

Local Journalism in the Age of Uncertainty: The Case of Youngstown, Ohio's *The Vindicator*

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The closure of thousands of newspapers in the last 15 years has evoked uncertainty for journalists and other media professionals about their professional identities, community roles, and the future of local journalism. Through an ethnographic case study of local media professionals in one U.S. community, Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley, Ohio, this study explores their response to the closure of their only daily newspaper. Informed by uncertainty management and community ties theories, the study provides an in-depth understanding of how media professionals navigated the uncertainty caused by the changing media landscape and the meaning they attach to those changes. Analysis of 10 personal semistructured qualitative interviews and additional observations reveals the following themes: loss and grief, community needs and identity, watchdogging and accountability, opportunity and differentiation, resilience and adaptability, and sustainability. These findings highlight both the importance of community ties in navigating the uncertainty resulting from changing media use and the need for ongoing monitoring to ensure the future of local news coverage.

Keywords: local journalism, local news, uncertainty, community ties, media professionals, precarity, news desert, sustainability, Vindicator

Over the last 15 years, thousands of newspapers across the United States have closed, leaving potential news deserts in their wake (Abernathy, 2018). This has resulted in uncertainty for these communities about whether local news will be covered, as well as uncertainty for media professionals as to which media models will be sustainable. In an era of mis- and disinformation, it is more important than ever for people to have access to truthful, reliable news sources. Because newspapers have been traditionally positioned as the watchdogs in democratic society, holding government and public institutions accountable, questions have even arisen as to how democracy can be sustained in the midst of such disruption in the media environment (Klas, 2019; Shaker, 2014). Previous studies have found that decreased availability of local news negatively impacts citizen engagement (Hayes & Lawless, 2015), and citizens' access to local news may even be necessary to decrease political polarization (Darr, Hitt, & Dunaway, 2018). With decreases in citizen engagement, democracy itself is at risk, and newspaper closures have left many communities feeling uncertain as to how to sustain citizen engagement without them.

This study explores the efforts of media professionals in Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley, Ohio, to manage the uncertainty caused by the closure of the area's only daily print newspaper and their

effort to secure the future of local news coverage. Informed by uncertainty management and community ties theories, the study reviews the conceptual framework and context of the case and proceeds with data analysis and discussion.

Conceptual Framework

How people manage uncertainty has been the focus of much research in communication studies (e.g., Berger, 2005; Goldsmith, 2001; Knobloch & Solomon, 2005), as well as across the social sciences (e.g., Clayton, Mishel, & Belyea, 2006; Dawson, Savitsky, & Dunning, 2006). Initially developed to understand communication processes in the management of individuals' health-related uncertainty (Brashers, 2001), Uncertainty management theory (UMT) was subsequently broadened to include uncertainty about other information types, the role social relationships play in managing uncertainty, and human information behavior (Afifi & Afifi, 2009). Two UMT principles in particular inform this case study: Gathering information is a social process involving collaborators in an individual's network, and uncertainty is appraised for its meaning.

While UMT guides the focus on media professionals, it is also important to analyze the changing media landscape in which they live and work. Stamm (1985) proposed community ties as a dynamic theory focusing not only on the links between individuals and their community but also on the role of change as a moderator of both media use and community ties. Neither media use nor community ties is static, and change in one can affect the other. Thus, the combination of UMT and community ties provides the framework to explore the following research questions in the case of Youngstown, Ohio's *The Vindicator*: How have media professionals navigated the uncertainty caused by the changing media landscape? What do they think the closure of *The Vindicator* means for themselves and their community?

The Case Context

When the news broke on June 28, 2019, that Youngstown's 150-year-old daily newspaper would cease publication on August 31, thousands of residents in the community were uncertain about where they would obtain local news (Barrett, 2019; Grzelewski, 2019). The only daily print newspaper for Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley, *The Vindicator* had a long-standing reputation for high-quality investigative journalism that included holding politicians accountable and exposing organized crime and corruption. It was the one-stop source for birth announcements and obituaries to school board and city government meetings. *The Vindicator* was also well known for coverage of economic changes, having chronicled the steel and auto industries' movements in the region for decades. National coverage by the *Washington Post* declared "Democracy . . . Is About to Die in Youngstown' With Closing of the Local Newspaper" (Sullivan, 2019). Local politicians and community residents described themselves as stunned (Barrett, 2019).

