The New Jersey Media Ecosystem: Distributed News in a Digital Age

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Introduction

New Jersey continues to "suffer from a chronic news deficit" exacerbated by the state's unique news ecosystem. As others have documented through extensive research, New Jersey news is often marginalized in that the state is split between two out-of-state markets, New York and Philadelphia (Starr, Weingart and Joselow, 2010). Moreover, the mentality of "home rule" that prevails in a state sustaining 565 municipalities sets forth a challenging landscape for aggregate state news coverage.

The past decade of shifts in journalism, its' business model, and the technology by which news is produced have further exacerbated the state's news deficit, translating into a withdrawal of coverage for many areas of the state. While this paints a dystopian landscape for New Jersey news, the demand and appreciation for better news coverage remains and new opportunities seem poised to come to the fore. An essential step to improving the coverage of news in New Jersey is to understand the state's ever-changing news ecosystem. This report begins to map what news infrastructure remains, what is emerging, and where opportunities lie.

Overview of Methods

For a long time, thinking about the news usually involved thinking about either the individual journalists who reported the news, or the institutions where those individual journalists worked. Taking the perspective of news within a media ecosystem, on the other hand, tries to think about news production, circulation, and sharing within a more distributed, holistic context. In a media ecosystem, there are a wide variety of organizations and individuals who create publicly important information and the form of their interactions impacts the health and survival of others within the system.

In establishing the New Jersey news ecosystem, this report draws from and extends work on news ecosystems in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and North Carolina's Research Triangle (Schaffer, 2010; PEJ, Baltimore, 2010; Morgan & Perez, 2011). Our research also extends the work of two 2010 reports which addressed critical corners of the New Jersey news ecosystem: Paul Starr's recommendations on New Jersey's public media and Mark Lisheron's discussion of changes in statehouse coverage (Starr, Weingart, and Joselow, 2010).

Our first phase of research was a comparative content analysis of public affairs news in *The Star Ledger* for August of 2009 and August of 2012. The J-Lab report on the Philadelphia ecosystem did a content analysis of public affair stories tracking both column inches and number of stories for August 2006 and August 2009 (Schaffer, 2010). Our content analysis also traced the coverage of public affairs journalism by counting public affair stories and measuring column inches.

The second phase of research included in-depth interviews with New Jersey journalists from across the state in all stages of their careers who work in a variety of formats (radio, print, television, and online). These interviews covered three broad areas: who is actually reporting the news in New Jersey, what news is being covered, and how or, rather, in what ways is coverage changing. Both stages of the research were augmented and informed through the documentation of critical outlets for news throughout the state. Further information was gleaned by tracking these news outlets (wherever possible) through RSS and twitter feeds and by obtaining a copy of printed sources.

The third stage of research actually *maps* the news outlets that make up the New Jersey media ecosystem. An additional stage of research is planned, one that moves us from the production of news to the consumption of news: in other words, to the audience, what it reads, what it ignores, and what kind of information it actually wants. In this report we simply examine the consumption of news in general. I more thorough analysis of local consumer behavior awaits a future report.

Content Analysis

Historical Groundwork

In order to clearly map the ecosystem for New Jersey news, we felt that this report needed to stand back and set the context for current conditions. Two structural and historical elements ground the infrastructure of the New Jersey news ecosystem: the split between New York and Philadelphia media markets and New Jersey's "time honored" tradition of home rule. These two forces exacerbate the fragmentation of New Jersey news coverage and prefigure the latest surge of fragmentation accompanying shifts in digital news practices. As the overall amount of fragmented, niche-oriented news grows, New Jersey's uniquely divided landscape offers an important site for study and experimentation that can shed light on conditions in the rest of the U.S...

In addition to the division accompanying the state's split between New York and Philadelphia, the mentality of home rule further fragments the state's ecosystem for news. Policies of home rule have multiplied municipal divisions throughout the state, increasing the number of boundaries for civic identity and identification. In other words, home rule policies forge narrow municipal divisions throughout the state increasing the dividing lines between those labeled "us" from those labeled "them." These boundaries work to limit the forms of news deemed applicable to "us." On the positive side of the ledger, however, they also work to build a strong sense of hyperlocal community.

These numerous municipal boundaries also increase the amount of space in which important political events occur, demanding additional reporting resources in order to provide adequate coverage. Local reporters face challenges in how to cover overlapping city council meetings and school board meetings between neighboring towns minutes apart. Reporters must also deal with multiple municipal police departments who hold different policies and procedures for sharing information. **These historic divisions within the state remind us that the fragmented landscape for news is not of recent digital origin, but has long been a part of the New Jersey's news ecosystem.**

Changing Coverage (2009-2012)

Overview

This section begins to chronicle some of the broad changes in news coverage for New Jersey from 2009 to 2012 based on empirical insights from both interviews and the content analysis as well as pertinent information from previous research. This section outlines two major shifts in forms of news coverage: *sustained coverage* of a news stories and what we call *spaces for*

news sharing. While qualitative interviews and observations clearly show a diminished amount of coverage for the state, another change appears in **how** the news is reported and, consequently, what events actually make the news. In addition, media outlets, impacted by convergences in media platforms and diminished resources for traditional news, face the challenge of a decline in the number of **spaces** where news is collectively shared[1]. The loss of this shared space for news translates into less sharing and discussion of news, which is what gives the news part of its value.

Decline in Constancy of Reporting

As journalistic resources are stretched to cover the latest stories, there has been a decline in sustained coverage of news stories. In our interviews with them, journalists throughout the state indicated the impact of changes in the way news is created on the style and scope of current news coverage. Journalists described dramatic shifts in the temporality of the news reporting including an increased speed of production and decreased amount of time given to develop and deliver a story. The scope of news coverage has also been tremendously affected by the consolidation of news outlets as these mergers have translated into fewer journalists covering larger areas with less time. Consequently, journalists have adapted their work procedures in order to save time and resources, and these adaptations have had a lasting impact on what New Jersey news gets reported.

The decreased time allotted for story development along with fewer reporters in the state has contributed to less comprehensive coverage including fewer follow-up stories, a diminishment of alternate voices, and a growing lack of context about why we should care. Ron Miskoff, a former reporter and editor for *The Home News Tribune*, former statehouse reporter for *The Star Ledger*, and instructor of Journalism at Rutgers, points out that the question is no longer about whether a story "is being covered, the question is whether it is being covered and followed." **Time-saving work procedures have become the norm-- these procedures include the growing use of freelancers who are "always on the hunt" for a story to "parachuting" journalists who drop in and out of a community for a single story. These new work procedures may allow reporters to cover the biggest stories across a larger area, but do not allow journalists-- and by extension do not allow the broader community-- the time to get to know the who or what behind each story.**

In a comparative snapshot of the highest rated television news stations in New York City (WNBC) and Philadelphia (WPVI) with New Jersey's public television station (NJTV), Matthew Hale (2012) found a greater range and breadth of content on the public station, NJTV. Hale also

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[1]   By our use of the term *spaces of news sharing* we hope to highlight the fact that, as James W. Carey noted more than three decades ago, news gains as much of its value in conversation as it does in the transmission of information. At the same time, we hope that our avoidance of the term "public sphere" will contribute (tangentially) to the growing scholarly critique of that concept.

saw a discrepancy in continued coverage of Sandy between the networks and NJTV. After the crisis of the storm passed, network operations returned back to business as usual, whereas NJTV's coverage offered more sustained discussion of the continuing impact from the storm. At the same time, Hale noted that NJTV, who is severely constrained by limited resources, missed opportunities to frame or contextualize events such as Trenton politics leaving the cameras rolling without providing information around the event's significance.

