

The Impact of Hyper-Local News: An Evaluation of the Relationship between
Community Newspaper Coverage and Civic Engagement

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Chapter One

Introduction: The Future of Journalism

It is widely accepted both within and outside the discipline and profession of journalism that the media industry is undergoing a transition. Many news outlets are faced with smaller audiences, along with smaller profits. U.S. newspapers' average daily circulation has been in decline since 1987 (Ahrens, 2009); at present, about 13 percent of Americans purchase daily newspapers, compared to about 31 percent in 1940. This evidence of newspapers' continued shift away from mass medium status raises questions about what the future of the media will hold.

Although the number of large-scale newspapers and their individual influence has continued to decline for a number of years, members of the industry and outside observers can only speculate as to how the media overall will change in the years to come. One theory is that the diminishing influence of larger newspapers will allow localized news outlets to become more prominent (Conhaim, 2006). Widespread Internet access makes it easy to find competing news outlets, but local publications may still be able to leverage an advantage to remain profitable – by choosing to focus on small target audiences, these papers can offer unique, concentrated, localized

content that other providers cannot. In addition to experiencing financial prosperity, hyper-local newspapers offer a potential avenue for print media to remain “the culturally dominant institutions within communities.” (Conhaim, p. 51)

In regard to the future of all media outlets, many believe that the Internet will pave the way. However, established news companies have faced difficulties finding ways for online journalism to be profitable. The *Wall Street Journal* offers a notable exception. At WSJ.com, some content is free and available to all users, but other content, particularly business or financial news, requires a paid subscription. *The New York Times* experimented with charging for content in the past, then returned to providing free online news, and is now trying another payment model that limits free access to its website. (Funt, 2010) Profits from online charges are relatively meager, so even news outlets that charge for online content must seek alternative revenues. In addition to profitability concerns, the digital divide for those who do not have access to computers or the Internet means that many could be left behind in a future that only includes online content. As such, it is critical to examine the wider implications of these potential changes.

Although 2010 marked a year of improvements for most sectors of the media, daily newspapers continued to experience drops in circulation and revenue (Rosenstiel, 2010). While Metro dailies experienced the worst declines, small daily papers and community weekly papers both had more stable circulation numbers than did their larger counterparts. Community newspapers (defined in this context as having a daily circulation under 50,000) make up about 30 percent of all daily circulation in the U.S., and the majority of dailies in the country (more than 1,200 of over 1,400) are community papers (Giles, 2006).

In 2008, *Editor and Publisher* reported that small-market papers were not only surviving the recession, but many were prospering (Fitzgerald and Saba, 2008). Others within the industry took notice – the 2011 State of the Media report details Metro dailies’ renewed plans for more hyper-local and neighborhood-based reporting (Rosenstiel, 2011). Asked about which online content they would consider charging for, editors at larger papers cited local sports and community news, amongst other products (Strupp, 2009).

There is no shortage of academic writing that suggests free speech is a pillar of democracy, or that newspapers are central to building effective communities. This

type of discussion predates the founding of the U.S. – indeed, these sentiments were the basis for the freedom of the press provision within the First Amendment to the Constitution. However, academics such as McChesney (1999) assert that the existence of media conglomerates has threatened the traditional role of journalism and advanced an antidemocratic discourse. Although McChesney’s work acknowledges a decrease in the number of media conglomerates, he asserts that this change has resulted in the concentration of more power in the hands of fewer conglomerates. With mass media changing in this manner, a counter-balance to the resultant damaging discourse ought to exist. Hyper-local publications in particular may provide a means of maintaining and advancing journalism’s former positive social role in society. As such, some scholars and journalists alike have begun to examine community newspapers as both a profitable and otherwise beneficial course for journalism in the future.

Journalism as a Solution to Societal Problems

Many theorists in the social sciences and humanities (Hubbard, DeFleur and DeFleur, 1975; DeJong, 2002) discuss the merits of mass media outlets as possible solutions to any number of societal problems – the general argument asserts that if members of the media can educate the public on whatever issue is at hand, then people

will agree on a course of action and the problem will be solved. Other academicians do not necessarily view mass media news providers as the only avenue to improving society, but view news sources as a vital part of the social problem-solving process.

For instance, in *America's Social Health*, the authors discuss mass media as follows:

“Filling the present gaps in coverage, providing greater context for issues, reporting on broad trends as well as sensational exceptions, and grouping stories that relate to social issues – all these changes would help to make social issues more visible and give the public a clearer overall picture of the nation’s social health.” (Miringoff and Opdycke, 2007, p. 43)

Much of the existing literature concerning community newspapers focuses on the production of the journalism itself. It is necessary to examine audience responses to community journalism to determine if these responses are consistent with theoretical predictions from the existing literature. This study therefore examines the ways that the journalism industry could have the capacity to provide the solutions theorists are seeking in the realm of civic engagement. In this sense, community journalism is a natural choice, as those reporters seem more likely to be embedded in

the community itself, and the coverage seems more likely to directly impact the citizens of the community because of its inherent relevance to their lives.

A community journalistic publication creates content that deals with a particular geographic area, but is also charged with both listening and leading its audience. (Lowrey, Brozana, Mackay, 2008) Barney, as cited in Lowrey et al, suggests that community newspapers must “bring about revitalized citizenship” (2008, p. 284). In addition, “hyper-local” reporting, which is conducted in a specific locale, typically includes significant news coverage that would only be of interest to the members of the community it serves. Based on these ideas, the project is intended to explore the relationship between community journalism and social capital (which encompasses human interaction and connections within communities).

A recent study by American University found that, “Community journalism is evolving as an exercise in participation, not merely observation,” and that “Building community rather than simply covering community is the impetus for launching community news sites.” (McLellan, 2009) These findings provide a strong incentive for this study, which will *examine the potential connections between community*

journalism and hyper-local journalism, and civic engagement in communities that have these publications.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The base of academic work concerning local media and community building is particularly diverse. Much of the existing scholarly writing has implications for the hypotheses pursued by this study.

Peters (2001) provides a historical and conceptual background, which begins by establishing that Aristotle originated the basic idea that communities are connected by communication. As Peters describes the history of the relationship between communication and community, he particularly focuses on the development of means of communication within the United States. In the process of describing the printing presses and other means of communication that were widely available in the colonies and the early years of the country, Peters suggests that using advanced forms of communication to forge community over a distance is necessary in achieving the democratic republicanism that America now enjoys.

