

Are Local Newspapers Still Necessary:

A Comparative Analysis of American Local and National Newspapers

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## Introduction

With the rise of horizontal integration in newspaper industries, including both digital and print publications, there is a significant decline in local daily newspapers over the last few decades. For example, in the UK, two-thirds of local authority districts lack a daily newspaper and about 77% local newspaper titles are owned by the big five local newspaper publishers; over 50% national UK papers sold are controlled by two billionaires, Jonathan Harmsworth and Rupert Murdoch (Media Reform Coalition, 2019). Similarly, the media cross-ownership in America is controlled by a few giant companies, which usually causes one single narrative about current news events in America, no matter local or national newspapers (Ali & Radcliffe, 2017). Another challenge for local newspaper outlets is the proliferation of social media use, and an increasing population has consumed their news on mobile devices through social media over the last few years. Many small-market local newspapers either change their business or move their print newspaper to the digital platform, website, application, and social media (Ali & Radcliffe, 2017). Such changes not only affect the audience's knowledge and attitude about local news events but also influence the audience group concerning media effects.

Given the current media environment, it is critical and necessary to identify the position of the local newspaper in the local news systems and determine the significance of local newspapers' roles in the future of journalism. This study is determined to identify the current definition of local news in today's news environment and also to answer if today's society still needs local newspapers while newspapers and online media are replacing the traditional local newspaper industries. This research is vital to pursue diversity in media and improve sustainability in the media ecology. Moreover, it helps the news media industry to relocate the local newspapers and rebrand their values in a promising future of journalism.

### **Literature Review**

When it comes to the competition of newspapers from local and national levels, the situation becomes more complicated with today's prevalence of user-generated content on the internet (Quandt, 2018). Previous studies have examined the current status of local newspapers and predict their futures. There are two different perspectives on this issue. One is optimistic and thinks that new technologies will help local news agencies obtain a bigger market in their communities and have a better chance to compete with national newspapers (Napoli & Mahone, 2019). Some scholars believe that local newspapers will be eventually replaced by citizen journalism and digital journalism will be the mainstream in the future (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2015).

Most studies used in-depth interviews in newsrooms and comparative analysis of local and national media on reporting various cases (Ali & Radcliffe, 2017; Östberg & Kleinschmit, 2016). However, they only focus on comparing differences between local and national newspapers but ignore the development of local news itself. Additionally, most researches only paid attention to the digitalization of local newspapers but failed to realize the endangered status of the local newspapers and neither proved any suggestions and solutions to the future survival of local news except for digitalization.

### **Research Question & Hypotheses**

RQ1: Is local news still local?

H1: No, traditional local newspapers have lost their advantages in the age of social media and less popular than influential national newspapers because they have greater ownership and resources.

RQ2: Is the local newspaper still necessary?

H1: Traditional local newspapers will have a less and limited market with the challenges from national newspapers and digital news providers. Local newspapers much upgrade and evolve to fits the new media system and secure their place in the future to pursue survival and define a new market.

### **Methodology**

In-depth interviews with the top 5 American national newspapers and top 5 local newspapers based on their circulations. Have at least 30 minutes with at least two of their newsroom editors for each newspaper agency. The interview will focus on their market strategy, most recent seasonal revenues, and protocols of news media selection, production, and reproduction.

A comparative analysis is necessary to identify the difference between national and local newspapers on reporting local news and the necessity to continue and upgrade the traditional local newspaper industry. The data for analysis will be collected from these top 5 national and regional newspapers.

Since readership plays a significant role in the news media industry. A survey will be essential to know the evaluation and the expectation from the audience group. The participants of the survey will be selected from Amazon Mechanical Turk, and the sample size is 200.

### **Anticipated Results**

Research findings will show the struggling for both local and national newspapers in keeping the prosperity of their market and readership. However, digitalization is not the only solution. Creativity and public service must be core values of journalism to satisfy readers' interest in news reading and the sustainable development of the news industry. Local news is not extra and will be more critical in the future, but the current way to produce local news must have their own advantages that national daily newspapers are hard to achieve. Also, the future will be more likely to be a collaboration of national, local, and citizen journalism. Regardless of media ownership, media diversity in national, regional, and internet level should be guaranteed for a better future of journalism.

### **Pilot Study**

To understand the reader's evaluation and expectation of local newspapers, I interviewed a senior reader who lives in Harrisburg and is a retired teacher in public school. Below are the significant findings.

Usually, contents on the local newspaper, such as Harrisburg Patriot-News, will no longer be news because these events have already been reported on TV and news applications from mobile devices. As a daily reader of local newspapers, the purpose of keeping purchasing newspapers is because of crossword puzzles and obituaries. Also, local news is pushing its digitalizing strategy. For example, Harrisburg Patriot-News has its own online news online service, pennlive, and they are encouraging readers to subscribe to their online newspaper services, but most regular readers are older generations. For the advertisement, local news did a great job of providing local events and sales, but now social media are replacing this part. And most ads are irrelevant and end up as wastes. Online news providers, however, are real-time and paperless.

As for the expectation for the future of local news, the interviewee thinks, so far, coverage has been rather shallow and not much in-depth local reporting. They only have Harrisburg Patriot-News in Harrisburg, and that is only three days a week. Also, he thinks the digitalization is the future, and there is little expectation about the future of local newspapers.

This pilot study again introduces the necessity and meaning of researching local newspapers and finding news solution to the renaissance of local newspapers.

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