either market with its six-figure circle of followers, routinely gets hundreds of likes and comments on a single post.

Collectively, the station’s Facebook stream rivals the size and energy of the Plain Dealer’s Website commentary in terms of number and frequency of comments. The two,
Website commentary and replies to Facebook posts, likely are separate but overlapping streams and represent a further expansion of the public sphere. As noted by the Pew Research, those most likely to take part in Facebook look more like the general population, while those who follow print Websites tend to look like those who use Twitter more. In other words, Twitter and print Website users tend to be whiter and richer than the average U.S. resident. Some research also indicates the personalities of those most likely to take part in a Facebook stream are different than those most likely to take part in Twitter, with Facebook users tending to be motivated more by the need for socialization and recognition. Table 5.4 breaks down audience reaction, focusing on the top five Facebook streams that get the most reaction. None of them are newspapers.
Table No. 5.4 – Top 5 Outlets for audience Facebook responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outlet</th>
<th>Likes</th>
<th>0-5</th>
<th>6-10</th>
<th>11-16</th>
<th>17-25</th>
<th>26-25</th>
<th>plus 35</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WJW (C)</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTOL(T)</td>
<td></td>
<td>63</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOIO (C)</td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>WEWS(C)</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WUPW(T)</td>
<td></td>
<td>47</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outlet</th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>0-5</th>
<th>6-10</th>
<th>11-16</th>
<th>17-25</th>
<th>26-25</th>
<th>plus 35</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WJW (C)</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>68</td>
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<tr>
<td>WTOL(T)</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>WEWS(C)</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WUPW(T)</td>
<td></td>
<td>48</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The headings are ranges of likes and comments per post. For instance, if a post received two likes, it was coded in the 0-5 range. The same ranges were used for comments.

Both the commentary on Facebook and the nature of posts from institutional organizations like commercial broadcast stations have led to some emerging scholarship about what the rise of the audience means to public life as an extension of the public sphere. Despite the sincere optimism some scholars have associated with social media and events like the Arab Spring, as noted earlier, other researchers have begun to question whether a pure network, without responsibility for content, has resulted in what researcher Anthony Ferri termed the “emergence of the entertainment age.” In what could be seen as the natural conclusion to a post-modern world where daily existence is constructed through a prism of selected messages, the enormous amount of information,
all with the same weight and presentation, surging through digital networks has created a situation where the ultimate goal is to amuse rather than inform, perhaps as an economic necessity. Researcher Matthew Auer picked up this theme in suggesting that social media, while making communication more complex, has not necessarily lessened the potential impact of policy makers. In a world in which entertainment is more important than public affairs and where daily professional journalism is on the wane, manipulation is easier. Noted Auer: “A closer look at the so-called democratizing functions of social media in politics reveals the influence of powerful intermediaries who filter and shape electronic communications.”

Yet, in Geauga and Wood counties, these intermediaries appear to be the media, not the political power structure reacting to and attempting to lead an increasingly complex array of media, as is seen more on the national level. The power structure has not embraced social media. In what seems contradictory, respondents to the survey of traditional opinion leaders in both counties say in-person communication (63.6 %, n = 91) is the “most important” method they have of communicating with their existing constituencies while social media ranks only ahead of the distant broadcast media (20 % ranked social media as “very important,” n = 28). Clearly, they do not see social media as a proxy for in-person communication. The rankings held true across the media when asked how important each is for communicating to potential customers and constituents, though newspapers rose to just behind e-mail newsletters as most important (29.1 % ranking them as “very important,” n=41). Yet, social media, again in a somewhat contradictory finding, placed ahead of all broadcast and just behind newspapers, when
asked which method was the most effective in gathering feedback about whether their messages were properly received. Table No. 5.5 displays the results for this question.

**Table No. 5.5 – Opinion leaders and feedback on their messages**

**Question:** Please rate the following for how effective they are in gathering feedback from your intended audiences. In other words, what type of delivery method is effective or not effective in giving you information about whether your communication was received.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Average*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local newspaper</td>
<td>19.2 % (24)</td>
<td>14.4% (18)</td>
<td>4.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>50 % (%1)</td>
<td>4.9 % (18)</td>
<td>2.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>48.4 % (%60)</td>
<td>1.6 % (2)</td>
<td>2.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cable</td>
<td>52.8 % (%65)</td>
<td>2.4 % (3)</td>
<td>2.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization Website</td>
<td>7.9 % (10)</td>
<td>30.2 % (38)</td>
<td>5.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Websites</td>
<td>36.3 % (45)</td>
<td>4.8 % (6)</td>
<td>2.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media</td>
<td>22.4 % (28)</td>
<td>17.6 % (22)</td>
<td>3.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (e-mail/newsletter)</td>
<td>5.5% (7)</td>
<td>36.2 % (6)</td>
<td>5.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-person</td>
<td>1.6 % (2)</td>
<td>53.9 % (69)</td>
<td>6.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*=Respondents were asked to rate the method on a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 being the most effective in gathering feed. The extremes are listed by those rating those methods as 1 and 7.

**Ethical implications of a mean sphere**

The results become more contradictory when the comments associated with the questionnaire are examined. Many mentioned social media as the future of journalism and public communication. Yet, there was an evident reluctance to engage. Wrote one respondent, a 26-year-old female who volunteered as a communications professional for a Geauga County school organization: “Democratization is not necessarily a good thing. For example, Facebook ‘likes’ and shares will determine what is seen as important. Entertainment is valued more than education about the real problems and issues in the world.” A 45-year-old businesswoman who describes herself as a community volunteer
in Geauga County believes social media will rule as well but worries about their impact:
“I believe the future of journalism will be more of the social media type, immediate
responses and information, which also calls to question fact checking and research - if it
is fast can it be fact or is it the best information at that moment whether it is true or not.
That is scary.”

It is likely the opinion leaders are expressing an element of their own poor
experience trying to consume news on social media, especially Facebook, by stressing
both the importance of their own communication as well as a desire, though tepid, for a
strong traditional journalism. Though social media, as found in this study, has yet to
significantly engage issues in Wood and Geauga counties, many of the respondents are
undoubtedly exposed to what is coming out of nearby metro markets, and they may be
uncomfortable with a purely audience-driven information landscape. Part of that may be
the extraordinary ugliness associated with some of the comment streams.

These streams are most often associated with the numerous crime reports put out
by the commercial stations. For instance, Lisa Rantala, the main law enforcement
reporter for WTOL in Toledo, posted the mug shot of an African-American man arrested
after a shooting at a Super Bowl Party. The man was out on bond from another suspected
shooting at the time he was arrested. Rantala posted this update to the station’s Facebook
account: “Remember Tremayne Griffin? Police arrested him Friday... accusing him of
shooting three people at a superbowl party. It was two days after he posted a $100,000
bond for another shooting. Now the judge who issued that bond wants to see Griffin
today face to face. What words would you have for Griffin?” The post, with no
accompanying link to a story, launched a string of fifty-three comments. Including this exchange:

**Danie Holmes:** I have no idea how this guy is. But I have seen many like him and I have seen what it can do to a family, a neighborhood and city. There seems to be no escaping this newly emerged dangerous generation …

**Craig Singer:** Fools like that give a bad name for an entire race no wonder people are prejudice.

**Michael Allen:** I just cannot get over how big them lips are.

**Craig Singer:** Big lipped beast is what he is and should be treated as such.

**Jerry Hicks:** From what i see from the media 90 % of the crimes being covered are blacks committing them, i see no prejudice here just facts. Havnt see any whits boys busted for drive by shootings or burlgaries lately.

**LaJauna Bailey:** No thry’re not being busted for drive bys or burglaries just running people over and dragging them with their cars and starting fires and shooting up schools and blowing things up….I’m sure there’s more, but its early and I’m sure you catch my drift.

**Hollie Imaledernotafollower Williams:** this is the very reason I left toledo,two many racist caucasusens,so sad the big lips comment,God bless y’all.

In the environment of a pure network, Facebook has no responsibility for the content of either postings or comments, though individuals using it do, as suggested by the Virginia ruling upholding the firing of the sheriff’s deputies. This depends, however, on the context. For instance, a former high school student successfully fought her suspension after setting up a Facebook page called “Ms. Sarah Phelps is the worst teacher I’ve ever met” by arguing her use of the social network was covered by the First Amendment. Facebook executives clearly are aware of the issue of the nature and content of comment streams on its network, sending out to more than 6,000 developers an updated “comment box” plug-in for sites like Wordpress and other back-end systems. The plug-in was pitched as a way for site owners to improve discourse by forcing viewers to use their Facebook log-ins before leaving a comment. The Blade, for instance, installed
the system during the course of this study. Facebook, too, monitors its network for spam and “offensive material,” without defining either. Of course, these likely are economic decisions as much as anything. The plug-in, in addition to offering monitoring tools, helps tie the enormous traffic many news outlets get, like the *Blade*, to Facebook.

Rantala, in fact, warns viewers on her Facebook page that she monitors the conversation and deletes offensive comments. The same post associated with her page collected only four comments. A story later posted to the station’s Website had no space for comments. The question is, are news outlets responsible for the conversations they start? Do the comments open a larger window to community thought, as *Washington Post* writer Gene Weingarten suggested anonymous newspaper Website comments can, or are they sometimes merely hate speech that serves no broader purpose than to perpetuate prejudice and stereotype? Researchers Mark Cenite and Yu Zhang suggest that journalists do have a higher responsibility to rational democratic discourse and that this higher calling should be reflected in policies directed at non-journalists using their established channels. Scholar Mark Deuze is a particularly strident critic of institutionalized journalism, arguing it is a system of control. It is true, he notes, that newer technology such as Facebook has enabled a once largely silent audience to become more producers and shapers of the world they live in, which he views as both good and bad. The answer, however, is not to have journalism impose corporate structures on them.

This study reveals that social media are becoming an integral part of the news landscape as media outlets move to expand or protect their economic interests. This has resulted in a largely urban-oriented social media stream, absent the typical public affairs coverage seen in the traditional media, especially newspapers. Print media in both
counties have largely chosen not to take part in social media, a move likely stemming from their historical roots as providers of a news product that results in paid circulation. Television, overall, has tightly embraced social media, in the process transferring its brand of the immediate, visual, and often, though not always, violent news to this medium. This has put the audience in the position of acting as their own gatekeepers, a situation that offers enormous promise to break the longheld criticisms of a journalism captured by corporate interests. But, it also means the audience, as their power increases, bears more responsibility for understanding what they are consuming and, conversely, what they are not consuming. Further, the same technology that has increased the potential influence of the individual has transformed the individual into a recognized commodity that can and is being sold to corporate interests.

These issues, while evident in times of routine, become amplified when big news hits. Metro newspapers transform themselves simultaneously into broadcast outlets and weekly newspapers, shooting video and reporting minutiae they normally disdain. Smaller newspapers strive to act like their urban counterparts, rushing out updates on their Websites. Most turn to social media to stake their own claim to the story. Television embraces the news with an historic lust, pre-empting programming and going live with experts while at the same time folding in their social media viewers. The audience, too, is transformed, struggling to find both fact and meaning as they toggle between outlets and each other. This process was sparked on a chilly late February morning in Chardon when a young man in a gray sweatshirt calmly walked into the high school cafeteria where he had waited for the bus hundreds of times before, pulled out a .22-caliber handgun, and took aim at his fellow students.
Notes


3 Ibid.

4 Facebook post, the Sentinel-Tribune, May 4, 2012.


14 Leticia Bode, “Opting into Information Flows: Partial Information Control on Facebook,” paper delivered to the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, July 2011, St. Louis, MO.


24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Facebook posting, WEWS NewsChannel 5, February 16, 2012.

27 Ibid.


30 Ibid.


32 John Hornton and Michael Scott, interviews by the author, December 11, 2011, Chardon, OH.


43 Ibid., 6.

44 Newspaper Association of America, “Trends and Numbers…”


49 Amy Mitchell, et al., “What Facebook and Twitter…”


The average was determined using a formula with numbers supplied in Arnold’s advertising brochure.

Facebook posting, Fox8 News, February 17, 2012.

The time period was February 16, 2012, to February 22, 2012. The time period was selected to include a weekend and avoid any large planned news events, such as the primary election in the spring.


T.J. Lane, a wiry, white, 17-year-old boy being reared by his grandparents in the quiet countryside of Geauga County, gave no clue that the cold, clear morning of February 27, 2012, was any different than the start of any other school day. Lane was among many students who gathered in the well-lit cafeteria of Chardon High School to wait for the bus that would take them to Lake Academy in Willoughby, about 15 miles away in Lake County. He displayed no emotion as the clock hit 7:30 a.m., and he pulled a .22-caliber, semi-automatic Ruger handgun from a knapsack. He pointed the weapon, firing at several of his classmates who were seated around a cafeteria table. He later told police he aimed high at the backs of their heads so they didn’t suffer as they died.1

The first call to the Geauga County 911 Center came in at 7:38 a.m., from a student with a cellular telephone who initially dived under a table when the shooting began and then ran from the school.2 In the first ten seconds of the call, the dispatcher could be heard telling someone in the background, “school shooting.” At 2:46 into the
call, or 7:41 a.m., the female student told the dispatcher she could hear sirens approaching. The student, weeping, then handed the phone to someone standing next to her. Three minutes later, while the dispatcher was still gathering information from the first 9-1-1 call, Cleveland television station WOIO posted a headline on its Website: “BREA ING: Possible shooting at Chardon High School.” WOIO attributed the information to “Chardon Fire” and reported that “19 Action News [the station]” had a crew on the way. Chardon Fire refers to the city emergency medical technicians.

The shooting touched off simultaneous information explosions. Participants and witnesses to the horrific event bounced from one information stream to another, relaying, responding, opining, and expressing, searching simultaneously for both facts and meaning. Those closest to the event but not actually involved, students, educators, and their loved ones, established an instantaneous feedback loop using mobile technology. Members of the broader community, with their deep connections to the school, began exchanging information and rumor, using social media and mobile technology and each other. The news outlets overwhelmed these narrower channels, wielding social media such as Twitter and Facebook to dip into, subsume, and then expand them using the air waves and Websites. All of this happened instantaneously, with the separate channels merging into a large, single public space made up of undulating funnels that danced and entwined together, serving both as separate streams as well as part of a larger whole.

The idea of multiple streams converging, in part, was borrowed from concepts suggested by researchers John Dimmick and his colleagues, who explored the use of mobile technology and whether it served to replace or complement more traditional means of consuming the news. They found in their 2011 study that the two tended to
work together, with users occupying the empty space between periods of more traditional media consumption with mobile use. The image of a public sphere in which participants bounce between streams, contributing and consuming bits of information from each to create a larger whole, as will be discussed in-depth in this chapter, also is supported by a growing literature that suggests, as the Pew Research found in 2011, that users tend to consume multiple channels of information. This is particularly true when a crisis occurs.

During times of relative quiet and routine, the public sphere can be envisioned as growing from small to large, with the ignition touched off by journalism performing its function, however imperfectly, of finding and telling stories. Depending upon the strength of the ignition, such as the Chardon Nog Jog and the Munson Egg Hunt, the energy expands the sphere as the audience grows and coalesces to debate, contribute, and decide meaning before finally subsiding. The reverse was seen in the moments after the shooting, an event that cracked the foundations of normalcy, and journalism had to react rather than create. An enormous space exploded into existence, with myriad streams of information all competing and struggling. This is best expressed as an inverted public sphere, where the space started large and grew narrower and smaller as more concrete information became available and the explosive event dissipated.

This was a time-driven process taking place both within and between spaces created by journalism and technology. In the first moment, the roles of media and audience became reversed, at least in part. The audience became reporter and the reporter became audience. Further, the roles of the individual media became reversed, with metro outlets displaying traits of hyper-local media and hyper-local media taking on traits of the
metro media. Convergence issues were taken to extremes, with commercial television attempting to take on the traditional role of print through written Website updates and print taking on the role of television through video and sound. All of these elements collided in social media. Media theorist Marshall McLuhan, though writing before the advent of the Internet, describes this process in his *Laws of Media*: “On the telephone or on the air, it isn’t messages that travel at electric speed: the sender is sent, minus a body, as information and image, and all the old relationships of speaker and audience tend to be reversed.”

Overall, this study found a reversal of what was observed during times of normalcy. Geauga County had largely been ignored by neighboring metro news outlets, with the primary responsibility for reporting public affairs falling to weeklies the *Maple Leaf*, the *Geauga Times-Courier*, and to a lesser extent the *News-Herald*. When the shooting happened, however, routines were shattered and a black hole of information formed, sucking in everything within reach, regardless of source. The metro media, as could be expected, dashed to fill this void. This chapter explores this phenomenon by tracing media and audience interplay among the various technology streams during the first eight hours of the tragic shooting at Chardon High School. Those hours are broken into three segments, reflecting when significant developments were relayed to the broader public. This chapter also reports the results of an Internet-based questionnaire and focus group with Geauga County residents, exploring their experiences with the media in

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1 Many of the streams, such as Twitter posts and Website updates, were captured live and no longer exist in the same way they were originally presented. These are available from the author. In addition, in many cases the timeline could not be exactly reconstructed through the lack of time stamps in some cases and the way many outlets presented the news, by repeatedly updating original Website postings. The timeline should be viewed as approximate.
connection with the event and their perceptions of credibility, which also was found to be
driven by time and technology.

7:44 a.m. to 8:18 a.m. – ‘More news NOW, please!!!’

While Cleveland station WOIO appeared to be the first in the market with the
news, reporting both the lockdown at the high school and the fact it appeared to be a
shooting, this was a distinction without a difference. The other media in the region also
reacted quickly and within minutes of WOIO. WEWS television Tweeted: “BREA ING:
Sheriff’s department and OHSP heading toward Chardon High School.” The News-
Herald first Tweeted, “We’re headed to Chardon High school on lockdown,” then
quickly followed with a reTweet of @mvielhaber: “Chardon Fire live scanner…. Possible
school shooting.” Mike Vielhaber is a photographer with WEWS television.\(^9\) The
Geauga County Maple Leaf followed moments later: “BREA ING: SHOOTING AT
CHARDON HIGH SCHOOL. SCHOOL ON LOC D OWN.” W Y C television, the first
to stake its claim to the hashtag #chardonshooting, Tweeted: “Shooting at Chardon High
School; police still searching for the gunman. WKYC-TV news for the latest
#chardonshooting.”

The Plain Dealer, in relative terms, was slow to rouse. The newspaper broke the
news to its audience by being the first to Tweet specific injuries: “BREA ING NEWS:
Shooting at #chardon High School leaves at least 4 injured.” The Tweet also was the first
to contain a link to a Website report. The story was supplied by reporter John Horton,
who had been preparing breakfast for his children at his home less than a mile from the
high school, when he got a call from the newspaper and dashed to the school. The
Website report appeared at 8:18 a.m. By then, the Geauga Maple Leaf had Tweeted at
least three times, taking on the traits of live television or radio reports with reporter observations from the scene:

#Chardon parents lined on streets, worried, talking on cell phones. Information hard to come by on sidewalk.
#Chardon shooting news from (Chardon schools Superintendent) Joe Bergant, 3 boys and 1 girl have been shot. Extent of injuries unknown.

As the media mobilized and scrambled, parents, students, and educators inside the school and those who had dashed outside served simultaneously as audience, reporter, and victim. In the first moments, the information goal was to get word to emergency medical personnel and law enforcement, as well as loved ones and friends. This happened largely through mobile technology. Plain Dealer reporter Michael Scott later that afternoon documented the frustration of students who were instructed to stay off their phones for as long as twenty minutes after the shooting began as they huddled in a classroom beneath their desks:

[Student] Melissa [Schmuhl] said students sat there for “probably 20 minutes” before the teacher asked if anyone had a smart phone, checked her email and found that police and emergency workers were on the way to the school where five students had been shot and injured another.

“So at that point, we still didn’t have our phones out - though a couple people did have phones on them and were quietly checking web sites for news,” she said. “Finally, she got an email that said if we had cell phones we could contact our loved ones and let them know what’s going on.”

The community at large consumed media reports, social media, and communicated with each other, in person and electronically. While most of the other media were staking their claims to the story on Twitter, Fox8 turned to Facebook and its enormous number of followers. The resulting commentary served to coalesce immediate
feelings and rumor, as well as to launch the struggle to give some meaning, some context, for the tragedy.

Within the first seventeen minutes of the post, 101 comments were attached to it. Of those, twenty-eight shared information, such as Valerie Victoria Gravino reporting, “3 people shot so far.” Melissa Hill reported in remarkable detail, “I am hearing that multiple kids were hit in the cafeteria and that one of the shooters is still on the lose. That the school is on lockdown. One mother said her son sent her a text, saying they were hiding in a room and had blocked the door with a piano.” Later in the string, it was revealed that rival Cleveland television station WKYC was interviewing on-air a mother who was on a cell phone with her child in the school. The interview had the same details as Hill reported. Sixteen comments passed along reports from other media or told the Facebook viewers to switch their media streams. “Watch Channel 3, they are live,” Helen Suchy wrote. Martino Popa simply posted a link to WOIO.

Fifty-two comments were reaction to the shooting, often with elements of the first steps toward trying to make sense of the event, with elements of tracing motivation for the shooting or placing blame. “It’s sad on how our children aren’t even safe in school,” Lisa Marie Tinker wrote. im F rydrych replied, “Moved there because of reputation.....isn’t that the truth..nowhere is safe. no where!!!!” Lucy Pacillo advanced the issue to the role of parents, “Where are they getting these guns from? Parents really need to pay attention to the kids more.” Five comments were framed as statements from witnesses or near participants to the event. “Lifeflight just flew overhead,” Jamie Andrews wrote. “Can hear nothing but sirens and I live in the township,” Sandy Fisher
reported. Ronnie Sweet wrote, “i am here there is one dead thay have not got the shooter yet.”

