Small Town Happenings: Local News Values and the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Local Newspapers

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Small Town Happenings:

Local News Values and the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Local Newspapers

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies from William & Mary

by

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If you take anything away from this thesis, please support local journalism!
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Introduction

As a little girl growing up in a small county, there are few experiences more exciting than seeing your name and picture in your local newspaper. My childhood best friend keeps a newspaper clipping of *The Clarke Times-Courier* featuring a grainy photo of my elementary school self and my mom crossing an intersection on Walk to School Day. In October 2005, we had no idea that our small, rural county’s one local newspaper would go out of business, like countless other small newspapers across the United States, just under four years later.

According to a 2009 column in *The Washington Post, The Clarke Times-Courier* “became Virginia's first paid circulation newspaper to die in the epidemic of closings, layoffs and cutbacks that are part of the dismantling of the American news infrastructure” (Fisher 2009). The newspaper was a staple of Clarke County, Virginia—an approximately 14,000-person rural community of the Shenandoah Valley—since 1869. In its 140-year history, *The Clarke Times-Courier* only had ten publishers. In 1997, Arthur Arundel—a Harvard graduate, Marine Corps officer, and the “son of multimillionaire Pepsi-Cola bottling magnate”—purchased the newspaper to be included in his Times Community media chain (Shapiro 2011). Arthur Arundel transferred ownership to his son, Peter Arundel, just a few years later. At its peak, Times Community (later re-named Virginia News Group) owned seventeen weekly newspapers around the northern Virginia area—including the *Loudoun Times-Mirror* in Clarke’s neighboring county. Faced with diminished advertisement revenue spurred by the beginnings of the Great Recession and the internet’s increasing popularity, Arundel sold the *Clarke Times-Courier* to Thomas T. Byrd in 2008. Byrd, a member of Clarke County’s (and, historically, Virginia’s) political and economic familial powerhouse, owned Winchester Evening Star Inc. which included Clarke’s neighboring county’s newspaper the *Winchester Star* (Burton 2009, A1).
Unlike Winchester’s paper, which is still in business, Byrd was unable to keep Clarke’s paper alive. On May 28, 2009, the *Clarke Times-Courier* printed its last edition.¹ Then, in 2018, the Byrd and Arundel families sold the *Winchester Star* and the seventeen papers owned by the Virginia News Group to Ogden Newspapers—the sixth largest newspaper group in the United States which owns 84 papers across 16 states (*Abernathy 2020, 35*). The owner of the newspaper group, Robert Nutting, also owns two resorts in Pennsylvania and is the majority owner of the Pittsburgh Pirates baseball team (*Schneider 2018*). The era of local family-based ownership of northern Virginia’s newspapers came to a grinding halt.

This one case study represents many of the problems facing newspapers all across the United States: economic setbacks due to the Great Recession, the rise of the internet, dwindling print advertisement revenue, and consolidation of newspapers into larger groups with profit-driven business models. Between 2004 and 2019, over 2,300 newspapers—approximately a fourth of the United States’ newspapers—ceased operations due largely to financial strain and decreased circulation (*Abernathy 2020, 11*). In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic took a further toll on newspapers as numerous businesses ceased their operations or cut back on their advertising budgets. Among the six largest newspaper companies in the country (Gannet, New York Times, Tribune, McClatchy, Lee, and Belo), advertisement revenue “fell by 42% in the second quarter of 2020 when compared with the second quarter of 2019” (*Barthel et. al. 2020*). This trend applied to local newspapers as well.

As state-wide Coronavirus restrictions led to a widespread cancellation of events and the closure of numerous local businesses, local newspapers saw their advertisement revenue dry up

¹ *See Image 1* in the Appendix for the front page of *The Clarke Courier’s* final issue.
even further. To assist local newspapers through the financial strain of the pandemic, Ohio representative Tim Ryan introduced the Protect Local Media act to the House of Representatives. If approved, the bill would

(1) [sic] expand the payroll protection program to newspaper, radio, and Internet publishing businesses with not more than 500 employees; (2) [sic] allow a payroll tax credit for 30% of first-year newsroom wages paid by a local media company; and (3) [sic] treat the publication (including electronic publication) of written news articles by an independent or community-based publication as a tax-exempt purpose (To protect local media, and for other purposes, 2020).

Despite the continuing need for financial assistance to local newspapers, there has not been any activity on the bill since May 15, 2020. Perhaps, like 71% of Americans, Congress members “think…local news outlets are doing very or somewhat well financially” (Pew Research Center 2019). And perhaps that disconnect comes from the fact that more Americans are consuming the rumor mill of social media and regional and national news over local news.

Even if most Americans are unaware of it, there is ample research showing the decline of newspapers in the United States. However, there is far less research showing how the coverage of local news publications in small communities differs from regional and national newspapers. Local publications in small counties undergo unique struggles because of the small sizes of their staffs, their commitment to community advertising, and the unique informational needs of the communities they serve. It is important to study the people that local newspapers directly affect including the editors and publishers of small county news publications and the consumers of the publications. To achieve this, I will interview the editors of small counties’ news publications and analyze the topics they cover in their newspapers. Additionally, I will determine how the
COVID-19 pandemic has affected local newspapers. Through this overview, I hope to highlight the importance of local journalism, especially during times of uncertainty.

First, using a news values model from Harcup and O’Neill (2017), I explore what types of topics are most frequently covered by local publications in four small counties across the United States. These are some of the research questions I focus my studies upon: Are the news publications’ articles localizing state, national, and international issues, or are they more focused on community-specific news? How much or little did 2020’s most popular topics—COVID-19, Black Lives Matter, and the 2020 election—influence the news cycles of local newspapers? How do the editors determine what articles to include in their papers? How much or little did the local news publications’ coverage overlap with what is shared on the local social media pages? Are Facebook community pages sharing crowd-sourced information adequate replacements for local news publications? How effective are the local publications and social media pages in encouraging civil commentary on local news?

I also focused upon the audiences of local print and online news publications. My research questions for this component are as follows: What do local news publications offer that social media and larger publications, such as The Washington Post, The New York Times, The Cap Times, Buffalo News, etc., do not? What demographics are the local print publications and their online counterparts serving in terms of the type of topics and people covered? Who are the people who run and/or write for local news publications? Do they believe that their news publications accurately reflect and serve the individuals in their communities?

Through a news values analysis of local newspapers in small counties in Virginia, Vermont, Arizona, and Mississippi and interviews with the local newspapers’ publishers, I answer these questions and more.
Literature Review

Evolving News Values

In journalism schools across the United States and in many western countries, journalism students are taught about news values. News values can apply to all forms of media including broadcast television, radio, online publications, and print newspapers. As defined by media scholar Andrew Boyd, news values are “criteria that influence the selection and presentation of events as published news” (Boyd 1994).

