NEWS ECOSYSTEMS & THE FALLACY OF

L O C A L

Matthew S. Weber | School of Communication & Information | Rutgers University
Research Overview

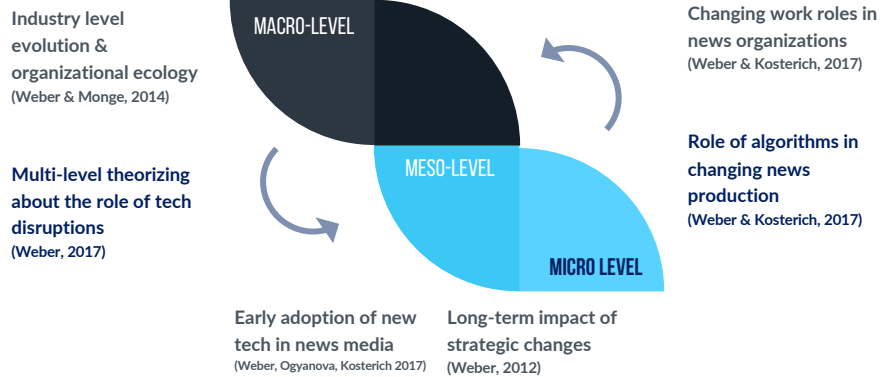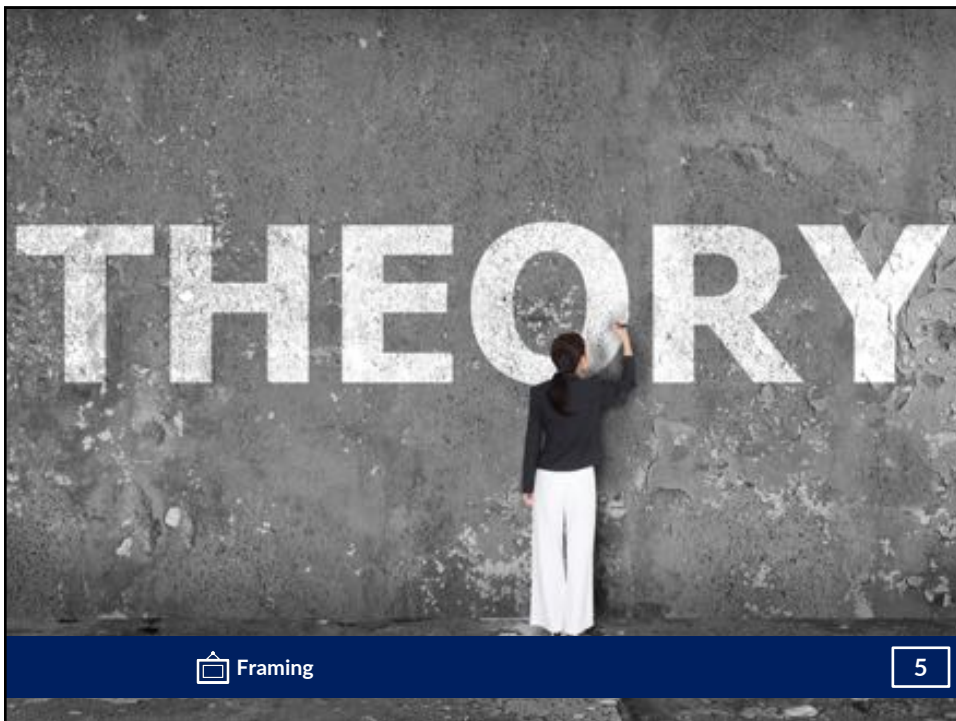About Me   Framing   Methods   Local News   Discussion   2

Transformation of News Media

Examining how organizations evolve in response to disruptions such as the introduction of new information communication technology,
focusing on transformation of the news media industry

Industry level evolution & organizational ecology
(Weber & Monge, 2014)

Multi-level theorizing about the role of tech disruptions
(Weber, 2017)

MACRO-LEVEL

MESO-LEVEL

MICRO LEVEL

Changing work roles in news organizations
(Weber & Kosterich, 2017)

