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**Notes From The Neighborhood: Who Is Writing What, When, Where,
How and Why**

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**Notes From The Neighborhood: Who Is Writing What, When, Where,
How and Why**

by

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Dedication

For my parents, Bina and Sunil, and my husband, Altaf, whose love, belief and support made this dream a reality.

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Notes From The Neighborhood: Who Is Writing What, When, Where, How and Why

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

Supervisor: Renita Coleman

Closure of many mainstream media outlets in towns across the United States have left many neighborhoods bereft of any news about their community. In a number of such areas, former journalists and/or community members have started online news sites that provide news and information to the community. As these outlets focus on a small geographic location, ranging from a neighborhood to a city, they are called hyperlocal news sites. The questions that logically arise then are how are these outlets reporting the news? Are they similar to their mainstream media counterparts or is their approach to news and information different? Most importantly, how do the people who start, or work at these sites, adopt the new all-in-one roles, where they are not only the reporter but also the ad sales manager and the publisher?

This dissertation, through a two-method approach, examines these questions and tries to provide answers. An online survey of the people who started and or work for hyperlocal sites, provides data that those working for hyperlocal media have the same demographics as those who work in American mainstream media. The survey results also showed that most of respondents follow the same journalistic behaviors and gatekeeping practices as their mainstream counterparts. From a role identity perspective, the study shows that in the absence of role-models, the journalists-turned-entrepreneurs are in the

process of carving a niche for themselves within journalism. In-depth interviews with the respondents reveal that while they identify themselves as journalists, their active role in revenue generation requires them to frame their work identity and present a holistic, positive image of their work.

What this study does is capture the dynamism of the journalists' changing roles. It explains why journalists who start news media sites are unable to monetize their product; they lack role models/exemplars/prototypes that can provide them a blueprint for modeling their behaviors in these new roles as well as the direction in which they take their sites. This research and more in the area can be seen as building blocks towards the creation of a roadmap for them.

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INTRODUCTION

Digitization of news media has led to a paradox in the journalism industry. On the one hand, with more people accessing news and information online, newspapers across the United States at the national, state and local levels continue to lose revenue and shrink their staff (Pew Research, 2014). On the other hand, digital technologies have provided people with publishing tools to start their own news sites with little to no seed money. Neighborhoods that were bereft of local coverage suddenly had news sites that catered solely to them and their issues. Called hyperlocal¹, these sites are valuable sources of information due to their focused coverage about a community in a specific geographic area (Sutter, 2009; Miller & Stone, 2009). Often started by community members, new media entrepreneurs or former journalists, these sites have garnered attention from industry observers and media scholars as sustainable business models on the Web (Shanahan, 2014; Sirkkunen, Cook & Pekkala, 2012; Kurpius, Metzgar & Rowley, 2010). Little research exists, however, on how journalism is practiced in hyperlocal news sites. Even less research exists on the roles and responsibilities of those who founded or work at these digital media startups. This dissertation addressed these limitations in hyperlocal news scholarship. The study examined the journalistic and gatekeeping practices of the people who work with content on these sites as well as how they adjust to their work roles in these new initiatives.

As the journalism field undergoes transformation, the future and form of local news is cause for concern (Thurman, Pascal & Bradshaw, 2012). Closure of newspapers across the United States has led to a situation where certain geographic communities do

¹ The ongoing debate on whether these sites should be called hyperlocal is explained in more detail in Chapter 2. An overview, however, can be found in this article by Hirschman (2012): <http://streetfightmag.com/2012/11/14/in-market-sizing-who-gets-counted-as-hyperlocal/>

not receive any information or coverage about their neighborhood. This would prove detrimental to American democracy or for that matter, any functioning democracy. Local news is important to Americans; in a survey conducted by Pew Research (2012), 72 percent of the respondents said they followed local news and information. The study also found that these local news consumers have strong ties with their neighbors and are more likely to think of improving their communities (Pew Research, 2012). This is not the only study that found a connection between local news use and community participation. Shaker (2014) studied whether the closure of local newspapers in Denver and Seattle were the main reason for a drop in the residents' civic engagement. His result was an emphatic yes; Shaker concluded that immediately after the removal of a local newspaper from a community, civic engagement decreases.

Therefore, for a democracy to function effectively and ensure active participation of its citizens, all communities must have access to information. While the term used here is "information", journalism is what has become almost synonymous with current-affairs information and is usually the source of knowledge a country's citizenry needs to act in an informed manner (Zelizer, 2007). Local newspapers may be on the decline but people are still interested in community news and information about events in the neighborhood (Seymour, 2013). In some instances, local newspapers publish scandals and exposes long before national media gains knowledge of them (Carr, 2014). Research scholar Shaker (2014) suggested future research into news use and civic engagement must examine the role of citizens in replacing the newspaper and the new opportunities new communication tools afford. Hyperlocal media are one such affordance of new communication tools and are perfect for examining what happens in the aftermath of community newspapers' closure as well as how that void is filled post their demise.

For the longest time, community weeklies were a “lifeline” (Garfrerick, 2010, p. 152) that not only kept residents of small towns and villages across America informed of local politics and news but also community gossip and social events taking place in the vicinity (Garfrerick, 2010). These print publications had a clear agenda of promoting their respective communities and earned the label of “boosterism publications”, (Garfrerick, 2010, p. 154). However, revenue pressures on the American news industry has taken a toll on local news coverage and as a result, several community weekly lifelines have been severed (Jurkowitz, 2014). Community weeklies are not the only casualty; several newspaper companies have also retreated from these areas by cutting back on local coverage and reallocating their resources to other news reporting (Jurkowitz, 2014).

This withdrawal of traditional media² from geographic areas struck a chord with me and led to my choosing this topic for not only my dissertation but also my research agenda moving forward. As someone who has about 12 years of experience in print and electronic legacy media, I was interested in examining what happens to news coverage in a specific area following the closure of a news media outlet. My questions focused around my replacements: Who they are, how they report the news and how they adapt to their roles of being information providers in neighborhoods and communities. Apart from contributing to hyperlocal media research -- for which there is a dire need as very little of it exists -- I was interested in learning about these journalism startups. I wanted to know who were the people who started these sites, the staffers and community contributors who reported and wrote stories for them and whether these startups were different from the gigantic, bureaucratic organizations I had worked for. Herein lies the assumption that

² In this dissertation, traditional and or legacy media will be used interchangeably and have been conceptualized as put forth by Ostertag and Tuchman (2012): “Entrenched, dominant, mainstream and largely corporate, often commercialized (i.e., ‘traditional’) media institutions,” (p. 926).

hyperlocal news sites would be different from traditional media organizations and the main reason for this is how these sites came into existence and the digital platform on which these sites established their presence.

These niche digital startups' origins lie in community residents' desire to get more local information and the low cost publishing technology that makes it possible. In terms of scale and scope, hyperlocal sites are fairly focused on a small geographic area or neighborhood, and in some cases, report on one specific issue or subject within that defined land boundary. A regular community weekly would report on all the relevant news and information within that area rather than focus on one topic or issue. Hyperlocal sites can also be considered as petri dishes for new forms of reporting and editorial practices. For instance, many of them rely on voluntary – often unpaid—labor for content contribution and cover issues that people are familiar with, unlike traditional news sites that tend to have paid journalists on their rolls and provide comprehensive coverage (Schaffer, 2007). Some other hyperlocal sites start and continue as one-person projects unlike traditional media organizations that usually have a fully staffed newsroom. Almost all of them promote community participation and a two-way information flow (Anderson, 2007). As sites that grow organically and allow for a democratic process of information production, publication and consumption, hyperlocals are almost utopian ideals of their mainstream news counterparts. Unfortunately, the sites are yet to find a firm footing.

The excitement surrounding hyperlocal sites dissipates when media experts and scholars start talking business. These startups have a high closure rate, as they are yet to find a way of generating revenue. The most prolific collapse was that of AOL Inc.'s hyperlocal network, Patch in 2013 (Shu, 2013). While Patch has not shut down completely, it was sold by AOL Inc. to an investment company following its failure to generate any revenue (Bercovici, 2014). A site that was an early rider on the hyperlocal

bandwagon, Everyblock was not so lucky. Owner NBC News ceased all operations on the site in 2013 after it failed to turn a profit (Sonderman, 2013). Other hyperlocal sites suffer from the same woes; many are yet to show signs of making money or provide a blueprint for a sustainable business model (Schaffer, 2007; Metzgar, Kurpius & Rowley, 2011). The sites also have received some criticism for their content. Skeptics claim the focus on pictures of pets and Little League results instead of news about the local council or important social issues is not helpful in increasing community engagement (Edmonds, 2007). Clearly, more work needs to be done to better understand the phenomenon of these hyperlocal media; some of the issues that need immediate attention-- which this study provides-- include better understanding of the roles and motivations of news workers and connections to citizens and community (Metzgar et al., 2011).

DISSERTATION FOCUS

As a first step in that direction, this study began by surveying the hyperlocal news sites currently functioning across the United States to develop a broad picture of the people working at these sites, the areas the sites cover, and the journalistic behaviors and gatekeeping practices these media startups follow. Along with this broad picture, the project focused more narrowly on the process through which people who work in these hyperlocal media adapt to their new roles as either startup entrepreneurs or reporters working for media startups. To study these questions, the dissertation comprised a two-part mixed methods study; a web survey to capture the broad view, while in-depth interviews that focused more intensely on hyperlocal founders and employees' new role formation and adaptation.

Hyperlocal media make for an interesting subject of study. Usually started by former journalistic professionals or individuals with no prior journalistic experience, these sites can have a staff of one to five or ten full-time employees. Demarcations between producers and users as well as the editorial and business sides are blurred in these small startups where fewer personnel must take on greater responsibilities. To get an overall picture of the individuals who started or work in hyperlocal media that constitutes the first and online survey part of the dissertation, the theoretical framework was drawn from the Hierarchy of Influences model put forth by Shoemaker and Reese (2013).

The Hierarchy of Influences model organizes effects on the construction of news content in five levels, arranged in a hierarchical manner; from the immediate to the broader impacts on news content. While the authors represent the model in concentric circles (Shoemaker & Reese, 2013, p. 9), it might be simpler to think of these levels in terms of an inverted pyramid divided into five parts with the news content just below the tip. The tip of the pyramid is the first level that examines the journalist and how his or her personal characteristics affect news content. Media routines are placed at the second level or part that examines the daily processes by which journalists gather and report the news. The third level comprises organization and helps researchers analyze how the policies and structure of the media entity affect news content. The fourth level is the social-institution level that analyzes the forces influencing news content based on media organizations' relationships and interaction with other powerful organizations, such as the government and business corporations. The fifth and last level, is social systems, viewed as how the "*aggregation of sub-systems* such as political, economic, cultural and mass communication," (Shoemaker & Reese, 2013, p. 64) analyzes the influence on news content from a systemic context. A good way of thinking about analysis at this level is

the comparative examination of media in two different countries (Shoemaker & Reese, 2013).

To examine the influence of social characteristics on news content at the individual level, respondents were asked questions related to their gender education, race, age, political affiliation, and professional experience. In addition, respondents were asked about their journalistic practices and gatekeeping behaviors towards user generated content, as well as perceptions towards user-generated content. These queries addressed influences on news content at the media and organizational levels. Taken together, all three levels of analysis explained how in hyperlocal media, the respondents' social characteristics (individual), processes of covering the news (routines) and implementation of organizational policies (if any) influenced content creation. The second part of the dissertation featuring in-depth interviews, explored these influences in greater depth.

The interview section was designed to get a complete understanding of the process by which those who have founded or work in hyperlocal media adapt to their new roles and construct their identities. For this purpose, the theoretical framework of work/professional identity construction from the field of organizational behavior, as put forth by Pratt, Rockmann & Kaufmann (2006) and Ibarra (1999) was used. Pratt et al. (2006) specifically laid out the process by which professionals construct their professional identities based on the functions they perform in their new roles. The study was applied in the interview process to analyze how individuals who have founded or work for hyperlocal media, make sense of their work roles and consequently, their professional identities. Therefore, both the theoretical frameworks of Hierarchy of Influences and role identity comprehensively explained what affects news content creation within a small, digital media startup.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Apart from furthering academic research, a central goal of this study was to understand who has filled the space created by traditional media's retreat from these small neighborhoods, how they do journalism differently from traditional journalists, or if they are practicing journalism differently at all. The findings presented in the latter chapters of this dissertation will help journalism scholars understand the phenomenon of hyperlocal media, what the industry looks like at present, and allow them to better predict the professional path of a journalistic entrepreneur. Most importantly, the findings will provide scholars with data to better guide journalists and new journalism graduates towards a future that may involve the creation of their own hyperlocal website. This field is fairly new, with little scholarly work on its various aspects. By adding to the scarce literature, this dissertation expands the horizon of knowledge related to reporting local in the current dynamic media industry.

This dissertation also contributes to the literature of work on identity construction among journalists. Research in online journalism usually emphasizes how journalists are incorporating new technologies in their work routines (Robinson, 2011; O'Sullivan & Heinonen, 2008), how they go about their jobs and make sense of it in a converged newsroom (Singer, 2004; Boczkowski, 2004) and how they assimilate these various functions to become the professionals they are. There are very few studies that have looked at how journalists make sense of their primary work of news reporting with their new role as entrepreneur or staff at a media startup that requires a reporter to don multiple hats, in some cases, including that of fundraiser. One could argue that in a digital news startup, the founder as well as the staff has to take on more responsibilities than they might have in a mainstream newsroom. Indeed, traditional news media organizations maintain a delicate dichotomy between editorial autonomy and commercial management

(Jenkins & Deuze, 2008). A recent study by Andersson and Wiik (2013), however, showed the wall between the managerial and editorial sides of Swedish newspapers slowly breaking down, allowing for more interactions between the two departments. They found that Swedish editors-in-chief were becoming more comfortable with the idea of editorial and commercial goals being intertwined. The authors concluded this has clear implications for reporters' daily work as emphasis on commercial values at the top are likely to trickle down to the employees and the stories they tell. If the walls between the business and editorial sides in newspaper organizations are only just crumbling, in hyperlocal organizations, they barely exist. In these sites, the responsibility for earning revenue as well as reporting the news lie with one to two people, or in some instances, small groups. Therefore, it becomes important to study how founders and or staff at new media startups reconcile these two functions and if this reconciliation has any effect on their news work.

Media scholar Reese (2007) said that in order to understand how news content is constructed, it is important to study the “constructing,” (p. 33). By posing questions related to the backgrounds of those who work in hyperlocal media and the process by which they carve their work roles and adapt to their new functions, this study adds value to the understanding of news constructing in hyperlocal media. As these sites are often started by community members or technology entrepreneurs who bypass traditional journalists (Miller & Stone, 2009), one could argue that their way of reporting the news or understanding what is news may be different. The other change at the hyperlocal level is an effort to engage community members by increasing interactions with them and asking them to participate actively in the news production process. This increased interactivity provides a sense of local news no longer being “proprietary,” (Bry, 2009, para. 8). In a recent news article on *Washingtonpost.com*, Jan Schaffer, the director of

American University's J-Lab, a research and funding organization for media entrepreneurs, said many digital startups were covering their communities in a different manner than legacy or mainstream media (Farhi, 2014).

This study, by examining how individuals in hyperlocal media handle editorial and professional responsibilities, provides an explanation for how the editorial and business dichotomy is handled in changing newsrooms. By studying a new dimension of journalism, that of journalist-turned-entrepreneur and or journalist-cum-fundraiser, this dissertation makes a valuable addition to journalism scholarship. This new perspective will help students who are pursuing careers in media industries understand how changes in the current information and communication fields influence creative and managerial practices at an individual level (Deuze, 2011). It also adds to the growing field of entrepreneurial journalism, a topic gaining popularity in various journalism schools (Breiner, 2013).

The dissertation has been organized in the following manner: Chapter 1 will discuss the creation of hyperlocal news sites and describe them. Chapter 2 provides the literature review and theoretical framework for this study. Chapter 3 will describe the methodology this dissertation followed and list the research questions and hypotheses proposed. Chapter 4 and 5 will list the findings from the web survey and in-depth interviews and Chapter 6 will provide conclusions. The interview and web questionnaires, study invitations and list of hyperlocal sites featured in the study will be attached as appendices at the end.

CHAPTER 1: HYPERLOCAL MEDIA

WHAT ARE HYPERLOCAL MEDIA, REALLY?

Is it a blog? Is it a digital community weekly? Is it a new digital platform for journalism? The media industry has found it difficult to define hyperlocal sites. Given the controversy surrounding the definition of the term “hyperlocal”, this chapter outlines the reasons why the industry members are unable to arrive at a consensus on its meaning. Then, it puts forth the conceptualization utilized in this study and the reason why it is the most appropriate one.

HYPERLOCAL ORIGINS

In most cases, these sites were started because someone felt that traditional news media were not comprehensively serving his or her community. Lack of information about a neighborhood was the motivation behind the launch of *Baristanet*, one of the earliest localized news and information sites in the United States (Radcliffe, 2012). It was set up by former *NYT* columnist and novelist Debbie Galant almost eight years ago and concentrated on news covering three neighborhoods in New Jersey with a combined population of about 100,000 people (Hirschman, 2011). The primary goal was to provide the people of these counties with information about their community that was relevant to them. This was finally news they could relate to, given that their alternative was no news at all. The *Baristanet* home page features stories such as a clothing and furnishings donation organized at a local hospital, the local school board meeting, neighborhood restaurants’ and real estate listings, events calendar, and traffic alerts. The site gained popularity and size, made-- and continues to make-- a profit, despite the failure of other

similar sites to do so, and gets about 9,000 visitors a day, and about 80,000 unique visitors a month (Stepp, 2011). When the *New York Times* decided to give up its coverage of three other neighboring towns, *Baristanet* stepped in and took over the paper's coverage of these areas as well (Hirschman, 2011).

Also called "town criers," hyperlocal sites have cropped up across the United States, Europe and other parts of the world with the purpose of serving small communities such as "a city, suburb, small town, village or a post-code," (Baines, 2010, p. 582). Hyperlocals are closest in form to community newspapers, which usually cater to cities with populations less than 100,000 and focus on community news (Hargrove, Miller & Stempel III, 2011) such as small town political news, crime, council meetings and traffic (Fitzgerald & Saba, 2008). In many cases, hyperlocals are directed at the small geographic communities that are not financially attractive to traditional media structures (Miel & Faris, 2008). Most of these sites are published primarily online to cut costs (Downie Jr. & Schudson, 2009). Many of them were created online as independent entities and not spun off existing print products or created as an extension of old newspapers or channels. Frequently, the sites depend heavily on the people within the community to provide news as well as the news reports, and the writing is often times not as good as what is found in a local print paper (Downie Jr. & Schudson, 2009).

The setting up of these community sites that offer a bird's eye view of the neighborhood -- and their subsequent survival -- indicates that people want news that relates to them on a micro level. As an article in *The Economist* noted, "Getting the latest from Afghanistan in the *New York Times* is nice, but a site that will tell you about the sale on paint at the hardware store around the corner is even nicer," (Kinsley, 2009, para. 8). In the state of New York, three residents of Chappaqua got together and started a website called *NewCastleNow.org: News & Opinion Weekly* (Schaffer, 2007) that focused on

news and happenings in their community. The site features stories such as public hearing on the town code of ethics, an annual neighborhood children's books festival, land use and pictures and locations of potholes following a brutal winter season. Other similar sites founded with the aim of providing news and information to local communities include *The Batavian* in upstate New York, *West Seattle Blog* in Washington and *Ann Arbor Chronicle* in Michigan. Despite minimal staff and shoestring budgets, these sites have managed to survive on the basis of the niche news they provide for their equally niche audiences in areas that are either being served poorly, or not at all, by legacy or traditional media. In situations where newspapers have folded, citizens have come together or joined with other journalists to provide news about themselves to themselves.

However, little research exists on these hyperlocal sites, their news coverage, their media routines as well as the relationship between former professionals and citizens who may (or may not) have the same interests at heart but go about achieving it very differently (or not). Are these sites really different from their paper predecessors or are they a case of old wine packaged in new bottles? Thus an important question is, do hyperlocal sites really fulfill the role they carved out for themselves--reporting on communities or issues that legacy newspapers do not cover anymore? Lack of scholarly data about these sites and scarce knowledge of the media practices that drive content collection, production and dissemination makes it difficult to analyze whether these sites can be models for how the media industry can reinvent itself. More research on hyperlocal media is required to better understand the socialization of journalists in these digital startups, as well as how they adapt to their new roles and work in these sites.

HYPERLOCAL DEFINITION- DEBATABLE

A first step towards conceptualizing a hyperlocal site is to set the parameters for defining the term. It may seem incredible but a lot of individuals and media companies who started hyperlocal ventures in the early stages were open to trying any idea because they had no inkling of what they were doing. A project leader for a hyperlocal startup in Kansas said that when they were thinking about what their site should entail, they designed it the way they thought best because no one knew what hyperlocal meant (Curley, 2007). What constitutes a hyperlocal site is still under considerable debate and questions related to the characteristics of an ideal hyperlocal medium--size, area of coverage, number of employees, affiliation and funding sources from advertising (Hirschman, 2012) -- not only keeps the discussion in this field vibrant but also provides ample fodder for journalism researchers to work with.

Various definitions of hyperlocal media have been proposed with the basic idea that these sites either focus on a physical community or a particular subject matter (Clemetson, 2011). One of the earliest experiments with hyperlocal media was *VillageSoup.com*³ back in 1997, built around the idea that people use the Internet to not only get answers but also enhance community life (Anderson, 2007). Since then, many sites have been set up to cater to various geographic microcosms such as *Dallas South News* in South Dallas, Texas, *Alaskadispatch.com* in Anchorage, Alaska, *West Seattle Blog* in Washington state and *Examiner.com* in San Francisco. The hyperlocal network called *Patch*, previously⁴ owned and operated by AOL (Swisher, 2009) also falls in this group. *Patch*, the community-specific news and information network, included sites that individual editors headed (Lauria, 2012). It had a tremendous presence in the hyperlocal

³ Anderson shut down the site in March 2012, citing “severe financial challenges” (LaFrance, 2012).

⁴ In January 2014, AOL sold its majority stake in Patch to an American investment company, Hale Global. AOL maintains a minority stake in the hyperlocal site network (Bercovici, 2014).

field at one time, with about 850 sites up and running across the U.S. (Lauria, 2012). These sites are for-profit, earning revenue through advertising.

The other kind of hyperlocal sites are those that focus on a specific issue, marking their territory by subject rather than geography. They are called hyperlocal too, given that their focus is rather narrow--hyper--except the marked territory is in the context of content and subject matter, not land boundaries. A couple of such examples are *InsideClimate*, a site based in Manhattan that focuses on environmental news and *C-Hit*, a website that describes itself as, “dedicated to producing original, responsible, in-depth journalism on issues of health and safety, in Connecticut and the surrounding region,” (About *C-Hit*, 2014). Then there are sites that not only focus in depth on an issue but also confine their coverage to a specific area. For instance, *Streetsblog* is a group of sites that focuses on sustainable transportation such as bicycling, walking, bike-sharing and public transit in the American cities of New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. A couple of other examples of sites that provide content and geographic niche are *Technically Philly*, a site that focuses on all business news in Philadelphia and *Brownstoner*, a site that focuses on real estate news in Manhattan.

The underlying common thread in all of these sites is specificity, in terms of geography and topic, and depth. The sites either cater to a specific area in great depth, or a specific topic in great depth, or a specific topic in relation to a specific area in depth. There is good reason to think that it is the combination of specificity and depth which leads practitioners, as well as those who study these media, to extend the term hyperlocal to all kinds of sites that take an extraordinary focus, be it a location, an issue or even a type of reporting. For example, in his article, “Realigning news sites to connect local and interests,” author Matt Sokoloff (2013) wrote that just providing a community with local news is not enough; it is important to report the local news according to people’s

interests. He wrote, “It will be key for local sites to not just think of hyperlocal as “more local than a newspaper,” but instead as “local and relevant.” Sometimes that means a user’s neighborhood — but other times it also means the topics and passions they are interested in,” (para 10).

At a macro level, these hyperlocal sites can be divided into hyperspatial and hypertopical sites. The following Venn diagram in **Figure 1** identifies these different kinds of sites:

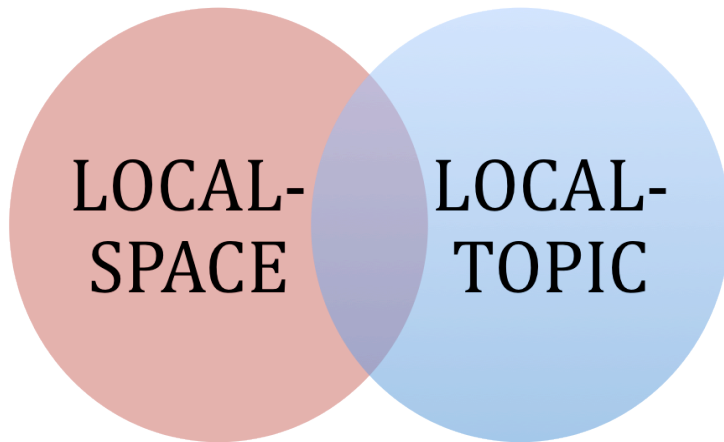


Figure 1: Diagram depicting all the “hyperlocal” sites based on geographic boundaries, specificity of topic and reporting genre

In the above diagram, the red color circle depicts sites that are focused around local boundaries while the blue circle depicts sites that focus on a specific topic or reporting genre. The overlapped part -- which I call **Local-Spacio Topical**⁵ -- focuses on the sites that are not only specific in topic or type of reporting but also focused on a

⁵ Thanks to Carrie Kaplan, Ph.D Candidate at University of Texas-Austin, for coming up with the term.

specific area. This representation works at a broad level; at a scholarly and possibly industrial level, however, there is the more pressing issue of defining a hyperlocal site.

Media researchers Metzgar et al. (2011) attempted to define a hyperlocal media operation or HLMOs (p. 773) based on six criteria they deemed important: geographic elements, community orientation, original news reporting, origination on the web, filling perceived gaps, and civic engagement (p. 777). They defined hyperlocal operations as: “Geographically-based, community-oriented, original-news- reporting organizations indigenous to the web and intended to fill perceived gaps in coverage of an issue or region and to promote civic engagement,” (p. 774). An independent UK-based charity, Nesta, with a mission similar to the Knight Foundation’s, released a report in June, 2013 titled, “Destination local: Our lessons to date.” The authors of that report defined hyperlocal media as, “online news or content services pertaining to a town, single postcode or other small, geographically defined community,” (Pearson, Kingsbury & Fox, 2013, p. 5). New media-startup scholar Michelle McLellan described hyperlocal media as “Micro local media” that “provide[s] highly granular news of a defined neighborhood or town. They may have a tiny staff— one or two people plus interns or citizen contributors— supported by highly local advertising,” (McLellan, 2010). What all these definitions have in common is coverage of a definite geographic area and the community that resides there. These definitions do not include what Lauterer (2006) called a “more liberal” definition of community- the ones that would likely fall in the hypertopical circle of the Venn diagram in Figure 1.

However, in his article, ‘Sizing the industry: Who gets counted as hyperlocal?’, author David Hirschmann (2012) challenged these definitions and highlighted various micro level dilemmas that one might face when attempting to define a hyperlocal:

So how big does a site have to be when it stops being ‘hyperlocal’ and becomes ‘local’ (and therefore is removed from the count)? When is it too small? And does a hyperlocal site only count if it sells advertising? Or if the journalists work on the site full-time? How many posts per week are required to qualify? Meanwhile, what about locally minded sites that don’t write exclusively about local news and information — or which rely entirely on national (rather than targeted local) advertising? And how about hyperlocal news and comments aggregators like Topix that have minimal editorial oversight over many thousands of locally focused sites — do they count? (para 6).

Hirschman raises valid questions related to size, business model, frequency of coverage, the kind of coverage and extent of editorial oversight. There is no consensus on any of these parameters that together ought to provide a meaning to hyperlocal news sites.