In the history of the term “news values,” Galtung and Ruge’s widely cited and reviewed article, “The Structure of Foreign News,” is considered to be the genesis. Their article outlines twelve factors that influence how the Norwegian news media chooses foreign events to become news. These news factors, later re-termed news values, became the basis of media scholarship for analyzing news media’s selection process behind the “newsworthiness” of events. In 2001, Harcup and O’Neill tested Galtung and Ruge’s twelve news values on a content analysis of three British newspapers. From this analysis, they created a new set of ten news values that reflected the late 1990s British media’s coverage of events. They “found that news stories must generally satisfy one or more of [their proposed news values] to be selected” (Harcup and O’Neill 2001, 278-279). As Harcup and O’Neill completed this study before the widespread use of the internet, they updated their set of contemporary news values in 2017 to account for the internet’s influence on the media. This article determines the contemporary news values are: exclusivity, bad news, conflict, surprise, audio-visuals, shareability, entertainment, drama, follow-up, the

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2 Galtung and Ruge’s 12 news factors are: frequency, threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite people, reference to persons, and reference to something negative (Galtung and Ruge 1965, 65-71).
power elite, relevance, magnitude, celebrity, good news, and news organization’s agenda (Harcup and O’Neill 2017, 1482).

Of course, Harcup and O’Neill are not the only media scholars who have devised a set of common news values for foreign news reporting. As they explain, media “scholars have taken different approaches to the theorization and study of news values, sometimes focusing on the apparent newsworthiness of an event or actor to uncover why a story has been selected. [The scholars may also consider] the organizational, cultural, and economic factors that…influence news selection” (Harcup and O’Neill 2017, 1472). Though Harcup and O’Neill’s 2017 news values are intended to be applied to national newspapers covering foreign news, theoretically, many of their values also apply to news stories on a smaller scale. For community newspapers, the “power elite” might instead refer to school board members or local government members and “celebrity” status given to well-known local residents.

In their 1999 article, Pamela E. Oliver and Daniel J. Myers analyze the selection of local news events in local newspapers. They focus on the coverage and framing of public events such as local business promotional events, athletic and entertainment events, parades, marches, pep rallies, and protests within two different newspapers in Madison, Wisconsin: the Wisconsin State Journal and The Capital Times. According to them, there are three main factors that influence more localized news’ coverage of events: the predispositions of news organizations and reporters, news routines (such as the constraints of deadlines or inability for reporters to attend spontaneous events), and news values. They argue that news values “generally include the prominence or importance of the issue including the number of people affected and the magnitude of the effect; human interest and human drama; conflict or controversy; the unusual; timeliness; and proximity, with a preference for local events over distant ones” (Oliver and
Myers 1999, 46). However, given the publishing date of the article, it assumes that daily newspapers are still being distributed. Even more significantly, it assumes that the events are covered by two well-stocked staffs of reporters distributed between two competing print newspapers in one city. It only takes a quick Google search to realize that the business and distribution model for the two newspapers used for their analysis has changed exponentially since the article was published.

One of the newspapers featured in their study, The Capital Times, could not endure the financial fallout of the Great Recession on its own. The Capital Times was a radical, progressive newspaper founded by William T. Evjue in 1917. It a long history of reporting on hard-hitting stories such as those in opposition of the “Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, U.S. Sen. Joe McCarthy of ‘Red scare’ infamy in the 1950s, and the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 70s” (The Cap Times 2020). The newspaper was also one of the earliest examples of newspaper consolidation. According to an article by The Cap Times, “In 1948, Evjue reached an agreement with Lee Enterprises, the owners of the Wisconsin State Journal, to form a new corporation that was then named Madison Newspapers Inc. Although the agreement combined the advertising, circulation and production departments of the newspapers, it ensured two completely independent newsrooms” (The Cap Times 2008). The Capital Times released its editions six days a week in the afternoon while the Wisconsin State Journal took over the morning and Sunday editions. Though this model worked for a while, the recession in 2008 changed that. The Capital Times traded its daily print publications for a weekly edition, merged with the Wisconsin State Journal, and switched over to a mostly online format. Today, its online articles and e-editions can be found alongside articles from the Wisconsin State Journal on Madison.com.
Despite the merge with the *Wisconsin State Journal*, *The Capital Times* (now titled *The Cap Times*) is still able to cover a wide range of issues under its new digital format. However, a city of 250,000 with the option of two newspapers is far different than a small county with under 20,000 residents and one local newspaper. Similar to *The Cap Times*, the distribution and business models of local newspapers have changed drastically since the dawn of the internet age, the Great Recession of 2008-2009, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, much of the media scholarship pre-dating the early 2000s, including the discussion of news values, increasingly reflects an era of pre-internet media history to which we will never return. Two modern problems undermine the relevance of news values for local community newspapers: the ability for the paper to stay financially afloat and the availability of a staff of two to five reporters.

**Why is Local Journalism Suffering?**

Penelope Muse Abernathy, the current Knight Chair in Journalism and Digital Media Economics at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s Hussman School of Journalism and Media, is one of the leading scholars in analyzing the decline of local news. Her research focuses on news deserts and ghost newspapers throughout the United States. As defined by UNC’s Hussman School of Journalism and Media, a news desert is “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” (2019). Additionally, Abernathy defines ghost newspapers as “mere shells of their former selves, with greatly diminished newsrooms and readership” (2020, 21). For many small counties, ghost newspapers and news deserts are increasingly becoming the norm. The evidence is visible on Abernathy’s website. Her interactive
map, titled “Do You Live in a News Desert,” is captioned “In the U.S. 200 counties do not have a local newspaper. Half of all counties – 1,540 – have only one newspaper, usually a weekly” (2021). Many journalists are experiencing this phenomenon first-hand.

Margaret Sullivan—former public editor of The New York Times and current media columnist of the Washington Post—also writes about news deserts and ghost newspapers. She incorporates her first-hand experiences of the decline of print newspapers during her reign as the editor of the Buffalo News during the 2008 recession. She remarks that in order to account for the decreased print advertisements and circulation, her paper had to cut around fifty staffers from her original 200-person newsroom. Additionally, she describes case studies from newspapers all across the United States that are using innovative methods to keep their local news alive. For example, in Little Rock, Arkansas, the publisher and owner of the Arkansas Democratic-Gazette gave away $12 million worth of free iPads to subscribers to assist in the print to digital newspaper transition (Sullivan 2020, 62). Additionally, East Lansing, Michigan’s citizen-generated newspaper, East Lansing Info, is pursuing the non-profit route. For $100,000 dollars a year, the coordinator of the project (who is a bioethicist at Michigan State University and Northwestern University) is able to pay a brigade of local volunteer, amateur journalists around $50 per article to report on East Lansing’s government and community happenings (56-59).

Additionally, Dan Kennedy—a journalist and assistant professor of journalism at Northeastern University—focuses his book on another nonprofit local news organization. He argues, “under some circumstances [the non-profit route] has emerged as a more reliable method of funding journalism than depending on the advertising priorities of commercial interests” (Kennedy 2012, 11). He writes about the rebirth of journalism in a post-newspaper age, specifically through New Haven, Connecticut’s online community-based news source New
*Haven Independent*. Its editor, Paul Bass, founded the news source in 2005. *New Haven Independent* is a non-profit funded entirely through “local and national foundation grants, corporate sponsorships, and reader donations” (10). The six-person staff works out of a tiny office rented from the local ethnic newspaper *La Voz Hispana de Connecticut*. By sharing the space, keeping the news entirely online, and even selling one of the staff member’s novels, *New Haven Independent* was able to keep rent low, avoid print and distribution costs, and generate enough income to weather the Great Recession—a feat that many for-profit newspaper models could not replicate.