Role of algorithms in changing news production
(Weber & Kosterich, 2017)

Early adoption of new tech in news media
(Weber, Ogyanova, Kosterich 2017)

Long-term impact of strategic changes
(Weber, 2012)

About Me

4

THEORY

Framing

5

Institutionalism and Organizational Change

A common thread across disciplines and domains of inquiry &
a mechanism for understanding change across levels

Journalism Studies	Management	Communication
Institutional pressures hinder change in news organizations; lack of networking hinders innovation	Firms garner legitimacy through the building of institutions, but seek new resources through their networks in order to innovate	Organizations craft their external perception through communication & signal alignment with institutions
(Lowrey 2011, 2012)	(Greenwood, Hinings & Whetten, 2014)	(Lammers, 2011; Kuhn 2012)

Framing

6

Institutionalism and Organizational Change

• Trend towards isomorphism as institutions evolve
  (e.g. DiMaggio & Powell, 1983)

• Stages of institutional change (Greenwood, 2002)

- • Precipitating jolt
- • Deinstitutionalization
- • Pre-institutionalization
- • Theorization
- • Diffusion
- • Re-institutionalization

Framing

7

Institutionalism and Organizational Change

- Organizations as entities, striving to sustain legitimacy, enact institutional messages (Thornton and Ocasio 2008)

  - Institutional messages reflect and align with the rules, norms and routines of the competitive environment (Scott, 1991)

> "a conceptual and empirical link between the predominantly macro world of institutions and the micro world of organizational communication"
>
> (Lammers, 2011: p. 154)

Framing

8

Framing

9

TECHNOLOGY

F.C.C. to Loosen Rules on Local Media Ownership

By CECILIA KANG OCT. 25, 2017

Framing 10

- A starting point for assessing a local journalism infrastructure involves identifying each source of journalism within a particular community
  (see, e.g., Lin and Song, 2006)

- Records of local news outlets are generally inadequate or incomplete
  (Barnett and Townend, 2015)

Monica Chadha. (2015). The Neighborhood Hyperlocal. *Digital Journalism*. doi: 10.1080/21670811.2015.1096747

Framing 11

Methods   12

Methods   13

Methods 14

A New Local

Local News 15
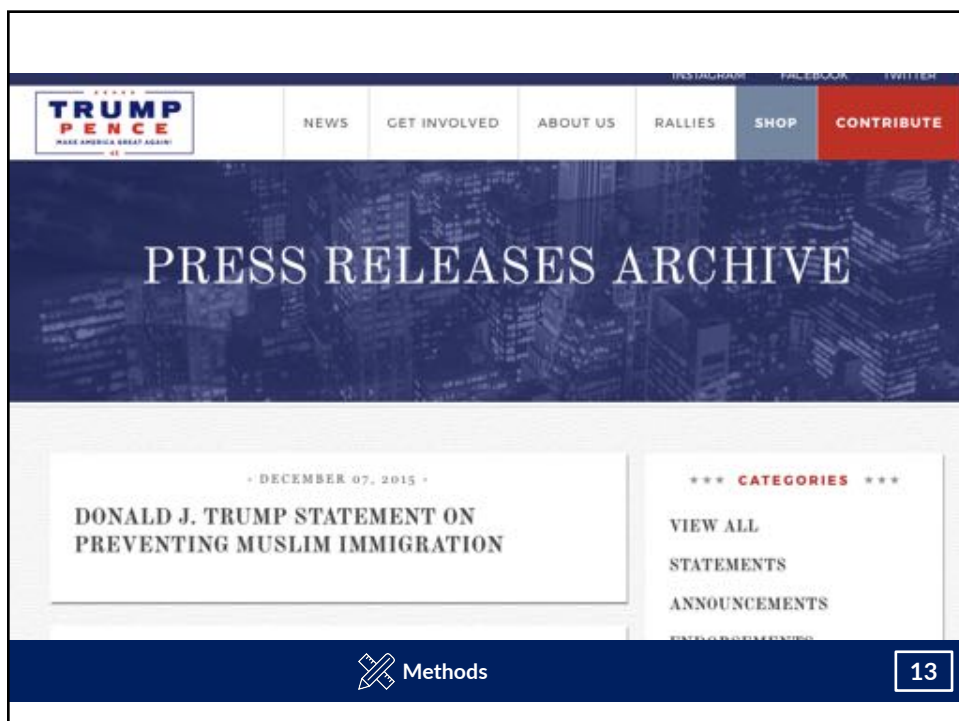
Institutionalism and Organizational Change

