Journalism Studies

ISSN: 1461-670X (Print) 1469-9699 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rjos20

River Flows and Profit Flows

The powerful logic driving local news

Kristy Hess & Lisa Waller

To cite this article: Kristy Hess & Lisa Waller (2016) River Flows and Profit Flows, Journalism Studies, 17:3, 263-276, DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2014.981099

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2014.981099

Published online: 20 Nov 2014.

RIVER FLOWS AND PROFIT FLOWS
The powerful logic driving local news

Kristy Hess and **Lisa Waller**

The importance of local news is gaining traction with industry and in journalism scholarship. But there is a need for careful analysis of what it means to be "local" and how we might theorise the role and place of news organisations and journalists who serve local audiences. This paper draws on three qualitative case studies of local newspapers serving small towns and cities in Australia to generate concepts that can be used to deepen understanding about this form of news. Our research highlights that to be local is practical and embodied. It requires individuals, groups, organisations or institution to be anchored in a particular locale and have in-depth understanding of that place that has developed over time. We extend the scholarship of Pierre Bourdieu to suggest this may be understood as local habitus—a powerful set of dispositions and practical logic developed within a place—that the small newspaper is inherently tied to. Reading a newspaper is part of one's local habitus while an individual who possesses it in the journalistic field may have a significant advantage in their day-to-day practices. We suggest this theoretical lens can offer rich insights into the future of local news production across the western world.

KEYWORDS Bourdieu; communities; community newspapers; habitus; hyperlocal; journalism; local journalism; online news

Introduction

Interest in the role and future of local news has intensified in a rapidly changing mediascape. Scores of small newspapers are closing their doors—most notably in the United Kingdom—as British scholars lament the loss of a vital cog in the wheel of democracy (Fenton et al. 2010; Barnett and Townend 2014). In the United States and Australia, small print and broadcast media outlets are being swallowed up by big conglomerates, or making deep cuts to editorial budgets as they grapple with new business models. In Australia, for example, there are 37 daily newspapers serving regional Australia, more than 230 non-daily newspapers and 150 regional, community or partly paid newspapers often separated by vast geographical distances (see e.g. Hess, Waller, and Ricketson [2014] on this important subject). Regional newspapers appear to be either maintaining or experiencing a decline in circulation, but like newspapers across the globe, advertising revenue is down. There is also discussion that Fairfax Media, the biggest owner of local newspapers across the nation, has plans to shut down some of its regional titles as part of a $AUS40 million cost-saving strategy (Markson 2014).

There are those, however, who argue that in discussions about the future of news, local content is king, regardless of the medium in which it is delivered. For example, one of the world's richest men, Warren Buffett, purchased 28 small-town newspapers across the

Journalism Studies, 2016
Vol. 17, No. 3, 263–276, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2014.981099

United States in 2012 at a cost of $US344 million. He is upbeat about their future, and stated in his annual report to shareholders:

> Newspapers continue to reign supreme … in the delivery of local news. If you want to know what's going on in your town … there is no substitute for a local newspaper that is doing its job… Wherever there is a pervasive sense of community, a paper that serves the special informational needs of that community will remain indispensable to a significant portion of its residents. (as cited in Badkar 2013)

Buffett is interested in newspapers that serve towns and small cities, which are also the focus of our research here. In this article, we draw on a qualitative study of small newspapers in Australia to build theory about the meaning and significance of "local" in a news media context. We will argue that to truly understand the role and place of news at the local level involves unpacking some ideas and approaches that have come to be taken for granted within industry circles and in journalism scholarship. This article also moves beyond current discussions about the importance of local media to democracy and a thriving civil society. While it is not our intention to discount the significance of such research, we join scholars such as Zelizer who suggest that an over-reliance on democratic theory in journalism studies narrows our view of the news media and society (Zelizer 2012). Instead we draw inspiration from media and cultural studies thinkers including Nick Couldry (2000, 2004, 2012) and Shaun Moores (2000, 2004, 2012) to examine the ways in which media products are put to social use more generally, and how they shape and are shaped by the meanings and connections we develop with certain places.

The article begins with a brief description of the context for the study and the theoretical concepts used in the analysis. This is followed by a discussion of how the local can best be understood in the digital age. We argue that to be local is to have a grounded connection with, and understanding of, a physical place and its social and cultural dimensions that is practical and embodied. Importantly, it involves an investment of time, requiring that one maintains a prolonged and continual presence in that place. In emphasising a continual link to a physical site we pinpoint the subtle but important difference between being local and having a "sense of place", which does not require the same physical connection (Hess 2013a, 56). We draw on the spoken word of research participants and Pierre Bourdieu's field theory (Bourdieu 1990) to explore being local as a form of habitus—a practical know-how and understanding of a locality that can be transformed into forms of social and economic power for those who acquire it. To possess local journalistic habitus implies having specialised knowledge and experience of what makes a place and the people within it "tick". This is required to build legitimacy as an authoritative public voice and to meet the audience's special informational needs. We conclude by making a case for why companies that own local newspapers need to understand and appreciate the power of local habitus if they want their publications to survive and thrive.