According to Abernathy, Sullivan, Kennedy, and numerous other media scholars and journalists, there are three major forces that led to the decline of newspapers in the United States: the rise of the internet, the Great Recession, and the profit-driven ownership of newspapers.

*The Rise of the Internet*

When envisioning a newspaper, many think of the traditional broadsheet, black ink, thin paged medium with articles arranged under different sections. According to University of North Florida’s Thomas G. Carpenter library, the typical sections of a newspaper include:

- national/international news;
- local news;
- sports;
- entertainment/amusements;
- classified advertisements;
- and neighborhood news. Editorials usually appear in the first section of the paper, although some newspapers have a separate section devoted just to insights and opinion (UNF 2020).
These sections, as well as those for weather, obituaries, local events and services, business advertising, comics, and puzzles, were once how the public stayed entertained and informed on their communities and the world. Then, came the internet.

It is no secret that the internet dramatically altered how the public receives information. As a byproduct of the internet’s ever-increasing popularity and effectiveness, the internet undermined the role of traditional newspapers. As Dan Kennedy writes, the internet demoted the traditional newspaper into “an artifact of the industrial age, destined to fragment into dozens of online niche services” (Kennedy 2012, 6). Websites like Craigslist and eBay took the place of the classifieds section, offering updates on the latest job offerings, services, and buying/selling opportunities (Sullivan 2020, 37). The public can access up-to-the-minute weather updates in seconds through cell phones’ weather applications. Facebook users can share the news of a beloved family member’s passing to an exclusive community of the user’s ‘friends’ through a post. Local police departments can use their Twitter feeds as a way to disseminate short, up-to-the-minute updates on evolving situations such as crimes and car accidents. The internet’s wealth of services is rendering many of the newspaper’s traditional sections obsolete.

With so much instantaneous—and free—information available on the internet, it does not make sense for many to pay for and read old news in print papers a day or week after it occurred. For-profit newspapers often found they could not make up for lost subscribers on an online news platform; it is difficult to convince readers to pay for online subscriptions without the materiality of a paper. As a result, in the early 2000s newspapers started to see their circulations decline and advertisers back out. For many newspapers across the United States, their business models relied on consumer subscriptions as well as the steady income of print advertising. Historically, there were three days that financed print newspapers. Sunday newspapers featured classified
advertisements and coupons by retailers. The Wednesday or Thursday editions printed local grocery store advertisements. Finally, Friday newspapers contained the weekend advertisements for movies, events, and other forms of entertainment (Abernathy 2020, 29). Around the same time as media consumers’ subscription cancellations, businesses began to see the potential of digital advertising. Not only could the internet reach a wider audience, businesses could target advertisements to specific demographics that were more likely to purchase their products and/or services. Even the newspapers that tried to make the digital transition and incorporate advertisements into their websites or social media platforms saw technology companies like Google and Facebook take an eighty-five percent cut of the revenue (Abernathy 2020, 59).

Between 2005 and 2009, digital advertising on newspaper websites grew by $716 million nationally, but during that same time newspapers lost $22.6 billion in print advertising (Kennedy 2012, 69). In a dwindling print advertisement landscape and even more tumultuous digital one, the Great Recession drove a final nail in the coffin for many newspapers.

The Great Recession and the COVID-19 Pandemic

The financial fallout of the 2008 to 2009 Great Recession forced thousands of newspapers and other media organizations to lay off staff, consolidate with other media groups, or even close their doors. According to an analysis of the Bureau of Labor Statistics data by the Pew Research Center, “the number of newspaper newsroom employees dropped by 51% between 2008 and 2019, from about 71,000 workers to 35,000” (Grieco 2020). Less staff often meant less coverage for local communities—especially for the arts and culture scene—and meant that one reporter would now have to cover what were once the beats of one to three other reporters. As Sullivan describes, “The Washington bureau [of Buffalo News], which for years
had two full-time reporters, a year-round intern, and an oversized office in the National Press Building, was eventually pared down to one reporter who worked from his home” (Sullivan 2020, 34). As a reminder, these cut-backs were for a regional daily serving a city of roughly 260,000 in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau). And when lay-offs weren’t enough, numerous papers faced closure.

Between 2004 and the beginning of 2020, the United States lost 2,100, or over a quarter, of its newspapers (Abernathy 2020, 9). Of course, this analysis does not account for the current COVID-19 pandemic—yet another crippling blow to the news landscape. Poynter is keeping a running tab on the impact of the pandemic on local newspapers. Between April 2020 and April 16, 2021, over 60 newspapers across the country have closed or merged, with another eight that temporarily closed during April and May of 2020 (Poynter 2021).

Profit-Driven Mega Ownership

Yet another factor in the wake of the Great Recession was the consolidation of ownership of local newspapers. Increasingly, “diversified, highly leveraged investment entities” were buying out family-owned media businesses in order to keep local papers financially afloat (Abernathy 2020, 31). As Abernathy describes:

In the latter years of the 20th century the large publicly traded firms – including Gannett, Knight Ridder, Lee Enterprises, and Pulitzer – supplanted the large privately held chains, using the money they raised by issuing stock to become aggressive buyers of other newspapers. In the wake of the 2008 recession, the publicly traded firms were supplanted by the private equity and hedge owners, who purchased hundreds of papers in bankruptcy
proceedings for bargain prices – two to five times annual earnings compared with 13 times earnings in 2007 (Abernathy 2020, 34).

Since 2008, the media landscape has consolidated even more. It is now estimated that “the three largest newspaper chains—Gannet/Gatehouse, Tribune/Digital First, and Lee/BH Media—own fifteen percent of all newspapers [in the United States] (990)…[whereas] the next seven largest chains–4 through 10–own a total of only 600 newspapers” (Abernathy 2020, 34). Since these corporate owners are so far removed from the communities their local newspapers serve, it is hard to believe that owners can invest the same energy into the newspapers serving over 200,000 than those serving small communities of under 20,000.

Why are local papers important?

The importance of local newspapers is even discussed in primetime sitcom television. In The Middle, the fictional small town of Orson, Indiana has a local print newspaper. When the main characters of the show question the importance of the newspaper, the newspaper’s editor, played by actor Ed Asner, refutes their claims in a heated speech. Brandishing his newspaper, he points to a front-page article about a man who recently died planting tomatoes but was once a World War II veteran who stormed the beaches of Normandy. In Asner’s speech he says, “No one’s gonna honor Jasper ‘cause CNN isn’t coming to Orson. No, no, no, no. And you two don’t seem to think it’s important that this ‘silly, little local newspaper’ gets delivered” (The Middle 2012, “The Paper Route”). This quote is a testament to the community-building benefits of a local newspaper and the hyper-local information it can provide that may otherwise be overlooked by larger media groups.
Highlighting the lives and accomplishments of local people is one way local newspapers can strengthen a community. Plus, it often comes off as more authoritative and less boastful than a social media post. But, as Abernathy writes, local newspapers also have more tangible effects on the communities they serve.

When a community loses its newspaper, coverage of routine local government meetings almost always declines. Without a professional journalist covering those meetings, transparency and government efficiency also decline. Residents in those communities frequently end up paying higher taxes as the cost of government borrowing rises (Abernathy 2020, 19).