- Pragmatic Legitimacy
  - An increase in shared understanding and coordinated planning that engenders routine (Lowrey, 2012)

- Communicative strategies can be implemented to affect a shift in accepted standards of legitimacy (Colleoni, 2013)
  - Focused on the use of corporate social responsibility & associated communicative efforts
  - Enacting institutional messages to "change the narrative"

- In converging institutions, organization may embrace existing legitimacy or attempt to signal a relationship to a new legitimacy (Lamberti and Lattieri, 2011)

**RQ: How does the pragmatic legitimacy of local news change
during the process of reinstitutionalization?**

Local News   16

Data Collection
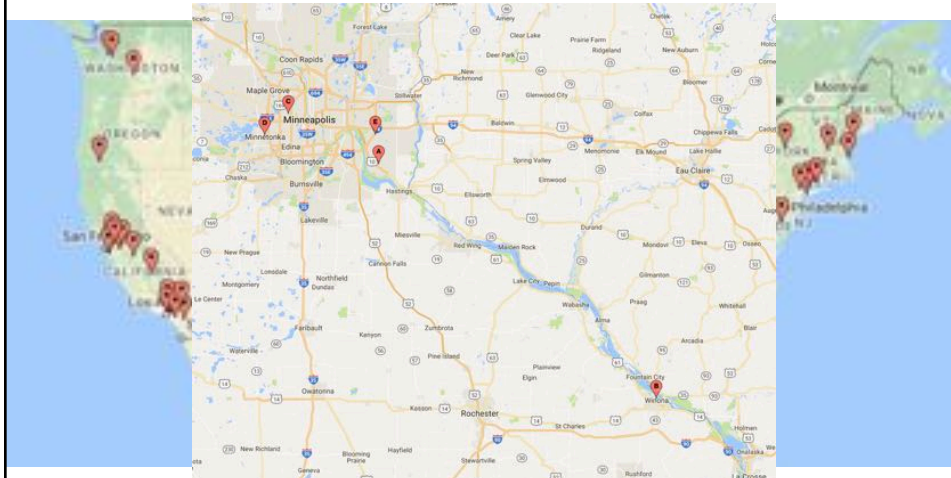
Local News   17

Data Collection

- **Outlet must be geographically based in the community**
    - Excludes out-of-area aggregation pages that aggregate news about the community
        - E.g., topix sites
        - E.g., community-specific pages provided by metro-area newspapers/TV stations
    - If an outlet is geographically based in the community, but is not focused on the community (i.e., has a state, national, or international orientation) it must still be included

- **Outlet must have the demonstrated or potential capacity to serve as a source of journalism (i.e. independent reporting)**
    - Excludes government news/information sites

Local News   18

Local News   19

Local News 20

Local News 21

Local News | 22

Local News | 23

Data

- **Content analysis of front webpages**
  - **Original**
  - **Local**
  - **Critical Information Needs**

- **Source measures**
  - **Corporate ownership**
  - **Social media presence**

- **Community level measures (US Census)**
  - **Household income**
  - **Density per square mile**
  - **Distance from large metropolitan market**
  - **Presence of a university**
  - **County seat**
  - **State capital**

- **Community level demographics (US Census)**
  - **Percent White**
  - **Percent African American**
  - **Percent Hispanic / Latino**

Local News   24

Analysis 1: Localness of Content
Hierarchical Logistic Regression

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Household Income	1.05*	1.06	1.06*
Distance from LMM	0.97*	0.97*	0.94**
County Seat	1.23**	1.22*	1.13*
Density per sq. mi.	1.02**	1.03*	1.04*
% White		1.04*	1.06*
% AA		.93**	.92**
% Hispanic		.92	.91
Corporate Ownership			.75**