The dynamic seen in the comments associated with Fox8’s post were evident in responses by participants to an online questionnaire when they were asked how they first heard about the shooting and their first action after hearing the news. The participants were recruited through Facebook by a snowball method (which asks those who received the link to the questionnaire to pass it on to others who lived in Chardon) employed by the author and by telephone requests from randomly selected Chardon telephone numbers by two research assistants. Fifty-four completed questionnaires were gathered and twenty-seven answered questions about their perceptions of the media. The respondents were asked to pick how they perceived themselves “within the context of consuming news such as the shooting at Chardon schools.” The goal of the question was to better understand how they identified themselves when tragedy struck their community, as opposed to during more routine times. When forced to choose, 13 percent (7) identified themselves as parents; 5.6 percent (3) as educators; 3.7 percent (2) as community leaders, and 77.8 percent (42) as community members. When asked how they learned about the event, which was designed to provide perspective on the dynamics of the first few moments, all types of media fell below the most frequent answer, “other.” Word of mouth apart from technology and streams of journalism was the most likely method for the spreading the news, followed closely by posts on Facebook from friends and acquaintances. Table No. 6.1 gives the responses.
Table No. 6.1 – First word of the shooting at Chardon High School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question: How did you first learn of the shooting?</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct communication from someone at the school</td>
<td>7 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio news</td>
<td>4 (7.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television news</td>
<td>6 (11.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter from media</td>
<td>2 (3.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter from friend/acquaintance</td>
<td>7 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook post by media</td>
<td>2 (3.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook post by friend/acquaintance</td>
<td>9 (16.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News media Website</td>
<td>2 (3.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15 (27.8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked about their first action after hearing the news, the primary response, not surprisingly, was to seek further information. They did this, overwhelmingly, by turning to the traditional media. A plurality turned to television newscasts or broadcast Websites. This, no doubt, is the result of two factors: Over seven decades, television news has taught its audience that broadcast is the place to go for breaking news. In addition, television was first with the breaking news and provided more information faster than the other media, though the quality of some of this information, as will be seen, can be questioned. Table No. 6.2 reports the results.
Table No. 6.2 – First reactions after learning of the news

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question: Immediately after learning of the shooting, which of the following best describes your actions:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sought more information from television news</td>
<td>15 (31.9 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sought more information from a newspaper Website</td>
<td>9 (19.1 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sought more information from radio news</td>
<td>3 (6.4 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sought more information from media Facebook posts</td>
<td>4 (8.5 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sought more information from your Twitter feed</td>
<td>2 (4.3 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tweeted about it</td>
<td>0 (0 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posted to Facebook about it</td>
<td>0 (0 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commented on Facebook or other Website</td>
<td>0 (0 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ReTweeted the information</td>
<td>2 (4.2 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7 (14.8 %)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those who answered “other” were asked to specify their actions. Most, too, said they sought more information, ranging from “checked the internet, not a specific tv website” to “sought more info from coworkers as I was on my way to work.” In a poignant answer, one respondent wrote in the questionnaire, “phoned spouse and went to school to get our daughter.” Another respondent wrote simply, “Thought about the tragedy deeply, but did no physical or electronic response.”

All this happened more or less simultaneously. As noted by the 9-1-1 calls, Lane fled the cafeteria after firing ten shots, an educator following him. The news and witness reports mingled together, as nearly always happens in such situations, and the media picked up this confusion as the next two hours unfolded. Media and audience reports had the number of students injured ranging from four to eight, with the severity of injuries
unknown. How many shooters there were vacillated between one and two. By 8 a.m.,
police and emergency responders had arrived at the school along with a swelling stream
of parents who were unclear about what exactly was happening. Geauga County 9-1-1
lines clogged with parents trying to get information on their children.12

8:19 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. – ‘Go to channel 3. they are interviewing people that were there.’

The initial reports ignited the information explosion, and the media scrambled to
get ahead of the audience. The idea of an armed gunman or gunmen on the loose in
Chardon ramped up an already shocking event. Parents lined up at the high school.

‘#chardonshooting parents still not allowed to retrieve children, deputy says, until
students accounted for,’ the Maple Leaf tweeted.

The confusion on the ground at the high school was replicated in the media
reports. As the clock crawled toward 8:50 a.m., the News-Herald tweeted: ‘Reports say
both shooters are in custody at Chardon High School.’ Though no link or source was
provided, this likely was a mash-up of two tweets moments earlier by WEWS television.
The station tweeted the essence of an interview with a mother who was in communication
with her daughter at the school: ‘Mom: Daughter heard shots fired and said there were
two shooters at Chardon High School.’ Moments later, the station followed it up:

‘Parent: 4 victims shot at Chardon High School, two suspects in custody.’ The Maple
Leaf tweeted back: ‘Despite reports of 2 suspects in custody, scanner reports sighting of
student-aged person sprinting away from school #chardonshooting.’ Chardon schools
Superintendent Joseph Bergant, who had dashed to the school with responders and
parents, spoke briefly with the growing crowd of journalists just before 9 a.m., and the
embattled Geauga Sheriff’s Department told reporters a news conference was scheduled
for 10:30 a.m. The News-Herald backtracked, “Chardon super says he thinks one shooter; but reports are saying two are in custody. Waiting for sheriff’s news conference.” The reports evidently referred to the WEWS report.

By 9 a.m., the audience seriously began crafting its own narrative with the help of the media, seeking simultaneously to get the facts of what happened and put the horrific incident into a manageble theme that reached beyond randomness. “DAG GONE BULLYING BET YAH. I and my prayer warriors praying!-(((,” Eva Cox-gibbs wrote in association with a WOIO television station Facebook. Sean Wahl reported in the same string: “People need to take kids these days alot more serious. This loser was Tweeting that he was going to do this and no one reported him. Hope those four kids pull through. Thoughts and prays.”

At 10:30 a.m., representatives from the Geauga County Sheriff’s Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation expanded the number of victims to five and confirmed that one student had died. No official would confirm the identity of the shooter or the victims. Some in the audience had no problem doing so, nor relaying rumors of who had died. “Ppl saying Russel King has died. (Posted by several on twitter and facebook) and shooter was TJ Lane,” wrote Amanda Price Ganslein in association with a Fox8 Facebook post about noon. King, in fact, had not died, but another student, Daniel Parmentor, had.

**Tweeting intent**

The purported Tweet from Lane would have surprising staying power and would ripple through the dialogue, becoming part of a narrative that harkened to the April 20, 1999, shooting at Columbine (CO) High School. The two shooters there initially were...
described in what *USA Today* ten years later called a “media consensus.” They were shown as being unpopular and bullied, turning to a group called the Trench Coat Mafia for friendship, compiling an enemies list for extermination, and eventually using automatic weapons to kill thirteen students and faculty before finally barricading themselves in the school library and committing suicide.

None of that except the shooting and suicides turned out to be true, but those themes returned with some force in the Chardon shooting, with reports of two shooters, retaliation for bullying as a motive, targeted victims rather than random killing, and signaling intent to do violence well before the act. The audience was an intimate partner with the media in crafting this initial narrative, with instances such as WEWS reporting the statements of a parent on the number of injured and the arrests of two shooters. Bullying was a consistent theme, such as this exchange on the WEWS Website about two hours after initial reports of the shooting:

**Melissa Lieberman:** and to think that people are bullied to commit these hateful crimes. who do we blame? the bullies or the gunmen?
**TJ Dudlee:** This is easy. Its the gunman. There is NO EXCUSE for what he did.
**Gomez Smith:** this is a tough one.....kids can only be pushed or bullied so far........they snap from years of torture.

Though difficult to trace the precise timing, the idea of a purported Tweet from Lane the night before the shooting was picked up by WEWS television just after 9 a.m. and was attributed to a Chardon High School student. Wrote WEWS on its Website: “[A Chardon High School student] told NewsChannel5 that a student tweeted that he was going to bring a gun to school but no one took him seriously.” At 11:13 a.m., WOIO aired a photograph of a slim young man wearing a tan trench coat and holding two
handguns, one of which appeared to be an automatic weapon. The station blurred the teen’s face. Though it would be another two hours before the *Geauga Maple Leaf* would be the first to Tweet “the shooter is rumored to be TJ Lane,” the WOIO announcer told his audience the station had learned the name but that “[the shooter] has not been identified by the authorities and we refuse to do so.” The report:

> But, using that name, getting on social media, getting on Twitter, we have found some pictures that are extremely jarring. This appears to be the gentleman, the 17-year-old involved in the shooting. These are pictures from his Twitter account. You can see him holding two handguns, one looks like a revolver and one looks like a 9 millimeter handgun there. But, this next picture is the one that is pretty chilling.

> This is the same individual holding a sign with today’s date and it says high school and I can’t make out that bottom word but then it says omegle and that is an online chat program. This is apparently a child, a kid that planned out this entire shooting, taking pictures … predicting this shooting, putting a date on it, putting these pictures out there. Why this hasn’t been reported is just incredible. Whoever saw these pictures should have immediately contacted someone.20

The photos took a meandering path before landing on television. They appeared to be linked to the Chardon shooting initially in a Tweet from an account under the name of Simo Kettunen, whose LinkedIn profile21 describes him as a freelance 3D graphic artist in Finland, that was posted at 9:16 a.m. The Tweet offered two links with no commentary but carried the hashtag #Chardon High School. The photos, in fact, had first been created and sent on Twitter on February 24, three days before the Chardon shooting. Though one of the links - http://i39.tinypic.com/zkojld.jpg - was taken down quickly, Figure No. 6.1 is a screenshot of the second link, http://i44.tinypic.com/jgpkt3.png.
At 10:18 a.m., “Barbara” relayed the link in a post to a Wordpress site by Steve Huff, who describes himself as a burned-out true crime writer and a weekend crime blogger for observer.com, a weekly newspaper based in New York City. His Wordpress site is called Huff’s Weird Blog. Huff thanked Barbara for the link and by 10:26 a.m. had captured the photos and posted them on his site, noting that the “EXIF data embedded in the photos show the images were assembled 2 days ago.” In this new posting, he wrote: “Chardon students and Chardon area residents have posted a striking photo of the person whom they say is the shooter, allegedly junior T.J. Lane.” While WOIO made the photos the focus of its coverage, none of the other traditional media included the photos in their news reports or reTweeted the information. The Plain
Dealer, however, did include a reTweet of the photos in a Storify package associated with the newspaper’s original Website posting of the shooting, and an automated Twitter feed posted on the Maple Leaf Website carried a link to Huff’s post.

The audience focused on whether the photos were presumed evidence that the tragedy could have been prevented. As viewers toggled from one news source to another, the photos and link picked up steam. A portion of a string of comments associated with a Facebook posting around 11:30 a.m. by Fox8:

Amy Brigham: “Why didn’t anyone report that the kid was sayin this on twitter? Joke or no joke, its a serious thing!”

Dan Dazzling Len: Channel 19 showed pics of shooter from Tweeter. They were posted last nite he had 2 weapons and a sign saying he was going 2 do this.

Lisa Gonzalez: Reminds me of Columbine all over again except on a smaller scale. There will be many questions. Thoughts go out to the families.

Cleveland Scene magazine writer Vince Grzegorek began tracing the origins of the Tweet late in the morning, quickly concluding the photo had no connection to the Chardon shooting. He traced a Tweet to @saltn4dollars who wrote simply, “Shooter?” followed by the link to the photos. It seems likely that had @saltn4dollars simply retweeted Simo Kettunen, the additional information contained in the second link might have dissuaded journalists from using the photos, though Grzegorek pointed out the sign in the photo said February 24, a bright flag that cast the Tweet into question as being connected. Grzegorek talked to WOIO News Director Dan Salamone about mid-afternoon, long after the Maple Leaf Tweeted T.J. Lane’s name and after the Plain Dealer, citing an interview with witness Nate Mueller, whose ear was grazed by a bullet, named him in a Web posting at 12:17 p.m. Salamone said he still had not confirmed
whether the photos were of Lane or someone else and that the station would continue to use them:

We’ve had probably 20 people look at those pictures with the guns and the picture of TJ Lane from his Facebook. Half say it’s him, and half say it’s not him. I’m looking at it, and there’s a very similar hairline, but the eyebrows look slightly different, and the nose is slightly different. But those things change depending on how you take pictures. They’re not definitive. We have calls out to the FBI to see if they have an opinion on where they came from, and we’re going to continue to use them with the identity blurred until we get some understanding of who that is and where they came from. It could be a hoax. If it’s a hoax, we’ll tell our viewers.28

12:31 p.m. to 6 p.m. – ‘Your Tweeting for "sensational journalism" is just sickning’

By early afternoon, the basic outline of what had happened was clear. T.J. Lane, a junior attending a private academy for troubled students, walked into the cafeteria where he had routinely waited for the bus, and opened fire. The shots seriously injured five students, of whom three later died. Though his name had not been confirmed and reported by the media until just after noon, Lane, in fact, had been picked up by law enforcers about 9 a.m., sitting calmly by the side of a road about a mile and a half from the high school.29 By 12:31 p.m, parents knew whether their children were safe, the community knew there were not two gunmen but one, and that he was in custody. The immediate threat was over, but the search for meaning had just begun.

The uneasy partnership between the audience and the media continued through the afternoon, as the information streams turned more from what happened to expressions of emotion and a quest for motivation and blame. The media were part of the dialogue, as the audience noticed they had stepped out of their routines and adopted seemingly different ways from what they normally saw. The Plain Dealer posted seven videos by 5 p.m., several photo galleries, and audio reports from some of the ten reporters it had on
the scene,\textsuperscript{30} in addition to numerous Tweets and Facebook postings. WTAM radio, the all-talk station in the Cleveland metro market, abandoned its usual syndicated programming, reporting on the incident and taking calls on the shooting for seven straight hours. All four network stations stayed live with the story through early afternoon, posting numerous stories and videos to their Websites. The Maple Leaf Tweeted often throughout the day, pointing to photos and videos posted on its Website, as well as a lengthening Web report posted on its home page as a free story.\textsuperscript{31} The coverage from the normally sedate Maple Leaf did not go unnoticed by its readers, including this exchange on Facebook:

\textbf{Virginia Bell:} Your Tweeting for "sensational journalism" is just sickning. I will never purchase your paper again. You should be ashamed of yourselves.

\textbf{Robin Masirovits Grow up Virginia:} Maple Leaf is a wonderful newspaper that keeps us updated on breaking news..... Geauga County Maple Leaf you have my thumbs up for your work....don’t let one idiot that obviously has no life worry you....

\textbf{Joe Brilla Jr.:} Sorry you were sickned, Virginia...and I’m sure the Maple Leaf will shutter its doors due to your failure to purchase their newspapers. It’s called "breaking news", in case you were wondering

\textbf{Virginia Bell:} There is a huge difference between reporting breaking news and reporting news for the shock and rating factor. It is a shame that the only local paper had to resort to this.

\textbf{Geauga County Maple Leaf:} Virginia, shock and rating factor? Are you serious? You obviously are not familiar with our newspaper.

\textbf{Joe Brilla Jr.:} Ok, Virginia, since you seem to know more about journalism than the rest of us, how exactly would BNN (Bell News Network) report this story?

\textbf{Virginia Bell:} I have faithfully purchased and read The Maple Leaf since it first came out. I loved that there was a paper that covered the county. I am certainly allowed to feel and comment on how some of the Twitter feeds and FB posts were so quickly published.\textsuperscript{32}

Comments associated with the main story on the \textit{Plain Dealer} Website built through the day as viewers conducted a meandering but in-depth debate on gun control,
with a smattering of other issues such as parental failure, geographical bias of white, suburban schools not taking safety seriously, and school bullying. Noted Tough Crust: “The US is still unique in the number that grab guns for general problem solving.”

Nonsense, said anonymous: “Yemen (out of all places) has a 100 million guns in a country with 23 million people. I follow Middle East news closely and you never hear of gun massacres there (except by the dictator government mowing down protestors). It’s not gun control that’s the issue in the US. It’s the severe moral degradation of society here in America.”

Similar strains of conversation were taking place on the News-Herald Website, with participants knitting together facts, rumors, and issues, including this exchange posted at 1:29 p.m.:

**a teacher:** Cutting teachers pay by 10% is a huge chunk of money from teachers already basically nonexistent pay. Putting in metal detectors isn’t going to stop things like thus from happening. There are multiple doors to schools that kids can sneak in to with the help of friends. Calling out for gun control isn’t going to prevent this either. Instead of calling out for ridiculous notions let’s pray that all the students and teachers at the high school get through this.  

**INSANE:** This is a sad situation. Instead of teaching children to believe in themselves and not worry about what others think.....they are taught to strike out by shooting, beating up or getting back at. People are out of their minds.....regardless BULLY OR BEING BULLIED OR SOLD BAD DRUGS....WHATEVER......doesn’t justify the actions.......and teachers shouldn’t have to be responsible for fixing what others have failed to do in teaching right from wrong to begin with. WAKE UP AMERICA!

As seen previously in routine times, the Plain Dealer and News-Herald Websites were primary gathering points for discussing the shooting story, with each collecting hundreds of comments associated with multiple stories. The Maple Leaf collected few comments in comparison. The other weeklies were non-players. The television stations’ Websites, however, were used far more during the first ten hours of coverage for
commentary than was typical. For instance, by 6 p.m. Fox8 collected 195 comments on its main story, far more than in the sample period examined earlier. The dialogue ranged widely from associating the issue to poor parenting to lack of school security to bullying, to whether the Roe vs. Wade U.S. Supreme Court decision had devalued life to the point where school shootings were becoming common. The audience continued to inform each other, such as this rather remarkable exchange, which occurred three hours after confirmation of the death of a student and within the context of Fox8’s story reporting the news:

Victoria Shea: So then, is there a student deceased or not? Not that it should matter, but for the students at Chardon, I hope they don’t have the grief of losing a classmate to deal with on top of the confusion and grief from the shooting
Patti Weese: Yes there is his name was Daniel Parmentor.
Rebecca Scott-Radolec: From what I understand, yes. That is what the police chief said in his news conference earlier today.
Tina Ann: there is 1 deceased."

The increased use of the television Websites for comments during coverage of the tragedy may be partially explained by the focus group responses. When asked to differentiate between the channel of information they found most useful in staying abreast of unfolding events and the source for that information, a plurality cited commercial, on-air television. However, a majority cited friends/acquaintances and social media when those categories were combined. Newspapers finished only ahead of radio. This question was designed to better understand how those most likely to be interested in the event stayed in touch with developments, regardless of the potential quality of content. Table 6.3 displays the results of the question.
The responses changed when the respondents were asked to pick which medium they found most *trustworthy* about reporting on the tragedy. This question was designed to force a judgment about the perceived quality of the content, itself, rather than the channel through which it was delivered. In addition, the author was curious as to whether the respondents would make a distinction between social media streams when mentioned specifically and social media commentary in general in light of the enormous amount of energy evident on Twitter and Facebook. Television remained the top single choice, while newspapers remained behind both television and friends and acquaintances. Table No. 6.4 reports the results to the question.
Table No. 6.4 – Trustworthiness of the media streams

Q: Regardless of how the information was delivered, which of the following did you find most trustworthy in reporting on the incident?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Stream</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends/acquaintances</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media commentary</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results, though perhaps disturbing for those interested in journalism as the main driver of public affairs information, are most likely the result of historic forces. People tend to trust others they know, as researcher Paul Lazarsfeld and his partners found in developing their theory in the 1940s of the two-step flow theory of communication. Under that theory, which was not developed in time of crisis but in a much more thoughtful setting of deciding presidential voting patterns, he found that undecided voters were only partially influenced by the media they consumed. They were just as likely to be influenced by opinion leaders they knew, such as church elders, doctors, teachers, and so on.36 This can be seen by nearly a third of the respondents saying they found their friends more trustworthy in reporting the news than any of the traditional media. A wide swath of scholarship has shown newspapers trail television by significant margins when the audience is asked to rate credibility.37 Yet, other scholars have argued that credibility and trust are separate concepts. Credibility, they tend to argue, is an extension of use, in that people tend to see as credible the media streams they
consume. Trust, however, combines a series of traits stemming from how information is presented, the sources used, the tone of the information, etc. When those factors are included and use controlled as a study variable, newspapers tend to fare as well or better than television. Scholar Kim Jooyoung and colleagues, for instance, found that major newspapers such as the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* rated higher on trustworthy scales than did equivalent broadcast networks.\(^3^9\)

The responses in this questionnaire likely stem from a combination of factors. It would be reasonable to assume that the *Plain Dealer* could be seen as the local equivalent to the *New York Times*, in terms of relative size, professional presentation, the use of sources, and so on, and that “newspaper” should rise significantly in the trust rankings. The author expected this to be a stronger result in light of two of the four television stations in the market erroneously reporting the Twitter photo. This, however, was only somewhat reflected in the responses, with newspaper rising to 20 percent when asked about trustworthiness rather than usefulness. Wrote one focus group respondent: “The *Plain Dealer* & *Maple Leaf* provided excellent coverage.” Of course, only the local weekly newspapers have routinely covered public affairs in the county, as the daily newspapers have withdrawn. Of those weeklies, only the *Maple Leaf* chose to cover the story on a breaking news basis. As its reach is tiny compared with those of the metro outlets, it is not surprising its coverage was overshadowed.

It also is highly likely that what scholar Mark R. Levy first found in 1979 was at play in the respondents’ answers. Building on Donald Horton’s 1956 explanation of parasocial relationships in the mass media of television, radio, and movies,\(^4^0\) Levy found the same phenomenon among audience’s watching television newscasts.\(^4^1\) Horton defined
para-social relationships as those formed at a distance, with audience members creating emotional attachments to projected personalities without direct experience. Audience members do not personally know the actors they see on either small or big screens, but they feel as if they do because of the intimate performances. Levy found the same effect when studying television news audiences. Individual audience members may not know the anchors and reporters, but they develop emotional attachments to them from a distance over time.

The role of social media is only now being studied in-depth by scholars and relatively little can be stated definitively about its role when big news hits other than, perhaps, both the audience and journalists use it extensively to transmit and respond to information. It is noteworthy that when questionnaire respondents were asked to pick the most useful methods of staying on top of developments, they chose Twitter and Facebook, with a combined 38.9 percent, surpassing that of even television. If friends/acquaintances were to be included, the percentage would rise to 53.8 percent, or more than the traditional media combined, either over the air or through their Websites. Yet, when asked about trustworthy information, they chose television, followed by friends and acquaintances. Social commentary finished ahead only of radio. This is likely the result of the respondents making a distinction between the postings of their friends and comments associated with postings made by the news media.

The findings also may be an artifact of the way the questionnaire was designed, which was to force respondents to pick one stream over another. When asked to judge “how the news operations covered the incident,” the majority of respondents used media as plural and often offered opinions on social media, television, and print. One
respondent walked through how she used the media streams available to her, including social media:

I was actually surprised and pleased at how professionally and carefully the incident was handled. It was good to hear cautious updates and interviews of people directly involved, and not sensationalism. Besides television, I kept looking at Facebook updates from the *News-Herald* newspaper, as well as Facebook updates from my children’s friends who were at Chardon High School that day.

My children go to West Geauga High School not Chardon, but we were equally worried that the shooter was someone who was going to go to all the Geauga County schools. As the news unfolded, we felt sad for the victims, but relieved that our kids were safe. My daughter and I texted back and forth a few times as we heard updates. Then both my kids used Facebook to connect with their several friends from Chardon. So most importantly, I’m glad the news media tried to have not only up-to-the-minute, but accurate updates; this was such a sensitive issue and event.  