Additionally, a community that is less informed on local issues, and therefore less engaged with their community, is less likely to run for local positions or vote in their local elections (Hendrickson 2019, 6). This lack of community engagement can also have national ramifications. According to a study, in communities that lost their local newspaper, split-ticket voting decreased by 1.9 percent—a small but meaningful margin that can make or break elections and add to political polarization (Darr et. al. 2019). National news is more likely to focus on partisan conflict than local news. And social media often lacks the objectivity and accuracy that professional reporting can provide. Even more significantly, social media users can consciously or unconsciously curate their social media feeds into bubbles of their own ideologies, feeding into confirmation bias (Stibel 2018). When people consume more of their news from national news outlets or social media, they are less likely to be exposed to and learn about different stances on political issues. This all goes to show that local newspapers are a vital component of grassroots democracy, and their loss should not go unnoticed.
In my overview, I further highlight the importance of local journalism by asking the editors of local news publications how they choose the stories they cover and their opinions on why local newspapers are worth saving. Additionally, I analyze the topics that local newspapers cover in four small counties across the United States.

**Backgrounds**

It is difficult to understand the ins and outs of a small community and gain its trust when you have never lived there or visited. Therefore, I chose my home county of Clarke County, Virginia as the foundational case study and point of comparison for the other three communities I would study. Using the interactive map “Do You Live in a News Desert” from Abernathy’s website, I randomly selected three other counties from different regions of the United States with only one newspaper (Abernathy 2021). I focused my search on choosing one county each from the North East, South, and Mid-West regions. The counties had to have a population of under 20,000 residents, and I had to be able to access at least some of the counties’ newspaper archives. After numerous rounds of trial and error to find counties that met all of these parameters, I selected Grand Isle County, Vermont; Humphreys County, Mississippi; and Greenlee County, Arizona along with my home of Clarke County, Virginia.

**Clarke County, Virginia**

Take a hike along the Appalachian Trail, and you might just find yourself passing through my home county. Situated between Loudoun County and Frederick County in north west Virginia and beneath Jefferson County, West Virginia are the 178 square miles of Clarke
County, Virginia. The county contains part of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the Shenandoah River, and the Shenandoah Valley. Lord Thomas Fairfax built his house in what is currently White Post, and owned the town of Berryville (then called Battletown) in the early 18th century as part of his 5-million-acre property. Battletown/Berryville was settled in 1775 and became incorporated in 1798. On March 8, 1836, it separated from the adjacent Frederick County to form Clarke County, named after the Revolutionary War officer and lifelong Virginian George Rogers Clark (though the additional “e” in the county’s name was a misspelling that stuck). Berryville became the county’s seat, and Clarke County included the incorporated town of Boyce, the unincorporated communities of White Post, Bluemont, Millwood, and Pine Grove, and numerous smaller communities—including the historically Black community of Browntown (Clarke County, Virginia).

Clarke County is an agricultural area with numerous acres of farmland and Berryville has a distinct small-town flair. From the many small businesses and restaurants on Berryville’s Main Street to the historic Rosemont Manor (1811), Burwell-Morgan Mill (1782), and Watermelon Park (known for its Bluegrass music festivals which once hosted Johnny Cash and Patsy Cline), Clarke County boasts a rich history and a friendly community. According to a 2019 estimate from the U.S. Census Bureau, the county contains 14,619 residents. The residents are predominantly white (85.3%) with Hispanic or Latino (6.4%), Black or African American (4.7%), and Asian (1.4%) making up the largest minority groups. The median household income is $77,936 as many commute to work in the more affluent areas of Northern Virginia and Washington, D.C. (U.S. Census Bureau 2019). The county is traditionally Republican leaning.

Grand Isle County, Vermont

20
Grand Isle County, Vermont has a unique geography as the majority of its 195 square miles are the waters of Lake Champlain. Four out of five of the county’s towns—Isle La Motte, North Hero (the county seat), Grand Isle, and South Hero—are located on islands. Therefore, the county is also known as the Lake Champlain Islands or, colloquially, as “The Islands.” The remaining town of Alburg is part of a peninsula that juts off of Quebec, Canada, and immediately west of all of the towns is the border of New York state. Isle La Motte contains a 1666 French garrison—the first evidence of European settlement in Vermont—the town of Grand Isle was chartered in 1779, and South Hero has one of the oldest existing log cabins in the U.S. (dating from 1783). Isle La Motte even contains what is considered to be the world’s oldest coral reef, Chazy Reef, which is said to be 480 million years old (Pioneer Press 2015). However, the county wasn’t charted until 1802 when it broke off from the adjacent counties of Franklin and Chittenden (Editors of the Encyclopaedia Brittanica 2013).

Today, Grand Isle County is a relaxing tourist retreat and beloved home to many of its residents. Outdoor water recreation, hiking, and biking are a few popular activities there. There are also numerous vineyards, farms, and locally-owned craft stores, restaurants, and bed and breakfast establishments. There are five K-8 schools in the county, but there are no high schools. The county typically serves under 1,000 students, and they are encouraged to attend private or public high schools in neighboring counties for either reduced tuition or free of charge (Hickok and Boardman). The population of Grand Isle County is 7,235, and its residents are predominantly white (92.3%). Mixed race (3.0%) and Hispanic or Latino (2.1%) are the largest minority groups. The median household income is $69,583 (U.S. Census Bureau 2019). Since 1988, the county has consistently voted for Democratic candidates.
Greenlee County, Arizona

In Greenlee County, Arizona, mining is time-honored tradition. Although originally inhabited by the Apache people, the area appealed to American settlers for its rich deposits of copper ore. By 1874 there was a population of just over 100 miners living there. Three mining companies established themselves in the area, and the population eventually grew to over 10,000 residents. After a long and arduous legal battle between the lawyer of the Shannon Copper Company and the Arizona state legislature, the formation of Greenlee County was officially approved on March 10, 1909 (Greenlee County). The county was named after settler Mason Greenlee and is made up of the towns of Duncan, Franklin, Morenci, York, and Clifton—the county seat—along with six unincorporated communities and four ghost towns. The county’s 1,848 square miles are located in south eastern Arizona, right on the border with New Mexico.

The county’s dynamic geography of mountains, valleys, deserts, and forests are particularly appealing to anyone who desires to adventure in the great outdoors. On the tourism side, the county leans on its history of being an ‘Old West’ community. Visitors can take tours of the 1881 Clifton Cliff Jail (built right into a cliff), the 1901 Clifton Railroad Station, and the Greenlee Historical Museum with Native American artifacts and a mining exhibit. For the locals, ranching and farming are common occupations in addition to copper mining—in fact, the Morenci Mine is the largest copper mine in North America. Greenlee County has a population of 9,498 and has seen its population grow in recent years. The two largest racial groups are Hispanic or Latino (47.7%) and White (45.5%) with a fairly significant number of Native Americans (4.1%). The median household income is $60,962 (U.S. Census Bureau 2019).
county was consistently Democratic from 1912 to 1996, but it has since been primarily Republican.