Method of Inquiry

Our research methodology is inspired by Nick Couldry's media-related practice theory (Couldry 2004, 2012), which aims to examine what people do and say in relation to the media. This approach can generate insights into the power of the "local" and media outlets that define themselves in this way. Couldry's main interest is how media (including

news media) order or "anchor" other practices, as the premise of media power forms part of his wider research focus. We draw on a multi-perspectival study into media-related practices conducted in 2012–2013. It involved three qualitative case studies of newspapers serving small towns and cities in regional Australia. One is a daily with a readership of 75,000, the second is a tri-weekly with a readership of 40,000 and the third is a weekly that serves a rural region with a population of 1000. They are referred to throughout as the daily, tri-weekly and weekly. Newspapers are our focus because they have tended to hold a more long-standing association with towns and small cities than broadcast media, establishing themselves over time as the local voice and source of information for such geographic places. The study involved the analysis of 33 semi-structured interviews with editors (3 interviews), journalists (7 interviews), online editors (2 interviews), advertising sales representatives (3 interviews), sources of news (8 interviews), citizens who engage with media (i.e. comment on social media) (4 interviews), media relations professionals (3 interviews) and non-readers (3 interviews). The data also included 30 diary entries where "everyday"[1] readers of newspapers were asked to document everything they "said and did" each day over a seven-day period that related to the newspaper. Three focus groups involving the same groups of readers from each case were also conducted, where participants were given the opportunity to reflect on comments made in their diaries. The ages of participants in each case ranged from 19 to 70 years and there was an equal mix of men and women. The research is part of a broader study (Hess 2013a, 2013b, 2014; Hess and Waller 2014) that seeks to examine the way newspapers connect people across print and digital spaces. It moves beyond discussions about the democratic ideal of the press alone to acknowledge the role of small news media outlets in shaping the everyday interactions and situations in which people connect with one another.

Through their talk, study participants provided compelling insights into local knowledge, local identity and the local newspaper. From this three themes emerged. Firstly, the idea of being local is rooted in a prolonged and continuing connection with a physical place and its social and cultural dimensions. Secondly, local knowledge is practical and embodied and, finally, the practice of reading or engaging with the local newspaper is considered an important part of what it means to be "local".

What It Means to Be Local

While the term is widely used in media discourse, there has been little analysis of what it means to be "local". As Pauly and Eckert contend:

> Scholars, for their part, have thoroughly studied other keywords that journalism uses to describe itself, most notably *independence*, *objectivity*, and *public*, but *the local* has escaped similar scrutiny. (Pauly and Eckert 2002, 311)

Franklin (2006) has teased out some of the difficulties of using "local" to describe small newspapers in the twenty-first century. He suggests direct reference to the town or city emblazoned on the newspaper's masthead may be one of the few remaining local features of the paper. He cites ownership of local press ceasing to be local, newspaper offices moving from the town centre as part of cost-saving measures, production shifting to centralised locations, and the fact that journalists are less likely to be "local" and spend their entire working life on a particular paper (Franklin 2006, xxi). Franklin makes the assumption that "local" is associated with geographic territory, or physical location in

some shape or form. This is also the case in wider journalism studies and industry circles, where "local" is synonymous with news and information that serves a well-defined physical area—most notably small towns, cities and shires, or as its digital subsidiary "hyperlocal" implies, a neighbourhood or street. This is an important point because the continued link to geographic territory and the physical site comes at a time when much contemporary scholarship about the media has tended to downplay the importance of location and instead emphasise time-space compression (Harvey 1989)—the geographic stretching of human relationships, where modernity tears "space" from "place" and where people are no longer united together to engage in face-to-face interaction in one "locale". As a result, attention has shifted to how the local is shaped by the global; how time and space have come together to shift focus away from the physical setting (see e.g. Meyrowitz [1985] on this important subject). Such thinking centres upon how globalisation theory changes or influences our understanding of how the physical setting is shaped by human relationships and social forces.