Despite the presence of other news providers in the area, *The Vindicator's* absence meant there would be an information gap. The city of Youngstown has 66,982 residents, is the county seat for a metropolitan area of 565,773 residents, and is Ohio's ninth-largest city (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). A significant portion of the state's population was at risk of losing local news coverage *and* its community identity. Other local news providers included one bimonthly print source with daily online updates and a

handful of weekly and monthly ad-based local publications serving the small towns in the county. There were also three main network television stations (two with a shared services agreement), public television and radio stations, and many commercial radio stations. The *Tribune Chronicle*, once *The Vindicator's* main competitor, was the daily print newspaper and online source available from the northern county, and in July 2019, its publisher stated they would "attempt to fill the void" by publishing a Mahoning County edition (*Tribune Chronicle*, 2019, para. 4).

At the same time, the national media corporation McClatchy began the Compass Experiment, a project funded by Google to prevent news deserts. In the summer of 2019, Youngstown became the pilot location to develop a new model for local news. As *The Vindicator* wound down, the Compass Experiment team held two community meetings to ascertain what people wanted in the next publication. On August 17, the *Tribune Chronicle* announced the purchase of *The Vindicator* masthead, subscription list, and Web domain, *vindy.com*, with the goal of publishing a "*Vindicator* edition of the *Tribune Chronicle*" beginning September 1 (*Tribune Chronicle*, 2019, para. 1). The Compass Experiment hired a team of journalists and developed a mission for its first locally focused, online publication, *Mahoning Matters*, which launched online on October 10, 2019.

Despite the efforts of local media leaders, uncertainty had remained high in the community since the June announcement of *The Vindicator's* closure. Residents and media professionals alike were unsure who would cover what and how often and how much coverage of Mahoning County would appear in the *Tribune Chronicle's Vindicator* edition and website. People were unsure of the Compass Experiment team's identity and intentions. For thousands in Mahoning County and neighboring counties, uncertainty remained regarding local coverage. Media professionals also faced the precarity of their livelihoods and roles in the new media landscape.

Approach, Data, and Method

This case study utilizes a qualitative constructivist approach to examine the information landscape in Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley from the announcement of *The Vindicator's* closure on June 28, 2019, through the first month of *Mahoning Matters* from October 10, 2019. This approach is particularistic in focusing on one case from June 28 through November 10, 2019. It is also descriptive and heuristic in illuminating understanding of the case. Ethnographic methods added to the description and understanding of the case. Data collection occurred through semi-structured interviews, observations of local organizations and meetings, and artifacts. Participants were 10 media professionals working in organizations that comprise significant parts of the media landscape. They were selected based on their leadership roles in their organizations and their participation in community discussions. The following section reveals the themes that arose in the data analysis as they pertain to the research questions.

Results

The 2019 closure of *The Vindicator* evoked strong reactions from its announcement on June 28 to the last issue on August 31. Clearly, the end of the 150-year-old paper was a shock. This was true even for those at *The Vindicator* who expected a sale of the paper rather than closure. For the entire community, the

loss meant the loss of an institution. Residents described themselves as shocked, stunned, and even “gobsmacked,” with subscribers calling the newspaper to express their sadness (Sullivan, 2019). Expressions of loss from subscribers and nonsubscribers alike revealed the extent to which the newspaper symbolized community and contributed to the process of negotiating community. The following themes emerged from the data analysis to reveal how media professionals managed uncertainty and the meaning they derived from it, beginning with loss and grief.

Loss and Grief

Although only approximately 26,000 people subscribed to the print newspaper, media professionals described how the loss of *The Vindicator* was felt throughout the community. Community members expressed shock, sadness, and grief. According to the former managing editor, the news was particularly difficult for elderly subscribers who depended on the newspaper for emotional and social connection. Feeling lost, more than one subscriber called the newspaper to ask, “What am I going to do? *The Vindicator’s* my only friend” (personal communication, October 11, 2019).

The loss of the print edition of *The Vindicator* also meant the loss of its paywall-free website. Although it is unclear how many people obtained local news from *vindy.com*, the increase in Internet use for news consumption in general over the last two decades indicates that for Youngstown, the website loss compounded the loss of the print edition. According to Pew Research Center (2019b) data on the Youngstown-Warren-Boardman Ohio-Pennsylvania area in 2018, 23% of adults in the area “often” got their local news from news websites and apps, and 33% did so “sometimes.” Nationally, 43% of daily newspaper consumers tended to get their local news digitally (from their newspaper’s website or listserv), rather than from the print edition (Pew Research Center, 2019a).