Consider size, for instance. The definitions outlined above delimit the geographic range to a neighborhood or a town, possibly a city. There is general acceptance among scholars and practitioners that a hyperlocal site is definitive of a media outlet that covers a small area, in some cases even a neighborhood. It can have a staff of one person or be operated entirely by volunteers. The confusion arises when one begins to think big. For instance, would coverage of a city, however, be considered hyperlocal? Some argue yes, and others, no. In their attempt to define hyperlocal sites, Metzgar et al. (2011) listed six online operations that included *VoiceofSanDiego* and *MinnPost*, both of which cater to cities. Thus, there is theoretical precedent for including sites that cover cities within the list of hyperlocal sites. In the process of this research, I tried to follow theoretical precedent for identifying hyperlocal sites as the definition is highly contested. I contacted both, *VoiceofSanDiego* and *MinnPost* and invited them to participate in my dissertation study. *VoiceofSanDiego* responded positively but *MinnPost* did not, claiming it did not identify itself as a hyperlocal. Thus, entry and exit into the hyperlocal category is based

on whether the person who started a site identifies it as one. To address this ambiguity in definition, it may be a good solution to restrict geographic boundaries for hyperlocal media based on population numbers, similar to the system followed by the newspaper industry. A focus on spatial boundary, however, necessarily excludes the sites that would feature in the hyperfocus category. Setting boundaries is not as easy as it seems.

Bounding hyperlocal media in geographic terms raises a pertinent question: Should a site only operating in one city in a state be considered hyperlocal, or can it operate in more cities in the same state? For instance, *Streetsblog* not only has a presence in San Francisco but also in Los Angeles. Ideally, these would still be counted as hyperlocal because at the site level, the coverage is still focused on a city. Similarly, the network of hyperlocal sites that form *Patch* are exactly that -- hyperlocal -- because each of the site's coverage is focused around a specific area. There is the possibility of an overlap in the news coverage in two neighborhoods but each site mostly covers its own stories, unique to its geographic boundary. There is also confusion about whether a site covering several small areas in a city would qualify as hyperlocal.

Hyperlocal media expert Michele McLellan has compiled a list of the new local news providers and categorized them according to, "their mission, size, reach and their potential revenue needs," (as quoted in Krewson, 2010). These are: (i) Micro local- one- or two-person for profit startup; (ii) community- sites that rely on professional journalists but also focus on community building; (iii) investigative- sites that focus only on investigative reporting; (iv) new traditional- relatively large non-profits; (v) niche local- focus on one or two topics in a specific geographic location; and (vi) aggregators- the site does not list how it conceptualizes aggregators, rather that it "may list the occasional aggregator or network if the model looks interesting," (McLellan, 2014). These categories, unfortunately, are not mutually exclusive but more than that, McLellan

consciously moved away from the term ‘hyperlocal’- it does not even feature in her list. The categories provide a useful taxonomy but do not solve the problem of defining a hyperlocal site. The confusion around what kind of a business model is best representative of a hyperlocal site does not help either.

Hyperlocal sites can be divided broadly into for-profit and not-for-profit categories and common for both types is the bottomline. Their revenue streams include funds from Foundations, advertising and individual donations. The question is, as raised by Hirschmann (2012), should a hyperlocal site be considered legitimate only if it has a business model? Does it count if the endeavor is simply an expression of community collaboration?

Then there is the number of staff; what is the minimum number that must exist for an operation to be considered hyperlocal? As the definitions suggest, but do not explicitly state, a small staff usually runs these sites. In the case of *Patch*, there is just one editor. Many hyperlocal startups are individual or two-person operations. Secondly, some sites may not have full-time staff but a rotating one, especially those that rely on journalism schools to provide them with manpower in return for the students gaining work experience in a real life setting. So should hyperlocal sites be considered serious news providers if they have full-time personnel or should the ones that are run solely by volunteers also be included?

To address the issues surrounding the definition of hyperlocal sites for the purpose of this study, these media were conceptualized as per Metzgar et al. (2011, p.774) with a very minor modification:

Geographically-based, community-oriented, original-news- reporting organizations indigenous to the web and intended to fill perceived gaps in coverage of an issue **and** or region, and to promote civic engagement.

This conceptualization manages to address the concerns raised by an unclear definition of hyperlocal media and is most suited to studying sites based in the U.S. By focusing on geographic boundaries but not defining them by size, it narrows the scope just enough to include a good-sized sample. It also specifies original news reporting but not what kind and that helps exclude sites that simply aggregate local content. Based on the parameters provided by the above definition, the study included sites that had definite geographic boundaries. To get an exhaustive list, hyperlocal network *Patch* was included in the list, as were sites that focused on geographic locations in more than one state. Sites that focused on many areas in one city were also included. The common thread running through them all was that each had at least one person who worked full-time on the site. This ensured that the site was regularly updated and serious in its commitment of informing the community. Finally, the study included sites that showed some kind of commitment to earning revenue as it showed the site's intention to strive for longevity.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The question directing this research study revolves around individuals who work in hyperlocal media, their work and how what they do affects their work identities. The theoretical framework of **hierarchy of influences**, proposed by Shoemaker and Reese in 1986, and updated in 2013 to account for the changing influences in journalism, will address the who and what (approach to newswork) of the question. The how will be addressed by the theoretical framework of **work identity construction** (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006) and specifically the model proposed by Pratt et al. in their paper on the process of identity construction.

HIERARCHY OF INFLUENCES: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Hierarchical Model explains the forces that are at play during the social construction of news content (Shoemaker & Reese, 2013). The authors conceptualize media content as, “the complete range of visual and verbal information carried in what were once called mass media, and increasingly by smaller, more interactive and targeted channels,” (pp. 2-3).

In this model, media routines are explained as processes that journalists follow everyday to report and write the news. The model helps to better highlight the influences on a journalist as he or she goes about creating news content. It organizes these influences into five levels, arranged in the order of micro to macro units, namely: individual, routines, organizations, social institutions and social systems (Shoemaker & Reese, 2013).

At the individual level, content is influenced by media workers’ socialization and attitudes and is focused on the communicator, emphasizing the personal, professional and

political factors that affect the individual's work. At the media routines level content emerges directly from the nature of media work; the organizational routines within which an individual operates form a structure that constrains and also enables him or her. At the organizational level, content is a result of reporters understanding what kinds of stories the organizations they work for accept and desire and the choices they make accordingly. The social institution level examines influence on news content at the level of media organizations as institutions and their relationships with other large institutions such as government and corporate houses. The last or macro-social level encompasses examination of influence from the entire system, including but not restricted to ideological forces at work in the construction of news content.

This study looks at influences on news content in hyperlocal media at the individual, media routines and organizational levels. It examines whether personal traits, specifically professional experience, media routines such as gatekeeping and professional journalistic behaviors, and organizational traits, such as a for-profit or not-for-profit business model, influence news content. The Hierarchical Model does not allow for simultaneous measure of these influences at all three levels but rather, provides a systematic way of interpreting results acquired by studying various levels (Shoemaker & Reese, 2013). The model also is not unidirectional; researchers can travel from micro to macro levels and vice versa when studying the various effects on news content. Again, they must traverse from one level to another; at no point do the levels combine or merge in any way.

Traditionally, the model has been applied to newsrooms with very definitive hierarchies. Such newsrooms are few and far between today as convergence and technology adoption have changed the physical and managerial structures of newsrooms (Robinson, 2010). Additionally, the post-industrial news economy has helped create new

kinds of news workers, new methods of news production and new channels of news delivery, which the Hierarchy Model does not quite take into account. Keith (2011) referred to this limitation when she said the factors influencing news content created by independent individuals in non-formal news organizations are not represented in the Hierarchy Model. She called for using this theoretical frame to think of the various levels being “not only breach-able but dynamic enough to, in some cases, disappear,” (Keith, 2011, para. 29). Hyperlocal websites could be considered such a form of new media; given the variety in size and structure of these sites as outlined in Chapter 1, they are ideal for investigating non-formal news organizations. The individuals working in them are either independent reporters or part of a small group. Thus, the Hierarchy Model will be applied to these individuals and to the hyperlocal startups to measure whether the levels in new media startups are breachable and capable of disappearing or they are carved in stone. Current research on the Hierarchy Model applies one or two of the influence levels to evaluate how certain news media construct news content. If the levels are breachable, then researchers will find that several levels may apply at the same time to the construction of news content in a new media startup. The next sections will analyze these levels in greater detail.

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Journalists and News Content

The studies that best exemplify this level of analysis are the surveys Weaver and Wilhoit conduct every ten years (1996) with a national sample of American journalists. The survey includes demographics such as age, education, gender, income and race, their professional experience, professional values, political and religious affiliations and every

other variable that could possibly describe a journalist. Media scholars have also followed initial studies with deeper inquiries into interactions between personal traits and news content in different news environments. For instance, gender plays an important role in news content creation, (Grabe et al., 2011; Correa & Harp, 2011) and in newspaper journalists' professional role perceptions (Cassidy, 2008). Level of professional experience influenced photojournalists to follow media routines, thus influencing how a breaking news event was covered (Yaschur, 2012). Beam (2008) evaluated the relationship between social characteristics of American journalists and news content creation; he found that gender, minority status and religious beliefs produced significant influences on content creation.

The social characteristics of people who work in hyperlocal media have not been evaluated as much as those in mainstream media. However, one study has attempted it. In a survey of individuals who work in hyperlocal media, Horning (2012) found his sample to be predominantly male, mostly White, highly educated with graduate degrees and retired or nearing retirement. Most of them had majored in "some other form of liberal arts" at the college level (p. 120), rather than journalism, and most had some experience in journalism. Given the high entry and closure rate of hyperlocal media, it is important to keep evaluating the characteristics of those who work in these new media startups, along the same lines as Weaver & Wilhoit (1996). This information will not only update researchers regularly as to who is still active in the hyperlocal media realm but also provide a snapshot of the kind of people the field attracts and retains. Therefore, the first research question posed in this study is:

RQ1: What are the social characteristics of individuals who work in hyperlocal media?

MEDIA ROUTINES LEVEL

Routines can be thought of as procedures that journalists follow on a daily basis in pursuit of news, writing and then, publishing it. Routines encourage “stasis and homogeneity,” (Lowrey, 2012, p. 219) and are usually emphasized by organizations to achieve efficiency, greater productivity and ultimately, profitability (Singer, 2007). These routines include following journalistic norms such as objectivity, fact-checking and gatekeeping, all of which have been professionally established to gather and produce news in a consistent manner. For example, a study by Carpenter (2008) explored how media routines influenced online news journalists’ and citizen journalists’ news content production. She specifically analyzed media routines such as maintaining objectivity and including organizational sources such as public officials and press releases in news content. She found that citizen journalists incorporated more opinion than online newspaper journalists while the latter incorporated more official sources than the former. These norms inform the professional skills journalists usually employ to carry out their work on a daily basis (Hermans, Vergeer & d’Haenens, 2009). This study specifically explores the norms of gatekeeping and daily professional skills, or journalistic behaviors within hyperlocal media, explicated in detail in the following sections.

Community and News Media

Literature available on hyperlocal media describes them as very similar to community weeklies as they focus on small geographic areas and cover issues in-depth (Grueskin, Seave & Graves, 2011; Fitzgerald & Saba, 2008). Reporters attend school board and town council meetings, talk to people, participate in neighborhood

organizations and events rather than just promoting content and interaction on an online platform. They have a strong physical presence in their community (Tornoe, 2012). These characteristics are reminiscent of community weeklies that covered, and continue to cover, small towns across America.

The community weeklies are defined as, “a publication with a circulation under 50,000, serving people who live together in a distinct geographical space with a clear, local-first emphasis on news, features, sports and advertising,” (Lauterer, 2006, p. 3). Community weeklies share a lot of common ground with their audience such as knowledge about the place, people and the institutions (Lauterer, 2006). Their news coverage is locally exhaustive and written with “more intimacy and concern about the reader’s reception,” (Byerly, 1961, p. 26). These qualities close the distance between a reporter and his or her subject and influence the new content produced in such an atmosphere.

From a Hierarchy Model perspective, in community-based news media, content is influenced by the levels of individual, organization and social institutions the most. Media scholars Berkowitz & TerKeurst (1999) found in communities, news content was influenced at the social institutions level. Researchers McKenzie et al. (2012) studied the interactions between editors of big and small community newspapers and audiences. They found that editors in small, homogenous communities are more likely to pay attention to market data, thus showing the influence of financial pressures on news decisions. The authors said this result could be explained by the editors’ dependence on a very limited number of powerful sources for revenue. News content is also influenced at the media routines level; editors of small newspapers ranked professional journalists’ roles more highly than citizen journalists’ roles (Nah & Chung, 2009), thus taking a more conservative stance on user generated content. These studies show that news construction

within a community is indeed socially constructed with strong influences at the individual, media routines, organizational and social institution levels.

As hyperlocal media also are situated within defined communities and cover them closely, it is reasonable to expect influences on news content at the media routines and organizational and social institution levels. Additionally, Rutigliano (2008) found that media routines influence news content created by hyperlocal initiatives. He said sites that covered marginalized communities operated effectively when they exhibited high levels of editorial control and news routines found in traditional media. Also, hyperlocal media by and large are run either professionally or as close to a news-centered operation as possible (Grueskin et al., 2011). Thus one would expect to find some modicum of journalistic norms and behaviors in news content creation. Another aspect of news work that this research explores is whether the business model of a hyperlocal site—for profit or not-for-profit—may influence the extent to which that site follows journalistic behaviors. This would help explore the influences of journalistic behaviors on hyperlocal content at both the individual and the organizational levels.

Journalistic behaviors is a construct of the functions that journalists follow when making news, such as verifying facts, using a neutral voice, editing for accuracy and grammar. Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2011) introduced the construct of journalism behaviors in their paper titled, “Blogging as a journalistic practice: A model linking perception, motivation, and behavior”, to measure whether bloggers, who perceived their blog to be a form of journalism, were more likely to engage in such behaviors. The same conceptualization has been utilized for this study. The reasoning used here is based on the above literature; as many scholars and media experts claim there are similarities between hyperlocal media and community weeklies, it is likely that both media routines and

organization level will influence news content creation. Therefore, the two research questions proposed here are:

RQ2: Which journalistic behaviors do people working for hyperlocal media employ when producing news content for their sites?

RQ3: Is there a difference in the manner by which profit and not-for-profit hyperlocal sites follow journalistic behaviors?

Gatekeeping Theory

The other journalistic norm this study examines in hyperlocal media is gatekeeping. Psychologist Kurt Lewin was the first to introduce the concept of gatekeeping and gatekeeper back in the 1950s when he put forth his ‘channel theory’ (1951, p.176). Lewin’s student, David Manning White (1950) applied the theoretical framework of gatekeeping to the decision-making process of an editor in a newsroom. Gatekeepers in the context of news media are individuals who choose which news will be covered or discarded. In this seminal study, White asked the wire editor of a morning newspaper to keep a record of his story choices/decisions. White wanted to examine the reasons why the editor chose a story over various others or excluded one in favor of another. The study lasted a week, during which the editor saved every piece of wire copy that arrived on his desk and listed the reasons for rejecting all the stories he did not include in his paper. White reported that the most common reason the editor cited was lack of space, followed by waiting for the story to develop or receive more information.

White concluded that studying Mr. Gates's process of choosing what to print and what to leave out provides an idea of, "... how highly subjective, how reliant upon value-judgments based on the 'gatekeeper's' own set of experiences, attitudes and expectations the communication of 'news' really is," (1950, p. 386). This is in keeping with Lewin's hypothesis that gatekeepers' "decisions depend partly on their ideology – that is, their system of values and beliefs which determine what they consider to be "good" or "bad"—and partly on the way they perceive the particular situation," (Lewin, 1951, p. 186). Snider repeated White's 1950 study in its exact format 16 years later (1966) with the same editor—Mr. Gates—to compare changes, if any, in the gatekeeper as well as in the process of gatekeeping. The researcher concluded that with changed situational circumstances, the editor's news story preferences also had changed. These studies were conducted in newsrooms of print papers and media organizations and the profile of the news worker has shifted since. Therefore, it becomes necessary to revisit the process of gatekeeping, especially in a new media startup such as a hyperlocal site.

The advent and 'affordances' (Norman, 1999) of the Internet have changed the notion as well as the function of gatekeeping. The term 'affordances' is used here to describe the capabilities the Internet provides users to carry out various functions. Media companies and 'professional' journalists are no longer solely responsible for the news. Any individual with access to the Internet is now capable of publishing information online as well as controlling its dissemination.

This new field where technology has allowed for a free flow of information and news amongst one and all is what Singer (2010) described as a "shared space" where, "the multifaceted process of doing journalism is more collaborative," (p. 120). This has resulted in the complete opening of news gates in some cases and in others, a significant shrinking of them. Some scholars even say the concepts of gates and gatekeeping are

becoming rather obsolete and have introduced “gatewatching”, (Bruns 2005, p. 18) or the idea of traditional journalists following the wide variety of information published online and using some of it as “source material in news reports,” (p. 18). Gatewatching conveys the evolution of the nature of a gatekeeper’s role; he or she no longer controls what gets published in the public arena but can only observe all that is being published.

The reality on the ground, however, has not yet evolved to that extent. The gates controlling information in general and news in particular are still tightly controlled even though it is possible for a news consumer to gather information and post it online, thus completely bypassing the gates. Irrespective, the role of gatekeeper is still very relevant to journalists. Research has shown that despite the rearticulation of the relationship between producers and users or journalists and audiences, the traditional process of gatekeeping as a way of controlling and defining news information amongst reporters in legacy newsrooms is still rather prevalent (Matheson, 2004; Singer, 2010; Bivens, 2008; Domingo, 2008).

Controlling of information is not just restricted to legacy newsrooms. Boyles (2006) conducted interviews with individuals who had established hyperlocal sites in Washington D.C or San Francisco and examined the kind of gatekeeping roles they adopted for their sites. The author found variation in their opinions, with some believing in the process of providing extensive and sustained guidance to the community contributors, which translated into the editors heavily editing and supervising user content. Others believed in opening the gates completely and allowing community members freedom over content production and publication, thus simply moderating rather than constantly supervising. We can think of gatekeeping having the following criteria: user generated content edited for grammar, factual accuracy and decency,

inappropriate photos and pictures removed from the site and distinguishing between staff-produced and user-generated news.

Professional journalists and gatekeeping

Media researchers have usually explored the existence of gatekeeping by measuring interactive or multimedia features on traditional legacy news websites (Bachmann & Harlow, 2011; Harrison, 2010) or the process through which editors and reporters invite and/or include contributions from citizen reporters or audiences (Paulussen & Uguille, 2008; Thurman, 2008; Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Steensen, 2009). In many cases, the reasons why professional journalists still hold on to the remnants of traditional gates relate to how they perceive the competencies required to do the job correctly. For instance, news correspondents were hesitant to open their gates for citizen participants and contributors completely because they believed that “journalists have important skills users lack,” (Singer, 2010, p. 137). Thurman (2008) found that while editors were open to the idea of audience contribution and encouraged it, they felt there was a need to edit the material.

Another form of exercising the process of gatekeeping among traditionally trained journalists has been restricting user content to specific areas. Deuze, Bruns and Neuberger (2007) studied emerging participatory journalism practices in the Netherlands, Germany, Australia and the United States and found that citizen participation was encouraged in “soft news areas” while “hard news” was left to the journalists. Ornebring (2008) saw similar restrictions on citizen-produced content in two European tabloid newspapers. Robinson (2010) found the editorial policy of a converged newsroom, while allowing for citizen contributions on the news site, restricted audience input to certain

spaces. She also found that younger journalists adopted a more collaborative attitude towards user-generated content than the older journalists in the newsroom. This indicates that those with more professional experience were more resistant to opening gates than those with less professional experience.

The literature cited above also begs the question if professional experience could play a moderating role in the process of gatekeeping? Studying this phenomenon in a hyperlocal site is ideal because it helps isolate the unit of analysis to an individual level; most sites are built-from-scratch products created by an individual or a small team of people who may have worked and therefore trained in a professional/traditional newsroom. On the other hand, citizens with no educational or professional training in journalism also have hyperlocal sites with the purpose of informing their communities. Gatekeeping practices can include censoring user comments for decency and appropriateness, grammar and factual accuracy and distinguishing clearly between staff-produced and user-generated content (Singer, 2010). Thus the following research questions are proposed:

RQ4: Which gatekeeping criteria do people working for hyperlocal media employ when working with user generated content on their sites?

RQ5: What are the respondents' perceptions towards user-generated content in general?

In her research, Boyles (2006) found that some editors of hyperlocal media felt user content needed to be supervised and edited. Through this process, they exercised their gatekeeping function of controlling what was published on the site. Horning (2012)

conducted a content analysis of 302 hyperlocal sites and found that many of them produced most of their content in-house and rarely linked to other content producers or hosted their material, thus not providing much support to other local bloggers in the area. However, it was unclear from the content analysis why this was the case. In addition, Harrison (2010) found that moderating user-generated content was a subjective endeavor as the choice to remove posts varied from one individual to another. While there is research that suggests hyperlocal journalists exercise gatekeeping in their sites, such as controlling and editing user content. However, it does not explain the extent to which professional experience of individuals working in hyperlocal media may moderate this action. Thus, the following two hypotheses are posed:

H1: Respondents with greater professional experience are more likely to use journalistic behaviors than those with less to no professional experience.

H2: Respondents with greater professional work experience are more likely to engage in gatekeeping behaviors when dealing with content for publication on the site than people with lesser professional experience.

Hard and Soft News

Professional journalists who work in local newspapers still view citizen journalists with skepticism and the latter do not quite view themselves as professional reporters, even if they claim their work is journalism. Robinson and DeShano (2011) studied citizen and professional reporters in a city in the American Midwest and found that the even though the two groups interacted with each other, viewed their content

creation as journalism and may have some overlap in the process of writing it, both groups viewed themselves and their work differently from each other.

Evidence of this kind of differentiation exists in the content hyperlocal media publish, but not quite as distinctly as in traditional media. Viall (2009) studied the differences in content between hyperlocal media and traditional media that existed and operated in the same market across the United States. She found that in almost all news content on hyperlocal media sites, there was opinion/subjectivity. She concluded that this might occur because hyperlocal citizen journalists did not see themselves as journalists. Horning's study (2012) of content published in 302 hyperlocals found that a majority of these sites covered politics, business, crime and education like their traditional or legacy predecessors. However, hyperlocal sites also "contained a good deal of coverage" (p. 78) of soft news, perhaps because they depend on more community contributions for content. This would be in keeping with findings of studies on professional media wherein user contributions are restricted to "soft news".

"Soft news" is a fairly contentious issue amongst scholars with some focusing on what is being reported, others highlighting how it is reported and yet some others focusing on both (Boczkowski & Peer, 2011). For the purpose of their content analysis, Boczkowski and Peer (2011) distinguished soft news from others by creating two broad categories of public affairs stories and nonpublic affairs stories. The former comprised reports related to politics, government, economics, business, international affairs, and "war on terror" (p. 872) while the nonpublic affairs stories covered sports, crime, entertainment, technology, and weather. The authors further distinguished between how these stories were told, that is, their format, thus allowing for an overlap in the subject matter. These categories were straight news, feature style, commentary and alternative, the last category provided to cover any other format not similar to the previous three.

Curran et al. (2009) differentiated between hard and soft news with the former comprising “reports about politics, public administration, the economy, science, technology and related topics”, (p. 9). The latter—soft news—were stories related to celebrities, human interest, sport and other entertainment-focused reports.

All of the above literature shows that journalists have been slow to completely let go of their gatekeeping function because they believe it is important to the kind of work they do as journalists. This points to the idea that professional experience also leads to a different kind of gatekeeping; restricting user contributions and content to soft news rather than letting them write about topics that come under hard news. Therefore, studying this aspect is ideal in hyperlocal sites because they employ both people with varying levels of professional journalistic experience as well as people without any professional experience. Also, those with professional experience as well as those without similar work experience have started hyperlocal sites and therefore, the following hypothesis are proposed:

H3: People with more professional work experience are more likely to cover hard news in hyperlocal news sites than those with lower levels of professional work experience.

WORK/ROLE IDENTITY

In organizational behavior literature, the relationship between people and the work they do is important because it has significant bearing on the workers’ satisfaction and motivation to continue doing it (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Another, far more important reason is that work “is a necessary and defining activity in the development of

the adult personality,” (Gini, 2000, p. 2). People spend a major portion of their lives-- “from approximately eighteen to seventy (years)”, (Gini, 2000, p. 13)--eking out a living. For many years, people could rely on stable jobs, consistent work, and stay employed in one company for most of those 52 years (Ashforth, 2001). Information technologies, however, have changed the nature of work and employment by promoting flexibility such as part-time, self or temporary employment and “individualization of labor,” (Castells, 2000, p. 12). A change in work then will have an effect on how people think about themselves and what they do.

The image people have of themselves when interacting with others or, the identity of an individual, is socially constructed (Gecas, 1982). In social interactions, people usually want to control others’ impressions of them and change their behaviors accordingly (Goffman, 1959). Thus, the identity of a person is not static; it changes when the interactions change and “people make identity claims on how they view themselves or hope to be viewed by others,” (Ibarra, 1999, p. 766). When viewed in the context of work, 21st century changes in the labor industry have meant the only thing consistent is a variety in work and the different work roles people take on in the span of their careers. With identity embedded in the role an individual takes on, “to switch roles is to switch social identities,” (Ashforth, 2001, p. 27).

For the purpose of this dissertation, certain terms need to be conceptualized. To begin with, the study focuses on *role transitions*, or “the movement of an individual from one role to another,” (Ashforth, 2001, p. 7). Movements can be macro--such as change in jobs, careers, transfers, promotions-demotions --or they can be micro -- transitions between simultaneously held roles, such alternating between professional role of associate professor and home-roles as spouse, parent (Ashforth, 2001). This study is focused on the macro-role transitions of job role changes. Role identity is conceptualized

as “role-based personas complete with goals, values, beliefs, norms, interaction styles, and time horizons,” (Ashforth, 2001, p. 51). As the roles being studied in this dissertation are specifically related to macro transitions in work, the terms role identity and work identity will be used interchangeably.

In no profession has transition in work roles been as dramatic as journalism, where technological advances have morphed journalists’ work (Hermans et al., 2009) and the way they do it. Amongst journalists, professional identity and practice is based on a “shared occupational ideology,” (Deuze, 2005, p. 446) that helps provide legitimacy to news people and their work. Ideology here is defined as “a collection of values, strategies and formal codes characterizing professional journalism and shared most widely by its members,” (p. 445). Deuze (2005) also identified the main components of this ideology, namely public service, objectivity, autonomy, immediacy and ethics and legitimacy. Professional identity, or the ideology, is not focused on members of organizations but rather encompasses a community that extends beyond corporate boundaries (de Bruin, 2000). As a concept, professional identity is defined as “the relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role,” (Ibarra, 1999, p. 764). These defining factors form over time as they are based on a person’s experiences and feedback (Ibarra, 1999).

Research has shown that change in work has led to changes in professionals’ identities. For instance, Hill (1992) studied professionals who took on managerial jobs and found that as they learned the new responsibilities inherent in their new positions, they changed the way they saw themselves. Ibarra (1999) found that professionals transitioning into new roles underwent incremental changes. From her interview transcripts, she deduced that often times, the banking professionals adopted specific

behaviors they deemed relevant to performing better in their roles, based on their professional role models and feedback they received from their bosses. Pratt et al. (2006) studied medical residents and found that when faced with work that did not fit with their identity, the residents used different methods to alter their identities to suit their work. The authors even proposed a theoretical model shown below that explains the process of work role transition and how the change in work also led to changes in the professional identities of the respondents.