Hindman's (1998) "Community, democracy, and neighborhood news," is an ethnographic study that examines the interplay among communication, democracy, and community from the perspective of the staff at an inner-city neighborhood

newspaper in Minneapolis, Minnesota. An avowed alternative, this newspaper, functions as the only neighborhood-wide voice in the most ethnically diverse and poorest area of the city. Inner-city alternative media offer a voice to those usually not represented in the mainstream press, acknowledging conflict and trying to solve the underlying problems, and providing space for truly local discussion of issues. This is a study, then, of one inner-city neighborhood newspaper and its attempts to create local democracy and community through communication. As such, Hindman's (1998) work directly advances rhetoric arguing that democracy and the presence of local media are linked.

Jeffres, Atkins and Neuendorf (2002) found positive results when studying localized newspapers and community politics in "A model linking community activity and communication with political attitudes and involvement in neighborhoods."

Although people tend to mobilize around local problems and restrict their political involvement at other times, the political communication literature generally has focused on national politics and elections. Jeffres et al (2002) argue that this is particularly surprising in investigations of political involvement since it is at the community level that people should feel more efficacious. Also, both mass and

interpersonal communication should be more significant locally given their importance in strengthening community ties. The study reported here (Jeffres et al, 2002) focuses on these relationships in a community context, with a survey of six inner-city neighborhoods and six suburbs classified using location and census data. Results point to a much more positive role for the media in community politics. Those most likely to rely on neighborhood newspapers as sources are less disillusioned with government, suggesting that the most "grassroots" of print media are more efficacious in their impact than the other channels. Also, readership of a daily newspaper is particularly strong as a predictor of both community political involvement and faith in community civic involvement. In addition, in "Local News Outlets and Political Participation," Filla and Johnson (2010) found that people in the study who read a daily newspaper were more likely to vote than were those who did not.

McLeod's work also provides a significant basis for pursuing further study of social capital in relation to local newspaper readership. McLeod, Daily, Guo, Eveland, Bayer, Yang and Wang (1996) found strong relationships between local media use and the dimensions of community integration, as well as links between local media use and community integration and local political interest, knowledge, and participation.

McLeod, Scheufele and Moy (1999) examined the role of community integration and mass and interpersonal communication in predicting two types of local political participation. An analysis of survey data showed a strong role of newspaper readership and a somewhat lower impact of interpersonal discussion on institutionalized participation.

Calabrese (2001) discusses community journalism in a globalized context, suggesting that globalization has threatened the ability of the U.S. national government to secure a democratic life for its citizens on a local level. This is because globalization has prompted some individuals to be less interested in local culture, knowledge or politics. Calabrese (2001) goes on to discuss the effects of some forms of communication on the surrounding community. Localism should not be viewed as regressive, instead it can offer a positive balance to the “placeless power” that dominates the global political economy, according to Calabrese (2001).

Communication and Community Building

In contrast to the previous academic accounts, some scholars suggest that local media have more capacity to build community by creating conflict. By reviewing the existing literature concerning communication and community, Rothenbuhler (2001)

establishes the ways contemporary thought defines community and communication. He states that both entities are typically defined in terms of commonality. Although this connection between the two allows for many other assumptions and evaluations to be made, Rothenbuhler (2001) challenges the legitimacy of the definition. Instead, he offers an alternative model that emphasizes difficulty and difference rather than happiness and commonality. In his model, community is a social accomplishment, not a pre-existing institution. Further, communication is a tool to build and achieve community, not a mere means to relate information about community.

Adams (2001) similarly finds it problematic that community has been idealized as the end goal of communication. He argues that this framework is a problem because it causes people to ignore the possibility that sophisticated communication is sometimes antisocial, it causes people to overlook the ways in which antisocial communication can serve and be necessary to the community, and it causes people to de-emphasize potential disadvantages associated with social communication. A focus on community as an end goal has resulted in a definition of “communication competence” that hinges on politeness and cooperation. Although these are positive qualities to have in a community, Adams holds that they are insufficient if they are the

only forms of communication. Adams (2001) and Rothenbuhler's (2001) work suggests that journalism exposing conflict or debate within the community can contribute to community building.

Defining Community Journalism

One article in particular (Lowrey et al, 2008) provides a good framework for this research, as it states that the body of academic work as of 2008 consisted of 108 articles, which were distributed across the following journals as such:

Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly (27); Political Communication (10); Mass Communication and Society (8); Journal of Health Communication (7); Newspaper Research Journal (7); Communication Research (5); Journal of Mass Media Ethics (5); Howard Journal of Communications (4); Journal of Communication (4); Journal of Communication Inquiry (4); Journalism Studies (3); Media, Culture and Society (3); Communication Review (2); Critical Studies in Media Communication (2); Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media (2); Journal of Media and Cultural Studies (2); and others (13).

Of the 108 studies mentioned above, definitions or constructions of community were provided in 65 – 23 gave direct definitions, while 42 offered implied definitions. Most of these studies emphasized community as a physical location with some sort of political or legal boundaries (Lowrey et al, 2008). Many of the studies that establish this geographical basis of understanding also focus on communities as “nodes of

human activity,” or places for people to connect to one another. While still acknowledging the existence of spatial relationships in communities, some of the articles also stressed the necessity for shared culture in order for a community to exist.

Other studies defined community as “imagined,” and removed from locational boundaries (Lowrey et al, 2008). This type of community is generally grounded in physical or other traits, such as being of a certain ethnic group or sexual orientation. Another related definition described community as interpretive rather than imagined (Lowrey et al, 2008). Members of this type of community do not necessarily share similar traits or reside in the same physical location – instead, they may share a significant life experience, such as having lived through an important historical event, or they may “share a common goal.” In this way, members of the community may share a common experience of some sort, but one that is not as linked to the physical world as the previously stated examples.

Much as was the case with definitions of community, few studies offered guidelines to define the term “community journalism” (Lowrey et al, 2008). Most of the definitions that were provided were extremely vague, stating that community journalism publications create content that deals with a certain geographic area. A

number of the direct definitions of community journalism include principles from civic or public journalism. Some of these emphasize the role of community journalists primarily as listeners for the audience that they serve (Lowrey et al, 2008). In contrast, the majority of the articles that included civic/public journalism stressed that community journalists must take a leadership role as opposed to a listening one – in this construction, it is asserted that journalists must prove that they are dedicated to solving problems by seeking a “higher objectivity.”

A portion of the studies (Lowrey et al, 2008) linked “community journalism” directly to an obligation to promote civic engagement, which is clearly relevant to the topic of this study. These definitions place an emphasis on the ability of community journalism outlets to “bring about a revitalized citizenship.” Some of the actions associated with community journalism in these articles include printing citizens’ articles in the newspaper, involving residents in the consideration of local problems, providing publicity for conflicts and aiding in the creation of a community consensus (Lowrey et al, 2008). Many of these roles are relevant to citizen and public journalism principles, rather than strict community journalism.