Humphreys County, Mississippi

Humphreys County, Mississippi is also known as The Catfish Capital of the World, and to prove it their county seat of Belzoni is home to the annual World Catfish Festival. Mississippi governor Cliff Finch granted Belzoni the nickname of “The Farm-Raised Catfish Capitol of the World” in 1976 when about 60% of the United States’ farm-raised catfish was cultivated in the town. But the county’s history spans back to its founding in 1918. Its 431 square miles is located in mid-western Mississippi and contains the Yazoo River and part of the Theodore Roosevelt National Wildlife Refuge (with cypress trees that are over 1,000 years old) (Broom 2018). The county was named after the Confederate general and former governor of Mississippi Benjamin Humphreys. In addition to Belzoni, the county includes the towns of Isola, Louise, and Silver City, plus five unincorporated communities. Over the years, multiple well-known artists, blues and jazz musicians (such as Denise LaSalle), and athletes emerged from Humphreys County.

The county does not have a large tourism industry. Instead, most of the jobs are found in the industrial and agricultural sectors. Though catfishing is still prevalent in the region, it is not nearly as large of an industry as it once was during the mid to late 20th century. As a result, what was once a booming population of 24,729 in 1930 has since dwindled to a population of 8,064 in 2019 (Mississippi Encyclopedia Staff 2018). Humphreys County is one of the 104 predominantly Black counties in the United States (Wikipedia contributors 2021). In 2019, 75.8% of the population identified as Black or African American. White (20.0%) and Hispanic or Latino (3.8%) are the largest minority groups. The county has a significant poverty rate of 37.0%, and
the median household income is $28,507 partially due to the county’s low cost of living (U.S. Census Bureau 2019). It has been consistently and heavily Democratic since 1972.

Method

To determine the editorial tendencies of the newspapers and the types of information they cover, I conducted a six-month data analysis of each of the four counties’ newspapers’ headlines between July 15, 2020 and January 15, 2021. The number of headlines I collected for each newspaper were determined by two factors: (1) the frequency of the newspaper (weekly versus monthly) and (2) their online accessibility. The Clarke Monthly and The Islander—serving Clarke County, Virginia and Grand Isle, Vermont—are both free news publications, and online versions of their full issues are available on Issuu or on their website. The Belzoni Banner and The Copper Era—serving Humphreys County, Mississippi and Greenlee County, Arizona—both require a monthly subscription to access the e-editions of their full publications. However, both of the latter papers do offer previews of the front pages of their publications. Every Wednesday, The Belzoni Banner uploads a picture of the front page of the week’s paper to its Facebook page. For The Copper Era, the front page of its newspapers can be viewed as a low-resolution image preview on the E-Editions section of their website.

Therefore, I collected 60 and 97 headlines of the front pages of The Belzoni Banner and The Copper Era’s weekly newspaper, respectively. I collected 82 headlines from the full, monthly issues of the Clarke Monthly and 636 headlines from the full, weekly issues of The Islander.
Once I collected the headlines from each newspaper, I categorized their content using Harcup and O’Neill’s contemporary news values: exclusivity, bad news, conflict/drama\(^3\), surprise, audio-visuals, entertainment, follow-up, the power elite, relevance, magnitude, celebrity, good news, and news organization’s agenda.\(^4\) This is how Harcup and O’Neill defines each of the news values (2016, 1482):

- **Exclusivity**: Stories generated by, or available first to, the news organization as a result of interviews, letters, investigations, surveys, polls, and so on.
- **Bad news**: Stories with particularly negative overtones such as death, injury, defeat and loss (of a job, for example).
- **Conflict**: Stories concerning conflict such as controversies, arguments, splits, strikes, fights, insurrections and warfare.
- **Surprise**: Stories that have an element of surprise, contrast and/or the unusual about them.
- **Audio-visuals**: Stories that have arresting photographs, video, audio and/or which can be illustrated with infographics.
- **Shareability**: Stories that are thought likely to generate sharing and comments via Facebook, Twitter and other forms of social media.
- **Entertainment**: Soft stories concerning sex, showbusiness, sport, lighter human interest, animals, or offering opportunities for humorous treatment, witty headlines or lists.

\(^3\) I combined the conflict and drama categories since it was difficult to distinguish between the two for local news coverage.

\(^4\) I omitted ‘shareability’ since I focused on printed articles that cannot be easily shared easily online.
- Drama: Stories concerning an unfolding drama such as escapes, accidents, searches, sieges, rescues, battles or court cases.
- Follow-up: Stories about subjects already in the news.
- The power elite: Stories concerning powerful individuals, organizations, institutions or corporations.
- Relevance: Stories about groups or nations perceived to be influential with, or culturally or historically familiar to, the audience.
- Magnitude: Stories perceived as sufficiently significant in the large numbers of people involved or in potential impact, or involving a degree of extreme behavior or extreme occurrence.
- Celebrity: Stories concerning people who are already famous.
- Good news: Stories with particularly positive overtones such as recoveries, breakthroughs, cures, wins and celebrations.
- News organization’s agenda: Stories that set or fit the news organization’s own agenda, whether ideological, commercial or as part of a specific campaign.

Even with the definitions of each news value that Harcup and O’Neill provide, the categorization of the articles is still fairly subjective and some articles could fit more than one of the news values. Additionally, when analyzing news headlines in 2020—a year riddled with the pandemic, election, and demonstrations for racial justice—many of the headlines addressed numerous interconnected topics. Therefore, headlines such as “Governor Scott announces $76 million for COVID-19 business grants” are confusing to categorize (Donoghue October 21, 2020, 1). Whereas grants are often viewed as good news, the grant is intended for businesses that were economically devastated due to the pandemic (bad news). At the same time, it could also be
categorized as exclusivity since the newspaper received the information from an exclusive announcement from Vermont’s governor. For this instance, I decided to classify the headline as good news since it focused on economic recovery and supporting businesses, but arguments could be made for classifying the headline under bad news or exclusivity instead.

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>O'Neill and Harcup's News Values</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
<th>Rank of Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exclusivity</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>32.93%</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad News</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.66%</td>
<td>6th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict / Drama</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surprise</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio-Visuals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.21%</td>
<td>8th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26.83%</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-Up</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.66%</td>
<td>6th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Elite</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.88%</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.21%</td>
<td>8th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.21%</td>
<td>8th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good News</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12.20%</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New's Organization's Agenda</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12.20%</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

82 articles

After Clarke County’s longtime newspaper, *The Clarke Courier*, ceased operations in 2009, the county went without a newspaper for the first time in 140 years. For three years, Clarke residents relied on the neighboring county’s newspaper, *The Winchester Star*, and the hearsay of in-person and Facebook gossip to keep up to date on local news. But as David Lillard, the future editor and publisher of *The Clarke Monthly* discovered, Clarke needed a local news publication. Lillard is a resident of Jefferson County, West Virginia and from 2007-2016 he was the editor and publisher of Jefferson County’s monthly magazine: *The Observer*. Friends came to him
expressing the need for a similar magazine in Clarke County. So, in October 2012, Lillard founded a Clarke County version of The Observer. When Lillard sold the Jefferson County magazine in July 2017, he retitled Clarke’s magazine to Clarke Monthly.

Clarke Monthly is a 16-page, tabloid news magazine with a circulation of 8,500—8,000 of which is mailed at no cost to Clarke County residents every mid-month. Local businesses purchase advertisement space to pay for the magazine’s upkeep, and residents of Clarke County contribute articles. Advertisement deadlines are the first of every month and articles are due in the second week of the month. Unlike daily or weekly newspapers, Clarke Monthly rarely covers local politics or crime and does not contain a classifieds section. Instead, its feature-length articles highlight the local businesses, events, wildlife, and community members that make up Clarke County. The Clarke Monthly contains around four recurring sections in every issue. The recurrence of these sections bolsters the frequency of three of Harcup and O’Neill’s news values: exclusivity, entertainment, and news organization’s agenda.

