

**Market-Based Opportunities in Local News Innovation:
Drafting a Theoretical Framework**

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the authors advance the argument that local news markets are not one size fits all. In the same way that a singular, monolithic news audience is a thing of the past, news organizations exist within complex communities that provide different opportunities and challenges. As such, the strategies and business models that work for some news organizations (that serve similar communities) will not work for other news organizations (serving different types of communities). Using a secondary analysis of Pew (2019b) survey data from over 35,000 U.S. adults, combined with the typology created by the American Communities Project (2018), the researchers argue that by accounting for these variations and developing a typology of local news markets, more specific strategies for innovation can be recommended, tested, and shared. To conclude, they discuss several recent examples of innovation that have market-level application.

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“The crisis in local journalism threatens our democracy and must be addressed.”

- Steve Waldman, the president of Report for America and an award-winning journalist for Newsweek and US News

“I think eventually, at some point in the future, people are going to wake up and go, ‘Whoops, there’s nobody covering the news,’ when all the local news outlets have disappeared.”

-Jennifer Parker, editor and publisher, CrossRoads News in DeKalb County, Georgia, which switched to online-only publication in 2018

“Everybody is looking for local as a sort of hope for the future because we have a toxic, polarized national climate.... So there’s common ground and the news there can’t be dismissed as fake because it’s there for all the world to see.”

-Andrew Heyward, Research Professor, Arizona State University

The challenges facing local news

There is little doubt that the local news industry faces serious challenges in the current media and technology environment. Chief among these are newsroom cuts and closures. Between 2004 and 2018, nearly 1,800 dailies and weeklies closed in the U.S. (Legg, 2019). University of North Carolina’s Penny Abernathy who has measured the phenomenon, along with the closely adjacent issues of industry consolidation and mass reductions in the volume and scope of content, has coined the term “news deserts.” The term originally referred to a community without a local newspaper, but today, that definition has expanded to classify “communities where residents are facing significantly diminished access to the sort of important news and information that feeds grassroots democracy” (Abernathy, 2018). According to Abernathy’s most recent count, nearly 200 out of 3,143 counties in the U.S. are news deserts, and this number is rapidly increasing: 1,449 additional counties are emerging as news deserts, having only one newspaper—typically a weekly.

While digital startups have emerged—about 400 by Legg’s 2019 count—such enterprises tend to be located in urban, affluent areas. These startups, too, are challenged by the changing business models of content and advertising that are vexing existing news organizations. One issue is that consumers are largely unwilling to pay for online content unless it comes from a nationally prestigious source. Large papers like the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* have found success in converting readership into paying digital subscribers, but local papers struggle with this model. The *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* have converted 3.6 percent and 4.5 percent of their readership into online subscribers, respectively, while many local papers have converted less than 1 percent of readers (Hagey, Alpert & Serkez, 2019). Another challenge for digital startups is gaining sufficient funding through advertisements. Digital advertising is so inexpensive that it cannot replace the revenue that the era of print advertising provided.

Furthermore, local media are disadvantaged in the digital advertising model. Technology giants Google and Facebook profit from an incredible 77 percent of digital advertising revenue in local markets (Hagey, Alpert & Serkez, 2019).

Much of this loss of revenue has played out in local newsroom cuts. Newsroom employment dropped 25 percent between 2008 and 2018, with newspapers experiencing the greatest decline (Pew, 2019a). In 2019 alone, nearly 8,000 media jobs—so not just those of local journalists—were lost. As Benjamin Goggin (2019) explained in a summative list of layoffs in *Business Insider*, “The massive cuts this year represent a recent trend in media that has seen upstart companies and newspapers alike shrinking and disappearing.” Ultimately these newsroom cuts produce subsequent concerns about resulting gaps in local coverage. The absence or weakening of a local press may lead to neglect around important local issues including schools and infrastructure, and present opportunities for political and fiscal malfeasance to go unchecked.