The studies also discuss the role of community journalism in regards to leading or listening. In studies where leading was emphasized, community journalism outlets were considered “social glue.” Those studies with a focus on listening suggested that news sources were obligated to increase the visibility of diverse groups and increase communication between such groups (Lowrey et al, 2008). Most compelling to me, though, were the studies that asserted that community journalists are responsible for both listening to and leading their audiences.

Choice of Definition

Due to the fact that a wide number of definitions for both community and community journalism already exist, much of the work in this regard is already done for me. Still, it is necessary to choose a definition for each term that fits the objectives of this project. In regards to community, definition that seems best suited for the project includes geographic location, along with shared traits or experiences. This definition should fit well, as people generally live in neighborhoods or areas where a significant portion of the population is similar to them. As far as community journalism, an inclusive definition again seems appropriate. The chosen definition relies upon publications to serve dual roles, as listeners and leaders in the community.

As such, successful community news sources ought to make citizens aware of possible sources for shared experiences (from events to institutions) while also encouraging discussions that contribute to the development of meaning in the community. The complexity of these definitions means that the practice of community journalism can best be considered on a continuum, as suggested by Lowrey et al (2008). The authors provide three standards for evaluation of community journalism: informing, listening and leading.

The current study therefore constructs varying levels of success in manifestations of community journalism. Publications which have contributed to the creation of civic engagement will be differentiated as particularly well-developed on the community journalism scale. Possible measurements of civic engagement include indicators such as voting, newspaper readership, political knowledge, volunteerism and other factors.

Ethical Dimensions of the “Leading” Role

A number of ethical dimensions and dilemmas arise when one considers the possibility of newspapers’ social responsibilities being expanded to include leading behaviors. Community journalists are faced with markedly different ethical concerns

that those at metropolitan or national newspapers. Jock Lauterer explains the distinction in his book *Relentlessly Local*, pointing out that readers trust community journalists because they know each other personally, whether from the PTA or the grocery store. (2006)

The nature of community newspaper coverage means that these publications must remain intertwined with their towns in a more pronounced manner than larger newspapers are. Lauterer describes the community newspaper as a “creature of service” (p. 261). For this reason, many community journalists take on the role of being advocates for their town (they are citizens in addition to journalists, after all), while still attempting to remain fair and balanced. It is unsurprising that these roles can be inherently contradictory at times.

In the average week, Lauterer asserts that a community paper is likely to face ethical dilemmas including “accusations of conflict of interest, whether to depict dead bodies and human suffering, how to handle obscenity and poor taste in relation to community standards,” etc. (p. 263) In his chapter on ethics, Lauterer provides anecdotes about a photographer who comforted a car wreck victim rather than taking the opportunity to get exclusive photographs and a reporter who refused to continue

covering funerals after a plane crash killed 21 people from her small town. While these behaviors would likely cause journalists to be fired from larger newspapers, such choices are sometimes what is most respectful or best for a small community.

Social Capital and Civic Engagement

Similarly to “community journalism,” definitions of “social capital” abound. Fukuyama (2002) describes the term as “shared norms or values that promote social cooperation, instantiated in actual social relationships” (p. 27). Halpern (2005) treats the terms “social capital” and “social fabric” as largely interchangeable. At its core, he argues, social capital is about “how people are connected with one another” (p. 1). In his discussion of social capital, Halpern (2005) refers to the interactions and connections that build and maintain everyday social networks and associations. The Centre for Literacy of Quebec released a report in 2010 that defined social capital in a manner similar to Halpern. In the report, “social capital refers broadly to the social connections and understandings between people that enable them to work together, live together and learn from each other, i.e. resources of the collectivity.” (Centre, 2010, p. 1)

Of these definitions, the one provided by The Centre for Literacy of Quebec seems to best consider the positive outcomes of social capital. There is widespread agreement amongst scholars that social capital is vital for American society to continue to flourish. According to Saguaro (2000), government agencies are more effective, individuals are healthier and students achieve better test scores when a stockpile of social capital exists.

Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of the American Community* (2001) discusses a decades-long decline in social capital. Putnam cites decreased political involvement, growing distrust of government and a decline in membership in social organizations (including bowling leagues, which give the book its title), as evidence of an overall decline in social capital. Putnam (2001) asserts, "the performance of our democratic institutions depends in measurable ways upon social capital" (p. 349).

This study particularly considers civic engagement, which is often discussed in relation to social capital. Civic engagement is defined as "working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference" (Ehrlich, 2000, p.

vi). Much of the existing research considers civic engagement as a necessary component for the production of social capital. Hyman (2002), for instance, argues that social capital is created when civic engagement is “excited” towards a particular outcome. In defining the term, Milner and Errson (2000) consider previous research that views social capital as a combination of “civic engagement and interpersonal trust.” (p. 2)

Newspaper Readership and Civic Engagement

Although scholarly work concerning the relationship between community ties and newspaper readership is considerable, many aspects of the relationship itself are debated. Some (Jeffres et al, 2002) believe that newspaper readership is antecedent to community ties, some (Stevenson and Ismach, 1979) believe that community ties are antecedent to readership, and still others (Stamm, 1985) believe that a more complex relationship exists between then two. However, it is widely accepted that community ties and newspaper readership have a positive relationship of some type.

Much of the scholarly discussion about newspapers and communities began with Morris Janowitz’s *The Community Press in an Urban Setting* (1953). The basis of Janowitz’s research viewed urban community newspapers “as one of the social

mechanisms through which the individual is integrated into the urban social structure” (p 22). With this in mind, Janowitz (1953) describes community newspapers as meeting “social, political and affectual needs.” In *Newspaper Use and Community Ties*, Keith Stamm (1985) found that community ties enhance news interest. Most notably, he discusses the possibility of a more dynamic relationship between community involvement and newspaper readership, as both measures are likely to change over time.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Therefore, the existing literature suggests the following research questions and hypotheses.

Based on Rothenbuhler’s (2001) and Adams’ (2001) arguments that conflict can be constructive, I ask the following research question:

RQ₁: Is there a correlation between the presence of civic journalism and readers’ willingness to read negative news?

In regards to the aforementioned standards for successful local newspapers listed above, it is unclear whether these standards are based on scholars’ or citizens

expectations for community publications. As such, I have developed research questions to determine this distinction.

RQ₂: Do people who live in areas with community journalism place responsibility on the staffs of their hyper-local publications to foster more civic engagement?

RQ₃: For what reasons do expectations for local newspapers' civic engagement creation match up or fail to match up between the academic and citizen realms?

Based on the previously discussed resources, particularly Janowitz (1953) and Stamm (1985), an overarching hypothesis was developed to guide the study. The hypothesis considers whether the use of certain reporting techniques at community newspapers build up social capital more effectively than others.

H₁: Newspaper readers in communities with hyper-local publications will experience more civic engagement than readers in communities that lack such publications.

