Taking the 'Local' out of Local News: Implications for an Informed Public

Lee Hood

Loyola University Chicago, lhood1@luc.edu

Recommended Citation

Taking the "Local" out of Local News: Implications for an Informed Public

Lee Hood

Loyola University Chicago, Chicago, USA

The meaning of "local" in TV news is not as straightforward as one might imagine. "Local" newscasts in several U.S. markets are outsourced to an independent company located hundreds of miles from the communities served. What are the implications of such a delivery system for coverage of local issues and the Jeffersonian ideal of an informed citizenry? This study employs a content analysis of outsourced and local newscasts, using a data set of more than 1,000 stories from more than 30 hours of newscasts to determine if differences exist on story topics and source types. Does one type of station cover more public affairs stories than the other? Does one type use more official sources, or more perspective from private individuals? Even with the wide array of news sources currently available, local TV news still ranks as the most widely used information source. How well that source delivers information to local audiences is an important question to ask, particularly when the information may be coming from a great distance.

Keywords: TV news, content analysis, local news, news outsourcing, public affairs coverage

Introduction

Thomas Jefferson's notions of an informed electorate and of a free and robust press are interdependent, for vigorous coverage of government and public issues would certainly contribute to an informed citizenry. Almost two centuries later, the Hutchins Commission's Social Responsibility Theory of the Press also touted the importance of public issues coverage (Hutchins, 1947). Neither Jefferson nor even the Hutchins Commission could have anticipated the 21st century media landscape, with its complexity of delivery systems and sources. One such delivery system, outsourced local TV news, is the subject of the current study. A content analysis of outsourced news will help determine whether such newscasts, produced and delivered from hundreds of miles away, are substantially different from news produced locally on coverage of issues and topics, particularly those that deal with public affairs.

Consider the following scenarios. In October 2011, a U.S. federal appeals court struck down part of Alabama's controversial immigration law. The following Monday, the court responded to an emergency appeal from the state of Alabama by refusing to reconsider the ruling (Lawson, 2011). The story of the court's refusal led the 10 p.m. newscast on one station in Montgomery, Alabama, with a reporter live outside the state capitol building. The report included interview clips from Gov. Robert Bentley and U.S. Rep. Terri Sewell of Alabama's Seventh Congressional District discussing the issue, as well as interview clips from three private citizens. Another station in Montgomery did not include the ruling in its 10 p.m. newscast, instead leading the

---

Lee Hood, assistant professor, School of Communication, Loyola University Chicago.

program with a voice-over (anchor reading over video) story about Governor Bentley's order the previous Friday banning the synthetic marijuana substitute "Spice". The video, according to the graphic on the lower-third of the screen, came from YouTube.

Two weeks later, the news website *The Daily Beast* ranked Columbus, Georgia, the "brokest city in America" (Owen, 2011). The story led one station's six p.m. newscast, with a reporter live in the newsroom detailing the information and including analysis from a local economics professor. Was the ranking accurate? Was Columbus really that broke? The local professor criticized the ranking's methodology and its conclusions. The story ran two minutes and 26 seconds, followed by three stories on education and local schools. On a competing station, the six p.m. newscast looked much different. It did not include the story on the city's finances, and two local education stories began eight minutes into the newscast; the first five stories dealt with crime and punishment, comprising nearly the first five minutes of the news.

These scenarios represent different approaches to covering local public affairs stories, and both happened in markets where one station's local newscasts are outsourced to a provider hundreds of miles away. In Montgomery, the station that began with the immigration ruling was local WSFA, and the "Spice" ban led the newscast on outsourced WNCF. In Columbus, the city finance story ran on local station WTVM; the station leading with five minutes of crime stories was outsourced WLTZ. These two scenarios are part of the story, but a larger systematic analysis will help broaden the picture.

Background and Literature Review

In many areas of the world, locally-focused community broadcasting, particularly radio, is gaining prominence. Daniels (2012) provided a comprehensive overview of more than a dozen studies since 2003 on community radio around the world, including Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, and Central and South America. Meadows, Forde, Ewart, and Foxwell (2009) argued that community radio in Australia empowers audiences through local news and information. This followed earlier work from the same research team, noting the importance of focused coverage in "the discursive arena of the local community" (Forde, Foxwell, & Meadows, 2003, p. 317). Pavarala and Malik (2007) asserted a similar perspective in India.

In contrast to the trend toward community broadcasting stands the opposite practice of local news outsourcing. In the United States, some radio stations have outsourced news for a number of years. A major factor was the exponential growth of radio companies after the 1996 Telecommunications Act raised or eliminated limits on the number of stations a company could own (Croteau & Hoynes, 2007). By 2004, the Radio-TV News Directors Association estimated that 40% of radio stations did news for one or more stations outside their market (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2004). Large companies such as Clear Channel implemented systems by which some of their stations, often in larger markets, would produce news for stations in their smaller markets (Hood, 2007; 2010). In another model, independent companies produce news for stations in other markets (Hood, 2011). Two companies providing outsourced radio newscasts are the Virtual News Center based in Wichita, Kansas, and the Remote News Service based in Montana.