Another respondent, who offered identification as a worker at the reference desk at the Chardon Public Library, worked with the visiting reporters as they came into the library looking for yearbook photos of the victims. The respondent found Facebook postings from students a more creditable and timely source than the local media:

I want to say that the tone was respectful from the media. I appreciated that. Also, when members of the news media came into the Chardon Library where I work the Reference Desk, they were always respectful asking for yearbooks to photograph student pictures. As far as trustworthy sources, kids on Facebook had much more timely news. They are not bound by confidentiality, so they freely reported when students died or were very close to death.

The findings reflect a minimal but growing body of research that has been relatively consistent in reporting that people tend to use social media to satisfy certain needs, including finding information that is both unique and unfiltered, as well as to reach out to family and friends. In experimenting about the effect of social media in generic crisis settings, researcher Lucinda Austin and colleagues found that: “audiences in our
study do not actively use blogs or Twitter during crises. However, participants still use forms of social media such as Facebook and text messages during crises to share or obtain insider information and to check in with family and friends.45

The aftermath

Intense coverage continued through the evening and into the next week. A second student, Russell King, was pronounced dead early on the morning of February 28. The third student, Demetrius Hewlin, died several hours later.46 Law enforcement and school officials gave several press conferences and updates, with Chardon Superintendent Bergant notably calling for parents, students, and community members, and journalists to get off social media, and to interact in person. “Hug your kids,” he said during a news conference the morning after the shooting. “Hug your parents. And news media, you do the same. Talk to your children. Don’t text them. Don’t Facebook them. I mean that from my heart.” Bergant also addressed a persistent stream of dialogue on social media, that Chardon was not Cleveland, that it was an essentially different place than what was routinely depicted in the mean sphere. “We’re not any old place, this is every place,” Bergant said. “As proof of the past, this could happen anywhere.”47 Despite repeated questioning, neither Bergant nor law enforcement officials would offer a motivation for the shooting, referring journalists to a news conference Geauga County Prosecutor Dave Joyce had scheduled for later in the afternoon after Lane’s initial court appearance. At the press conference, Joyce addressed the persistent rumors swirling through the digital space. He told reporters Lane told police he had chosen his victims at random, implying there was no connection to an ex-girlfriend. He declined to articulate a motive for the shooting, saying only that it did not involve drugs
or bullying. Lane, he said, “was not well.” The audience continued debating both the facts and the meaning of the incident. For instance, a majority of the sixty comments associated with the Plain Dealer’s late afternoon post on Joyce’s news conference challenged the prosecutor’s characterization of the shooting as random. Wrote GodHatesClevelandSports.com: “Another article quotes the prosecutor as saying Lane said he didn’t know the victims. This is clearly not true. Since that is untrue, it is likely that other statement’s by Lane – such as that this was random – also are not true.” Markwhiten23 agreed. “Exactly. By saying they were random, the defense is starting to build their case … Eventually, pleading insanity. Which is how you would probably want to defend this case.”

In the coming days, the metro outlets stayed outside of their normal treatment of Geauga County and tended to treat the shooting as a local story. The Plain Dealer devoted its entire front page to the shooting the following day, as well as four full pages inside covering various angles. The package included eight different bylines and four different photographer credits. The story remained on the Plain Dealer front page, though coverage by March 3 had dropped to photo that was used as a reference to a B1 story. The following Monday, March 5, there was no mention in the paper of the shooting, Chardon, or Geauga County. The News-Herald devoted its entire front page to the shooting for four consecutive days. The Maple Leaf’s first edition after the shooting, March 1, interestingly, did not have a front page entirely consumed by the shooting. The bottom quarter of the tabloid-sized paper was taken up by an article and photograph of the sentencing of the woman convicted in the drunken driving death of local judge Charles “Chip” Henry. While day-after editions of both the Plain Dealer and News-
Herald were found in the Chardon Public Library two weeks after the shooting, copies of both the Maple Leaf and the Geauga Times-Courier were missing.

G-TV did not cover the press conferences, though it did provide ongoing dates and places of events related to the shootings, such as community vigils and church gatherings, through its scrolling announcement service. G-TV also provided taped coverage of several of the community vigils. Geauga News did not mention the shooting until more than a week had passed. Co-founder Gabe Arnold addressed the tragedy in a column, noting that at the time of the shooting he was with a friend whose husband was in law enforcement. He got, he wrote, real-time updates without the benefit of the media. When he did turn to the media for “a few minutes,” he was abhorred:

It was difficult to watch the thirsty horde of opportunistic reporters swarming the victims looking for blood. I cannot describe those images any differently. While our brave and beloved law enforcement and emergency medical services teams worked with all their hearts to protect and serve our community, there were people there whose sole focus was to capture the moments of horror in real time. Seeing that disturbed my soul to its deepest core.

I am one of the founders of Geauga News, and our primary mission is to spread positive local news. Why is that so important to me? Because I feel the evil moments of this world are glorified way beyond measure. I understand that traditional media outlets have a job to do, but how far will someone go in an attempt to be the first to report on some heinous piece of horror?52

The column received the most response of any posting to date for the site, with twenty comments. Of those, fourteen could be classified as having a neutral or positive response. Six, however, took exception to Arnold’s characterization of the media. “I must say I didn’t like the reference in the story to the thirsty hordes of opportunistic reporters looking for blood,” wrote Bob Morrissette. “These are journalists doing their jobs. The editors send them out to get the story, what are they supposed to do?” Catherine
Whitright agreed: “Thank you for your comments but I do take exception to calling the news media bloodthirsty as for the most part I felt they did a better that usual job on reporting with sensitivity.” Meg Carver, noting that “not everyone has firsthand access to law enforcement information,” said the media were essential: “Without the news media on that horrible Monday, a lot of us would’ve been in the dark about what was happening. While it is a sad way to learn and stay updated, it is necessary.” Arnold responded twice to the critics, both times with a link to the portion of the Society of Professional Journalists Statement on Ethics that calls for minimizing harm when covering a story.

This chapter examined the role of the audience and the interplay with the media during a time of crisis, or big news. Overall, this study found an inverted public sphere that sprang into near instantaneous existence, with the audience serving as a partner with the media in delivering fact and crafting narrative. The individual roles of the media were reversed and expanded. The metro outlets, accustomed to ignoring Geauga County, suddenly become local outlets, reporting details and events they would normally ignore outside the context of shocking news. The local media became metro outlets, reporting unfolding events in real time, often without context. This partnership, while certainly resulting in a deeper, richer news report than could have been achieved without it, also resulted in implanting an erroneous image that is unlikely to be erased. Two days after the shooting, for instance, and long after the Plain Dealer and other outlets such as Cleveland Scene and the Maple Leaf had pointed out the inaccuracy of the purported Twitter photos, pxt123 challenged a neighbor who said Lane gave no hint of the violence to come: “Yeah, right, unless you looked on his Facebook page any time in the last 60-90
day where he posted ‘everyone must die’ and posted photos of himself in a trench coat with two pistols in the killer position. Give me a break. This neighbor is part of the problem.”

Certainly, this dynamic of the audience taking part in the news was in existence long before digital technology increased the speed of communication. It is not difficult to imagine a crowd rushing out of their Habermasian pubs to rush to the town square as a courier cried news of a king’s death. This, too, was a public sphere, a space, where information was collected, exchanged, debated, and meaning determined. There are, however, some essential and important differences between the historic chatter that amplified and extended the known facts and instantaneous comment and contribution. Technology has made this process visible, as well as created – in some cases, at least – a readily accessible permanent record. The nature of social media has further complicated this process by presenting information in a single stream with fewer signposts and clues as to what is important versus not important, comment versus reporting. The traditional media, too, most notably commercial broadcast, are soliciting audience contributions that become visible as soon as they are contributed, without standard vetting. When big news happens in a location deficient in daily professional journalism, these issues are exasperated as the audience searches for information, regardless of source. The Geauga Maple Leaf, in fact, transformed itself into a daily for the purpose of the crisis, but its efforts, clearly among the best quality information coming out in the midst of the maelstrom, were overwhelmed by the metro media.

All of these issues contribute to the rise of the audience, leading to what may be the most vexing of questions in the coming decade. Who is a journalist? And what is
journalism? The audience, as seen in extraordinary times like the Chardon High School shooting and when sufficiently roused as in the Nog Jog, is remarkably adept at gathering information and creating narrative. The television stations that incorrectly passed along the Twitter photos can be rightly criticized for failing in their journalistic responsibilities to properly check before going on air with the information. So, too, editors at the News-Herald likely cringed at Tweeting the existence of two shooters. But, a Facebook commenter reported the death of Russell King twenty-four hours before he actually died. Is this a mistake by a citizen journalist on par with errors by paid journalists? During more routine times, will the citizens transform themselves into reporters to ask “where shall we go” without journalism to launch their efforts? If the citizens will not pay for their news, will they produce it on their own?

And what of those times when the paid journalists, through economic pressure to amass audience, sloth, or sheer exhaustion, mislead, misdirect, or flat out report wrong information? When individual audience members gather and distribute information they have gathered themselves to refute or contextualize media reports, such as was seen in the Chardon Nog Jog, are they acting as journalists, involved observers, or merely participants in a vibrant public sphere where truth and fact collide to create meaning? Or, all of the above? Thirty-six hours after the shooting at Chardon High School, these issues emerged in stark relief when WEWS reported the arrest of a high school student by the local sheriff for posting a picture of himself holding an assault rifle to his Facebook page.
Notes


9 Mike Vielhaber, https://twitter.com/#!/mvielhaber.


13 Facebook post, WOIO television, February 27, 2012.

14 Horton, “3 students killed…”


19 Ibid.


24 Ibid.


32 Facebook posting, Geauga County Maple Leaf, February 27, 2012.

33 Horton, “3 students killed…”


42 Responses available from the author.

43 Ibid.


48 Ibid.


50 Ibid.


53 Ibid.

Chapter 7: Citizens and journalism

“Ok, I read through the comments... CH5 has misrepresented and misreported the story.. good work. Whoever wrote that headline and the first sentence should be arrested for creating panic, lol.” – Connie Lynn (through a Facebook comment).

Thirty-six hours after the shooting at Chardon High School, Cleveland television station WEWS posted this headline on its Website: “Sheriff: Student in Portage County arrested for holding assault rifle in Facebook picture.”¹ In a Facebook posting, WEWS used the headline, the first sentence of the Web story, and added a question: “In the wake of the Chardon school shooting do you think this was an appropriate action?”² The problems were that the student had not been arrested for posting the photo, but for writing threats on his Facebook page and that he was one of two students Crestwood School District officials had asked local law enforcement to investigate.

The distinction between a photo and making alleged threats was not a subtle distinction for Chuck Christie, who posted ten comments challenging the story on the station’s Website site, supplying two links to other news outlets, suggesting viewers call up the original Crestwood schools news release, and repeatedly interpreting the issue for those he felt were being misled. Neither the First nor Second amendments were at stake in this arrest, Christie argued, which he felt would be self-apparent had the journalism been accurate. Wrote Christie: “The ‘Threatening Comments’ are what got him in trouble ... not the holding or owning of a firearm. I’m all for gun ownership ... I’m all for people taking pictures of themselves proudly holding a favorite weapon ... but when you cross that line and threaten the safety or lives of other people ... it’s time to get arrested and deal with the consequences!” This was not a high-level conversation. At one point,
Christie lost patience: “What a stupid comment!” he replied to one poster who suggested the boy be sent to the U.S. Army. “BTW… it’s also pretty stupid when you ‘like’ your own stupid comment!”

The rise of the audience and the technology that has given them extraordinary power to create their own narratives and inflate the public sphere have contributed to more than an economic disruption for institutionalized journalism. A news landscape in which the audience has instant access and the ability to immediately opine and contribute has called into question the definitions of both journalist and journalism. How are these concepts for an industry so intimately entwined with the nation’s founding to be interpreted in an environment that Marshall McLuhan described as one where “everyone is a publisher?” What are the implications for public affairs news, especially in locations such as Geauga County, where daily professional journalism resides outside its borders?

Does Christie’s contribution to the content of the WEWS Website constitute an act of journalism or merely an unusually energetic exercise of the role the audience always has played in reacting to and interpreting what it sees? This study examined a live news landscape in an attempt to better understand the interaction between the audience and journalism through the lens of the structural elements of the public sphere. Underlying that concept is that there is a fundamental difference between what the audience provides and what journalism provides. The key question: Has technology essentially erased the distinction between professional journalism and the audience? As seen in the Chardon Nog Jog episode, the audience served simultaneously as witness, interpreter, gatekeeper, and creator of narrative. All of these traditionally have been viewed as functions of journalism. If Christie and the hundreds of contributors to various
stories are contributing their own information and crafting their own narratives, are they a replacement for professional journalism? Is there even a distinction between the paid journalist and an engaged audience member who uses essentially the same tools?

This chapter addresses popular and scholarly debates of the role of the citizen in contributing to the news, as well as outlines the distinctions lawmakers at every level have made between professional journalism and inquiring citizens. These issues are put in context in Geauga and Wood counties, including the result of an examination of citizen efforts in the Toledo and Cleveland markets and survey results of opinion leaders, who acknowledge the changing landscape even while privileging traditional journalists. Finally, the author offers definitions for both journalism and journalist that attempt to separate tradition and emotion from the eternal but ever-evolving needs of representative democracy.

Overall, this study found three distinct areas of contributions from citizens, which some have argued put them in the traditional role of journalists: As contributors and interpreters of news stories supplied by traditionally defined journalists; as creators of their own, unique content that is presented in the form of journalism through established news outlets, and as entrepreneurs seeking to build their own platforms to both generate wealth and to inform their communities. This study found that the vast majority of these contributions took place within the confines of established journalism, as incidental elements of the public sphere and as intentional marketing and outreach efforts by news outlets seeking to find their way in a new landscape.

Before it is possible to discuss what happens next for journalism, it is necessary to parse these roles. For instance, without professional journalism to provide the ignition
and parameters for the public sphere the vast majority of citizen efforts likely would not exist. This is particularly true for public affairs information, an area almost solely the province of professional journalists. No routine citizen surveillance of governmental, institutional, or cultural organizations was found in either county. Searches on the most common Websites for collecting what has been called citizen journalism – placeblogger.com, the Knight Citizen News Network, and Cyberjournalism.net – revealed no sites situated in Geauga or Wood counties, though three were found centered in or near Cleveland, with none found in the Toledo area. Dozens of Google searches and explorations of top blogging sites such as Wordpress.com also failed to yield any significant efforts by citizens outside established journalism, with two exceptions: Geauga News and NBXxpress, both of which were started by local entrepreneurs and discussed extensively in previous chapters.

Parsing the roles and contributions of citizens requires some framework through which to gauge their efforts. The outlines for doing so were borrowed from The Elements of Journalism by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, both members of the Committee of Concerned Journalists and leaders of the Project for Excellence in Journalism. They argue nine essential elements, which knit together both practice and intent, must be present in order for what is produced to be defined as journalism:

1. Journalism’s first obligation is to the truth.

2. Its first loyalty is to citizens.

3. Its essence is a discipline of verification.

4. Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover.

5. It must serve as an independent monitor of power.
6. It must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise.
7. It must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant.
8. It must keep the news comprehensive and proportional.
9. Its practitioners must be allowed to exercise their personal conscience.\(^5\)

In discussing journalism, news, and journalists, The Missouri Group, which publishes a popular newswriting textbook, added a tenth element in distilling the book: “Citizens, too, have rights and responsibilities when it comes to the news.”\(^6\)

Traditional media outlets near or in both Wood and Geauga counties, as in other parts of the country, are attempting to harness local citizens for producing content. The \textit{Toledo Blade}, for instance, is supplementing journalist-supplied content on its hyper-local sites, OurtownSylvania.com and the newly launched OurtownPerrysburg.com, with contributions from local residents. The \textit{News-Herald}, through its MediaLab program, has institutionalized the recruitment and presentation of information from local bloggers and professionals. Weeklies in both counties, though not concentrating on the digital landscape through their Web sites, have long accepted contributions from local officials, ministers, and others, such as the \textit{Geauga County Maple Leaf} regularly printing a column from an unnamed Amish contributor who supplies reports on the local settlement. While commercial television, historically the medium with the least audience interactivity, rarely puts the citizen on air as a news-deliverer, the stations are increasingly seeing contributions through social media and comments on their Websites.

\textit{Journalism and communicators}

The intersection of audience and journalism always has been seen as problematic. The First Amendment was designed to protect and nurture an independent stream of
information to a public tasked with governing themselves. The fact this took place within
a private, money-driven marketplace meant news outlets must provide content that
even people would buy, or at least consume, to create profit. Since most of this money
came from advertisers, independence was constantly under threat from unholy allegiance
to corporations that wanted to sway a consuming public. This is what Upton Sinclair
bitingly called the “brass check” in 1919. This system resulted in routines and
professionals, people paid to provide this content as their livelihood. Walter Lippmann,
though not the first, was the most eloquent in connecting producers, news content, and
the formation of public opinion that affected public policy.

The problem with democracy, he wrote in 1922, is that it requires an
“omnicOMPetent citizen” with mastery of a variety of fields of expertise, which is
impossible. The nature of human existence is to assess the surrounding environment
through experience. The issue is that most of the environment is unseen. Not everyone
can and wants to experience a starry night in Georgia (or a Chardon City Council
meeting), for instance, but they can develop a stereotype, or picture, through the words of
someone else. The press, he argued, is the primary means by which Americans form
their stereotypes, or public opinions, about the government and public policy. The press
is not so much wrong, he wrote, but misleading, forced by routines and the marketplace
to concentrate on the interesting but ultimately unimportant.

The newspaper, which was the primary mass communication medium of the time,
rests on the work of the reporter, which Lippmann noted was the lowest paid and hardest
working employee in any news operation, a point reinforced in a somewhat dark
portrayal by George F. Kennan in his wide-ranging view of politics and the public.
journalists wanted to stay journalists; they did the work mainly to move up to better-paying management or to go on to public relations. Lippmann’s solution was the development of a network of experts that would translate for the public the most important and vexing issues of the day, allowing average citizens to continue to live their lives without having to develop specialized knowledge in the vast number of fields necessary to make judgments on whether their government was doing the right things.\textsuperscript{11}

Lippmann’s arguments were countered in 1927 by sociologist John Dewey, who suggested the audience was neither as puerile nor unattached as Lippmann portrayed. He did not dispute Lippmann’s assessment of the journalism environment at the time as being primarily concerned with entertainment rather than democracy, but suggested the solution was not government-supported experts but rather the employment of artists and craftspeople who could make issues come alive for the audience.\textsuperscript{12}

Neither Paul Lazarsfeld’s landmark study on voter influence, conducted in 1944, nor Maxwell McCombs’ influential agenda-setting study in North Carolina in 1972 defined journalism or journalists, taking as a given that most people understood the distinction between audience and journalist. There was little reason to challenge this assumption at the time. Anyone ambling through a news landscape, nationally, regionally, or locally, could easily and quickly get a grasp on what information was being produced by whom and for what purpose. This could be done by flipping on a television set, radio, or visiting the newsstand.

\emph{Citizens as journalists}

As technology changed the landscape and brought the audience closer and, in many cases, into the journalism being performed, it became necessary to return to
defining who is a producer and what, exactly, they were producing. Barbie Zelizer, in a wide-ranging attempt to define journalism, suggested it can be viewed in five ways: 1) As a profession with, albeit largely uncodified, ethical and legal rules; 2) As an institution with cultural, economic, political, and social functions and responsibilities; 3) As a text, or set of symbols, that transmit meaning; 4) As a group of people sharing similar values and norms; 5) As a specific set of practices. These definitions, as Dewey noted in 1927 in describing news routines, served to set journalists apart from their audiences. This divide began to break down in earnest when Dan Gillmor published in 2004, *We the Media*, arguing the audience was no longer a passive consumer but an active producer of its own news and in some cases “doing a better job than the professionals.” Since then, a thin but growing literature has sought to examine the idea of citizen journalism.

In 2007, the Pew Center’s annual State of the Media report christened citizen journalism as “becoming less something that is dismissed as the amateur hour before the professionals take the stage and more as something that enriches the conversation.” The same year, Knight Journalism Center researcher Jan Schaffer found citizen journalists were “prose shy,” and were hitting the middle between what most would recognize as “professional journalism” and idle chatting, providing snippets of potential stories.

Others were more direct in refuting Gillmor’s optimistic assessment, suggesting citizens were fine at commenting and even providing analysis on issues close to them, but were unreliable as reporters except when they found themselves in “the wrong place at the right time,” such as the London bombings, Hurricane Katrina, or more recently the landing of a commercial aircraft liner in the Hudson Bay. The dean of Columbia
University Graduate School of Journalism dismissed the idea of citizens as journalists as nonsense, noting that, “It sounds obvious, but reporting needs reporters.”

Journalism scholar Serena Carpenter argued in 2010 there should be no separation between the concept of news, as the end result of journalism, and information supplied generally by the audience. Any distinction in the information found in any given news landscape should not be located in the producer or the product per se but in intent. She defined an online citizen journalist as “an individual who intends to publish information meant to benefit a community,” though she shied away from defining benefit. Her study compared newspaper Websites with citizen journalism Websites, concluding that the citizen sites offered a greater diversity of content, including more multimedia elements. Researcher Stephen Lacy and his colleagues, too, examined citizen journalism Websites in comparison to newspaper Websites, but through the prism of economics. Lacy defined citizen journalism sites as being geographically based, focused on metro, county, city, or neighborhood areas, with original content supplied by “volunteers or community members.” Citizen blogging sites were primarily defined by how the sites described themselves. Overall, Lacy found that the citizen sites were not substitutes for local newspaper Websites because they failed to update as frequently, had fewer graphical elements, and tended to offer fewer interactive opportunities.

As scholarly and industry research has begun to incorporate social media in the news mix, discussion about the definition of journalism and journalist has only intensified. In looking at the audience contribution through Twitter to the evolving narrative of a shooting at the University of Texas, for instance, Avery Holton found in interviewing a sample group of Twitter users that they rejected any suggestion their
Tweets were journalism. Yet, Holton noted, “They consistently illustrated traits of journalism by breaking news, providing new information, and clarifying erroneous or misleading reports from news outlets.”

Holton defined citizen journalist as anyone contributing information about the incident who had no education or background as a journalist.

Less than eight years after British scholars Ian Hargraves and James Thomas argued “news is, in a word, ambient, like the air we breathe,” scholar Alfred Hermida advanced the idea. It is not just news that permeates modern existence, he wrote, but journalism, itself. Social media and mobile technologies have put the citizen in the forefront of gathering and disseminating news.