But as other scholars remind us, to be "local" is to have a powerful connection to a particular location and its natural, cultural and social dimensions. Cooke (1989) differentiates the concept of "locality" from places or communities. He defines locality as "the sum of social energy and agency resulting from the clustering of diverse individuals, groups and social interests in space" (Cooke 1989, 296). Cresswell (2004) also insists there is a need to clearly define terms when we talk about place and the local. He uses the expression "locale" to describe the material setting for social relations—the way a place looks (Cresswell 2004, 7). Some scholars whose work we draw on point to the local as being more than a descriptor of physical location alone. Pauly and Eckert (2002) suggest "local" is a myth invoked to signify our sense of connectedness. Kaniss (1991) argues locality is a construction rather than a "cause". She claims the news media "produce local identity as much as they produce news". In this way the media can be seen as constructing the idea of local where news exists not only to provide information for and about a well-defined locality, but also to define locality (Cheng 2005). Appadurai (1996, 182) suggests that "locality" is a structure of feeling that is produced by particular forms of intentional activity that yield particular sorts of material effects, but cannot be separated from the actual setting in which it is reproduced. He argues the idea of the "local" is a cultural product where local subjects are indoctrinated into "communities" of kin, neighbours and friends through things such as rites of passage and rituals (179). Drawing on this work, Buchanan (2009) suggests small newspapers play an important role in the production of local subjects as they feature sections and notices about rites of passage—for example, births, deaths and marriages columns, the publication of engagements and graduations. Cheng's (2005) review of the term "local" in media literature found it was generally associated with geographic territory, but there was a strong stream of literature that viewed "local" as people-oriented; that is, referring to people rather than geographic territory (Entman 1990).

Comments from research participants support the idea that "local" has a strong people-oriented dimension and is associated with a continuing and prolonged connection with a place. Take this focus group discussion, for example:

> Participant: You're a local if you've lived here a long time.
> Interviewer: What would you consider a long time?
> Participant: At least a few years, if not a decade or more.

And this from a journalist at the weekly newspaper:

> I've only been here a few weeks and I don't think I'll ever be considered a local. To be a local you have to be born and bred here. (interview with author, March 12, 2013)

In contrast, readers often described people who had lived in the area but relocated elsewhere as "former locals". This focus group comment from a female reader of the tri-weekly illustrates this:

> My son lives in Melbourne … I suppose you would call him a former local. He reads the paper online all the time.

And this from a reader of the daily newspaper:

> My cousin is a former local who reads it online everyday from Darwin. She's lived there for 10 years but she reads this local paper to see what's happening, to stay in touch.

Our previous research has considered the online media habits of people who consider themselves former locals and highlighted the flaws of using "local" and "community" as one-size-fits-all descriptors of small media outlets. That research aims to reposition the way "local" and "community" are understood in regards to media production. We have argued for the concept of "geo-social" as a more appropriate framework in which to understand small newspapers in the digital age (Hess 2013a; Hess and Waller 2014). Geo-social highlights the continued importance of geography as a more definitive marker for such publications, while recognising the way they shape and are shaped by wider social forces and play a role as a powerful information node in global media networks. We have moved towards the idea of "sense of place" (Hess 2013a, 56) as a way of recognising the array of motivations of those who engage with such publications. Sense of place is one's connection to a place by living or having lived there. It may have physical, social and economic dimensions, but does not require a continued, ongoing physical presence in that place. It means that people may have a dual sense of place—marking an important difference to being "local", which requires a continuing presence in a particular location. That said, many news outlets and people who engage with them consider themselves "local" and so it is an important concept to the study of news.

Local: Practical and Embodied

We have ascertained the important link between the local and a physical site, but it also has a strong association with the body. The word "local" derives from the Latin *locas* (place) and was first used in late fourteenth-century medicine to describe any ailment that was confined to a specific part of the body. Revisiting this age-old link is theoretically useful as we argue that our attachment to localities, the feeling of being "local", is practical and embodied and that this directly relates to how we produce and consume news. Scholars including Tuan (1977), Moores (2012) and Couldry (2000) highlight the power of "place" in their work, but the need for critique and examination of "the local" has tended to be overlooked. While Tuan (1977) does not discuss the "local" specifically, he argues that the "know how" required to get around in urban spaces and to feel at home in everyday physical environments is practical, embodied and involves a combination of bodily senses (Tuan 1977; see also Moores [2012] on this important subject). Tuan argues that for people to form a lasting attachment to a location, to know a place, there must be repetition and return (as cited in Moores 2012, 30). This may involve everyday movements

that swing back and forth "like a pendulum" (Tuan 1977, 180)—they take time. This kind of repetitive behaviour relates to the habit of reading the local newspaper. Take this comment from a 65-year-old reader of the daily newspaper and focus group participant, which captures how embodied the practice of reading the local news can become for some citizens:

> If I don't read the paper in the morning I feel like my arm's been cut off. It's just what I do. If I don't, I feel cut off from everything that's happening locally.