In television, one high-profile example of outsourced news was Sinclair Broadcasting's much-criticized *News Central* service from 2003-2006, in which segments of "local" news were produced at company headquarters in Maryland (Free Press, 2004). While that service is long gone, local television outsourcing is not. The Independent News Network (INN) (Retrieved 2013, from http://www.inn-news.net/) produces newscasts for several markets around the United States from headquarters in Davenport, Iowa. INN's website says it

"offers a customized, quality driven newscast…delivered by experienced anchor and reporter teams at a fraction of the cost to produce it internally!" (www.inn-news.net →"What We Do", emphasis original). As the website notes, the company uses reporters in each market to cover local stories. Video and information are sent to Davenport, where newscasts are assembled and delivered back to the stations electronically. INN's client list includes stations in nine TV markets; many are small, though a station serving the Boston area, one of the largest U.S. markets, aired INN newscasts from fall 2011 until May 2013 (Callahan, 2011; McCrystal, 2013). The list also includes Spanish-language stations in Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, and Austin, Texas; Atlanta, Georgia; and Las Vegas, Nevada.

Previous research on local news outsourcing has found substantial differences in news content on outsourced and local stations. In radio, this author's previous work (Hood, 2007; 2010) documented such differences in a case study of one market. The first study (2007) detailed such incidents as remote newscasts emphasizing conflict stories over a major local celebration and missing major local stories such as a forest fire just outside the city. The second study (2010) employed a content analysis and found highly significant differences in the location focus of stories, with local newscasts carrying 40.9% local stories, compared to only 3.97% on outsourced newscasts.

Television outsourcing studies have found similar results. Daniels (2008) studied *News Central*, comparing the remote newscasts to those locally-produced in three markets on several news attributes, including story location and type. The study found statistically significant differences, with local newscasts carrying considerably more locally-focused stories than remote newscasts. Mills and Daniels (2009) found that Sinclair's *Sports Central* carried significantly fewer local stories than local station sportscasts in the same markets.

One might wonder how local TV content relates to an informed citizenry. Arguably other sources provide more in-depth information on public issues. But a key reason to examine local TV is its pervasiveness in the media landscape. In U.S. news consumption studies since 1991 by the Pew Research Center, local TV has consistently ranked as the public's most-used news source. Though audience numbers have declined significantly in recent years, in the most recent survey 48% named local TV as a regular news source, compared to 46% for online sources and 38% for print newspapers (Pew Research Center, 2012, p. 14). In that context, it makes sense to ask how well local news covers topics that can help promote an informed citizenry. And if the "local" news is produced hundreds of miles away, does that model mean less coverage of pertinent community information?

Several studies have examined local TV news content, particularly in light of criticisms about overemphasis on sensationalism to the detriment of covering public affairs (Dominick, Wurtzel, & Lometti, 1975; Ryu, 1982; Wulfemeyer, 1982; Hoffstetter & Dozier, 1986; Bernstein & Lacy, 1992; Carroll, Tuggle, McCollum, Mitrook, Arlington, & Hoerner, 1997). Slattery and Hakanen (1994) replicated what they called Adams' (1978) "benchmark study", concluding that sensationalism and human interest stories had increased appreciably in the interim, "largely at the expense of information related to local government, politics, and public policy" (Slattery & Hakanen, 1994, p. 214). Coulson, Riffe, Lacy, and St. Cyr (2001) documented the concerns of television reporters about declining coverage of local government on their stations.

Concerns about coverage of local issues from outsourced entities are not unique to the United States. In Australia, while community radio is showing considerable success (as referenced above), questions remain particularly on the television side. The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) has

launched an investigation to determine whether regional outlets are meeting a government requirement to broadcast at least minimal amounts of "material of local significance" (ACMA, July 9, 2013). The move comes after one regional broadcaster dropped local news programs in two areas earlier in 2013 (Television.AU, 2013). And these concerns may have been building for awhile. In 2008, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation program *Media Watch* reported an incident in which a "local" TV newscast delivered from 1,300 kilometers (800 miles) away showed a graphic of dairy cattle in a field to introduce a story about a rugby match at the receiving market's stadium, which happened to be owned by a dairy cooperative. It raised an obvious question, the *Media Watch* anchor noted, about how much the personnel producing the remote newscasts actually knew about the other market's context (*Media Watch*, 2008).

Source Types, Race, and Gender

Many studies have examined news sources, both the types of sources as well as their ethnicity and gender. In the classic study *Deciding What's News*, Gans (1979) defined two source categories, and found that "knowns", mostly government officials and other well-known people, received significantly more coverage than "unknowns".

> The economically and politically powerful can obtain easy access to, and are sought out by, journalists; those who lack power are harder to reach by journalists and are generally not sought out until their activities produce social and moral disorder news. In short, access reflects the social structure outside the newsroom; and because that structure is hierarchical, the extent to which information about various parts of America is available to journalists is hierarchically and differentially distributed. (p. 81)

Gans (1979) advocated a "multi-perspectival" approach to include a "bottom-up view" with sources "recruited from all levels of society" (p. 315).