Media professionals expressed shock, grief, and a sense of loss for the ending of an era, as well as fear for the future of local news coverage. One participant from *The Vindicator* said employees learned of the closure directly from the newspaper’s owner. Receiving the news was “devastating and shocking.” Likening the situation to the family of a cancer patient when they learn there is nothing more that can save the patient, the participant described the newsroom during the announcement:

[It] was about three o'clock, I think, in the afternoon . . . And so the reporters and photographers, etc., the copy editors and the news department, kind of all heard at that point. And they were devastated. Tears . . . I mean, it was just . . . it was shocking.
(personal communication, October 11, 2019)

Because the newspaper still had two months of publication remaining, the staff had to prioritize getting the news out despite their personal feelings and uncertainty about their own futures—professionally, financially, and in the community.

Another participant described observations of community members’ reactions to the news of the closure:

The initial news was like a gut punch and everybody said that, I mean, it was just, people were stunned. They wanted to stop it. You know, there was a lot of like, showing of grief and a lot of outpouring of sentiment. (personal communication, September 25, 2019)

One immediate concern was the outpouring of worry from members of the community about how the information gap would be filled. National and international coverage fueled this by reporting that the area was in danger of becoming a news desert (Gabbatt, 2019; Sullivan, 2019). However, participants were unanimous that due to the willingness of existing local news providers to expand coverage, and the Compass Experiment's launch of *Mahoning Matters*, the area would not become a news desert. Reassurance for the community that the void would be filled began immediately following the closure's announcement.

Community Needs and Identity

Four days after the closure's announcement, on July 2, 2019, the Youngstown Press Club and Youngstown Rotary Club cohosted a community forum. Approximately 150 adults ranging in age attended. Community members expressed various concerns, including how to: (1) save *The Vindicator*, support its staff, and find funding alternatives; (2) continue the annual *Vindy* spelling bee and Greatest Golfer award, both community traditions; (3) serve the elderly, for whom print journalism holds unique value; (4) continue the civic function of print journalism; (5) expose corruption; (6) promote entertainment in the Valley; (7) report the social calendar; and (8) record the past for future generations (M.H., observation, July 2, 2019).

Local media professionals discussed their plans to expand local coverage. Three examples stood out. First, the publisher of the Warren-based *Tribune Chronicle* said the newspaper was not there to replace *The Vindicator*; "that can't be done," also stating that because the *Tribune Chronicle* was delivered "all over the county," the publication already had a delivery mechanism in place (M.H., observation, July 2, 2019). Second, a representative from WFMJ, the local NBC television affiliate owned by the family who owned *The Vindicator*, said the station would provide new online content. Third, one co-owner of the bi-monthly *Business Journal* stated that publication was committed to a regional solution, including continuing its print edition.

However, uncertainty remained for media professionals as to whether there would be a daily print publication for Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley. One participant stated:

The thing I thought the *Vindy* provided that none of the other solutions were looking to provide was a daily print product. And we have an older population. In the Mahoning Valley I couldn't imagine what their life would be like without starting the day with a daily newspaper delivered to their home. And so when it was like, we're going to add, you know, more digital content...that's all well and good, but we have these politically engaged older citizens. Their primary means of being connected to the community is through a daily print paper. (personal communication, September 25, 2019)

The Vindicator was part of the identity of Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley, and its subscribers spread to three surrounding counties. Prior to its acquisition by the owner of the *Tribune Chronicle*, Ogden Newspapers, *The Vindicator* was locally owned and published. The identity of the community was partly

defined and shaped by the “*Vindy*,” as residents called it. The *Vindy* helped perpetuate the community by shaping and maintaining its identity and culture across time. One participant noted that the cultural identity of the area centers on Youngstown, despite the proximity of the city of Warren to the north and the numerous smaller communities throughout Trumbull and Mahoning Counties in Ohio, as well as across the state border in western Pennsylvania. To that participant, community identity is defined by “Youngstown,” and, having been shaped for so long by economic downturns and industrial decline, the community’s needs include building the business and enterprise culture.