In addition, political participation and voter turnout, especially for local politics, suffers at the hands of diminishing local news coverage (Rubado and Jennings, 2019). Local news serve important tasks in information diffusion, such as highlighting issues at stake, introducing and following candidates, reminding readers to vote, and sharing vital polling place and election day details (Genzkow, Shapiro and Sinkinson, 2009). When local political news coverage decreases, information is not as readily available with the frequency and scope that local audiences need to remain politically engaged and active. A recent California study of 11 local newspapers exemplifies this relationship (Rubado and Jennings, 2019). Cities experiencing newspaper staff cuts experience both larger reductions in turnout for local elections and less competition in mayoral races (Rubado and Jennings, 2019).

As part of this California study, authors Rubado and Jennings interviewed newspaper journalists about the effects of staffing cuts and other challenges on local communities. One reporter noted that the shift to digital publishing led to a deconstruction of the historic newspaper model with impact on the quality of local government coverage. Before online journalism, each story contributed to the overall success of a paper, regardless of whether it appealed to every single reader, because it ran in the print edition contributing the brand and heft of the news product. The digital era, however, ushered in a “by story” metric. The success of an individual article is measured by the number of people who directly engage with it, and by these metrics, government news has often not fared as well. According to the reporter, “online is king, and you need clicks” (Rubado and Jennings, 2019, p. 9). Therefore, understaffed newspapers force reporters to spend their limited time generating high-traffic, reactionary articles that will engage large audiences, leaving less time to generate exhaustive political content for local audiences (Rubado and Jennings, 2019).

These gaps have revealed a need for innovation in the local news marketplace.

Local news is not one-market-fits-all

This white paper advances the argument that local news markets are not one size fits all. In the same way that a singular, monolithic news audience is a thing of the past, news organizations exist within complex communities that provide different opportunities and challenges. As such, the strategies and business models that work for some news organizations (that serve similar

communities) will not work for others news organizations (serving different types of communities).

By accounting for these variations and developing a typology of local news markets, more specific strategies for innovation can be recommended, tested, and shared. While it may seem obvious that a community like Austin is different than, say, Des Moines, Cleveland, and even El Paso, and certainly broad innovative ideas *are* valuable across the board, many news leaders concede privately that they are presented with “best practices” that are actually a mismatch for their individual communities.

Additionally, as local economies reinvent themselves for the digital era, the structures in place to cover and understand the institutions and people of a given place are being taxed by declines in newsroom employment as well as by the pace and breadth of change. This leads to asymmetries of knowledge, exemplified by,

- The reduction in “beat” or specialized reporting, leaving local newsmakers and officials in the position of repeatedly educating one general-assignment reporter after another about their industries, histories, and community impact, rather than beginning each contact with a shared set of background.
- The local TV news industry’s historical reliance on young journalists who do not stay in any given market for long before seeking to “move up” to a larger DMA,
- The newspaper industry’s largely unsuccessful decades of effort to diversify its journalism work force, as measured by the News Leaders Association (formerly the American Society of News Editors), leaving minority communities almost invisible to staffers tempted to pursue obvious stories on short deadlines.

To bridge this gap, we adopt a meso-level approach to local news markets. That is, local news is not one-market-fits-all, nor is every market an island, completely unique with no shared commonalities with other local media markets.

In this white paper, we outline the community and media factors that may result in different types of local media markets. We then argue that typologizing local media markets enables local news organizations to thrive while also having synergy with their communities.

Communities, ecologies, markets

There are many ways in which news organizations differ. They may differ in terms of ownership, size, publication frequency, media form, and so on. Our focus is in contextualizing these differences within a larger structure of factors—many of which have no explicit connection to news. Our intention with this conceptual white paper is not to make causal claims about the factors that result in certain news organizations or certain types of local news coverage, but rather to articulate the various factors that matter when identifying different types of geographical areas that news organizations exists within.

Communities. We are not the first to approach local news from a meso-level perspective. Much research has focused on communities as the unit of analysis. Defined broadly, a community reflects a group of people who are “linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage

in joint action in geographic locations or settings” (Maaqueen et al., 2001, p. 1929). While the boundaries of a community are a bit amorphous—some research have used county boarders, while other have examined neighborhoods, zip codes, or city residency—the overarching logic is that the geographical space in which news organization are imbedded within matters. The demographic composition, for example, may vary from one community to another. The people that reside in physical area can have particular characteristics, backgrounds, attitudes, and interests.