Racial and gender diversity in news has been an issue in U.S. media at least since the 1968 Kerner Commission report (U.S. Kerner Commission, 1968) that charged news was too much from a white male perspective. Many studies over the years have examined racial diversity in news, both national (Roberts, 1975; Ziegler & White, 1990; Entman, 1994; Owens, 2008) and local (Heider, 2000; Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Pease, Smith, & Subervi, 2001). Poindexter, Smith, and Heider (2003) found a significant lack of racial diversity both among sources and on-air personnel. Gender differences among sources have also been studied, though to a lesser degree (van Zoonen, 1988; Ziegler & White, 1990; Cann & Mohr, 2001). As Smith (2009) pointed out, while local stations do not have control over the sources offered on network and satellite news feeds, they do have control over the sources they use in local stories. Hence, given the history of research on racial and gender diversity in news, it is an important topic to include here in examining the practices of local and outsourced stations.

Research Questions

Smith (2009) pointed out two models for framing local news: the free market model, by which a station's purpose is to make a profit for owners and stockholders, and the public trustee model, with a station's purpose to serve and educate the public. The current study is built around the latter, not examining stations' ratings and economics but rather how well they "promote active citizenship via information, education and social integration" (Croteau & Hoynes, 2007). To assess how local and outsourced newscasts compare on coverage of issues and use of sources, the following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: Do differences exist in story topic between local and outsourced newscasts? For example, does

either carry more stories on local government? More crime, spot news, or other topics?

RQ2: Do differences exist in source type between local and outsourced newscasts? For example, does one use more government officials? More regular citizens?

RQ3: Do differences exist in source location between local and outsourced newscasts? For example, how do the stations compare in terms of local voices on the newscasts?

RQ4: Do differences exist in race and gender for sources and on-air personnel between locally-produced and remotely-produced newscasts?

Method

This study employed a content analysis to compare local and outsourced newscasts in six U.S. markets with stations that aired newscasts from the INN. Markets ranged in size from Omaha, Nebraska (market 76) to Alexandria, Louisiana (#179), and also included Reno, Nevada (#108); Montgomery, Alabama (#119); Columbus, Georgia (#127); and Gainesville, Florida (#163), based on Nielsen rankings for 2011-2012, when the study was conducted. In each market, newscasts were recorded from the outsourced station and the top-rated local news station over five weeks in fall 2011, using a constructed-week format (Riffe, Aust, & Lacy, 1993) with a randomly-selected Monday, then Tuesday the following week, and so on until Friday, since most of the outsourced stations did not air newscasts on weekends.

Early-evening newscasts were recorded where available, since they are often more locally-focused programs airing adjacent to network evening newscasts. Late local newscasts tend to be more a mix of local and national news (Silcock, Heider, & Rogus, 2007). In three of the six markets, however, outsourced newscasts aired only in the late evening; in those markets the late local newscast was used for comparison. In all but one market local and outsourced newscasts aired concurrently. In Omaha, outsourced KPTM airs news at nine p.m., which was compared with the 10 p.m. newscast on local station KETV. Table 1 shows the markets and newscasts studied.

Table 1

Outsourced and Local Newscasts

Market	Outsourced station, affiliation, and newscast time	Local station, affiliation, and newscast time
Omaha, NE	KPTM (Fox), 9 p.m.	KETV (ABC), 10 p.m.
Reno, NV	KRXI (Fox), 11 p.m.	KOLO (ABC), 11 p.m.
Montgomery, AL	WNCF (ABC), 10 p.m.[*]	WSFA (NBC), 10 p.m.
Columbus, GA	WLTZ (NBC), 6 p.m.[*]	WTVM (ABC), 6 p.m.
Gainesville, FL	WGFL (CBS), 6 p.m.	WCJB (ABC), 6 p.m.
Alexandria, LA	KLAX (ABC), 6 p.m.	KALB (NBC), 6 p.m.

Note. [*] Montgomery and Columbus have since severed outsourcing with INN, though Columbus still airs INN's weathercasts.

The sample included more than 30 hours of newscasts, with 1,020 stories—453 on local stations, 567 on outsourced stations. One reason outsourced stations included more stories was because Omaha's outsourced newscasts run one hour, while most newscasts in the study were half that length. Using the individual story as the unit of analysis, and using percentages for each station type, made comparisons possible despite the difference in sample size. Stories were coded for topic categories; source types and location; and race and gender of sources and on-air personnel. Sports stories were counted with news. Regular weather segments were not included in the analysis, but stories about weather events were. In addition, total times were calculated for

some coverage categories to compare the time devoted to those topics.

Stories were coded using 13 topic categories: (1) local government/politics; (2) national government/politics; (3) community affairs—activities without a government component, such as Red Cross blood drives, feeding the homeless, and the like; (4) education; (5) crime/punishment; (6) non-crime spot news, such as fires and accidents; (7) weather, nature/science; (8) health/medical; (9) business, economic and/or consumer; (10) international; (11) sports; (12) human interest/features; and (13) other.

A source was someone who spoke in a story (the "sound bites"); most appeared on-camera, though a few spoke by phone. Source types were coded according to six different categories: (1) private individuals, which also included political activists, crime victims or witnesses; (2) public officials or public servants, which included government officials and candidates, law enforcement and military; (3) public relations practitioners or private company officials; (4) experts, such as doctors or economists; (5) sports, including coaches, athletes, and other sports figures (such as an athletic director); and (6) other or unable to determine. Sources were sorted into one of three location categories: local, in stories within the station's market, as designated by Nielsen's designated market areas (DMAs); state/regional, in stories outside the viewing area but within the same or an adjacent state; and national/international for those that did not match the other categories. The regional (adjacent state) distinction was particularly useful for Omaha, Nebraska, and Columbus, Georgia, which are on a state line. However, stories in their local market were still coded as local, e.g., Council Bluffs, Iowa (5 miles from Omaha) or Phenix City, Alabama (1.5 miles from Columbus).

