



Markkula Center
for Applied Ethics
at Santa Clara University

Modern Media Structures

Lily Evans '21

2020-21 Hackworth Fellow





5 Things to Know About Modern Media Structures

1. Before the internet, there was mass media
2. 2008 was a major turning point for news media
3. Key distinctions between mass news media and digital news media
4. Digital challenges: If it looks like news and feels like news, it still might *not* be news
5. Many news media organizations are financially insecure - could public media be a remedy?





5 Things to Know About Modern Media Structures

1. **Before the internet, there was mass media**
2. 2008 was a major turning point for news media
3. Key distinctions between mass news media and digital news media
4. Digital challenges: If it looks like news and feels like news, it still might *not* be news
5. Many news media organizations are financially insecure - could public media be a remedy?





Before the Internet...there was mass media

- Prior to the rise of the Internet, news media took the form of:
 - Print newspapers
 - News magazines
 - Radio
 - Television
- **Mass** media means content is transmitted from 1 sender to many receivers
 - Audience engagement was limited to venues like letters to the editors or call-in radio segments





5 Things to Know About Modern Media Structures

1. Before the internet, there was mass media
2. **2008 was a major turning point for news media**
3. Key distinctions between mass news media and digital news media
4. Digital challenges: If it looks like news and feels like news, it still might *not* be news
5. Many news media organizations are financially insecure - could public media be a remedy?





What changed in 2008 and why?

- 2008 Great Recession
 - Effect on newspaper industry--advertisers began to focus their attention on reaching customers online instead of through traditional mass media
 - Advertisers began pulling their ad budgets from newspapers and turned to the newfound prominence of pay-per-click digital platforms - which were more cost effective than mass media advertising
 - Digital platforms broadened their advertising business as news organizations' advertising revenue shrank
 - Local newspapers around the country began to close their doors due to finances (e.g. Seattle PI)
- Many major news outlets were initially resistant to the Internet and did not see value in news online - nor did they expect digital news would pose a true challenge to sustaining traditional mass media





“Save the news!”

- Calls to “Save the news!” arose in the news sector as publishers, editors, and reporters noticed persistent dwindling revenue, shrinking or shuttering newsrooms, all of which contributed to increased precarity for staff reporters and freelancers, and growing concerns about how audiences would become informed citizens in the absence of news organizations
- Lack of willingness-to-pay for content compounded the challenge for news’ survival
 - Dominant digital platforms contributed to user expectations that content is free, which placed news orgs at a disadvantage when they attempted to monetize content
- Local news deserts
 - “A community, either rural or urban, with limited access to the sort of credible and comprehensive news and information that feeds democracy at the grassroots level” - Penny Abernathy
 - *The Expanding News Desert* - <https://www.usnewsdeserts.com/>
- Nonprofit news sector expanded
 - From Texas Tribune to proliferation of locally-focused, philanthropically-funded news outlets
 - Three of the largest nonprofit news outlets today include ProPublica, the Center for Public Integrity, and the Center for Investigative Reporting
 - Institute for Nonprofit News offers a member directory of many local nonprofit news outlets as well





News media go online, but \$ troubles are far from resolved

- Legacy news outlets ultimately went online and developed digital news offerings
- However, moving online has not solved the news industry's financial problems overall
 - Many readers are still reluctant to pay for online content
 - For most medium to small news publishers, the income from the sale of digital advertising space remains significantly less than it was for print
 - The rise of search engines and accessing news via social media has continued to grow, and news organizations are not compensated for their content that is indexed on these channels
 - Nonprofit news depends on philanthropic donors and member support, and the richest donors (aka benevolent billionaires) have no obligation to offer consistent long-term support





5 Things to Know About Modern Media Structures

1. Before the internet, there was mass media
2. 2008 was a major turning point for news media
- 3. Key distinctions between mass news media and digital news media**
4. Digital challenges: If it looks like news and feels like news, it still might *not* be news
5. Many news media organizations are financially insecure - could public media be a remedy?





What are the main differences between mass news media & digital news media?