Additional hypotheses generally follow the same line of thinking as H₁, but provide a more detailed and nuanced manner of asserting a positive relationship

between hyper-local newspaper readership and social capital. The following hypotheses concern civic engagement and community connectedness measures, which are generally correlated.

H₂: Residents from communities with a more localized newspaper will be more knowledgeable about civic affairs.

H₃: Residents from communities with a more localized newspaper will be more likely to have direct contact with people engaged in civic affairs.

McLeod et al (1996) argue that attention to local news ought to enhance community integration. As such, it would seem that living in a more connected community would prompt citizens to be more likely to read local news.

H₄: Residents from communities with a more localized newspaper will be more likely to read the news section of the paper more frequently.

In regards to Adams and Rothenbuhler's suggestions about the value of conflict and differences in community building, the next hypothesis asserts that an individual who understands of the importance of news they disagree with is likely also an engaged citizen.

H₅: Residents who are more civically engaged are more likely to value reading news that they disagree with, or that makes them uncomfortable.

Based on Lowrey et al's (2008) findings in "Toward a Measure of Community Journalism," the next hypothesis asserts that individuals who live in a community with a hyper-local newspaper will be more likely to expect "leading" community journalistic tendencies from that newspaper.

H₆: Residents in communities where the newspaper practices hyper-local journalism will be more likely to expect that the newspaper will offer potential solutions when covering conflict.

Chapter Three

Survey Method: Ohio University Study of Civic Involvement and Newspaper

Readership

This study examines the research questions using data gathered through responses to surveys sent to members of targeted communities. The survey data illustrate the development of civic engagement and community journalism in the selected geographic areas. Of particular importance is the surveying methodology, as the survey poses questions that test civic engagement indicators – for instance, “What elected office does (insert mayor’s name) hold?” Questions also measure citizens’ news consumption and their perception of the publication’s role in the community. Surveys were sent to two communities of comparable size and demographic make-up with newspapers that practice different types of community journalism, Hannibal, Missouri and Defiance, Ohio. The survey was entirely voluntary, and no information about the respondents was recorded, other than their answers.

In order to choose survey recipients, a mailing list for each of the towns was purchased from InfoUSA. The lists included 500 randomly selected addresses for each community. Mailings were sent in January, and respondents were given the option of

replying to the first mailing via post (using provided self-addressed, stamped envelopes). Later, when the number of responses began to decline significantly, a reminder postcard was sent out, which included a link to the survey on SurveyMonkey, an online questionnaire tool. This reminder and the online option were intended to achieve the highest response rate possible. Respondents were marked off the list when their response was received, so the researcher could determine which individuals should receive a reminder postcard, but their responses were not connected with their names or addresses. By comparing the survey results from the two areas, the study could effectively determine if a correlation exists between community journalism and higher levels of civic engagement.

Dillman's Tailored Design Method

In the process of designing and implementing the survey, aspects of Dillman's Tailored Design Method (2000) were used whenever feasible. For instance, the survey and cover letter showed positive regard towards recipients by explaining the reasons for the survey, providing a phone number to call and including personal addresses using Mail Merge. The follow-up postcard was intended as a "thank you" as well as a reminder, a tactic that Dillman found produces a surge in responses almost equal to

that of the initial mailing. In order to make responding as convenient as possible, a return envelope with postage was included in the initial mailing, as Dillman suggests. Cover letters were printed on Ohio University E.W. Scripps School of Journalism letterhead, and were individually signed in order to provide proper personalization. Although Dillman (2000) suggests four or five mailings to each individual recipient, only two mailings per person were affordable in this study. The project was funded by the Provost's Undergraduate Research Fund and the Honors Tutorial College Dean's Discretionary Fund.

Choice of Communities

The *Hannibal Courier-Post* is the oldest paper in Missouri, and it began its transformation to hyper-local reporting in 2006. Only a year later, the paper noticed increases in subscription sales, which had been steadily declining for several years prior (Montgomery, 2007). The paper's staff is small and they aim to offer two pieces of local news for every one piece of other content. In addition, the relative newness of this change is appealing for data collection. This community represents an ideal model to test the study's primary hypothesis. The second community, selected to provide a control, is Defiance, Ohio, a town of similar size and demography to Hannibal.

However, the newspaper in Defiance (*the Crescent-News*) provides significantly more national and state coverage than local reporting. Using these two communities, it is possible to contrast the impacts of local reporting versus more traditional, larger-scale journalistic coverage.

Demography

The two towns are similar in most demographic characteristics, with the exception of average family income, which differs somewhat. Hannibal has a slightly larger population of 17,757, compared to Defiance's population of 16,465 (Census, 2000). The age divisions within each town's population was sufficiently similar, with 22.5 percent of Defiance's population and 24.4 percent of Hannibal's population made up of people 55 years of age or older. Both towns have predominantly white populations; Defiance is 87.1 percent white and Hannibal is 90.6 percent white. Of the total population, 94.9 percent of Hannibal residents live in households, compared to 96.8 percent of Defiance residents. Defiance residents tend to have a slightly higher level of education, with 41.8 percent of residents having attended some college, or attained an associate, bachelor's or graduate degree, as opposed to 38.3 percent of Hannibal residents meeting the same qualifications (U.S. Census, 2000). Both towns

have a similar proportion of long-term residents, with 28.8 percent of Hannibal's population living within the county in 1995, and 26.4 percent of Defiance residents having lived within the county in 1995. More Defiance residents are in the workforce, 67.3 percent of the population 16 and over, compared to 62 percent of Hannibal's 16 and over population. The median family income in Hannibal was \$37,264 in 2000, whereas the median family income in Defiance was \$49,599.

Question Development

The first four questions comprise a scale of civic engagement. The questions asked respondents to answer on a four-point Likert scale, including the options: "Never," "Not very often," "Often," or "Very Often," (see survey in Appendix 1). The questions and Likert scale choices were taken from Stamm, Emig and Hesse (1997), whose research measured four types of involvement: "(1) attending – following what goes on in local government and local political affairs; (2) orienting – thinking of ideas for improving the community; (3) connecting – getting together with others to talk about the community's needs; and (4) manipulating – working to bring about change in the community." The use of this scale was intended both to replicate and advance the existing body of research by implementing measures with proven

reliability and legitimacy. The next question tests whether respondents recognized the mayor's name and were able to correctly select the elected office he held. This question was intended to indicate how closely respondents follow local politics. The following two questions measured whether respondents had ever met a local elected official and whether respondents had met a reporter for the local newspaper. These questions were intended to indicate the connectedness of the communities, based on the accessibility of reporters and elected officials.