With limited resources, journalists are publishing content that can gather and maintain sustained interest, but that also involves less time-intensive "hunting" or reporting. Sustained coverage usually requires a greater amount of "beat journalism," which is increasingly cut from newspapers as part of cost-saving measures. Mark Lisheron's 2010 article, "Reloading the Statehouse," points to the argument that fewer reporters in the statehouse means the loss of "the stories that tell readers what elected officials do when they aren't cataclysmically clashing and why readers should care." Again and again, we see how less time and resources not only impacts the number of stories published, but also impacts the content and type of stories that remain in the news.

This shift in content also appears supported by our content analysis of public affairs news for August of 2009 and 2012. As the recession ruled the front pages in 2009, our content analysis found a disproportionate 14 articles on "Cash for Clunkers." This disproportionate coverage can be seen more dramatically in the 2012 coverage of Chris Christie's role in the Republican National Convention (RNC). Over six-percent of public affairs articles from August 2012 centered on Chris Christie and the RNC (35 out of 541). Furthermore, 15 of the 35 articles on Christie and RNC were located on the front page. This extensive front-page coverage becomes even more significant as the front page of *The Star-Ledger* offers one of the few remaining shared spaces for state-level news coverage.

Results from the Content Analysis (August 2009 vs. 2012)

Methodology/Design

Our content analysis design was derived for comparative purposes from a previous content analysis of public affairs stories in Philadelphia conducted by the J-Lab in August of 2006 and 2009, which looked at the number of stories and column inches in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *The Daily News*. Our analysis focused on counting the column inches and number of public affairs stories within *The Star-Ledger* for August of 2009 and 2012.

In order to clarify our definition of public affairs journalism and code it for operational purposes, we started with the contention that *publics* do not exist without *issues*. In other words, and in the words of science and technology studies scholar Nootje Marres, "issues call a public into being." John Dewey defines publics as groups of citizens who share the indirect effects of a particular action.

Our definition of public affairs journalism then is a journalism that identifies and discusses either (1) the consequences of particular actions already taken, or planned (2) the groups of citizens affected by those consequences or (3) plans on how the consequences of an action will be dealt with. For coding purposes, we limited our count of "public affairs journalism" to stories original to the *Star-Ledger*, i.e., excluding AP copy, other wire copy, or copy syndicated from other publications.

Overall Results

The August 2012 Ledger offered a "streamlined" version of 2012 focused around NJ-oriented public policy stories. There was sustained statehouse coverage between 2009 and 2012 (even, perhaps, an increase in this form of coverage in 2012); however, overall, 2012 had 18% fewer articles than 2009.

While statehouse/public policy coverage remained steady, cultural and civic-oriented issues lost a large portion of their coverage. The coverage missing from 2012 included reviews of events for the arts, the voices of columnists (arts, gardening, business profiles), and sustained coverage of news at the county level.

By Section (2009 vs. 2012)

A more detailed understanding of changes in coverage between 2009 and 2012 appears through a comparison of the paper's major sections: the front pages, county news, business, and entertainment. The front page for both years contained 2-3 original public affairs articles. The remainder of the front section was AP/other sources. This was true of both years, but 2009 had a greater amount of AP-content (although this is based on qualitative observation and was not counted as part of the content analysis).
County coverage remains (by far) the section that contains the largest amount of policy or issue-related news. This section also typically holds the editorial section, which did not show any major changes between 2009 and 2012. There was noticeable, but not substantially less coverage for county issues in 2012 vs. 2009. 2009 included 6-7 versions of the paper for the following counties: 1) Essex 2) Morris 3) Warren, Sussex & Morris 4) Somerset and Hunterdon 5) Middlesex 6) Union.

The business section was reconfigured between 2009 and 2012. 2012 had a more streamlined arrangement than in 2009 with a back page for business news including 1-2 original articles. 2009 had more robust business section with more regular columns and columnists (e.g., small talk and coffee break) that did not appear in 2012.

While the number of policy or issue-oriented entertainment articles remained constant between 2009 and 2012, the overall entertainment section was much smaller with less informative and critical content (such as reviews) of various arts/cultural events. The 2012 paper is missing many features/columns focused around the community: lists of events/movies, reviews of

shows/plays (at a ratio of about 1 vs. 5), Star Ledger scanner (guide to broadcast and cable TV), Star Ledger ticket, longer comics, "I am NJ" and other weekly columns (including health/home improvement, and gardening).

The state's largest daily newspaper, *The Star-Ledger*, amidst significant losses to circulation and staffing has been forced rethink the role held in earlier ecosystems. Our content analysis comparison between August of 2009 and 2012 points to a streamlining of a paper in favor of state-level public-policy news with losses to civic-cultural and county coverage. Cuts to the civic-cultural portions of the paper signal a loss in the community's connection with the paper and point the continued need for the paper to embed itself more closely with its community of readers.

Declines in Shared Space

Another critical change to the ecosystem of New Jersey news is the continued decline in shared space for news consumption, distribution, and circulation resulting from increased news fragmentation online. Traditional news formats (the paper, radio, network television newscast) have historically facilitated a shared space for news. This does not mean to imply that there was ever a true centralized news hub for the state (as we've seen, the state's news system is built on a fragmented geography). It does imply that the current ecosystem supports fewer shared spaces at a smaller scale than existed in previous news ecosystems (such as those based on broadcast media).

A public policy poll conducted by Monmouth University points to the changing state of the New Jersey news ecosystem. As Patrick Murray notes, "the media environment is shifting rapidly. Less than a decade ago, the internet was a secondary or niche source for news about New Jersey public affairs." In 2012, the internet has become one of the primary sources of news – and an even more significant source given the lack of public affairs reporting on most television news. When asked what type of media they use to get most of their information on public affairs, NJ citizens responded: for 2012, 34% TV, 28% Internet, 27% Newspapers and 6% Radio; for 2009, 41% TV, 28% Newspapers and 19% Internet; for 2005, 48% Newspaper, 31% TV, and 6% Internet. Furthermore, the internet is on track to "displace both newspapers and television in importance in the next couple of years" (Murray, 2012).

The shift from broadcast media to interactive networks changes ways that citizen consumers engage with news sources. As news moves online, the system also allows for increased customization enabling the construction of individualized contexts for news consumption. While customization offers a number of advantages, such as an increased potential for diverse voices and news producers, it also dismantles spaces of shared news consumption.

Another change related to greater interactivity with news sources is that news seekers are more information-driven, rather than institution-driven; in other words, they are more engaged with the information that they find and care relatively less about the source of that information. As historian Ellen Gruber Garvey notes, the process of viewing the press as a collection of

"detachable, extractable, movable, reclassifiable information" traces back to the clipping bureau (2012, p. 242). In the digital era, this reconception of information as detachable and movable is augmented as articles are sortable by "facts" culled according to "key-words" through searchable databases.