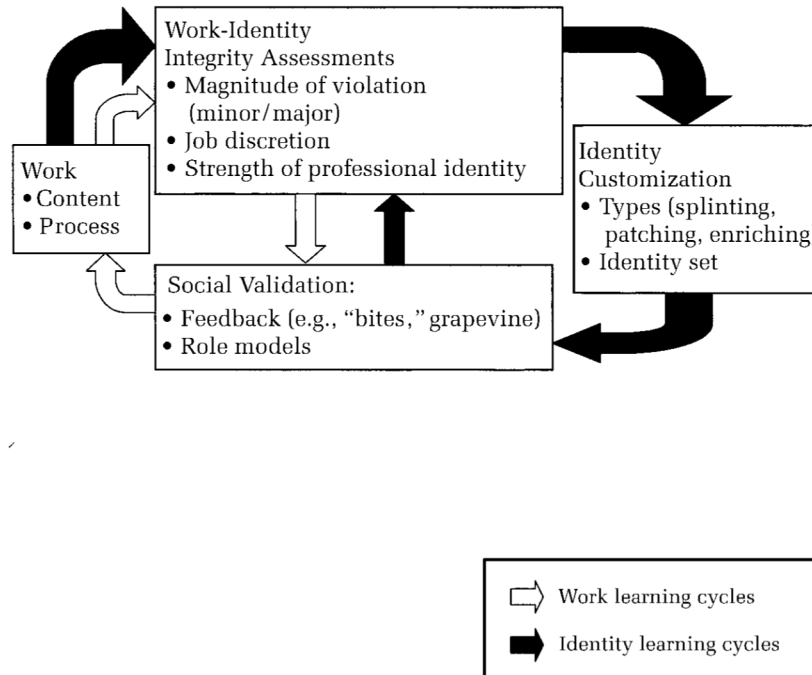


Figure 2: Interplay of Work and Identity Learning Cycles in Profession Identity Customization (Pratt et al. 2006, p. 253)

The above cycle shows that there are two processes at play when an individual's work role changes, namely learning new work and work identity changes. The authors showed that when confronted with new work, professionals evaluate whether it aligns with their work identity or not. If the latter, then based on the "magnitude of violation" or just how far off the work is from what they expect to do as professionals, they undergo an identity customization processes. These customization processes get enforced via some form of social validation. Following a social stamp of approval, the work identity undergoes change, almost always leading to identity enrichment, or what Pratt et al. (2006) describe as an individual's professional identity deepening and becoming more nuanced. For example, in the authors' study, when medical residents expanded their understanding of being primary caregivers by replacing it with "treating the sick" (p. 246) or being medical healers, they experienced identity enrichment. An example closer to home would be when an academic starts thinking of his or her work identity as not just a professor but also a teacher or an educator, in a more holistic sense of the term, then the academic has undergone identity enrichment.

As professionals, journalists have not been immune to these changes. Steensen (2009) studied the role formation of online feature journalists in a Norwegian online newspaper and found that compared to their print counterparts and online news counterparts, the former interacted more with the audience and were more detached from news sources. The author said pre-established values and norms of traditional and online journalists helped shape the online feature journalists' new role in the newsroom. The important observation here is that Steensen (2009) says this influence was a result of the online feature journalists sitting in the same space as the other news journalists; had they been sitting elsewhere, their roles might have developed differently. Thus, their role identity was socially constructed.

Other studies also have examined the changes in news work and how journalists have adapted their professional identity to these transitions. In most cases, change in news work was a direct result of technology adoption in news production and dissemination processes, leading to a change in journalists' work roles. These changes have been studied from an institutional-structuralist perspective (Usher, 2013; Boczkowski, 2004) and or journalistic agency point of view. Results usually showed that journalists are slowly redefining their roles by being receptive to interactivity and the user participation that technology affords but they continue to reiterate their positions as gatekeepers and authoritative, credible information providers (Singer, 2006; Singer & Ashman, 2009; Domingo, 2008; Robinson, 2010; Hermida & Thurman, 2008). Journalists, while open to the idea of convergence -- being able to tell stories across multiple platforms -- and other technological affordances, were not amenable to changes in their practices and routines of news work (Singer, 2004; O'Sullivan & Heinonen, 2008). It must be noted that most of these studies were conducted among journalists working in mainstream media newsrooms and almost always in relation to sharing the news making space with their audiences.

Outside the newsrooms, following numerous layoffs and media company closures, journalists took on entrepreneurial responsibilities and started their own sites to inform their communities of the daily news. These endeavors have required former reporters and editors to display editorial leadership (Andersson & Wiik, 2013, p. 706), explained as finding a delicate balance between fulfilling their social and democratic functions as well as achieving economic profitability. This is particularly difficult for news people because news organizations have traditionally divided their editorial and financial sides and kept them separate. This negotiation has not been studied in hyperlocal media.

Media scholars Deuze and Marjoribanks (2009) said there is need for more exploration in the “transformation of news work, as fundamentally the outcome of contested and negotiated social, political, economic and organizational processes,” (p. 560-561). They also said researchers must study journalists and news work beyond the existing professional structures and it is in that space the following research question positions itself. The application of the Pratt et al. model to individuals in hyperlocal media will help explain how their work identities are created in new media startups. Based on the above literature and call to study changes in news work and its effects on journalists, the following RQ is proposed:

RQ6: How do individuals working for hyperlocal news sites create their work identities and what does this process look like?

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

The questions proposed in the previous chapter lend themselves aptly to a two-method approach; surveys and in-depth interviews. The purpose of the first part of the study is to get an overview of not only the hyperlocal sites that exist in the United States but also the people who work at them. Little research exists on how many of these sites are for profit vs. not-for-profit, how many people work there, what kinds of journalistic and gatekeeping behaviors they practice and the kind of news they cover. Survey instruments, used frequently in quantitative analysis, are useful in targeting a large population and acquiring a descriptive picture of their characteristics (Babbie, 2010), such as demographics, educational degrees, news media habits, and means of producing and editing media content. As the questions above are also aimed at acquiring a broad picture of the hyperlocal media as well as individuals who have founded or work in hyperlocal media, an online survey is most suited for this section.

The second part of the study examines how journalists-turned-entrepreneurs, as well as those working in media startups, adapt to their new roles and responsibilities. Interviews are appropriate for studying how people make sense of their surroundings, “describing their experiences and self-understanding, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world,” (Kvale, 1996, p. 105). They also are a useful technique for gathering data by engaging respondents in a dialogue that is closer to a regular conversation (Potter, 1996) and highlight people’s everyday motivations for action (Hopf, 2004). Together, the survey and interview processes will help in methodological triangulation to attain validity for the acquired results (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011).

In social science research, triangulation of methods improves measurement and allows the researcher to gather more than one viewpoint about the phenomenon being studied (Olsen, 2004). There are a few advantages to achieving triangulation: Findings from one study can be confirmed, questioned or complemented, based on the results from the other study (Denscombe, 2010). For this dissertation, the survey results will provide a panoramic view of present hyperlocal media, as well as the individuals working at them. In addition, the interviews will contribute details about how those working in hyperlocal media step into their roles and perform the requisite tasks.

SURVEYS AND INTERVIEWS: A GOOD FIT

Surveys have been used in past journalism research to get a snapshot of a professional population. The best example of this is the survey of American journalists carried out every ten years by researchers Weaver et al. (2007). The survey method has proven effective in gathering information about the sample's demographics such as their age, education, professional experience, income, gender and race. It also provides a general view of the journalists' values, ethics and attitudes towards the profession. Pew Research also uses surveys for its annual State of the Media report, and other scholarly endeavors have also made effective use of this procedure (for example, Fleming, Thorson, & Zhang, 2006; Beam, 2006; Pierce & Miller, 2007).

Compared to other kinds of surveys, Web surveys are gaining in popularity because they are useful for collecting data from large samples at minimal costs and allow for easy data storage and data analysis (Greenlaw & Brown-Welty, 2009). They do, however, have drawbacks. Web surveys are limited to individuals with internet access (Fan & Yan, 2010). They also have a lower response rate than other survey modes such

as phone and mail, with and without incentive (Sax, Gilmartin, & Bryant, 2003; Fricker et al., 2005). Couper (2000) saw this result as an inevitable consequence of the “democratizing” power of web surveys (p.465). He said the ease with which web surveys allow anyone with access to the internet to collect data will lead to people being inundated with survey requests and they may begin to ignore surveys completely. His words have proven true. A meta analysis of 45 published and unpublished studies that compared web surveys to other survey modes such as telephone, mail, fax and IVR showed, on average, that web surveys have an 11 percent lower response rate than other survey modes (Manfreda et al., 2006).

Despite the risk, web surveys are cheaper than other survey modes and useful when respondents are situated in geographically diverse areas (Fricker & Schonlau, 2002). Also, the quality of data received via web surveys is comparable to other modes. For instance, Shin, Johnson, and Rao (2012) employed a national U.S. sample to study the response rates and quality of data acquired in a mail survey versus a web survey. They found that while online surveys yield a lower response rate than mail surveys, the quality of data -- for open-ended and close-ended questions--was higher in the former than the latter. Nagelhout et al. (2010) also found that compared to data collected via telephone surveys, the data acquired from web surveys were of better quality. Greenlaw & Brown-Welty (2009) compared the different modes of survey administration--(paper) mail, web and mail & web--to examine which one provided a good response rate. They found that a combination of mail and web surveys was the best option. After considering the high cost associated with this method, however, Greenlaw & Brown-Welty (2009) concluded that the web-based survey is possibly the best method for collecting data when budget constraints are a pressing reality.

Several journalism scholars have also used web surveys successfully in their studies. For example, Cassidy (2008) used a web survey to examine men and women journalists' professional role conceptions. Sylvie and Huang (2008) used a web survey to examine value-systems and decision-making styles of newspaper editors. Therefore, despite the risk of low response rates, the pressing constraint of a small budget and the findings of higher quality response were reason enough to chose web survey as the method for the first section of the dissertation. The research question featured in the second part of the study asks how individuals working in hyperlocal media step into their new roles and manage their responsibilities. In-depth interviews will be used to address this query.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Qualitative research scholar Trainor (2013) wrote, "When researchers want to understand how people make meaning of their life experiences, they often go straight to the source and ask questions," (p. 125). Question that get more at the "how and why" are best answered by in-depth interviews that offer tremendous flexibility and versatility, (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013, p. 121). This research instrument helps a researcher understand the lived experiences of people and what they make of them (Seidman, 2013). More than just providing understanding, qualitative research also helps evaluate a phenomenon or process, as described by Patton (1990). He argues that when a researcher, "examines or judges accomplishments and effectiveness, one is engaged in evaluation," (p.11). Thus, this qualitative data--descriptive, direct quotes from respondents, encapsulating their perspectives and lived experiences (Patton, 1990)--will be collected and analyzed for this section of the dissertation.

This study will employ a purposive sample. Purposive sampling includes preselecting specific cases that will provide rich information and understanding of the research question under scrutiny (Emmel, 2013). Purposive samples have been chosen in the past for the purpose of qualitative analysis in journalism research. Hermida and Thurman (2008) conducted 11 semi-structured interviews, specifically with news executives who headed digital news publications in the UK, to examine their attitudes towards user-generated content.

There is little consensus however, on the number of interviews that need to be conducted, and the number of interviewees that need to be included, to get a clear picture of the phenomenon under examination. Most qualitative researchers say that the point in the study when the interviewer begins to hear the same information, also called saturation, is a good stopping point (Seidman, 2013). Guest, Bunce, & Johnson (2006) analyzed data from sixty in-depth interviews with the intention of finding out when this saturation point occurred. The authors found that point after 12 interviews. Apart from data saturation, Emmel (2013) says the number of respondents a researcher wishes to include in his or her qualitative study also depends on “personal and practical limitations,” (p, 140). Thus, the number of interviews conducted for this study will take into account realistic constraints of time and resources. Studies that have previously examined role identity have used in-depth interviews as their data collection method (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006; Barley, 1989). Therefore, there is theoretical precedence for this choice of methodology.

Validity is an integral aspect of scientific inquiry and in qualitative research, “the researcher is the instrument,” (Patton, 1990, p. 14). In the case of this researcher, past professional experience as a journalist, academic training in qualitative methods during the graduate program and research papers that employed in-depth interviews as a method

have provided her with the requisite skills to carry out this study. The interviews will be semi-structured to allow for some kind of order and prior establishment of topic areas. This will help facilitate the interview analysis (Guest et al., 2013). Finally, validity of data will also be achieved through triangulation--acquiring perspectives from two or more directions to achieve a deeper understanding of the issue being studied (Trainor, 2013). Singer (2004), in her examination of newspaper journalists adjusting in a newly converged newsroom, used a combination of in-depth interviews and a survey. She said such triangulation helps “guard against the danger that findings will reflect the method of inquiry in misleading ways,” (p. 844). Thus, this study will employ both methods in its analysis.

STUDY 1: WEB SURVEY AND PROCEDURE

A single database that exhaustively lists all the hyperlocal sites currently active in the U.S. does not exist. There are two reasons for this: one, as hyperlocal sites are difficult to define, those who have tried to create lists say they do not know which sites to include and which to exclude (Hirschman, 2012). The second reason is the high turnover rate of hyperlocal sites; it is difficult to keep track of all the sites that start and shut down in various neighborhoods across the country. There are three databases, however, that have attempted to list all the hyperlocal sites in various parts of the nation. I referred to these databases to draw up a list of all the hyperlocal sites that met a set of predetermined criteria, based on available literature. They are:

1. www.kcnn.org
2. www.cjr.org/news_startups_guide
3. <http://InOtherNews.us/>

These three databases are open, publicly available, online guides of hyperlocal sites that are currently operational in the U.S. *Kcnn* stands for Knight Community News Network and is an initiative of J-Lab: The Institute for Interactive Journalism at American University's School of Communication, "fully supported" by the John F. and James L. Knight Foundation (Knight Community News Network, para. 6). It also provides a database of known citizen media sites, searchable by town and other criteria. *Cjr* is the *Columbia Journalism Review* (CJR) guide to online news startups. Formerly known as the *News Frontier Database*, it lists digital news outlets across the United States and is meant as a guide is for those who want to pursue online journalism (Meyer, 2011) or research it. The *CJR* guide lists the sites based on the following criteria, taken from their website (2011):

1. Digital news sites should be primarily devoted to original reporting and content production.
2. With rare exceptions, outlets should have at least one full-time employee.
3. Digital news site should be something other than the web arm of a legacy media entity.
4. The digital news site should be making a serious effort to sustain its work financially, through advertising, grants or other revenue sources (McLellan, 2010).

The third database, *InOtherNews.us* is described by the author as, "a compilation of online, independent journalistic startups in the wake of legacy media layoffs and industry changes," (Durkin, 2011). I also conducted separate internet searches on *Google*, *Yahoo* and *Bing* search engines with the terms "*hyperlocal news sites*", "*hyperlocal newspapers*", "*community newspapers*", "*citizen journalism*", "*citizen journalists*" and "*hyperlocal media*", "*community news sites*", and "*neighborhood news*," (Horning,

2012). For all these searches, the top 100 results were considered, producing a total of 2400 search results. Any hyperlocal sites that came up in these results and were not listed in the databases were included in the study. I also referred to the list of hyperlocal sites featured in Horning's dissertation (2012). The sites that were finally included in this dissertation study are listed in **Appendix 1**. The following criteria, inspired by those listed on the *Community Journalism Review* website, mentioned above, were used for the hyperlocal sites' inclusion in the study:

1. Online only sites that covered geographic areas smaller than a state were included in the study. The decision to include sites that covered an area larger than a neighborhood was made following Metzgar et al.'s (2011) inclusion of city-wide news media sites in a research study wherein they attempted to define hyperlocal media.
2. The sites should carry original reporting; if a site resembled a personal blog that contained personal opinion but no relevant and/or informative content for the community, it was not included in the list.
3. If the site had not been updated in the last 3 to 6 months, I excluded it from the list. Given the high turnover rate of these sites, I assumed if the content had not been updated, the site was possibly inactive.
4. The sites must carry advertising or declare foundation/grant funding --any financial information that showed some sign of longevity.
5. As the focus of the study was primarily on online hyperlocal news sites, I excluded print only publications that were also hyperlocal in nature. For example *Community Impact* in Austin is a hyperlocal, but is a print paper. It was excluded from the list. Similarly, a hyperlocal magazine in New York, *Bedford & Bowery*, was excluded from the list.

6. Sites that were just aggregators of hyperlinks that connected to news stories on other websites also were excluded from the list.

The sample is not perfect. This is a known risk that faces researchers who are studying new phenomena; there is no way of getting a perfect sampling frame, especially when there is no official or comprehensive list available (Poindexter & McCombs, 2000, p. 83). Once the list of hyperlocal sites was finalized, the email addresses of the founders, co-founders, editors, reporters, columnists, staff writers and regular contributors listed on the website were collected and included in the database. Most hyperlocal websites list email addresses for the founders while many others also list email IDs for their staffers as well as regular contributors. The total number of email addresses gathered from the sites was 1566. The entire sample was used for the web survey to get as many respondents who worked for hyperlocal media as possible.

The survey was built using the Qualtrics survey tool; the tool was also used to administer the survey and collect the results. **Appendix 2** lists the questions asked in the online survey and **Appendix 3** lists the invitation letter that was emailed to the respondents. The research questions and hypotheses that the survey will answer are:

RQ1: What are the social characteristics of individuals who work in hyperlocal media?

RQ2: Which journalistic behaviors do people working for hyperlocal media employ when producing news content for their sites?

RQ3: Is there a difference in the manner in profit and not-for-profit hyperlocal sites follow journalistic behaviors?

RQ4: Which gatekeeping criteria do people working for hyperlocal media employ when working with user generated content on their sites?

RQ5: What are the respondents' perceptions towards user-generated content in general?

H1: Respondents with greater professional experience are more likely to use journalistic behaviors than those with little to no professional experience.

H2: Respondents with higher professional work experience are more likely to engage in gatekeeping behaviors when dealing with content for publication on the site than people with lesser professional experience.

H3: People with more professional work experience are more likely to cover hard news in hyperlocal news sites than those with lower levels of professional work experience.

The total number of emails and contacts acquired from the web search was 1545. Of these, only 1521 emails were functional and the first email including the survey link was sent out to the working accounts on September 5, 2013; three reminders were sent out in the following three weeks to increase the response rate. In addition, the survey was sent out to the 20 respondents who were interviewed for the second part of the study. In all, the survey was sent out to 1541 respondents. Of these, 210 respondents completed the survey while an additional 71 respondents started the survey but never completed it or clicked on the link but did not fill out any responses. The respondents represented 144 hyperlocal sites across the U.S. The final response rate, for the web survey was 14.32

percent⁶. While this is not a remarkably high response rate, studies using online panel samples tend to have low response rates (Chyi, 2012). Also, a low response rate does not reflect on the quality of the data being collected (Shin et al., 2012; Nagelhout et al., 2010).

In order to encourage respondents to participate in surveys, researchers provide incentives and at least three reminders to acquire better response rates (Correa, Willard-Hinsley & Gil de Zúñiga, 2010). Along with three reminders, the respondents for this study also were offered an incentive; they were told their participation in the survey would qualify them to participate in a drawing for an iPad Mini, should they choose to do so. Apart from incentives to participate in the survey, the respondents were also provided with a choice to opt out of the survey by either clicking on the ‘Unsubscribe’ link provided at the end of the invitation email or emailing me with their request. A fair number of respondents used both those options. These responses amounted to 6.43 percent. As most of the respondents worked for online media, there was little cause for concern that internet access may be a deterrent in reaching out to all those who would qualify to participate in this study or that they may not be comfortable using a computer or answering questions in an online survey.

MEASURES

The independent variables used to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses are *professional work experience* and *kind of hyperlocal organization*. The independent variable of *professional work experience* was measured by asking respondents how long they had worked in journalism. These categories were, *one year or*

⁶ Calculated using AAPOR’s (2004) RR1, estimated as (completed interviews)/ (completed + partial interviews) + (refusals and break offs + non-contacts + others) + (unknown if housing unit + unknown, other)

less, 2-4 years, 5-9 years and 10 years or more. The variable *kind of hyperlocal organization* was measured by asking respondents to choose what best described their hyperlocal organization from the three options provided: *for-profit*, *not-for-profit* and *other*. The dependent variables used to answer the research questions include *journalistic behavior*, *gatekeeping behaviors*, *hard news topics* and *soft news topics* coverage.

Journalistic behaviors was measured by asking respondents to rate from 1 to 7, the level of their agreement with ten different functions they carried out in the process of news production. These were: (i) *post something you have written on the site*, (ii) *include links to original source material you have cited or used in some way*, (iii) *confirm the accuracy of all information you post online*, (iv) *spend additional time trying to verify facts you want to include*, (v) *quote other people or media sources directly*, (vi) *discuss current events or news with community members*, (vii) *try to include contrary views in your posts/stories*, (viii) *get permission to post copyrighted material*, (ix) *try to post online something you hear of immediately*, and (x) *include your opinion in self-produced content*. Five of the above nine functions, (ii), (iv), (v), (vi) and (viii) are taken from the journalism behaviors construct introduced by Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2011). Function (i) was adapted from the same study. Function (iii) was adapted from Weaver et al. (2007) while the remaining functions (vii) and (ix) were included by the researcher.

To test this relationship, seven items measuring *journalistic behaviors* were added together to create an additive scale (Cronbach's alpha = .716). These seven factors are: *quote other people or media sources directly*; *post something you have written on the site*; *discuss current events or news with community members*; *include links to original source material you have cited or used in some way*; *spend additional time trying to*

*verify facts you want to include; try to include contrary views in your posts/stories; and confirm the accuracy of all information you post online.*⁷

The variable *gatekeeping behaviors* was measured by asking those respondents who said they worked with user generated content, to state on a 7-point scale, how much they agreed or disagreed with a list of 12 behaviors. These behaviors were, (i) *users can share the stories/links on social networking sites*, (ii) *content produced by a staff writer or invited contributor is published more often than that created by a user*, (iii) *clear distinctions are made between contributions submitted by users and those submitted by staffers and regular contributors*, (iv) *user posts and discussion comments that are considered offensive are removed from the site*, (v) *user generated stories are usually checked for factual accuracy before publishing them*, (vi) *user generated content is edited for grammar and style before publishing on the site*, (vii) *users can post comments on the site without prior edits*, (viii) *user generated stories are controlled for biased opinion in content*, (ix) *user submitted stories and pictures that could be considered controversial in the community are removed from the site*, (x) *users can upload pictures freely on the site*, (xi) *stories are rarely linked to local bloggers or other local content*, and (xii) *users can post stories on the site without edits*. Most of these functions were taken from (Singer, 2010) but were modified by the researcher for the purpose of this study.

The 12 items were added to create a scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .780$). Three of the items were reverse coded to get a strong relationship, namely: *users can post stories on the site without edits*; *users can post comments on the site without prior edits*; *users can upload pictures freely on the site*.

⁷ The remaining three items that were excluded from the scale are: (viii) *get permission to post copyrighted material*, (ix) *try to post online something you hear of immediately*, and (x) *include your opinion in self-produced content*.

The scales of *hard news*, *soft news* and *general news* were additive and formed from a multiple response set of questions that asked respondents to choose the top five topics they covered for their hyperlocal site. The topics were divided into the three categories as the dichotomous division of *hard* and *soft news* can exclude news topics that do not fall in either category (Lehman-Wilzig & Seletzky, 2010). The additive scale of *hard news* was created using the classifications put forth by Curran et al. (2009). Thus the scale comprised education, politics, crime, business, energy, environment and science, and accidents and disasters. Curran et al. (2009) included celebrity news, human interest, sport and other entertainment-centered reports in their conceptualization of soft news. Based on that classification, the *soft news* scale comprised topics such as community residents, social issues, entertainment and music, social activism, school events, and sports. The *general news* additive scale comprised the topics of traffic, weather, consumer affairs, law, religion and pets.

STUDY 2: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS AND PROCEDURE

The interview method has been previously used to understand how professionals adopt new practices, new technologies and new roles (Matheson, 2004; Lowrey & Latta, 2008; Ramaprasad, Liu & Garrison, 2012; Singer, 2004; Pratt et al., 2006; Korica & Malloy, 2010; Slay & Smith, 2011; Ibarra, 1999). This segment of the dissertation focuses on individuals' adoption of new roles and responsibilities in hyperlocal news sites/new news media startups. The best way to study these phenomena is through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Specifically, the research question posed for this study is:

RQ6: How do individuals working for hyperlocal news sites create their work identities and what does this process look like?

Similar to the online survey, there was no ready list available for the hyperlocal sites that were best suited for this part of the study. Therefore, I followed the process of choosing a sample similar to that followed by Kurpius et al. (2010) in their study of hyperlocal sites' revenue models. In the methodology section of their paper, the authors wrote they "selectively chose sites" (p. 364) that had received national recognition. They also consulted with hyperlocal experts on their list of hyperlocal sites chosen for the study.

Following a somewhat similar guideline, I used purposive sampling and drew up a list of names based on extremely limited literature that defined these hyperlocal sites as top performing endeavors (Kurpius et al., 2010; Schaffer, 2007; McLellan, 2010; Stepp, 2011; Briggs, 2012). The criteria for choosing the sites were that they should have received recognition from scholars and media people alike for being stable and successful enterprises. Sites that focused on a narrow geographic area or a topic were included and effort was made to include sites that were situated in various parts of the United States, rather than being concentrated in just one area. All the staffers and contributors whose names and emails were listed on each of these sites were contacted via email and asked to participate in the interview as well as the survey section of the study. Those who said they no longer worked for the site or in some cases, founders who said their site did not identify as hyperlocal, were removed from the mailing list. In two cases, founders of two hyperlocal sites who were not on the original list volunteered to participate in the interview process and were included in the sample. The hyperlocals chosen for this part of the study are listed in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Hyperlocal sites chosen for In-Depth Interviews

NAME	LOCATION
Baristanet	Montclair, Maplewood, NJ
New Castle Now	Westchester County, NY
New Haven Indep.	New Haven, CT
Technically Philly	Philadelphia, PA
Ann Arbor Chronicle	Ann Arbor, MI
**St Louis Beacon	St Louis, MO
Davidson News	Davidson, NC
Voice of San Diego	San Diego, CA
Berkeleyside	Berkeley, CA
West Seattle Blog	West Seattle, WA
Dallas South News	South Dallas, TX
*NowCastSA	San Antonio, TX
Branford Eagle	Branford, CT
Valley Ind. Sentinel	Lower Naugatuck Valley, CT
*Frankford Gazette	Frankford, PA

Note: * Sites were included after the respondents asked to participate in the study. **Site was removed after it asked to be excluded from the study.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with 21 people who had either started a hyperlocal news site or worked for one in a freelance or regular capacity. The entire sample comprising 90 people included those who identified as editorial staffers and community contributors on the hyperlocal websites. All were emailed the invitation to participate in the interview and survey parts of the study. All respondents from the St Louis Beacon (15) said they did not identify their organization as hyperlocal and 2 other said they no longer worked for a hyperlocal site. From the remaining 73 respondents, 23 participated in the interview part of the study while 18 answered the survey as well. The response rate for the interviews was 31.5 percent.

The respondents were contacted by email and two additional follow-up emails were sent to set up a conveniently mutual interview time with the ones who agreed to participate. The final sample comprised 9 women and 12 men, a total of 21 people. Of the 21, 9 of them had founded their own hyperlocal sites, and 9 were full-time reporters or content contributors. The remaining three were part-time contributors. The age groups varied from the young in their mid to late 20s to the oldest being in his 70s.

As these interviews were semi-structured, a list of questions was prepared in advance that focused on how the interviewees came to start or join a hyperlocal and how they “learned the ropes” when adopting this new role of editor and entrepreneur for a small, independent media startup. They also were asked queries about their approach to work on a daily basis, their role models, their problem-solving procedures, and previous work experience. These questions are listed in **Appendix 4**. Apart from the few specific questions, the interviews were allowed to flow organically and the interviewees were allowed to talk about the issues they felt were important to their roles in hyperlocal media startups.

The researcher conducted the interviews from September-October 2013 via a radio studio telephone in the *School of Communication* on the campus at the University of Texas at Austin. They were recorded using Adobe Audition audio software in mp3 format. The average length of the interviews was about 40 minutes, with some lasting 30 minutes and others spilling over the 90-minute mark. The interviews were transcribed verbatim by a transcription agency⁸ hired to perform this task.

To evaluate how new work role adaptation takes place among hyperlocal media personnel, the transcripts were read numerous times and analyzed for major themes that recurred in most of the interviews. Following a textual analysis of the transcripts, the results were differentiated into four broad findings. These findings are first, broadly listed and then explained in further detail in the next chapter.

⁸ Kissamago Transcription Agency has representatives in Mumbai and the U.S. and was hired for transcribing the interviews.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS FROM WEB SURVEY- STUDY 1

This chapter provides the findings from the web survey, which was sent out to the national sample of hyperlocal respondents. The methodology for the sample and the web survey has been explained in the previous chapter. Below are the results.