Such variance is highlighted in a 2019 Pew study of local communities. The impressive project surveyed approximately 35,000 U.S. adults to construct “local news profiles of individual communities” (Pew, 2019b). The interactive tool (available [here](#)) presents data grouped by core-based statistical areas (or CBSAs), which is the classification system used by the U.S. federal government to define geographical areas of at least 10,000 people; plus, adjacent counties. According to the federal government, there are 933 CBSAs in the United States.

The Pew project efficiently displays the differences among different communities in terms of local news exposure and also the topic different communities care about and their perceptions of local media coverage. For example, the two tables below provide a breakdown among four communities: Chicago, Illinois; Dayton, Ohio; Fresno, California; and Madison, Wisconsin. Table 1 displays the proportion of people who consider various news topics important to their daily lives, among the four communities. Compared to the overall breakdown, note that fewer people in Fresno think the topic of weather is important to their daily lives, while more people in Fresno consider the topics of prices, schools, and jobs to be important to their daily lives. A different pattern of importance is seen in Madison, where people consider prices and jobs to be less important, and topics like weather, government/politics, and sports to be of greater importance (compared to the overall average proportion).

Table 1.

Percent saying the topics is “important for my daily life”									
	Weather	Crime	Traffic	Prices	Govt / Politics	Schools	Community activities	Jobs	Sports
Chicago, IL (n=1082)	78.5%	48.4%	42.5%	36.6%	30.2%	17.4%	15.2%	15.4%	10%
Madison, WI (n=122)	79.5%	40.2%	36.9%	20.5%	33.3%	19.7%	9.8%	3.3%	16.4%
Fresno, CA (n=93)	69.9%	48.4%	45.2%	47.3%	29%	33.3%	16.1%	24.7%	9.7%
Dayton, OH (n=96)	86.5%	37.5%	49%	39.6%	19.8%	16.7%	9.4%	10.4%	7.3%
Overall average (n=34,897)	74.9%	43.9%	41.7%	35.1%	28.3%	18.3%	14.3%	11.5%	9.5%

Similarly, Table 2 provides a breakdown in preference in getting news and information across the four communities. In the greater Chicagoland community, for example, there is a greater preference toward news in print and websites/applications, and less of a preference for television, compared to the overall proportional breakdown. The opposite pattern is seen for Dayton, with a much stronger preference for TV news, and a decreased preference for print. Taken together, the tables highlight just a couple examples of how communities may differ from the national/overall average and by comparison to one another.

Table 2.

Percent preference for getting news and information					
	Print NP	Radio	TV	Social media site	Website /app
Chicago, IL (n=1082)	22.6%	8.3%	32.3%	8.6%	27.6%
Madison, WI (n=122)	22.1%	10.7%	27%	6.6%	33.6%
Fresno, CA (n=93)	15.1%	9.7%	43%	15.1%	17.2%
Dayton, OH (n=96)	10.4%	7.3%	56.3%	5.2%	20.8%
Overall average (n=34,897)	18.4%	8.6%	38.5%	10.1%	23.7%

Research also points to the different levels of connection or belonging that exists within communities and how this may influence local news consumption. For example, people that live in an area for a longer period of time, or are homeowners are more likely to be invested in community issues, thus more likely to consume local news (Finnegan & Wiswanath, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Paek et al., 2005).

However, suggesting the potential nuances of community differences, research surveying households in seven areas in Los Angeles found that home ownership and residential tenure did influence local news consumption, but the nature of this relationship is not consistent for all areas (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Metei, 2001). For white residents (“old immigrants”), home ownership and length of time living in a neighborhood were *positively* related to local news consumption, yet, for “newer immigrants” (e.g., Latino and Asian residents) the factors were *negatively* related to local news consumption. According to the authors, “the findings from the Asian and Latino study areas suggest that the local media play sufficiently different storytelling roles in new immigrant compared with old immigrant areas” (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001, p. 420).