Readership behavior questions were asked next to measure how frequently respondents read the newspaper and for how long, and how frequently they read specific sections of the paper. The first two questions concerning the social role of the newspaper were intended to measure respondents' willingness to read news that they agree with versus news they disagree with. The final three questions in this section were included to measure respondents' expectations for the role of the local newspaper – whether it should provide news that improves the community, whether it should cover conflict, and if it should include suggestions for solutions when it covers conflict.

The survey ended with demographic questions, related to respondents' age, how long they had lived in the town, their educational attainment and their family income. These were intended to allow comparisons of respondents from each community and to compare responses with the demographics of the entire community.

Institutional Review Board Approval

This study required Ohio University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, because of its use of human subjects. The proposal was approved as of November 5, 2010. The project was given "exempt" status, because there was no potential of harm to the research subjects. An amendment was submitted to the IRB in February, as the text of the reminder postcard and the online survey component was not originally submitted. This amendment was approved on February 28, 2011.

Chapter Four:

Results

The total number of respondents was 176, with 83 surveys returned from Hannibal, Missouri and 93 from Defiance, Ohio. The results include 17.6 percent of the original 1,000 survey recipients. Of the responses, six were collected online through SurveyMonkey and 170 were received via U.S. Postal Service in the pre-paid return envelopes. The surveys were mailed to both communities on February 7, 2011, and reminder postcards were sent after the response rate began to decline, on March 4, 2011. The first responses were received February 21, 2011, and the final response was received April 7, 2011.

Demographics

As established in the survey method section, the two communities (Hannibal, Missouri and Defiance, Ohio) were chosen because they are similar in size and demographic makeup, and because the communities' newspapers have differing percentages of local versus state and national coverage. With this in mind, it is critical to examine how the demographics of survey respondents in each community compare to Census data concerning the overall makeup of the two towns.

Table 1: Age distribution of respondents

Age	Hannibal (n)	Percent	Defiance (n)	Percent
18-25	1	1.2%	2	2.2%
26-30	1	1.2%	3	3.2%
31-35	1	1.2%	5	5.4%
36-40	4	4.9%	10	10.8%
41-45	3	3.7%	6	6.5%
46-55	17	21%	12	12.9%
56+	54	66.7%	55	59.1%
Total	81	100%	93	100%
Mode	56+		56+	

Table 1 shows that the distribution of ages was relatively similar in both communities, with respondents from Defiance comprising a sample with more age diversity. Most respondents were age 56 or older, which is above the average age in both cities, according to Census data. The median age in Hannibal is 36.1 years, and the median age in Defiance is 35.2 years (U.S. Census, 2000).

In both communities, the majority of respondents had lived in the community for 11 years or more, as shown in Table 2. However, a slightly larger portion of the Defiance respondents fell into this category. These findings are inconsistent with the Census data. In Defiance, only 26.4 percent of people age five or older lived in the

same county in 2000 as they had in 1995. In Hannibal, 28.8 percent of people age five or older fell into that category.

Table 2: Residency

Years lived in community	Hannibal (n)	Percent	Defiance (n)	Percent
0-3	3	3.7%	2	2.2%
3-5	3	3.7%	0	0%
6-10	6	7.3%	3	3.2%
11 or more	70	85.4%	88	94.6%
Total	82	100%	93	100%
Mode	11 or more		11 or more	

In both communities, most respondents attended college or attained a degree.

Table 3 shows that respondents from Defiance were more slightly more likely to have attended or graduated college, and respondents from each town were almost equally likely to have attained a postgraduate degree. According to Census data, the average educational attainment for the population 25 years and over in Hannibal was “high school graduate,” with 38.8 percent of people falling into that category. For Defiance, the average educational attainment for the population 25 years and over was also “high school graduate,” with 41.6 percent of people falling into that category. A high school diploma was the highest level of education for 37 percent of Hannibal’s respondents and 29 percent of Defiance’s respondents.

Table 3: Educational Attainment

Education	Hannibal (n)	Percent	Defiance (n)	Percent
Attended high school	1	1.2%	3	3.2%
Graduated high school	30	37%	27	29%
Attended college	15	18.5%	22	23.7%
Graduated college	21	25.9%	25	26.9%
Postgraduate degree	14	17.3%	16	17.2%
Total	81	100%	93	100%
Mode	Graduated high school		Graduated high school	

The majority of respondents from each town were members of the top three income brackets, as shown in Table 4. In Hannibal, most respondents had a family income of \$75,000 or more, whereas in Defiance most respondents had a family income of \$50,000-\$74,999. Both of these figures exceed the median family income as reported by the Census Bureau. In Hannibal, the median family income is \$37,264 and in Defiance the median family income is \$49,599. According to Census data, only 13.3 percent of family incomes in Hannibal exceed \$75,000. In Defiance, 22.4 percent of family incomes exceed \$75,000.

Table 4: Family Income

Income	Hannibal (n)	Percent	Defiance (n)	Percent
Less than \$15,000	6	8.3%	4	4.4%
\$15,000-\$24,999	8	11.1%	13	14.3%
\$25,000-\$34,999	8	11.1%	8	8.8%
\$35,000-\$49,999	13	18.1%	10	11%
\$50,000-\$74,999	12	16.7%	33	36.3%
\$75,000 or more	25	34.7%	23	25.3%
Total	72	100%	91	100%
Mode	\$75,000 or more		\$50,000-\$74,999	

In summary, when compared to Census data, my respondents tend to be somewhat older, more highly educated, higher paid and more established than the average residents of the two communities.

Descriptive Statistics

The first set of survey questions was intended to measure civic engagement. These questions were prefaced with, “How often do you participate in these activities in your community?” The four relevant activities, as mentioned in the methodology section were: “Following what goes on in local government and local public affairs,” “Thinking of ideas for improving the community,” “Getting together with others to talk about the community's needs,” and “Working to bring about change in the community.” The first hypothesis is associated with these questions.

H₁: Newspaper readers in communities with hyper-local publications will experience more civic engagement than readers in communities that lack such publications.

Table 5: Civic engagement indicator average scores

Question (How often do you...)	Hannibal (n=83)	Defiance (n=93)
Follow local news	2.84	2.75
Std. dev.	(.833)	(.789)
Think of local improvements	2.57	2.40
Std. dev.	(.784)	(.739)
Discuss community changes	2.23	2.10
Std. dev.	(.738)	(.754)
Work to make changes	2.11	2.02
Std. dev.	(.609)	(.707)

Table 5 shows that for each of the four civic engagement questions, respondents from Hannibal on average scored higher than respondents from Defiance, with “higher” meaning closer to the response “Very often.” The sample size is not large enough for these differences to be statistically significant, so these results do not support H₁.