Sources and on-air news personnel were categorized by race and gender. Race was coded using U.S. Census Bureau categories of white, African-American, Latino, Asian-American, Native American, or other/undetermined. Owens (2008) noted the difficulties of coding for race, but as in that study, this one used surface evidence of appearance and name—as Owens pointed out, the same evidence a viewer has. On-air personnel—anchors (including news, weather, and sports) and local reporters—were also coded for race, and were each counted only once during the study period. Outsourced anchors were counted only once, even though they appear in multiple markets. Network reporters whose stories ran on some newscasts were not included, because arguably their race and gender do not reflect hiring practices at individual stations. However, since outsourced stations employ one or more on-air reporters in each market, naturally those reporters were included in the count.

For all dimensions coding was mutually exclusive, i.e., each story was coded in only one category, each source as only one type and location. Each source was counted only once per newscast, even if the person appeared in multiple sound bites or in different stories.

The bulk of the coding was conducted by the primary researcher, with more than 20 years of television news experience. A second coder was trained and coded approximately 10% of the sample. Using Krippendorff's alpha (1980) to calculate intercoder reliability resulted in agreement levels of 0.94 for story category, 0.91 for source type, 0.81 for race, 0.95 for source location, and 100% agreement on gender.

Results

Some differences were detected on many of the dimensions comparing local and outsourced stations, though in many cases the results were not dramatic. The dimension of locality, however, indicated the largest distinctions. Table 2 shows the percentages of stories covered in each of the 13 topic categories.

Table 2

Story Topics (by Number of Stories)

Topic category	Local stations (N = 453)	Outsourced stations (N = 567)	Fisher's exact p
Local government and politics	48 (10.59%)	44 (7.76%)	0.1243
National government and politics	20 (4.41%)	30 (5.29%)	0.5617
Community affairs	41 (9.05%)	44 (8.46%)	0.4946
Education	22 (4.85%)	21 (3.70%)	0.4334
Crime	74 (16.33%)	90 (15.87%)	0.8640
Spot news	26 (5.74%)	24 (4.23%)	0.3076
Weather/Nature/Science	14 (3.09%)	23 (4.05%)	0.5010
Health/Medical	21 (4.63%)	41 (7.23%)	0.0881
Business/Economics/Consumer	19 (4.19%)	48 (8.46%)	0.0072
International	4 (0.88%)	15 (2.64%)	0.0595
Sports	146 (32.23%)	113 (19.93%)	0.0000094
Human interest and features	15 (3.31%)	43 (7.58%)	0.0039
Other	3 (0.66%)	4 (0.70%)	1.00

Local stations covered a larger percentage of stories on local government and politics, but the numbers were not overwhelming. Outsourced stations ran more stories on national government and politics, which is consistent with the fact that outsourced stations covered more national and international stories in general than local stations (33.15% vs. 16.36%). For community affairs and education, local stations covered only slightly more stories, percentage-wise. If these categories are consolidated, grouping local and national government, community affairs and education, stories that could collectively be labeled public affairs, the number comprised 28.92% of stories on local stations, compared to 24.51% on outsourced stations.

For the story categories most often criticized as sensational—crime and spot news—differences were subtle. Local stations covered slightly more spot news, possibly attributable to outsourced newscasts being pre-taped, making it more difficult to cover or include late-breaking stories (Though it's not clear how early the newscasts are taped, in Reno the newscast airs at 11 p.m. Pacific time, 1 a.m. in Davenport, Iowa, so the difference in that case may be several hours). Percentages were virtually identical for crime stories. If crime and spot news categories are combined, local stations covered more stories: 22.07% compared to 20.10% on outsourced stations.

The biggest difference is in sports coverage. On local stations, almost one-third of all stories were sports, while on outsourced stations the number was approximately one in five. It should be noted that the football scandal at Pennsylvania State University and subsequent firing of Coach Joe Paterno were prominent stories during the time of the study and were coded as sports. However, those stories added numbers for each type of station; local stations covered considerably more sports in general. Here, too, the outsourcing model poses challenges: Newscasts taped earlier make it difficult to include highlights of a local high school game or even a national game played that evening, for example.

Statistically, an Omnibus Pearson chi-square test was conducted to test for overall differences within the entire 13 × 2 table, with the following results: $\chi^2(12, N = 933) = 42.071$, $p < 0.000033$, $\omega = 0.206$ (ω indicates effect size), in this case between small and medium, according to Cohen (1988). Separate 2 × 2 Fisher's exact tests (Fisher, 1922) were used to compare each category, since it is more precise for cells with low observed frequencies (Howell, 2009). Three topic categories demonstrated statistically significant

differences: sports significantly higher on local stations; human interest/features and business/economic/consumer stories significantly higher on outsourced stations. Marginally significant differences were found for health/medical stories and international news, both higher on outsourced stations. The fact that international coverage received the lowest percentage of coverage besides the category "other"—0.88% on local stations and 2.64% on outsourced stations—could be an expanded topic for another study.