Not only does this participant express a reliance on the newspaper in quite dramatic physical terms. His comment reveals a belief that this daily ritual connects him with his social and physical environment. Tuan contends that this kind of embodied knowledge and practice takes time to develop, but that it shapes people to a significant degree, and can be expressed physically as well as psychologically:

> Abstract knowledge about a place can be acquired in short order if one is diligent … but the "feel" of a place takes longer to acquire—it is made up of experiences, mostly fleeting and undramatic, repeated day after day and over the span of years. It is a unique blend of sights, sounds and smells, a unique harmony of natural and artificial rhythms such as times of sunrise and sunset, of work and play. The feel of a place is registered in one's muscles and bones. A sailor has a recognisable style of walking because his posture is adapted to the plunging deck of a boat in high sea … it takes time. It is a subconscious kind of knowing. (Tuan 1977, 183–184)

Tuan makes no reference to the work of Pierre Bourdieu in his early writings, but the concept of embodied knowledge shares synergies with Bourdieu's idea of habitus. Possessing habitus is feeling like a fish in water, rather than out of water (Grenfell 2008; Webb et al. 2002) in a given social situation, and it has been a useful concept through which to examine class divisions and battles for power and dominance in social space (Grenfell 2008; Painter 2000). Bourdieu defines habitus as:

> …the practical sense, or if you prefer, what sports players call a feel for the game as the practical mastery of the logic or of the immanent necessity of a game is mastery acquired by experience of the game, and one which works outside conscious control and discourse (in the way that, for instance, techniques of the body do). (Bourdieu 1990, 61)

Habitus forms part of Bourdieu's suite of theoretical tools. It is intertwined with his concepts of field and capital, and together they are useful for interpreting the social world[2] (Bourdieu 1990). This study is concerned with understanding "local habitus" and the forms of capital possessed by members of the local media field. Savage, Bagnall, and Longhurst (2005, 120) have used the term "local habitus" to unpack the relationship between place, class and habitus in a "working-class" village in the United Kingdom. Inglis (2008) refers, albeit briefly, to the idea of "local habitus" in discussing Ireland's "place" in a globalised world. He says local habitus is evident among those who have lived in a village/town for a long period of time. He refers to the practices that are a product of this habitus:

> locals engaging in the gossip and conversations that are central to community survival, knowledge necessary to be able to decipher new information about what has happened to whom, where, when and why, they are able to engage in the nuanced game of conversational give and take, they show the necessary deference and reverence, shock, display and despair when the latest news is discussed, names mentioned and events

> recalled. Those who are new to the area see that it is based on a language they do not know how to speak, a habitus in which they have not been socialized. (Inglis 2008, 203)

One participant—a reader of the tri-weekly—said she had only moved to the region 12 months prior to being interviewed:

> I started reading the paper to see what all the locals are up to … I hope to become a local eventually, but it takes time. (interview with author, July 16, 2012)

This woman's comment shows an understanding that to become local involves a set of physical and psychological practices for acquiring deep knowledge and experience of the place. She gives expression to Tuan's (1977) notion that it takes time to acquire this "language", or local habitus that Inglis (2008) describes. She revealed that the practice of reading the local newspaper regularly was a key strategy for gaining the necessary social knowledge to embody "the local" and engage fully in her new setting. This brings us to the next section, which positions reading the local newspaper as a place-constituting activity. This is followed by a discussion of how journalists and news organisations can utilise local habitus as a form of cultural or social capital.

Local Habitus and News Habits

Reading a small newspaper, then, may be seen as a practice that manifests from one's local habitus or from the desire to develop this deep, embodied knowledge. Participants often closely associated the practice of reading a newspaper with the idea of being a "local", especially those who had genealogical connections or had lived for a prolonged period of time in the town or city the small newspaper served. A reader of the tri-weekly who participated in a focus group said:

> If you live here and you consider yourself a local you tend to read the local paper. I do, my parents do.

Another participant's comment revealed that she regarded the practice of reading the weekly newspaper as a "given"—a taken-for-granted feature of what it means to be a local:

> It's just what you do as a local.

The editor of the daily newspaper offered another insight, which points to the importance of local media to individuals' construction of themselves as local (Kaniss 1991). It also resonates with Pauly and Eckert's (2002) idea that local media generates a "myth of connectedness":

> if you read it, you see yourself as part of something bigger, of belonging. (interview with author, March 20, 2012)

The editor described reading the local newspaper as a practice created by one's experience of a place—in this instance a town or city. His idea of it being a practice that involves seeing yourself as part of "something bigger" relates to Bourdieu's ideas about the interplay of field, habitus and capital (Bourdieu 1990). It can be interpreted as the development of local knowledge through reading the newspaper helping to construct a degree of social order. This order can be used to build or maintain an identity or social

position as a "local" (Kaniss 1991). This generates forms of capital that can benefit actors in the field (Bourdieu 1990), and is discussed in the following sections.