The third page of the publication usually contains a From the Editor section—an example of news organization’s agenda. This section’s headlines, such as “Shopping Locally is Even More Important Now” and “The Joe Biden I Know,” are written by the editor and publisher, David Lillard, and often reflect his own ideological views (Lillard November 2020, 3). Lillard wrote “The Joe Biden I Know” for the January 2021 issue, and the letter describes his personal encounters, as a former Delawarean, with Joe Biden. The letter shows support for Joe Biden as a person and barely references his politics (Lillard January 2021, 3). But, in a traditionally Republican-leaning county, Lillard said he received criticism for the piece not because of its partisanship, but because the piece wasn’t explicitly signed with Lillard’s name. Since the January issue, Lillard now features his name prominently at the end of the From the Editor
section. Also under news organization’s agenda is the “Around Clarke County” calendar of local events. Though the calendar does not reflect an ideological view, it does reflect the *Clarke Monthly*’s commercial goals of supporting its advertisers’ events and the *Clarke Monthly*’s mission to keep its readers informed on local events.

Entertainment is the second most frequent news value in the *Clarke Monthly*. This is due, in part, to one contributor who writes “As the Crow Flies”—a birdwatching and wildlife column complete with hand-drawn illustrations—in every issue. These stories are, as Harcup and O’Neill describes in their definition of entertainment, “soft news” that focuses on animals and “lighter human interest” (2016, 1482). Other headlines in the entertainment category are “Iconic Dinosaur Land represents six decades of childhood memories,” “Tales of grocery delivery during a pandemic,” and “In the kitchen: Chopping and slicing as meditation” (*August 2020*, 7; *Maynard 2020*, 10; and *Lillard 2021*, 14). I also categorized many of the articles referencing programs at the local arts center as entertainment. However, others could argue that, since they are stories that were exclusively given to the newspaper by the arts organization for promotion, they could fall into the category of exclusivity.

The most frequent news value is exclusivity: “stories generated by, or available first to, the news organization as a result of interviews, letters, investigations, surveys, polls, and so on” (Harcup and O’Neill 2016, 1482). Many of the short blurbs under the “Community News” section are exclusive updates from Clarke County’s local organizations and service departments. The section frequently announces position changes and press release-style updates from the local library system, fire department, health department, churches, and other community organizations. Many of the articles with exclusivity featured interviews with local business
owners. Additionally, many of the articles pertaining to COVID-19 school reopening plans, election updates, and community health updates fell under the exclusivity category.

As often as *The Clarke Monthly* featured articles on COVID-19 and local elections during the July 2020 to January 2021 period, the paper devoted a lot of its pages to nature, conservation, and history. Since Clarke County is a very agricultural area with many historical sites, it makes sense that the paper reflects the county’s interests. An article written by a guest contributor in the August 2020 issue about who built the stone fences of Clarke County—enslaved people who once lived on the county’s plantations—was one of the paper’s most cited articles (*Martin August 2020, 8*). In the September issue, a resident wrote a follow up response to the article claiming “there is evidence suggesting these enslaved people [who built the walls] were treated with respect in Clarke County” (*Snead September 2020, 11*). Then, in the October issue, there were two more follow ups from citizens in response to the September follow up: “Gone with the Wind history” and “No respect possible with slavery” (*McCall October 2020, 16; Russell October 2020, 16*). These follow ups show Clarke County residents’ engagement with the *Clarke Monthly* and some of the civil dialogues that the paper is able to facilitate—dialogues that often aren’t as civil on social media pages.

*Clarke County Facebook Groups*

In Clarke County’s Facebook community, there are three main pages that residents turn to for the latest news and gossip: Clarke County Community Happenings, ClarkE Land of the Free, and Clarke County, Virginia.
Clarke County Community Happenings is the most popular page with around 9,200 members. As it is a private group, users must be approved by the moderators before joining. The pages About tab, which can be publicly accessed, describes the page as:

[a] group for sharing local events and fun happenings within the borders of Clarke County, not other neighbor counties. This is a family-friendly group; keep it kind and clean (no profanity) and an enjoyable resource for our community.

This is not the place for you to voice your complaints against businesses and individuals, nor is it a gossip group. If you're incapable of responding to a viewpoint difference in a mature and civil manner, please do not request to join this group. This group is moderated to ensure the group remains friendly, helpful and a wonderful resource for the community members. Moderators have the subjective discretion to delete any post/comment without explanations, restrict members from commenting, turn off commenting and remove members from the group.

All members must read and follow the group rules found under the announcements and under the FILE section before participating in the group. If the event is not happening in Clarke County, do not post here, this group is specific to only CC events. Thank you and welcome! (Clarke County Community Happenings)

Usually around 30 posts are added to the page by Clarke County residents and those interested in reaching out to Clarke County residents every day. The posts generally include inquiries about road conditions, recommendations for services (such as babysitting, pet sitting, tutoring, real estate, etc.), suspicious happenings such as petty crime or odd sounds around the county, job openings, local business and event advertising, and even just publicly thanking local organizations, individuals, or businesses.
Though Clarke County Community Happenings’ moderators try their best to be fair, not all Clarke County residents are pleased with the moderators’ oversight. Thus, three Clarke residents started the offshoot page, ClarkE County Land of the Free, in February 2018. This private group has around 1,700 members and describes itself as “[a] place for Clarke residents and those with ties to Clarke to gather. A place between deleted posts and censorship and complete and utter chaos.”

Clarke County’s final major news-like Facebook page is Clarke County, Virginia. In contrast to the other pages, this group is public and has a following of around 7,000. The page is run by Clarke County’s government and serves as the official page for representing Clarke County on Facebook. The page is much more structured than Clarke’s community-run private groups as it sticks to a rough schedule of themed posts based on the day of the week. Mondays’ posts feature Pets of the Week—all adoptable through the Clarke County Animal Shelter. There are #TBT (Throw Back Thursday) posts with snippets of county history. Saturdays are reserved for local business spotlights. Sundays feature Virginia Department of Transportation updates pertaining to Clarke as well as “Coming Up in Clarke”—a schedule of local events for the upcoming week. More general announcements—such as Clarke County government updates, event announcements, or informal business advertisements—are posted on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

Interestingly enough, for Clarke County, it appears that its Facebook pages fill in some of the voids that the Clarke Monthly is not able to cover on a daily basis. That being said, the most popular Facebook page, Clarke County Community Happenings, is completely citizen-run and therefore may not always have the most accurate or objective information.
The Islander

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>O'Neill and Harcup's News Values</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
<th>Rank of Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exclusivity</td>
<td>147</td>
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<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad News</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>7.70%</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict / Drama</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4.87%</td>
<td>6th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surprise</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.47%</td>
<td>10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio-Visuals</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4.87%</td>
<td>6th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>16.82%</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-Up</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.26%</td>
<td>9th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Elite</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.14%</td>
<td>8th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.16%</td>
<td>11th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.16%</td>
<td>11th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good News</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>8.49%</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New's Organization's Agenda</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>28.93%</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

636 articles

The Islander is a free weekly newspaper distributed in and around Grand Isle County, Vermont. The newspaper was created in 1974, and the papers are printed in Montreal, Canada. Its four person staff consist of the publisher/editor, office manager, staff reporter, and photojournalist. The papers are generally 16-24 pages long and are published on Wednesdays. Deadlines for advertising, editorial submissions, announcements, news, and photos are Mondays at 10 a.m. The latest issues are delivered to houses in print and archives of their work from July 3, 2018 to present day can be accessed through their website. They also feature e-editions of fifteen of their papers from the 1970s.