Because, local news is both consumed *by* people in the community and *about* the people in a given community, it makes sense that audience-centric factors are an important part of conceptualizing different local news markets.

Ecologies. A related approach adopts a news ecology perspective. While there is no conciseness on the precise definition of “news ecologies,” scholarship has explored the factors that make up the environment that news organizations operate within (Anderson, Bell, & Shirky, 2013) and the “dynamic interaction of production and distribution of news in particular geographic spaces” (Kim, Konieczna, Yoon, & Friendland, 2016, p. 3).

For example, a group of researchers examined “four metropolitan regions” (Chicago, Seattle, Minneapolis, New York City) to identify the structural factors that contribute to more “sustainable” local news organization. They accounted for factors like the number of startups and the amount of investment (to capture a climate of entrepreneurship), the region’s history of civic engagement (e.g., volunteerism, philanthropic giving), social capital (including voting and association membership), and the presence of postsecondary institutions. Together these factors reflect the different environmental factors that shape the viability of local news in these cities.

Interestingly, the researchers found three factors—climate of entrepreneurship, affiliation with other news organization, and the presence of a postsecondary institution—played the strongest role in local news sustainability. Though the authors note that, “these cities are, of course, not representative of news ecologies in the United States, which have a much wider range of populations, ethnic compositions, and political affiliations” (p. 9). Thus, raising the question of whether the same factors play a role of different regions or communities.

In another study, researchers examined the journalistic infrastructure and output across three New Jersey cities: Newark, Morristown, and New Brunswick. The three cities were chosen because they “are substantially different from one another in terms of their size, demographic composition, and geographic location within the state [of New Jersey]” (Napoli et al., 2015, p. 14).

The researchers found that Newark—a larger city with a population ethnically diverse and with lower average income—had fewer local news sources available (per 10,000 capita) and fewer original news stories, compared to the other two cities. According to the authors, “these findings potentially point to specific types of problems in local journalism, in which lower-income communities are dramatically underserved relative to wealthier communities” (p. 29). However, it is unclear if this pattern exists across a larger collection of cities, or what other related factors contribute to the observed disparity in local news production.

Table 3. Approaches to identifying the factors that influence local news consumption

	Focus	Scalability	Comparative	Depth	Example
Communities/ neighborhoods	How people in a given geographic area differ	Depends	High	High	Survey of 35,000 U.S. adults from various CBAs Survey of households in seven areas in Los Angeles
Ecologies	The environment that news organizations operate within	Low	High	High	Four metropolitan regions (Chicago, Seattle, Minneapolis, New York City) Three cities in New Jersey
Markets	Supply and demand of news in a given geographic area	High	High	Low	210 Designated Market Areas across the U.S.

Markets. At the most basic level, a market refers to a geographic area of supply and/or demand for a good or service. Media markets define a geographic area in which the same (or similar) media are available and/or consumed by the population. These boundaries often subsume several cities and metropolitan regions.

There is a long history of media markets defined by commercial ratings providers. Designated Market Areas (DMA) were first created in 1955 by Nielsen (“Our history”). Currently, there are 210 DMAs in the United States. These markets largely correspond to television viewing areas and are still prominent boundaries in determination metrics of television viewership and setting advertisement rates.

Different from an ecological approach which tends to focus a small number of regions or cities to study more in-depth, a market approach is more about large-scale comparisons. This research tends to highlight the availability, competition, and consumption of media across different geographic areas. The strength of this approach is in its scale. While 210 DMAs ignores a lot of variances that exists at the neighborhood or country level, it does provide an ease of comparing different markets nation-wide.