OVERVIEW: RESPONDENTS AND HYPERLOCAL SITES

Research Question 1 asked what are the social characteristics of the individuals who work in hyperlocal media. **Table 2** provides an overview of the respondent demographics. The demographic picture of this sample is comparable to the results of the most recent national survey of American journalists (2002) conducted by Weaver et al. (2007). More women responded to the hyperlocal survey than the national sample, 49 percent compared to 33 percent. Journalism is a profession for the young and this was evident in the hyperlocal survey, just as it was in the national sample; 24.8 percent selected 19-29 years and 26.2 percent selected 30-39 years versus 29.3 percent that selected 25-34 years and 27.9 percent selected 35-44 years. (Weaver et al, 2007, p. 7). Most hyperlocal respondents were predominantly White or Caucasian and highly educated, with 40 percent saying they had completed college and 28 percent saying they had done some graduate work. About 29 percent said their undergraduate degree was in journalism or another subject with journalism as a minor. The majority of respondents, 40 percent, said they had an undergraduate degree in other subjects, mostly history and political science. Political affiliations of respondents in both samples are more to the left of center than the right.

Table 2: Social Characteristics of the Respondents

	Percent (N=210)
Gender	
Male	51
Female	49
Age	
19-29	24.8
30-39	26.2
40-49	18.4
50-59	21.4
60-69	7.3
70-79	1.9
Race	
White or Caucasian	82
Black/African American	3
Asian or Asian American	6
Pacific Islander	1
Hispanic or Latino	4
Other	4

Table 2 (continued)

Education	
Some College	9.5
College	44.8
Some Graduate Work, ND	13.8
Graduate Degree	27.6
Doctorate, law, Medical Degree	4.3
Income	
Less than \$10,000	5.5
\$10,000 > \$20,000	6.5
\$20,000 > \$30,000	8.5
\$30,000 > \$40,000	15.5
\$40,000 > \$50,000	19.5
\$50,000 > \$75,000	19.5
\$75,000 > \$100,000	16
\$100,000 > \$150,000	6.5
\$150,000 or more	2.5

Table 2 (continued)

Political Affiliation	
Very Liberal	21
Somewhat Liberal	33
Closer to Liberal	19
Neither Liberal nor Conservative	10
Close to Conservative	3
Somewhat Conservative	2
Very Conservative	2
Don't Know	1
Other	9

Additionally, 82 percent of the respondents said they had some professional journalistic experience while 18 percent replied in the negative. About 45 percent said they had worked in the news business for 10 years or more, while 24 percent and 23 percent of the respondents selected 5-9 years and 2-4 years respectively. The remaining 8 percent said they had less than one year of professional news experience. The respondents were also asked to choose which of the news media they had previously worked at, such as newspapers, websites and radio stations. They could check all the options that applied. More than half, 55 percent, chose a website, followed by 39 percent that selected a daily newspaper. About 27 percent had worked at a weekly newspaper, while 24 percent had worked at the website of a newspaper. About the same percent -- 24 -- chose magazine as a medium where they had gained professional experience. Very few respondents chose radio and television media, thus showing a more robust presence of previous work experience in print and digital media.

Table 3 provides an overview of the hyperlocal organizations in the sample. Most of them, 65 percent, follow a for-profit business model and 42 percent of the respondents said their hyperlocal site had more than 20 editorial and full-time staff. From the data, it seems that the organizations also counted their freelancers within the category of editorial and full time staff. About 31 percent of the respondents said they had 2-5 people on their payroll while 14 percent said they ran a solo operation. In terms of coverage area, a little over half (51 percent) said they cover a city while 28 percent chose the category ‘other’. Most of open-ended responses stated **county** as the area of coverage.

The majority of the respondents--43 percent--said they work from home, followed by 22 percent who chose ‘On-the-go (Anywhere, really),’ to describe their workspace. In terms of topics covered, 78 percent of the respondents selected business and 78 percent of the respondents also chose politics. These two topics were followed by education with 77 percent saying their sites covered issues in this subject area, community residents (76 percent), and social issues (76 percent). As a revenue-generating source, banner advertising was the top source with a mean of approximately 39 percent, followed by grants from private foundations or users. All top three revenue-generating sources are some kind of grant or sponsorship options. At the bottom of the revenue rung were classifieds, providing product sales, and collaborating with local businesses to offer special deals to users, basically any kind of advertising sales oriented source.

Table 3: Overview of the Hyperlocal Sites

	Percent
Business Model (N=232)	
For Profit	65
Not for Profit	28
Other	7
Editorial and Full-time Staff (N=281)	
Solo Operation	14
2-5 People	31
6-10 People	8
11-20 People	5
More than 20 People	42
Coverage Area (N= 232)	
Neighborhood	12.5
Town	8.6
City	51.3
Other (primarily “county”)	27.6

Table 3 (continued)

Work Space (228)	
Home Office	43
Desk in a Newsroom	13
Sublet Space (part of another office)	5
Space in a Local Educational Building	5
Coffee Shop	1
On-the-go (Anywhere, Really)	22
Other	11

Table 3 (continued)

Topics covered (multiple response)	
Business	78
Politics	78
Education	77
Community Residents	76
Social Issues	76
Entertainment and Music	65
Crime	61
Energy, Environment, Science	51
Accidents and Disasters	51
School Events	51
Weather	50
Social Activism	47
Sports	41
Pets (cats, dogs and other)	37
Traffic	35
Consumer Affairs	31
Law	30
Religion	28
Other	27

Table 3 (continued)

Revenue Source	Avg. %
Advertising from Banners	38.56
Grants from private foundations and/or users	16.48
Support from Corporations/Businesses	6.91
Publishing advertorials	2.79
Spl. features with focus on advertising	2.00
Advertising from Classifieds	1.87
Content Subscriptions	1.87
Org. local/community events for fundraising	1.60
Partnering with local businesses for specials	1.11
Providing product sales on the site	0.88

Respondents were also asked whether their site carried multimedia elements such as video, audio, and photos, and almost all of them selected yes. Photographs were the most popular multimedia element, with 75 percent respondents saying their site carried them. Video came next with almost 69 percent respondents saying their sites hosted them and only 38 percent of the respondents said they carried audio clips on their sites. Hyperlocal sites actively engage with their audiences on social media; 73 percent respondents said their site had a Facebook page, 72 percent said the site had a presence on Twitter and only 11 percent said their site had a presence on a location-based social site, such as FourSquare. About 22 percent selected the “other” option; they were asked to name the sites on which they had a presence and Instagram, Tumblr, Google Plus and Pinterest came up frequently. The best response possibly came from the respondent who wrote, “Too many to list. If our readers or potential readers are there, so are we.”

Research Question 2 asked which journalistic behaviors editors and staffers displayed when gathering and publishing news/information on their sites. The question included in the survey to gain responses for **RQ2** was, “With reference to producing content for your hyperlocal site, which of the following behaviors are applicable to you?” **Table 4** shows most of the respondents agreed to posting something they have written on the site, including links to original source material, confirming the accuracy of all the information posted online, spending additional time trying to verify facts, and quoting other people and media sources directly.

The numbers show that the respondents followed journalistic behaviors quite closely. The means show they leaned towards strong agreement for behaviors that are about maintain factual accuracy and disagreed with including their opinions in self-produced content ($M=3.32$) but the standard deviation of 2.07 shows there is some dispersion in the responses to this behavior.

Table 4: Means of Journalistic Behaviors performed

Journalistic Behaviors	Mean	SD
Post something you have written on the site	6.56	0.99
Include links to original source material you have cited or used in some way	6.55	0.89
Confirm the accuracy of all information you post online	6.50	0.97
Spend additional time trying to verify facts you want to include	6.40	1.01
Quote other people or media sources directly	6.32	1.14
Discuss current events or news with community members	5.78	1.46
Try to include contrary views in your posts/stories	5.72	1.31
Get permission to post copyrighted material	5.49	1.75
Try to post online something you hear of immediately	4.74	1.85
Include your opinion in self-produced content (reverse coded)	4.68	2.07

Scale: 1= Strongly Disagree- 7= Strongly Agree

H1 predicted respondents with greater professional experience are more likely to use journalistic behaviors than those with little to no professional experience; this hypothesis was not supported. A zero order correlation between the additive scale of journalistic behaviors and the number of years of professional experience did not reveal any statistical significant relationship ($r = .96$; $p > .05$; $N=176$). Respondents with a year or less of work experience are as likely to follow journalistic behaviors as those who have more than ten years of work experience.

The third research question (**RQ3**) asked which *gatekeeping behaviors* the respondents apply when working with user-generated content submitted for publication. Specifically, the question in the survey asked, “With reference to working with user

contributions, which of the following behaviors do you practice? Please choose the appropriate response for each statement.” **Table 5** lists the means and standard deviations of these behaviors based on the respondents’ answers on a seven-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree and 7=Strongly Agree).

The results show the respondents agreed they made clear distinctions between content submitted by users versus those by staffers and regular contributors (M=5.88, SD= 1.45) and remove user posts and discussion comments that are considered offensive (M=5.82, SD= 1.33). Most respondents continue to follow *journalistic behaviors* and *gatekeeping practices* when working with content that is published on hyperlocal sites. They continue to moderate user comments, check them for factual accuracy and edit them for grammatical errors, processes also observed on other online news sites (Hermida & Thurman, 2008). Editors have opened their minds to user-generated content to some degree, but they continue to maintain gatekeeping practices.

Table 5: Means of Gatekeeping Practices followed in Hyperlocal Sites/News Startups

Gatekeeping Practices when working with UGC (N=88)	Mean	SD
Users can share the stories/links on social networking sites	6.52	0.95
Content produced by a staff writer or invited contributor is published more often than that created by a user	6.28	1.34
Clear distinctions are made between contributions submitted by users and those submitted by staffers and regular contributors	5.88	1.45
User posts and discussion comments that are considered offensive are removed from the site	5.82	1.33
UG stories are usually checked for factual accuracy before publishing them	4.99	2.21
User generated content is edited for grammar and style before publishing on the site	4.78	2.38
Users can post comments on the site without prior edits (reverse coded)	3.29	2.34
User generated stories are controlled for biased opinion in content	4.23	2.29
User submitted stories and pictures that could be considered controversial in the community are removed from the site	3.72	1.81
Users can upload pictures freely on the site (reverse coded)	4.59	2.41
Stories are rarely linked to local bloggers or other local content	3.26	1.85
Users can post stories on the site without edits (reverse coded)	5.14	2.41

Scale: 1= Strongly Disagree- 7= Strongly Agree

H2 proposed that respondents with higher *professional work experience* are more likely to engage in *gatekeeping practices* when dealing with content for publication on the site than people with *less professional experience*; it was not supported. A zero order correlation between this additive scale and level of professional experience revealed a non-significant relationship ($r = .172; p > .10; N=70$).

RQ4 was posited to examine respondents’ perceptions related to user contributions. Perceptions of prior professional journalistic experience being important for producing quality news content were also analyzed. **Tables 6** and **7** below, provide the means and standard deviations to show the respondents’ opinions on the two issues.

Table 6: Means of Journalists’ Perceptions about Users and the Content they generate

Perceptions about UGC (N=208)	Mean	SD
User contributions add value to the site	6.00	1.24
Content provided by users must be distinguished from content provided by staff on the site	5.81	1.46
Inaccuracy or defamatory comments from users are likely to land the site in trouble	5.21	1.58
Majority of the users are interested in commenting on the stories posted on the site	4.00	1.46
Users must be rewarded for their contributions	4.00	1.51
The site receives more web/traffic visits from the community because it posts more content from the members	4.00	1.59
Majority of the users are interested in contributing to the site	3.00	1.43
Users do not know what they want to read	2.92	1.48
Users can effectively police their own comments on the website	2.83	1.47
Everyone is an expert and must be allowed to speak his or her mind freely on the site	2.00	1.47

Scale: 1= Strongly Disagree- 7= Strongly Agree

The means listed above show that respondents agreed that user contributions add value to the site ($M = 6.00$, $SD = 1.24$) but neither agreed nor disagreed that users must be rewarded for their contributions ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.51$). The respondents did not think

of their audiences as purposeless consumers and disagreed that users did not know what they wanted to read (M= 2.92, SD= 1.48). At the same time, they somewhat disagreed that the majority of the users are interested in contributing to the site (M= 3.00, SD= 1.43). The respondents agreed that content from the users must be distinguished from content provided by staff (M = 5.81, SD = 1.46) and inaccurate or defamatory comments from users would likely get the site in trouble (M = 5.21, SD = 1.58).

Respondents were also asked to rank the importance they place on prior professional journalistic experience for hyperlocal news gathering. The results in **Table 7** show that respondents view professional experience in a favorable light. They strongly agree that reporters with professional experience have important skills that are lacking in reporters who have not had any professional experience (M = 6.00, SD = 1.27). They also agree that reporters with professional experience understand news better (M = 5.08, SD = 1.59) and provide stories of better quality than those without any professional experience (M = 5.42, SD = 1.58).

Table 7: Perceptions of Prior Professional Journalistic Experience

Importance of having prior Journalistic experience	Mean	SD
Reporters with professional experience have important skills that those without any professional experience lack	6.00	1.27
The quality of stories provided by reporters with professional experience is better than the stories provided by those without any professional experience	5.42	1.58
Reporters with professional experience talk to more official representatives in government and private companies than those without professional experience	5.31	1.49
Reporters with professional experience are better at filtering good information from bad than those without professional experience	5.24	1.62
Reporters with professional experience understand news better than those without any professional experience	5.08	1.59
Reporters with professional experience tend to write more stories related to local governance than those without any professional experience	4.94	1.54
Reporters with professional experience guide others without professional experience on what to post on the site	4.77	1.58
Reporters with professional experience suggest more stories for posting on the website than those without professional experience	4.60	1.63
Reporters with professional experience tend to link with fewer stories on other sites than those without professional experience	4.11	1.45
Reporters with professional experience tend to interview fewer people on the street and other unofficial sources than those without professional experience	3.56	1.49

Scale: 1= Strongly Disagree- 7= Strongly Agree

The ten items that were used to elucidate respondents' perceptions of the importance of prior journalistic professional experience in the news reporting process were added together to form a scale called *professional experience perception* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .788$). A zero order correlation between *professional experience perception* and *number of years of professional experience* was statistically insignificant ($r = .118$; $p > .10$; $N=176$). There was a statistically significant relationship, however, between *professional experience perception* and *journalistic behaviors* ($r = .178$; $p < .05$; $N=206$). The positive relationship, albeit weak, indicates that respondents who perceive that prior journalistic professional experience leads to a better grasp of news and quality of work, are more likely to adhere to journalistic behaviors.

The third hypothesis (**H3**) predicted that people with extensive professional work experience are more likely to cover hard news in hyperlocal news sites than those with less professional work experience. A correlation between *professional work experience* and the three news scales revealed a significant negative relationship between work experience and the soft news scale ($r = -.162$; $p < .05$; $N= 153$). This relationship shows that the more work experience a respondent has, the less likely he or she is to cover soft news or the topics of community residents, social issues, entertainment and music, school events, social activism and sports. There was no significant correlation between the number of years of professional experience and the other two scales, hard news ($r = 0.067$; $p > .10$; $N= 159$) and general news ($r = 0.114$; $p > .10$; $N= 159$)

RQ5 was posed to find out if there are differences in the manner in which for profit and not-for-profit hyperlocal sites followed journalistic behaviors (see **Table 8**). There is a statistically significant difference between the mean of not-for-profit organizations ($M= 6.47$, $SD = .52$) and the mean of for-profit organizations ($M= 6.18$, $SD = .73$) with regard to the scale of journalistic behaviors $t(197) = -3.08$, $p < .01$. The

difference in means shows that not-for-profit organizations are more likely to follow journalistic behaviors (M=6.47) than for-profit organizations (M=6.19).

Independent sample t-tests between for-profit and not-for-profit sites and gatekeeping practices as well as their perceptions of prior professional journalistic experience showed no significant difference for the latter. Both kinds of organizations guarded their gates in relation to news content. There is a statistically significant difference, however, in their perceptions of whether prior professional journalistic experience leads to better quality newsgathering. Non-profit organizations are more likely to agree to with these perceptions compared with for-profit organizations (see **Table 8**).

Table 8: Mean significant differences between profit and not-for-profit organizations in newsgathering and publishing processes and perceptions

	For Profit M (SD)	Non-Profit M (SD)	T Statistic
Journalism Behaviors	6.18 (0.735)	6.47 (0.516)	-3.077**
Gatekeeping Practices	4.84 (1.171)	4.95 (0.582)	-.562
Professional Experience Perception	4.84 (0.861)	5.12 (0.846)	-2.083*

*p < .05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

SUMMARY

The main goal of the survey was to get a general idea about the people who work at hyperlocal sites, their demographics, some information about the kind of sites they work for, their views on the importance of journalistic behaviors and gatekeeping practices in hyperlocal workrooms. The findings show that most respondents working

hyperlocal media are college educated, fairly young and mostly liberal. The respondents featured in this sample were similar to the ones who participated in Weaver et al's (2007) last national study of American journalists working for mainstream media. The respondents featured in the hyperlocal study follow journalistic and gatekeeping practices in a manner similar to editors of traditional media outlets. They prioritize the factual accuracy of content and are equally skeptical of user generated content and allowing contributors absolute freedom to participate online.

The number of years of professional experience of the respondents was not relevant to their gatekeeping practices. Respondents working with user-generated content seem to manage that content in a similar manner. All respondents were editing user-generated stories for grammar, factual accuracy and biased content. They all made distinctions between content produced by staff writers and invited contributors and that produced by users. Thus, for those with significant professional experience and those with a year or less, content entry is select and dependent on the discretion of the gatekeeper.

Across the board, all respondents disagreed that users should be allowed to post comments freely on the site and agreed to making clear distinctions between content produced by users and that produced by staff. Most also believed that reporters with prior professional experience had important skills that those without any experience lacked, and those with more professional experience were less likely to cover soft news. The respondents understand the importance of user generated content and engaging the community. At the same time, they attempt to maintain their hold on the process of newsgathering by means of intangibles such as experience and quality.

There were significant differences in means of for-profit organizations versus not-for-profit organizations in relation to journalism behaviors and perceptions of prior work

experience. With reference to journalism behaviors, both kinds of organizations displayed journalistic behaviors but the not-for-profit organizations seemed to follow these behaviors more stringently. Not-for-profit organizations were also more likely to believe that prior professional journalistic experience leads to better news work.

Taken together, the results paint a picture of tightly controlled gates when it comes to content generated by users as well as those who do not have prior journalistic professional experience. In the opinions of the respondents, news content produced by the experienced is of better quality and more likely to have been appropriately filtered. Younger respondents also are more likely to agree that those with more professional experience guide others without any professional experience on what to post on the site. Thus there is a tremendous amount of control being exerted on the content that is published on the site.

The story these findings really tell, however, is that the field of hyperlocal media or new media startups comprises primarily former journalists who are using new media tools to continue doing the jobs they are familiar with; informing their neighborhoods, communities, counties and cities about issues they feel are important to the people living in those areas. They report on a wide range of issues but primarily community residents, politics and crime. Most of them work from home. They continue to do the job in the manner they learned it—they practice journalistic behaviors the way other reporters do-- and their gatekeeping behaviors also are no different from their peers in mainstream media. Thus, repetition and replication of the way news is covered may explain why hyperlocal media is more of the same, only on a much smaller scale. Is it really any surprise, therefore, that they are constantly under threat of going under, quite like their big mainstream media siblings?

Several reasons have been attributed to the usually short life of a hyperlocal news site. Lack of business models is one (Kurpius et al., 2010); concentrated, small audiences that restrict the revenue a site can possibly earn is another (Seymour, 2013). Both these reasons feed into the other problems that plague hyperlocal media, primarily limited resources to spend on news gathering and staff, thus severely restricting the amount of content a site can produce. There are, however, very few studies that question the work itself. For example, is the way news being reported really the way it ought to be done for a hyperlocal site? Are those working for these online startups overlooking the fundamental function purpose of storytelling and how it must change to suit the times and the medium⁹?

Thurman et al. (2012) suggest exercising caution against making propositions about the “right way forward” (p. 281) for hyperlocal media. The authors say innovation can come from either side, the print publishers or the independent new media. What this research shows is lack of innovation not at the organizational level but rather at the media routines and individual levels. Those who have professional journalistic experience continue to report news in the way they learned it, irrespective of the media they work in. Many of the respondents in this study had worked in professional mainstream media before joining an independent online startup. However, number of years of professional experience had no bearing on journalistic behaviors; a respondent with less than a year of journalistic experience held the same beliefs as someone who had more than ten years of experience on how journalists must behave when reporting the news.

Thus, if those working in hyperlocal media continue to report news the way it has always been done, then they may protect everything news professionals hold dear but at

⁹ By medium here I mean the capacity of the site to create news content as well as the size of the audience it caters to, rather than medium in terms of print, television and digital.

the cost of losing their audience. Usher (2013) wrote that journalism faces a post-modern crisis in which everything about the profession is being questioned, be it writing style, business models, and accountability. Based on the findings elaborated upon in this chapter, this researcher concludes that in the post-modern crisis lies journalism's opportunity: the profession suffers from a severe case of inertia and this may be the perfect chance for journalists to reinvent themselves and their work.

In order to move one step closer to the goal of reinvention, it is imperative to first learn how individuals take on new roles in new media startups. This platform is perfect for studying the strength of media routines because hyperlocal media are not shackled by organizational structure or design. These work roles also do not have any shape or context; they will be what the people who enter into these roles make of them. The next chapter attempts to understand this process by examining how individuals take on new roles of hyperlocal media entrepreneurs or employees working for these new media startups.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS- STUDY 2

The previous chapter listed the findings from the web survey. The results provided a demographic picture of the people working for hyperlocal sites as well as an insight into the journalistic behaviors and gatekeeping practices they followed. The results also conveyed that hyperlocal media were not different from mainstream media in their newsgathering and publishing practices. This chapter takes the analysis one step further to understand how and why hyperlocal founders and staff follow traditional routines and practices. At the same time, these interviews allow for better comprehension of how they adapt to their roles after taking on new positions as entrepreneurs or employees of new media startups. I have drawn on organizational behavior theories of role identity construction during work role transition to analyze this process.

These startups, small in size and situated deep within the community, require their staff to be in direct contact with their audience and to take ownership for their content. They become the persona of their respective hyperlocal sites. Their community identifies with them as well as the site; workers are residents of the community they report on. Thus, working for a hyperlocal media outlet not only requires a holistic understanding of the media business, given how small sized and staffed these sites are, but also being able to maintain an acceptable distance when reporting on one's own community. In this chapter, I will analyze and unravel these processes to better understand how individuals working in hyperlocal media adapt to their new work roles.

The focus on the work of an individual addresses the call to bring back the role of work, as a unit of analysis, into organizational behavior studies. Barley and Kunda (2001) argue that this is the central feature of a post-industrial economy. Studying the work professionals do also pushes research in the direction of understanding how new start-up

organizations form, and this process may hold the key to creating new media business models. The important overarching idea explored in this chapter is how individuals working for these small, new media startups navigate the role transition from strictly editorial to also being responsible for bringing in revenue. With the wall between the content and business sides non-existent, how do these journalistic professionals adapt to their new role?

ANALYSIS

As this section specifically looks at the role transition of journalists from staff and reporters to editors/publishers and entrepreneurs of new media startups, the primary focus was on the process of role adaptation. The larger question here is how do journalists adapt to a role that straddles both the financial and editorial sides of the business?

The interviews revealed:

1. Lack of role models for these new media entrepreneurs has meant they draw from their previous experiences in a traditional news environment and hence:
 - a. Continue to practice journalism the traditional way.
 - b. Prioritize reporting over innovation and using new ways of presenting the news.
2. The former-journalists-turned-entrepreneurs face a difficult conundrum when they find their responsibilities for the site extend to not only the editorial side, but also the business and revenue side of the startup. This is an idea most journalists cannot reconcile with their fundamental belief of maintaining editorial objectivity. Thus they explain their function of overseeing advertising and revenue sales as part of their holistic role of providing an important service to their communities.

This work-integrity violation and attempt to provide a holistic explanation for their revenue seeking has led them to indulge in patching, or finding consonance between the work they are expected to do versus the work they do, by coming up with new, positive, composite work images of themselves (Pratt, Rockman & Kaufman, 2006).

3. Changes to their work identity have led entrepreneurs and staffers to redefine their work and their role in the community. They see themselves as ‘community campaigners’, who speak in a biased but fair voice. Hyperlocal writing tends to be freer, liberally infused with the reporters’ “voice” and personal pronouns, changing the narrative from third person objective to a more personalized conversation.
4. To guide themselves and each other along the untraveled path of journalistic entrepreneurship, hyperlocal media entrepreneurs have formed a group called LION—Local Independent Online News—and use a closed Facebook group page to exchange notes on how to run a news media startup. Their interactions include giving each other tips on how to handle an advertiser who may not be paying up, a bad review of a restaurant that also advertises on the site, and discussing issues related to the day-to-day operations of the news business. This professional colloquy is an important step in the media entrepreneurs’ role identity formation. Through discussions about their work on a common, communication platform, they try to make sense of their work and daily negotiations between being a reporter and an entrepreneur.

Finding 1: Lack of role models for these new media entrepreneurs has meant they draw from their previous experience in a traditional news environment.

It is common for professionals to find mentors who can guide them on how best to fit in to or perform a new role. It is equally common for professionals who take on new roles to look at others around them who are already performing similar roles or model their behaviors based on a role model--someone they hold up as an epitome of performance par excellence. Ibarra (1999), in her study of banking professionals found that new employees tend to look to their superiors to figure out the appropriate behaviors for specific roles. Journalists who took on the role of entrepreneurs when they started their own hyperlocal sites, however, claimed they had no such role model they could refer to. They mentioned exchanging notes and ideas with other journalists-turned-entrepreneurs but did not mention them as “role models”. This was best epitomized by the comment of Respondent1:

And so there was, and still is, a lot of communication via this Facebook group about issues that come up, anything from advertising to scanner selection to ad display, etc, ... and I guess it was the Reynolds Journalism Institute, who a number of years ago started this Block by Block in 2010, this first community news summit. And so very early on, we made connections with people, and then I think later that year, or the next, NYU held a conference and I went to that. So you know from the beginning there has been sort of a community of people doing a hyper-local except for Patch, you know they were never really accepted. Anyway, we definitely have had a lot of communication with other owners of sites but I don't think we modeled ourselves on anyone in particular, we sort of formed our own vision.

Another media entrepreneur on the East Coast, Respondent2 reiterated the same thought as Respondent1 and said:

I don't think I could ever point to one site that was the answer to what we want to do, I think it was, our interest in new media, and old media alike, and kinda taking these experiences from both those and trying to create something new... Obviously we were very interested in the hyperlocal space, but we never compared ourselves to someone like, the NJ-based hyperlocal, Baristanet. And I

mean, I think, that was a different game too where we felt that we were differentiated from them because not only were we a hyperlocal, but we were also a very niche topic... we've always kept up with industry news in this realm, there wasn't another site like that where we were getting advice. We were more of the mind, or more interested in setting out to explore and test rather than just take proven models and kind of expect that they would work for us.

The new journalistic entrepreneurs or employees at these new media startups constantly reiterated their expertise for being in the "business of news" by virtue of their past experience either as a reporter, editor or producer. The respondents, who cited previous professional experience, also mentioned their former editors and colleagues in prior jobs as important mentors who helped them "learn the ropes". Most respondents, when asked, "Tell me a little bit about yourself and how you came to join/start [hyperlocal news site]," began their responses, "Well, I had worked as a journalist for ____ years," thus implying their credibility to be a founder or employee at a news media hyperlocal is derived from their previous work experience. Newsroom organizational socialization, thus, clearly has a lasting impact; hyperlocal or online media journalists-turned-entrepreneurs relied on their prior expertise in reporting the news as an important criterion for being qualified to take on this new entrepreneurial role.