Building a “culture of entrepreneurship” to draw in and retain a younger demographic is the primary goal of one participant’s publication, with an emphasis on “Youngstown” businesses and entrepreneurship (personal communication, October 16, 2019). The publication post-*Vindicator* remains focused on economic growth and development but also plans to cover city, county, and regional issues on a broader range of topics.

Despite the desire among local media professionals in the July meeting and the subsequent October meeting to reduce uncertainty in the community, they remained uncertain themselves. Even after *The Vindicator* ceased publication in Youngstown on August 31 and the first *Vindicator* edition of the *Tribune Chronicle* was published in Warren on September 1, uncertainty remained.

Confronted with the question of how to fill the information gap left by *The Vindicator*, media professionals accepted the financial realities associated with expanding coverage. For those working for print publications, it was not feasible to change the frequency of their print editions. Yet the ties among media professionals reduced the precarity of their own situation in terms of job security. The *Business Journal* and *Tribune Chronicle* added reporters and increased website content. The *Business Journal* hired a former member of the *Tribune Chronicle* staff, and the *Tribune Chronicle* hired four reporters from *The Vindicator*. In addition, the Compass Experiment’s first local, online publication launched in Youngstown on October 10, marking the entrance of a nonregional publisher to the media landscape. The former managing editor of *The Vindicator* became the editor of *Mahoning Matters*, and two former *Vindy* reporters comprised the staff. In addition, WFMJ hired former *Vindicator* employees. These changes in the media landscape not only provided employment for former *Vindy* employees—securing their professional futures in the immediate, and thereby reducing their uncertainty—but also signaled to the community that perhaps not all the watchdogs had left their posts.

Watchdogging and Accountability

After the final edition of *The Vindicator* hit the newsstands on August 31, 2019, participants expressed interest in continuing the watchdog role associated with traditional journalism. Although others may intend to fill the watchdog role, editors at the *Business Journal*, the *Vindicator* edition of the *Tribune Chronicle*, and *Mahoning Matters* expressed specific interest, as did the executive producer of WFMJ. At a community meeting on October 7, 2019, hosted by the Youngstown Press Club and the Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County, the *Business Journal*’s Mike Moliterno stated that they have an investigative reporter from ProPublica for one year whose sole focus is accountability. Executive producer Sheila Miller from WFMJ said the station would continue to cover politics and had added a column to the website called The Watchdog Report to keep government agencies accountable (observation, October 7, 2019).

The editor of the *Tribune Chronicle* and the *Vindicator* edition of the *Tribune Chronicle*, Brenda Linert, stated:

I think we've now shown that we are serious about covering Mahoning County and covering it as thoroughly and as in depth as we possibly can . . . We'll delve a little deeper into stories that need to be covered with more depth, ask some tough questions of our government . . . not just on the national level, but also on the local level. (personal communication, October 7, 2019)

The editor of *Mahoning Matters*, Mark Sweetwood, expressed interest in the watchdog role but extended accountability beyond local government. He stated that the mission of the new digital publication is "to tell the stories that matter in Mahoning County and empower citizens to engage in their community with a focus on solutions" (Sweetwood, 2019, para. 4). In its first week of publication, *Mahoning Matters* ran the story, "10 Troublesome Food Inspections in Mahoning County—and How Businesses Responded" using health department data to inform readers about health code violations in local restaurants (Dennis, 2019). The story sparked controversy in the community and resulted in the *Mahoning Matters* staff having to move their meet-the-staff reception for the following day from the local restaurant where it had been scheduled to the local library. Sweetwood wrote in the editorial of that morning's edition, "Our goal was never to attack restaurants as a group. Woven into the DNA of what we plan to do at *Mahoning Matters* is explanatory reporting" (Sweetwood, 2019, para. 2). He continued:

There's a dirty secret about such reporting in the Valley: This is not done. Most established media would rather avoid doing real restaurant reviews, let alone publish these types of records. A fear of a backlash is what silences many media members from reporting thoroughly on business interests throughout the Valley. Yet, it's that fear that has contributed to the erosion of public confidence in the media. (Sweetwood, 2019, para. 3)

Sweetwood's vision emphasizes journalism as a community service and positions journalists as heralds of accountability. Indeed, in addressing the information gap left by *The Vindicator*, media professionals emphasized their organizations' roles in filling the watchdog role. However, the loss of *The Vindicator* as the alpha watchdog for print journalism illuminates the smorgasbord of choices in the information landscape. Consumers can now find more local news in more sources, while at the same time, those sources are still in the process of differentiating themselves from one another.