Local Habitus and Journalism Practice

The concept of local habitus is important to discussions about newspapers because an agent who brings their local habitus into the field of small newspaper production may utilise this resource as a form of embodied cultural or social capital. Inglis (2008) argues villagers who possess local habitus may accumulate cultural capital, which adds to their position and standing in the community. In the interviews for this study, journalists and those working for small newspapers, from advertising, editorial and management, all highlighted the value of "local knowledge" to their media-related practices. Some news workers described local knowledge as "a feel for a place", "knowing what makes the town tick" often put into practice by knowing automatically who to go to and where to go for news and information, along with the "history of the place". The practice of spelling the names of streets and surnames of residents are obvious manifestations of local habitus, but they do not encapsulate the concept in its entirety.

To illustrate this, there were four journalists, aged between 34 and 64, interviewed for the study who were "born and bred" in the regions where they worked and described themselves as locals. None of them had university qualifications and all indicated that one of the main reasons they had been recruited to the industry was because of their understanding of the area in which they worked—its natural, social and cultural dimensions (Cresswell 1996). They considered this an advantage in their day-to-day journalism practice. As a journalist at the tri-weekly newspaper said:

> Local knowledge is everything … understanding the area and how it works and the people. You can't do your job properly if you don't have it. (interview with author, July 18, 2012)

Local habitus can translate into cultural capital that is "embodied" as it evolves from long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body and can be understood as a particular cultural competency that is sometimes acquired "quite unconsciously" (Bourdieu 1986, 244–245). The four "homegrown" journalists suggested that the possession of local knowledge (embodied cultural capital) was often more beneficial than a university degree in journalism (what Bourdieu may describe as a form of institutional cultural capital). A journalist at the daily newspaper said:

> In gathering local knowledge it's about understanding demographics of the region, like here it's very conservative largely Catholic community and a slowly ageing population. You have to know things like where the local school is, the name of the principal … and the people. It's not just that, you have to know how a place works, what makes it tick. That's not the sort of thing you come away with from a university. (interview with author, April 5, 2012)

Five journalists interviewed for this study had a university degree, and ranged in age from 21 to 34. All of these journalists had lived in the areas in which they worked for less than 10 years, with one arriving on the job from interstate three weeks before being interviewed. All of these journalists highlighted the importance of developing local knowledge, which they agreed was a significant advantage to their work, but something they had come to appreciate only since entering the field. One male journalist, aged 23, said:

> I suppose it's hard to know these things until you start working for a particular newspaper. If you grew up here, then local knowledge would be just second nature, so you have to work at it. (interview with author, March 12, 2013)

These reporters indicated that they looked towards more senior journalists who were known for their local knowledge. A 24-year-old female journalist at the tri-weekly newspaper said:

> If we need to know something about the area we just go to [him]. He's been around forever … he knows everyone and everything. (interview with author, July 19, 2012)

One veteran reporter said possessing local knowledge helped to generate an element of "trust" among sources of news, which might be best understood as what Bourdieu refers to as symbolic capital in terms of credibility or reputation:

> Building up that rapport with people is almost the foundation of what you do as a journalist in a regional area and you don't realise that when you first start out, unless you're a pretty smart cat. But it's the most important thing you have and local knowledge is essential to that. After 35 years in the job I say that with some authority. If you're a local, or you've been around a long time in the job, people tend to trust you more implicitly with information. (interview with author, April 5, 2012)

Conversely, a lack of "practical know-how" about a place may be seen to impact on a journalist's symbolic capital (reputation) in the localities where they play a role. Where journalists appeared to lack local habitus, their reputation among readers and sources did not appear as strong. Said one reader of the tri-weekly:

> I remember once when I was a kid and there was a new journalist reporting on TV. She pronounced [name of a town wrong] and I remember everyone was talking about it the next day and saying "what an idiot". (interview with author, August, 2012)

And this from a source of news for the daily newspaper:

> I said to her [journalist] that I'd meet her at the 'dirty angel' for a photograph. She had no idea what I was talking about, obviously she wasn't from here, but you'd think she'd know something like that. (interview with author, February 13, 2013)

This source of news was referring to a war monument of an angel and a soldier that was a prominent landmark in the city and that the source said "any local would know". This highlights local habitus at play. A number of participants who were sources of news indicated they had experienced conversations with journalists who appeared to lack an understanding of the region. One source of news for the tri-weekly said:

> This area is a farming town and it's no good if the reporter doesn't know anything about the land. Half the time they've never lived here and [tongue in cheek] I don't reckon they even know what a cow looks like! I'd rather speak to someone who knows what I'm talking about. (interview with author, July 15, 2012)

And this from a non-reader of the daily newspaper:

> I used to read the local paper, but it was obvious the journalists had no idea what they were writing about (regarding environmental issues). Or people (who had been interviewed) would tell me that the journalist didn't have a clue when they were asking questions. You'd think they'd do a little bit of research about an area before they start asking questions. (interview with author, August 4, 2013)

These participants' experiences and observations provide some evidence that journalists' "local" status, the depth and quality of their knowledge of the environmental, social and economic features of the place and embodied social capital have important economic and cultural value for the news outlets they represent. It goes to the trustworthiness and legitimacy of the news they produce, affecting sources and readers' decisions about providing news and buying it.

Resourcing Geo-social News Production and the Impact on Local Knowledge

Journalists said local knowledge and social connections took time to generate, but small newspapers were particularly renowned for high staff turnover as many young reporters used such publications as stepping-stones to careers in metropolitan news (Franklin 2006). The ability to build local knowledge was also impeded by staff cutbacks and a depletion of resources. As a 23-year-old journalist at the daily newspaper said:

> Resources and time to do things has got less and less over the past four years. My boss is less willing to let me travel distances to meet people and get that local knowledge, less willing to do stories that require time. There is a shrinking of resources and in any way you can cut costs and anything superfluous to that, anything that sits outside budget is not considered worth it. (interview with author, April 2, 2012)

One editor said while coverage of local news was what made the business model for regional newspapers competitive in the wider news marketplace, his company's persistence in cutting resources made it difficult to chase and cover the news and for new reporters to develop local knowledge:

> Editorial staff are doing more with the same resources. Is that the right thing? Probably not, from an editorial perspective. One of the tools that's being used to get business "under control" has been to get journalists to take annual leave … you end up with a skeleton staff covering day-to-day issues. The business model and the bottom line I feel are more important to the company. (interview with author, March 20, 2012)

And this from a younger journalist:

> You get local knowledge by getting out and meeting people, seeing how things work, getting a feel for the area. But there's no time, there's no resources. You have to just keep churning out copy.

A media-relations officer for a local council, who previously worked as a journalist at the tri-weekly newspaper, said one of the reasons he had left was an apparent disregard for local knowledge by the parent media organisation:

> Local knowledge is extremely important, from the spelling of street names to understanding the history of a place. With [the company] making cutback after cutback and a preference for younger and less experienced journalists because they are cheaper, gets rid of the experience [and local knowledge] inside the operation. Redundancies have targeted older and more experienced journalists. I just became disillusioned. (interview with author, November 5, 2012)

Resourcing and changes to the large media company's business model had also impacted on the geographic stretching of news production practices at two of the

newspapers (Hess and Waller 2014). At the time of the interviews, journalists at the tri-weekly had been informed that it was likely all sub-editing would be outsourced, or moved to a metropolitan or larger regional area. Some journalists argued the shift towards centralising production practices devalued the importance of local knowledge. A veteran journalist at the daily newspaper encapsulates this sentiment:

> I think the big fear is, that if there are central subbing nodes, then you miss that local knowledge. It's things like spelling street names, people's names, you don't want to get basic stuff like that wrong … you would start losing credibility with people. That's the sort of knowledge that subs who don't know the area might not have, but it's what a newspaper should just know. (interview with author, April 5, 2012)

A veteran sub-editor at the tri-weekly highlighted the increasing importance of local knowledge in a geo-social news framework:

> I actually don't think it matters where subs are located, but they have to [know this area]. They need to know the issues, the background to the issues, the people and proper spelling of people's names. You can't be a sub-editor without knowing your community, without having seen it, lived it. We had a story and the journalist had the river flowing the wrong way! That was simply ignorance of the local community from not having lived here for long. (interview with author, July 16, 2012)

The reference to the direction of river flow highlights the subtle dispositions that emerge from one's local habitus. A veteran journalist at the tri-weekly said a failure to recognise the value of this for newspapers in the digital age would eventually take its toll on the newspaper:

> I think this will impact on readers in a very big way if you've got people producing a paper without an understanding of that geographic area. If it's being produced by someone who doesn't know the first thing about [this area], then readers will rapidly become disillusioned. The effect will be subtle and immeasurable on a pie graph or a budget for some time, but this disillusionment is a very dangerous thing to happen to a paper. It loses its credibility. I think the bean counters and managers elsewhere need to be very careful about losing the credibility of the paper from all these tiny little chips. (interview with author, July 16, 2012)