Model 1 -> Constant = 0.20, Nagelkerke R^2 = 0.55
Model 2 -> Constant = 0.22, Nagelkerke R^2 = 0.58
Model 3 -> Constant = 0.24, Nagelkerke R^2 = 0.68

n = 15,760   * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** = $p < 0.001$

Local News   25

Analysis 1: Localness of Content
Hierarchical Logistic Regression

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Household Income	1.05*	1.06	1.06*
Distance from LMM	0.97*	0.97*	0.94**
County Seat	1.23**	1.22*	1.13*
Density per sq. mi.	1.02**	1.03*	1.04*
% White		1.04*	1.06*
% AA		.93**	.92**
% Hispanic		.92	.91
Corporate Ownership			.75**

Model 1 -> Constant = 0.20, Nagelkerke R^2 = 0.55
Model 2 -> Constant = 0.22, Nagelkerke R^2 = 0.58
Model 3 -> Constant = 0.24, Nagelkerke R^2 = 0.68

n = 15,760   * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** = $p < 0.001$

Local News   26

Analysis 2: Originality of Content
Hierarchical Logistic Regression

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Household Income	1.00**	1.01**	1.02*
Distance from LMM	0.97**	0.96**	0.96**
County Seat	1.45**	1.12*	1.13*
Density per sq. mi.	1.01*	1.02*	1.05*
% White		1.06*	1.08**
% AA		.98**	.95***
% Hispanic		.93*	.92**
Corporate Ownership			1.07**

Model 1 -> Constant = 0.84, Nagelkerke R^2 = 0.55
Model 2 -> Constant = 0.53, Nagelkerke R^2 = 0.56
Model 3 -> Constant = 0.50, Nagelkerke R^2 = 0.63

n = 15,760   * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** = $p < 0.001$

Local News   27

Analysis 2: Originality of Content
Hierarchical Logistic Regression

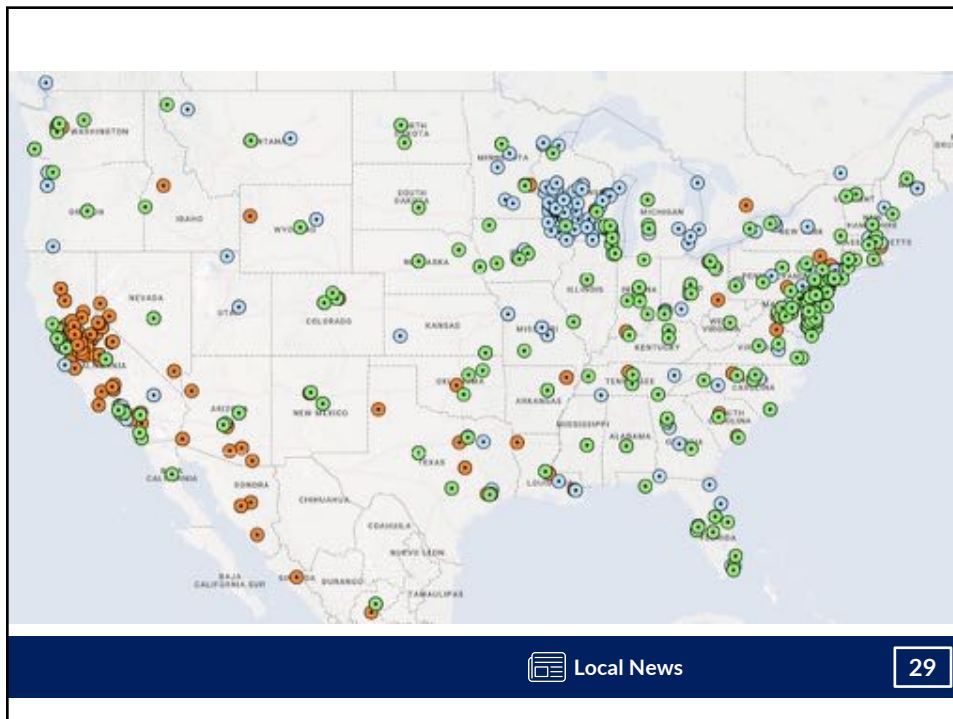|	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Household Income	1.00**	1.01**	1.02*
Distance from LMM	0.97**	0.96**	0.96**
County Seat	1.45**	1.12*	1.13*
Density per sq. mi.	1.01*	1.02*	1.05*
% White		1.06*	1.08**
% AA		.98**	.95***
% Hispanic		.93*	.92**
Corporate Ownership			1.07**