Opportunity and Differentiation (or, From "Happy Meal" to "Lanes")

The information gap left by *The Vindicator* created opportunities for new and existing media to reappraise their provision of local news. Describing consumers' preferences for the presentation of information as more "a la carte" than [McDonald's] Happy Meal, *Mahoning Matters* editor Mark Sweetwood said:

The Vindicator was kind of the Happy Meal of journalism. And now if you look at it, the way it works now, everything is more a la carte. That's really the marketplace that's driven by millennials, younger readers. It's going to be more people are going to pick and choose. They're not going to stay at your website all day, they're not going to pick only you. They want more choices. (personal communication, October 7, 2019)

At the same meeting, the *Business Journal's* representative used the analogy of "lanes":

And what's next for us is we're going to stay in our lane. We're going to keep telling the stories about economic development, about growth in the region. And keep listening . . . to our audience and tell the stories that we think our neighbors want to hear. (personal observation, October 7, 2019)

However, media professionals remained uncertain of the parameters of each lane. Many saw opportunities to expand print or broadcast journalism, increase website content, or change the mix of what they cover. As one editor stated, "There's nothing better than uncertainty, because you jump in and make it happen . . . If you see or sense uncertainty, that's actually good, because it means there's an opportunity" (personal communication, October 16, 2019).

Opportunities were also framed differently by different professionals. At one end of the continuum, the *Tribune Chronicle* remains committed to the traditional model of daily print journalism. The owners of the newspaper saw the opportunity to expand their readership to Mahoning County by providing another edition. They are doing this with an expanded but combined staff of journalists for both papers, which means they have employed a staff of approximately 30 journalists to cover both papers. The publisher sees this as more efficient than having a staff of that size for each paper. His view is that one reporter can cover the same story for two papers (observation, October 7, 2019).

Regarding what readers in the two counties want to see, however, participants said readers in Youngstown do not want their headlines to be about Warren, and vice versa. One participant stated, "There's always been a bit of a rub between the two counties" (personal communication, October 15, 2019). For Mahoning County readers of the new *Vindicator* edition, time will tell whether the content is sufficiently local, or "Youngstown" enough.

At the other end of the continuum, another media professional who saw opportunity in the information gap left by *The Vindicator* is its former managing editor. In transitioning to *Mahoning Matters*, he saw the opportunity to create a new model for local journalism in a new "lane": "The lane that we saw, in talking to people at these meetings, was that people had a zeal for news that was deep, they wanted deeper reporting. They wanted it unbiased, they wanted it apolitical" (personal communication, October 11, 2019).

To what extent each of the media organizations differentiates from the others will become more evident with time. Among the factors affecting differentiation are the resilience and adaptability of local media professionals.

Resilience and Adaptability

For the media professionals in this study, a key task in managing uncertainty in the community has been to reassert the professional role of journalists and the essential place of journalism in community members' lives. However, media professionals also experience uncertainty about their careers. Two qualities impact how they manage uncertainty: resilience and adaptability. Experienced media professionals that have remained in the field often demonstrate resilience, "the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties," as well as adaptability, "the quality of being able to adjust to new conditions" (Lexico, 2019a, para. 1; 2019b, para. 1). As one participant stated about a nearly 40-year career, "I've had to . . . find ways of reinventing myself. So to me, this is just an evolution" (personal communication, October 11, 2019). In contrast, several *Vindy* journalists retired after the closure or changed careers.

Given the changes in journalism in the last 30 years, other experienced media professionals demonstrate resilience but may express less willingness to adapt, particularly with regard to how they view changing media models. For example, consumer demand for online content has increased, but not all media professionals in the area see the need to allocate resources to online content. As another professional with 40 years of experience stated, "Our online presence has always been measured, because we can't afford it." The journalists at that organization "just have to use the content that they have" because "websites do not generate revenue" (personal communication, October 15, 2019).

In contrast, more adaptive professionals perceive changes in the media environment differently. Their willingness to adapt is evidenced by their willingness to embrace the full range of digital tools to maximize the reach and influence of their online content. For example, one participant believes part of his publication's role is to educate users through content marketing: "Content marketing and media go hand in hand. Because, you know, advertising is out, straight promotion is out. Education is in because of the world of search we live in" (personal communication, October 16, 2019). This participant and others recognize the importance of digital content and analysis to the adaptability of their organizations, which is ultimately related to their long-term sustainability.