Besides numbers of stories, another way to compare coverage is in the time devoted to various categories. For example, a 20-second reader (story with no video) and a two-minute reporter package count equally in the story tally but represent much different commitments of time, effort, and personnel. On this measure, differences between station types are more pronounced. For this criterion, coverage was calculated as a percentage of the total time devoted specifically to news content—excluding weather, sportscasts, commercials, and other elements—with significance calculated using t-tests. The combined public affairs categories comprised an average 41.67% of news time on local stations, compared to 33.74% on outsourced stations ($t = 1.82$, $p = 0.0745$). For *local* public affairs, differences were even more stark: an average 39.17% of news time on local stations, compared to 28.06% on outsourced ($t = 2.539$, $p = 0.014$). Local stations also devoted more time to crime and spot news (26.90% to 21.60%, $t = 1.079$, $p = 0.285$), though with a smaller distinction for local crime and spot news stories (25.31% to 21.19%, $t = 0.835$, $p = 0.407$).

Story Sources

Local stations used a higher percentage of private individuals as on-air sources (30.97%, compared to 24.87% for outsourced stations), the only category that showed a marginally significant difference (Fisher's exact $p = 0.0834$). Local stations also used more sports sources (28.78% to 25.88%, $p = 0.3433$). Outsourced stations used more public officials (26.64% to 24.14%, $p = 0.7489$), more public relations and private company officials (12.43% to 9.75%, $p = 0.1733$), and more experts (7.61% to 5.61%, $p = 3.198$).

Local stations used more total sources (410) than outsourced stations (394), even with considerably fewer stories in the sample, which points to a wider divergence when comparing source usage within stories. Almost half of all stories on local stations (224 of 453, 49.44%) included on-air sources. On outsourced stations, just 41.27% of stories (234 of 567) included on-air sources. Thus, outsourced stations ran a considerably higher percentage of stories with no on-air sources—mostly shorter stories, but also more packages (reporter stories). In fact, outsourced stations ran more than four times as many packages without on-air sources (36) as local stations (8).

Another important comparison is the use of *local* sources. On this measure, results were highly significant for two of the three location categories. Local stations, in addition to giving voice to more private individuals, carried significantly more local sources (68.78% to 56.99%, $p = 0.00045$) while using far fewer national or international sources (7.31% to 23.35%, $p = 0.015 \times 10^{-8}$). Local stations also used more state and regional sources, though the differences were not as dramatic (23.90% to 20.05%, $p = 0.2020$).

Besides noting the Fisher's exact numbers, another way to think of the results is that the odds of a story source being local were 1.7 times greater on local stations; the odds of a story source being national/international were 3.9 times greater on outsourced stations.

Racial and Gender Diversity

For RQ4, on racial and gender diversity, differences between local and outsourced stations were not

nearly as pronounced as in some other categories. Neither appears to fully represent diversity in their communities. On both types of stations, story sources and on-air personnel were overwhelmingly white. Local stations were marginally better, with whites comprising 74.14% of sources, compared to 82.23% on outsourced stations; people of color comprised 23.65% of sources on local stations, 16.49% on outsourced (Fisher's exact $p = 0.0105$). The number of sources whose race could not be determined was small in both cases (1.95% on local stations, 1.27% on outsourced). On-air personnel on local stations were 82.61% white, 15.94% people of color; percentages were similar for outsourced stations, with 83.78% white, 13.51% people of color ($p = 1.00$). Each included just one person in the undetermined category. Though people of color were differentiated more specifically by race in the coding, as described in the methods section, results were combined since some cells were so small; for example, only two Asian females were included as on-air personnel for either type of station.

According to the latest U.S. Census (Retrieved 2011, from http://www.census.gov), the country's white non-Hispanic population is 63.4%, with the next largest categories Hispanic/Latino (16.7%) and Black/African American (13.1%). While Census numbers vary considerably in the study markets, the across-market trend was consistent in overrepresentation of whites compared to other racial/ethnic groups.

Regarding gender, the Census lists females as 50.8% of the population. Yet for both types of stations, story sources were overwhelmingly male: 71.95% on local stations, 78.17% on outsourced ($p = 0.042$). Females were better represented among on-air personnel. Outsourced stations included more females as a percentage of their total on-air contingent (54.05% to 42.03%, $p = 0.307$), even though only two females were among the eight people regularly appearing on-air from the headquarters in Iowa. More female than male reporters in the outsourced stations themselves accounted for the difference.

Qualitative Content Observations

While the numbers tell part of the story, a qualitative content evaluation also helps complete the picture comparing local and outsourced newscasts and how communities are served by each system. The scenarios presented earlier are two examples of differences in story treatment that, by chance, occurred during the study's constructed week. They were not the only differences observed.

Local stations can provide local perspective that a remote producer may not have. One example was on Alexandria, Louisiana's newscasts for November 18, 2011. Both stations ran the story of the plane crash that killed the women's basketball coaches for Oklahoma State University. Only local station KALB added that the victims had previously coached at nearby Louisiana Tech.

As noted in the story topic results, sports was a category in which local stations covered a significantly higher number of stories. While both types of stations carried stories about local college teams, with regular interview clips from coaches and players, the starkest difference was in high school sports coverage, as an example from Columbus, Georgia, illustrates. On November 10, 2011, a number of local high school athletes committed to playing college sports at various schools. Local station WTVM ran five stories on the signings, with video and sound clips from several of the athletes and a total time of one minute, 41 seconds devoted to the high school players. Outsourced WLTZ ran one story, 16 seconds in length, on the signings, and the sports anchor stumbled over some of the names. WLTZ did run a feature story on a local scholar-athlete from their locally-based sports reporter that day.