For example, a group of researchers (Althaus, Cizmar, & Gimpel, 2009) examined how several market-level factors influenced exposure to local news. The nation-wide study used DMA-level data about demographic characteristics (e.g., percent of population in DMA that is white, the median household income, percent that is aged 65 and older, population density at the DMA-level), combined with market-level characteristics (e.g., market size and complexity). The researchers found that “news consumption has a distinctive geographic structure” (p. 263), with there being little evidence of a “general audience for news in the United States” (p. 263). Instead, there existed patterns of market-level differences across the U.S. related to local news exposure. For example, larger markets were positively associated with local television news exposure and listening to local radio, but negatively related to local newspaper use. Similarly, median market-level income was positively related to local newspaper use and local radio listening, while unrelated to local television news.

Overall, the environments in which local news organizations are imbedded within matter. To put it another way, local news consumption has a geography as well as a psychology (Althaus, Cizmar, & Gimpel, 2009). A wider focus that accounts for the web of structural factors that make up a given community, news ecology, and media market is needed. Yet, according to Napoli and co-authors, “supply, demand, efficiency, and competition do not adequately capture the increasingly diverse context in which news and information are produced, distributed, and consumed—and in particular how these dynamics affect the functioning of local communities” (2012, p. 4).

Our effort is in connecting the structural factors that distinguish different communities, ecologies, and markets with detailed strategies for innovations. The first step in this framework involves systematically grouping different markets. Note: we formally adopt the terminology of markets in this paper, due in part because our focus is nation-wide comparisons that reflect more of a business-model orientation. That being said, these terms are often interchangeably, especially due to their imprecise definitions. We make little distinction between communities, ecologies, and markets in our proposed approach.

On typologies

There is often a tension when typologizing local news markets. On one hand, the essence of local news is seen in the unique particulars of a given neighborhood, city, and county. On the other hand, there is a need to scale outward and identify factors of commonality. We should not think of local news strategies as one-size fits all, and, at the same time, the challenges and opportunities that face a news organization in a particular community are not completely idiosyncratic.

Rather than making broad recommendations about business models or innovation strategies, there is a need to develop a typology of local media markets. Typologies are an analytical tool that “organize systems of types” (Collier, LaPorte, & Seawright, p. 217) that identify “conceptually derived interrelated sets of ideal types” (Dotty & Glick, 1994, p. 232). Common in social science and commercial research, typologies explicatie complex concepts into more precise attributes.

For the purpose of this conceptual paper, we used an existing typology created by the *American Communities Project* (2018). The project includes a range of county-level data including population density, military service, and religious adherence. For more information see (<https://www.americancommunities.org/methodology/>). The result is 15 mutually exclusive community types:

1. Exurbs (7.1%)
2. Graying America (11.6%)
3. African American South (11.8%)
4. Evangelical Hubs (11.8%)
5. Working Class Country (10.7%)
6. Military Posts (2.8%)
7. Urban suburbs (3.4%)
8. Hispanic Centers (5.1%)
9. Native American Lands (1.4%)
10. Rural Middle America (19.1%)
11. College Towns (4.9%)
12. LDS Enclaves (1.3%)
13. Aging Farmlands (5.1%)
14. Big Cities (1.5%)
15. Middle Suburbs (2.4%)

Note: Classifications are at the county-level and include 3,143 U.S. counties clustered into the 15 community types. Percentages reflect the proportion of counties in each classification type.

The table below provides more information about the 15 community types. Included in the table is the basic description (taken directly from the ACP website map) and three exemplar countries that fit each typology group. It should be noted that the four communities highlighted in Tables 1 and 2, are included in Table 4 (in red front by their county). Specifically, Chicago is part of the “Big Cities” type; Dayton an “Urban Suburbs;” Fresno is a “Hispanic Centers” type; and Madison fits within the “College Towns” type.