As new forms of interaction emerge through the convergence of news online, news producers need to adjust the emphasis in their role as news providers from one of content creator to one of content curator and most importantly content circulator. This is not to imply that quality content is not important (see the previous discussion about the importance of the constancy of news reporting); however, it does imply that within an ecosystem driven by digital fragmentation quality content needs to be circulated in order to be discussed, and shared. To combat the decline in outlets for news sharing, news outlets are tasked with re-envisioning their role in ways that facilitate, rather than hinder or block the circulation of news. One way to build shared space is through improved systems of curation between news outlets. Above all, success in the new ecosystem depends on the ability of news outlets to increase the sharing and discussion of news, which is what gives the news its value.

A New Model

One way for news outlets to begin re-envisioning their role is by starting to imagine and understand what we call, following Goodman and Chen, "the layered model" of the news. A layered model offers a modular and unbundled conceptual framework of the flow of information through networks, rather than building divisions between news mediums. These layers are identified in terms of function: connection, curation and creation, which are all undergirded by infrastructure (Goodman and Chen, 2010). Connection engages content across platforms; curation identifies content and applications of value and supports broad public access; and creation makes the content and applications that do not receive sufficient support from the market (Goodman and Chen, 2010). This new model is better situated to supporting news outlets within a news ecosystem composed of networks, rather than a broadcast system.

The Current New Jersey News Ecosystem

This section provides an overview of news outlets throughout the state in order to track the legacy journalistic infrastructure that remains and the new institutions and networks that are emerging. This new ecosystem demands that news practitioners and researchers rethink the traditional categorization of news by type or format (print, radio, etc). In turn, the appendix at the end of this report organizes news sources by geographical county rather than medium/news type in order to point to the uneven distribution of news sources throughout the state. As Debbie Galant, director of the New Jersey News Commons, asserts the "state's local news assets are not evenly distributed." Areas such as Maplewood and Hoboken have a "tremendous duplication," while other areas (particularly in the southern half of the state) remain completely unserved" (Dorbian, 2012). The categorization of New Jersey news outlets by the county they cover hopes to bring greater attention to the uneven geographical distribution of the state's news sources.

Overall the tracking of existing news outlets throughout the state points to a void in news coverage-- we have seen a decline traditional news forms (particularly daily newspapers) and what is going away has yet to be replaced by the journalism provided by new ventures. This section also points to areas of increased cooperation and synergy emerging in the state's system of news reporting. In fact, the passion and efforts of many throughout the state make New Jersey a dynamic laboratory for studying strategies to combat a fragmented ecosystem.

Rethinking Format Divisions

Most overviews of news ecosystems continue to be divided into categories based on media type (for instance: paper, radio, TV, digital, etc). These divisions have been used for over half a century as each news medium maintained a clear separation. This separation was facilitated through the spatial separation between each outlet. For instance, viewers would gather in front of the television in the evening, while the daily paper delivery was passed around the kitchen table in the morning. While there were shared concerns and stories, and while news stories did indeed diffuse from medium to medium, there was relatively little interaction in the space between each news institution. Each separate format provided a different form of news (video vs. print) and there was enough difference and between each news type for it to make sense to think of them separately.

The separate spaces (newspaper, radio, and television stations) of traditional news forms converge on the web as traditional outlets also support web pages and social media accounts. As the online format enables video, audio and print, the convergence of outlets online creates much greater interaction between news formats, and it also means that the boundaries between each separate medium have become quite tenuous. For instance, radio and television news

may be streamed online and print news also appears online. In fact, online sites connected to traditional newspapers "overwhelmingly lead the state's visitor traffic" online. For instance, the Star-Ledger's site, NJ.com, according to comScore "averaged nearly 4.5 million visitors from April to September of 2012" (Dorbian, 2012).

Another way to see the level of convergence within today's ecosystem may be shown in the ways that news is consumed. An increasing number of viewers watched the 2012 presidential election coverage on television with their electronic devices in hand. Real-time tweeting and retweeting, in turn, are discussed on the live television newscast. Young Soo Yang, the senior Web editor for *NJ Today,* says that the site is experimenting with Twitter parties, which are basically chats "to drive awareness around shows and special programs" (Dorbian, 2012). In another instance, someone reading a printed news source may use an internet search to learn more about a story of interest. Consequently, a study of the system for news based on a model of separate news types or forms fails to accurately capture dynamics of the current ecosystem.

Overview by Format

Much of this research remains to be done. At this point, however, we demonstrate our inability to completely follow our own advice as we now turn toward a brief overview of New Jersey media by format. This information *does* provide a valuable comparison to previous ecosystem work and is useful in related research on media public policy, which often makes its rules and regulations based on medium categories.

Daily Newspapers

Overall, circulation, resources, and production of daily newspapers continue to diminish throughout the state. The extent of the decline of the daily papers continues to leave a void in news coverage for the state as these daily papers (even in diminished form) continue be *the* major contributor in covering the news for their communities. In particular, the county coverage cut by the Star-Ledger following the extensive staff buy-outs of 2009 was a great loss for those counties and has still not been adequately filled by other outlets.

Decades of daily paper delivery have generated high levels of awareness and remain "go to" sites for many seeking New Jersey news. The reputation and continued legacy of the daily newspapers can be seen as their online counterparts hold the highest unique site visitor rates for the state with 4.5 million for NJ.com and 219,500 for MyCentralNJ.com (Gannett's Asbury Park Press/Courier News/Home News Tribune) for April to September of 2012.

Within the broader ecosystem, the daily papers' decline has not yet stabilized as papers continue to lose circulation numbers and consequent staffing cuts. In July 2011, Gannett, one of the largest owners of daily papers throughout the state cut their staff in half for three major papers, *The Daily Record*, *The Courier News*, and *The Home News Tribune*. In process of drafting this report in mid-January 2013, NJSPJ has reported that *The South Jersey Times* cut

11 reporters and The Star-Ledger, the largest daily paper in the state, had an additional 34 cuts (including 18 in the newsroom).

Weekly-Quarterly Print Sources

Weekly, twice-weekly, monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly print publications appear to be more sustainable in the new ecosystem then their daily counterparts.   Weekly community papers maintain a loyal readership and a clear sense of community, which distinguishes them from many of the daily papers. Weekly papers function as one of the only remaining news sources for many towns throughout the state. However, these community papers are only published once-per-week and often follow "family-standards" for news reporting. These papers also continue to be locked into legacy work practices. Consequently, these weekly papers often fail to provide adequate news sources for the entire community... nor should they be expected to as they were never designed to function as solo acts.

NJ Public Media (Radio)

New York Public Radio, which comprises WNYC, WQXR, and The Jerome L. Greene Performance Space, created New Jersey Public Radio (NJPR) in 2011 when it purchased four former NJN stations from the state, extending NYPR's reach from 60 percent to approximately 72 percent of the state's population. Montclair State will serve as headquarters for New Jersey Public Radio (NJPR) News, which will produce content for NJPR and WNYC, as well as for other radio and online outlets throughout the state. Montclair State will provide broadcast studio space and production facilities, and will collaborate with NJPR News to provide student internship opportunities and support for expanding New Jersey-centric news and public affairs programming.