Mass news media

- Production speed
- Inflexible formats
- Institutional newsrooms
 - Masthead (tells you who works there)
 - Expectation of job stability
- Mass audience, often a passive audience receiving content with limited means to engage with it

Digital news media

- 24-hour news cycle
- Flexibility in how content looks on the “page”
- Distributed working conditions
 - Increased use of contractors/freelancers
 - Expectation of job precarity
- Digital interactivity, intertwined with social media and platforms





5 Things to Know About Modern Media Structures

1. Before the internet, there was mass media
2. 2008 was a major turning point for news media
3. Key distinctions between mass news media and digital news media
- 4. Digital challenges: If it looks like news and feels like news, it still might *not* be news**
5. Many news media organizations are financially insecure - could public media be a remedy?





Much of digital news media sounds like an improvement over mass media in a lot of ways - what's the downside?

- Digital content can easily assume the look and feel of news without actually being news
 - Looks like news and talks like news, but used for propaganda, marketing, and strategic aims unrelated to public service
 - Funded by political operatives, corporate executives, and PR professionals
 - Often virtually indistinguishable from credible news reporting





Hundreds of 'pink slime' local news outlets are distributing algorithmic stories and conservative talking points

By Priyanjana
Bengani

DECEMBER 18, 2019



FOLLOW
THE AUTHOR



SHARE
ON TWITTER



SHARE
ON FACEBOOK

An increasingly popular tactic challenges conventional wisdom on the spread of electoral disinformation: the creation of partisan outlets masquerading as local news organizations. An investigation by the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia Journalism School has discovered at least 450 websites in a network of local and business news organizations, each distributing thousands of algorithmically generated articles and a smaller number of reported stories. Of the 450 sites we discovered, at least 189 were set up as local news networks across ten states within the last twelve months by an organization called Metric Media.

Titles like the *East Michigan News*, *Hickory Sun*, and *Grand Canyon Times* have appeared on the web ahead of the 2020 election. These networks of

ABOUT THE TOW CENTER FOR DIGITAL JOURNALISM

The Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism is a research center exploring the ways in which technology is changing journalism, its practice and its consumption – as we seek new ways to judge the reliability, standards, and credibility of information online.

TOW REPORTS

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 18TH, 2021



What makes for robust local news

https://www.cjr.org/tow_center_reports/hundreds-of-pink-slime-local-news-outlets-are-distributing-algorithmic-stories-conservative-talking-points.php





Social media can make news access easier and harder

“News feeds” on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are filled with a range of content - not all of which is reliable news, and most of which is not from news organizations

Even savvy users encounter difficulty with verifying claims and distinguishing between news articles and native advertising content

Personalized news feeds challenge traditional media’s approach to providing 1 shared set of claims per day - which creates opportunities for critical narratives and also intensifies challenges for reaching agreement about contentious issues





Navigating and evaluating online content — is it news?

- What to look for:
 - Who wrote the piece? (If there's no byline or editor's note about authorship, be wary)
 - When was the piece written? (If there's no date, or a date years in the past, take note because claims may be outdated)
 - Who are the sources in the piece? (If there are no sources, only 1 source, or only anonymous sources, consider why and what the report is based upon)
 - Who is commenting on the piece on social media? (Are commenters disputing key claims in the story, affirming them, or a mix? Who are the commenters?)
 - Who is sharing this piece on social media? (Are people resharing this piece on social media to spread the word, to criticize claims, or to fill in gaps?)
 - Who else is writing about this piece? This issue? Are there competing narratives? (Seek out multiple frames for the same story - and keep an eye on where claims diverge)
- [Firstdraftnews.org](https://www.firstdraftnews.org)
- [ALA - Media Literacy for Adults: Media Landscape and Economics](#)





5 Things to Know About Modern Media Structures

1. Before the internet, there was mass media
2. 2008 was a major turning point for news media
3. Key distinctions between mass news media and digital news media
4. Digital challenges: If it looks like news and feels like news, it still might *not* be news
5. **Many news media organizations are financially insecure - could public media be a remedy?**





Can local news save the day?