Table 4. *American Communities Project* typology with descriptions and exemplars

Exurbs <i>Wealthy, well-educated, largely white. Low crime rates & longer commutes.</i>	El Dorado, CA St. Johns, FL Jefferson, MO
Graying America <i>Large senior population. Middle-income, low diversity, avg. education.</i>	Lincoln, CO Jackson, FL Middlesex, VA
African American South <i>Median roughly 40% African American. Low income, high unemployment.</i>	Mobile, AL Jefferson, FL Marshall, MS
Evangelical Hubs <i>Many evangelical adherents. Fewer college grads & healthcare providers.</i>	Marshall, AL Chattooga, GA Jasper, TX
Working Class Country <i>Rural, blue-collar America. Low income, college-graduation rates.</i>	Lincoln, KS Henderson, TX Marquette, WI
Military Posts <i>Middle-income, diverse communities around military bases.</i>	Lanier, GA Beaufort, SC Laramie, WY
Urban suburbs <i>Educated and densely populated. Racially and economically diverse.</i>	Montgomery, OH (including Dayton) Hartford, CT Palm Beach, FL
Hispanic Centers <i>Heavily Hispanic & rural. Young, lower incomes, limited healthcare access.</i>	Yuma, AZ Fresno, CA El Paso, TX
Native American Lands <i>Large Native American population. Young, low income, many uninsured.</i>	Navajo, AZ Sioux, ND Menominee, WI
Rural Middle America <i>Largely rural and white. Middle income, average college graduate numbers</i>	Clinton, IL Fayette, IN De Moines, IA
College Towns <i>Highly educated, low diversity. Young with high turnover in population.</i>	Champaign, IL Polk, OR Dane, WI (including Madison, WI)
LDS Enclaves	Butte, ID

<i>Large youth population. Middle income, low diversity, low crime.</i>	Kane, UT Salt Lake, UT
Aging Farmlands <i>Agricultural with many seniors. Little diversity, low unemployment.</i>	Calhoun, IA Mercer, MO Campbell, SD
Big Cities <i>Dense and diverse. High incomes and high poverty. High crime rates.</i>	San Francisco, CA Cook, IL (including Chicago, IL) Dallas, TX
Middle Suburbs <i>Middle income, low diversity, and below average for college education</i>	Peoria, IL Lancaster, PA Racine, WI

Innovating innovation

Given the differences in local markets, innovations for local news are not one strategy fits all. Local news organizations face particular challenges, and opportunities, that influence their success and failure, and this should be accounted for when making tough decisions about how to allocate resources, engage audiences, and build—or rebuild—a business model. That being said, the news industry is not short on innovative thinking and strategies. As Margaret Sullivan highlights in her recent book, *“Ghosting the News,”* there several “beacons of hope” where local news organizations have found success in telling important local news stories, enaging a local audience, and in making money in the process.

Yet, we caution against seeing these examples as discrete, one-off success stories. A middle approach—in between viewing successful strategies as universal (e.g., “quick, everyone do this!”) on one side, and completely ideocratic (e.g., “that will only work in Madison”) on the other—is what we propose. Innovating innovation means describing, and celebrating, success stories, with an eye toward identifying the market factors that played a contributing role, and may work in other markets with similar characteristics.

In what follows, we describe a small number of news organizations as examples of recent success. In doing so, we call attention to the particular market factors that play a role in their success and how organizations in similar markets may want to peruse similar approach.

In Santa Fe, New Mexico, the locally owned *New Mexican* has published continuously since 1849, with an advertising and circulation strategy tailored to the state capital’s economic drivers of tourism and government. A particular example of seizing local-market opportunity is *The New Mexican’s* weekly entertainment supplement, *Pasatiempo*, which not only draws entertainment and tourism advertising throughout the year—particularly in conjunction to the city’s large summertime markets in Native American and Southwestern arts—but also leads to increased reader revenue: The Friday issue of the print paper doubles in price to \$1.50, and *Pasatiempo* is

sold separately for a full week for \$1.25 per copy. The advertising is as much a draw as the high-quality editorial content.

What is important about this example from a market-factor perspective? While Santa Fe (population 85,000) is classified as an “urban suburb,” about an hour by car from New Mexico’s largest city, Albuquerque (population 560,000), one of its distinguishing market characteristics is that it positions itself as a separate tourist and entertainment destination from Albuquerque. That may make Santa Fe look more like the markets of Santa Barbara, California, and Palm Beach, Florida (also “urban suburbs”). Or, possibly, akin to arts-centric markets such as Asheville, North Carolina (classified as a “college town”); and Saugatuck, Michigan (“rural middle America”) when it comes to looking for media innovations.