In Montgomery, Alabama, on November 18, during the high school football playoffs, outsourced WNCF

ran a 24-second story with a graphic giving the scores of several playoff games, while local station WSFA carried video from nine games and a live report from a sports reporter.

Watching the newscasts, one picks up more subtle ways stations try to distinguish themselves. In Alexandria, for example, the pre-produced newscast opening announcement on local KALB proclaims it is "live from Central Louisiana", and reporters end packaged stories identifying KALB as "your local station". At outsourced stations, on-air personnel incorporate language apparently designed to de-emphasize the nature of the news operation, using such phrases as "in our area" or "in our state". Weather anchors use such expressions as "here in Gainesville" or "here in Omaha". One weathercaster showed video he described as "what we could see outside the station earlier today"—not noting, of course, that while the station itself is in Reno, Nevada, he was several hundred miles away in Iowa.

Discussion

This study set out to examine how coverage of public affairs, particularly local issues, compares between locally-produced and outsourced newscasts. While numbers of stories do not indicate a stark contrast, the amount of time devoted to public affairs does provide an important, statistically-significant distinction. A parade announcement on an outsourced station counted as community affairs, but would not carry nearly the import nor amount of information as investigating how the needs of local disabled citizens are being met, to give two examples from the study sample. Such examples, in addition to the earlier scenarios in Montgomery, Alabama, and Columbus, Georgia, do indicate some cause for concern about public affairs coverage on outsourced stations. Still, it could be said that neither local nor outsourced stations covered a vast number of stories on public affairs topics. Though locally-produced newscasts in the sample ran a slightly higher percentage of public affairs stories than outsourced stations, they aired a lower percentage of public affairs (28.92%) than sports stories (32.23%). The Jeffersonian ideal of an informed electorate is not particularly well-served in either scenario, when less than three in 10 stories can be categorized as public affairs content on local stations, and less than a quarter of the stories on outsourced stations.

In terms of source use, the fact that local stations used a higher percentage of private individuals points to local stations better satisfying the notion promoted by Gans (1979) of multiple perspectives, with sources recruited from all social levels. The drastically higher percentage of specifically *local* sources on locally-produced newscasts points to an important distinction regarding whose perspectives are heard on the newscasts.

Looking at the model of outsourced news, though, it is important to consider whether having local stations airing outsourced newscasts is preferable to not having local news at all on many of these stations. In two of the six markets studied—Gainesville, Florida, and Alexandria, Louisiana—outsourced newscasts compete with only one local commercial station (though Gainesville does also have PBS station WUFL, affiliated with the respected University of Florida journalism program, which airs regular newscasts). In all the six markets, the outsourced stations have had a sporadic history with local news, sometimes shuttering the news department for several years and/or airing newscasts from another market. Since the INN model employs a few local employees in each market, some local stories do receive coverage. Is that preferable to having fewer truly local choices and/or getting another market's local news? It is an important question to consider if local television economics encourage the continuation or expansion of the outsourcing model.

Suggestions for Future Research

To continue the study of outsourced TV news, further research could be explored using data from the current study or from additional data-gathering. In addition to looking at the number and type of story sources, such sources could be compared by race and gender to see if there are differences between local and outsourced stations. Owens (2008) found that among network newscasts studied, whites were the overwhelmingly majority of experts presented, 86.4% compared to 3.5% for blacks. Further explication of the current data, or additional data, could determine if there are differences in representations of race and gender among sources between local and outsourced newscasts. A preliminary reading of the data here seemed to suggest that black males were most common in sports and largely absent from other categories, with U.S. President Barack Obama and Herman Cain, running in the 2012 U.S.. Republican presidential primaries, among the only black males in the category of public officials, though that was true for both local and outsourced stations.

Another topic to research would be audience reception of these newscasts. Ratings data could give some indication of the audience for outsourced local news, though it would be illuminating to hear from viewers in markets served by outsourcing. Torosyan and Munro (2010) found that listeners rely on local broadcast radio as a source of news and information, that they value relevant local news, and "that listeners are aware of remotely produced news content and exclude it from their definition of 'local'" (p. 45). Can the same be said in television? Is it common knowledge in these markets that some of their local news is outsourced? Can viewers tell the difference between local and outsourced newscasts, and if so, what distinctions are most important to them?

As mentioned previously, Smith (2009) utilized a comparison between free market and public service models in framing local newscasts. The current study was built around the public service model, to ask about differences in coverage of public affairs. An examination through the lens of the free market model could look at whether outsourcing is a profitable and viable alternative for station owners. How well do outsourced stations fare in ratings? Anecdotal evidence suggests not very well; however, when considering the amount station owners must save by not staffing an entire newsroom or outfitting a local studio, ratings may not be the only factor in deciding whether to continue outsourcing arrangements. Outsourced stations do sell local advertising, and an economic analysis could look more closely at commercial breaks to compare the quantity (numbers of spots) and quality (paid ads versus unpaid public service announcements or station promotions) of advertising on the newscasts.