River Flows and Profit Flows

Warren Buffett is confident his $344 million investment in 28 local US newspapers will pay handsome dividends. But if journalists report the rivers flowing the wrong way in his newspapers, will the famous investor's capital flow backwards too? Our research suggests it is likely that business success for local media outlets in the digital age will rely to a significant degree on what we have conceptualised as local habitus. Our research has drawn upon and extended theory to inform journalism practice. We have argued that to be local is to have a grounded connection with, and understanding of, a physical place and its social and cultural dimensions that is practical and embodied. Importantly, it involves an investment of time, and requires a continual presence in that place. Over time, local newspapers themselves have become part of people's local habitus—for many readers, to consider oneself a local is to read the newspaper, which is more powerful than habit and routine alone. Therefore, media companies in print and digital formats need to continue, if not revive, their own investment in the "local"; ensuring some physical

presence within the locale and nurturing local habitus in its staff and its audience. This means guiding them slowly, not forcefully, in the transition to a digital world.

While Moores (2012) argues that the newspaper itself is a recognisable and familiar space, its future is uncertain. This does not mean the end of local news outlets because while media production and consumption are shifting, it is not the first time technologies have changed. Bourdieu (1990) contends that habitus evolves over time as fields transform. Our point is that local habitus is complex and needs to be nurtured by media companies as part of the change. In the near future, digital transformation may mean that all local news consumers get their news through a multimedia application on a smart device. Given the enduring news value of "proximity", the news sites consumers choose to access may very well reflect their "sense of place" and/or where they consider themselves a "local". Local habitus is therefore vital for the successful production and consumption of local news and needs to be considered in the social, cultural, economic and political interests of society. It means media companies with local ambitions need representatives on the ground, in powerful and visible sites such as chambers of commerce, halls of local government, the courts and sports fields, but also in coffee shops, pubs, visiting schools and people's homes. It may be that citizens are recruited primarily for their local habitus as "go-to" sources for reporters starting out on the beat.

News organisations that have survived the digital onslaught may be able to rely on the symbolic capital of their traditional and trusted mastheads in the short term. These have served well in the construction of the newspaper as the most legitimate and credible source of local information. It is a form of power that has been established over centuries, but as in any story of power, there can be changes in its trajectory, and these are worthy of academic attention. Does it mean that small media outlets that have already closed their doors lost this credibility, and if so how? Were they "local" in name only, as Franklin (2006) suggests? Does it mean that the demographics changed and the people did not understand themselves as locals? That their hearts, heads and media focus were elsewhere? Studying the local as a discrete and key concept in Journalism Studies is the first step to understanding what really makes local news media "tick".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

An earlier iteration of this paper was presented at the Local Journalism Around the World Conference (2014) at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Oxford University. We would like to thank conference delegates for their feedback and advice in refining the article.

NOTES

1. Craig (2004) contends that the everyday is difficult to define—"(it) is highly individualised and amorphous and yet it also suggests activities that are shared and uniformly recognised and understood by a large number of people". He highlights how everyday life is ultimately described as a sphere "drained of politics" (Craig 2004, 192). In this study, everyday readers were determined as those who read the newspaper but did not actively engage with the paper, they did not appear as sources of news and did not make public comments on stories.

2. Bourdieu outlines four types of capital that agents may use to their advantage in any given field or social space; economic, cultural (embodied and/or objectified in the form of cultural goods such as art work, and institutionalised such as academic qualifications), social and symbolic (honour, prestige; Bourdieu 1986). "Habitus" (or the structure of dispositions, tastes, practical know-how, second sense) equips social actors in a particular field (Bourdieu 1977).

REFERENCES

Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Badkar, Mamta. 2013. "Buffet Explains Why He Paid $344 Million for 28 Newspapers, and Thinks the Industry Still Has a Future." *Business Insider Australia*, March 2. http://au.businessinsider.com/warren-buffett-buying-newspapers-2013-3.

Barnett, Steven, and Judith Townend. 2014. "Re-invigorating Local Media: New Approaches to Policymaking on Media Plurality and Citizenship." Paper presented at the Media Communication and Cultural Studies Association (MeCCSA) conference, Bournemouth University January 8–10.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. "The Forms of Capital." In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by John Richardson, 241–258. New York: Greenwood Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Buchanan, Carrie. 2009. "Sense of Place in the Daily Newspaper." *The Journal of Media Geography* Spring: 62–82.

Cheng, Hau Ling. 2005. "Constructing a Transnational, Multilocal Sense of Belonging: An Analysis of Ming Pao (West Canadian Edition)." *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 29 (2): 141–159. doi:10.1177/0196859904273194.