The newspaper primarily focuses on news within Grand Isle County, but they also cover some news within their other distribution areas: Milton; Georgia; Swanton; Colchester; Rouses Point, NY; and Champlain, NY. The Islander contains many recurring sections located in different pages of the paper from week to week. Like many standard newspapers, The Islander contains classifieds, legal notices, letters to the editor, church services, obituaries, memorial
services, election updates, and construction updates. Since Grand Isle County has a relatively small school system, the paper also contains an “Academic Kudos” section which highlights the accomplishments of local K-12 and college students. I classified all of these aforementioned sections under the category of news organization’s agenda therefore making it the most frequent news value.

News on local elections, nominations, and resignations; the school system; local businesses and services; crime; arts/entertainment; and wildlife are common and often fall under Harcup and O’Neill’s category of exclusivity. Some examples of these headlines are “South Hero family sues state and town seeking tuition payment” and “Wood manufacturing shop, brewery proposed for South Hero” (Donoghue October 7, 2020, 1 and Donoghue August 19, 2020, 5). Given the majority of articles were collected within 2020, multiple news, announcements, and cancellations explicitly pertaining to COVID-19 were prevalent in 22 out of the 24 issues studied. Their one staff reporter writes the majority of these news articles. Though for election coverage, The Islander featured biographies of Vermont candidates written by reporters from The Stowe Reporter—an independent, 5,000 circulation weekly newspaper serving the town of Stowe (Vermont Community Newspaper Group). The paper is also part of the Vermont Community Newspaper Group—a Vermont-based newspaper group that publishes eight local news publications. Other announcements and events are submitted by local residents, businesses, and organizations. In particular, the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department submits many articles about hunting and fishing licenses, workshops, and safety tips. One example of this is the headline, “Muzzleloader antlerless deer permit application deadline, August 12” (Hall July 22, 2020, 15). Combining all of these articles together, exclusivity was the second most frequent news value in The Islander.
More unique to the paper are the pages entitled “Take A Break” and “A Little Something to Keep You Busy” which are pages filled with puzzles, trivia, horoscopes, and comic strips. The regularity of these sections—at least two in every issue—along with the articles promoting arts events in the county, such as “Art thrives on Isle La Motte” written by the Isle La Motte Preservation Trust, bolstered the entertainment category as the third most frequent news value (Fitch September 23, 2020, 9).

Another unique feature of the newspaper are the regular photography spreads of life around the islands submitted by residents and the staff photojournalist. “Only in the Islands” is a daily photo feature by their photojournalist which is shared to The Islander’s Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter pages. Merchandise and prints of the photojournalist’s work can be purchased through the Islander Boutique, and some of the photojournalist’s best pictures are featured within the newspaper. Therefore, the audio-visuals category for The Islander ranks higher than the other counties’ newspapers.
The Belzoni Banner
(front page headlines only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>O'Neill and Harcup's News Values</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
<th>Rank of Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exclusivity</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>50.52%</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad News</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.06%</td>
<td>7th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict / Drama</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.12%</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surprise</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.03%</td>
<td>9th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio-Visuals</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12.37%</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.06%</td>
<td>7th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-Up</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.12%</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Elite</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrity</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good News</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11.34%</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New's Organization's Agenda</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11.34%</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

97 articles

The Belzoni Banner is a six-to-eight-page weekly newspaper serving Humphreys County, Mississippi. Banner Printing Company, Inc.—owned by The Belzoni Banner’s editor and publisher Julian Toney III—prints and distributes its circulation of 950 to its subscribers every Wednesday. Unlike the Clarke Monthly and The Copper Era, The Belzoni Banner charges a yearly subscription of $25 - $35, depending on area code and whether or not the user wants access to e-editions of the paper. Because of the restricted access, I only analyzed the front-page headlines. An image of the first page of each newspaper is posted to their website and Facebook page on Tuesdays or Wednesdays.

For most newspapers, the front page contains the most important or latest news from the week. Therefore, I found that the majority of articles (51.58%) were under the news value of exclusivity. Especially around July 2020, COVID-19 and election updates dominated the front pages. Seventeen out of the twenty-seven issues analyzed from July 15, 2020 to January 15, 2021
contained one or more references to COVID-19 and/or local, state, and national elections. The front pages generally contain a blend of local, state, and national news. Of the 97 articles analyzed, 49 pertained to local issues, 36 to state issues, and 12 to national issues. As an example of this blend, the August 5, 2020 edition features the headlines “Voters choose Horton for Humphreys County Tax Assessor” (local), “State Health Officer issues immediate statewide isolation order” (state), “Do not plant mystery seeds from China” (national), and “Lady Rebs [local softball team] take 2nd” (local) (*The Belzoni Banner* August 5, 2020).

Audio-visuals was the second most frequent news value. Large pictures of the county’s local farms, the local high schools’ Homecomings and sports events, holiday greetings, and even snow were featured.

Surprisingly, in a year that seemed dominated by bad news across the world, good news was the third most frequent news value in *The Belzoni Banner*—tied with news organization’s agenda. Some examples of the good news headlines are “Catfish Institute names 2020 Catfish Farmers of the Year,” “Rice crop looks promising as harvest approaches,” and “Wicker [Mississippi senator] welcomes news of COVID-19 vaccines” (July 29, 2020, 1; Gregory August 11, 2020, 1; and December 2, 2020, 1).

There were two particularly interesting articles to analyze between September 30, 2020 and October 7, 2020 that pertained to the nomination of Amy Coney Barret to the Supreme Court of the United States. Typically, articles announcing national nominations would filter under the exclusivity news value. However, two of these articles seemed like examples of news organization’s agenda disguised as exclusivity. A headline from the September 30th edition reads “Judge Amy Coney Barret continues to win praise from all corners” and an October 7th headline says “Wicker: Amy Coney Barret is outstanding pick for Supreme Court” (*September 30, 2020,*
Both articles do not have author bylines and only compliment the Supreme Court nominee. One article opens with “President Trump’s nomination of Judge Amy Coney Barret to the Supreme Court is once again showing how the Trump Administration continues to keep its promises to the American people.” The article does not explain what ‘promises’ it is referring to. Later, the same article lists praise for the nominee “including [from] liberal members of the mainstream media.” The article concludes by saying, “Bottom line: By all accounts, Judge Amy Coney Barret is a widely respected legal scholar whose intellect, character, and qualification are beyond reproach” (September 30, 2020, 1). The phrasing of all of these quotes, the lack of author byline, and the omission of any dissenting opinions suggests that *The Belzoni Banner* reports with a conservative lean.