Additional research could examine other areas of outsourcing besides in broadcast venues. For example, the researcher has been told of news organizations that outsource some or all of their web operations, including one major news company that reportedly outsources much of its web content to a company in the Philippines. Another informant reports that a major news organization runs its "foreign" desk from a site in the southeastern United States. These and similar arrangements could be explored to examine how decisions are made about news content when they are taken out of the original context and made by those who may or may not have, to use the term from the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, "local knowledge" (Geertz, 1983).

The new investigation launched by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (mentioned above), intended to ascertain whether outlets are meeting the need for relevant local information, also bears watching and could become a model for future research and action in the area of media localism.

Final Thoughts

The current study sample—1,020 stories and more than 30 hours of newscasts—is a start for researching outsourced TV news. One obstacle to obtaining additional data is the expense involved. Snider (2000) and Long, Slater, Boiarsky, Stapel, and Keefe (2005) noted the difficulty of studying local TV without a resource similar to the Vanderbilt archive of network newscasts. Hale, Fowler, and Goldstein (2007) called the then-fairly new University of Wisconsin News Lab "perhaps the largest database of local TV news content currently available" (2007, p. 228). At the time, the archive included 44 stations in 11 markets; while a good start, the number is far below archiving all newscasts in the 210 U.S. local news markets (Nielsen Media Research, 2011), let alone newscasts in other areas around the world. For the current study, the researcher employed a video company to record newscasts in four markets and graduate students to record in two others.

With local news outsourcing in both radio and TV, it is worth continuing to ask how well such arrangements serve local communities that receive these newscasts. Are local stations meeting their public interest obligations when they outsource much of their news to a remote provider? What kind of community picture is provided in newscasts originating elsewhere? In a classic TV news study, Epstein asserted that "broadcasting must function preeminently as a local institution. Since it is presumed that the informational needs of different localities may be different, licensees must ascertain and attend to the local needs" (Epstein, 2000, p. 48). How well licensees meet the informational needs of their communities if the news is outsourced to a remote entity will remain a pertinent question as long as some "local" news is not, in fact, local, at all.

References

Adams, W. C. (1978). Local public affairs content of TV news. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 55*(4), 690-695.

Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). (2013, July 9). *Local regional TV content under the spotlight.* Retrieved from http://www.acma.gov.au/theACMA/Newsroom/Newsroom/Media-releases/local-regional-tv-content-under-the-spotlight

Bernstein, J. M., & Lacy, S. (1992). Contextual coverage of government by local television news. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 69*(2), 329-340.

Callahan, K. (2011). Newly launched WBIN-TV hopes to take a bite out of WMUR's market. *New Hampshire Business Review.* Retrieved October 7, 2011, from http://www.nhbr.com/news/935099-395/newly-launched-wbin-tv-hopes-to-take-a.html

Cann, D. J., & Mohr, P. B. (2001). Journalist and source gender in Australian television news. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, 45*(1), 162-174.

Carroll, R. L., Tuggle, C. A., McCollum, J. F., Mitrook, M. A., Arlington, K. J., & Hoerner, J. M. Jr. (1997). Consonance in local television news program content: An examination of intermarket diversity. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, 41*(1), 132-144.

Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Coulson, D. C., Riffe, D., Lacy, S., & St. Cyr, C. R. (2001). Erosion of television coverage of city hall? Perceptions of TV reporters on the beat. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 78*(1), 81-92.

Croteau, D., & Hoynes, W. (2007). *The business of media: Corporate media and the public interest.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

Daniels, G. L. (2008). A centralcasting postmortem and a news-share projection: Using market theory to assess alternative local television news strategies. *Electronic News, 2*(3), 138-152.

Daniels, G. L. (2012). Broadcasting and Community Journalism. In B. Reader, & J. A. Hatcher (Eds.), *Foundations of community journalism* (pp. 177-194). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dominick, J. R., Wurtzel, A., & Lometti, G. (1975). Television journalism vs. show business: A content analysis of eyewitness news. *Journalism Quarterly, 52,* 213-218.

Entman, R. M. (1994). Representation and reality in the portrayal of blacks on network television news. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 71*(3), 509-520.

Entman, R. M., & Rojecki, A. (2000). *The black image in the white mind: Media and race in America.* Chicago: University of

Chicago Press.

Epstein. E. J. (2000). *News from nowhere: Television and the news* (2nd ed.). Chicago: Ivan R. Dee.

Fisher, R.A. (1922). On the interpretation of χ^2 from contingency tables, and the calculation of *p*. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, 85*, 87-94.

Forde, S., Foxwell, K., & Meadows, M. (2003). Through the lens of the local: Public arena journalism in the Australian community broadcasting sector. *Journalism, 4*(3), 314-335.

Free   Press   (2004).   *Sinclair   and   the   public   airwaves: A   history   of   abuse*.   Retrieved   from http://www.freepress.net/files/Sinclair_Report.pdf

Gans, H. (1979). *Deciding what's news: A study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Geertz, C. (1983). *Local knowledge*. New York: Basic Books.

Hale, M., Fowler, E. F., & Goldstein, K. M. (2007). Capturing multiple markets: A new method of capturing and analyzing local television news. *Electronic News, 1*(4), 227-243.

Heider, D. (2000). *White news: Why local news programs don't cover people of color*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum Associates.