For instance, Respondent3 said he started his hyperlocal site when he saw a need for neighborhood news following his return home after a work assignment abroad. He said he was interested in news about his community but could not find one adequate source that informed him of the important events taking place in local government. When his informal neighborhood newsletter took off within a very short period of time, he decided to take news matters into his own hands and start a site that would focus on issues relevant to his community. He thought he was the right man for the job given his journalistic experience spanning 35 years. He said:

There were some Town Hall issues that I had been trying to follow and realized that there was really no place to get information about especially development news and things that were going on at Town Hall. Some of the other newspapers, the big newspaper in the city near us, had cut back on the coverage of the suburbs and the weekly paper was not following some of the issues I was interested in. I looked around and said, 'Somebody ought to cover this stuff because we citizens need it,' and to make the long story short, I looked around and it seemed like I would be the best person to do it. I had this easy to use format (blogging platform wordpress) available to me so I started playing around with it for a few months and in mid 2007 I decided to incorporate as a small business.

Another media site founder, Respondent4 while not directly saying that past professional experience gave her the expertise to start a hyperlocal site, spoke about other reporters approaching her and asking her to consider the option of starting an independent news site. She said as she was already actively reporting for her opinion columns, she agreed to their proposition, and started her hyperlocal news site. For her, going from reporting to starting a local media site seemed like a natural progression; she thought of the site as a platform to continue reporting on community issues that mattered to her. She said:

I was looking for a place to write a column, I did not think I would be writing about the town in which I live but there were a variety of political issues which were going on that were deemed problematic and nobody was writing about them, so I began writing a column for _____ and I called it _____ and I stayed in the column for about 2 years or so. We had another newspaper in town, a print publication called _____ which was a family owned paper and it was about 75-80 years old. It had been purchased along with many other weeklies in the _____ area by the _____. About 4 years ago or so the _____ Company sold those papers. Two of their reporters came to me and asked if I would expand the _____ and make it into a community type news site and I agreed. So I hired two people, we are a non profit and I pay them as well as I can which is not much unfortunately but they are grateful because they love reporting and they want to do it. I have had a number of interns over the years and so I started in 2006 and we are in 2013 and we are still going.

Another hyperlocal founder, Respondent5, said that prior knowledge about reporting and gathering information helped her hit the ground running.

I strongly believe that while there have been a few cases of people who certainly didn't have professional journalism experience, it sure helps. Either that or have someone that you kinda consult with who can kind of help you because even though I don't believe that, or that you can draw the lines anymore between journalists and non-journalists and so forth so clearly, it just, if there was a lot that I didn't know that I hadn't already learned, I don't know where I would have gotten it.

In instances where the founders did not have extensive reporting experience to fall back on, they cited either their journalism degrees and/or their membership in the community as residents who have lived there for years, in some instances, generations,. They too said they did not have the luxury of a prototype to observe and examine before starting their own websites. They conveyed a sense of wanting to explain how they were 'qualified' to run a hyperlocal news site despite not having any previous journalistic experience; they emphasized their commitment to the community as long-term residents, as their eligibility to run a news site that raises issues and concerns important to the people who live there. For example, Respondent6 did not study journalism, nor does he have traditional journalism experience. He said:

For us, I think to be successful in an economically depressed neighborhood, you really have to be committed to the idea of civic change, the idea that residents really need to have a voice, if you are going to have a better neighborhood. My parents were semi involved in the community before the _____. My mother once ran for ward leader (which is at a political system in _____) committee person, she wasn't a ward leader, committee person. My mother ran a daycare, on the corner of, at one of the corners of _____, and I think just the history we had in here, kind of encourages us to do that (cover _____). I don't know how somebody else would, I don't know if there's some kind of magic formula that would make what we do successful in another place because people don't really do that.

He tried to overcome his limitation of not being a professional by highlighting the fact that he is a second-generation resident and his family is committed to the welfare of the community. It must be noted that most of those who cited professional experience as their qualification for getting into the business of news, are also long-time residents of the

community they report on. These interviewees, however, chose to cite their professional experience as the reason why they were suited to do the job and do it well. In both instances, there was a need to express knowledge expertise, either of the editorial work, or the geography being covered. The idea of anybody going to any neighborhood and simply starting a hyperlocal news website did not emerge, nor was it said aloud. In fact, in one instance, hyperlocal founder Respondent7 said she has now moved to another nearby neighborhood and wondered aloud during the interview if that qualified her to continue running a hyperlocal that is so intimately intertwined with a community and a particular geographic location. She said:

I am very conflicted because I love reporting, I love reporting on the place I am from, and I love telling these stories that are otherwise not being told at all... On the other hand, I kind of pigeonhole myself into this place, sort of identify me with being of _____. I recently moved out of there into a different section of the city so then it became a question of, can somebody who doesn't live there actively report on what's going on, and it's sort of the direction my life is going, where like, this is just where I had to move at this time and I hadn't considered the implications of owning a business that is so tied to geographics (sic).

Respondent5 also said that in order to do this job well, it is important to reside in the community one is covering.

For doing specifically what we do, I also believe that you have to be based in the community. Okay, maybe if somehow it works out this way, maybe you could live ten minutes away, perhaps, I guess, but I can't imagine not, kind of the way that Patch and some of them, at some point had people trying to write about communities remotely. That just doesn't work terribly well. If the community is your beat, you kind of have to be immersed in it, it's not really the same as saying, 'Well I am a cop reporter, doesn't mean I have to be a cop,' or to have to live in a crime-ridden neighborhood. In this particular case, you have to be able to absorb what's happening, you have to be able to see things as you drive around a supermarket, into a school and so forth. And of course you have to have a lot of, a lot of energy and you have to probably not need terribly much sleep.

As these examples suggest, the founders identified a lack of role models that perfectly fit the image of a successful journalist-turned-entrepreneur and used phrases such as “figuring it out as we go” to describe their steering through uncharted waters. They cited prior professional journalistic experience, a degree in journalism or family involvement in the community as forms of credibility and legitimacy to cover the news in a community. They relied on journalistic behaviors they had learned during their professional careers or college education to gather and publish information.

It was a different story, however, for the reporters and contributors working at these sites. They said they looked to people in senior positions within the organization for markers on how to model their roles and work in a new online media startup. For instance, Respondent8 mentioned he was “very, very, very, very, very fortunate” to have a boss who was supportive and provided him with feedback on stories that helped him figure out how best to approach reporting on the community. He said:

So I don't know I am the type of the person who is sort of anti-authoritarian like I don't traditionally have great relationships with bosses but he has been just amazing and like a great resource and has always [been] willing to teach me anything or set time aside and a lot of the day, we just sort of flesh stories out just between the two of us like what is... he will read my story and say, “We have to get this person's point of view or whatever, see what's happening with this aspect of it.”

Other reporters gave similar responses; they mentioned they sought feedback from senior editors and the founders/CEOs on their reporting and news coverage. They subsequently modeled their writing, choice of stories and overall coverage of the community to suit the identity of the organization as well as the demands of the senior editorial staff. For example, Respondent9 said all that he had learned in the traditional newsroom was “beaten out” of him in the new hyperlocal site. He described the traditional newsroom writing style as impersonal, jargon-filled and uncomprehending and

said he had to unlearn all the lessons he had acquired in a traditional print newsroom. Respondent10 said she learned the organization's reporting and writing style from the senior reporter and editor who had been there for longer than she had.

I would say in _____, it's been my editor, and the reporter who has been here since 2009. The reporter has taught me a lot about political issues and told me about certain things I should read to better understand the city, my supervisor, my editor, has certainly helped me to get better at picking up good story ideas and just like kinda working for an online audience and not for a newspaper anymore because that's definitely been the biggest transition for me, just the freedom (in the organization), is so much larger and more significant and sometimes I've had to get used to that.

From the above comments, it emerges that reporters working lower down in the managerial hierarchy experience organizational socialization similar to the way it takes place in traditional media organizations. Research on organizational socialization in traditional newsrooms showed reporters learned what to write and how to write it based on how editors and news desks treat their copy and what ends up on the newspaper pages. There are never any clear-cut instructions, only the printed results (Sigelman, 1973). The respondents mention stylistic differences in writing style but that is to be expected when one moves from one media organization to another.

It is clear that the founders at the top of the employee pyramid in hyperlocal site relied on their past professional experience, and highlight the similarities between them and other journalists. The employees lower down the pyramid, such as reporters and contributors, however, looked to their bosses and company leaders for guidance on role adaptation. While they think they are changing as journalists and are now different from their print and television peers, they are only going through the conventional process of organizational socialization in a new firm. This emphasis on past professional journalistic experience at the top of the hyperlocal hierarchy, that filters down to the reporters and

contributors who write for the site, leads to the next finding of journalists using traditional methods to gather news and publish it.

a) Continue to practice journalism the traditional way

Almost all respondents interviewed for this study spoke about doing journalism the “right” way and following the norms of the profession, such as attending city hall meetings, talking to people, fact-checking and confirming information before publishing anything online. In addition, the often hired professional freelancers or “experts” to write specific stories for their site. Even when providing instructions to freelancers, most hyperlocal founders tended to give them very detailed guidelines on traditional journalistic norms and ethics. Thus, they make every effort to do things the “journalistic” way even though they are ambivalent about the boundaries between “journalists” and “non-journalists”. For instance, Respondent7 said:

I don't always like to make a distinction between journalism and blogging because there's a ton of overlap but it's pretty much journalism. Everything is edited and fact checked. We have standards in terms of who can be used as a source and, how we disclose when someone is advertising and we also happen to be writing a story about them, and clearly marking content as either commentary or news, paid advertisements. We don't want there to be any confusion. And I think it's important in such a small site; you need to sort of make those lines clear and stick up for yourself because it's so easy for people to get confused about what's what.

It is important to note here that even though Respondent7 did not have professional experience, she had a degree in journalism from a school in the North East region of the United States. The respondent had been instructed and socialized in traditional norms and therefore, it is not surprising that the respondent espoused them when asked about the process of reporting the news. Other respondents too highlighted

how they followed the ‘right’ way of reporting the news, in a bid to gain credibility for their news site. Site founder Respondent4, said:

I have been in reporting long enough. I mean I’ve spent over 40 years of my life on this and in this field. I kind of know what will make readers read a story. You know what should be on page 1 and when I get up and when I think about it, I try to do a story a day, which isn’t a lot you know. Some publications do more. The issue for us is we do real reporting where I send my reporters out on stories, they interview people, they look at meetings. That is not happening in online journalism in every community in the United States. In fact one of my great fears is that when people like us stop writing, when we get too old or we decide okay that’s it we won’t do it any more, there won’t be any people with my skill sets around to do this stuff...

Respondent5 said along with personally following reporting norms, such as fact-checking details, talking to sources and attending meetings, they also had to teach freelancers and contributors the basics of reporting to ensure the content covered is kosher. She said:

I’ve learned over time how I can’t assume everybody knows these things like if you are going to cover a dinner or some sort of an event and someone offers you a food or beverage, you can’t accept it because our ethics code does not allow that (emphasis). So you have to very kindly tell them that, ‘You know, you are a working journalist, you can’t do that.’ Also that... in most cases, they’ll be taking pictures so they just want to be sure, get a wide shot, get a narrow shot etcetera. Don’t worry about writing every little single word that’s said, be sure and listen for key points, get the supporting information so that you can go back and say, ‘Oh okay, when they talked about this, here’s what I did.’ There are a lot of things that we don’t do so I don’t have to worry about assigning people about. We don’t do ‘gotcha journalism,’ I don’t assign people to go shadow someone or go make a cold door knock. A lot of what I use freelancers for, tends to be either features or events so it’s pretty simple but it’s also, you realize after you talk to people that you just need to make sure that they get the 5Ws as well as getting people’s business cards. We’ve wound up sort of teaching people from scratch, people that hadn’t worked as journalists before but had worked as writers, so they had to get a little bit of reporting basics.

There is strong emphasis from the founders on following journalistic norms when reporting the news, even if the site or staff may not give the impression of being anything like a regular news organization. Most of the founders work from home, report on their neighborhood that includes people they know as neighbors and friends. Thus apart from gaining credibility, it is almost as if they use these journalistic norms to put some distance between their personal and professional lives. One site founder Respondent11 said all content, including pre-written press releases are edited for clarity, and context before it is posted on their website. He said:

So have we provided everything that we know at the _____? Have we provided some direction to the other part of the archives that could be relevant to understanding this smaller event? So that's one thing that we edit for and the standard writerly things that you know, complete sentences, does the subject agree with the verb? Is the name spelled right? That's more proof reading than editing but it's a part of it. It's not a separate proof reading process but I would say for comprehensiveness for and occasionally... it could be a choice of headlines and the introductory material... you are making choices about what are the most important materials or what was the most important thing in the meeting or what is the central thing.

Respondent2 tried to represent the work his site does and the process for publishing news as more of the same standards followed in traditional media, but with a few changes made to keep up with the times. He said:

I think our ethics policy, which you can see at _____, it's pretty standard fare for any publication but in terms of the process used, I mean, I should say there's not anything different. We have a reporter who is on the beat of technology, and is connecting with sources and even like reporting any meetings with them, as any news organization would, but I think what changes is the story of journalism's past where you are writing a longer feature about and trying to capture both sides of the story, I think objectivity is now more representing the contextual information that shapes the story and if there's a quote from a single source and that's a faster turnaround, I think the community will correct, or straighten out how that story is conveyed. So, we think that our editorial process is an ongoing reporting process, you don't just sign off with a tag on it, and say the story's done, we continue that conversation on Twitter, we continue that

conversation on Facebook, so the story is never done. I think that's been the model of beat reporting for as long as beat reporting has been around. The only thing that has changed is the turnaround time, and the keeping that conversation moving through distribution channels.

Overall, most respondents tried to convey the point that their journalism and newsgathering processes are of equal quality and caliber as that produced by journalists in mainstream media. The respondents emphasized fact-checking, attending meetings, talking to sources, holding up a high level of ethical standards and continuing the conversations with community members even after the news has been published. Not only did this help them gain credibility in the community but also by performing a job in a manner associated with journalists, they were trying to show themselves to be professionals as well. They did not give much mention to experimentation with new story formats or multimedia packages. Most respondents spoke of continuing discussions related to important issues in the community via social media but the use of new technologies seemed to be limited. Their primary focus is on the reporting and publishing of the big news story, as explained in the following section.

b) Prioritize reporting over new media (journalistic) innovation

As many of these sites are operated by a handful of people or in some cases, an individual on non-existent budgets, they tend to use most of their human and financial resources on reporting the big stories of the day. They hire freelancers to file occasional features and emphasize the use of video and photos. Most of the sites are situated on the web and some have started a weekly print edition for their community but by and large, their sites are devoid of any multimedia packages one might find in mainstream news sites such as the New York Times or BBC News. Their use of limited resources, however, is rather strategic. By focusing on timely reporting of the news and expending

more resources and energy meeting and interacting with people rather than multimedia packages and interactive graphics, the respondents not only make their presence known but also gain a positive reputation in the community. This is important for sites that are trying to get a foothold in a new market. Most respondents make use of social networking sites, however, to continue the conversation around important issues with the community, as expressed by Respondent2, and they use Facebook, Twitter, Flickr among other platforms. Almost all have a Facebook page, including Respondent4, who is possibly the most reluctant to adopt social media and other forms of interactive platforms. She said:

I have finally done a Facebook page and I'm hopeless when it comes to getting it really moving. I think I've had it for a year now. I have only 200 likes on it I should have 2000 likes on it but I know to drive it I will need to do more work and when it's the question of spending the time learning how to get up to 2000 likes as opposed to writing 2 stories I will choose the 2 stories any day. But that's me, that's me... do I get a kid to help me? Yes I'm working on that but it's not that important to me. You know I have a Twitter account, I Twitter the _____. Do I... am I on twitter all day? No. Do I get Twitters (sic)? Yes. But do I answer them? No. I'm not interested. I'm interested in only trying to keep up with the report end and the production end and I can't do everything. But there are kids who would say I'm crazy because you've got to do it that way.

It is unfortunate that reporting the news and creating multimedia packages often comes down to an either or choice for the hyperlocal founders; lack of revenue is a big reason why. Most of them can barely meet their monthly budget for running the site, let alone paying freelancers or taking on full-time reporters to help them with the newsgathering process. The news business is anything but cheap. Respondent6 said the choice is out of necessity; almost pacing oneself so that one does not run out of steam or money.

I think we are also very aware that you can't burn yourself out with news especially since there is no money, so we are very conscious not to over-extend ourselves or exhaust ourselves. We like to tread water, if that makes sense. We could do huge features ... once a week or every two weeks and really just expend

an enormous amount of energy but we would really grow tired of it. But right now we are stronger than ever, we are more consistent than ever, we have an ever increasing base and I think a lot of that has come from the fact that we do as much as we can and bide our time.

Calculated spending of sweat and dollars did not mean the founders were not aware that an online medium is more visual than a print newspaper. They were also aware their sites lacked multimedia sophistication, but they try to make up for it by posting photos and videos on their sites. They say it increases the level of interactivity with the audience. Respondent1 says they are a huge hit in her community:

We have a very interactive relationship with our readers through Twitter, through Facebook, through emails... someone will send us a tweet, 'Hey, there are 10 cop cars here, what's going on,' and often times that will lead us to go to the police and say what's going on and we will post something. I think our stories are very well written we are professional journalists. We have some community contributors and, but you know our standards are very high. We have really great graphics, we believe in doing a lot of photos and I think people really, really like the visual aspect of _____ and I don't think every hyperlocal puts emphasis on photos like we do and I think people really like that. And in fact, community engagement is so critical, we have a Flickr page and every day we run something called _____ which is a compilation of stories about _____ that we haven't written, they are just links to it and we put a beautiful photo on that that has nothing to do with the news at the top of that story, so a lot of people file pictures that we can use so you know, that's one example of the community interaction.

Across the board, respondents agreed that photos, slideshows and video are audience magnets. They mentioned using these aids to get community members to their site to interact with them. People seemed to respond positively to submitting photos to the site and also watching slideshows when they are posted on the front page. The content, however, still reigns supreme. All respondents agree that the reason they are still standing is because the news they publish is relevant and of a high standard. Respondent2 said people come to them not for the visuals but for the information they receive via text.

I think a lot of attention has been paid to multimedia elements over the years. What I'd say, right after that is text is still the driver of content online and that's anywhere... we do a lot of photos, we do a photo slideshow and it gets a lot of attention; people love photos and video... but I think the reason people like us because we do good reporting, not because we just post slideshows. We've seen some local organizations move to that model and I don't know if it's actually the way to go. We are still very much dedicated to the idea that we are a place where we really help you get information about a community, but we are not just posting content that isn't impactful. ... I think we are doing interesting things like we were able to leverage the content we'd published in the last few years and develop an information directory about the companies, organizations we write about, the people we write about. And that's not as sexy as the New York Times data visualization tool but I think it's as effective and maybe we wish more organizations are taking advantage of the information we publish in different ways. We are not doing data visualization in-house, because there's not enough of it on a local level to justify these types of expenses. And I think that people are still looking for actual form, like text... I think we are just less interested in making it a daily part of our production cycle, and more interested in doing it as special projects or side initiatives.

There are limits to being a small organization; especially a new startup that does not enjoy the kind of venture capital investment that technological startups in Silicon Valley do. In the context of hyperlocal sites, these limitations play out with the founders focusing on content rather than spending resources on fancy infographics. Apart from the limitations, keeping the company's focus on reporting also reiterates their motto of providing the community the information it needs. It also is an important way for them to gain credibility for their new organization. Too much newness may be detrimental to news; by constantly striving for journalistic norms such as fact-checking, developing and meeting with sources and publishing confirmed information, hyperlocal personnel may be trying to find their audience by sending out a message that they are different from mainstream media, but not too different. By taking their method of reporting to the days before Internet reporting made virtual coverage possible, they make their presence known and felt within their community.

This could also be viewed as a way for the hyperlocal news people to distinguish themselves from bloggers and other news “producers” (Bruns, 2005) or media consumers who are now media producers as well. In order to receive funds and earn advertising revenue to continue doing news, the founders and staffers working in hyperlocal media must adopt a more traditional approach to news to gain ground amongst an audience and potential funders. The respondents’ focus on delivering quality content underlines this point. A similar result was highlighted in the research of Ostertag and Tuchman (2012), who found that in order to receive funding, an innovative news blog had to hire former journalism professionals, who infused traditional journalistic professional norms in the content. The blog lost its personal voice, adopting a third person narrative and objective view rather than voicing the writer’s views. The authors concluded that, “Emergent news organizations entwined in innovative profit/non-profit relationships may have little choice but to accommodate the institutional logics and ideological inertia of legacy, market-dominated models of newsmaking,” (p. 925). In order to gain credibility with a new venture in the news market, it is actually desirable for the sites to portray traditional products and means of production.

Even though it seems contradictory, hyperlocal media eschew the routines and journalistic practices followed by traditional media. While traditional media are losing readers, hyperlocal media, instead of trying something new, are following in their footsteps. The respondents interviewed here emphasized how what they did was no different from traditional media and it seemed to help them gain credibility and a trustworthy reputation. Whether this is indeed the case was not evaluated in these interviews. The interviewees did say, however, that they published checked information, strived to incorporate contrary views in their stories, showed up at council meetings

evening after evening and this consistency helped them gain a foothold as a news organization in their community.

Finding 2: The former journalists-turned-entrepreneurs face a difficult conundrum when they find their responsibilities for the site extend to not only the editorial side, but also the business and revenue side of the startup. This is an idea most journalists cannot reconcile with their fundamental belief of maintaining editorial objectivity. Thus they explain their function of overseeing advertising and revenue sales as part of their holistic role of providing an important service to their communities. This work-integrity violation and attempts to provide a holistic explanation for their revenue seeking has led them to indulge in what Pratt et al. (2006) identified as patching or finding consonance between the work they are expected to do versus the work they do, by coming up with new, positive, composite work images of themselves.

One of the biggest work integrity violations former journalists turned entrepreneurs have had to deal with is maintaining their site's balance sheets. No longer is the business side separated from the editorial side; the journalists-turned entrepreneurs now have to straddle both worlds simultaneously. This is not a function that has been required of journalists in the past. In fact, reporters and traditional media organizations have gone to great lengths to show how revenue does not affect editorial content and the employees working in these two departments do not interact.

The interviews with hyperlocal founders and reporters reveal this has not been easy. Some of the respondents said they have continued to keep the two sides separate, citing similar reasons as former journalists such as they would rather not have the editorial material "affected" by the decisions taken to bring in revenue. For instance, Respondent5 said never the twain meet on her watch.

I run the site with my husband; I am the editor-in-chief and I do most of the writing, and he does photography and advertising sales and I don't do anything that has to do with advertising.

However, given that it is a two-person set up with her husband taking care of the business, it is difficult to estimate just how far removed she is from the revenue side of things. Another hyperlocal founder, Respondent11 is also one half of a two-person set up. He said while he is primarily responsible for the editorial section of the site and does not engage in any financial aspect of the news site, his wife, who is also his business partner manages the sales, revenue, public relations and the occasional writing. While she enters his journalistic space, he does not enter her business space, seemingly more out of choice and lack of desire than any institutional demarcation. He said:

I report and I edit and I have little to do with the business side meaning my business partner and spouse. That was the agreement we struck before we decided to launch that I would have nothing to do with selling ads, with logging invoices, managing the accounts or any of the financial records. So I report and I edit and it's essentially... it's a two man shop. I mean she reports and she edits. So what I write she edits, what she writes I edit...

One reason for this could be that his wife had prior experience as a business manager in the local newspaper. Therefore she was comfortable functioning as both, editorial and business heads of the enterprise whereas the respondent refused to step out of his editorial boundary. One founder, Respondent12 even used the phrase "division between church and state" and said while it may not be as rigid as in a mainstream newsroom, they do try to keep it as separate as possible.

I think we are reasonably good at managing the division of church and state. We are not New York Times-rigid about it, partly because we are owners as well as editors. But, you know, we don't say to people, 'Oh if you advertise we will write about you or we don't say, (chuckles), 'If you don't advertise we will write nasty things about you,' or any of those. That will clearly be pretty bad and certainly unethical so we try and keep a decent division of church and state but we are not like some journalism organizations where the salespeople would never speak to journalists. We are a very small team and everyone knows each other and we work very cooperatively together and, try and make a go of it.

Note that the respondent wanted to maintain the wall between the editorial and financial sides, but could not due to the organization's small size and staff. On the other hand, the founder of a slightly bigger hyperlocal, Respondent2 said as an organization, they have become better about distinguishing between the editorial and business sides of the startup but that was not how they began. At the same time, he said there has been an organic meeting of the two sides when it comes to generating revenue by organizing corporate events that revolve around conversations important to the community.

I think it was complicated in the early days because the first few years, we weren't a full time operation, we were doing this on the side so we had to, as co-founders, take responsibility for both, the business side and the editorial side. I think as we've grown, we've been able to be more consistent in how that actually comes down the pipeline. At this point, we have essentially a business development side of the business and the editorial side of the business and very rarely, are those conversations intermixed. So, where I think there's some more interesting conversation is how most of our events, we feel are editorially relevant, so we are using sponsorship dollars for events that came out of something we covered and we said, how can we fixate into this conversation, how do we orient around this really smart concept that was discovered on the editorial side and then use it to continue our mission of the business relevant side, cause in the end, it funds both sides.

Those who are singularly responsible for a site have had to reconcile this dichotomy the most. As they run a solo operation, not only must they cover the news, but also sell ads and sponsorships to local businesses. Interviewees who fall in this category, and have been interviewed for the study, said they have made it a priority to learn the business side of managing a news site and have openly embraced their new role of master of revenue and content. Respondent7 said:

...I am the person who writes the stories and I am the person who handles the advertising not because I want (emphasis) that to be the case, not because I want people to pay me for ads or I'll go after them but because I am all there is, literally. So you know in a traditional news organization, that would never happen (emphasis) people would be horrified to learn that someone was writing content and then selling advertising but it sort of just, when you are reporting on a small

geographic community, naturally overlaps so you have to get comfortable with that... we need to make money because we need to produce content and when you limit yourself to a geographic area, you limit yourself to a certain number of resources for both.

Respondent3 said even though he hired a business manager soon after he launched his site, he is still responsible for the revenue earned by his site. Referring to the separation between the financial and editorial side as the “Great China Wall,” he said it was “a luxury” that for his entire career, he never had to deal with the business side of things. He said towards the middle of his career, however, he found the wall beginning to fall, at least at a small metro newspaper. This wall did not exist when he started his own news site; he said it was apparent from the beginning he was running a small business and not just a news operation.

So I look at what I am doing right now as the same thing as the guy that runs the sandwich shop down the street on _____ you know. He or she has to figure out how to make one number bigger than the other at the end of the month and that is our challenge as well because nobody is gonna give you money to do this and let you do it in a total non business vacuum. I mean we have got to figure out how to pay for it.

The line separating the editorial and business sides is blurring as managerial concerns and goals are steadily infiltrating professional journalistic discourse and practice in mainstream newsrooms (Andersson & Wiik, 2013). Respondent3’s comment above and other respondents’ comments before his, show that founders and staffers working for hyperlocal/new media startups realize that earning revenue is crucial if they want to continue to do journalistic work. Respondent3 was one of the few respondents who identified himself as someone responsible for a small business. His response when asked what he did for a living was, “*I am a publisher, I’m a local news publisher.*” Other respondents usually said they ran news organizations, were journalists or editors. For instance, hyperlocal founder Respondent7 said:

I usually start with journalist and then wait for the eyes to glaze over and (laughs) if they are more interested I follow up. I think on my website, on my resume, I sort of start with, multimedia journalist. I think that's the shortest and easiest way to get at what I am doing.

Another founder, Respondent11 said, "*They know me as the guy from the _____,*" while Respondent2 said:

We like to say we are a news organization that's focused on building community. I think that's the best way to translate the message of, 'We write content everyday and we do events.'