"When New York Public Radio launched NJPR last year, we vowed to extend the reach of our already significant news coverage of New Jersey," said NYPR President and CEO Laura Walker in a 2011 press release. "We are delighted to expand our presence in the state through this exciting partnership with Montclair State University. The NJPR News bureau will better equip us to produce the kind of in-depth news and public affairs journalism WNYC is already known for among New Jerseyans." (Press Release, 2011).

NJ Public Media (TV)

NJTV is the state's new public television network, which operates under an agreement with the state of New Jersey by Public Media NJ Inc., a nonprofit affiliate of WNET. NJTV hosts a television news program, NJ Today, which reaches the entire state and has its own microsite in addition to the parent website that supports the TV platform. NJTV was recently able to build a television studio in the statehouse that has started operating at the end of January 2013.

When the previous New Jersey public media network NJN was disbanded, Philadelphia-based WHYY bought five public radio stations from New Jersey and has been making increased efforts to expand their service to New Jersey residents. WHYY also supports an online network of news, NewsWorks, which added a page on New Jersey to its online home in March of 2012. The site includes a "speak easy" with links and interactive stories, health and science, arts and culture (including links to art blogs), blogs, and news by region including New Jersey, Delaware, and NW Philadelphia. The NewsWorks New Jersey page features content from four online New Jersey start-ups: NJ Spotlight, Jersey Bites (food writers), Jerseyarts.com, and New Jersey Arts News.

Commercial Radio

The Millennium Radio Group owned by Townsend Media serves as the only source of New Jersey commercial radio news. NJ1015.com, "Proud to be New Jersey," is ranked the third-highest source for online news in New Jersey. Radio continues to hold a captive audience of commuters and this segment of the news ecosystem has been augmented and extended, rather than cannibalized, by online news convergence. The Townsend Media group has also been active in incorporating social media and new technology as part of their news distribution. As this research took place in the wake of Sandy, radio news saw an enormous spike in audience and attention in the wake of power and cable outages.

Online NJ News: Fertile ground for the hyperlocal

Declines in traditional news sources and the state's fragmented landscape make NJ well suited for hyperlocal online news coverage. A number of independent hyperlocals, such as morrisbeats and RedBankGreen, started by former daily newspaper reporters, are gaining audiences and sustainability. New entrants in the digital space also include sites like NJ Spotlight, which is a very successful online news source and yet would not be considered a "hyperlocal." In fact, New Jersey boasts one of the highest numbers of local news websites throughout the country according to George White, executive director of the NJ Press Association (Dorbian, 2012). The high number of hyperlocals reflects a deluge of Patch sites (approximately 89 in total) throughout the state since 2008.   However, **the high volume of hyperlocal sites has not translated to greater news coverage for the state as many directly compete in geographical clusters leaving other areas of the state without coverage.**

A news gap alone is not enough to sustain an online news site. What is most critical to success of online news sites is a receptive and supportive community. Hyperlocal sites are more commonly found and supported within wealthier urban areas of the state or areas that sustain robust public infrastructure, a strong tax base, successful public schools, and a bare minimum of citizens with the time and energy to report the news either for free or for very little money -- at least initially.

One of the greatest challenges for online news sources is how to sustain site traffic. Without a big story to generate traffic, these sites too often remain out of sight and hence out of mind. Traditional mediums for news (print, radio and TV) do not face this challenge to the same extent as there is less news choice and, in some cases, the news source is delivered directly to the doorstep. Online-only outlets, in turn, gain leverage in sharing and extending their content through other formats (print, radio, television). Partnerships between hyperlocals and traditional media formats (for instance, a hyperlocal and the weekly community paper) may help to increase resources, content quality, and circulation for both outlets. Editors of local websites discussed strategies for driving sales with mixed success including flyers at community events, email newsletters, and social media updates. As social media sites function as hubs of distribution and circulation for many online (Facebook, twitter, and/or Google newsfeeds) integration of news into these distribution networks is an increasingly important. The successful use of social media points to the benefits of increased circulation within a fragmented online news ecosystem.

As many interviews were conducted in the wake of Sandy, the opportunity arose to see the critical role of social media and hyperlocals within the breaking news landscape. As they are distributed online, in contrast to the weekly local newspaper, hyperlocals hold the opportunity to break the news as it is happening on the ground. As they operate on the ground, hyperlocal outlets knew the community and were able to quickly know where and who to go to in order to adequately and quickly cover key stories around the storm. While hyperlocals do not have the resources to write forty stories a day, they can give an instant update that builds an appetite for a later story. Breaking on the scene coverage became critical during Sandy-- the power is out here, a tree down there, police reports on gas stations, and so forth.   In fact, there is a great deal of pressure on hyperlocals to continually update and publish new stories in order to drive/sustain traffic to their sites.

Another challenge, raised in interviews with hyperlocal journalists was the lack of resources to recruit journalists like traditional papers. Several outlets mentioned losing young talent to larger outlets. While many of these outlets are led by experienced newsmakers, **a great deal of time and resources are devoted to training and managing staff to meet the demands of online journalism. Increasing efforts are being made to offer more collaborative training for these outlets.**

Many hyperlocals rely on an available pool of stringers/freelancers. This system leads to a greater reliance on single-source stories compared to traditional journalism. At the same time, hyperlocals provide a greater opportunity for crowdsourcing. If a point of view is missing from a story, it may be added in the comments. Of course, unfiltered comments may also create loss of control or, as one hyperlocal journalist joked with me, a "comments crisis."

A Closer Look: NJ Spotlight, The Alternative Press (TAP), and Jersey Shore Hurricane News (JSHN)

The section offers a more nuanced understanding of the emerging forms of New Jersey journalism through a focus on two success stories within the online landscape: NJ Spotlight and The Alternative Press (TAP). These two case studies offer a closer examination of strategies used by each outlet to adapt within a shifting New Jersey ecosystem. Above all, both sites point to the need for strong community connections and support in order for online news start-ups to succeed.

NJ Spotlight

John Mooney succinctly describes the NJSpotlight.com's unique approach as the site focuses on the "issues of the day as opposed to news of the day" (Kirchner, 2010). State coverage of issue beats for education, environment and healthcare were cut from Newark's *Star-Ledger* in July of 2009 (CFNJ, 2011). NJ Spotlight launched in May of 2010 to fill-in these gaps. The site's focus initially was to contextualize the state house dealings around issues on education, energy, and environment (Kirchner, 2010). It has since expanded to cover the budget, healthcare, opinions, and other issues. As Tom Johnson asserted "people want the issues covered, and they're just not getting covered to the degree that they were in the past" (Kirchner, 2010). Spotlight has continued to fill a critical niche in the New Jersey news ecosystem for issue-focused state/statehouse news, and its reach is beginning to expand.

The journalism experience and talent of the NJ Spotlight's team has been central to its continuing success through their reporting experience, institutional knowledge, credibility, political connections, and calculated experimentation. The credentials of the initial founders (McNichol, Mooney and Johnson) made possible not only the initial garnering of capital and press, but also a form of in-depth and contextualized beat reporting missing from other outlets. NJ Spotlight picks up stories that others miss filling in the context, detail and institutional knowledge gleaned from years of experience. Mooney emphasizes that "We can do this because we're experienced, and we have the institutional memory. We can do the story because we remember what happened ten years ago. I don't think this model works so well if you're dumping in people who are brand new" (Kirchner, 2010). As resources for journalism diminish, this form of institutional knowledge gains greater value.