Hoffstetter, C. R., & Dozier, D. M. (1986). Useful news, sensational news: Quality, sensationalism and local TV news. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 63*, 815-820.

Hood, L. (2007). Radio reverb: The impact of "local" news reimported to its own community. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, 51*(1), 1-19.

Hood, L. (2010). Radio recentered: Local news returns home. *Journal of Radio and Audio Media, 17*(2), 151-166.

Hood, L. (2011). News outsourcing: The producers' perspective. *Journal of Radio and Audio Media, 18*(2), 295-308.

Howell, D.C. (2009). *Statistical methods for psychology* (7th ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.

Hutchins, R. (1947). *Commission on freedom of the press: A free and responsible press*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Krippendorff, K. (1980). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Lawson, B. (2011). 11th Circuit Court rejects Alabama request for rehearing on blocked parts of immigration law. *Alabama Media   Group,   AL.com*.   Retrieved   October   17,   2011,   from http://blog.al.com/breaking/2012/10/11th_circuit_rejects_alabama_r.html

Long, M., Slater, M. D., Boiarsky, G., Stapel, L., & Keefe, T. (2005). Obtaining nationally representative samples of local news media outlets. *Mass Communication and Society, 8*(4), 299-322.

McCrystal, L. (2013). Bill Binnie's WBIN stops news broadcasts. *Concord (NH) Monitor*. Retrieved May 1, 2013, from http://www.concordmonitor.com/news/5950671-95/bill-binnies-wbin-stops-news-broadcasts

Meadows, M., Forde, S., Ewart, J., & Foxwell, K. (2009). Making good sense: Transformative processes in community journalism. *Journalism, 10*(2), 155-170.

Media   Watch.   (2008).   Footy Lovin' cows. *ABC Television, Australia*. Retrieved March 17, 2008, from http://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/s2191817.htm

Mills, J. M., & Daniels, G. L. (2009). SportsCentral as winner or loser? Centralcasting as strategy for efficient local sportscast production. *International Journal for Sports Communication, 2*(3) (unpaginated).

Nielsen   Media   Research.   (2011).   *2011-2012   local   television   market   universe*.   Retrieved   from http://www.nielsen.com/content/dam/corporate/us/en/public%20factsheets/tv/nielsen-2012-local-DMA-TV-penetration.pdf

Owen, M. (2011). Website ranks Columbus as "brokest city in America". *Columbus Journal-Enquirer*. Retrieved November 1, 2011, from http://www.ledger-enquirer.com/2011/11/01/1801634/website-ranks-columbus-as-brokest.html

Owens, L. C. (2008). Network news: The role of race in source selection and story topic. *Howard Journal of Communications, 19*(4), 355-370.

Pavarala, V., & Malik, K. K. (2007). *Other voices: The struggle for community radio in India*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pease, E. C., Smith, E., & Subervi, F. (2001). *The news and race models of excellence project—Overview connecting newsroom attitudes toward ethnicity and news content.* St. Petersburg, FL: Poynter Institute.

Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. (2012). In *changing news landscape, even television is vulnerable*, section 1, p. 14. Retrieved from http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/2012%20News%20Consumption%20Report.pdf

Poindexter, P., Smith, L., & Heider, D. (2003). Race and ethnicity in local television news: Framing, story assignments, and source selections. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, 47*(4), 524-536.

Project for Excellence in Journalism. (2004). *State   of   the   news   media   2004, Radio   section*.   Retrieved   from http://stateofthemedia.org/2004/radio-intro/news-investment/

Riffe, D., Aust, C. F., & Lacy, S. R. (1993). The effectiveness of random, consecutive day and constructed week sampling in newspaper content analysis. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 70*(1), 133-139.

Roberts, C. (1975). The presentation of blacks in television network news. *Journalism Quarterly, 52*, 50-55.

Ryu, J. S. (1982). Public affairs and sensationalism in local TV news programs. *Journalism Quarterly, 59*, 74-78, 137.

Silcock, B. W., Heider, D., & Rogus, M. T. (2007). *Managing television news: A handbook for ethical and effective producing*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Slattery, K. L., &Hakanen, E. A. (1994). Sensationalism versus public affairs content of local TV news: Pennsylvania revisited. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, 38*(2), 205-216.

Smith, L. (2009). Consolidation and news content: How broadcast ownership policy impacts local television news and the public interests. *Journalism and Communication Monographs, 10*(4), 387-453.

Snider, J. H. (2000). Local TV news archives as a public good. *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics, 5*(2), 111-117.

Television.Au. (2013). *ACMA investigates regional TV content*. Retrieved July 10, 2013, from http://televisionau.com/2013/07/acma-investigates-regional-tv-content.html

Torosyan, G., & Munro, C. (2010). EARwitness testimony: Applying listener perspectives to developing a working concept of "localism" in broadcast radio. *Journal of Radio and Audio Media, 17*(1), 33-47.

U.S. Kerner Commission. (1968). *Report of the national advisory commission on civil disorders*. U.S. Government Printing Office.

van Zoonen, L. (1988). Rethinking women and the news. *European Journal of Communications, 3*, 35-53.

Wulfemeyer, K. T. (1982). A content analysis of local television newscasts: Answering the critics. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, 26*(1), 481-486.

Ziegler, D., & White, A. (1990). Women and minorities on network television news: An examination of correspondents and newsmakers. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, 34*(2), 215-223.