*Law and citizen journalism*

While the industry and academia wrestle with what journalism means and just who is a journalist, law and policymakers at every level of government have been engaged in the same debate. The concepts of journalists as special actors in helping to shape an unfettered public sphere and journalists as ordinary citizens have collided for decades in the battle over whether the First Amendment provides, or should provide, exceptions from normal citizenship in two primary areas: 1) access to information and events, 2) protection against government. In *Branzburg v. Hayes*, which is largely seen as the U.S. Supreme Court precedent addressing core definitions, the high court in 1972 consolidated three cases involving journalists seeking protection from lower courts and prosecutors forcing them to reveal information or testify in criminal cases. The court split 5-4, but a majority found no special shield for journalists within the First Amendment. Justice William White, the author of the majority opinion, noted that
journalists were not, in fact, supercitizens, with rights of access to information above and beyond that of their fellows nor entitled to special exemptions from prying prosecutors. To exclude “newsmen” now from the duty to testify, White wrote, would give a power to the press not intended by the First Amendment.\textsuperscript{25} The freedom of speech and freedom of the press clauses, White implied, were not synonymous since “without some protection for seeking out the news, freedom of the press would be eviscerated.”\textsuperscript{26} But, White noted that the press clause was not aimed solely at the institutional press, but covered as well “the lonely pamphleteer.”\textsuperscript{27} The Supreme Court could not see in 1972 the coming digital revolution that would fog the metaphor harkening back to pre-Revolutionary printers using their technology to address issues of the day without consent of royal governors. The court, however, did note the historical problem of defining journalist.

This debate has moved to the digital world. At issue is whether those who post their work on a Website through blogs or use Facebook to publish their comments are the equivalent of “lonely pamphleteers” or neighbors chatting over a fence. The former, many argue, is entitled to the protections, if not the privileges, of a journalist, while the latter, the chatty citizen, might not be.\textsuperscript{28} The U.S. Supreme Court has yet to address the issue, and it may well be that it will not accept such a case until the tumult in the media has settled. In one of the first cases to reach the courts involving an Internet-only information provider, a lower court dismissed on procedural grounds in 1998 a demand that Matt Drudge reveal his sources for what he posted on the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal. The court, however, noted Drudge could not claim privilege because he was “not a reporter, a journalist or a newsgatherer.”\textsuperscript{29} Few would make that claim today, in light of such powerful and popular Web-only news sites as The Huffington Post, Politico, and
Slate. Drudge, in fact, remains a potent Internet presence. The most celebrated case of an Internet-only information provider seeking journalist protections was Josh Wolfe. He spent 226 days in 2007 jail after refusing a federal grand jury subpoena to turn over video he had made of a San Francisco street protest. A lower court ruling, later upheld by the U.S. 9th Circuit Court, said that even if Wolfe were deemed a journalist, he would have to comply with the subpoena.

A glimpse into judicial thinking about the role of the Web in the information landscape perhaps may be found in a decision by the U.S. District Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia. In this 2007 case, In Re: Grand Jury, the judges overturned a ruling prohibiting grand jury witnesses from reviewing transcripts of their own testimony and snidely equated “bloggers” to neighborly gossips. Wrote the court: “A grand jury witness is legally free to tell, for example, his or her attorney, family, friends, associates, reporters, or bloggers what happened in the grand jury.”

The increasingly confusing news situation has served as a backdrop as the nation’s traditional media have clamored for protection against revealing their notes, tapes, and sources to prosecutors either too lazy or unable to get the information elsewhere. The latest attempt was in 2008-2009. The measure received initial rhetorical support during the intense general election from many political leaders, including presidential candidates Barack Obama and John McCain. But, it died the usual death a year later when Congress could not agree on a definition of journalist and how far a shield should stretch. Obama, himself, thrust the final dagger when his office sent changes to a House-passed bill that significantly weakened the protections, carving out broad portions of the proposed law for anything related to terrorism or national security.
and resting too much discretion with the courts. The changes prompted Society of Professional Journalists President Kevin Smith to proclaim the new president had been “scared into making this poor decision” by his national security team.\textsuperscript{35} The debate highlighted the historical fear on both sides of the First Amendment, those who feared the rise of the audience was diminishing the watchdog role of a free press and what Anthony L. Fargo called the government’s need “for evidence to help ascertain the truth.”\textsuperscript{36}

\textit{State Shield Laws and citizen journalism}

The states have been far less reluctant to decide these issues. In 1972, the year the high court decided \textit{Branzburg}, seventeen states had Shield Laws, the majority of which came between 1933 and 1941 and were prompted by a series of criminal cases involving journalists and their sources.\textsuperscript{37} By 1997, twenty-nine states had passed some form of Shield Law.\textsuperscript{38} In studying these laws, Lawrence B. Alexander and Leah G. Cooper found no common language, but noted a typical statute would define journalist in relation to specific media organizations, with the majority of the states with Shield Laws singling out newspaper and broadcast reporters.

Their study was conducted just as the Web was building out. While there were several Internet-only information providers in 1997, such as America Online, the perceived challenge to journalism and established media by digital-only information purveyors was just being felt. In their study, Alexander and Cooper argued the more generic state statutes possibly could be stretched to cover digital “information feeders,” but that judges were unlikely to accept this argument for several reasons:

First, these operators generally do not enter confidential relationships to obtain their information. Second, they lack a common shared historical, social and political experience with journalists. Third, they
lack the experience in an adversarial role as the Fourth Estate, which often leads to the problem of subpoenas being issued to journalists.\textsuperscript{39}

\textit{The legal debate}

Much has changed in the last fifteen years. This study sought to examine the legal landscape and provide perspective on the issue of citizen journalism by incorporating how state legislatures were defining journalist. The author analyzed use of the words “news media” and “journalist” in the statutes and administrative codes of all fifty states and the District of Columbia using LexisNexis. Administrative codes accompany the statutes passed by state assemblies and legislatures. These codes are designed to “fill any gap” left by legislative mandates. They carry the force of law and generally are approved by lawmakers or committees of lawmakers acting on behalf of the entire body.\textsuperscript{40}

Since 1997, an additional ten states have enacted some form of Shield Law, with the majority protecting established media while failing to address the digital denizen who makes little or no money, has no oversight, and whose motivations for creation are as varied as the content.\textsuperscript{41} The language of the newer statutes tends to mirror that of the older laws, privileging people who make money from their information gathering from an established media source, rather than as ordinary citizens attempting to bypass traditional gatekeepers to reach an audience. Just as Alexander and Cooper found, there is no common language in the newer statutes. However, a typical definition defines journalism as “gathering, receiving or processing information for communication to the public” on behalf of a “news media” organization.\textsuperscript{42} Of the ten, five specifically include Internet or digital technologies, though seven generically cover “news” operations.\textsuperscript{43} Two, Hawaii
and Kansas, address digital-only information purveyors (if one stretches the definition of “online journal” to include Internet-only operations that are not adjuncts of traditional media). Two states are illustrative of the extremes adopted over the last decade, Florida and Hawaii.

Florida lawmakers raised their shield in 1998 only over “professional journalists,” defined as those: “. . . regularly engaged in collecting, photographing, recording, writing, editing, reporting, or publishing news, for gain or livelihood, who obtained the information sought while working as a salaried employee of, or independent contractor for, a newspaper, news journal, news agency, press association, wire service, radio or television network, or news magazine.” The statute specifically does not cover “book authors and others who are not professional journalists, as defined in this paragraph.”

Hawaii, too, connected its Shield Law in 2008 to a “journalist or newscaster presently or previously employed” but included those who work for “any digital version” of a newspaper, magazine, radio, or television operation. Hawaii lawmakers tiptoed up to the issue of digital-only purveyors by including those who could make the case that they are similar to and share the same motivations of a professional journalist.

Ohio does have a Shield Law, which mirrors the language of the older statutes in other states, covering only newspapers, press associations (such as the Associated Press), and broadcast outlets. Further, those who wish to keep sources and documents secret from prosecutors must prove they are “employed” by a covered organization. The Citizen Media Law Project warns, “A court could give this language an expansive interpretation, but, for now at least, online publishers should not expect to be covered by the Ohio shield
That means entrepreneurs such as Gabe Arnold and Jeff Miklovec likely would not be covered, even though they may be engaged full-time in the business of gathering information with the intent to publish. Certainly, independent posters to Facebook, Twitter, and media Websites would not be covered.

Definitions by function

As in the Shield Laws, the states, pressed by circumstance, need, and desire have quietly sprinkled duties, roles, protections, exemptions, and definitions for journalists as they defined them throughout statutory codes. In the process, they have done what the U.S. Supreme Court declined to do, created a privileged class of supercitizen with access and rights beyond that of the audience, though in often astonishingly narrow ways and categories. In examining all fifty state and administrative codes, the author distilled five major categories in which journalists were carved out from ordinary citizens. These are 1) official witness 2) promoter 3) town crier 4) chronicler/commentator, and 5) official representative of the people and of journalism. For example, in Idaho, prosecutors can force journalists to reveal their sources, but reporters are among the privileged few allowed to get free tickets to scholastic sporting events (provided there is enough “comfortable” room in the press box). In Illinois, authorities must get permission from a judge to electronically eavesdrop on suspects when they converse with their doctor, lawyer - or journalist. In Washington D.C., anyone who disseminates information of public interest to anyone else may not be compelled to reveal the sources of that information but to get an official police press pass, but those who wish to be called journalists must prove they work for a “bona fide” news outlet. In Delaware, journalists
who wish to protect their sources and information must show they have worked at least 20 hours in the previous eight weeks for a news outlet.\textsuperscript{52}

The majority of definitions in state statutes rest on two main prongs: Whether the information seeker is being paid by a news outlet and therefore blessed by an ultimately responsible gatekeeper, and whether the news outlet is deemed legitimate. While many state statutes do explicitly define journalist in a wide variety of criminal and civil circumstances, many also do so implicitly by referring to the media’s role. In Wisconsin, for instance, the Department of Tourism, in its administrative code, is specifically banned from withholding from “media representatives” the names, addresses, and demographic information of those who have requested information about travel opportunities in the state. “News media” is not defined.\textsuperscript{53}

In some cases, specific statutes within the same state use differing definitions of journalist. A peculiar instance is in Ohio, where lawmakers permit employed journalists to read a list of concealed carry gun permit holders, but do not allow them to obtain copies or take notes. An Ohio Attorney General’s opinion confirmed the statute intended to allow journalists only to use their “mental faculties” to retain the information.\textsuperscript{54} The concealed carry statute defines journalist as a “person engaged in, connected with, or employed by any news medium.”\textsuperscript{55} This language, presumably, would cover Arnold and Miklovec, but not those contributing to their Websites as casual viewers.

In only rare instances do the statutes make mention of the role of citizens who distribute information through blogging, video, or commentary Websites. When the issue of citizens gathering their own information for dissemination is specifically addressed, it

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is always in the form of barriers rather than support. For instance, in California it is a crime “to post” the home addresses or telephone numbers of state politicians.\textsuperscript{56}

\textit{Official witness}

Twenty states make specific provisions for journalists to be present during arguably the most solemn acts of government, deciding disputed elections, documenting the voting process, and putting inmates to death. For the purposes of this study, “official witness” is defined as journalists being given access to otherwise private processes where it is clear the state desires to make claims of credible transparency. Eleven states specifically state that journalists may be present when inmates are executed. These include the rather macabre and literal “Death Lottery” in Tennessee, in which journalists put their names into a pool to be chosen to watch and report on executions.\textsuperscript{57} At the opposite extreme is South Dakota, which does not define who a journalist is, but says merely “at least one media representative” may be authorized to attend an execution.\textsuperscript{58} In terms of monitoring elections, most state laws that do address journalists tend to address the voting itself, and the counting of challenged ballots. In Kentucky, for example, the county boards of election “shall authorize representatives of the news media” to watch the counting of challenged absentee ballots,\textsuperscript{59} while in Oklahoma both the sheriff and local media are invited to witness the process.\textsuperscript{60}

\textit{Promoters}

Thirteen states carve out news media for special treatment in otherwise restricted circumstances. For the purposes of this study, “promoter” is defined as being given special privileges, access, or exemptions in circumstances where the ordinary citizen must pay for admission, is barred outright or could be held liable. Few of the
regulations, most of which are found in administrative codes, attempt to define either “news media” or journalist. The majority of these involve providing free passes to reporters covering sporting events, though the circumstances range from liquor trade shows in Georgia\textsuperscript{61} to promoting risqué art exhibits in Nebraska.\textsuperscript{62} In Missouri, for instance, boxing and pro wrestling promoters have no choice; they “shall provide” free tickets to “journalists who are performing his/her duties as such.” Provided, of course, the ticket is clearly “marked press.”\textsuperscript{63}

*Official town criers*

For the purposes of this study, “town crier” is defined as the official messenger of the government. This was narrowly construed in order to examine circumstances beyond what has traditionally been viewed as the town crier function.\textsuperscript{64} For instance, all fifty states and the District of Columbia have sections in their open meetings laws requiring “public notice” of changes in meetings or emergency meetings of public bodies. These were not closely examined in this study for two reasons: In the vast majority of cases, the open records laws treat anyone who has asked for such notifications as equals with journalists. Missouri has a typical statute, which equates making the notice “available to the news media” at the same time as notices are sent to members of the body and posted in a public place.\textsuperscript{65} Further, the laws are generally well-known and the language is relatively consistent across the states. Generally, the so-called sunshine laws require public bodies to give 24-hour notice of changes in regular meetings or to post as soon as possible notice of emergency meetings. However, there are portions of the open records laws that do single out “journalists” for special treatment.
Also not addressed are the various requirements for public notices during disaster or other events. Nearly every state has such requirements. In addition, many states continue to carry legal advertisement requirements. For instance, in Oklahoma, those seeking an environmental waste permit must “publish notice of the filing as legal notice in one newspaper of general circulation local to the proposed new site or existing facility.”66 In addition to the standard references to notifications and legal notices, eight states make provisions for notifying the media in specific circumstances. In Vermont, the state government departments affected by changes in state law “shall” notify the public of the changes by, among other things, “submitting press releases to the news media.”67

Ohio’s public notice requirements

Government advertising traditionally has been an important component of supporting local print journalism, with a relatively small but steady stream of revenue, as John Karlovec noted when he set about re-establishing the Maple Leaf in Geauga County. During an interview with Sentinel-Tribune Assistant Publisher Karmen Concannon, the author first encountered her poring over a ledger book. She shook her head, explaining that she was trying to figure out how to replace the potential loss of legal advertising in 2013. The Ohio Legislature passed as part of the state budget for 2012 “public notice reform.”68 The new rules, which the Ohio Newspaper Association supported,69 maintained newspapers as the required medium for publishing paid notices, but expanded the definition of newspaper to include freely distributed print publications. The law also allows government subdivisions to reduce the size of mandated second legal public notices, if these subsequent notices included the link to a new statewide database of advertisements maintained by the Ohio Attorney General’s Office. The Ohio Supreme
Court identified more than a dozen instances where “multiple notices” are required by state law. Concannon would not say how much her paper gets in legal advertising. “It’s just something else we have to deal with,” she said. The Press, a free weekly newspaper in Lucas County, was ecstatic, calling it a victory after a 21-year struggle for equal treatment and a way to give “public officials more flexibility and a new tool to control costs.” In other words, The Press is now able to compete with the Blade for legal advertising.

**Official chronicler/commentator**

Thirty-nine states carve out journalists from citizens in a wide variety of circumstances to act as official chronicler or commentator on public affairs. In general, however, these are protections from certain potential crimes, such as illegal lobbying; access to some public records denied to most citizens, and exemption from some copying fees. Other areas range from Louisiana barring search warrants at a journalist’s home or business unless the person is suspected of a crime to Kentucky allowing “newspaper reporters” and photographers (including broadcasters) to carry police radios in their cars. For the purposes of this study, Official Chronicler/Commentator is defined as duties, functions, protections, or prohibitions directly related to the gathering, dissemination or interpreting of information meant for public consumption.

In some cases, lawmakers have directly protected information gathering. Minnesota, for instance, makes it a criminal misdemeanor to lie to “any newspaper, magazine or other news media” with the intent to defame someone. Washington State allows only emergency personnel and journalists into the area immediately surrounding Mount St. Helens. In Oregon, without defining journalist, lawmakers have codified the
long-held journalistic practice of “off the record” by permitting journalists to attend most executive meeting sessions of public groups, though “the governing body may require that specified information remain undisclosed.”

Conversely, some states have set into law purity standards for political endorsements and news coverage. Three states – New York, Washington, and South Carolina – have made it a crime for anyone to solicit money from candidates or political parties in exchange for endorsements or favorable coverage. None of the three states defines news media in their statutes and all share language similar to South Carolina’s, which bars soliciting candidates for an “endorsement, article or other communication in the news media.”

Though several of the statutes define journalist and news media, most rely on the typical language similar to that found in other parts of the code. For instance, in the obscure Mt. St. Helens rule, Washington rulemakers defined news media as “journalists, publishers, television and radio broadcast persons who are regularly engaged in the business of publishing or broadcasting.” Some statutes do use more generic language that conceivably could be stretched, as Alexander and Cooper noted in examining state Shield Laws, to cover non-traditional journalists. In Washington, D.C., a police press pass would be available to anyone working for any “printed, photographic … or electronic means of disseminating news and information to the public.” D.C., however, as noted earlier, bypasses the discussion of medium by using employment as a gauge, a central theme throughout the state codes. In Ohio, for instance, some workers compensation records are available only to those “whose primary occupation is a journalist” without listing the distribution methods. Only one state specifically mentions
Web operations. New Jersey allows some adoption records to be available to the media, including those journalists who work for “print or online publications.”

**Official representative**

Twelve states make provisions for the appointment of journalists to various boards and commissions or, in the case of South Dakota, to act as official arbitrator with other media. For the purposes of this study, official representative is defined as appointments by government officials to positions that act on behalf of government or make recommendations for action to the government. The most unusual of these cases can be found in South Dakota, where administrative rules adopted by the court system call for the appointment of media coordinators who work with other media to resolve issues concerning court coverage. This rule is clearly aimed at cameras, either still or video, in the courtroom. Part of the rule requires the undefined media, at their own cost, to supply the court with at least one copy of whatever was shot. Pennsylvania, too, suggests judges “consult” with the news media on the high profile “or sensational” cases but does not provide a procedure for doing so. The rule does not define news media. The other instances all involve appointment to state boards or commissions. Of these, five deal with access issues involving state Sunshine laws.

*Opinion leaders in Geauga and Wood counties*

As legislatures across the country have dealt with the rise of the audience by privileging the traditional media, opinion leaders in Geauga and Wood counties, too, gazed over the landscape with some fretting about the potential absence of professional journalism, especially print by Wood County opinion leaders. When asked to respond to the question “How do you see journalism evolving in the coming decades?” a majority of
respondents in both counties thought digital and social media would be the predominant means of both distributing and consuming the news. Many respondents tied this development to the potential quality of the news. A sampling from Geauga County:

- “Less reliably objective because more user driven.”
- “Becoming bloggers without ethical standards for the truth.”
- “Everyone will be an Ireporter and that snapshot in time will be misleading and hopefully people will be able to sort fact from fiction.”
- “We will all be journalists through social media but news media will still survive.”

Most Wood County opinion leaders responding to the survey also felt social and Web dissemination would be dominant, though they were far more likely to frame their responses as the demise of print, rather than the rise of the audience. A sampling from Wood County:

- “Paperless.”
- “Journalists will begin to communicate more through social media and less through conventional printed outlets i.e. newspapers, magazines. I believe television newscasts and internet news shows will stay in the mainstream however.”
- “Unfortunately it will involve more and more electronic media.”
- “More to social meda and web - printed paper cease to exist.”
- “Declining print media; evolving into digital media.”
- “Replaced by electronic media/communications.”

This difference, too, is reflected in response to the question of whether professional journalism is important to their organizations. In Geauga County, only 14
percent of respondents replied it was “very important,” while 28.9 percent of respondents did so in Wood County. In Geauga County, 8.5 percent of respondents said professional journalism was “not important,” while only 2.6 percent of those did so in Wood County. Results of this question are displayed in Table No. 7.1.

**Table No. 7.1 – The importance of professional journalism**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Average Rating*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geauga (n=47)</td>
<td>4 (8.5 %)</td>
<td>7 (14.9 %)</td>
<td>4.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood (n=76)</td>
<td>2 (2.6 %)</td>
<td>22 (28.9 %)</td>
<td>5.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*=Respondents were asked to provide their responses on a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 being “very important.”

The responses provide a stark illustration of the difference between communities where professional daily journalism is present and those where it is not. The daily *Sentinel-Tribune* and the relative strength of the *Blade* in Wood County, while thinning and growing weaker, provide a regular reminder of the role of journalism in the life and times of communities dealing, as they always have, with constant change. Twenty years after the demise of the *Times-Leader* and two years after the retreat of regional dailies, opinion leaders in Geauga County have become accustomed to the news divide that keeps their county and their residents in the shadows. The *Maple Leaf*, while offering broad coverage and an enormously important service, does not have the presence to significantly change the landscape. The opinion leaders, like other residents in the county, are left to respond to what they regularly see, which is largely television
broadcasts, digital Web reports, and social media streaming across the border from Cleveland.

This finding seems contradictory to responses to other questions in which Geauga County respondents, as did those in Wood County, privileged newspaper reports second only to their own personal communication (whether in-person or on their Websites) when it came to communicating to the community at large and to potential customers and constituents. In fact, Geauga County respondents rated newspapers slightly higher than did those in Wood County. One possible explanation for this is the principle of scarcity. Since the Geauga County opinion leaders have fewer opportunities to have their stories told in what they overall perceive as a credible medium, they tend to give those rarer times more weight than do opinion leaders in Wood County where print reports are more common.

Citizen journalism in Geauga and Wood counties

Local opinion leaders and state legislatures, overall, clearly have privileged established producers in defining both journalist and journalism, with the latter concluding that reporters are those who are hired by journalism outlets. This circular definition is not unlike popular dictionary definitions of news, such as that provided by dictionary.com, which defines news as “the presentation of a report on recent or new events in a newspaper or other periodical or on radio or television.” (It may be interesting to note that a Web-based dictionary does not include Web reports in its definition of news.) The definitions of journalist and journalism are equally circular. A journalist is “a person who practices the occupation or profession of journalism,” which is the “occupation of reporting, writing, editing, photographing, or broadcasting news or
of conducting any news organization as a business.” In other words, if it appears in the media, it’s news that was produced by a journalist employed by a firm in the information business. These definitions tie together both producers and what is produced, resting the final judgment on the result of a specific process.