Given the traditional separation between the two sides of the business, these journalists/journalistic entrepreneurs have responded to this responsibility by highlighting the journalistic value of transparency and representing themselves as upholders of journalism itself. This is best reflected in Respondent1's response, when she said that the profession of journalism itself is in such turmoil, that how one does journalism or what doing journalism incorporates has changed significantly. In response to the question, if someone asked her what she did for a living, what would she say, she replied:

I would say I am an author and a journalist, that's what I would say. I consider myself a journalist. But I think that... journalism is in such turmoil now that you know many journalists are starting experimenting with producing the news. So, you know, the idea of a journalist just working for a news organization, that's fading away. There is a new paradigm for journalists, people who can do many different kinds of media, who maybe are their own brand, or maybe they are being creative in their own way. Because I think in order to make it in journalism you have to do that now, you can't just be expecting to work for the _____ News for 40 years.

While they are hesitant to call themselves entrepreneurs or any other title that represents the business side of the news site, they discuss earning revenue as a necessary means for informing their communities. The adoption of a function journalists have kept at an arm's length, or possibly even greater, has led to their attaching the identity of being involved in earning revenue onto their existing journalistic identities. This process has

been termed *patching*: professionals faced with a situation in which the work they do is very different from the work they expect to do, make sense of this dissonance by connecting the work they do onto their pre-existing work notions (Pratt et al., 2006). Following this process, the professionals expand their understanding of their work and start expressing their functions in a more holistic, positive manner.

The term *patching* was introduced by Pratt et al. (2006) in their study of medical residents undergoing a training boot camp. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with medical residents from radiology, primary care and surgery at various times during the residents' intense training program. Their professional identities, or how they saw themselves as primary care providers, radiologists and surgeons, changed when the work they were asked to do during their training was vastly different from what they expected to do in these capacities. For instance, surgical residents expected to do "dramatic work in disease" (p. 245) but were instead asked to file paperwork and other more mundane tasks such as "lowering a patient's toilet seat or deciding whether a patient could have a different flavor of vitamin shake," (p. 245). This dissonance in the work they expected to do and the work they had to do led to their creating "new, composite identity... as the most complete doctors," (p. 247). Attachment of new work functions to pre-existing notions of what it means to be a surgical doctor, led the surgical residents to expand their conceptualization of themselves as surgical doctors. For them, doing the routine medical work made them capable of addressing any illness that a patient came with to the hospital.

The process of *patching* is a way for professionals to maintain positive identities about themselves. Social identity theory says that individuals like to see their self-reflections in a positive light (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Therefore, patching allows professionals to view the work they are expected to do as part of their job –which initially

was unexpected or anathema for them—as meaningful and relevant to their new, holistic identity.

This theoretical concept can also be applied to journalists who have started their own hyperlocal startups or work for news media startups that do not have deep financial pockets. They justify their engagement in the revenue side of the business by saying it allows them to do the more important job of reporting the news to their community and informing them of the important events occurring in the neighborhood. One senior reporter at a hyperlocal site, Respondent13 said he tells his audience if they like what they read, then they ought to pay for it so they can continue to read it.

I've gotten a lot less reluctant to go and tell people that in order to do our job, we need to have money. And so you know, telling people that, 'Hey if you read us and you like us, you are not going to get anything out of it other than continuing good journalism but you should really give us money,'... I always tell people to guess our budget and I ask them to guess the local NPR affiliate's budget, both non profits, you know, and the local NPR's budget is something like, is close to twenty times ours, annually, and I always tell people, 'If you listen, if you think you get twenty times the news out of them than us, then by all means, you're into them, but if you don't (laughs), then we could use the help, right'.

Other respondents talked of participating in community events and moderating events. A reporter at a hyperlocal site, Respondent14 said initially she found this foray in to the business side a little uncomfortable, as her previous work experience in a local newspaper newsroom did not involve working or interacting with the business side of the paper. She said she soon realized, however, this was an important part of the new site's goal and commitment to the community.

I have to represent _____ as this part of the community, does that make sense? And so, I had to learn a lot about the community and my former editor jokes that I am sort of a business woman too; I have to go to these events and I have to, I guess, you could say schmooze, you have to have the small talk, you have to show your face, be like you are here to support and like, I moderate panels so it's very different than my old job... it definitely took a while to get used to it.

I do come from that feeling that journalists should be separated (from the business side) and so, like there was a discomfort in the beginning, but I guess as time went on, I kind of realized that our role is also of helping grow the tech community... the mission is to hold people accountable and report on what's happening, and here there's more of a dedicated goal, and I realized that being so part of the community was crucial to this goal of ours.

Another reporter at a hyperlocal site, Respondent10 said being part of the community was important to the survival of focused reporting sites like hers. She said it is important to earn grassroots support in the community, as this support would most likely translate into financial aid.

If you are a local, small, non-profit news entity, you can't just be doing your job like you would if you were at a big newspaper. Not only do you have to sell what you do to folks as consumers, but you also have to build and win supporters. And, to do that, you obviously need to do good work, but you also have to be very upfront with folks about the fact that this costs something and you have to basically win cheerleaders in the community. Because that's how you are going to get additional members, that's how you are going to get the sponsorships and foundation grants that you need, you literally need cheerleaders.

Journalists working for most hyperlocal and news media startups, thus, say they must straddle both the business and editorial sides of their respective news sites to cultivate community cheerleaders. The respondents also balance this business involvement by highlighting journalistic transparency in their content, on their overall site. In addition, they clearly distinguish between what is popularly called native advertising, or content created specifically for an advertiser that "mimics the editorial content that surrounds it," (Sebastian, 2013, para. 4) and actual news. Finally, hyperlocal entrepreneurs and reporters emphasize how their way of reporting is how 'it's always done'. In other words, they are not veering too far away from the journalism they learned in traditional newsrooms--they follow the norms and culture upheld by the oldest of the old journalists to cover news, albeit with a twist, as explained in the next section.

Finding 3: Changes to their work identity have led new entrepreneurs and staffers to redefine their work and their role in the community. They see themselves as ‘community campaigners’, who speak in a biased but fair voice. Hyperlocal writing tends to be freer, liberally infused with the reporters’ “voice” and personal pronouns, changing the narrative from third person objective to a more personalized conversation.

Journalism scholars concur that similarities between journalists across the board—providing public service, being objective, autonomous, immediate and ethical in the newsgathering and publishing process—can be explained as “a shared occupational ideology among newswriters which functions to self-legitimize their position in society,” (Deuze, 2005, p. 446). The post-industrial economy is, however, already forcing journalists to redefine their work and profession in new ways (Anderson, Bell & Shirky, 2012) and journalists working for online media are the ones on the frontline of these changes.

Usher (2013) argues that journalists can be purposive actors even in the face of pressing organizational constraints such as time and organizational identity. Research has also shown that journalists associate more with the profession than they do with the organization they work for (Russo, 1998). In the case of journalists-turned-entrepreneurs and reporters/contributors for new news media startups, this agency is expressed in changing some of the norms of the profession in writing up the content and their choice of stories, rather than the method of gathering the content. As these new media startups chart their own paths and pave the way for others, they are exercising a certain ‘liberated’ way of reporting on the community.

An important theme that came up again and again was respondents’ identification as journalists who were reporting on the side of the community; they were community campaigners, who reported fairly and accurately but with the primary purpose of serving the neighborhood. This is an extension of what Hume (1996) defined as,

“public or civic journalism, (that) works to cover the news from the citizen up, rather than from the expert down,” (p. 148). Given that most are residents of the neighborhoods they reported on, news tends to take on a personal hue. For instance, Respondent6 was clear about the side his site supported:

I would say, before we call ourselves journalists I think we would consider ourselves advocates for our neighborhood. And so we are definitely on a side, we are on the _____ side, we are on the community side... when I feel like we have been ignored by our council person but we don't say that because we don't want to antagonize her, to make her ignore _____ even more. I think a lot of journalists... they have to publish stories and they want to be a part of the whole journalism thing and to that extent, they'll follow the story, more towards their, “truth”, than we will, we will be a lot more measured with it.

Respondent6's response was the extreme end of the spectrum. Most respondents who fell along the middle had responses similar to that of reporter Respondent8, who said:

...It's not like we are rooting for certain things to happen or whatever. We want the communities we cover to succeed but we are not on the sidelines saying, we hope this project will blah, blah, blah or anything like that, just sort of... not focusing on the process and focusing on as I said, the impacts (it has) on the average person or the average reader and trying to put their interest at the forefront of any story or piece that we do. And just being accurate and fair and like you have to be accurate and fair but that doesn't mean you check your brain or your heart at the door...

The above respondent was a little more muted in expressing his support for the community he reported on. He said they refrain from rooting but ended his quote on a more supportive note by mentioning they put the interests of the reader at the forefront of their news coverage. He also spoke of not checking his brain or heart at the door, which could be interpreted as his caring more for the community than he initially admits. Then there are the hyperlocal journalists who are not shy of cheering for the community through its high and low points. Respondent1 said the cheerleading extends to not only

reporting what is going wrong in the community but also what is going right. This is one reason why her site gained respect in the community:

We try to celebrate the community. _____ is such an interesting city, I mean there are so many smart, artistic and creative people around and we try to write about them. So people see themselves reflected in the site. I think it's a question of, you know, just showcasing the accomplishments and failings of an urban area, I think people are interested (in that).

This cheerleading or supporting the community raises the question of objectivity and distance from the subject being covered, both important components of news reporting. Respondent1 said that reporting on the community one is a part of is it changes the way reporters interact with the people. She also said this closeness is not an excuse to let go of the journalistic integrity that is at the core of good reporting. Respondent13 summed it up when he said journalists must revisit the concept of objectivity and bias.

I think, the word bias has received a, or has a negative connotation in journalism, and I'd like to try to, at some point, reclaim it. I don't think bias is bad, I think bias is, the word bias is good and the concept of bias is good and the public wants a biased journalist. I think one of the things that journalists really did to themselves that really hurt the profession is this idea of objectivity because again, I don't think anyone can be objective and I don't think anyone wants journalists to be objective. Every time you write, in the order in which you put the words, and the quotes that you decide to use, and the quotes you decide not to use, you are exerting your bias and your shape and your understanding of what the situation is. And so, yes, I mean you want, people want someone to call ball and strikes, they want someone who will spend eight hours more than them, learning about an issue to be able to tell them what the heck's going on, and the only way you can do that is if you are comfortable saying in your own voice instead of having to rely on dial-a-quote that something is nonsense or not, you know.

Thus, the respondents spoke of writing content that was representative of the community, moving away from "objectivity" but not fairness and transparency. Lewis (2010) saw a similar "pulling apart" (p. 159) of journalism in the perceptions of news innovators who participated in the Knight News Challenge. As hyperlocal journalists redefine their work and role in society, they appear to be taking a new perspective on

their closeness to the subjects of their reporting. Respondents believed their sites had gained community respect because they themselves were part of the neighborhood on which they reported. “Facetime” with members of the community, attending city hall meetings, interacting with people day-in-day out and forging personal relationships with them was key to gaining their audiences’ acceptance. Respondent6 said some of it might have to do with their fighting the fight with the community when it faces political or social threats. Hyperlocal reporter Respondent8 said people appreciate them because they show “a level of commitment” to the community that other organizations do not.

This is in contrast to other studies that reported that online journalists, in an effort to redefine their roles, were distancing themselves from their sources (Steensen, 2009). It is interesting to note that in an effort to redefine journalism, hyperlocal journalists are taking journalistic work back to its roots of civic journalism and news that has a direct impact on the community.

Finding 4: To guide themselves and each other along the untraveled path of journalistic entrepreneurship, hyperlocal media entrepreneurs have formed a group called LION- Local Independent Online News—and use a closed Facebook group page to exchange notes on how to run a news media startup. Their interactions include giving each other tips on how to handle an advertiser who may not be paying up, a bad review of a restaurant that also advertises on the site, and discussing issues related to the day-to-day operations of the news business. This *professional colloquy* is an important step in the media entrepreneurs’ role identity formation because through discussions about their work on a common, communication platform, they try to make sense of their work and daily negotiations between being a reporter and an entrepreneur.

The process of setting up a news media website, in some cases being the only media outlet in a community, can be a lonely endeavor. In an effort to define their new roles as journalistic entrepreneurs, hyperlocal founders and reporters have formed a group

called Local Independent Online News or LION. Membership is open only to those who have started or work for an independent online news site. An important aspect of the group is a closed page on the social networking site Facebook, which allows members to discuss issues related to running a news media startup. This discussion, that I call *professional colloquy*, helps them problem-solve and troubleshoot issues they face in their daily line of work. More than just a discussion though, this *professional colloquy* is an important step in their making sense of their new roles and responsibilities as editors and entrepreneurs.

Lack of role models has meant that most hyperlocal founders looked to each other for advice and guidance related to their day-to-day work. This group also provides social validation for founders' actions as well as external feedback, two crucial elements in the process of role and work identity formation. The restricted membership and closed nature of the group has helped the members communicate openly and honestly with each other. One of the founders of a hyperlocal startup, Respondent7 said:

It's so helpful to be able to post to this group, you know, I was able to go on there and say, 'Here's the deal, I ran an advertisement before I got paid, which I almost never do, but it was an exception because I sort of knew the person, now the ad's been up and I haven't been paid. How would you guys handle it?' And I got 12 responses, some of them from people who've been doing this longer than I have, making their entire living off what they are doing with hyperlocal journalism, and I've been able to offer the same type of advice to other people, and it's there, it's at your fingertips, it's immediate, it's reliable information you can trust, you know it's a closed membership group, so you have to have the credentials to get in, um, it's, it's an immense comfort to know at any given moment that someone is going through exactly (emphasis from the respondent) what you are going through.

LION can be compared to a “community of practice,” (Lave & Wenger, 1991), best explained as a group of “practitioners who do similar work,” (Barley & Kunda, 2001, p. 87). Many founders spoke of forming communities online or on social media in an effort to find kindred spirits with whom to discuss work-related issues and ideas. Learning through such communities occurs “when individuals mobilize the network to access the community’s collective expertise,” (Barley & Kunda, 2001, p. 88). In a community of practice, one not only learns new knowledge but also shares the values and acquires the identity of the community (Husband, 2005). One of the founders, Respondent15, explained the reason for creating this network. She said:

The last time I went to the News Association in Boston and I looked around the room at the News Association and there was no one there who looked like me. I mean whose site looked like mine, there was no one there who had the same issues that I had and there was not a single conference event that was aimed at small fry. It had been completely assumed by the large and mostly legacy (media)... and that’s when I just said I am not spending any money here. I need to go and figure out where there are people.

One of the founders, Respondent5 said groups such as LION often work as support networks where one could either discuss what is going in the hyperlocal world with other similar site publishers and/or find some empathetic listeners. Almost all the founders spoke of the importance of foundation-funded conferences and how valuable these meetings were for them to meet others who were doing similar work. They spoke of learning from each other as well as finding solutions to the daily routines of running a media startup. All of these are measures for building a strong network of journalists-turned-entrepreneurs and those who work for new news media startups.

Another co-founder of LION, Respondent3 said meeting with other journalists-turned-entrepreneurs at conferences and talking to them on LION’s online platform has been a turning point in his understanding of news as business:

I just was thrilled to be surrounded by other people who were like me... doing what I was doing and sharing stories with them and I think that was an important step in my understanding that this was a business and not just a hobby.

That the respondent had found people who took him seriously and recognized his business endeavor as a proper news site was a form of social validation that he had missed before. Discussions amongst people who belong to the same professional group, however, can lead to the same cycle/behavior of news production perpetuating, even in new settings. Most of the respondents have trained in traditional newsrooms and therefore, their approach to new online entrepreneurial sites are not different. It would be unfair to say that they are not open to experimentation; they want their projects to succeed and are open to new ideas as much as anyone else. One respondent spoke of how incremental changes to her site were made over the years based on feedback from her community. However, years of traditional newsroom socialization meant their ideas of a journalist, journalism and news have “calcified” (Lewis, 2010, p. 159) and they find it difficult to think differently. As hyperlocal founder Respondent1 said, “I am 53 years old and perfectly comfortable with who I am.”

Organizational behavior researchers would argue age has nothing to do with it. Rather, if professionals want to bring about change in their work roles, they need to be willing to try new things and be prepared to fail (Ibarra, 2003). Presently, when it comes to innovation in new media startups, lack of guidance and perpetuation of old norms for approaching journalism through feedback and social validation from other journalists who have similar backgrounds ensure that the same tried and tested methods are repeated.

SUMMARY

The findings above show that journalists-turned-entrepreneurs fall back on traditional ways of newsgathering because they do not have role models who could show

them an alternate path. As they rely on their own past expertise, they continue to do journalism the way they learned it in their professional careers. Not having a clear path moving forward, many of them continue to reiterate journalistic norms, such as editing, fact-checking and writing clearly so that audiences could easily understand their news content. These norms get perpetuated down the pipeline in the bigger hyperlocal sites that have more than one person on staff. The reporters and contributors interviewed here said they looked to their editors and owners for guidance on norms for reporting news. In fact, most respondents also said having prior journalistic experience was an important criterion for performing well in this role.

The hyperlocal entrepreneurs emphasized the importance of face-to-face interaction at a time when more and more journalists were reporting the news virtually. They spoke of shoe leather journalism and attending community events—being physically present at council meetings, public gatherings and interviewing people in person—as a way of earning validation from their professional peers, community and society at large. One respondent even pointed to his ethics policy posted on his website, to underline the similarity between his and other news publications. Thus, most interviewees believed following these norms separated them from other kinds of online publishers who were posting information online but not quite “doing journalism”.

Interaction is not only restricted to person-to-person; many of the interviewees spoke of encouraging dialogue with the community members online. Almost all used Facebook or other social networking sites to interact with their audiences and even encouraged them to send in news tips, photos and videos to post on their sites. In the end, however, most concurred that what brought audiences to their sites was quality news writing and reporting. Thus, while the audience is encouraged to participate in the conversation, it is with the understanding that they will be moderated. Not all content

they send in or want to see on the site will be published; the content must meet the entrepreneurs' idea of impact and quality before it makes it to the home page. The process of gatekeeping is practiced diligently in these sites.

As entrepreneurs who must look after the business of running the news site as much as creating the content for the site, they have to get used to straddling two worlds. The new work also does not quite match their traditional expectations of the journalistic role they thought they would perform. They try to get around this dissonance by incorporating earning revenue as a crucial means to providing information for the public good. They say in order to continue serving the community, they have no choice but to make money off of it. They are almost apologetic for the need to make money for themselves as well as their news sites and would probably fall on the opposite end of the spectrum of media magnate Rupert Murdoch, the wolf of Fleet Street. Thus, along with talk of revenue, the respondents invariably spoke of the service they provide to the community, the long hours they put in their work and the depletion of their own savings to fund a news operation they deem important for the people. The respondents created a positive composite image of the new journalist-entrepreneur who is not looking to make a profit, just enough money to continue doing good work.

Another aspect of the hyperlocal interviewees' service to the community was writing content that was fair, but had a community bias. Most interviewees said along with their desire to provide the community with accurate and informative news, they also wanted to show the community they were providing them with a voice. Many respondents spoke of holding public officials accountable, writing content that is primarily beneficial to the community and writing as many positive stories as negative ones. Hyperlocal founder Respondent6 said his site were advocates for their neighborhood while another hyperlocal entrepreneur, Respondent1 said they celebrate the

successes and point to the failings of their community with equal measure. The respondents spoke of writing with a pro-community slant but maintaining fairness and accuracy in their news copy.

The ideas of celebrating a community and news as a public service to the community members are not new; community newspapers fulfilled these roles for a long time. The idea of a journalist taking on the role of a publisher and establishing a formal news outlet, however, is a new development. One could argue that freelancers have performed this role for a long time but I would argue that freelancers only had to worry about their own content. They do not have to worry about developing a product, building it into a formal entity and making it last. An analogy from nature would help explain this difference: A freelancer is a butterfly, flitting from one attractive flower to another while a hyperlocal entrepreneur is a young sapling trying to grow roots. For hyperlocal entrepreneurs, however, there are no guidelines or experts advising them on how to grow strong roots. Therefore, they are constantly engaged in a dialogue with other hyperlocal entrepreneurs -- what I call *professional colloquy* -- to make sense of their new role and the new responsibilities that come with it.

Hyperlocal entrepreneurs have formed groups -- online and offline -- to have or conduct this professional colloquy. These are important dialogues for a group that is trying to figure out its own identity as a collective, the identity of a hyperlocal site and the identity of a journalist who is also a businessperson. They are constantly traversing the realms of editorial and business and this colloquy helps them make sense of how one reports the news and runs the business of news. Respondents said they learned a lot from posting queries on the groups' pages and receiving responses from others who are in a similar boat. Another respondent said conferences meant for hyperlocal media

entrepreneurs are useful in not only making them feel part of a group but also as a forum to exchange ideas and knowledge on running these new sites.

The big picture one can interpret from the above is that the only thing new about these sites is the technology and its affordances. These hyperlocal sites are published online and use multimedia -- to a certain degree -- for storytelling purposes. Hyperlocal media entrepreneurs try to engage the community online but moderate their participation. They emphasize quality content and by that logic, underline the traditional norms of practicing journalism. One could argue that some of this repetition of journalistic norms is required and possibly necessary to ensure quality content is published. At the same time, lack of innovation in storytelling and using technology to communicate with audiences arises from the lack of a role model, who could guide them on an alternate path of reporting and publishing news for a community. Hyperlocal entrepreneurs do not know of another way and therefore, continue to practice journalism the way they learned in a newsroom in their previous jobs. Almost all respondents either had a journalism degree or had worked as journalists in mainstream media. The one exception followed traditional journalistic routines because that is what he had seen other hyperlocal entrepreneurs do. They are in the process of figuring out how best to perform their new roles of journalists-turned-entrepreneurs and have professional colloquy to understand their new responsibilities.

Logically, then, the answer to innovate in news reporting and hyperlocal journalism seems simple: Provide journalists-turned- entrepreneurs with a new role model and they may be more willing to try new ways of reporting or interacting with their community. The question then becomes, would that new process or form of reporting be called journalism at all? These results say otherwise. No matter what the platform or who the audience, if people claim they are doing journalism, then they are

usually following the norms in reporting, talking about innovation but in exceedingly small increments. On the other hand, any of the numerous technology entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley will say the first step to innovation is doing what has not been done before. Maybe the reason journalism does not innovate is because it always finds a way of repeating its old norms even in new settings and changing times. It is difficult to move forward if one is constantly looking back.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The reason I chose to study hyperlocal media is rather personal; I have worked as a journalist for about 12 years in mainstream media and consider myself a remnant of a time past. When I learned about the phenomena of independent news sites springing up in neighborhoods, towns and cities--where mainstream media has retreated--I wanted to know who or what had filled the void created by my kind's departure. I was curious to see if they were covering the news and their community better than their mainstream predecessors and if so, what was their process for covering the news? Was it any different from ours? Finally, I wanted to see how journalists took on entrepreneurial roles within these new media startups when for the longest time, the editorial and business sides of news organizations had no interaction. As journalists-turned-entrepreneurs, hyperlocal founders not only take care of the editorial side but also make business decisions which can make or break the startup's future. As for those who had not founded these sites but worked for them, I wanted to learn of their experience and compare it to my own. At the end of the dissertation, what I found was both disheartening and promising. If I had to choose between the two, however, I would say largely promising.

In response to the question of who has taken my place, depending on how you look at it, I never really left. If mainstream media left the building, then electronic versions of community weeklies have entered it. Hyperlocal media work on the same premise as community weeklies, except the former are on the web. Across the board, respondents talked about the importance of being physically present in the community, reporting on it closely, caring about what community members want to read, writing in a more personalized tone, encouraging audience engagement and generally being invested in the community's betterment. And herein lies the disheartening news; respondents

working in hyperlocal media think they are at the forefront of something new but the only thing new is the technology they use to publish their news. To give an example; one of the many books I read while researching was a 1961 publication called ‘Community Journalism’, written by Kenneth Byerly, a Journalism professor at University of North Carolina and former owner and publisher of weekly and daily newspapers in Wyoming and Montana.¹⁰ Byerly, writing before the internet existed, could have been writing about hyperlocals in the 21st century. What he describes is that similar. For example, he wrote that community newspapers report local news that is not published in any other local paper, provide information about neighborhood stores and ongoing sales, inform the people about elections, the local government and promote projects that are good for the community (Byerly, 1961). Moving 53 years forward to present times and hyperlocal media say these functions and their primary purpose of serving their community are what distinguish them from other kinds of news media. The interviews revealed that hyperlocal founders and staff are “community campaigners”, they provide their neighborhoods with information that is or was not available in other media publications and they not only inform their readers about local political and civic activities but also encourage their engagement. What is different though is that the internet has made the community weekly a cool product; a publication that was representative of small town America in print, now represents an engaged, technologically-connected, hip community. There are many hyperlocal sites in Manhattan and Brooklyn, just as there are in Seattle and San Diego. But in the similarity lies the lesson.

The media industry resists change, even when it claims otherwise. Gigaom columnist Matt Ingram, in a review of Vox, former Washington Post Editor Ezra Klein’s

¹⁰ I must add here that these are the two states which are not as populated with hyperlocal sites as some of the others in the East and South West.

latest news venture, wrote, “Building new things is never easy -- especially in the media industry, which often likes to devour or shoot down anything even remotely new or different, “ (2014, para. 2). Ingram went on to say that experimentation is key to innovation and the industry could do with more of it (Ingram, 2014). The recently concluded International Symposium on Online Journalism (ISOJ) at the University of Texas is possibly the best example of the paradox that exists in the media industry. Not all, but quite a few panelists and researchers talked about using new technology tools to do journalism the way it has always been done. So while the news environment has changed, the work remains the same. The industry is moving in circles by incorporating traditional journalistic and gatekeeping practices onto new platforms. It does not explore the potential of new technologies to change the way journalists work.

But herein lies the heartening news; the hyperlocal industry should see this as a wake up call to promote experimentation in content creation and dissemination. While it would be unfair to say that no one is experimenting -- because some sites like Technically Philly are -- such sites are few and far between. Digital platforms afford opportunities to journalists to change the way news is created. The change does not have to be drastic; incremental steps would be helpful. For example, many hyperlocal entrepreneurs and staffers spoke of the importance of shoe leather journalism and attending every council meeting or being physically present everywhere they could. Maybe they could encourage citizen participation by trusting community members to talk about the happenings at these meetings on digital platforms like Twitter. Journalism scholars talk about media trust, maybe it is time to talk about audience trust. Some hyperlocal entrepreneurs and staff spoke about changing their writing style and incorporating their personal voice but a deeper study of their responses reveal they are not changing their manner of writing stories as much as they claim. Hyperlocal media can

certainly experiment more with narrative and writing style and encourage more individuality in content creation on their websites. Steps like these would increase community engagement and involvement and help these sites win support- emotionally and financially.

The big discussion around hyperlocal media is the lack of a revenue model, but not many hyperlocal founders and staff care to talk about their news, or what they could do to change the way they provide information to their audience. More attention should be paid to the actual work that hyperlocal entrepreneurs do and how changes to the newsgathering and dissemination process can help the floundering sites turn a corner. It is important to clarify that the changes being mentioned here relate to hyperlocal founders and staff's openness to utilizing new technological tools and experimenting with storytelling techniques, reporting narratives and community interaction. They can increase community participation and win some supporters; they can innovate with their storytelling and raise their site's profile; a bigger profile could mean more advertising money. They can hold forums to discuss news and issues that are important to the community; these can be very good revenue earners. Some hyperlocal founders said they made a sizeable amount of their spending costs in this manner. These are just a few ways that hyperlocal sites can try to expand their audience base and generate funds. At the same time, an undeniable part of the problem beyond the reach of journalism entrepreneurs is hyperlocal media's chosen platform of publication -- online -- and the medium's unproven potential to make a profit in the news business.

Any digital journalistic enterprise must currently face two major concerns: One, trying to earn revenue on a platform that is unable to generate any substantial earnings and two, trying to make money in an industry that hits a new low each year. Recent data shows that print newspaper advertising revenues reached their lowest levels since 1950,

the year Newspaper Association of America (NAA) started tracking this data (Weissman, 2014). To add to digital news media's troubles, in spite of print media's poor performance, they still make more money than the former by a big margin. Revenue numbers of the U.S. newspaper media in 2013 show that even though print revenue fell by about 9 percent, it comprised about 46 percent of the total newspaper media revenue while digital advertising, up by 1.5 percent, formed only about 9 percent of the total revenue (NAA, 2014). Also, data reported by Scarborough Research, an agency that collected readership data for the American newspaper industry, showed that while audiences that read the news on digital + print and digital-only platforms are increasing, a solid 54 percent of the audience still reads its local news in just the print paper (Edmonds, 2014). Attempts by news companies to install pay-walls and charge users to read the content failed quite decisively (Masnick, 2013), even though the number of digital-only subscribers for various newspapers has gone up to a third of their total number of subscribers in the past few years (Mutter, 2013). Thus an increase in digital readership does not necessarily translate into revenue dollars; online news sites are simply not the cash cows the industry hoped they would be.