Model 1 -> Constant = 0.84, Nagelkerke R^2 = 0.55
Model 2 -> Constant = 0.53, Nagelkerke R^2 = 0.56
Model 3 -> Constant = 0.50, Nagelkerke R^2 = 0.63

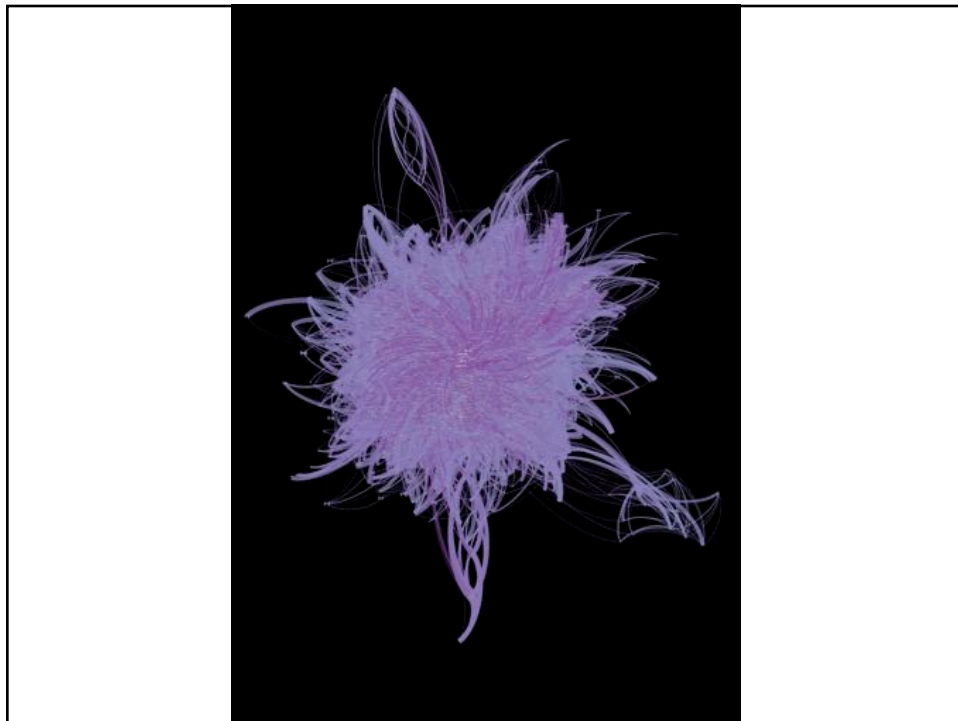n = 15,760   * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** = $p < 0.001$
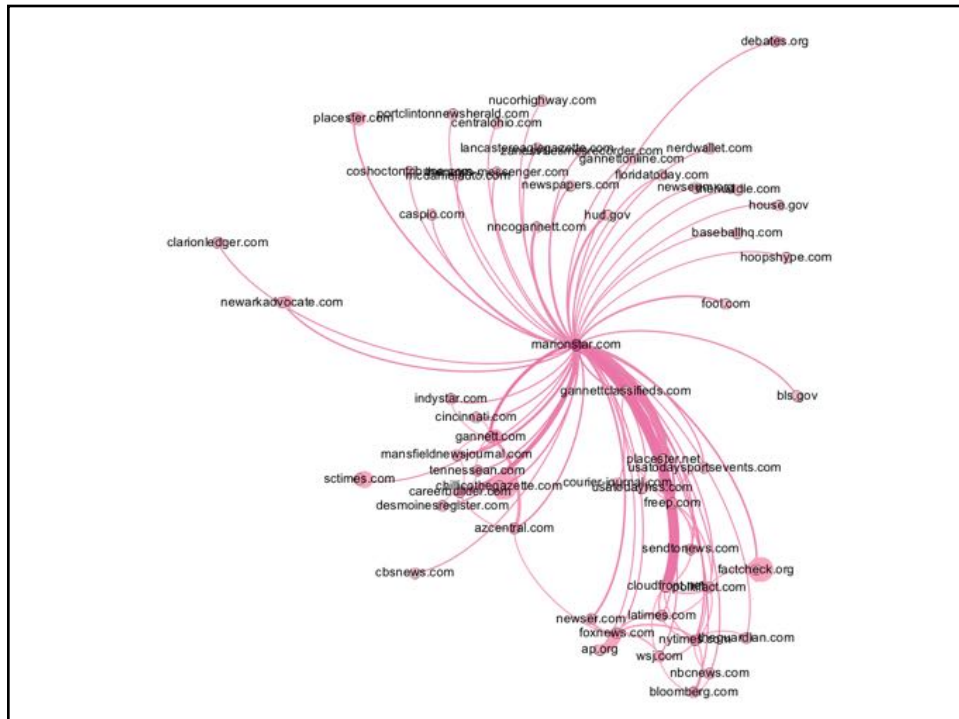
Local News