Yet, citizen journalism, defined by The Missouri Group as “news coverage, usually online, by people who don’t work for commercial companies,” has long been viewed as a subset of journalism. Historian David Paul Nord, examining an early example of what he called public affairs journalism, nodded toward citizen journalism, tying contributions to process when he noted the difficulty in getting unpaid correspondents to contribute as pure civic responsibility to work presented by someone else. Cotton Mather, in putting together his *Magnalia Christi Americana*, used the imprimatur of Harvard College to ask ministers throughout the colonies in the 1730s to submit written reports on the strange and unusual as long as the “Occurrents” were “well attested with credible and sufficient witnesses.” Disappointed in the scant response, the final published version included Mather’s chiding of the ministers for failing in their duty to provide reports.

In this regard at least, not much has changed. Overall, this study found citizens were not routinely, or even occasionally, engaging in what could even loosely be called public affairs journalism by watching their institutions and asking the question of “what shall we do” or the antecedent to that question, “what is being done?” This is not to say they cannot be engaged in public affairs information. They are, often with astonishing energy. But, these efforts are taking place within and as an adjunct to established journalism that prompts their participation. As noted earlier, few citizen blogs or
Websites could be identified targeting Wood or Geauga counties that concerned information regarding local cultural, government, non-profit, or charitable institutions, with the exception of the two independent Websites, geauganews.com and NBXnewsexpress.com.

In order to put parameters and context on citizen contributions in the two target counties, three primary streams of information were examined: comments associated with social media updates and Website stories posted by established media outlets, contributions from community residents through blogs and user-submitted items, and stand-alone Websites being operated by independent entrepreneurs. By defining what exists, it is possible to discuss what doesn’t exist, as well as inform discussions on a possible dividing line between the professional journalist and the citizen.

Comments and dialogue as journalism?

Since this portion of the study is primarily concerned with what type of information was being produced by citizens, not the amount, a single event was analyzed using comments collected from several outlets across two streams, Facebook and Website postings. The incident chosen was the traffic death of three Bowling Green sorority sisters heading to the Detroit airport for a spring break trip. The three were among a group of five in a single car that was hit about 2:15 a.m. March 2, 2012, by a 69-year-old woman driving her vehicle the wrong way on Interstate 75. The story was covered extensively by all media outlets either residing in or reaching into Wood County. The postings, Web stories, and comments were collected on the same day and all dealt with essentially the same details, the release of the identities of the victims and the naming of the woman driving the other car.
After an initial examination, the responses were coded into five categories: speculation, information, reaction, response/question, solution/new idea. Speculation was defined as viewers framing their comments as suggestions or guesses. Information was defined as viewers providing purported facts, details, or perspective involving the crash, such as comparing the incident to other crashes, the names of the victims, and the like. Reaction was defined as simply a response to the post or story. Typical responses were statements such as “praying for the families” and the like. Response/question was defined as any comment made to another commenter, unless the response provided facts or details, in which case the responses were coded as information. Solutions/new ideas were defined as comments that offered ways to prevent such crashes or provided perspective. For instance, two common suggestions were spike strips on interstate ramps that would blow out the tires of vehicles attempting to enter interstate ramps from the wrong direction and forcing elderly drivers to pass a driving test in order to renew a license.

Overall, this examination revealed the most likely comment was made in response to other commenters, followed by reaction. Table 7.2 breaks down the responses by stream and outlet.
Table No. 7.2 – Breakdown of comments by stream and outlet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outlet</th>
<th>Speculation</th>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Reaction</th>
<th>Response/question</th>
<th>Solution/new idea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WTOL (Facebook)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blade (Website)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentinel-Tribune (Facebook)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC13 (Facebook)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those providing information ranged from being quite specific to the much more general. For instance, Kristen Prahl informed those taking part in the string associated with the WTOL Facebook posting that “those killed in the accident were members of the Alpha Xi Delta Women’s Fraternity.” After several comments on the same string speculating the elderly woman was drunk, Carrie Phillips wrote: “The lady that cause it was a neighbor with my sister she was an older woman who normally would get off work around that time.” All streams offered some version of providing solutions or new ideas, such as discussing ways to prevent similar incidents. Wrote “tragic” on the Blade Website: “They need to implement road spikes on exit ramps, so it’s a small bump going the right way, but blows out all your tires going the wrong way. They could be placed near a open shoulder so emergency vehicles could drive around them.” Speculation primarily was concerned with the cause of the accident, such as whether the elderly woman was drunk or confused, or whether the women traveling to catch a flight were drinking and therefore could not avoid the oncoming car.
The commenters providing specific information clearly served to advance the story, those offering solutions or new ideas provided analysis and perspective, while those posting responses to other commenters and pure reactions were much like community comment seen routinely in traditional news reports. All such contributions are historically viewed as functions of journalism. Yet, the contributions just as clearly lacked some essential elements before they legitimately can be viewed as journalism or the producers as journalists. The contributions, for instance, attempted no context or comprehensive reporting. They provided no visible verification, and their intent is unknowable.

The sample is representative of the vast majority of citizen contributions seen throughout this study. While not journalism or journalists per se, their information, views, and perspective define the issues of the rise of the audience. Their individual efforts do not rise to the level of journalism but their collective dialogue, as seen in the Chardon Nog Jog, often results in new narratives apart from the frames offered to them by journalism. The result is that the two – journalism as defined by Zelizer and Kovach and Rosenstiel and citizen contributions – combine to create something bigger, more comprehensive, and, likely, closer to a knowable truth than either could do without the other. This must be viewed as a dramatic, and ultimately, welcome expansion of the public sphere that continues to be largely inspired by journalism.

Content contributions

Several of the news outlets that reside or reach into Wood and Geauga counties regularly invite viewers and readers to contribute content in some form. This is most frequently seen in the form of submitted photos and videos. For instance, both WTOL in
Toledo and the *Plain Dealer* in Cleveland invite readers/viewers to post photos and videos to their Websites. *Plain Dealer* editors view the contributions before posting them and the most common submission by readers is through one of several photo contests held each year. Yet, these are not regular submissions. The newspaper created numerous “galleries” in an attempt to herd contributions. The most recent in the “communities” gallery, for instance, was seven weeks old at the time this study was conducted. 96 The majority of the entries were posted in 2010. WTOL invites contributions through a national photo-sharing service, which has the odd effect of having smart phone snapshots of a Toledo crime scene, with no cutline or other contextual information, next to a house fire in Arizona and a sunset at the Providence Dam in Wood County. 97

The *Blade* is attempting to make user-submitted content a cornerstone of its foray into hyper-local content. During the course of this study, the *Blade* launched two community-oriented hyper-local sites, Ourtownsylvernia.com and Ourtownperrysburg.com. Both sites, which carry the slogan “powered by the *Blade* and you,” accept both submitted photos and articles. In Our Town Sylvania, for instance, ten “guest columns” were available for viewing during the study period, posted between March 26, 2012, and May 17, 2012. Four of them were written by Sylvania Mayor Craig Stough. Typical headlines included “Mayor Touts Arbor Day, Shred Day,” and “Mayor outlines summer fun.” 98 Three were written by a local veterinarian on pet care, one by the Sylvania deputy fire chief and one by a local charity group.

Both sites also include a section called “*Blade* headlines” that links back to the main newspaper Website. Our Town Perrysburg, launched several months after Our Town Sylvania, is based on the same template. At the time this study was conducted, the
site had been active for three weeks. The site hosted three “guest columns,” including one from Mayor Nelson Evans. He pledged a monthly update and endorsed the Blade’s new site: “The Blade has given the City of Perrysburg and its citizens, new and old, another medium to showcase our successes and undertakings.”

Newspapers, of course, always have accepted user-submitted news to one degree or another. Weeklies have and do more so than the larger dailies, as seen in the analysis in Chapter 2. Television, historically, has relied on its personalities to bring audiences closer to them, a strategy that has worked marvelously. While technology has made these contributions easier and allowed television into the game, overall this study found little difference between traditionally submitted items and those being offered in the current landscape.

That does not mean to say some of these individual items meet the test of journalism in any given circumstance. It is possible some of them may, but that was not observed during the ten months of this study period or during specific sample periods. The contributions seen in this study clearly were episodic and offered no analysis, comprehensive coverage, or independence. That also is to not say such efforts as the Blade’s hyper-local sites will not ultimately have an effect in the news landscape. Within a week, for instance, of launching Our Town Perrysburg, the weekly newspaper there, the Perrysburg Messenger Journal, took the extraordinary step of posting its entire newspaper online in PDF format.

**Community blogging**

In addition to comments and episodic contributions, citizens and community members are contributing to the news landscape by writing blogs, or Web-disseminated
dispatches. Largely hailed early in the build-out of the Web as a new, edgier, more
efficient form of journalism,\textsuperscript{100} the movement remains powerful but less part of the
debate about the future of journalism as the focus shifts to social and mobile media and
citizen-run and operated Websites. In its annual State of the Blogosphere Report, for
instance, Technorati.com reported that about 61 percent of bloggers make some minimal
income from their efforts but only about 5 percent view their blogging as full-time
occupations. While the overall number of bloggers remains relatively constant at about
nine million in the United States, the bloggers tended to post more often in 2011 than in
2010.\textsuperscript{101}

As noted earlier, few stand-alone blogs or Websites were identified in either
Wood or Geauga counties. It is likely several exist, but it was extraordinarily difficult to
locate them if they were not registered on an aggregating site such as cyberjournalist.net.
Since this study is primarily concerned with public affairs information, searches were
limited to geographic locations tied to issues or institutions such as crime, schools,
education, and so on. In addition, each of the dozens of people interviewed for this study
was asked if they read or had heard of blogs covering their counties or communities. One
such blog was identified, the aptly named Burton Blog, which serves as the primary
platform for Scott Weber, the staunchly conservative owner and operator of a Burton
Village gun shop in Geauga County. Weber posted fifteen times during the month of
May, offering a mix of personal observations, announcements about upcoming events
and auctions at his store, political notes about fund-raisers, and issue-oriented posts.
Issues included applauding the local state representative on a vote to restrict abortion and
a possible village takeover of an historic home.\textsuperscript{102}
While efforts such as Weber’s were rare, a few of the media outlets in the area, like others across the nation, were regularly reaching out to residents to contribute to their digital sites through blogs. This study adopted a broad definition of blogging in order to capture as much citizen effort as possible. Blogs were defined as any posting that carried a headline or had a logo, was produced by a non-staff member of a media outlet, and was promoted as a recurring if not regular feature. Posts identified as letters or guest columns, which were the most frequently seen contributions on the weekly newspaper Websites and on sent-trib.com, were not included in the definition.

The *Plain Dealer* and the *News-Herald* newspapers were by far the most active in recruiting and hosting area bloggers. The *Plain Dealer* has established a database of 157 bloggers, only some of whom are affiliated with the newspaper. None of them could be identified as targeting Geauga County. The *Plain Dealer* invites bloggers to apply to become an affiliated blogger or to register an existing blog for its database. After being approved by an editor, the sites are added to the database. A regular feature of the Website highlights blogs, without apparently discriminating between those affiliated directly with the newspaper and those independently produced. For instance, on March 5, 2012, Cleveland.com promoted a blog with the headline, “New Jell-O Pudding Snacks & Strawberry Sundae Review.” The link connected to a site called 2wired2tired.com. The site is run by a Cleveland woman who goes by the name of Tired Mom T sa. “Kora and Logan [her two children] love Jell-O,” she wrote. “So when we heard that there were new Jell-O Pudding Snacks flavors we couldn’t wait to try them!” She posted a large photo of the packaging and a YouTube video of her children eating the snacks. At the bottom of the post, Tired Mom met the legal requirements of the Federal Trade Commission rules...
on blogging: “Products were provided. No compensation was received. The honest opinions are my own and those of my family.” In its annual report, Technorati.com noted the majority of those who identify themselves as full- or part-time bloggers get the majority of their income from product reviews and that they are approached an average of three times a week by marketing companies offering either samples or money for reviews. However, just more than half of those identifying themselves as being compensated reported knowing about disclosure rules put out by the Trade Commission. The rules were developed as an extension of truth-in-advertising laws that were meant to ensure the public was not misled about the nature of the information they encountered in the marketplace.

The News-Herald runs a “Community Media Lab,” inviting local residents to attend training sessions on blogging, technological issues such as using Wordpress and other blogging sites, and working up photographs for the Web. The eighty listed as being produced through the Media Lab are nested under a “blogs” tab on its Website labeled “media lab,” and they are readily discernible from reporter- and editor-supplied blogs. Here is how the News-Herald describes the program:

**What you have to do ...**
1. Have an interest in improving your community.
2. Be willing to dedicate time to reporting on the issues you feel are important to area residents.
3. Participate in our training program.

**What we will do ...**
1. Give you access to our staff and our newsroom.
2. Provide you with training.
3. Give you a larger audience and a stronger voice.
The blogs on Cleveland.com and news-herald.com were examined with the purpose of determining whether and how they contributed to the public affairs information available. Only blogs listed as being associated with the Plain Dealer were examined since no blogs were found in the database dealing with Geauga County. Though not directed at the target county, the Cleveland.com blogs were examined for the purpose of providing perspective on the issue of citizen journalism. Three blogs were identified in the Media Lab program as being based in or targeted at Geauga County. One of them, the Geauga County Park District, had no entries. The other two were Chardon Flight 93, which documented a school program, and the Geauga County Historical Society, which used the blog to promote events. After an initial look, the blogs were examined and coded into one of four categories, lifestyle/entertainment, sports, other, and promotional. The blogs were first looked at to determine if they were essentially promoting a business or another Website that acted as a business for the blogger. This was determined by following through the links and locating the about or profile sections contained on the accompanying blogging page or Website. If the blog was identified as promoting a business, it was coded as “promotional,” regardless of content. If no affiliated business could be determined, the content was examined for category. Lifestyle was defined as anything hobby-related, such as cooking, quilting, and the like. Sports was defined as being centered on any sporting activity, whether youth, high school, or professional. Blogs not fitting the previous three categories were coded as other. The blogs also were coded for the last update day, using the categories of yesterday, this week, this month, and more than a month ago. The time element was included to reflect
Lacy et al.’s suggestion that frequency of updates was a factor in the contribution of citizens to the overall news landscape.\textsuperscript{108}

Overall, this study found the most frequent type of blog on both sites was promotional and the most common frequency of update was more than a month ago, the promotion category being more prominent on news-herald.com than on Cleveland.com. Few blogs were identified as being directed at public affairs. A promising exception was a blog written by Jerry Strothers titled “Cleveland RTA Riders.” In the blog, he reviewed and commented on the conditions he found using the Regional Transportation Agency system in Cuyahoga County. A typical entry: “Brookpark Station floor tiles are destroyed and the floor is completely exposed.”\textsuperscript{109} Strothers averaged 1.3 entries a month. However, the latest entry at the time of this study had been posted five months earlier. Table 7.3 shows the results of the examination.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outlet</th>
<th>Lifestyle/entertainment</th>
<th>Sports</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Promotional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland.com</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News-herald.com</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of updates</th>
<th>Yesterday</th>
<th>This week</th>
<th>Within a month</th>
<th>More than a month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland.com</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News-herald.com</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The blogs categorized as promotional ran the gamut from those centered on sports to lifestyles to business. For instance, the Cleveland.com blog “Barks-from-the-pound,” a reference to the Cleveland Browns fan section known as the Dog Pound, is authored by Keith B. McGlothin. The blog links to www.stepienrules.com, which is his Website devoted to Cleveland professional sports and includes advertising. McGlothin was a part-time high school football correspondent for the *News-Herald* newspaper for five years while working as a real estate project manager. Another promotional blog is authored by Athy L.irk, who has trademarked the phrase “Applied Spirituality” and offers herself for speaking engagements and seminars. Her blog, “The New View of Things,” links to her personal Website where she offers her book on spirituality for sale and promotes her restaurant in California.

Promotional blogs on news-herald.com range from several insurance agents and attorneys offering advice in their specialties to local organizations promoting their events and activities to small business owners. For instance, a blog called “Joe the Coupon Guy” links to his Website, which offers a coupon book for sale and himself as a speaker. Other business owners include a hair and make-up artist, an auto body shop owner, and an accountant.

Some blogs, however, were clearly written for the purpose of communicating observations to a wider community. For instance, a particularly compelling blog on Cleveland.com was authored by Katie Faulhaber. Called “One Candle,” she pledged to write about issues associated with “keeping families safe” after the death of her sister in a house fire started by a candle left burning. The house had no smoke alarms. Posted on March 21, 2012, the blog consisted of a single entry retelling her sister’s death and
funeral. On news-herald.com, a retired teacher regularly wrote lovingly of Lake County history in a blog called “Local Lore,” while a high school student told about the struggle of balancing being a teen-ager, high school student, and soccer player in a blog creatively called “The Silent I in Team.” Both had been updated within the last week at the time of the study.

What is all but missing from the blogs was any sort of independent public affairs information. While news-herald.com hosted blogs from local organizations that provided information on events, fund-raisers, and programs, the information was no different than what these groups already offered on their own Websites. Another blog on Cleveland.com, in addition to the RTA critic, that could loosely be classified as public affairs was one written by Ted Rink called “Conservative or Liberal.” His latest post, which was six weeks old at the time of this study, chastised Ohio United States Senator Sherrod Brown, a Democrat, for failing to respond to seven of his inquiries.

While the blogs clearly advance individual voices in the communities and provide perspective and information that likely would not be available in the public sphere without them, they do not overall rise to the level of journalism. The majority of the blogs do not meet even the widest test of being independent, comprehensive, or loyal to truth and the wider community. This is not to dismiss contributions from business owners and those seeking to promote their own financial ventures. Much of the information is no doubt sincere and could likely be helpful to readers and viewers interested in those specific topics. Yet, these blogs are much more akin to what the U.S. Supreme Court has long held to be commercial speech, which can be highly regulated as seen in the
disclosure rules promulgated by the FTC, rather than pure speech, which has far fewer restrictions.

*Web-only providers*

The business plan for Geauga News calls for mixing pure speech and commercial speech. Neither Rachel Hunziker nor Gabe Arnold, the founders of Geauga News, considers themselves journalists. Both say they are entrepreneurs, which they distinguish from publishers. Yet, the key to their business and viewership, they contend, is the type of information they offer. “People are really responding,” Hunziker said. “As they begin to see what a positive place [Geauga News] is, we are starting to build trust with them. We think the community will start generating stories for us.”

Arnold’s business plan calls for the site to generate $15,000 a month by the end of the first year of operation. He does not see the site as competition for local news outlets. “I don’t think we are competing in the same world at all,” he said. “I’m shocked the PD [Plain Dealer] still prints a paper. If they are still printing ten years from now, I will be even more shocked.”

Their business model depends upon selling a mix of traditional advertising space, social media posts, and what Arnold called “feature stories.” “The big thing will be the stories,” he said. “We’ll write it or they will.” The plan called for holding quarterly workshops to train advertisers in writing their own stories and using more Web technology, including analytics that allow them to see who is seeing their ads. “We totally know how to do that,” Arnold said. The story-ads, what newspapers for years have called advertorials, are presented on the site as news. For instance, two of the eight links under “Latest headlines” posted on May 22, 2012, were story-ads: “Bada Bing Pizza” and “Trusts Can be a Key Element in Financial Planning.” Bada Bing was written
by the Geauga News Staff, while Trusts was a canned financial advice column from the Mutual Insurance Co. and supplied by a local financial planner. It was unclear whether two other headlines were to posts that were paid story-ads or submitted by promotional bloggers as commonly see on news-herald.com. One dealt with a children’s art program that ended with a gallery showing and was written by a local art teacher who offered classes through the local arts guild. The other was supplied by the Geauga County Farm Bureau representative and concerned a local dairy farm. The other four consisted of a promotional item for the Website, itself, a first-person column from Arnold, a community blog supplied by a woman returning to her roots by raising chickens, and a report on the Chardon Healing Fund written by the Geauga News.

Jeff Miklovec, the founder of www.NBnewsexpress.com, does not sell stories, nor does he host what he would call regular bloggers. Several community members, however, do contribute content, such as pastors and the local historical society. He, too, does not consider himself a journalist. “I used to have a spiel on that,” he said. “I consider myself a character and an entrepreneur.” He smiled when asked whether he was making any money from the site. “I paid taxes on $1.39 last year [2010],” he said, laughing. Though the site brings in about $1,000 a month, Miklovec largely writes that off in expenses through mileage and overhead for the site. He sells his own advertising, which is presented in traditional blocks across the top and side of his site.

As part of the natural flow of conversation, both Miklovec and Arnold referred to what they produced as newspapers, occasionally tossing in the modifier “online” depending on the context. Of the two, Miklovec, which is not surprising given his age and background as a community newspaper editor, is more aware of the classically
defined role of publisher. He understands, for instance, that he is legally and ethically responsible for what appears on his site. He joined the Online Newspaper Association to have access to both technical and legal advice should the need arise. It very nearly did at one point. During a routine ride-about, he came across a state police road block. He stopped a couple blocks away and began taking photos. A few moments later a clearly upset trooper arrived, telling him officers in a state police helicopter had seen him and wanted him checked out. Miklovec told him he was taking photos for his Website. The trooper told him to leave, and he readily agreed.

Miklovec, Arnold, and Scott Weber, the gun shop owner and creator of the Burton Blog, share many of the same traits of journalism. They all produce unique content published with the intent of informing a broader audience. Commercialism on its own is not a barrier to being defined as journalism, since the majority of U.S. media are commercial to some extent. All three have significant commercial aspects to their sites, though Weber does not sell outside advertising but uses space to promote his own business.

The three differ widely in the types of content they produce. Arnold publishes only “positive news,” making it difficult at times for the viewer to determine what is paid advertising and what is not. Miklovec offers a wide range of news and opinion, most closely resembling a community newspaper, while Weber follows his own political agenda in choosing what to post. Arnold and Weber fail the tests of being comprehensive and independent (though both are loyal to the citizens and are concerned with truth), and therefore are not journalists. Of the three, only Miklovec qualifies. As in the other categories, this is not to dismiss the contributions made by Arnold and Weber. They are
important voices in the communities they serve, but it would be a distortion of the vital issues surrounding journalism to label their efforts as news.