However not all innovations in print will necessarily be distributed equally across newspaper markets. Consider *The (Virginia) Recorder* in Bath and Highland Counties, which are classified as “working class country” and “graying America,” respectively. Anne Adams, who took over as publishers of the weekly in 2007, announced at the America East News Media and Technology Summit in April 2019 that she *raised* the newsstand price to \$5. She did so with an added benefit sensitive to her market: She increased the point size of the font in the newspaper. While younger, growing marketplaces might scoff at this, “graying America” markets—there are 364 according to ACP with large swaths in upstate New York, northern Maine, Nevada, Wyoming, and Oregon—might consider innovations that are thoughtful response to their aging audience’s needs.

But the market factors need not be demographic to be relevant. In Boise, Idaho, news startup BoiseDev found a niche in a growing “exurb.”¹ Boise, named the fastest growing city in 2018, had a “burgeoning tech scene,” with “microbreweries, luxury condos, and Brooklyn-esque coffee shops.” (Warren, 2019). With this, BoiseDev attracted 800 subscribers with an innovative “time wall” that delivered content to them first, then later to the general public. (Day, 2020) Additionally, BoiseDev relied exclusively on local advertising, which became another meaningful revenue stream. Why did it work? Growth is certainly one answer, but we can also look to distinctive market characteristics: a rich local culture; a robust business community; an educated, professional workforce; and pride in the distinctiveness of Boise from its Silicon Valley counterparts. Similar communities that might benefit from the media innovations that served BoiseDev include Saratoga, New York; Williamson, Tennessee; and Chatham, North Carolina.

Related, but different, local-first strategies are thriving in growing urban markets such as San Antonio, Texas, located in Bexar County (a “big city”). As the Institute for Nonprofit News (2020) reported, San Antonio’s *Rivard Report* generates significant revenue from flat-rate advertising, event sponsorships, and what it calls “business memberships.” This mechanism requires a relationship-based model with businesses from lead generation to bespoke collaborations and packages. So in addition to the need to have a well-trained, thoughtful sales team, the custom advertising/sponsorship model exemplified by the *Rivard Report* is well-suited to fast-growing urban markets such as Maricopa, Arizona (home to Phoenix, Tempe and

¹ Boise, Idaho, is in Ada County, not the adjacent Boise County.

Scottsdale); Dallas, Texas; Miami-Dade, Florida; Davidson, Tennessee (Nashville); and Wake, North Carolina (Raleigh).

Finally, COVID-19 coverage has, among other things, reminded us of the potential for college newspapers, especially in “college towns.” *The Alligator*, the student newspaper of the University of Florida in Gainesville (Alachua County), was highlighted in the national press for its mapping of local cases. (Izadi, 2020) *The Daily Tar Heel* (2020), the student newspaper of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Orange County), made waves across social media with its “clusterf---” op-ed after the university opened in the fall and then promptly sent students home when cases soared. And the *Michigan Daily*, the student newspaper of the University of Michigan (Washtenaw County), as the only daily newspaper in Ann Arbor for the past decade, reported on the COVID-related strikes by graduate students and resident advisers. (Izadi, 2020) It is clear that “college towns” can benefit from a robust student press, and that opportunities for innovation here—in Alachua, Orange, and Washtenaw counties but also Douglas (home to the University of Kansas), Champaign (University of Illinois), and Boulder (University of Colorado at Boulder) counties—may rest on town-gown engagement.

While there are certainly more examples of innovation at the local news level, we highlight only a select few to draw attention to the need to connect innovation to market typologies. Our goal is to push local organizations to identify the most important factors (i.e., audience, community, media, industry) that define their communities and make them similar to other markets. Local news leaders should answer the question: “Where in the United States are there communities that have a similar set of factors as we do?” Keep in mind that these communities may not exist in geographic proximity. But what they will share are potential market-based challenges and opportunities across content, production, and business models. We argue, essentially, that local news providers may have more in common with distant (similar) markets than they do with nearby (but different) neighbors.

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