Cooke, Phillip. 1989. "The Local Question – Revival or Survival?" In *The Changing Face of Urban Britain*, edited by Phillip Cooke, 296–306. London: Unwin Hyman.

Couldry, Nick. 2000. *The Place of Media Power: Pilgrims and Witnesses of the Media Age*. London: Routledge.

Couldry, Nick. 2004. "Theorising Media as Practice." *Social Semiotics* 14 (2): 115–32. doi:10.1080/1035033042000238295.

Couldry, Nick. 2012. *Media, Society World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Craig, Geoffrey. 2004. *The Media, Politics and Public Life*. Crows Nest NSW: Allen and Unwin.

Cresswell, Tim. 1996. *In Place Out of Place: Geography, Ideology and Transgression*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Cresswell, Tim. 2004. *Place: A Short Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Entman, Robert. 1990. "Modern Racism and the Images of the Black in Local Television News." *Critical Studies of Mass Communication* 7 (4): 332–345. doi:10.1080/15295039009360183.

Fenton, Natalie, Monica Metykova, Justin Schloseberg, and Des Freedman. 2010. *Meeting the Needs of Local Communities*. London: Media Trust.

Franklin, Bob. 2006. *Local Journalism and Local Media: Making the Local News*. London: Routledge.

Grenfell, Michael, ed. 2008. *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*. Durham: Acumen.

Harvey, D. 1989. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Social Change*. Cambridge: Blackwell.

Hess, Kristy. 2013a. "Breaking Boundaries: Recasting the Small Newspaper as Geo-social News." *Digital Journalism* 1 (1): 48–63. doi:10.1080/21670811.2012.714933.

Hess, Kristy. 2013b. "Tertius Tactics: Mediated Social Capital as a Resource of Power for Traditional News Media." *Communication Theory* 23 (2): 112–130. doi:10.1111/comt.12005.

Hess, Kristy. 2014. "Mediated Social Capital and the Small Town Press." *Journalism Studies*. doi:10.1080/1461670X.2014.922293.

Hess, Kristy, and Lisa Waller. 2014. "Geo-social Journalism: Reorienting the Study of Small Commercial Newspapers in a Digital Environment." *Journalism Practice* 8 (2): 121–136. doi:10.1080/17512786.2013.859825.

Hess, Kristy, Lisa Waller, and Matthew Ricketson. 2014. "Are There News Gaps in Rural/Regional Australia? Researching Media Plurality Beyond Finkelstein." *Australian Journalism Review* 36 (2): December 6.

Inglis, Tom. 2008. *Global Ireland: Same Difference*. New York: Routledge.

Kaniss, Phyllis. 1991. *Making Local News*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Markson, Sharri. 2014. "Fairfax Media to Shut Some Local Newspapers in Regional Restructuring." *The Australian*, October 8. http://www.theaustralian.com.au/media/fairfax-media-to-shut-some-local-newspapers-in-regional-restructuring/story-e6frg996-1227083073748.

Meyrowitz, Joshua. 1985. *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behaviour*. London: Oxford University Press.

Moores, Shaun. 2000. *Media and Everyday Life in Modern Society*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Moores, Shaun. 2004. "The Doubling of Place: Electronic Media, Time-space Arrangements and Social Relationships." In *Media Space: Place, Scale and Culture in a Media Age*, edited by Nick Couldry and Anna A. McCarthy, 21–36. Abingdon: Routledge.

Moores, Shaun. 2012. *Media, Place and Mobility*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Painter, Jo. 2000. "Pierre Bourdieu." In *Thinking Space*, edited by Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift, 239–256. London: Routledge.

Pauly, John, and Melissa Eckert. 2002. "The Myth of 'the Local.'" *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 79 (2): 310–326. doi:10.1177/107769900207900204.

Savage, Michael, Gaynor Bagnall, and Brian Longhurst. 2005. "Local Habitus and Working Class Culture." In *Rethinking Class: Culture, Identities and Lifestyle*, edited by Fiona Devine, Mike Savage, John Scott, and Rosemary Crompton, 95–122. London: Palgrave.

Tuan, Yi-Fu. 1977. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Webb, Jen, Tony Schirato, and Geoff Danaher. 2002. *Understanding Bourdieu*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Zelizer, Barbie. 2012. "On the Shelf Life of Democracy in Journalism Scholarship." *Journalism* 14 (4): 459–473.

Kristy Hess (author to whom correspondence should be addressed), School of Communication and Creative Arts, Deakin University, Australia. E-mail: kristy.hess@deakin.edu.au. Web: https://deakin.academia.edu/KristyHess

Lisa Waller, School of Communication and Creative Arts, Deakin University, Australia. E-mail: lisa.waller@deakin.edu.au. Web: https://deakin.academia.edu/LisaWaller