Journalists and journalism

Defining journalist and journalism is far more than an academic exercise. The role of journalism is entwined with the history and mission of the republic, serving to inform and inflate the public sphere where meaning is made and self-governance occurs. If technology has created an environment where, as McLuhan notes, everyone is a publisher and where, as Alfred Hermida argued, journalism is “ambient, like the air,” then no one is a journalist and journalism is not a process of thoughtful deliberation but a naturally occurring phenomenon. This is simply not true. Journalism is occurring on a daily basis, though it is in a transformational stage and at times unrecognizable to traditionalists. A suitable analogy may be the final quarter of a tight football game. The crowd is on its feet, roaring a hundred-thousand messages at once, some for and some against each competing team. Each individual is unique, with a solitary voice. But, in that time of being together their voices, while starting separately, rise to become one, combining to create something bigger, louder, than anyone could to do alone. Journalism is not so much the referee in this metaphor, which would harken to the old paradigm of pronouncement, but the stadium.

The historical language defining the characteristics of journalism and its practitioners no longer suffices. It is understandable that lawmakers and dictionary editors would mostly define journalism by privileging the companies with news as a core business by citing employees of print publishers, broadcasters, and wire services as journalists. These operations are businesses with their own unique ways of manufacturing
and delivering the news, which are, of course, forms of technology. The First Amendment, itself, helps to establish this view by singling out a specific technology, “the press.” This has resulted in official blessings of specific machines and networks, the press and the airwaves. This is a comfortable system of rules, practices, ethics, and guidelines. If something goes wrong, there is somebody to blame, an organization to investigate or criticize. A new generation of technology has created a common delivery system for all information, without distinction to its type or content. This requires a different lexicon and a different frame for discussing the issues.

This does not, nor should not, affect core definitions of journalism or journalist. This study has shown that citizen journalism is a poor moniker for what is actually happening in the news landscape. The citizens are not producing their own news. They have never done so, and they are unlikely to do so now. Yet, they are contributing to the news within established journalism channels in important and vital ways, by offering perspective, opinion, new information, and, at times, challenging the status quo. In the process, they are creating their own narratives. It always has been thus. Technology has made this process much more visible, infinitely faster, and vastly expanded the scope of community comment and involvement. But, this by itself is not journalism, nor can individual contributors such as Chuck Christie in the arrest of the Portage County teen be defined as a journalist. Christie’s efforts, clearly a valiant and energetic battle for truth, took place within the confines of an imperfect journalism and would not have existed but for journalism. Neither can the episodic contributions of individuals in a community submitting photos, videos, or the occasional written observation be viewed as journalism. Their contributions are important, again, as part of a greater whole. Web entrepreneurs
who are creating new spaces for consuming information and offering a different type of information are important, too, but their work can only be classified as journalism if it meets the tests of journalism outside the technology in which it occurs.

In attempting to divorce definitions from technology, scholars Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel perhaps went too far by resting journalism on the intent of the practitioner. Such terms as truth, independence, and loyalty resonate with working journalists, but do only so much to illuminate what actually is happening. Barbie Zelizer’s definition, too, sought to separate the concept of journalism from technology by privileging both the organizations behind it and the values of the practitioners. State law and policy makers have been less concerned with intent and practice than with ensuring those defined as journalists ultimately report to a responsible gatekeeper. The author suggests taking elements of each, tweaking a few, adding a couple, and distilling them. The intent is to reflect what is happening, as this study demonstrated, in a live news landscape as well as to prepare the way for discussing critical issues facing journalism as revealed by that landscape, as a concept, an industry, and the cornerstone of representative democracy that demands citizen involvement, understanding, and a shared vision of what shall we do.

The definition: Journalism is a process of communication and involvement leading to knowable truth.

Its main traits, all of which must be present in order to satisfy the definition, are:

- Independent curiosity and the development of skills necessary to distill verifiable fact from confusion.

- Routine surveillance of a community, issue, or subject.
• Regular delivery of intelligence gleaned from surveillance.

• Adherence to transparency in process and final message.

• Responsibility for, and commitment to, monitoring and taking part in conversations started.

• Allegiance to accuracy in all things.

Though definitions are necessary in order to see the issues, they are only a first step. The transformation of journalism from pronouncer of truth to starter of conversations and providers of fact likely will not happen without fundamental and ongoing change. Of the six elements listed above in the traits associated with journalism, the most vexing may well be “routine” and “regular.”
Notes


3 Mike Waterhouse, “Sheriff: Student in …”


9 Ibid., 239.


11 Ibid., 240.


14 Dan Gillmore, We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People, (Sebastopol, CA: O’Reilly Media, 2004), 14-16.

15 State of the News Media, “Citizen Media,” Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2007,


21 Avery Holton, “Case of the #UTShooter: Citizens Working Around, With, and for Traditional News Media,” paper delivered to the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Conference, St. Louis, MO: 2011.


25 Ibid., 683.

26 Ibid., 681.

27 Ibid., 704.


304
On November 20, 2010, Drudge self-reported 73 million visitors to his site over the previous 31 days. While unverifiable, there is seems little question the site would qualify as a “news site.”

For a recap of the episode see http://www.onthemedia.org/transcripts/2007/02/16/03.


Ibid., 53.

Ibid., 57-59.

Morton v. Ruiz, 415 U.S. 199,467. In this case involving whether Native Americans could obtain Bureau of Indian assistance even if they lived off designated reservations, the court noted that the Department of Interior had failed to properly follow the guidelines for its administrative rules, which includes publishing them in the congressionally approved Federal Register.

Wordpress alone reported more than 363,000 bloggers using its service, with more than 250,000 posts in a single day (November 7, 2010, www.wordpress.com). In 2009, the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics reported slightly more than 40,000 reporters (apart from producers and editors) working in the nation’s newsrooms.

The states are Connecticut, Hawaii, Kansas, Texas, and Washington.

Florida Annotated Statutes § 90.5015 (LexisNexis 2010).

Ibid., (Section 1, paragraph A).

Hawaii Revised Statutes, Division 4, Title 33, Chapter 621.

Ibid.


IDAPA 03: State Athletic Commission Title 01: Rules of the State Athletic Commission (LexisNexis 2010).


10 Delaware Code 4322 (LexisNexis 2010).

Wisconsin Statutes § 8.12 (LexisNexis 2010).

Ohio Attorney General’s Opinion, No. 2007-039.

Ohio Revised Annotated Code § 2923.13(A) (LexisNexis 2010).

California Governance Code § 6254.21©(1)(A-B) (LexisNexis 2010).

Tennessee Compiled Rules and Regulations § 0420-3-4-04 (LexisNexis 2010).

South Dakota Codified Laws § 23A-27A-34.

Kansas Revised Statutes 117.087 (LexisNexis 2010).

Oklahoma Administrative Code 375:9-7-3 (LexisNexis 2010). Neither Kentucky nor Oklahoma define “news media” in the statutes.

Georgia Complete Rules and Regulations 560-2-2-.55 (LexisNexis 2010).
62 Nebraska Revised State Statutes. 28-815 (LexisNexis 2010).

63 Missouri Compiled State Rules 20 CSR 2040-3.011 (LexisNexis 2010).


67 Virginia State Administrative code 15A 6-111 (LexisNexis 2010).


69 Ibid.


71 Karmen Concannon, assistant publisher, Sentinel-Tribune, interview by the author, February 24, 2012, Bowling Green, OH.


73 Louisiana Revised Statutes § 15:42 (LexisNexis 2010).

74 Kentucky Revised Statutes § 432.570 (LexisNexis 2010).

75 Minnesota Revised Statutes 3100.6800 (LexisNexis 2010).

76 Washington Revised Code § 118-03-030 (LexisNexis 2010).

77 Oregon Revised Statutes § 192.660.

South Carolina Annotated Code § 2-1-130.

Washinton Administration Code, 118-03-030 (LexisNexis 2010).

CDCR 24-2103 (LexisNexis 2010).

Ohio Revised Annotated Code, § 4123.88 (LexisNexis 2010).

New Jersey Annotated Statutes, § 10:133-1.3 (LexisNexis 2010).

South Dakaota Codified Laws § 15-24-6 (LexisNexis 2010). The regulations include several caveats, including a strongly worded admonition that the court retains the right to withdraw and change the rules at any time.


The Missouri Group, Telling the Story, 6.


Ibid., 80-81.


94 Ibid.

95 Taylor Dungjen and Jennifer Feehan, “Elderly Perrysburg…”


104 Ibid.

105 State of the Blogosphere 2011…


108 Stephan Lacy, et. al, “Citizen Journalism Web Sites…”


117 Ibid.
Chapter 8: Journalism

‘People can be so swayed. I’m worried.’ - Wood County focus group member.

The small group that gathered in the upstairs community room of the spacious Wood County Public Library did not agree on much when asked about how, when, why, and whether they consumed news about public affairs. It was in many ways, as expected, a clash of generations. Without prompting, they segregated themselves by age, a smiling 28-year-old aspiring artist, substitute teacher, and part-time coffee barista, for instance, sitting on the opposite side of the table from a couple in their 80s, the woman a volunteer officer for the Wood County Historical Society. The young man said he often read the Sentinel-Tribune at the coffee shop where he worked but couldn’t afford a subscription, though he acknowledged buying the paper was a low financial priority. “If I hear something that interests me, I go to the Internet to check it out,” he said. The couple takes both the Sentinel-Tribune and the Blade, as well as routinely watches WTOL. The generation gap, however, disappeared when the author asked them to imagine the news landscape without the local newspaper. The young man and the older couple readily agreed. “News will be through Websites and things like Twitter and Facebook,” the older man said. The young man nodded and jumped in. “I agree. That makes the most sense. It really is faster and better, anyway.” The conversation stopped when the author interjected, “Who do you think will be doing the tweeting?”

It was clear the earlier question – what does the news landscape look like without a daily newspaper – had evoked a specific image, one of a tangible product no longer being delivered. Asked to call up another image, not the end product but who creates the
journalism that the product represents, the question stumped both ends of the generational divide. “Maybe it will be citizens, you know, people interested in what’s going on,” the young man said, and then laughed. “Not me. But some people.” The older woman scoffed. “People are too busy living their lives. They are not going to go to a council meeting,” she said. “Maybe it will be from the clerk or someone. But, then, what are we supposed to think about that?” The older man weighed in. “Even if it were a citizen or someone, how are we supposed to know if there is an agenda or something?” His wife agreed that was the crux. “People can be so swayed. I’m worried,” she said.

It is, of course, the nature of the generational divide for those who have come before to worry about what comes next. Change is inherently a scary proposition. Yet, the conversation did seem to hit the central issue: as professional journalism wanes, citizens are left with essentially two choices, either become more sophisticated at gathering and assessing their own information or disengage. Without information to discuss, debate, shred, and organize around, citizens are left in the shadows. Overall, this study found daily professional journalism vital to this historic and dynamic process. This study also found the audience can rise with sometimes astonishing insight and vigor, becoming a partner with established journalism. Yet, this is a process, especially involving public affairs and the routine surveillance of government, cultural, and business institutions, that takes place within and as a part of established journalism. Without daily professional journalism, much of this energy likely would not exist or would be focused on issues and areas outside home communities.

This chapter concludes the exploration into two live news landscapes, one with a daily newspaper and therefore more journalistic resources at its disposal and one where a
daily newspaper has closed. This chapter revisits the theoretical underpinnings of the study and suggests alternatives to current paradigms for future theoretical work, summarizes the major findings, and reviews historical attempts at addressing fundamental issues with journalism. Finally, the author suggests ways of exploring journalism’s future based on the findings of this study, a future decoupled from an industrial past and shed of the emotion of news routines genetically coded into specific channels of information. This could be an astonishingly bright future, one where journalism is rebooted in the concepts of convergence and community, where news routines remain routines, resulting in a vibrant, public affairs-inspired public sphere. This is a future, however, where routines must be reimagined and reinvented. What an increasingly complex world needs, it is clear and as this study has demonstrated, is more professional journalism, not less. It is not enough to stop the industrial decline, if that were possible or even desirable. Journalism must be expanded to fulfill its historical and constitutional missions. Yet, this must be a different kind of journalism, one that does not forget its past but is focused on a future based not in proclaiming to a passive audience but one in which it is equal partners with the audience. This future also relies on a fundamentally different kind of audience. A partnership implies equal responsibility. If this is to be the case, as this study implies, those who consume the news and help to create it have a responsibility to understand what they are consuming, what they are not consuming, and how they are contributing to the information landscape.

Theoretical grounding

Unlike every other industrial process, which results in a product to be sold and consumed, the end result of the journalism manufacturing process was never a product
per se, but of the delivery of ideas. True, these ideas came in prepackaged formats like breakfast cereal. But, the technology was always ancillary to the end result, though the enormous machinery behind the creation and mass distribution of books, magazines, newspapers, or even newscasts tended to obscure this. The invention of the printing press was not dangerous to the status quo because books and periodicals made great projectiles but because the technology advanced the spread of new ideas, a far more dangerous proposition than a new weapon.¹

This underlying concept is contained in the First Amendment, which protected the producer not the industrial process from government interference. A newspaper, as a business, though enjoying some benefit from its constitutional status, still had to pay taxes, follow most (but not all) labor laws, adhere to environmental standards, and the like. The intent of the First Amendment, famously articulated by legal scholar Alexander Meiklejohn, was to preserve the flow of information to a populace tasked with governing itself and hiring its own managers through an electoral process.² In effect, the First Amendment created a constitutional space where new information could be debated and then acted upon by an engaged citizenry. The fact the founders could express themselves only through the technology of the time period… “Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of the press…” has caused great mischief throughout the American experience as institutions wrestled with definitions. Magazines, for instance, for decades were denied postal privileges accorded newspapers because they were not seen as providing timely news or geographically local reports and therefore were not the press.³

Broadcast always has been a hybrid of protected and unprotected journalism. Using the argument that the airwaves were publicly owned, Congress concluded the government
had the right and duty to proscribe not just technological restrictions, meaning how the journalism was delivered, but the actual content. This can be seen in a wide variety of policies, including the now-defunct Fairness Doctrine and rules on child and public affairs programming.4

After World War II, though certainly beginning long before that, including the still-scrutinized debate between Walter Lippmann and John Dewey in the 1920s about the nature of the audience and the formation of public opinion, journalism became intimately tied with the study of communications and the rise of the culture industry. The extraordinary success of propaganda campaigns in both Germany and the United States gave energy to scholars and industry leaders seeking to take advantage of new thinking and techniques as well as those seeking to illuminate mass communication as a means of social and economic control.5

Paul Lazarsfeld et al. found the press was not so powerful perhaps as initially thought, that opinion leaders, informed by the media, helped disseminate and instruct opinion. Maxwell McCombs and his partners found an intricate relationship connecting the public, journalism, and policy makers through their ground-breaking agenda-setting studies. J r gen Habermas, like Alexis de Tocqueville before him, found the potential central power of representative democracy not in the great institutions of society but in the people themselves in the way they consumed information and arrived at new meaning through an at times chaotic process of debate, argument, and eventual agreement, however fleeting. Habermas described this as both a process and a space, the public sphere.
All of these theorists were working within the industrial age of the press, with news as a product at its essence. Though often critical of the way the market-driven media functioned outside their central role of informing democracy, these scholars were not confronted with what have become more fundamental questions: What does the public sphere look like when the audience and the journalist share in the creation of news and cultural narrative? And, what happens to the public sphere in the absence of journalism?

The advent of digital networked technology has transformed the industrial manufacturing of news from an assembly line packaging process to a conversation, as this project has confirmed. Technology always has disrupted the journalism establishment, beginning with the telegraph and going through cable and satellite television. The latest disruption, however, is different. For the first time, the commotion is not merely through making more choices available in a given marketplace, though that is a large part, but in how the technology has changed the essence of the relationship between news provider and audience. While this change is far more subtle than many would argue, it is no less profound.

*Structural elements of the public sphere*

This study points up the need for ongoing theoretical advancement to better understand what clearly are new news landscapes forming through technology and the rise of the audience. It is tempting to see these changes as the result of technological determinism, a doctrine that suggests technology causes the change, rather than is correlated or an adjunct to it. This would, in the author’s view, be a mistake. Technology, as it always has been, is a tool that can be used, discarded, and twisted to suit various
needs. This is seen most clearly in how television stations are transferring their traditional version of news to social media.

Journalism, after all, has been in a constant state of expansion and contraction. The latest round of consolidations, closings, and retraction of newspapers is more worrisome now than previous periods of disruption because the number of journalists is declining. This has resulted, as this study has shown, in less public affairs information reaching the public sphere, a situation that demands a re-examination of how news is formed, disseminated, and used, as well as what doesn’t enter the public sphere.

More parsimonious and textured ways of looking at news landscapes are needed. The author suggests, as scholar Peter Dahlgren pointed out in 2005 within the context of discussing the Internet, one powerful way forward is to examine and articulate the forces and foundations that shape the public sphere. These certainly include various types of technology, but also incorporate law, public and private policy of media companies, ethics, economics, geography, historical factors, and time, or speed of discourse. Discussion about the public sphere long has been ruffled by the normative frame Habermas used in articulating it. The author does not argue for abandoning the proscriptive elements of the public sphere, which suggest robust, rational debate as the cornerstone of representative democracy. But, rather, the author suggests parsing the forces that shape the public sphere, apart from normative debates and ascribing attributes of good and bad to various phenomena.

As this study confirmed, the audience and the news have become entwined in ways not seen before and in ways not thoroughly understood. But, this study also has shown this occurs primarily when news is present. This has profound implications for
how the First Amendment was intended to work as a constitutional framework for the public sphere and how it really works. The author suggests a reimagining of the public sphere not as a space that can be entered or exited at will, but as a process that results in a space that appears, grows, and then declines based on the discursive energy within it. The energy is created by the interaction between audience members within a space created by journalism within the confines of the First Amendment. The end results, as Habermas suggested, in communicative action. The process begins with a spark, some sort of ignition that heats discourse and inflates the public sphere. The spark can be an event, an incident, a situation, something that happens. This then must be communicated to a broader public, moving from the private sphere of home and the immediate environment to a larger, public space where more members of an interested community have access to information describing the spark. The communication creates the space where energy is expended through discussion and debate and eventually dissipated as meaning is created. A variety of forces come into play to both create the spark and shape the resulting public sphere. Habermas extended his metaphor of the public sphere to include “communicative action,” the various ways by which the resulting dialogue and eventual acquiescence to shared meaning are transferred to the power structure, or the public actors who carry out the public will. Figure No. 8.1 shows what this might look like.
As theorist Nancy Fraser suggested in 1991, there are many public spheres, with different publics tending to use different spheres. Any attempt, she suggested, to use Habermas’ theory to examine public discourse should include an examination of inherent inequalities, such as gender, race, class, and so on. Two such inequalities, though she did not articulate these, are the news and digital divides, defined in this study as communities and populations deficient in matters of public affairs information to discuss as well as the technology needed to consume the news and engage with it. (The latter, though likely present in both counties because of small infrastructure gaps and pockets of low income residents, was considered outside the scope of this study.) Visualizing the public sphere as a process that creates a dynamic space satisfies this core requirement of the theory by suggesting it is necessary to examine the ignition event as well as the forces shaping the resulting sphere. It also is true, as this study has shown, that there are multiple public
spheres occurring at the same time. Viewing the public sphere as a process that creates and collapses space serves to incorporate this important concept. Using the Chardon Nog Jog as an example, Figure No. 8.2 illustrates how different spheres intersected and then collapsed. The same principles would apply to local, regional, and national public spheres that operate independently but can and do intertwine.

**Figure No. 8.2 – Overlapping of multiple public spheres**

**Major findings**

*From product to conversation*

These processes are evident in this study. Overall, the central finding is that more journalism leads to more conversation through the introduction into the public sphere of more things to talk about. Further, this study found that in addition to providing fodder
for conversation, the dialogue tends to take place in the space created by journalism. As professional daily journalism retreats, the audience is left to cobble together its own daily intelligence service through Websites, social media, and the occasional report in print or on broadcast. This requires much more attention to what isn’t being discussed. This is particularly true for public affairs information.

In Wood County, which has a daily newspaper based in the county and where the metro newspaper continues to pay at least some attention to its neighbor, the amount of public affairs information entering the public sphere, as measured by the number of headlined stories, was nearly double that of what was available in Geauga County. This held true across nearly all types of public affairs information, ranging from government reports to traffic accidents to business topics. Not surprisingly, fewer things to talk about led to fewer conversations taking place about the essential question of what shall we do in Geauga County than in Wood County. This is explained both through the nature of public affairs reporting resting primarily with weekly operations in Geauga, which do not put a premium on audience interaction, and the amount of information available.

By examining what enters the public sphere, it is possible to shine a light on what doesn’t. During the industrial age of journalism, the amount of journalism per se was not the central concern of either industry or the academy. Most examinations, especially those critical of established journalism, tended to focus on a scarcity of the diversity of viewpoints in a given marketplace through the corporate consolidation of the press, the closing of second and third newspapers in cities, and the nature of television as an immediate, visual medium poorly equipped to deal with public affairs issues. In other words, topics of conversation were seen as relatively plentiful but the resulting debate
and dialogue was too thin and barred too many citizens. The popular portrayal of the current landscape and episodic incidents of viral, citizen-provided information have masked the reality of what is actually happening on a routine basis. This requires deeper examinations of the antecedent to important questions of how information is being used and passed along, whether the citizens even know what they should be debating.

This is readily seen. In a single meeting in December 2011, Geauga County commissioners agreed to change the definition of family, noted the local impact of the nationwide housing slump with a 5 percent reduction in county property tax revenues, and fretted about the impact of a controversial natural gas extraction practice called fracking on county communities. They also noted revenue associated with the county’s decision in 2007 to build a massive prison complex to house inmates, mostly from neighboring Cuyahoga County, was expected to drop from $2 million a year to $5,000 in 2012. County residents still owed $700,000 in debt on the complex. Commissioners also agreed to continue pursuing plans for an additional $5 million in public debt to switch the county’s law enforcement communication system from analogue to digital. In other words, the titanic issues seen repeatedly in national politics, economics, and cultural debates were being put to the ground by local governments in ways that affect local communities. Still, the commissioners noted, the county would have money to start the new fiscal year in the black. All was good. “I think we’ve done a great job,” Commissioner Tracy Jameson told his colleagues.11

No residents were in attendance at the 10 a.m. meeting. Two reporters were there, one each representing the weeklies Geauga Times-Courier and the Geauga County Maple Leaf. The meeting was held on a Thursday, the day after the print deadline for
both. Neither updated their newspapers’ Websites. The story in the *Maple Leaf* the following Thursday made mention only of the overall county budget. The lead: “Geauga County will ring in the new year with a $4.1 million carryover thanks to conservative financial management and budgeting.”\textsuperscript{12} The *Times-Courier* emphasized the budget as well, carrying through on the narrative established earlier in the year. The lead from a *Times-Courier* story from April 2011: “While Geauga County faces challenging economic times like much of the country, county Auditor Frank Gliha said experienced officials and a conservative approach will get the county through it.”\textsuperscript{13} Neither mentioned the budget details outlined above.