28

Local News

29

Our operating budget was cut by about 15% over 14 months; there's not much you can do when you're facing those conditions. Also, keep in mind the market we're in…

So yea, we're trying to do that, but we have a new mandate that doesn't leave us much choice.
The result is content that fills our pages is increasingly regional because that is their model. How do I fight that?

- Editor, PA News

Local News

33

Institutionalism of Local News

Theory
- New ownership models in local news are creating tension with regards to the core legitimacy of the institution
  - Multiple identity organizations (Foreman and Whetten, 2002)
  - Re-institutionalization is an ongoing process

- Pragmatic legitimacy is signaled through a strategic choice to regionalize content
  - Likely to result in a conflicting legitimacy within newsrooms in response to perceived challenges to the organization's identity

Practice
- Erosion of local content has far reaching implications; current research underscores concerns with regards to SES variables
  - Data hints at news deserts as a growing problem, but longitudinal data is needed
- New ownership models improve fiscal viability, but at a cost

Discussion 34

Transformation of News Media

Examining how organizations evolve in response to disruptions such as the introduction of new information communication technology,

focusing on transformation of the news media industry

MACRO-LEVEL

MESO-LEVEL

MICRO LEVEL
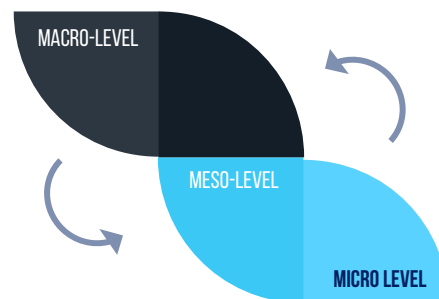
Discussion 35

matthew.weber@rutgers.edu

@docmattweber

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean (SD)
Original	0.42 (0.49)
Location	0.16 (0.37)
Population	76,686 (59,031)
Density per sq mi - population	26.96 (15.78)
Dollar	66,504 (23,590)
Distance from LMM	87.32 (74.61)
%White	83.94 (15.75)
%AA	11.22 (12.35)
%H/L	15,11 (17.78)
Universities	0.46 (0.65)
County Seat	0.34 (0.47)
State Capital	0.03 (0.18)
Corporate	0.51 (0.50)
FB	0.71 (0.45)
FB Likes	58894 (256643)
FB Followers	57193 (250509
Twitter	0.69 (0.46)
Tweets	24377 (31596)
Twitter Followers	20971 (119621)

Local News

37