In its current form, the site continues as a growing niche for issue-focused public policy news--what American Journalism Review has described as "the spinach covered by experienced journalists." The site also remains "nonpartisan, independent, policy-centered and community-minded." The site layout does include images or interactivity beyond comments. The "opinions" section does offer space for monitored dialogue extending the conversation surrounding key stories. In many ways, the site's content remains true to its roots as the vision of beat-focused print journalists.

NJSpotlight began with the support of a small, but influential and critical audience including elected officials, school board members, government administrators and interest groups (Kirchner, 2010). The site has sustained a steady increase in traffic through 12,000 unique

monthly visitors (June 2010) to 37,000 one year later (June 2011) (CFNJ, 2011) and a report from Sept 2012 describes a typical month as 80,000 unique visitors (Scott, 2012). After two years of operation the site has stabilized and is beginning its' efforts to grow and diversify its audience.

One effort to increase the site's reach has been around "social media, community partnerships, and increased digital initiatives" lead by a new hire in Dec. 2012, Paula Saha, director of community engagement and social media (Press Release, Jan 2013). Within the new ecosystem, community engagement and social media are rising to the top as critical areas for sustaining news circulation and sharing. Spotlight's investment in this area is a testament to their forward thinking. By late January of 2013, the site has already begun expanding their social media reach with 4,137 Twitter, and 1,504 followers on Facebook in comparison Sept of 2012 had 2,849 Twitter, and 1,184 followers on Facebook (Scott, 2012). These efforts at community outreach and social media are a key to expanding the site's viewership.

NJ Spotlight also points to the critical role of foundations in offering support for journalism and civic engagement during this period of transition. Community Foundation of New Jersey CEO Hans Dekker, described how "our board was very passionate about this work. They realized that if we don't fill this void, no one will" (CFNJ, 2011). The site began with 10,000 dollars from the Community Foundation of New Jersey used to create a business plan, which lead to a Community Information Challenge grant from the Knight Foundation for $350,000 (Scott, 2012). While two-thirds of the site's 2012 annual budget ($770,000) came from foundational grants (Scott, 2012), the site is making great strides generating additional revenue sources including community roundtables and content sharing agreements with media partners.

NJ Spotlight has been able to attract additional financial backing from sponsors/investors for the coverage of particular issues or beats (health, education, energy), rather than support for the site's overall quality coverage. As Dekker notes "foundations are coming to [the decision to support journalism] through the lens of caring about certain issues, not caring about the media" (Scott, 2012). For instance, Spotlight's health beat gained funding in 2013 by "The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, dedicated to improving health and healthcare for Americans, granted NJ Spotlight a two-year, $260,000 grant that includes supporting in-depth coverage of health and healthcare issues in New Jersey." This issue-specific support has enabled Spotlight to hire a fulltime health beat writer, Andrew Kitchenman (Press Release, 2013). By foregrounding their ability to cover the issues or beats that matter most to particular foundations, NJ Spotlight is able to fulfill critical gap in coverage for these issues. However, not all issues are able to attract financial backing and so "less profitable" issues may not receive coverage.

Another way that Spotlight is able to receive financial backing centered on issues (vs. their role as a media outlet) is through funding received at community roundtable events organized around specific issues such as education and energy. The roundtables consist of well-known panelists representing different sides of the issues (Scott, 2012). These events are free and public and include targeted invitations to "influential stakeholders, like legislators, corporate leaders, and policy wonks" (Scott, 2012). The event's revenue is generated through sponsors

whose mission fits with the issue or topic under discussion such as "Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey, NJ Educators for Reform, and Verizon." At the same time, these workshops allow NJ Spotlight to become more immersed within the community reflecting its "community-minded" orientation and increasing awareness of the site among those interested in these key issues.

Another way that Spotlight generates revenue is through content sharing agreements with WNYC, WHYY, NJTV, and Philly.com (the website for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*). These partnerships are critical for the site as they increase the visibility of quality of the site's stories and increase the reach of each story. Spotlight's stories will not be seen or heard (beyond a small critical mass) if they are not shared through other news outlets with larger reaches. Spotlight must continue to negotiate and expand these relationships with other news outlets to expand itself as a key source statewide for issue-driven news – and to expand the reach of stories on the site. In turn, these partnerships not only provide critical revenue, but connect back to NJSpotlight.com increasing the site's traffic.

The Alternative Press

In October 2008 Mike Shapiro and his wife, Lauryn, launched The Alternative Press (TAP) in the towns of Summit, New Providence, and Berkeley Heights with the motto "your Neighborhood News Online." Mike Shapiro's understanding of finance and law, as a former litigation attorney, along with his strong relationship within the community have allowed TAP to form an impressive independent news network. TAP's success depends on the maintenance of close ties with the local community, local ownership and revenue gains through licensing, business-savvy leadership, and an intangible passion and connection with its communities.

Local ownership is sustained and expanded within the TAP network through its unique licensing model. Licenses allow the site to remain locally-run and community centered, while offering shared collective resources. The TAP licensee is offered their own site, e-mail accounts and full hosting services. Licensees are also provided media liability insurance coverage; sales and editorial training; marketing templates and support in addition to legal documents, such as contracts. In addition to a licensing fee, sites share 10% of their advertising revenue. A further 20% commission comes when sites are able to sell an ad onto other sites (McIlwain, 2013). TAP began selling licenses by town in January of 2012. The metrics of TAP's first 11 licenses followed "the same growth curve as the first three, corporate-owned markets" (McIlwain, 2013).

As of January of 2013, the network encompasses 20 towns/sites clustered in northern New Jersey including Sussex, Union, and Essex counties. TAP continues to expand the sale of its platform to journalists and non-profits elsewhere in the state. TAP's four main incentives for 2012-2013 include redesigning its' sites, expanding licensing beyond New Jersey, introducing video, and introducing deals on TAP. In pitches to gain capital for further license expansions, TAP identifies three markers of their success: 1.) a consumer trend toward seeking both online and "hyper-local" content to manage daily life, 2.) online ad market is 15 Billion and advertisers

continue to seek more targeted, local markets, 3.) a proven and attractive business model in 10 markets capable of generating 40%+ operating margins" (McIlwain, 2013).

The "Anti-Patch" Model

The launch of TAP may be compared to the launch of NJ Patch sites, owned and funded by AOL, which began in many of the same towns within five months of TAP. In contrast to the centralized ownership of AOL's Patch, TAP built "a network of online community destinations that is for local and by locals." Patch's system involves hiring an editor for a town supplemented with freelance. In contrast, TAP model beings with someone who wants to start their own site "they've lived in that town for a long time and they own it, so they're not going anywhere" (Depp, 2012). This cuts down on turnover that can be damaging to sustaining relationships central to the success of a hyperlocal.