*From conversation to cloud*

The newest player in the news game, social media, has not expanded the availability of public affairs information. This study found commercial broadcast television stations were embracing social media, particularly Facebook, far more aggressively than newspapers in either market. Further, this study found that television stations were transferring their news brands of the immediate, visual, and violent to the new medium. Since newspapers, the primary providers of public affairs information, have chosen not to engage in the medium, this means social media reaching into both Geauga and Wood counties carries little public affairs news. In addition, since viewers react to the journalism they see and they most often see crime, death by traffic accident, the odd and nefarious, and weather, this has created a mean sphere, where conversations often center on fear and race.
From cloud to creation

Just as social media have failed to enhance the amount and type of public affairs information available to inflate the public sphere, citizens are not creating their own journalism. But, they frequently can and do craft their own narratives by toggling between outlets and contributing to and – occasionally – countering what they see in the established media. Citizen blogs hosted and recruited by the media were almost exclusively the province of newspapers. The majority of these blogs were promotional in nature, contributed by business owners and entrepreneurs with content centered on their own operations. Many others were done by hobbyists and enthusiasts of various stripes opining about their areas of special interest. Yet, while little evidence was found suggesting citizens were routinely watching and reporting on their local institutions on their own, they frequently contributed deeply to the creation of their own narratives in reaction to the news they were presented. They did this in two primary ways: by offering their own information, often first- or second-hand accounts of an event or issue, or gathered from other area media, and by adding perspective and opinion as part of an overarching search for meaning.

Role reversal

While the roles of the audience and the media are readily observed in routine times, a new dynamic takes over in times of great turmoil, when events shake the foundations of communities. When this happens, the routines of audience and news provider become reversed, with journalist becoming audience and audience becoming journalist. Further, the individual and routine roles of the media become reversed, with metro news operations performing more like community news outlets and small
operations acting more like their larger metro brethren. Broadcast takes on more traits of
the newspaper, and vice versa as principles of convergence are pushed to the extreme.
While clearly evident in other times, the multiple spheres at play during times of crisis
are starkly evident. This dynamic, too, tends to mask what actually happens during times
of routine, with many reporters parachuting not from far-flung media cities but from one
side of a market to the other.

*Historical concern*

The news media, how they function, and their impact on public affairs have been
of concern from before the nation’s founding. The rise of the industrial press, a
perceived increasing allegiance to advertisers, and the resulting intense competition for
readers led to a string of popular, academic, and government examinations of the press.
The criticism rose to such a din that government intervention, rather than anathema to
First Amendment principles, began to be seen as a way to preserve the public affairs
function of the press. In 1912, the newspaper trade journal *Editor & Publisher* endorsed a
plan for the licensing of newspapers as a way to check the growing number of critics
upset over sensationalism. Appalled, many of the nation’s editors, as movie industry
leaders would in the 1960s, decided self-regulation was preferable to government
oversight. In 1922, *Editor & Publisher* giddily reported the adoption by the newly formed
American Society of Newspaper Editors of journalism’s first Code of Ethics. The code
called freedom of the press a “vital human right” and listed independence as its third
canon, with a focus on banning “the promotion of any private interest not in the general
welfare.” The group adopted the code as Oklahoma lawmakers were considering
legislation that would have created a state board to craft qualifications for journalists
In 1947, the Commission on Freedom of the Press, popularly known as the Hutchins Commission, examined the state of journalism, using as its underlying premise that the press as big business was the single greatest danger to American free expression. The commission reported:

When an instrument of prime importance to all the people is available to a small minority of the people only, and when it is employed by that small minority in such a way as not to supply the people with the service they require, the freedom of the minority in the employment of that instrument is in danger.

This danger, in the case of the freedom of the press, is in part the consequence of the economic structure of the press, in part the consequence of the industrial organization of modern society, and in part the result of the failure of the directors of the press to recognize the press needs of a modern nation and to estimate and accept the responsibilities which those needs impose upon them.19

President Lyndon B. Johnson established the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders in 1967, in part in response to a growing feeling that the media, especially major metropolitan newspapers and an evolving television news industry, were responsible for ongoing racial unrest. The goal was to investigate the root causes of racial tension and violence that had erupted in 150 cities across the nation. The commission released its findings, popularly known as the Kerner Report after the Illinois governor who led the investigation, in March 1968. After examining radio, television, and newspaper reports in the largest cities before, during, and after the riots, the commission concluded the media likely contributed little to starting specific riots and, in fact, tended to report them only after the fact.20 Yet, the commission found the media shared significant responsibility for the underlying social conditions that created the environment that allowed the riots to occur in the first place. Among them was the fact the media, both broadcast and newspaper, failed to employ minorities, covered their
communities from the perspective of the white, middle class, and tended to portray African-Americans only in terms of the violent or the odd. This, the report noted, served to alienate potential minority readers and viewers as well as gave the white community an inaccurate impression of the black community. Once again, rather than face congressional action, industry leaders launched affirmative action initiatives and pledged to do better in covering all parts of their communities. In assessing the effort forty years later, a team of Howard University scholars concluded little has changed and that the ongoing consolidation of the media after passage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act meant the chance of significant improvement was minimal.  

While the newspaper industry fought off attempts at regulation, it subsequently embraced the Newspaper Preservation Act passed in 1970 during the Nixon administration. The act specifically exempted newspapers from federal anti-trust enforcement by allowing them to combine business functions as long as they kept news and editorial operations separate. The act came in response to a 1969 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that banned so-called Joint Operating Agreements. While noting the act failed to save a significant number of newspapers, some scholars have pointed to the legislation as evidence that Congress is occasionally willing to dip into core journalism issues.  

In 2009, U.S. Senator John Kerry, inspired by threats from owners of the *New York Times* to shut down his home state *Boston Globe*, held a hearing on “The Future of Journalism.” Though styled to include all media, his comments dealt almost exclusively with newspapers. He connected a failing business model for print to the loss of public affairs news available to the public. “Americans once counted on newspapers to be the rock on which journalism, the best sense of the word ‘journalism,’ was based,”
said at the hearing.\textsuperscript{24} Witnesses included fellow senators, media representatives, and former journalists. Among them was David Simon, a former \textit{Baltimore Sun} reporter who created the popular “The Wire” series for the Home Box Office channel. He followed a century of media critics in placing the blame for the decline of newspapers, and therefore substantial public affairs reporting, on the industrial corporations that run them:

We know now, because bankruptcy has opened the books, that \textit{The Baltimore Sun} was eliminating its afternoon edition and trimming nearly 100 reporters and editors in an era when the paper was achieving 37-percent profits. Such shortsighted arrogance rivals that of Detroit in the 1970s, when automakers offered up Chevy Vegas, Pacers and Gremlins without the slightest worry that mediocrity would be challenged by better-made cars from Germany or Japan. In short, my industry butchered itself, and we do so at the behest of Wall Street, in the same unfettered, free-market logic that has proven so disastrous for so many American industries. Indeed, the original sin of American newspapering lies in going to Wall Street in the first place.\textsuperscript{25}

In January 2010, the Federal Communications Commission sponsored an extensive effort to document the news landscape with “the objective … to assess whether all Americans have access to vibrant, diverse sources of news and information that will enable them to enrich their lives, their communities and our democracy.”\textsuperscript{26} For those concerned with core principles of journalism independence, the all-inclusive framing of the investigation into “news and information” marked a potentially alarming expansion of federal reach beyond historic broadcast standards. And, in fact, the commission’s first report based on its investigation did connect its power to set electronic regulations to the digital world through a wide-ranging broadband initiative. In a remarkably detailed, well-written, and even-handed 478-page report, the FCC concluded in 2011 there were “media deficits” in many communities created by the decline in newspapering, gaps not filled by broadcast, cable, Web-startups, or citizens doing their own news.\textsuperscript{27}
Ongoing discussion

The angst-filled chatter through industry, government, and academia has spawned a wave of suggestions, though no concrete action, for how to promote and preserve journalism. The FCC report, for instance, concluded with a raft of recommendations for policy tweaks and reforms aimed at improving the public affairs information available for communities. These included changing Internal Revenue Service regulations to make it easier for newspaper owners to convert their operations to non-profit status, providing incentives for the formation of local community access and government cable channels, and making it easier for public broadcast stations, radio and television, to do and document local public affairs programming.28

Leonard Downie Jr., a journalism professor and an executive for the Washington Post, and noted news flow scholar Michael Schudson, offered suggestions for turning the “current moment of transformation into a reconstruction of American journalism.”29 They recommended a far more textured business model for newspapers that included a “long-tail advertising” scheme to allow them to offer specific viewers of their Websites to merchants at premium prices.30 In foreshadowing the FCC report, they also endorsed passing new IRS regulations to make it easier for independent news organizations to be set up as non-profit, 501(c)3 corporations. In addition to releasing the profit pressure on commercial news organizations, charitable status would make it more attractive for foundations and philanthropic trusts to contribute on an ongoing rather than episodic basis.31 Legal scholar Richard Schmalbeck offered a particularly compelling argument that most newspapers, with a few tweaks to their operations, could qualify under current IRS guidelines as either educational or charitable groups. One barrier, he noted, could be
changed by the IRS without an act of Congress through recasting its historic definition of “commerciality.”

Scholars Mike Ananny and Daniel Kreiss, in a particularly creative romp through the U.S. Constitution, connected the copyright clause to the First Amendment, arguing for a “positive” interpretation of the rights of free press and free speech. The founders, they suggested, clearly intended for public affairs information to be in the public domain and to be acted upon by the citizenry. The Constitution was not meant solely to prevent government interference in this process, a negative right, but to actively promote the education of the public and their ability to take part in the discussion, a positive right. They suggested direct subsidy of journalism by reporters exchanging their copyrights for government payments. Other scholars, such as James Curran and colleagues, have argued for a change from what they called entertainment-centered, market-driven journalism to a public service model supported by government. In comparing television industries across four countries, they found public service models did more and better public affairs programming but that, overall, more and more countries were leaning toward the U.S. system of private, for-profit ownership and programming. “This trend seems set to foster an impoverished public life characterized by declining exposure to serious journalism and by reduced levels of public knowledge,” Curran wrote.

Most observers in academia, the news industry, and government acknowledge making non-profit status more easily obtainable for existing newspaper operations would be helpful but represents just a small part of what would have to be a complex array of financial resources to preserve even a portion of the existing reporting cadre. The author argues that so much energy devoted to the subject of non-profit newsgathering detracts
from the far more important core issue confronting the First Amendment and representative democracy – expanding the amount of public affairs information available provided by professional journalism. Non-profit does not mean no-revenue. While few solid numbers exist for what deleting final profit from the bottom line of newspaper companies would mean in terms of resources available for reporting, profit margins – defined as the difference between all expenses and what is left – are available. They range from the *New York Times*' 8 percent profit to McClatchy’s 1.5 percent to losses reported by companies in bankruptcy such as the Tribune Co.\(^{36}\) Based on the *New York Times*' reported total annual revenue of $2.3 billion, the 8 percent profit represents $184 million, a not inconsiderable sum. However, assuming nothing else were to change, a failing business model still would have to come up with $2.12 billion.\(^{37}\) Removing profit pressures at a time when advertising revenue continues to drop yearly in the high single digits seems at best a short-term stopgap.

The essential dilemma facing the overall newspaper industry is a cocktail of issues stemming from its industrial legacy. This is seen in the enormous overhead in the form of presses, paper, and corporate bureaucracy; high debt incurred during the mass consolidation period between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s, and a sweaty addiction to large amounts of advertising money.\(^{38}\) Even without the legacy cost and revenue issues, the newspaper industry is confronting what many industrial concerns have faced at one time or another since the advent of the Industrial Revolution: a shifting consumer base that no longer sees as much value in the products produced as it once did. In a market-driven system, this necessarily means less money. Focusing discussion and energy on salvaging the industrial process that results in a tangible product that fewer and
fewer people want, rather than the true value of the journalism that the product represents, seems to the author counterproductive and decidedly quixotic.

These discussions also tend to leave out what clearly is an enormously important and emerging partner in the creation, dissemination, and use of the news produced by professional journalism – the audience. While newspapers, the main providers of public affairs information, have been enormously successful in building their Web audiences, the growth has slowed and there are signs this is an extraordinarily thin and inherently at-risk relationship. Overall, while traffic continues to grow modestly, market share for newspaper Websites, defined as the percentage of traffic collected by all news sites, has declined from 44 percent to just more than 35 percent. Part of this trend may be newspapers’ failure, as seen in this study, to fully take part in social media. Another significant factor is the investment, or lack of it, viewers are willing to make in the sites. For instance, the average time per month spent on Cleveland.com by a unique monthly visitor was 3.75 minutes. The average unique visitor to Facebook spent 423 minutes a month on the site in 2011. At the same time, an increasing number of users say they are contributing to the news through tweeting, posting comments on Facebook and websites, and even blogging.

The apparent paradox – an increase in contributing to the news at the same time consumption becomes increasingly superficial – points to the need for increased attention by the industry, the academy, and education leaders to fields that have variously been described as information literacy, media literacy, and digital literacy. As this study has demonstrated, the audience is more adept at reacting than assessing, which is not unlike some journalists. Further, this study found, in line with much previous research, that the
audience has become partners with journalism in the creation of news and narrative. That partnership is strongest where journalism is strongest. In the absence of professional daily journalism, the audience is left more on its own to create its own daily news report from social media, Web sites, and television reports, the vast majority of this information streaming across county borders. This means the audience must take increased responsibility for what it is consuming, and more importantly, what it is not consuming. Failure to demand public affairs information, as well as adequately consume and process what is available, must be viewed in the current landscape as a social misdemeanor on the same level as failing to provide it.

Though outside the scope of this project, a brief discussion of information literacy will serve to illustrate the point. The basic tenets of information literacy have changed in recent years from a rather staid library-centered definition of finding and using sources, to a more far-reaching definition of the ability to both locate and critically analyze information. Scholars Paul Stuges and Almuth Gastinger connected the concepts of information literacy to the growing worldwide movement for public information as a human right, correctly noting that information without the ability to adequately assess it is like giving a man dying of thirst a bottle of wine without a corkscrew. Scholars Li Wang and colleagues argued information literacy can be viewed through a prism of long held sociocultural theories, which suggest that knowledge is socially constructed through interaction with information and sharing with it individuals. Former Ohio Governor Ted Strickland made “media literacy” a key plank in his education reform plan in 2009, an ultimately doomed attempt at what he called building “skills that help people live their lives.” Media literacy, within the context of being both an educated consumer and
engaged citizen, should be a required course in secondary education and should be added
to the core requirements of history, English, math, and science in higher education. No
student should graduate from high school without understanding the nature of the media
that permeate their lives, and no student should obtain a college degree without being
able to critically examine the messages bombarding them from four primary angles: the
environment in which the message is presented, the producer of the message, the various
possible incarnations of intent of the message, and the message that is not present in the
various information streams being consumed.

*Overall landscapes in Geauga and Wood counties*

The landscapes for public affairs information in the two studied counties are
decidedly different, with Wood County demonstrating a deeper, more vibrant news
environment. This is mostly the result of more professional daily journalism being
present. Yet, as seen in the declining circulation and market penetration numbers, the
public affairs landscape there is experiencing the same thinning and faces the same risk
as seen in communities across the country. The *Blade*’s attempt at launching hyper-local
digital operations holds some promise, though these, as seen in America Online’s
struggle to launch similar efforts, have yet to yield either significant traffic or revenue. It
may be that the *Blade*, which can leverage its deeper regional report, may have more
success. This requires further study.

Television in both markets has perhaps the best opportunity to advance public
affairs journalism. The stations are unburdened by industrial legacy overhead and have
new technology tools at their disposal to create deeper, richer environments for news and
audience interaction. Their willingness to embrace social media, a small rise in overall
viewing audience, and the fact the majority of a tsunami of political spending in a post
Citizens United world likely will go to television all bode well for commercial
broadcasting. Citizens United is the U.S. Supreme Court decision that gave corporations
citizen status, with the concurrent ability to spend whatever amount they wished to
influence political races. However, as this study demonstrated, overall, broadcasters
have not used these advantages to expand public affairs reporting but rather to extend
their historical brands of the violent and odd. The two broadcast entrepreneurs identified
in this study, Geauga TV’s David Jevnikar and Bowling Green’s Dave Horger, both
provide vital services to their communities but rather than expanding are struggling. Both
are within a decade of retirement and both fear what they do eventually will be lost.

Web start-ups were identified in each county, reflecting a fitful national trend.
These, too, hold promise. Any revenue for these operations is good revenue. But, as seen
with the Geauga News business model of co-mingling commercial reports with soft
news, they do not automatically advance public affairs information. North Baltimore’s
Jeff Miklovec does seem to represent a stronger effort at deepening public affairs
information, including holding such events as political forums. These kinds of operations,
though extraordinarily feeble through the reliance on a single individual, should be
nurtured and protected.

All of these issues point to the need for an ongoing discussion of how not just to
preserve what is present but to expand journalism’s resources to meet the needs of an
increasingly complex world. While the public sphere in Wood County faces many
challenges, it is in better shape currently than that seen in Geauga County, thereby
making the latter the most logical focus for a discussion about what can be done. This is a discussion that must focus on both practice and finances, since the two are inseparable.

Marshaling resources

As seen in testimony during Senatorerry’s hearing as well as the FCC-sponsored report on local news, there is little will among news industry and political leaders for direct government subsidy of journalism. Traditions of the press being independent from government, though steeped in mythology and often contradicted through both journalism practices and legal definitions, make such a solution directed at public affairs reporting unlikely and from the standpoint of most observers, including the author, undesirable. This sentiment was reflected by opinion leaders in both Geauga and Wood counties. In an interesting and perhaps slightly contradictory finding, Wood County leaders felt more strongly about the importance of professional journalism than did those in Geauga County (as reported in Chapter 7) but were more opposed to “taxpayer-funded media.” The respondents, however, did seem to create an opening for discussing alternatively funded media, with more than a third of respondents saying “maybe.” The results are shown in Table No. 8.1.
Table No. 8.1 – Public funding for news operations

**Question:** The issue of the future of the media has been widely debated as traditional media outlets (such as newspapers and local broadcast stations) struggle financially. Would you support taxpayer-funded media outlets in your community?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Geauga</th>
<th>Wood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>53.1% (26)</td>
<td>57.9% (44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6.1% (3)</td>
<td>6.6% (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>40.8% (20)</td>
<td>35.5% (27)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The responses likely were affected by the language of the question, which purposively injected the word “taxpayer” to incite extremes by implying direct subsidy. Even with this, however, the large minority of “maybes” suggests a potential willingness to debate other ways of paying for public affairs journalism. So what would that look like in Geauga County, where daily professional journalism does not exist and public affairs news, and consequently debates about what shall we do, rest primarily with weekly print operations and episodic reports from television and the metro and regional daily newspapers?

The results of this study do point to a specific model for discussion and also help to outline the parameters and definitions of what alternative public affairs journalism models might look like in general. The author argues several principles should be used in framing discussions of alternative models. The principles:

1) Public affairs journalism is paramount. Though all journalism is not public affairs reporting, all public affairs reporting is journalism. What is most at risk in the current news landscape are the loss of professional reporters...
monitoring, challenging, questioning, and making visible the decisions, opportunities, and risks associated with government, cultural, business, and non-profit institutions.

2) Public affairs journalism must be regular and routine.

3) Convergence is king. The technology employed in the creation of public affairs journalism is incidental to the journalism being performed. All traditional and digital tools of gathering, disseminating, and story-telling must be available, deployed with the purpose of how best to tell any individual tale. The result must be a central gathering place for both consuming and using the journalism produced.

4) The audience is a partner. This can be articulated in three primary ways:
   Deciding what journalism is performed, contributing to it, and reacting to it.

5) Independence must be maintained and continually enhanced.

6) Transparency is essential. Methods and sources used in gathering and producing news must be made part of the journalism, as well as any resulting community dialogue.

7) Open copyright is key. Any news, information, data, stories, visuals, etc., must be available for any and all to use at will.

8) Open access is mandatory. Only in the most grievous cases can a contributor be barred from contributing and never may anyone be prohibited from consuming what is produced.

9) Advertising and direct payments for access, such as pay walls, are prohibited, including government legal advertising.
10) Sustainability is a guiding concept in all management decisions. In order to build trust, confidence, and a following, public affairs journalism must not be put at risk by varying economic winds.

*Deploying the principles*

Public affairs journalism in Geauga County is beset not by the absence of journalism but by the nature of the journalism that does exist. Two of the weeklies do a remarkable job in attempting to cover the governments in the county, especially through meeting reports. Yet, the nature of the operations as weeklies and their failure to fully engage in either the digital or social media streams, especially in terms of audience contribution, creates a news divide that can only be addressed by an increased presence of professional daily journalism. At the same time, any attempt to fill this media deficit should not interfere with the business models of existing news outlets. This is essential to the concept of expanding journalism, not replacing it or switching resources. This would be accomplished by banning advertising and direct payments to any new news operation formed under alternative principles. This is not to say the existing weeklies would face no competitive pressure. Likely, they would. But, this would be in the healthier arena of content rather than advertising money. The following outlines the basic structure and foundations of an imagined Geauga County Public Affairs Center based in the county library system using the potential resources available to it. It is important to note that the creation of such a center would require willingness on the part of every level of governance and community, from federal regulators to state overseers to local officials. The implications are discussed following the outline of the structure:
Funding

Cable Franchise Fees: Of all the communities in Geauga County eligible to collect cable franchise fees, only six contribute to Geauga TV and of those some contribute less than what is available. Under Section 622 of the federal Cable Act, municipalities are eligible to negotiate franchise fees with cable television providers for up to 5 percent of the gross revenue generated in the community. The majority of communities across the country, and in Geauga County, collect these fees but choose to use the money for general operations, rather than for Open Government Channels or Community Access Channels. Asked to estimate what full collection of the fee in Geauga County would mean in terms of annual revenue, Geauga TV founder Jevnikar estimated a possible $400,000 a year, with nearly half of that coming from two of the largest townships, Brainbridge and Chester.50

The franchise fee, however, would be collected, in essence, only from those living in or near the municipalities served by the cable operators. An estimated 40 percent of the households in the county likely fall into rural categories, based on adjustments to figures provided by city-data.com.51 Jevnikar’s estimate of potential cable franchise fees translates into $21.07 per year per household cable subscriber. If this fee were translated to rural residents as an addition to or a switch in the existing revenue generated by the property tax levy for the Geauga County Public Library, that would mean an additional $265,692 per year. That amount represents 4 percent of the library’s $6.05 million annual operating budget. Total funding for the Public Affairs Center under this scenario would be $665,692.
The library system is key to this imagined center for a variety of reasons. These include: the library already has wide community support, a countywide infrastructure that includes six regional branches, a built-in delivery system through its vibrant Book Mobile program, a support staff educated and trained in matters of information literacy, and a digital infrastructure that would require the least amount of tweaking. Further, and perhaps most importantly, the library is led by a volunteer board of directors appointed at both the state and county levels with experience in dealing with public issues.