The following set of questions was intended to measure connectedness within each community. The first question in this section asked respondents to select the

correct public office (mayor), given an elected official's name. Respondents were also asked whether they had previously met any local elected official, and whether they had previously met any reporter for the local newspaper. These questions are associated with the next two hypotheses.

H₂: Residents from the community with a more localized newspaper (Hannibal) will be more knowledgeable about civic affairs.

H₃: Residents from the community with a more localized newspaper (Hannibal) will be more likely to have direct contact with people engaged in civic affairs.

Table 6: Community connectedness

Question	Hannibal (n=82)	Defiance (n=93)
	Percent	Percent
Able to identify the mayor	86.6%	87.1%
Have met a local public official	90.4%	83.9%
Have met a reporter for the local newspaper	88%	91.4%

Respondents from Defiance were slightly more likely to correctly identify the mayor's job title, and slightly more likely to have met a reporter for the local newspaper, as shown in Table 6. However, respondents from Hannibal were marginally more likely to have met a local public official. In both communities, the

vast majority of respondents was able to correctly identify the mayor, and had met both a local public official and a reporter for the local newspaper.

Table 7: Readership behavior

Times you read the newspaper in the last week	Hannibal (n)	Percent	Defiance (n)	Percent
None	12	14.6%	5	5.4%
1-2	16	19.5%	12	12.9%
3-4	8	19.8%	10	10.8%
5 or more	46	56.1%	66	71%
Total	82	100%	93	100%
Mode	5 or more		5 or more	

According to Table 7, respondents from Defiance were more likely to have read the local newspaper multiple times in the last week. For both communities, the most common response was “5 or more times,” but for Hannibal this answer made up 56.1 percent of responses, and for Defiance this answer was 71 percent of responses. This difference in readership is statistically significant. Because the responses to these questions are correlated, respondents from Defiance were also more likely to have spent more than 1 minute reading the local newspaper each day (see Table 8), and they were more likely to have read each of the individual sections in the newspaper (see Table 9).

Table 8: Reading time

Time spent each day reading the newspaper	Hannibal (n)	Percent	Defiance (n)	Percent
0 minutes	15	18.3%	5	5.4%
1-15 minutes	31	37.8%	28	30.1%
16-30 minutes	25	30.5%	38	40.9%
31 or more minutes	11	13.4%	22	23.7%
Total	82	100%	93	100%
Mode	1-15 minutes		16-30 minutes	

Responses to the question set concerning readership of individual sections of the newspaper relate to the following hypothesis.

H₄: Residents from the community with a more localized newspaper

(Hannibal) will be more likely to read the news section of the paper more frequently.

Table 9: Section readership

Question (How often do you read news in the...)	Hannibal (n=82)	Defiance (n=91)
News section	2.96	3.42
Std. dev.	(.987)	(.776)
Sports section	2.38	2.91
Std. dev.	(1.026)	(.967)
Lifestyles section	2.57	2.81
Std. dev.	(1.012)	(.959)
Opinions section	2.70	2.79
Std. dev.	(.990)	(.949)

The next two questions measure which types of reporting the respondents found to be important. Respondents were asked if it was important to read news that they agreed with or felt comfortable reading, and if it was important to read news that they disagreed with or felt uncomfortable reading. These survey questions are associated with the following hypothesis and research question:

H₅: Residents who are more civically engaged are more likely to value reading news that they disagree with, or that makes them uncomfortable.

RQ₁: Is there a correlation between the presence of civic journalism and readers' willingness to read negative news?

Respondents from Defiance were slightly more likely to value reading both the news items that they agreed with or were comfortable with and news they disagreed with or were not comfortable with.

Table 10: Importance of news that you agree/disagree with

Question (How important do you find it to read news that makes you...)	Hannibal (n=82)	Defiance (n=93)
Uncomfortable	3.84	3.92
Std. dev.	(.728)	(.767)
Comfortable	3.92	4.00
Std. dev.	(.741)	(.676)

The final three questions were intended to measure respondents' expectations of the newspaper's coverage. These questions are associated with both a hypothesis and a research question.

H₆: Residents in communities where the newspaper practices hyper-local journalism will be more likely to expect that the newspaper will offer potential solutions when covering conflict.

RQ₂: Do people who live in areas with community journalism place responsibility on the staffs of their hyper-local publications to foster more civic engagement?

Table 11: News expectations

Question (The local newspaper should...)	Hannibal (n=82)	Defiance (n=92)
Cover news that improves the community Std. dev.	4.00 (.861)	4.23 (.537)
Cover conflict within the community Std. dev.	4.01 (.738)	4.14 (.673)
Offer potential solutions to community problems when it covers conflict Std. dev.	3.15 (.976)	2.92 (1.030)

Although respondents from Defiance were more likely to agree that the local newspaper should provide news that improves the community and that it should report

on conflict or debate within the community, respondents from Hannibal were more likely to agree that the local newspaper should offer potential solutions when it covers conflict. In both towns, the mean for the “solutions” question was relatively close to 3, or “neutral.”

Chapter Five:

Discussion

As previously stated, respondents to the survey tend to be somewhat older, more highly educated, higher paid and more established than the average residents of the two communities (U.S. Census, 2000). People with these characteristics tend to be more civically engaged, on average (Shah, McLeod and Yoon (2001) cite Fukuyama (1995), Putnam (1993, 2000), and Verba, Scholzman and Brady (1995)). Age and education enhance community involvement. In addition, answering a survey is an engaged action in and of itself. As such, those who answer the survey will tend to be more civically engaged than the average citizens within each community.

The absence of younger respondents likely has implications for data on readers' expectations of community newspapers. As discussed in the literature review, Lowrey et al (2008) assert the existence of a continuum of community journalism, which spans listening, informing and leading roles for the newspaper. Lewis' (2008) work suggests that younger audiences may be more amenable to a "leading" community newspaper. His study ties young adults' current news perceptions to their future intentions for news consumption. Lewis found five dimensions of news

perception: “socially useful,” “biased,” “satisfies civic and personal needs,” “devoid of fun” and “time and effort consuming.” Overall, young adults in his study reported that in five years they expected to obtain more of their news from traditional sources – his findings project an expected increase of print newspaper consumption from 14 to 41 percent in the U.S. population of 18 to 29-year-olds (Lewis, 2008). Those respondents with positive perceptions of news were more likely to anticipate becoming “heavy” users of traditional news sources. Additionally, those who felt strongly that news met their civic and personal needs expressed significantly more interest in TV, print, radio and online news than did counterparts who did not. There were similar findings for those who strongly identified news as being socially useful.