The site is also able to generate greater loyalty in picking up advertisers. Shapiro asserts that "local news and advertising is at its best when individuals in each market combine their knowledge of local places and local players with an inherent desire to see their communities succeed." Similar to Patch, most of the daily community news is produced by stringers or freelancers. Columnists are paid by the number of unique visitors they attract. TAP has much lower visitor-acquisition costs ranging from about 28 cents for TAP to the Patch's $1.39 (Grubisich, 2011). In 2011, the site boasted a network of over 200 freelancers (Grubisich, 2011) and an average-sized town had about 50,000 unique visitors annually.

Local market knowledge is at the heart of Shapiro's mission as he "lives to serve communities and bring them together in socially and economically productive ways." This intangible personal passion trickles down the organization (McIlwain, 2013). In addition, Shapiro notes that "The scalability both on the advertising and content sides is critically important, but so is the consistency from site to site," he said. "You come to one Patch site and it's really well done and you come to the town right next to it and it's awful" (Depp, 2012).

The narrow, local focus of the hyperlocal makes it challenging for these sites to offer cover diverse neighboring communities. This can be seen in the initial struggle by *The Alternative Press* to answer the question: How do we have an overarching site for *both* ten wealthy towns and Paterson, a far more economically distressed big city? Which town's big story gets featured on the homepage? In solution to this, over time the site's design has been optimized for greater customization – allowing each user to tailor the site to get the news for their community.

In 2010, the Citizens Campaign through a $57,000 grant from the Taub Foundation was able to launch two TAP franchises in New Brunswick and Paterson. The New Brunswick site, New Brunswick Press, failed to take off; however, Paterson Press under the editorial direction of former Star Ledger journalist, Joe Malinconico, started with a bang winning two New Jersey Society of Professional Journalists awards within eight months of launching (Temkal, 2011). These awards garnered the attention of many within the journalism community and heightened

awareness of the site. However, Malinconico points to the success of the site as its traditional, aggressive reporting with "no smoke and mirrors, just hard work" (Temkar, 2011).

The state of news coverage within in Paterson reveals the gaps in coverage that continue to plague large areas of the state. As the third-largest city in New Jersey, Paterson received most of its coverage from the *Bergen Record* as the *Star Ledger*, who was forced to cut county coverage of Passaic county over five years ago. Through the efforts of the Citizen's Campaign, the entry of the Paterson Press and Malinconico's leadership has allowed for a greater depth of reporting in the city. However, problems, difficulties, and complications remain. The PatersonPress, even with its awards and highly-regarded journalism, has been unable to sustain itself on the TAP site and recently launched a partnership with the Bergen Record in an effort to generate more revenue to sustain its operations. The difficulties of the site again reveal the importance of experienced journalists (who can train others) as well as the necessity of Foundation support in helping to launch sites in areas without coverage.

Jersey Shore Hurricane News (JSHN)

Jersey Shore Hurricane News (JSHN) has succeeded as a breaking news source that understands and recognizes the limitations of its social media format, while leveraging the format's advantages. Auciello describes the operation of his Facebook site as, "people report what is happening around them, and I serve as the filter/curator" (Muck Rack). JSHN offers contributors access to local, real-time, trustworthy information easily accessed through phones during (and after) a crisis for those both seeking help and seeking to help.

The JSHN Facebook page was founded by South Seaside Park resident, Justin Auciello, on August 23, 2011 in the days before Irene. JSHN had over 60,000 users prior to Sandy so that there was already a base "to report on Sandy before, during and after." As the site had been operating for over a year prior to Sandy, Auciello not only had a critical mass of contributors, but also had developed the trust of "hundreds of official sources" that enabled him to "fact-check quickly" during a state of crisis. The site was selected as one of just a handful of media properties handpicked for Governor Christie's "storm preparedness" Twitter list of credible storm resources (Galant). In addition, JSHN was one of three key twitter streams used by Debbie Galant as part of the N.J. News Commons #NJSandy event utilizing ScribbleLive to facilitate statewide coverage in October 2012. Prior to #NJSandy event, JSHN had 66,000 likes that grew to 120,000 by the end of the weekend. This points to the advantage of social media to enable quick and easy sharing between news platforms.

A main advantage of JSHN as a social media platform is that the site operates as a social outlet in addition to a news outlet. As a social resource, the site was able to "facilitate rescues, find people gas, and direct people to appropriate resources." Furthermore, social media has become one of the most accessible forms of news and information during power loss. Auciello notes that, "so long as your phone is charged, social media can help you stay connected when nothing else can." The site has continued to grow in the wake of Sandy through these

community ties and the trust that it has built as a reliable resource; for instance, as of May 2013, it maintains over 200,000 likes. David Hansen, chief of the Seaside Park Volunteer Fire Department, notes how the page, "continues to bring our community closer even though so many of our residents have been scattered due to the storms impact."

JSHN takes advantage of the crowdsourcing ability of social media to pass along on-the-ground information. The site also maintains a strong respect and connection with contributors generating a spirit of "we are in this together" that is less visible in other news outlets. Auciello describes how he sees "journalism as an opportunity to not just inform people with accurate and context-rich reporting, but also as a mechanism to comfort people and keep them safe, especially during an emergency."

At the same time, Auciello, recognizes that citizens often lack the training to set the context for facts, offer backstories, and to differentiate hearsay from their own observations; although, he is quick to note how this can improve with training. In recognition of these limitations, the site "employs strict journalistic standards in its review and reporting of reader tips. JSHN will not post any news tips unless there is confirmation from two independent reliable sources." The site holds strict standards for ethics as well as for fact checking including a service called Rumor Control (Duros). In turn, JSHN offers and unmatched platform in the local community for reliable "real-time news" including "breaking news, traffic and weather" and other community needs such as missing persons and lost pets.

The site's Facebook platform offers several advantages for maintaining its veracity. Auciello asserts that it is "extremely rare to see an utter false report. I think because Facebook is 'public' — in the sense that people are generally identified by their real names — they are very weary. In addition, in the event that a report is false, it would get exposed quickly by someone else" (Muck Rack). Facebook functionality also allows the site's administrator to verify reports through police scanners, phone calls, and the community network. As Auciello describes, "I have over 200,000 stringers." Additionally, Facebook's format differentiates between comments from the site and from contributors. In turn, followers may easily distinguish between the more official posts and breaking news reports.

Since JSHN is only on social media, there is no monetary reward. Auciello notes that attempts at selling t-shirts, hoodies, have yielded poor sales, but donations are doing better. What JSHN has not garnered in monetary rewards, it is beginning to garner in public accolades. In April 2013, Justin Auciello was honored at the White House as a Champion of Change for his work during Hurricane Sandy. Furthermore, the site has a passionate following and continues to function as a critical community resource.

Mapping the New Jersey Media Ecosystem

For the Interactive Map of the New Jersey media ecosystem, please see:

http://communitymediadatabase.org/node/412

For an incomplete, but continually updated, online list of New Jersey media outlets, please see:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0Asn0VK60RLLBdGJ4QWkzNFVvdnBTVkw3N mhLR3Fzb3c&usp=sharing

Understanding the News Audience

Goals

The goal of this section of the larger research is to identify how people find and consume news. This will focus on the demand side, and not on the questions of quality of the journalism media companies produce. The main purpose is to track the current landscape of news sources and also provide a snapshot of how technology has or has not changed consumption behavior in recent years. We hope that this overview will contribute to future New Jersey research-- a report that will specify the way that these general findings apply to the Garden State[2].