As digital-only ventures, hyperlocal media face an uphill climb- financially and work-wise. These small operations with scarce to negligible resources, must find a way of establishing a successful news business where big media companies with extensive experience, capital and staff have failed. However, given their size and lack of established bureaucratic channels, there is a certain sense of optimism surrounding their ability to find the missing pieces of the profitability puzzle. Based on this research, future studies could examine the revenue models of these sites more closely and pay attention to the kinds of revenue generating methods these startups may experiment with. Some are already experimenting with the non-profit news model (Robinson, 2014) and in their

interviews with me, many hyperlocal founders spoke of their goal to make their site sustainable. Hence, while they are fighting a battle in which they stand a strong chance of losing, they may come up with ways of earning revenue that could prove enlightening for the media industry at large.

Apart from the monetary aspect, journalistic entrepreneurs also struggle with advancement in their work. Lack of role models and mentors to help them move further along does not help. Not knowing where they are going, how to get there and with nobody to guide them, hyperlocal founders and staff repeat the professional behavior they learned in their previous workplace. This strategy mostly does not work in their new roles. In his keynote speech at ISOJ 2014, NYU Journalism Professor and media critic Jay Rosen said journalists lack training and mentorship in newsrooms; they are barely given 24 hours to learn their work (Badgen, 2014). He also pushed for more cooperation in journalism schools between practical training and teaching of academic knowledge, and this research is a step in that direction.

By examining the work of journalism entrepreneurs as well as how news is published in new media startups, this study offers insights into the struggles of the former and the stagnation of the latter. It is the first step in understanding how technology affords entrepreneurial opportunities to journalists but journalism does not quite afford innovation to them. The next section summarizes the findings of the study, followed by a discussion of theoretical and professional contributions and finally, concluding thoughts.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

This dissertation comprised a two-method study, a web survey that provided a snapshot of the hyperlocal workers in the U.S. and in depth interviews with some of the

hyperlocal founders and staff to better understand the work they do and how they make sense of their new roles and work identities. The web survey revealed those who founded or worked for hyperlocal media are doing more of the same reporting, writing and gatekeeping as mainstream media. Most respondents agreed to following journalistic behaviors such as checking content for accuracy, confirming facts, quoting people or media sources directly, discussing current events with community members and including contrary views in online posts and stories. There was no statistically significant difference in the number of years of professional experience and the tendency to follow journalistic behaviors; everyone across the board adheres to them.

The same is the case for working with user generated content; hyperlocal media personnel guard the gates of information as closely as their predecessors. They edit user content for grammar, factual accuracy and biased opinion. They remove user content that is considered controversial or offensive to the community and they do not allow users to post stories or pictures on the website without edits. Thus communication and interaction on the news site is controlled and edited for decency. This may be a wise thing to encourage more interaction between community members. However, there is little research on whether editing and moderating comments leads to greater interaction among community members. One respondent interviewed for this study said on his site, the style of moderation is a little different; if any community member decides to use the platform to pass a value judgment that has no relevance to the topic, then they try to steer the conversation back to the issue at hand by engaging with him or her. So there is scope to innovate in community interaction without closing it off completely.

Most of the respondents thought journalists with prior professional experience in their field file better quality stories, understand news better, and are more equipped to filter good information from the bad. While one could argue that these are obvious

findings given that more than 80 percent of the respondents said they had some journalistic experience, what I take from these results is that journalists in hyperlocal media, who have the opportunity to nurture new kinds of storytelling and narratives and possibly new styles of writing while underlining the importance of content quality and accuracy, continue to perpetuate the same ideas and processes as their mainstream media counterparts. They do so even when there is ample research that shows that if journalists want to survive in the post-industrial economy, they must be open to changing their ways (Lewis, 2010; Anderson et al., 2012). For example, they should explore the new forms of storytelling that are possible on a web platform rather than trying to post reports every few hours similar to that of a wire agency. They should try and engage the community more and use the people as their eyes and ears on the ground. As one interviewee said, this may mean that the story is an ongoing conversation rather than a complete product. They should certainly study their audience and try and provide them the news they want, in the format they prefer, such as a daily digest, a weekly newsletter. Overall, they should be more accommodating to their readers' needs without letting them interfere in the editorial process.

The in-depth interviews revealed that hyperlocal journalists already struggle with the amount of work on their plate, but by far, they struggle the most in trying to find a balance when straddling the editorial and revenue sides of the business. Not only must they gain credibility within their community as a news media startup, but also earn enough revenue to keep their fledgling organization operational. This balancing act does not even account for their unease with handling revenue that is directly affected by their news coverage and vice versa. At the same time, they have become more accepting about raising money to keep up the news coverage; they are slowly but surely accepting the idea that as a small setup, they must participate in every aspect of running the news site.

As this is unmapped territory, for most of the hyperlocal entrepreneurs, they rely on each other to figure out issues as they go along. The rotation of ideas within a group of highly similar people may explain the repetition and replication of journalistic routines, storytelling ideas, and the inability of respondents studied in this research to break old reporting and gatekeeping habits. In order to walk down new avenues or try something completely out of character, one must interact with people outside of one's daily routine (Ibarra, 2003). For example, one of the first successful hyperlocal sites was Chicago Crime, created by journalist and computer programmer, Adrian Holovaty, to track crime in the city's neighborhoods using Chicago Police Department data (Kiss, 2008). One could argue that Holovaty had programming skills as well as resources to build the site that many hyperlocal founders and staff lack. However, I see this as him utilizing his skills to disseminate important information in an innovative and unique manner to neighborhoods in Chicago. Instead of writing a series of reports, he created a database. Seen from an overarching perspective, technology allows for new perspectives and methods to create news and disseminate it and hyperlocal media founders and staff should use it more effectively.

In contrast, the interviews showed that most respondents were so caught up with daily reporting pressures that they either did not have time or the resources to pursue newer forms of storytelling. Apart from the tangible constraints, there was also a reiteration of the idea that what they were doing is journalism and therefore, using new technologies and other methods to tell stories was secondary to their fundamental responsibility of providing news reports and information. This kind of mindset needs to change if entrepreneurial and hyperlocal journalists are to be encouraged to execute new ideas in their startup ventures. By no means must hyperlocal media founders and staff relinquish the basic tenets of journalism that include writing in readable, correct

language, checking for facts and ensuring accuracy as well as transparency of all that is reported. At the same time, they should take the opportunity to change and innovate from the narrative and storytelling perspective that new technologies make available and step out of their comfort boundaries.

The news is not all bleak, however, as the interviews also revealed respondents' optimism for the reporting that independent news media startups allow. For instance, those working for hyperlocal media say they have a lot of freedom to choose what they would like to report on because they are a small setup and not bound by the practices that constrain bigger newsrooms. For example, they either do not have to follow a managerial hierarchy at all or have just one supervisor, so they have a lot of autonomy in choosing their stories. In one respondent's case, he was asked to design his job profile the way he wanted it and follow any beat he desired. Hyperlocal journalists can use more personalized language and write stories in a more conversational style. Their headlines are not necessarily the big news story of the day but rather an important issue for the community that may not be featured in any other media publication. As many of them report on their own communities, they are not afraid to get intimate with the issue they are reporting on; they will put the interests of the community ahead of objectivity. In fact, some said objectivity is passé, and that fair representation of an issue is the new black. Of the respondents who were interviewed, many were more optimistic about working in a new news media startup or for that matter, starting one. Their reasoning was journalism no longer offers a stable job and they would rather be part of a media organization that shows commitment to its community and members than an impersonal conglomerate that does not value its audience as much as profits. In an effort to make the community care about the news, journalists working for hyperlocal media have begun to care about the news themselves.

What the findings of both studies show is that hyperlocal founders as well as those who are working for these new media startups face a pull-push relationship with journalism in relation to their new roles. The constant oscillation of the respondents from what they know to understanding the new responsibilities that are part of their new work roles can be seen as their struggle to create a new space for themselves and figure out where they fit in the larger profession of journalism. This process can theoretically be explained as the formation of a new professional sub-group within the larger profession of journalism.

In their paper on formation of virtual team categories and prototypes, scholars Brandon and Pratt (1999) said that group prototype formation--prototype is explained as specific identity associated with that group (Bartel & Wiesenfeld, 2013)--“will be enhanced when information about specific group attributes is provided by ingroup members,” (p. D4) and when “members are free to negotiate conflict and disagreements about the attributes of the group,” (p. D5). A number of respondents said they were members of closed discussion groups for precisely this reason. The interviewees said they used these platforms to talk to each other and discuss issues related to the daily running of the hyperlocal site. They mentioned the need for such a resource and how useful it is for them, when they do not have any role models they can refer to or any other exemplars that could guide them. They also spoke about the usefulness of conferences where they get opportunities to meet other people like themselves and not feel too alone in their work.

Thus, the respondents do not feel that they fit in a conventional professional journalists’ group in their current work roles. Even though they are quick to defend their work as journalism, they speak about differences between themselves and traditional outlets in terms of the choice of stories, use of the occasional first person narrative,

providing their community with a voice in their news reporting, and increased involvement in the business side of the news site. These new work roles have demanded that the journalists-turned-entrepreneurs as well as those working for these new media sites find a new niche for themselves.

PROFESSIONAL AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

The discussion above expands on literature related to influences that affect news construction in a new media startup that may or may not have a formal organizational setting. It also applied the theoretical model of role identity formation to journalists who had taken on an entrepreneurial role in their new venture. Scholarship around all these topics is nascent at best and usually focused on how journalists must adapt to the ever dynamic online environment by incorporating journalism ideals in news media leadership (Pavlik, 2013), new content and business models for hyperlocal media (Kurpius et al., 2010; Radcliffe, 2012; Pekkala, 2012) and repurposing their journalistic practices for the digital environment (Nee, 2014). These papers do get at the question of how journalists do news work in a new medium and environment, however, none of them question how journalists step into their new roles of entrepreneurs and negotiate the responsibility of handling both the business and editorial sides of a news outlet. No research project has specifically dealt with how journalists-turned-entrepreneurs are settling into these new roles and formulating their perceptions of what it means to be a journalism entrepreneur, until now. There are also few research projects that look at new media startups headed by former journalists who are now CEOs and the kind of organizational socialization they provide for their employees.

These topics are important research issues because how former journalists define themselves in a new group, and how those ideals filter down to the company employees, will set the parameters by which this new group will begin to identify themselves. And this identification will affect the news content that is produced via these startups. Moreover, this research helps understand what it means to be a journalism entrepreneur in a time when things are not as black and white as a print newspaper. By focusing on how hyperlocal entrepreneurs adapt to their new responsibilities of running a startup and implement their policies, this study informs scholars of the development and sustainability trajectories of these digital news startups.

THEORETICAL ADDITION

The steadfastness of media routines in entrepreneurial news ventures reiterates that an individual's journalistic professional identity informs his or her reporting practices more than his or her affiliation with an organization. This study tested the Hierarchy model in new media startups and applied it to the individual media content producer, who is an entity in his or her own right. The study found that the Hierarchy model is applicable to the independent workers and the individual, and that media routines and institutional levels are most influential, depending on the role the individual performs at any given time. For example, when reporting, individual and media routines are most salient and when running the business, the institutional level is most salient. The organizational level does not appear to influence the individual, which makes sense as the size of a hyperlocal site can range from 1 to 5-6 employees.

This study also adds to prototype formation and work identity literature in organizational behavior by showing how professionals, who do not have any prototypes

they can refer to, make sense of their new roles and behaviors to deal with the new responsibilities. Organizational behavior literature has shown that a prototype plays an important part in helping individuals make sense of their new roles and responsibilities (Ashforth, 2001), as well as figuring out how best to act in that position (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al, 2006). But this study shows what professionals tend to do when they do not have a role model they can refer too; they begin to look to each other for socially acceptable cues and behaviors. They form a little “community of practice” (Handley et al., 2006) that helps them learn how to navigate business/editorial-related dilemmas on a regular basis. In that process, they begin to form an idea of what they do and the characteristics that distinguish them from other journalist groups.

PRACTICAL ADDITION

This study showed that as professional journalistic experience or a journalism education trumped all other influences, most hyperlocal journalists carried over the processes learned in a traditional media organization to the digital platform. Thus, new media startups will need vast funds to run profitably because the carrying over of traditional journalistic behaviors will cost more. It will create similar hierarchies that exist in newspapers and not supported by digital platforms (Naldi & Picard, 2012). Therefore, this research shows that if we want journalistic entrepreneurs to innovate and try new methods of storytelling, interact with their audience and increase participation in innovative ways, then these practices need to be taught to them in the classroom. Thus the role of journalism schools in training the new generation of journalists becomes that much more important.

The other important point brought forth is that hyperlocal journalists suffer from “formational myopia” (Naldi & Pickard, 2012) or the idea that new media startups tend to reinforce professional journalistic norms and routines in their new workplaces. This research shows that lack of prototypes or role models that better inform new journalistic entrepreneurs on how to break the traditional mold is a serious hindrance to their success. Thus, other journalistic entrepreneurs and journalism schools in general can start promoting role models other than Edward Murrow and Bob Woodward. Maybe, promoting a role model more like Adrian Holovaty may encourage new journalists to adopt new media skills more willingly and try new ways of informing the public.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study’s principal strength is that through an online survey, it provided a general overview of hyperlocal media operating in the United States as well as the people working in these organizations. It also provided information about the kind of organizations these hyperlocal media are and the journalistic behaviors and gatekeeping processes that are applied when gathering and publishing content on these sites. Through in-depth interviews with the respondents, the study sheds light on the ongoing process of journalists-turned-entrepreneurs as well as staff in hyperlocal media/ new news media startups who struggle to make sense of their new roles and their news organizations. The dual-method approach applied here has proven beneficial in unearthing a holistic picture of hyperlocal media and the people who started them or work in them. The survey provided an overview of the people who work in hyperlocal media, their journalistic behaviors when reporting the news, their gatekeeping practices when working with user generated content and their perceptions about user generated content. The interviews

provided rich information on how hyperlocal founders and staff go about their daily routine of reporting the news, how they are finding their feet in their new roles and how they negotiate their new responsibility of running a news business as well as reporting the news.

While an effort was made to incorporate all the hyperlocal sites operating in the United States, there is a very good chance some sites may have slipped through the cracks. Also, the decision to include the sites for the survey and the interviews was made on the basis of a list of parameters that I thought were most important. Another researcher may have approached the list of hyperlocal sites differently as a major issue currently facing the industry is what kind of site gets included as a “hyperlocal” (Hirschman, 2012). Hence, a researcher is left with little choice but to make decisions based on the limited literature as the starting point for conducting a study.

These weaknesses, however, can be considered as starting points for future research. To begin with, a content analysis comparing the stories published on hyperlocal sites versus the stories published on mainstream media in the same geographic location would provide a good comparison on differences in news content and style, thus proving whether the interviewees do indeed take a different approach to content as they have claimed in this study. A good way forward would be to apply Weaver & Wilhoit’s (1996) journalists’ perceptions of their functions, namely interpretive, disseminator, adversarial and populist mobilizer (p. 137) and see which ones do hyperlocal founders and staff see themselves performing most frequently. In this research, I also was unable to tease out the effects of previous professional experience on journalistic behaviors and gatekeeping functions; the results were statistically insignificant even though I strongly believed otherwise. This could mean either prior professional experience or lack thereof actually does not make any difference to how a journalist approaches his or her work or, when it

comes to journalist work, how it is done makes all the difference. The other alternative could be that instead of the time spent in a newsroom, which one the journalistic professionals worked in prior to working in hyperlocal sites -- such as print, television, online -- may influence how they approach their work. Future studies could use different measures to help tease out the difference between professional experience and approach to news work.

More research also is required into whether the news content provided by these hyperlocal sites is indeed relevant to the communities they cover; following the news media's perspective, it is important to get the audience's perspective. Questions related to engagement and interactivity will reveal whether readers feel encouraged to participate in conversations that are moderated and controlled by journalists or if they would rather be able to say what they like, even at the risk of upsetting others. As these websites are created for the purpose of community engagement, it would be useful to examine if communities find these sites credible and if they gain knowledge from these sites or simply use them as supplements to their regular news source. It would also be important to study the public's perception of these journalistic entrepreneurs as it is central to the latter's professional identity. Hyperlocal founders and staff are in constant touch with the community members, physically and online and these interactions form the basis of what their community thinks of them as professionals. Many interviewees said what has led to them and their news site gaining respect in the community is their physical presence within the neighborhood. Thus examining these interactions more closely may provide a better sense of how a journalistic entrepreneur gains respect in the community and what influence it may have on his or her professional identity.

Finally, hyperlocal media are trying all kinds of business models to earn revenue for their news operations; an in-depth analysis of these models may provide the

journalism industry with ways of improving the numbers on their balance sheets. In terms of impact on content, journalism scholars should start exploring the influence of money. How do journalists deal with the financial and editorial processes in their new news media startup? Scholars also do not know nearly enough about how sub-groups are formed and the process by which they arrive at an identity for the new group. More research on how the journalists-turned-entrepreneurs use group communication platforms to work through conflict and to arrive at some conclusive characteristics for their group would clarify the group formation/prototype procedure. This study is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg; much is left for further exploration.

The research here suggests that journalists-turned-entrepreneurs are trying to carve their own niche within the field of journalism but find it difficult to cut their umbilical cords attached to their previous workplaces -- mainstream media. While they are trying to figure out their new role and the responsibilities that come with it, they still continue working like they did in their old jobs. Given that for journalists, their professional identity overpowers organizational identity, the new work and responsibilities are forcing them to question what it means to be a journalist. For hyperlocal founders, the dilemma is worse; the change in their work role implies change in their professional identity. This leads to the obvious question: what kind of journalists do they want to be? The answer will be as revealing for journalism scholars and the industry, as for them.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF HYPERLOCAL SITES IN THE SURVEY

Name	Hyperlink	Geographic Location
Locust Fork News-Journal	blog.locustfork.net	Birmingham, AL
Your Palm Beach County	yourpbc.org	Palm Beach, AZ
Tucson Velo	tucsonvelo.com	Tucson, AZ
Tucson Citizen	tucsoncitizen.com	Tucson, AZ
InMaricopa	inmaricopa.com	Maricopa, AZ
Tucson Sentinel	tucsonsentinel.com	Tucson, AZ
Fayetteville Flyer	fayettevilleflyer.com	Fayetteville, AK
First Arkansas News	firstarkansasnews.net	Benton, AK
Ozarks Unbound	ozarksunbound.com	Ozarks, AK
Mission Local	missionlocal.org	Mission, CA
NeighborWebSJ	neighborwebsj.com	San Jose, CA
Corona Del Mar Today	coronadelmartoday.com	Corona Del Mar, CA
Oakland Local	oaklandlocal.com	Oakland, CA
Intersection South LA	intersectionsouthla.org	Los Angeles, CA
Cal Coast News	calcoastnews.com	San Luis Obispo, CA
EastSider LA	theeastsiderla.com	Los Angeles, CA
LA Observed	laobserved.com	Los Angeles, CA
Claycord News & Talk	claycord.com	East Bay, CA
SF Appeal	sfappeal.com	San Francisco, CA
CalBuzz	calbuzz.com	San Francisco, CA
Yubanet	yubanet.com	Nevada City, CA
The Alamedan	thealamedan.org	Alameda, CA
Surf City Voice	surfcityvoice.org	Huntington Beach, CA
Berkeleyside	berkeleyside.com	Berkeley, CA
Alhambra Source	alhambraresource.org	Alhambra, CA
Leimert Park Beat	leimertparkbeat.com	Los Angeles, CA
Noozhawk	noozhawk.com	Santa Barbara, CA
Ocean Beach Bulletin	oceanbeachbulletin.com	Ocean Beach, CA
The Bold Italic	thebolditalic.com	San Francisco, CA
The Natomas Buzz	natomasbuzz.com	Natomas, CA
Voice of San Diego	voiceofsandiego.org	San Diego, CA
Speak City Heights	speakcityheights.org	City Heights, SD, CA
Patch	patch.com	All U.S.
Voice of OC	voiceofoc.org	Orange County, CA
Long Beach Post	lbpost.com	Long Beach, CA

Richmond Confidential	richmondconfidential.org	Richmond, CA
Oakland North	oaklandnorth.net	Oakland, CA
Carlsbadistan	carlsbadistan.com	Carlsbad, CA
Neighborhood News Net	sfcommons.tv	San Francisco, CA
Laist	laist.com	Los Angeles, CA
SFist	sfist.com	San Francisco, CA
Everything Long Beach	everythinglongbeach.com	Long Beach, CA
Edhat	edhat.com	Santa Barbara, CA
East County Magazine	eastcountymagazine.org	San Diego, CA
Coast Sider	coastsider.com	San Mateo County, CA
Coachella Valley Ind.	cvindependent.com	Coachella Valley, CA
Benito Link	benitolink.com	San Benito, CA
Amador Comm. News	amadorcommunitynews.blog spot.com	Amador, CA
Soapbox Media	soapboxmedia.com	Cincinnati
Aspen Journalism	aspennjournalism.org	Aspen, CO
Colorado Public News	cpt12.org/news	Denver, CO
Summit County Citizen's Voice	summitcountyvoice.com	Summit County, CO
Salida Citizen	salidacitizen.com	Salida, CO
Lymeline	lymeline.net	Old Lyme, CT
Valley News Now	valleynewsnow.com	Essex, CT
The Connecticut Mirror	ctmirror.org	New Haven, CT
Yale Environment 360	e360.yale.edu	New Haven, CT
New Hartford Plus	newhartfordplus.com	New Hartford, CT
New Haven Independent	newhavenindependent.org	New Haven, CT
Valley Ind. Sentinel	valley.newhavenindependent. org	Naugatuck Valley, CT
Branford Eagle	newhavenindependent.org/in dex.php/branford	Branford, CT
Woodstock CT Café	woodstockctcafe.com	Woodstock, CT
Killingworth Today	killingsworthtoday.com	Killingworth, CT
Darien Daily Voice	thedailydarien.com	Darien, CT
Fairfield Daily Voice	fairfield.dailyvoice.com	Fairfield, CT
Norwalk Daily Voice	norwalk.dailyvoice.com	Norwalk, CT
New Canaan Daily Voice	newcanaan.dailyvoice.com	new Canaan, CT
Stamford Daily Voice	stamford.dailyvoice.com	Stamford, CT
Greenwich Daily Voice	greenwich.dailyvoice.com	Greenwich, CT
Weston Daily Voice	weston.dailyvoice.com	Weston, CT
Wilton Daily Voice	wilton.dailyvoice.com	Wilton, CT
Westport Daily Voice	westport.dailyvoice.com	Westport, CT
Westport Now	westportnow.com	Westport, CT

DCist	dcist.com	Washington D.C.
The Hill is Home	thehillsishome.com	Washington, D.C
Milford Live	milfordlive.com	Milford, DE
Lake City Journal	lakecityjournal.com	Lake City, FL
Your PBC	yourpbc.org	Boca Raton, FL
83 Degrees	83degreesmedia.com	Tampa Bay, FL
Locally Grown News	locallygrownnews.com	Tampa Bay, FL
Florida Current	floridacurrent.com	Tallahassee, FL
West Orlando News	westorlandonews.com	Orlando, FL
Savannah Now	savannahnow.com	Savannah, GA
Smyrna Vinings	smyrnavinings.com	Smyrna Vining, GA
Peach Pundit	peachpundit.com	Alpharetta, GA
Worthit2u	worthit2u.net/worth	Sylvester, GA
Hometown Headlines	johndruckenmiller.com	Greater Rome, GA
Gaper's Block	gapersblock.com	Chicago, IL
Center Square Journal	centersquarejournal.com	Chicago, IL
Edgeville Buzz	edgevillebuzz.com	Chicago, IL
Chicago Talks	chicagotalks.com	Chicago, IL
Austin Talks	austintalks.com	Chicago, IL
CU-CitizenAccess	cu-citizenaccess.org	Urbana, IL
Evanston Now	evanstonnow.com	Evanston, IL
Gazebo News	gazebonews.com	Lake Forest, IL
North Lawndale Community News	nicn.org	North Lawndale, IL
Wellespark Bulldog	wellesparkbulldog.com	Chicago, IL
Chicagoist	chicagoist.com	Chicago, IL
U-C Ind. Media	ucimc.org	Urbana-Champaign, IL
Muncie Free Press	munciefreepress.com	Muncie, IN
Silicon Prairie News	siliconprairienews.com	Des Moines, IA
Juice	dmjuice.com	Des Moines, IA
Kansas City Kansan	kckansan.com	Kansas City, KS
Prairie Valley Post	pvpost.com	Prairie Valley, KS
Lexington Commons	kylelexingtoncommons.org	Lexington, KY
The Midway Messenger	midwayky.blogspot.com	Midway, KY
Daily Yonder	dailyyonder.com	Whitesburg, KY
River City News	rcnky.com	River City, KY
Uptown Messenger	uptownmessenger.com	New Orleans, LA
Nola Defender	noladefender.com	New Orleans, LA
Silicon Bayou News	siliconbayounews.com	New Orleans, LA
The Lens	thelensnola.org	New Orleans, LA
NolaVie	nolavie.com	New Orleans, LA
The Cecil Times	ceciltimes.com	Cecil County, MD

The Chestertown Spy	chestertownspy.com	Chestertown, MD
Dagger Press	daggerpress.com	Harford County, MD
Baltimore Brew	baltimorebrew.com	Baltimore, MD
Bmore	bmoremedia.com	Baltimore, MD
Eye On Annapolis	eyeonannapolis.net	Annapolis, MD
Bethesda Now	bethesdanow.com	Bethesda, MD
Your Town	yourtown.boston.com	Boston, MA
Cape Cod Today	capecodtoday.com	Cape Cod, MA
Open Media Boston	openmediaboston.org	Boston, MA
Manomet Current	manometcurrent.com	Manomet, MA
Universal Hub	universalhub.com	Boston, MA
The Swellesley Report	theswellesleyreport.com	Wellesley, MA
Your Arlington	yourarlington.com	Arlington, MA
Ann-Arbor Chronicle	annarborchronicle.com	Ann Arbor, MI
Cambridge Day	cambridgeday.com	Cambridge, MA
Franklin Matters	franklinmatters.org	Franklin, MA
Hopnews	hopnews.com	Hopkinton, MA
Inside Medford	insidemedford.com	Medford, MA
NOBO	nobomagazine.com	Boston, MA
Melrose Mirror	melrosemirror.media.mit.edu	Melrose, MA
Jacksonopolis	jacksonopolis.com	Jackson, MI
A2Politico	a2politico.com	Ann Arbor, MI
The Rapidian	therapidian.org	Grand Rapids, MI
Rapid Growth	rapidgrowthmedia.com	Grand Rapids, MI
Metromode	metromodemedia.com	S.E. Michigan
Model D	modeldmedia.com	S.E. Michigan
Capital Gains	capitalgainsmedia.com	Lansing, MI
Concentrate Media	concentratemedia.com	Washtenaw County, MI
Second Wave	secondwavemedia.com	N.W. Michigan
Community Voices	comvoicesonline.com	North, MI
Hamtramck Star	hamtramckstar.com	Hamtramck, MI
River Country Journal	rivercountryjournal.info	River Country, MI
Locally Grown Northfield	locallygrownnorthfield.org	Northfield, MN
Northfield Citizens Online	northfield.org	Northfield, MN
TC Jewfolk	tcjewfolk.com	Twin Cities, MN
The Line	thelinemedia.com	MN
Bring Me the News	bringmethenews.com	Minneapolis, MN
St Louis Beacon	stlbeacon.org	St Louis, MO
Gasconade County News	gasconade.countynewslive.com	Gasconade, MO
Republic Tiger Sports	republictigersports.com	MO
Big Red Network	bigrednetwork.com	NE