Based on these results, Lewis (2008) asserts that newspapers should target young adults who are already inclined to future readership. He described these individuals as wanting “value-added, utility-oriented news that gives them help in making choices, something to talk about with friends and a sense of their place in the world” (Lewis, 2008, p. 48). In particular, his discussion of news that helps with decision-making suggests young adult audiences’ potential support of a “leading” role for the newspaper. If younger audiences are truly so willing to accept non-traditional

roles for newspapers, community journalism is likely to undergo a significant shift towards the “leading” end of the continuum in the future. However, the limited number of young adult participants in the current survey may not allow for full consideration of citizens’ expectations of their community newspapers.

Evaluation of Hypotheses and Research Questions

As discussed in the Results section, respondents from Hannibal on average scored higher than respondents from Defiance on all questions in the civic engagement scale, with “higher” meaning closer to the response “Very often.” Although the sample size is not large enough for these differences to be statistically significant, this data illustrates a clear trend in the direction that was predicted by hypothesis one. The results do not support the hypothesis, but the higher levels of engagement in Hannibal suggest that certain types of reporting techniques and newspaper content (hyper-local reporting, in this case) are more successful than others at boosting civic engagement levels. While the existing literature considers how newspapers of various sizes impact civic engagement, few distinctions are made based on the content within the publications. These findings suggest a need for closer examination of how reporting styles may impact engagement levels.

H₁: Newspaper readers in communities with hyper-local publications will experience more civic engagement than readers in communities that lack such publications.

However, in regards to community connectedness, it appears that the use of hyper-local reporting techniques has little effect. Defiance's respondents were more likely to correctly identify the mayor's job title, and more likely to have met a reporter for the local newspaper, whereas Hannibal's respondents were more likely to have met a local public official. The differences in responses to these questions from the two communities were slight. In both communities, the vast majority of respondents was able to correctly identify the mayor, and had met both a local public official and a reporter for the local newspaper. These results are not statistically significant, and they do not represent a trend in the direction predicted for hypotheses two and three. It is clear that both communities experience very high levels of community connectedness. This result illustrates the significant community ties that often exist in towns of such a small size. These communities' relatively small populations (fewer than 20,000) and the resultant community ties mean that reporting techniques and news content have less effect than they might in somewhat larger, less interconnected populations.

H₂: Residents from the community with a more localized newspaper (Hannibal) will be more knowledgeable about civic affairs.

H₃: Residents from the community with a more localized newspaper (Hannibal) will be more likely to have direct contact with people engaged in civic affairs.

Respondents from Defiance were more likely to have read each of the individual sections in the newspaper, including the news section. This data illustrates a trend in the opposite direction from the prediction in hypothesis four. These results may be attributed to a larger portion of Hannibal's respondents that do not read the local newspaper at all. Of Hannibal respondents, 14.6 percent had not read the newspaper in the last week, as opposed to only 5.4 percent of Defiance respondents. Because overall newspaper readership is correlated with readership of individual newspaper sections, this difference impacts support for hypothesis four. Differences in the number of times respondents read the newspaper per week, the amount of time they read during each sitting and the frequency with which they read the news section were all statistically significant.

This hypothesis was based on McLeod et al's (1996) assertion of a positive relationship between attention to local news and community integration. However, as discussed in regards to the prior two hypotheses, the two communities are connected at similar levels. As such, one would expect that the respondents from both communities would be similarly likely to read local news. The discrepancy between readership levels in the two towns likely indicates the influence of an outside factor, such as the newspapers' political leanings or the affordability of subscriptions.

H₄: Residents from the community with a more localized newspaper (Hannibal) will be more likely to read the news section of the paper more frequently.

The correlation between the civic engagement scale and valuing news that one disagrees or is uncomfortable with is statistically significant. Analysis shows the same correlation for each of the communities individually. This data trends in the direction predicted in hypothesis five. In regards to research question one, respondents from Defiance were slightly more likely to value reading both the news items that they agreed with or were comfortable with and news they disagreed with or were not comfortable with. This trend, although not statistically significant, suggests a correlation between the presence of community journalism (rather than hyper-local

reporting specifically) and willingness to read news with negative personal associations, as residents of both communities on average provided comparable answers. The fact that highly engaged citizens are more likely to value this type of news lends support to Rothenbuhler and Adams' suggestions about the importance of conflict and difference in community building.

H₅: Residents who are more civically engaged are more likely to value reading news that they disagree with, or that makes them uncomfortable.

RQ₁: Is there a correlation between the presence of civic journalism and readers' willingness to read negative news?

Four of the final five questions comprise a scale of news expectations. The questions are as follows: "I think it is important to read articles about my community that I disagree with, or that make me feel uncomfortable"; "I think it is important to read articles about my community that I agree with, or that make me feel comfortable"; "I think that local newspaper should provide news that improves the community"; and, "I think that part of the role of the local newspaper is to cover conflict and/or debate." The four items on this scale hold together well, as evidenced

by a Cronbach's alpha of .828. This scale was created to address research question two.

Mean values were close to four for the former two questions, and above four for the latter two questions, meaning that all questions received mean answers at or around "Agree." Based on the mean scores for these questions, it is clear that community members expect the local newspaper to create civic engagement in the community. This data supports a considerable body of existing literature, which constructs newspapers as having both a social role and responsibility within communities.

RQ₂: Do people who live in areas with community journalism place responsibility on the staffs of their hyper-local publications to foster more civic engagement?

Although respondents from Defiance were more likely to agree that the local newspaper should provide news that improves the community and that it should report on conflict or debate within the community, respondents from Hannibal were more likely to agree that the local newspaper should offer potential solutions when it covers

conflict. In both towns, the mean for the “solutions” question was relatively close to 3, or “neutral.”

The data for the “solutions” question trends in the direction predicted. The “solutions” question is the best indicator for approval of a non-traditional role for the newspaper. Only a truly civic newspaper would offer solutions when reporting on community problems; this is an even more active role in improving the community than “covering news that improves the community” or covering conflict.

H₆: Residents in communities where the newspaper practices hyper-local journalism will be more likely to expect that the newspaper will offer potential solutions when covering conflict.

RQ₃: How do expectations for local newspapers’ civic engagement creation match up or fail to match up between the academic and citizen realms?

Based on the data for the “solutions” question, it is clear that although respondents from both towns expect the newspaper to cover conflict and report on news that improves the community, these expectations do not rise to the standards of some of academic definitions of “community journalism.” It seems that these readers are unprepared for the newspaper to serve a “leading” role in the community, although

residents from the town with more localized reporting are more likely to approve of this role for the newspaper. This answers research question three, by showing that scholars are more willing to accept a broader and less typical role for community journalism than are citizens in the two communities. As discussed earlier, it is unclear how the measures of expectations would compare if a more representative sample were collected.