Sustainability

The final theme that emerged from analysis of the data concerned how media professionals envision sustainable local journalism. Since 2004, one in five newspapers in the United States has closed, most of which were weekly papers (Takenaga, 2019). Still others have smaller staffs or lack resources to cover their communities sufficiently. Considering the issue of their organizations' sustainability, participants mentioned two areas of importance: mode of content delivery and financial viability.

Participants who linked the sustainability of local news coverage to a specific mode of delivery perceived the role of online content differently, as indicated by the participant who remains committed to the traditional print mode of delivery with fewer resources allocated to the publication's website. This contrasts with those who have allocated additional resources to their websites (content, staff, or both) and those who are digital-only content providers. For example, producers for both main television stations stated they were revamping their websites and adding content to maintain their stations' relevance as sources of

local news, which they will achieve through both the traditional mode of delivery (broadcast television) and digital platforms (personal observation, October 7, 2019).

The least committed to traditional delivery vehicles were those participants whose organizations placed high priority on delivering online content. One of them stated, "We're platform agnostic," and that publication provides content via a proprietary platform as well as on several social media platforms (personal communication, October 16, 2019). Consumers receive daily email updates with links to the content. Another participant framed the issue of delivery as follows:

The product is the content, the news, the advertising, the obits, you know, that's the content. So we are content providers. We can choose to put that content in paper form, we can choose to put that content in digital form, but we're delivering content. (personal communication, October 11, 2019)

Like the other publication, the participant's medium provides consumers with daily email updates and promotes content on several social media platforms.

Participants also linked financial viability to sustainability. Two participants emphasized maintaining low overhead with smaller staffs, and one noted that operational costs are lower without paying for office space. Several participants expressed concern about the long-term financial viability of delivering online content and may implement paywalls for content that is currently free. Three are considering continuing some free content with subscription for full access, and one anticipates asking for donations. Time will tell if these models of local journalism are sustainable.

Discussion and Conclusion

The potential significance of this case study is threefold. First, as an explanatory case study of the loss to one city and surrounding area of its only daily print newspaper, the study provides a richly detailed description of events for the people of that community. Six themes emerged in the analysis of how media professionals in Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley are managing uncertainty: loss and grief, community needs and identity, watchdogging and accountability, opportunity and differentiation, resilience and adaptability, and sustainability. Additional research may determine whether the same themes emerge in other geographic areas at risk of becoming news deserts. For Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley, these events are part of the history and identity of the community.

Second, this case study adds to Bernard Berelson's (1949) and Clyde Bentley's (2001) studies of what missing the newspaper really means to a community. Studying different communities at separate times, both scholars noted that "missing the newspaper" is not merely a statement about the physical loss, but of psychological and social trauma (Bentley, 2001, p. 2). Clearly, the media professionals in Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley see the closure of *The Vindicator* as a loss to the community. The 150-year-old newspaper is gone, and time will tell whether its replacement by the *Tribune Chronicle* edition is merely a ghost. The decline in *Vindicator* subscriptions over time indicates changes in media use in the community. However, regardless of subscriptions, the media professionals in this study described community ties to the

symbolic meaning and institutional role of the newspaper (Lowrey, Brozana, & Mackay, 2008). The sense of loss and grief they experienced was accompanied by great uncertainty. This uncertainty, in turn, created opportunities for media professionals to reassert the importance of local journalism to the community, challenged their resilience and adaptability, and hastened the quest to establish new models of sustainable local journalism.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the findings of this study highlight the importance of local media professionals' community ties when faced with an uncertain media landscape and the precarity of their own positions. The ties between local media professionals and the community, as well as among the media professionals themselves, provided the basis for negotiating the adjustment to a changed media landscape. In particular, their ties facilitated the reduction of their own precarity. Previous research indicates that newspapers contribute to the maintenance of community stability and adjustment to change (Hindman, 1996). Additional research is needed to ascertain whether such community ties are unique to Youngstown or are as evident—and potentially as stabilizing—in other communities. Future research is also needed to see if the actions taken by media professionals in Youngstown have, in fact, secured the future of local journalism. The insights gleaned from this case may be transferable to other situations and experiences in which media professionals navigate uncertainty. These insights, in turn, may assist in securing the future of sustainable local journalism and, by extension, the civic engagement necessary to sustain democracy.

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