**Structure:** The center would be formed as a non-profit corporation with a board of community advisers and an executive director who reports to the library board, which would have appointment powers to the advisory board and hold the ultimate authority to make decisions. The main center would be housed in Chardon, where the cable infrastructure and high-speed Internet access already are available. “Bureau” offices and public spaces equipped with the necessary technology for citizen contributions would be created in Chardon and the regional offices.

**Journalism:** The center would be responsible for routinely reporting on county-situated institutions through the principles of convergence. This means the center would be responsible for airing government meetings, just as Jevnikar does currently, but also in reporting on those meetings and any other matter of public affairs concern on a daily basis. The daily news report would be delivered throughout the day through social media, a central Website, video reports delivered through the public access channels as well as on the Web. Regular print-oriented reports also would be produced, likely through magazine-style presentation through one of various print-on-demand services where individual readers could either pay or donate for the service. A limited number would be
printed at center expense and distributed by request through the library Book Mobile program.

The audience, or Geauga County residents, would be at the forefront of deciding how resources are to be deployed both long term and on a daily basis through constant feedback and contributions in-person and through technology. All stories generated, for instance, would include not just an opportunity for what has been called crowd-sourcing, but a specific call for contributions. Crowd-sourcing is a somewhat murky concept, but essentially describes the process by which the audience is directly asked to contribute information to a specific issue or situation.\(^{52}\)

**Personnel:** The emphasis would be on hiring professional journalists and producers who have demonstrated their abilities through education or experience. The key question, of course, is what would the imagined revenue stream buy? The average starting salary for a journalist with a college education is $36,000 a year.\(^ {53}\) Assuming additional benefit costs at the national private rate of 29.5 percent,\(^ {54}\) the cost-per-employee would rise to $46,620. If all imagined revenue went to journalists, that would mean the hiring of 14.2 full-time equivalent journalists, or about the size of the Geauga Times-Leader newsroom when it closed in 1992. However, certainly some costs would have to be incurred for technology and other infrastructure issues and expenses, even assuming the library system would provide in-kind space. The Inland Press Association reported in its annual survey of newspapers, the most closely equivalent newsroom operation to the imagined center, that employee expenses make up an average of 80 percent of a newsroom’s total cost.\(^ {55}\) Based on that estimate, the number of journalists would fall to 11.35.
Barriers to implementation

This imagined scenario, obviously, is only a bare bones outline of points for possible discussion and fails to address a host of issues, none of which the author contends is insurmountable. Jevnikar, after fifteen years in the trenches of non-profit, public media, is weary. “There is absolutely no way G-TV would get started here today,” he said. “The inertia in those communities that don’t fund [public access] but do collect the fee is very strong to continue to use the funds as just another revenue source for more general application.” Indeed, creating a Geauga County Public Affairs Center would require changes in federal regulation to mandate not only the collection of the fees, which some communities now choose to pass along to cable subscribers through slightly reduced rates, but also how those fees are to be used. The state would have to continue supporting library services at current or even enhanced levels in order to maintain the infrastructure, and local officials would have to cooperate through policies and negotiating with the cable companies. Increasing the library levy, though seemingly a small amount, would require the support of the county as a whole and some, no doubt, would argue the levy amounted to a direct subsidy of journalism. And, in many ways, they could correctly point out the author’s hypocrisy in suggesting a library fee when earlier he had joined critics of direct government funding for journalism.

The author can only respond thusly: Most discussions of government payments, though not all, tend to focus on existing journalism outlets that are a legacy of the industrial system, rather than supporting the journalism that system represents. Further, the funding mechanism suggested for Geauga County is locally based and locally controlled, a key component that sidesteps the perils of a federally sponsored system that
few want and most would oppose on constitutional grounds. The author argues that the
future of journalism, though obscured by emotional debates that often focus on national
outlets, actually rests where it always has, in geographically based public affairs
journalism that both informs and reacts to the national news landscape. Since public
affairs journalism is geographically based, solutions for advancing it must necessarily
come from within the physical places where it lives. The author drew on the resources
observed in Geauga County in outlining the concept of a Public Affairs Center. Each
community is different and likely would have different resources available at its disposal.
For instance, a large endowment from a philanthropic resident could readily replace the
library levy. But, the author argues, any source of funding and the creation of any such
journalism must meet the principles outlined above or little has been accomplished.
Further, the author is most vehement in arguing that any public-fueled efforts at
expanding public affairs journalism must support and complement existing news outlets,
not put them out of business.

Putting together such an effort would require dedicated, energetic, and creative
community organizers. The author suggests that such talent, and in many cases financial
and infrastructure resources, are available for many communities through local
institutions of higher education. Universities throughout the country have formed news
services, putting their resources and students to work in reporting public affairs that is
shared with the public directly in some cases and through partnerships with media
outlets. In Ohio, significant efforts have been undertaken by Ohio University, which
used foundation funding to put reporters to work in Columbus and Washington, D.C.,
and by Youngstown State University. YSU led a consortium of two other universities and
private media partners across the state to use student journalists in conjunction with full-
time professionals to investigate specific topics.\textsuperscript{58}

\textit{Further research}

This study examined two live news landscapes, one with a daily newspaper and one where a daily newspaper had closed. Future research should expand this concept to more rural communities that have lost their local print operations. This likely would reveal not just a news divide but a deep gulf in the information landscape. Further, this study focused primarily on news where the author found it and explored only by implication the impact of the findings on the actual participation and governance of communities with more journalistic resources at their disposal. This is a vitally important area that needs to be explored in-depth. In addition, the audience was studied primarily anecdotally and through their contributions to the news landscapes. A deeper examination of news usage and audience motivations likely would help sharpen and inform suggestions for both expanding public affairs journalism and addressing issues with what is now being produced.

\textit{Conclusion}

The future of journalism has been clouded with emotion tied to long held, mythologized ideals of a muscular, industrialized news system. In one of the first radio broadcasts of Superman, the comic book hero conceived in 1934 by two young men who grew up in Cleveland, the Man of Steel rescued a college professor by stopping a runaway trolley. Grateful, the professor asked Superman what he could do in return. Superman replied he wanted advice about the best way to get to know the people he had come to serve. “I want to … observe them, study them, see them at their best and their
worst, know which to help and when help is needed.” The professor paused only for a moment. “To mingle with people, to see men at their highest and lowest, that’s what you want … how about a newspaper, a great metropolitan daily? Join their staff, be a reporter.” Superman loved it. “Yes … that should give me an opportunity to learn the troubles of men, to learn who to help and when help is needed.”59

Such an ethos infuses practitioners to this day, a deep sense of service and, in many cases, a saddening sense of loss. This is not surprising. The news routines created by the industrial press fostered a tight community and a reliance on others akin to law enforcement and emergency room workers, professions that also see the best and worst of humanity. Anyone who has felt the thrumming of a press spitting out the latest edition and breathed deeply of the musty mixture of paper and ink cannot help but to be emotionally involved. It smells like democracy.

Glenn Miller, the Maple Leaf’s county reporter, has nearly forty years’ experience as a journalist, starting out as a radio reporter in Rome, Georgia, before gravitating north through a variety of newspaper jobs at smaller dailies and weeklies, never really considering leaving journalism. He had been bought out and laid off several times before being hired by Maple Leaf owner John a rlovec to help beef up the weekly’s county reporting. Unlike the Plain Dealer’s Michael Scott, Miller is 65 and near the end of his career. The fear of unemployment is less palpable, though he carries the scars, like autoworkers in Detroit, of an industrial system in decline. And, like the older couple in Bowling Green, he now fears less for himself than for the fate of a republic that rests on an ever-thinning journalism. “I started during a time when we had typewriters. The whole
industry is just collapsing. I fear we are going to have an uneducated and uninformed populace,” he said.  

At its best, journalism performed those functions so dear to the Man of Steel but always was hampered by the confines of the system within which it was produced. It is time to put aside comic book ideals and confront the reality of what could be a shining future, one where a new genetic code is implanted and a new ethos of involvement and participation are as valued as the process. Technology and the rise of the audience has overlaid a new system on top of the old, requiring new ways of thinking, studying, and figuring out when people are at their best and their worst. The citizens cannot and will not do this by themselves, nor should they be expected to. As this study demonstrated, the partnership between audience and journalism is strongest where journalism is strongest.
Notes


10 Geauga County Board of Commissioners, Agenda, December 8, 2011.

11 Observation by the author, December 8, 2011, Chardon, OH.

12 Glen Miller, “Conservative Spending Nets County $4.1 Million Carryover,” Geauga County Maple Leaf, January 5, 2012.


15 Donald R. Rodgers, “Journalism is a loose-jointed thing: A content analysis of Editor & Publisher’s discussion of journalistic conduct prior to the canons of journalism, 1901-1922,” Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 22 no. 1 (1998): 66-82.


17 Ibid., 72.


24 Ibid., 1.

25 Ibid., 29.


28 Ibid., 345-354.

30 Ibid., 77.

31 Ibid., 82-83.


38 Ken Doctor, “The Newsonomics…”


42 Amy Mitchell, et al., “What Facebook and Twitter…”


50 David Jevnikar, founder, Geauga TV, personnel communication to the author, February 21, 2012.


56 Waldman, “Information Communities Need…,” 175.


58 TheNewsOutlet.org, “About Us,” http://www.thenewsoutlet.org/about/


60 Glenn Miller, reporter, Geauga County Maple Leaf, interview by the author, January 28, 2012, Chardon, OH.
Appendix A: Coding sheets

**Part 1 – Outlets (Newspapers)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V1 - Print</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – Blade</td>
<td>2 – Perrysburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – Press</td>
<td>4 – Rossford Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – Sentinel</td>
<td>6 – PD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 – W. Geauga Sun</td>
<td>8 – Bnbridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 – Times</td>
<td>10 – Mapleleaf</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**V2**

Date: ______________________________

**Part II – Content**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V3 - Type of outlet</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – Print _____</td>
<td>2 – Weekly _____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – Other ______</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V4 - Categories</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – Government proceedings</td>
<td>2 - economic activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - transportation and travel</td>
<td>4 – crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – public moral problems</td>
<td>6 - accidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 - public health and welfare</td>
<td>10 – education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 – entertainment</td>
<td>12 – sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 - other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V5 - Total stories</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V6 – Sources</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – government _____</td>
<td>2 – Business/nonprofit _____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – Expert _____</td>
<td>4 – Resident ____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – Other ______</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V7 – Length</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – 100 words or less _____</td>
<td>2 – 100 to 250 words _____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – 250 to 500 words _____</td>
<td>4 – 500 words or more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Part III – Comment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V8 - Type of comment</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – Guest column _____</td>
<td>2 – Letter ______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – Other __________</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V9 – Naming convention</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – Formal name _____</td>
<td>2 – Anonymous ______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – Pseudoname ______</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V10 – Directonality</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – To the newspaper/editor ______</td>
<td>2 – To power structure ______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – To other reader ____</td>
<td>4 – To community at large</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V11 – Themes</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – Discussion debate _____</td>
<td>2 – Alternatives/new ideas _____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – Personal attack/nonmaterial _____</td>
<td>4 – Issue/politics _____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – Other ______</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V12 – Tone</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – Formal _____</td>
<td>2 – Informal ______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – Scatalogical ______</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part 1 – Outlets (digital)

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Blade</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Perrysburg</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Rossford Journal</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sentinel</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>PD</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>W. Geauga Sun</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Bnbridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Times</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Mapleleaf</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>WTOL</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>FOX8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Newsnet5.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>WKYC</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>WOIO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>News-Herald.com</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>WTAM</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Geauganews.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>13abc.com</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Foxtoledo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Northwestohio.com</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>NBXnewsexpress.com</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Date: ______________________________

Part II – Content

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
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<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>TV</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Radio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Standalone</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part III – Comment

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Guest column</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
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<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Discussion debate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Alternatives/new ideas</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Personal attack/nonmaterial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Issue/politics</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Scatalogical</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Coding sheet: Social media (Facebook)

V1 = Day: _________________________

V2 = County:
  Geauga = 1
  Cuyahoga = 2

V3 = Outlet:
  PD = 1
  NH = 2
  GML = 3
  GTC = 4
  WGS = 5
  WKYC = 6
  WEWS = 7
  WOIO = 8
  WJW = 9
  WVIZ = 10
  GC = 11
  GS = 12
  BV = 13

V4 = SM stream
  FB = 1

V5 = Type of post
  Promotion = 1
  News/update = 2
  Contest = 3
  Call for comment = 4

V6 = Geography
  1 = International
  2 = National
  3 = State
  4 = Cuyahoga County
  5 = Geauga County
  6 = Other
  7 = Undetermined

V7 = Topic
  1 – Crime
  2 - economic activity
  3 - transportation and travel
  4 – Government
  5 - public moral problems
  6 - accidents and natural disasters
  7 - public health and welfare
  8 – education issues/schools
  9 – entertainment
  11 – sports

V8 = Likes
  1= 0-5
  2 = 6-10
  3= 11-16
  4= 17 to 25
  5=26 to 35
  6=More than 35

V9 = Comments
  1= 0-5
  2 = 6-10
  3= 11-16
  4= 17 to 25
  5=26 to 35
  6=More than 35
Appendix B: Questionnaire

**Demographic information**

Position:
Age:
M ___    F ____

Time in position (years):
0 to 3 ___
4 to 6 ____
7 to 10 _____
More than 10 _____

Type of organization:
Government _____
Education ______
Non-profit ______
Religious ______
Business/commercial ______
Other ______

**Communication**

This section is meant to gauge how much importance you place on communicating to those inside and outside your organization.

1) Speaking as a member or leader of your organization, please estimate the level of importance you place on communicating information about your organization to its members or employees. Circle the number.
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
   **(not important)** | **(very important)**

2) Speaking as a member or leader of your organization, please estimate the level of importance you place on communicating information about your organization to those who are not yet members, customers, or constituents but may be interested in your organization. Circle the number.
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
   **(not important)** | **(very important)**

3) Speaking as a member or leader of your organization, please estimate the level of importance you place on communicating information about your organization to the community at large. Circle the number.
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
   **(not important)** | **(very important)**
Means of Communication
This section addresses how you use and perceive various methods of communicating.

1) Please rate the following in terms of how important each is for communicating with your existing members, customers, or constituents. Circle the number:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Means of Communication</th>
<th>Not important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local newspaper:</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadcast Television:</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio:</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local cable television</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your organization’s Website</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Websites:</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media: (such as Twitter and Facebook)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: (such as e-mail; newsletters)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-person: (such as meetings, etc.)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2) Please rate the following in terms of how important each is for communicating to those who are not yet members, customers, or constituents but may be interested in your organization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Means of Communication</th>
<th>Not important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local newspaper:</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television:</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio:</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local cable television</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your organization’s Website</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Websites:</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media: (such as Twitter and Facebook)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: (such as direct mail; e-mail; newsletters)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-person: (such as meetings, etc.)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3) Please rate the following in terms of how important each is for communicating to the community at large. Circle the number.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Means of Communication</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio:</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4) Speaking as a member or leader of your organization, please rate each for their effectiveness in achieving your desired communication goals for reaching various audiences. Circle the number.

### Within your organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not effective</th>
<th>Very effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local newspaper:</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (such as e-mail; newsletters)</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-person (such as meetings, etc.)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Potential members of your organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not effective</th>
<th>Very effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local newspaper:</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Community at large
Use of Communication
This section is meant to gauge how you use the communication systems available to you and what systems are most effective in achieving your communication goals.
1) Speaking as a member or leader of your organization, please estimate the amount of time the person or persons in your organization spends on communicating organization matters to all possible audiences through all means, including in-person, electronic or otherwise:
   1 to 2 hours a week ___
   3 to 5 hours a week ___
   6 to 10 hours a week ____
   More than 10 hours a week _____

2) Please rate the following for how effective they are in gathering feedback from your intended audiences. In other words, what type of delivery method is effective or not effective in giving you information about whether your communication was received:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Method</th>
<th>Not effective</th>
<th>Very effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local newspaper:</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>(such as meetings, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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3) In the event your organization must communicate an urgent message to your members, customers, or constituents, which method of delivery are you most likely to use? Please rank the top five by placing a number next to the category. For instance, if you feel your organization’s Website would be most effective, put a number “1” next to that category.

Local newspaper ___
Television _____
Radio _____
Your Organization’s Website ____
Radio ______
Local cable television _____
Your organization’s Website ______
Other Websites ______
Social media (such as Twitter and Facebook) _____
Other (such as e-mail; direct mail; newsletters) ______
In-person (such as meetings, etc.) _____

Media impact and future

This final section is meant to gather your impressions of the impact of the media generally, as well as to solicit your thoughts on the future of the media.

1) Information about your organization might also come from sources other than you or your designated communications person. Which of the following method of delivery is likely to have the most impact (either positive or negative) on your organization? Please rank the following by placing a number from one to seven next to the category.

Story in the printed local newspaper ___
A letter to the editor in the printed local newspaper _____
A television news story _____
A comment left on a local news Website ______
A caller to a radio station ______
A Tweet or Facebook post _____
Other _____ (describe: _______________________________________.)

2) The issue of the future of the media has been widely debated as traditional media outlets (such as newspapers and local broadcast stations) struggle financially. Would you support a taxpayer-funded media outlets in your community?

No ___ Yes _____ Maybe ____
3) The news media can be defined as paid, professional journalists covering issues and events of interest to a community. Speaking as a member or leader of your organization, please rate whether this role is important to your organization:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4) How do you see the role of journalism evolving in the coming decades?

Thank you very much for your participation. Please use the space below to provide any comments about the survey or to address any issues you feel would be helpful to the research project.

Name:

Comments:
Appendix C: Chardon shooting questionnaire

The tragic shooting at Chardon High School has raised new questions about the role of technology, the news media, and social media in the way information flows through a community. This survey is meant to help inform discussion about those roles. The survey is designed to take just a few minutes to complete and concentrates on how you first learned of the shooting and what you did with that information.

The survey is anonymous. The results will be used as part of an ongoing study by an Ohio University doctoral candidate into the changing nature of the news media and how the public is informed about their communities.

Question No. 1
You are a:

Student
Parent
Educator
Community member
Community leader

Question No. 2
How did you first learn of the school shooting?

Direct communication from someone at the school.
Radio news
Television news
Twitter from media
Twitter from friend/acquaintance
Facebook post by media
Facebook post by friend/acquaintance
News media Website
Newspaper
Other

Question No. 3
Immediately after learning of the shooting, which of the following best describes your actions:

Sought more information from television news
Sought more information from a newspaper Website
Sought more information from a television Website
Sought more information from radio news
Sought more information from media Facebook posts
Sought more information from your Twitter feed
Tweeted about it to your followers
Posted to Facebook about it
Commented on Facebook or other Website
Retweeted the information
Other

**Question No. 4**
Regardless of how the information was delivered (either through Facebook or traditional means such as a news cast), which of the following did you find most useful in staying informed of the latest developments concerning the tragedy

Newspaper
Television
Radio
Facebook
Twitter
Friends/acquaintances

**Question No. 5**
Which of the following did you find most trustworthy in reporting on the tragedy

Newspaper
Television
Radio
Facebook
Twitter
Friends/acquaintances
Bibliography

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van der Wurff, Richard andlaus Schonbach, “Between profession and audience: Codes of conduct and transparency as quality instruments for off- and online journalism,” Journalism Studies, 12 no. 4 (2011): 407-422.


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Holton, Avery, “Case of the #UTShooter: Citizens Working Around, With, and for Traditional News Media,” paper delivered to the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Conference, St. Louis, MO: 2011.


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John Doe No. 1 v. Patrick Cahill (2005) 884 A.2d 451 (Supreme Court of Delaware, LexisNexis, 2010).


Personal interviews


Buker, Deb, editor, Perrysburg Messenger Journal, interview by the author, December 14, 2011, Perrysburg, OH.
Carter, James, Wood County commissioner, interview by the author, December 15, 2011, Bowling Green, OH.

Shofar, Cassandra, news editor, Geauga Maple Leaf, interview by the author, February 26, 2012, Chardon, OH.

Concannon, Karmen, assistant publisher, Sentinel-Tribune, interview by the author, February 24, 2012, Bowling Green, OH.

Horton, John, Plain Dealer reporter, interview by the author, December 28, 2011, Chardon, OH.


Jevnikar, David, owner/operator, G-TV, interview by the author, February 18, 2012, Chardon, OH.


Karlovec, John, owner, Geauga County Maple Leaf, interview by the author, December 8, 2011.

McLaughlin, Jan Larson, Sentinel-Tribune county editor, interview by the author, December 15, 2011, Bowling Green, OH.


Miller, Dave, editor of the Sentinel-Tribune, interview by the author, February 24, 2012, Bowling Green, OH.

Miller, Glenn, reporter, Geauga County Maple Leaf, interview by the author, January 28, 2012, Chardon, OH.

Scott, Michael, Plain Dealer on-line reporter, interview by the author, December 28, 2011, Chardon, OH.

Newspapers

(Geauga County)
The Plain Dealer
The News-Herald
The Geauga County Maple Leaf
The Geauga Times-Courier
The Middlefield Post
The Chester News

(Wood County)
The Toledo Blade
The Sentinel-Tribune
The Perrysburg Messenger-Journal
The Rossford Journal

Broadcast/Television Stations

(Geauga/Cuyahoga)
FOX8
WEWS
WKYC
WOIO
Geauga TV
WTAM

(Wood County)
WTOL
ABC13
WNWO
Foxtoledo
The Dave Horger Report

Websites/Social Media

A significant portion of this dissertation examined Websites and social media streams of the traditional media as well as the Web entrepreneurs. Where specific Web addresses were available for social media, they are provided in the notes. In many cases, the comments were available only in relation to the posts and there was no separate Web address. The following are the Websites examined:

Web-only
www.geauganews.com
www.nbsexpress.com

Traditional media
Cleveland.com
News-herald.com
Geaugamapleleaf.com
Chagrinvalleytimes.com
In addition to the media sites, a variety of databases, digital-only reports, and Web services were used for this dissertation. Following are the primary sites and services used.

Lexis-Nexus
Alexa.com
Stateofthemedia.org/2012
Facebook.com
Twitter.com
Surveymonkey.com