Key Findings

- Contrary to popular belief in many media circles, not all news consumption has migrated to Facebook and Twitter, or even online for that matter. Still, online news consumption continues to be the only source where audience has grown.
- Overall, most Americans still get their news from their local TV news broadcast. However, after years of seeming to be impervious to audience losses that racked newspapers and magazines, local TV has finally started to show some viewership weakness in 2012.
- People still turn to traditional brands for their news sources on any platform, especially on tablets.
- While there's been a lot of hand wringing around social media, the reality is that the platforms are additive to peoples' news consumption rather than a replacement.

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[2]   This report draws from research by:

- _____ Pew Research Center's "State of the Media" reports 2011-2013
- Federal Communications Commission's 2011, "The Information Needs of Communities,"
- Bonnier Corp. report about tablet magazines in 2011: "Research Reveals Tablets Radically Alter Magazine Expectations and Behaviors"
- BBC's results of a global study of 3,600 news consumers who own digital devices in Australia, Singapore, India, UAE, South Africa, Poland, Germany, France and the US
- Pew Research Center's 2011 study of tablet user behavior
- Pew Research Center's 2012 Trends in News Consumption: 1991-2012

Specific points of attribution for the numbers contained here are left out in the interest of readability.

- More people get their news through mobile devices like phones and tablets than ever before. But even heavy users have not completely abandoned print, and are in fact greater consumers of TV news overall.
- People have begun to abandon some news sources when consumers no longer feel served.

News Sources: What are the sources people turn to for news?

Summary

Television remains king, but online/digital continue to grow. Newspapers have begun to stop bleeding, with regional papers still a popular source for news. Magazine sales at the newsstands continue to erode, even among strong brands. Audio AM/FM, as all other traditional news outlets, lost audience overall and have begun to migrate more to websites and online delivery.

Television

Overall, television is still the way most Americans find their news. These brands include ABC, NBC, CBS, and Fox. For many years, people still turned to local TV for news. This was true even as they fled other traditional sources like newspapers. There was actually growth in news time segments at 4:30 AM and 7 PM. But the number of viewers at those times seems limited and may have already hit a ceiling. Even in election year 2012, cable TV news barely blipped up one percent across primetime viewership CNN (626,000), MSNBC (818,000), and Fox (1.9 million). There seems to be some question whether people considered shows like Jon Stewart's Daily Show as news, and how that was or was not accounted for, particularly among younger viewers.

Online/Digital

Of all the sources of news, online/digital was the only area of growth. In the 2013 State of the Media, they asked respondents where they got news "yesterday" before the survey. Fifty percent accessed their news online or digital (computer or devices), just a few percentages below TV.

Newspapers

For the first time in years, readership declines in newspapers slowed to stay flat with the year before. And there was actually modest growth among Sunday paper editions. People also still value their local and smaller regional newspapers.

Magazines

Newsstand sales dropped double digits even at big brands like the Economist (-17%), Time (-27%), and the New Yorker (-12%). The number of people who received magazines as part of circulation remained flat, determined largely by how many readers publishers "purchase."

Audio

Overall, people who "listened yesterday to" AM/FM or digitally has dropped to 30 percent in 2012 from nearly 50 percent in 1990. One bright spot was that people downloaded the NPR

mobile news app three million times last year. Still the number that downloaded a podcast "yesterday" was a mere four percent, although that may have to do more with different habits for on demand news.

News Paths

Summary

There seems to be some divergence in the news habits. People who consume news consume more and for longer with new digital devices and social media. Americans report 70 minutes of news consumption a day. That's broken down in 57 percent with traditional media (TV, radio, newspaper) in line with reports from 2000, and now they add 13 percent digital consumption. But an increasing number of Americans (17%) reported they had not consumed news the "day before" the survey, compared to 12 percent in 1998, and is highest (31%) among 18-24 year olds. News consumers said they abandoned outlets not because of quantity decline, but deterioration of quality.

Computer/Laptop

Most Americans still use their computers or laptops most often to access news. Over 80 percent of people who get news from computers/laptops say that's where they get most of their news. But evidence shows that as people start using new mobile devices, news consumption shifts to new devices. Sharing news via email has not changed since around 2010. Roughly 13 percent of those surveyed said they regularly gets news from email.

Mobile/Tablet

Over half of mobile phone (51%) and tablet owners (56%) use their devices to find and access news. But mobile users tend to be less loyal to one brand. Fifty-one percent of those surveyed reported going to six or more news sources for local news. Use of news apps have risen, roughly 11 percent of surveyed Americans report having a news app installed on their device. A very small percentage (1%) actually pay for mobile news apps. In spite of that, users of news apps spend much more time consuming news than on other platforms.

Still, most people look for news through the browsers installed on their devices. Another trend in tandem with mobile is their use as a "second screen." Over 80 percent of the people who own tablets report using them while they watch TV. Tablet users are more likely to pay for a news app, and are more loyal than mobile phone users. Fourteen percent of tablet users who said they read news weekly on their device would pay for a news app. Sixty-five percent rely on one to three news sources, with CNN, The New York Times, and Fox News most popular.

Brands

The top way people get to their news is through brands. Over a third of people surveyed on computers/laptops and almost 40 percent on tablets, go directly to news brand websites. Although newspapers have lost significant ground on their traditional media, news consumers go to their websites and apps. Twenty of 25 top visited news sites in 2012 belonged to legacy newspaper, cable, and network brands. Still, the top visited brand online was Yahoo, followed

by HuffingtonPost. After news brands, people most often use keywords in search engines to find news.

Referrals

A full 72 percent of Americans hear about most of their news through word of mouth from friends and family. Roughly 30 percent of those people follow up on what they hear to learn more about the news item.

Social Media

For the time being, the rumors that social media has significantly changed the way most Americans consume news are overwrought. Facebook and Twitter drive only a few percent of news consumption. Still, the number of users are growing. One interesting note is that people get their links mostly from friends and family, particularly on Facebook rather than news brands and journalists. The difference is much less pronounced on Twitter. People feel that the news they read about on Facebook would have been seen elsewhere. But Twitter users feel like they would not have seen the news they found otherwise.

News Consumer Demographics

Gender

Women are much more likely to follow up on news items shared via word of mouth or social media than men. Women are also more likely to pay for news. More men use Twitter.

Age

As a cohort, younger news consumers are more online, more mobile, and more social media savvy. Thirty-nine percent of Twitter users were 18-29 years old. The sweet spot for people most active news consumers is 25-34. In 2012, only a third of 18-29 year olds watched TV news "yesterday," down 15% since 2006.

Minorities

African-Americans and Hispanics are heavier users of social media, particularly Twitter, than whites. African-Americans and Hispanics are also more likely to use their mobile devices to access local news. Hispanics are almost two times more likely than whites to have an app for local news and information.

Income/Education

These indicators mostly move in tandem. Those with high school or less education are significantly less likely to look for news online. Among those who own mobile devices and tablets, those with higher income and with some or college completion are heavier consumers of local news and information. Twitter users are more highly educated.