Chapter Six:

Conclusion

Overall, the study indicates that community journalism is correlated with high levels of civic engagement, regardless of reporting styles. Although this finding is not what the study originally predicted, it contributes to the existing body of literature by examining questions about reporting techniques that have largely gone unasked. More research, particularly similar studies of towns with larger populations or more varying reporting styles, is necessary to determine news content's true impact on civic engagement. The differences between responses from the two communities for most questions were marginal. Residents overall expected the newspaper to build civic engagement in the community, were very well connected to and knowledgeable about the community, and were relatively civically engaged. All of these findings indicate respondents had strong community ties in the two communities.

Based on the data, it is reasonable to conclude that residents who are accustomed to hyper-local reporting techniques are more open to the idea of a non-traditional social role for their community newspaper. This is somewhat unsurprising, considering hyper-local reporting can necessitate an atypical role for the newspaper

and its staff. In order to effectively cover community news, the staff must be well integrated into the community. As discussed previously, community journalists' responsibility both to serve the community and to comply with the journalistic tenets of balance and fairness can be contradictory at times. More acceptance of non-traditional social roles for the newspaper, including "leading" behavior, could tip the scales toward serving the community and away from accepted journalistic standards of objectivity.

The study also found that residents who value community news content that makes them uncomfortable or that they disagree with are more likely to be civically engaged. This indicates that if a community newspaper intends to meet its social and societal responsibilities, it must offer content that allows for discussion and dialogue, and that readers may disagree with.

Limitations of the Research

This study was limited by the costs associated with mail surveys, particularly postage costs. The project was generously funded by the Honors Tutorial College Dean's Discretionary Fund and the Provost's Undergraduate Research Fund for approximately \$2,000 total. However, more funding would have allowed for a larger

number of individuals to be included in the initial recipient pool. In addition, more mailings to the recipients (four or five to each person, as suggested by Dillman (2000), rather than the two employed in this study) would have helped to increase the response rate, lending more credence to the data.

The very small size of these communities also likely impacted the results. Community journalistic newspapers can have circulations of up to 50,000, and these two communities had populations of fewer than 20,000. It can be inferred that the residents of smaller communities often exhibit stronger community and social ties. As such, a survey sent to somewhat larger communities could have significantly different results.

Research Process

At the outset, this project was intended to examine a much broader range of topics within the subject of community journalism. The project narrowed over time, particularly due to time and feasibility constraints. However, many of the subtopics or research strategies that were not included in this work raise significant questions that should be examined in the future.

For instance, I initially wanted to evaluate the degree of uniformity within the practices of hyper-local publications in different areas. This topic is significant because more research could help establish a set of “best practices” within the hyper-local journalism community to suggest the approaches and characteristics that are most often associated with enhanced civic engagement. This project was also intended to consider the differences between community, public and civic journalism. It is difficult to differentiate between these types of journalism, because standard definitions for these terms do not exist. Additionally, many of the intentions or tenets of these styles of journalism overlap.

Although this project includes some discussion of the ethical dilemmas associated with community journalism, the original prospectus gave more consideration to the possibility that these newspapers may at times create conflict or somehow damage their communities. Reporters for hyper-local publications must maintain a more precarious citizen versus journalist balance than most reporters. They almost exclusively cover the happenings in the small town in which they live. People, including journalists, often have opinions on the issues and concerns that face their community. This can become problematic and harmful to civic engagement if

reporters abuse their positions to advance their views on a particular issue in the community. However, including one's own thoughts on the community in journalistic work may not always be harmful – it is important for future research to draw distinctions between what methods and situations lend themselves to an emphasis on the journalist as a citizen.

Future Research

There is considerable potential for future research in this field. For instance, as there is no standard definition for “community journalism,” it would be advisable to examine what practices are uniform within the industry. Additionally, this study considers the impact of news content on civic engagement, but in a very limited manner. More research into this subject is necessary to further determine the possible positive effects of community journalism and hyper-local or other specific reporting strategies

Appendix 1: Hannibal Survey

Ohio University Study of Civic Involvement and Newspaper Readership

General Instructions: For all of the following questions, please circle the best answer.

First, we will ask some questions about your community engagement:

How often do you participate in these activities in your community?

1.) Following what goes on in local government and local public affairs:

Never Not very often Often Very often

2.) Thinking of ideas for improving the community:

Never Not very often Often Very often

3.) Getting together with others to talk about the community's needs:

Never Not very often Often Very often

4.) Working to bring about change in the community:

Never Not very often Often Very often

Now, a few questions about your ties to the community:

5). Do you know what office Roy Hark holds?

A.) Township Trustee B.) City Council Member C.) Auditor D.) Mayor E.) Don't know

6.) Have you ever met any local government officeholders?

A.) Yes

B.) No

7.) Have you ever met anyone who works for *the Hannibal Courier-Post*?

A.) Yes

B.) No

The following questions are related to your newspaper readership:

How often have you read *the Hannibal Courier-Post* in the last week?

None

1-2 times

3-4 times

5 or more times

How much time do you typically spend reading *the Courier-Post* each day?

0 minutes

1-15 minutes

16-30 minutes

31 or more minutes

How often do you read news about your community in the following sections of *the Courier-Post*?

News:

Never

Not very often

Often

Very often

Sports:

Never

Not very often

Often

Very often

Lifestyles:

Never

Not very often

Often

Very often

Opinions:

Never

Not very often

Often

Very often

Now we would like to ask a few questions about the newspaper's social role in the community. Would you agree with the following statements:

I think it is important to read articles about my community that I disagree with, or that make me feel uncomfortable:

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

I think it is important to read articles about my community that I agree with, or that make me feel comfortable:

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

I think that *the Courier-Post* should provide news that improves the community:

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

I think that part of the role of *the Courier-Post* is to cover conflict and/or debate:

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

When *the Courier-Post* covers conflict, the paper's staff should also offer potential solutions:

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

Finally, please answer a few questions about yourself. Note: Only aggregate data will be analyzed.

What is your age?

18-25 26-30 31-35 36-40 41-45 46-55 56+

How long have you lived in Hannibal, Missouri?

0-3 years 3-5 years 6-10 years 11 or more years

Which best reflects your level of educational attainment?

Attended high school	Graduated High School	Attended college
Graduated college	Postgraduate degree	

Which best reflects your family income?

Less than \$15,000	\$15,000-\$24,999	\$25,000-\$34,999
\$35,000-\$49,999	\$50,000-\$74,999	\$75,000 or more

**END OF SURVEY **

Appendix 2: Reminder Postcard Text

Hello,

We recently sent you a questionnaire about your newspaper readership and civic engagement. If you have already completed it and returned it, thank you. If you have not gotten to it, please fill out the survey and return it.

If you did not receive your questionnaire or you have misplaced it, you can follow this link to fill out the survey online: <survey monkey link>

Thank you,

Caitlyn Zachry
Researcher
(phone number)

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