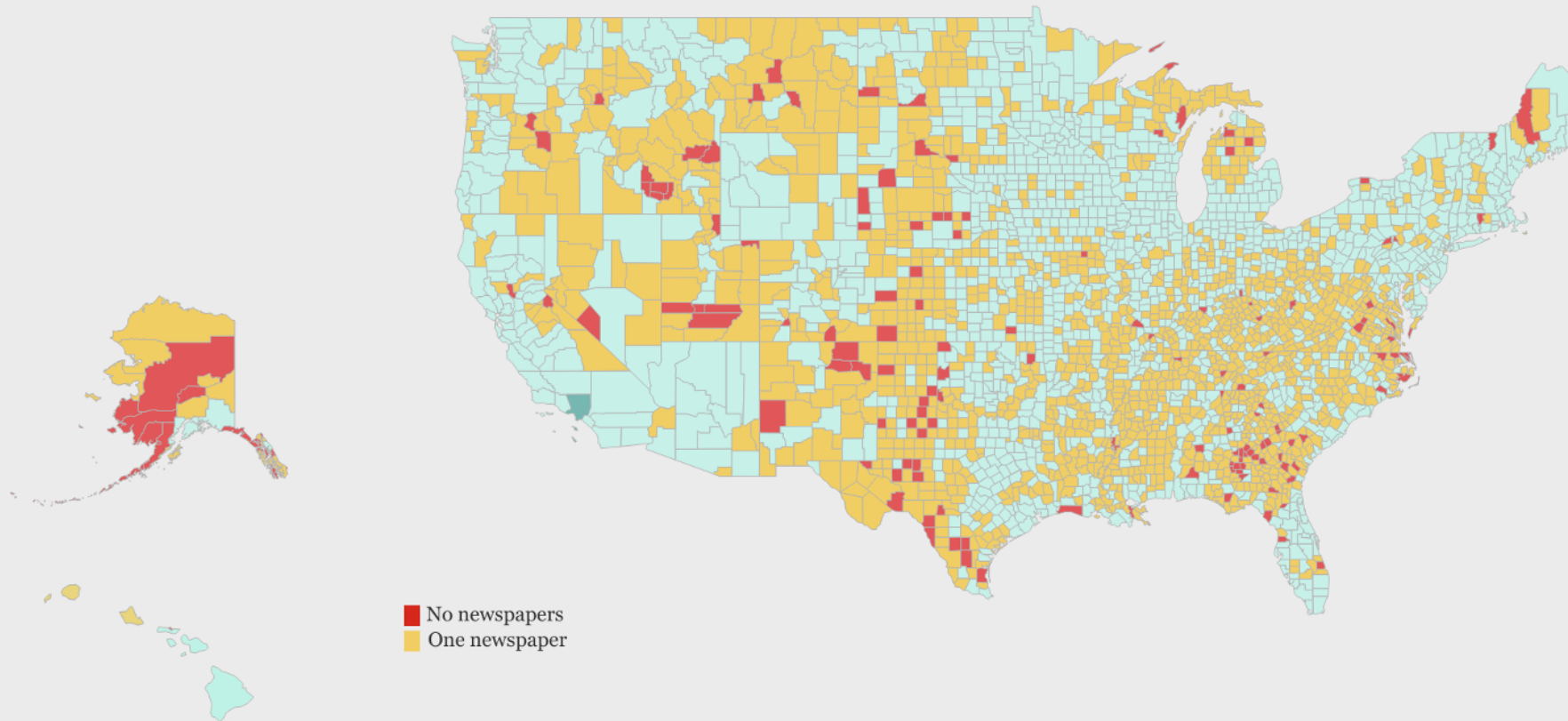
- At its best, local news...
 - Helps sustain a sense of community
 - Acts as a resource for citizens to remain informed about local and national issues
 - Promotes participation in our democracy





Do You Live in a News Desert?

In the U.S., 225 counties do not have a local newspaper. Half of all counties - 1,528 - have only one newspaper, usually a weekly.



Source: UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media

https://public.tableau.com/shared/X4K3XNJQ6?:display_count=y&:origin=viz_share_link





Public media as a possible solution to news deserts in an era of digital disinformation?

- Original intention of public media was to cover stories and produce content “the market typically failed to support” - Victor Pickard, 2009
 - For example, racial equity stories are in the public interest, even though they may not attract as many eyeballs as celebrity news stories
- “Combination of the crisis in corporate media and advances in digital production and distribution could be an historic moment for public media’s reinvention” - Victor Pickard 2009
- Public media is not a silver bullet, but worth considering as a remedy outside the marketplace
 - Who should control public media?
 - Who should public media serve?
 - What are past issues with public media coverage in the US? How might these issues be addressed?
 - WeMakeNPR: <https://wemakenpr.squarespace.com/dei-demands>





Next up: Media Influence & Persuasion

What are media messages?

What does agenda setting mean and why does it matter?

How do media representations (including but not limited to news) influence society?