Urban/Suburban/Rural

People who live in the suburbs or rural areas are more likely to pay for local news. This is mostly about whether or not they subscribe to the local paper.

Geography

West coasters are more social media savvy than the rest of the country, while Midwesterners are more likely to share news by word of mouth to friends and family. People on the west coast are also significantly more likely to follow up on news shared by friends and family on social media.

Politics

Democrats and Independents are more likely to share news on social media than their Republican counterparts. On the other hand, Republicans are more likely to share news by word of mouth to friends and family, and also more likely to follow up on news tips.

Where Opportunities Lie: Recommendations and Closing Thoughts

Overview

An increasingly fractured and fragmented landscape for New Jersey news limits the utility of broad recommendations; on the other hand, the diversity of the landscape also means that different approaches may be viewed as an opportunity depending on context.

The largest opportunity for New Jersey news is also often overlooked and underappreciated. It is the fact that people continue to care about their communities and the stories that impact them. Furthermore, the ability of good news to start conversations remains unchanged. Journalistic experience, training, and talent continue to positively impact the ability to find and share stories that make people want to talk. New Jersey also sustains a set of people dedicated to revising and improving the state's system for news.

Part of the Community

In conducting research on the ecosystem of New Jersey news being part of the community emerged as a critical aspect of sustainable success. Survival in the current news system, depends on not only covering the stories within a particular community (or issue), but also with an identification as part of the community. When the outlet covering the news comes from the voice of someone who is part of that community, their understanding and connection to the issue resonate and connect readership within a landscape often defined by news as bits of information.

Social Media as Extender and Amplifier

The tweets, Facebook status updates, headlines and pictures of instant news on social media are increasingly linked with longer articles and information on hyperlocal home pages. The sharing content on multiple sites drives traffic between the social media site and the home page. Some hyperlocals have found innovative ways to use social media and to integrate it within the platform of their home pages through an Rb gripper. Rb gripper (see redbankgreen.com) operates as a banner at the top of home page that links directly to the site's Facebook where there is an associated story/image. A site's Facebook page also links to its webpage and to its twitter feed. The clear connections and links between each site support one another and this amplifies the overall impact.

Building connections through social media also allows sites to extend their reach. Social media offers a different format and a different set of users than those who go directly to the website. Each platform connects with users in different ways and are used for different purposes. For instance, on Facebook, a story's emotional connection (affect) plays a critical role in what stories are shared.

Entrepreneurial Journalism

The neoliberal economic, within which the New Jersey news resides, demands greater flexibility and entrepreneurial tactics. References to "entrepreneurialism" are so common as to create antipathy to the very idea; yet, what entrepreneurialism demands is a clear vision and passion for taking risks. Forms of entrepreneurialism such as the collaborative efforts of the New Jersey News Commons may provide a more positive model or perspective on this tactic for success. Tiffany Shackelford, the executive director of the Association of Capitol Reporters and Editors, echoes this sentiment as she asserted that in order for reporters to thrive the landscape in 2010, they would "have to show some entrepreneurial spirit" (Lisheron, 2010). Mike Shapiro, points to the success of The Alternative Press network as it creates "incubators of entrepreneurship." As any closer look at the ecosystem for New Jersey news shows entrepreneurialism affords the ability to create opportunity from what at first appears as a dystopian landscape for news.

Collaborative Curation and Circulation

New Jersey's fragmented landscape, through necessity, is heralding an unprecedented level of collaboration between news producers. The vast majority of these collaborative efforts cluster among players in digital and public media. In particular, observers note that the state's "online digital media scene is defined by "synergy" (Dorbian). One of the largest of these collaborative efforts is the New Jersey News Commons who has received nonprofit support to "connect news organizations throughout the state."
 A critical area of potential for collaborative efforts is content sharing. Increased sharing of content allows information from a smaller outlet to reach a much larger audience and much larger outlets to fill-in gaps in their own coverage. Efforts at sharing and curating content are a vital way for news organizations to combat the increasing fragmentation of news in digital spaces.

NJ.com's homepage, the largest online outlet for news in the state, points to the advantage of collaborative content sharing as the site utilizes original active content from 12 area newspapers including *The Star-Ledger* and *The Times* of Trenton. Another space this can be see is on, WHYY online news hub, NewsWorks. NewsWorks NJ page features partnerships with several prominent independent hyperlocals: NJ Spotlight, Jersey Bites (food writers), Jerseyarts.com, and New Jersey Arts News. These partnerships are critical leveraging existing resources in a mutually beneficial way to both ensure content is shared more (increasing its value) as well as providing support to existing outlets enabling them to improve their story quantity and quality.

Curation of shared content also allows news outlets to broaden and deepen the conversation around critical stories, issues, or events. For instance, the NJ News Commons through hashtags such as #Sandy and #NJVote, helped stories on Sandy and complications with voting from the storm to reach a larger readership. Increasingly news outlets are curating links to related articles that increase perspectives and coverage of key stories.

Another major effort from the News Commons is Repost.us, a searchable newsfeed with sharable content. Repost.us reinvents the traditional newswire making syndication online "as easy as embedding a video." Repost.us technology automates syndicated content allowing for the content to maintain its "integrity, branding, attribution, and monetization" so that publishers may share content without being concerned that it will impact their search ranking.

Sharing content is critical with the loss in shared spaces for news. Online news is easily framed as bits of searchable information content, not as part of a specific news outlet. Curation of content through collaboration allows users to find out what information is available and get to know where to go to find it. Greater linking and sharing between sites ultimately increases the sharing of news allowing publics to be formed around key stories, events, or issues.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to go "beyond the headlines" about New Jersey news in order to

- first, chart how the resources available to newsrooms and journalistic enterprises in the Garden State continue to contract;
- second, document that the large news organizations in the state seem to have partially stabilized editorially (though not in terms of their business model) by focusing on the most iron of the iron core of news;
- third, describe some of the ways that another, often under-appreciated deficit in the New Jersey Media Ecosystem lies in the lack of shareability, distribution of, and conversation about the news of the day;
- fourth, that new resources and journalistic organizations are emerging;
- fifth, that these new resources and organizations remain highly unevenly distributed across the state, with certain areas rich in resources and others lacking, and that often these disparities mirror larger socio-economic disparities in the state
- and sixth and finally, that a key step in the consolidation of the New Jersey news ecosystem is the creation of a central hub responsible for sharing, summarizing, organizing, and distributing important news content.

In journalistic terms, we think that New Jersey's best days lie ahead of it, not behind it. There is no guarantee of better days, however. Only committed reporters, editors, organizers, university administrators, and grant-making foundations can, by working together, build the future of New Jersey news.

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Footnotes

Our initial plan was to conduct a content analysis of public affairs articles in The Star-Ledger for 2006, 2009 and 2012. However, extensive efforts to locate copy of the August 2006 Ledger (microfilm was needed in order to measure column length) remained unproductive. The unavailability of the 2006 paper on microfilm indicates the level of upheaval within the industry during this period for a variety of work processes including archiving and digitalization. A similar story emerged through interviews as the decades of archiving of Gannett's Home News Tribune was almost thrown away as the paper consolidated offices with the Courier News and moved to Somerville.