Husker Zone	huskerzone.com	NE
Nebraska Mosaic	cojmc.uni.edu/mosaic	Lincoln, NE
The Forum	forumhome.org	Deerfield, NH
My VeronaNJ	myveronanj.com	Verona, NJ
North Jersey on Paterson	northjersey.com/paterson	Paterson, NJ
Planet Princeton	planetprinceton.com	Princeton, NJ
The Jersey Tomato Press	thejerseytomatopress.com	Montclair, NJ
Somerville Today	somervilletoday.com	Somerville, NJ
Jersey City Independent	jerseycityindependent.com	NJ
RedBankGreen	redbankgreen.com	NJ
Baristanet	baristanet.com	Montclair, NJ
Bronx Bureau	bronxbureau.org	Bronx, NY
Brooklyn Heights Blog	brooklynheightsblog.com	Brooklyn, NY
Long Island News	longisland.com	Long Island, NY
The Lo Down	thelodownny.com	Manhattan, NY
The Loop NY	theloopny.com	Larchmont, NY
All Over Albany	alloveralbany.com	Albany, NY
Brownstoner	brownstoner.com	Manhattan, NY
Buffalo Rising	buffalorising.com	Buffalo, NY
Capital New York	capitalnewyork.com	Albany, NY
DNAinfo	dnainfo.com	Manhattan, NY
Gotham Schools	gothamschools.org	Manhattan, NY
Gothamist	gothamist.com	Manhattan, NY
Inner City Press	innercitypress.com	Manhattan, NY
Oswego County Today	oswegocountytoday.com	Oswego County, NY
Riverhead Local	riverheadlocal.com	Long Island, NY
Streetsblog	streetsblog.org	Manhattan, NY
Brooklyn Ink	thebrooklynink.com	Brooklyn, NY
Watershed Post	watershedpost.com	Catskills, NY
Ditmas Park Corner	ditmasparkcorner.com	Ditmas Park, NY
South Slope News	southsloopenews.com	Manhattan, NY
Kensingtonbk	kensingtonbk.com	Brooklyn, NY
Park Slope Stoop	parkslopestoop.com	Brooklyn, NY
The Ithaca Ind.	ithacaindy.org	Ithaca, NY
Sheepshead Bites	sheepsheadbites.com	Brooklyn, NY
New Castle Now	newcastlenow.org	Chappaqua, NY
The Batavian	thebatavian.com	Batavia, NY
Davidson News	davidsonnews.net	Davidson, NC
Cornelius News	corneliusnews.net	Cornelius, NC
Locally Grown News	locallygrownnews.com	Greensboro, NC
Cary Citizen	carycitizen.com	Cary, NC
Outer Banks Voice	outerbanksvoice.com	Nags Head, NC

Yadkin Valley Sports	yadkinvalleysports.com	Yadkin, NC
Hendersonville Live	hvlive.com	Henderson, NC
Henderson Scoop	hvllescoop.com	Henderson, NC
Plan Charlotte	plancharlotte.org	Charlotte, NC
Q City	qcitymetro.com	Charlotte, NC
Raleigh Public Record	raleighpublicrecord.org	Raleigh, NC
Fresh Water	freshwatercleveland.com	Cleveland, OH
Columbus Underground	columbusunderground.com	Columbus, OH
The News Outlet	thenewsoutlet.org	Youngstown, Ohio
Heights Observer	heightsobserver.org	Cleveland, OH
East Portland News	eastpdxnews.com	Portland, OR
Lane Today	lanetoday.com	Lane County, OR
Eugene Daily News	eugenedailynews.com	Eugene, OR
Neighborhood Notes	neighborhoodnotes.com	Portland, OR
Portland Afoot	portlandafoot.org	Portland, OR
Plan Philly	planphilly.com	Philadelphia, PA
Philadelphia Neighborhoods	philadelphianeighborhoods.com	Philadelphia, PA
The Sanatoga Post	sanatogapost.com	Sanatoga, PA
West Philly Local	westphillylocal.com	Philadelphia, PA
North East Philly	neastphilly.com	Philadelphia, PA
Technically Philly	technicallyphilly.com	Philadelphia, PA
Frankford Gazette	frankfordgazette.com	Frankford, PA
Pop City Media	popcitymedia.com	Pittsburgh, PA
Beaver Countian	beavercountian.com	Beaver County, PA
Go Laurens	golaurens.com	Laurens County, SC
Read Charlie	readcharlie.com	Charleston, SC
The Digitel	thedigitel.com	Charleston, SC
Brentwood Home	brentwoodhomepage.com	Brentwood, TN
Franklin Home	franklinhomepage.com	Franklin, TN
Knoxviews	knoxviews.com	Knoxville, TN
Hispanic Nashville	hispanicnashville.com	Nashville, TN
Daily Yonder	dailyyonder.com	Knoxville, TN
Grand Prairie Reporter	grandprairiereporter.com	Grand Prairie, TX
NowCastSA	nowcastsa.com	San Antonio, TX
*Pegasus News	pegasusnews.com	Dallas, TX
Quorum Report	quorumreport.com	Austin, TX
Dallas South News	dallassouthnews.org	Dallas, TX
The Rockwall News	rockwallnews.com	Dallas, TX
Alamo City Times	alamocitytimes.com	San Antonio, TX
Rio Grande Guardian	riograndeguardian.com	Rio Grande Valley, TX
Town Square Buzz	townsquarebuzz.com	McKinney, TX

Austin Indymedia	austin.indymedia.org	Austin, TX
Only Katy	onlykaty.com	Katy, TX
Silicon Hills	siliconhillsnews.com	Austin, TX
Stone Oak Info	stoneoakinfo.com	Stone Oak, TX
The 109	the109.org	Fort Worth, TX
Front Porch Forum	frontporchforum.com	Burlington, VT
iBrattleboro	ibrattleboro.com	Brattleboro, VT
iPutney	iputney.com	Putney, VT
Valley Post	valleypost.org	Pioneer Valley, VT
Arlington Mercury	arlingtonmercury.org	Arlington, VA
Downtown Short Pump	downtownshortpump.com	Short Pump, VA
Greater Jackson Ward News	gjwn.net	Greater Jackson Ward, VA
Near West End News	nearwestendnews.net	West End, VA
North Richmond News	gjwn.net	North Richmond, VA
ARL Now	arlnow.com	Arlington, VA
Charlottesville Tomorrow	cvilletomorrow.org	Charlottesville, VA
Richmond Bizsense	richmondbizsense.com	Richmond, VA
RVA News	rvanews.com	Richmond, VA
Exit 133	exit133.com	Tacoma County, WA
Go Lake Chelan	golakechelan.com	Lake Chelan, WA
Inside Bainbridge	insidebainbridge.com	Bainbridge, WA
My Local Health Guide	mylocalhealthguide.com	Seattle, WA
Lynwood Today	lynnwoodtoday.com	Lynwood, WA
My Edmond News	myedmondsnews.com	Edmonds, WA
MLT News	mltnews.com	Mt. Lake Terrace, WA
My Everett News	myeverettnews.com	Everett, WA
Capitol Hill Seattle	capitolhillseattle.com	Seattle, WA
Crosscut	crosscut.com	Seattle, WA
Investigate West	invw.org	Seattle, WA
My Ballard	myballard.com	Ballard, WA
Phinneywood	phinneywood.com	Phinneywood, WA
West Seattle Blog	westseattleblog.com	Seattle, WA
B-Town Blog	b-townblog.com	Burien, WA
Pinehurst	pinehurstseattle.org	Seattle, WA
Rainier Valley Post	ravennablog.com	Seattle, WA
Shoreline Area News	shorelineareanews.com	Seattle, WA
Sun Break	thesunbreak.com	Seattle, WA
Urban Milwaukee	urbanmilwaukee.com	Milwaukee, WI
Madison Commons	madisoncommons.org	Madison, WI
Milwaukee Neighborhood	milwaukeeenns.org	Milwaukee, WI
Yellowstone Gate	yellowstonegate.com	Yellowstone, WY

APPENDIX 2: ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONS

The following questions are related to your professional experience.

Q1 Do you have any professional journalistic experience?

Yes (1)

No (2)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To In which field have you attained prof...

Q2 What has been the duration of your professional experience?

More than 10 years (1)

5-9 years (2)

2-4 years (3)

1 year or less (4)

Q3 Which of the following media did you work in? Check all that apply.

Daily newspaper (1)

Weekly newspaper (2)

TV channel (3)

Private radio station (4)

Public radio (5)

Magazines (6)

website of a newspaper (7)

website of a tv channel (8)

website of a private radio station (9)

website of a public radio station (10)

website of a magazine (11)

website (12)

Other (please specify) (13) _____

Answer If Do you have any professional journalistic experience? No Is Selected

Q3a In which field have you attained professional experience before working/writing for a hyperlocal news site?

The next few questions are related to the organizational structure of the hyperlocal news site.

Q4 What best describes your hyperlocal organization?

For profit organization (1)

Non-profit organization (2)

Other (please specify) (3) _____

Q5 What best describes the area your site serves?

Neighborhood (1)

Town (2)

City (3)

Other (5) _____

Q6 What kind of topics does your site cover? Choose all the ones that are relevant.

Crime (1)

Sports (2)

Politics (3)

Community Residents (4)

Business (5)

Education (6)

Social Issues (7)

Religion (8)

Law (10)

Entertainment and Music (11)

Energy, Environment, Science (12)

Accidents and Disasters (13)

Consumer affairs (14)

Social activism (15)

Pets (cats, dogs and others) (16)

School events (17)

Weather (19)

Traffic (20)

Other (21) _____

Q7 How many full-time news and editorial people are employed in your organization?

Q8 What year was your organization started?

Q9 Does your site hold daily meetings to decide who will post what on a particular day?

Yes (1)

No (2)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To How would you best describe your work...

Q9a What is the official designation of the person who leads the daily meeting?

Q10 How would you best describe your workspace?

Home office (1)

- Desk in a newsroom (2)
- Sublet space (part of another office) (3)
- Space in a local educational university building (4)
- Coffee shop (5)
- On-the-go (anywhere, really) (7)
- Other (Please specify.) (8) _____

The following questions are related to the content produced and published on the hyperlocal site.

Q11 What is your job title?

Q12 Which of the following topics do you, as an individual, cover for your site? List the top five in order of importance.

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)
Crime (1)					
Sports (2)					
Politics (3)					
Community Residents (4)					
Business (5)					
Education (6)					
Social Issues (7)					
Religion (8)					
Law (10)					
Entertainment and Music (11)					
Energy, Environment, Science (12)					
Accidents and Disasters (13)					
Consumer Affairs (14)					
Social Activism (15)					
Pets (16)					
School events (17)					
Weather (19)					
Traffic (20)					

Q13 With reference to producing content for your hyperlocal site, which of the following behaviors are applicable to you?

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Somewhat Agree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Disagree (5)	Disagree (6)	Strongly Disagree (7)
Quote other people or media sources directly. (1)							
Post something you have written on the site. (2)							
Discuss current events or news with community members. (3)							
Include links to original source material you have cited or used in some way. (4)							
Spend additional time trying to verify facts you want to include. (5)							
Get permission to post copyrighted material. (6)							
Try to post online something you hear of immediately. (7)							
Try to include contrary views in your posts/stories. (8)							
Include your opinion in self-produced content. (9)							

Confirm the accuracy of all information you post online. (10)							
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Q14 Does your site post user-generated content?

Yes (1)

No (2)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To Does the site carry any multimedia elements...

Q15 Please check the topics (could be more than one) covered by citizen journalists.

Law (1)

Sports (2)

Politics (3)

Community Residents (4)

Crime (5)

Business (6)

Education (7)

Relationships (8)

Social Issues (9)

Religion (10)

Entertainment and Music (12)

Energy, Environment, Science (13)

Accidents and Disasters (14)

Traffic (15)

Social Activism (16)

Pets (17)

School events (18)

Weather (19)

Consumer Affairs (20)

Q16 Does the site carry any multimedia elements such as video, audio, photos?

Yes (1)

No (2)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To Would you provide (more) multimedia e...

Q16a The site carries which of the following multimedia? Check all that apply.

Video (1)

Audio clips (2)

Photos (3)

Other (Please specify.) (4) _____

Q16b Who frequently posts the multimedia elements? Check all that are relevant.

Full-time employee (1)

Professional freelancer (2)

Citizen Journalist (3)

Other (Please specify.) (4) _____

Q16c What kind of multimedia do the full-time employees contribute to the site? Check all that are relevant.

Video (1)

Audio Clips (2)

Photos (3)

Other (Please specify.) (4) _____

Q16d What kind of multimedia do the professional freelancers contribute to the site?

Check all that are relevant.

Video (1)

Audio clips (2)

Photos (3)

Other (Please specify.) (5) _____

Q16e What kind of multimedia do the citizen journalists contribute to the site? Check all that apply.

Video (1)

Audio clips (2)

Photos (3)

Other (Please specify.) (4) _____

Q16f Does the inclusion of multimedia elements on your site contribute to your revenue in any way, such as make your site more attractive to advertisers and/or users? Please provide reasons for your response. If you are not in a position to answer this question, please skip to the next question.

Q16g In your opinion, should your site carry (more) multimedia elements? Please provide reasons for your response.

Q17 Does the site have a presence on any of the following social media? Check all that apply.

Presence on location-based media (for example, FourSquare) (1)

Facebook page (2)

Twitter handle (account) (3)

Other (Please specify.) (4) _____

Q18 Do you talk to other reporters/content contributors in the area covered by your hyperlocal site?

Yes (1)

No (2)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To Which of the following topics do you,...

Q19 Do you read the local newspaper for your area, if there is one?

Yes (1)

No (2)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To With reference to interactions between...

Q20 Do you get story leads or ideas from the local newspaper in your area?

Often (1)

Sometimes (2)

Never (3)

Q21 With reference to interactions between traditional media outlets and your site, which of the following statements do you agree/disagree with on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is Strongly Agree and 5 is Strongly Disagree?

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly Disagree (5)
Reporters from traditional media call the sites's reporters/contributors for source information. (1)					
Reporters from traditional media outlets carry content published on our hyperlocal site. (2)					
Reporters from traditional media outlets call the site's reporters/contributors for leads on published stories. (3)					
Reporters from traditional media outlets cite me or one of my colleagues as an expert on community-related					

news. (4)					
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Q22 Do your professional duties include working with user generated content?

Yes (1)

No (2)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To The following statements are related ...

Answer If Does your site post user-generated content? Yes Is Selected

Q23 With reference to working with user contributions, which of the following behaviors do you practice? Please choose the appropriate response for each statement.

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Somewhat Agree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Disagree (5)	Disagree (6)	Strongly Disagree (7)
Users can share stories/links on SNSs (1)							
Content produced by a staff writer or invited contributor is published more often than that created by a user. (2)							
Clear distinctions are made between contributions submitted by users and those submitted by staffers and regular contributors. (3)							
User posts and discussion comments that are considered offensive are removed from the site (4)							

<p>User generated stories are usually checked for factual accuracy before publishing them. (5)</p> <p>UGC is edited for grammar and style before publishing on the site. (6)</p> <p>Users can post comments on the site without prior edits. (7)</p> <p>UG stories are controlled for biased opinion in content. (8)</p> <p>User submitted stories that could be considered controversial in the community are removed from the site. (9)</p> <p>Users can upload picture freely on the site. (10)</p> <p>Stories are rarely linked to local bloggers or other local content. (11)</p> <p>Users can post stories on the site without edits. (10)</p>							
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Q24 The following statements are related to what people, who work for a hyperlocal news sites, generally feel about content contributions from users. Which do you agree/disagree with? Please choose the appropriate response for each statement.

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Somewhat Agree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Disagree (5)	Disagree (6)	Strongly Disagree (7)
Users do not know what they want to read. (1)							
Content provided by users must be distinguished from content provided by staff on the site. (2)							
Inaccuracy or defamatory comments from users are likely to land the site in trouble. (3)							
Everyone is an expert and must be allowed to speak his or her mind freely on the site. (4)							
Users can effectively police their own comments on the website. (5)							
Majority of the users are interested in contributing to the site. (6)							
Majority of the users are interested in commenting on the stories posted on the site. (7)							
Users must be rewarded for their							

contributions. (8)							
User contributions add value to the site. (9)							
The site receives more web traffic/visits from the community because it posts more content from the members. (10)							

Q25 The following statements are related to an individual having professional experience, defined as having prior work experience with a news media organization in a writing/editing capacity. To what extent do you agree/disagree with each of them? Please choose the appropriate response for each statement.

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Somewhat Agree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Disagree (5)	Disagree (6)	Strongly Disagree (7)
Reporters with professional experience have important skills that those without any professional experience lack. (1)							
Reporters with professional experience understand news better than those without any professional experience. (2)							
The quality of stories provided by reporters with professional experience is better than the stories provided by those							

<p>without any professional experience. (3)</p> <p>Reporters with professional experience guide others without professional experience on what to post on the site. (4)</p> <p>Reporters with professional experience suggest more stories for posting on the website than those without professional experience. (5)</p> <p>Reporters with professional experience tend to write more stories related to local governance than those without any professional experience. (6)</p> <p>Reporters with professional experience talk to more official representatives in government and private companies than those without professional experience. (7)</p> <p>Reporters with professional experience tend to link with fewer stories on other sites than those without professional experience. (8)</p>							
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Reporters with professional experience tend to interview fewer people on the street and other unofficial sources than those without professional experience. (9)							
Reporters with professional experience are better at filtering good information from bad than those without professional experience. (10)							

Q26 Below are some common ways that hyperlocal news sites have generated revenue. Please list the extent to which your site relies on one or more of the following methods for earning revenue. Approximate the values in terms of percent; the final tally should add up to 100 percent.

- _____ Advertising from banners (1)
- _____ Advertising from classifieds (2)
- _____ Support from corporates/businesses (3)
- _____ Grants from private foundations and/or users (4)
- _____ Content subscriptions (5)
- _____ Organizing local/community events for fundraising (6)
- _____ Providing product sales on the site (7)
- _____ Partnering with local businesses to offer customer specials (8)
- _____ Publishing advertorials (9)
- _____ Special content features with a focus on advertising (10)

You are almost done! Just a few more demographic questions.

Q27 What is your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)

Q28 What is your age? _____

Q29 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- High School (1)
- Some College (2)
- College (3)
- Some graduate work, no degree (4)
- Graduate degree (5)
- Doctorate, law or medical degree (6)
- Vocational or technical degree (7)

Q30 What was your undergraduate major?

Q31 In which of the following groups would you place yourself?

- White or Caucasian (1)
- Black or African-American (2)
- Asian or Asian-American (3)
- American Indian or Alaska Native (4)
- Pacific Islander (5)
- Hispanic or Latino (6)
- Other (7)

Q32 What is your annual income before taxes?

- Less than \$10,000 (1)
- \$10,000 to under \$20,000 (2)
- \$20,000 to under \$30,000 (3)
- \$30,000 to under \$40,000 (4)
- \$40,000 to under \$50,000 (5)
- \$50,000 to under \$75,000 (6)
- \$75,000 to under \$100,000 (7)
- \$100,000 to under \$150,000 (8)
- \$150,000 or more (9)

Q33 When it comes to politics, some people consider themselves conservative, some consider themselves liberal and then some people do not identify with either position. Where would you place yourself on the following scale?

- Very Liberal (1)
- Somewhat Liberal (2)
- Closer to Liberal (3)
- Neither Liberal nor Conservative (4)
- Close to Conservative (5)
- Somewhat Conservative (6)
- Very Conservative (7)
- Don't know (8)
- Other (9) _____

Q34 Please enter your email address if you would like for your name to be entered in the draw for an iPad mini. If not, just click on the '>>' button below to record your responses.

APPENDIX 3: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE WEB SURVEY

You are invited to participate in a research study, entitled “**Notes from the neighborhood: Who is writing what, when, where and how?**” The study is being conducted by Monica Chadha, Department of Journalism of The University of Texas at Austin, BMC 3.338 300 W. Dean Keeton, Austin, TX 78712-1073. The researcher’s phone number is 914-589-353 and email id is monica.chadha@utexas.edu.

The purpose of this research study is to examine the process of newsgathering in hyperlocal news sites. Your participation in the study will contribute to a better understanding of the daily business of news collection and dissemination in hyperlocal news sites. You are free to contact the investigator at the above address and phone number to discuss the study. You must be at least 21 years old to participate.

If you agree to participate:

- The online survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes of your time.
- Should you choose to participate, your name will be entered in a random draw to win an iPad mini.

There are no known risks. In fact, the risk of participating in this survey is as minimal as what you encounter in daily life. There will be no costs for participating, nor will you benefit from participating. Your name and email address will be stored separately from your responses and will not be kept after the data collection phase. This information will be destroyed after the data collection and analysis phases are completed. Only the principal investigator named above will have access to the data during data collection. All identifying information will be stripped from the final dataset.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to answer any question and you have the right to withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawal will not affect your relationship with The University of Texas in anyway. If you do not want to participate either simply stop participating or close the browser window.

If you do not want to receive any more reminders, you may send an email to monica.chadha@utexas.edu and you will not receive any further emails.

If you have any questions about the study or need to update your email address contact the researcher Monica Chadha at 914-589-3530 or send an email to monica.chadha@utexas.edu. This study has been reviewed by The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board and the study number is [2013-02-0086].

If you have questions about your rights or are dissatisfied at any time with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board by phone at (512) 471-8871 or email at orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

If you agree to participate, click on the following link [[HTTP://LINK TO STUDY URL](#)] at the end of the page to indicate your consent for participating in this online survey.

Thank you.

APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Tell me a little bit about yourself and how you came to join/start [hyperlocal news site].

Did you look at some kind of exemplars, prototypes, people/sites when thinking about what this site and your role should be?

Who would you say helped you “learn the ropes” in your professional development?

What kind of new responsibilities did moving into this job entail?

What are the qualities that best describe the character/style/spirit of this hyperlocal?

What does your regular (work) day look like?

What editorial/writing style do you follow for your hyperlocal site? Would you say it’s different from other media in the area?

What do you think it takes to be successful and effective in your current job?

What kind of evaluation do you use, if at all, to examine your performance?

What would you say are your strengths and weaknesses, work wise? How are you working on them?

How do you think the site and you gained respect in the community?

If someone asked you what you do for a living, what would you say?

Is your work something you do or part of who you are?

What are your goals for yourself and your site, moving forward?

APPENDIX 5: INVITATION LETTER FOR PARTICIPATION IN INTERVIEWS/SURVEYS

You are invited to participate in a research study, entitled “**Notes from the neighborhood: Who is writing what, when, where and how?**” The study is being conducted by Monica Chadha, Department of Journalism of The University of Texas at Austin, BMC 3.338 300 W. Dean Keeton, Austin, TX 78712-1073. The researcher’s phone number is 914-589-353 and email id is monica.chadha@utexas.edu.

The purpose of this research study is to examine the process of newsgathering in hyperlocal news sites. Your participation in the study will contribute to a better understanding of the daily business of news collection and dissemination in hyperlocal news sites. You are free to contact the investigator at the above address and phone number to discuss the study. You must be at least 21 years old to participate.

If you agree to participate:

For part 1 of this study, you will be interviewed by the principal researcher. She will collect information related to your experience and work for the hyperlocal news site.

The interview will take place via phone or skype, as per your convenience, and last approximately 30 minutes of your time.

The interview will be digitally recorded (with your permission) but this is not required in order to participate in the study.

For part 2 of this study, a survey form will be sent to you electronically (via email); it will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. Information related to the newsgathering process in the hyperlocal news site will be collected.

You have the option to participate in either of the two parts of the study; you can choose to not participate in one of the two, or both.

Should you complete the in-depth interview, you will receive a **\$10 iTunes or Starbucks card as compensation** for your time. You can choose to receive one of the two options. If you complete the online survey, your name will be entered in a **random draw to win an iPad mini**.

Risks, Benefits and Confidentiality of Data

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study. In fact, the risk of participating in this survey is as minimal as what you encounter in daily life. There will

be no costs for participating nor will you receive any additional monetary benefit from participating. However, your experience and response will help further media scholarship and provide insight in the daily business of news collection and dissemination in hyperlocal news sites.

Any **audio** recordings will be stored securely and only the Principal Investigator will have access to the recordings. These will be labeled by serial number, date when it was collected and the city of the respondent, for example, *01_Apr132013_Philadelphia*. Only the PI will have complete information about the respondent. All audio recordings will be destroyed after the scholarly work related to their use is completed. For the online survey, your name and email address will be stored separately from your responses and will not be kept after the data collection phase. This information will be destroyed after the data collection and analysis phases are completed. Only the principal investigator will have access to the data during data collection. All identifying information will be stripped from the final dataset.

Participation or Withdrawal

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to answer any question and you have the right to withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawal will not affect your relationship with The University of Texas in anyway.

If you wish to participate in both or only one part of the study, please email the researcher on monica.chadha@utexas.edu to inform her of your decision. If you do not wish to participate in the study, simply inform the researcher.

Contacts

If you have any questions about the study please contact the researcher. This study has been reviewed by The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board and the study number is [2013-02-0086].

Questions about your Rights as a Research Participant

If you have questions about your rights or are dissatisfied at any time with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board by phone at (512) 471-8871 or email at orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

Thank you.

APPENDIX 6: IRB EXEMPTION FOR HUMAN SUBJECT RESEARCH



OFFICE OF RESEARCH SUPPORT
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

P.O. Box 7426, Austin, Texas 78713 · Mail Code A3200
(512) 471-8871 · FAX (512) 471-8873

FWA # 00002030

Date: 05/06/13
PI: Renita B Coleman
Dept: Journalism
Title: Notes from the Neighborhood. Who is Writing What When Where?

Re: IRB Exempt Determination for Protocol Number 2013-02-0086

Dear Renita B Coleman:

Recognition of Exempt status based on 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2).

Qualifying Period: 05/06/2013 to 05/05/2016 . Expires 12 a.m. [midnight] of this date.
A continuing review report must be submitted in three years if the research is ongoing.

Responsibilities of the Principal Investigator:

Research that is determined to be Exempt from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review is not exempt from ensuring protection of human subjects. The following criteria to protect human subjects must be met. The Principal Investigator (PI):

1. Assures that all investigators and co-principal investigators are trained in the ethical principles, relevant federal regulations, and institutional policies governing human subject research.
2. Will provide subjects with pertinent information (e.g., risks and benefits, contact information for investigators and IRB Chair) and ensures that human subjects will voluntarily consent to participate in the research when appropriate (e.g., surveys, interviews).
3. Assures the subjects will be selected equitably, so that the risks and benefits of the research are justly distributed.
4. Assures that the IRB will be immediately informed of any information or unanticipated problems that may increase the risk to the subjects and cause the category of review to be reclassified to expedited or full board review.
5. Assures that the IRB will be immediately informed of any complaints from subjects regarding their risks and benefits.

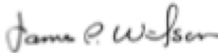
6. Assures that confidentiality and privacy of the subjects and the research data will be maintained appropriately to ensure minimal risks to subjects.
7. Will report, by amendment, any changes in the research study that alter the level of risk to subjects.

These criteria are specified in the PI Assurance Statement that was signed before determination of exempt status was granted. The PI's signature acknowledges that they understand and accept these conditions. Refer to the Office of Research Support (ORS) website www.utexas.edu/irb for specific information on training, voluntary informed consent, privacy, and how to notify the IRB of unanticipated problems.

1. Closure: Upon completion of the research study, a Closure Report must be submitted to the ORS.
2. Unanticipated Problems: Any unanticipated problems or complaints must be reported to the IRB/ORS immediately. Further information concerning unanticipated problems can be found in the IRB Policies and Procedure Manual.
3. Continuing Review: A Continuing Review Report must be submitted if the study will continue beyond the three year qualifying period.
4. Amendments: Modifications that affect the exempt category or the criteria for exempt determination must be submitted as an amendment. Investigators are strongly encouraged to contact the IRB Program Coordinator(s) to describe any changes prior to submitting an amendment. The IRB Program Coordinator(s) can help investigators determine if a formal amendment is necessary or if the modification does not require a formal amendment process.

If you have any questions contact the ORS by phone at (512) 471-8871 or via e-mail at orsec@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

Sincerely,



James Wilson, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair

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