The newspaper also frequently features a “Pages from the Past” column along the left side of the front page. These contain short news updates that were featured in past editions of *The Belzoni Banner* anywhere from the 1960s through the 1990s. For example, the December 9, 2020 edition contains blurbs from 1968 (December 9, 2020, 1). It cites that 216 students from Millsaps College earned the Dean’s List for the fall semester, a student graduated with a bachelor’s degree from Odessa College, the 20th Century Club of Indianola hosted a fashion show at a local Baptist church, eight local students received high ratings at a music festival in Cleveland, a local young man was serving on the USS Ticonderoga, and a local journalism student became the president of the Mississippi Junior College Press Association. I did not include the Pages from the Past headlines in my analysis since they were not current news, but the section could fit under the entertainment news value.
The Copper Era

(front page headlines only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>O'Neill and Harcup's News Values</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
<th>Rank of Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exclusivity</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>65.00%</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad News</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict / Drama</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surprise</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.67%</td>
<td>7th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio-Visuals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.67%</td>
<td>7th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-Up</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Elite</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.33%</td>
<td>6th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrity</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good News</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New's Organization's Agenda</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.67%</td>
<td>7th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

60 articles

The Copper Era is a print and online news outlet that prints weekly newspapers and publishes daily online articles about Greenlee County, Arizona. Local advertisers and subscribers finance the paper. The subscription rates are $8.62 for a monthly digital pass (or $103.44 per year) and $31.50 for a combination of six months of print papers and online access. It has a circulation of 1,300 and is owned by Wick Communications—a “family-owned community media company with newspapers, websites, magazines, and specialty publications in 11 states” mostly around the northern mid-west region of the United States (Wick Communications). The Copper Era is operated by the same Managing Editor as the Eastern Arizona Courier which covers neighboring Graham County, Arizona. Both publications share an office in Safford—in Graham County—so The Copper Era’s reporters must drive thirty to forty-five miles away from their office to do on-the-ground reporting in Greenlee County.
After analyzing the front-page headlines of *The Copper Era* from July 15, 2020 to January 15, 2021, I found that exclusivity was the most frequent news value followed by entertainment and good news. Unlike *The Belzoni Banner*, almost all of *The Copper Era*’s front page headlines pertained to reporting on local issues. The coverage primarily focused on the latest updates and stories from local businesses, the school system, town council meetings, and local service departments which mostly fell under the exclusivity news value. One story on a local business, “Petrified dung to fire agates to amethysts, Duncan shop has it,” was the one article filed under the surprise news value (*The Copper Era* October 21, 2020). As expected, there were a number of COVID-19 related articles—fourteen to be exact—and local election coverage took up the front pages between October 14 and November 11, 2020. More unique to Greenlee County, there were also articles about the mines such as “Records show Morenci, Safford mines are mostly compliant with ADEQ rules” and “Morenci, Safford mines seeing a decrease in accidents” (*September 23, 2020 & October 7, 2020*).

On many front pages of its newspapers, *The Copper Era* likes to feature human interest stories on individuals from the county. For example, one headline is “A Duncan-area rancher takes water rights to YouTube” and another is “Morenci brothers bring Duncan bakery back to life” (*August 5, 2020 & January 6, 2021*). Some of the lighter human interest (or in some cases animal interest) stories such as “Meet Chase: GCSO’s drug-detecting dog,” “Serendipity brings backpacking chef to Clifton until Spring,” and a Thanksgiving article titled “We asked elementary students what they are thankful for this year” applied to the entertainment news value (*July 22, 2020; December 23, 2020; and November 25, 2020*). The frequency of these stories centered upon local citizens shows *The Copper Era*’s devotion to serving and highlighting the unique people who make up Greenlee County. It could be argued that some of these
entertainment stories could also fall under the category of good news. However, I chose to categorize good news as stories that benefitted multiple people in the community such as “PJ’s opens its doors: Other restaurants managing to survive as well” and “Light at the end of the tunnel; Vaccines start arriving” (August 12, 2020 and December 23, 2020).

Discussion

After codifying 875 article headlines from the four case study newspapers, I determined that exclusivity, news organization’s agenda, entertainment, audio-visuals, and good news were the most frequent of Harcup and O’Neill’s news values (2017). For my categorization of local newspapers’ headlines, many of the more mundane but important updates about local businesses, services, governance, and public health fell under the exclusivity category. But for national newspapers reporting on more shocking, larger scale stories about influential people and groups (such as those newspapers chosen for Harcup and O’Neill’s research), I imagine it would be easier to categorize stories under the celebrity, power elite, drama, and surprise news values. This suggests that the news values of local newspapers and national newspapers—as well as regional and metropolitan newspapers—are all slightly different, and there is a need for a new set of news values that reflects local newspapers.

To learn more about the news values of local newspapers and the impact of the pandemic upon their operations, I reached out to the editors of each of the publications I studied. I interviewed David Lillard, the publisher and editor of Clarke Monthly, Kim Smith, the Managing Editor of The Copper Era, and Tonya Poutry, the publisher and editor of The Islander. The
*Belzoni Banner* could not be reached for response. From these interviews and extra independent research, I discovered what determines the articles they write.

**Reporting and Representation**

In order for there to be news values in a local newspaper, there needs to be reporters to obtain and write the news. For all of the editors I interviewed, there was one frequently repeated phrase: “we are under staffed.” One of the biggest influences on the amount of news and what articles are included in local newspapers is the amount of, availability of, and experience of the newspapers’ reporters. As previously discussed, the financial fallout of the Great Recession and economic losses due to the rise of the internet forced many national, regional, and local newspapers to close, merge with other papers, or lay-off their staff. But Kim Smith, the Managing Editor of *The Copper Era*, adds another layer to this story. Smith said that from August 2020 to February 2021 the entire online and print newspaper was written by herself and one other full-time reporter, not because of lay-offs, but because she could not hire anyone to join their staff.

“I was turned down by a potential thirteen other candidates, and I think a lot of it had to do with COVID,” said Smith. “Our size paper tends to attract fresh college graduates, and these fresh college graduates did not want to get very far from their families during COVID because they didn’t know what was going to happen. It took a long time to convince [their latest reporter] to come on board. I feel very fortunate that he’s here now because it relieves a lot of pressure on myself and my full reporter.”
Since *The Copper Era* has such a small staff and the office they share with the *Eastern Arizona Courier* is around thirty to forty-five miles away from Greenlee County, Smith says she is not able to report on everything she would like. She is proud of her paper’s coverage of local human-interest stories and their recent initiatives to file records requests and report on harder news topics such as childhood sexual abuse and drought conditions in their county. Her inclinations to report on these topics undoubtedly comes from her 30+ year career as a reporter for nine different newspapers across Texas, Nevada, and Arizona. However, because of *The Copper Era*’s limited staff and time, Smith still feels that there are groups she is unable to cover to their fullest extent.

“I’m vastly understaffed so I’m sure there are plenty of stories we’re not getting to,” said Smith. “Part of our coverage area includes the San Carlos Apache Reservation so I’m sure there are plenty of stories there that could be had regarding our Native American community. We have a couple of copper mines in our area and we have a huge agricultural [scene]—tons of farmers and ranchers in the area—and we probably don’t do them justice either.”

Tonya Poutry, the publisher and editor of *The Islander*, faces similar concerns with the limited staffing and the difficulty of hiring. She said, “There is a shortage of reporters in the print industry. With a staff of three reporters, it is challenging each week to determine how much coverage we are able to offer due to funding and the time constraints of staff.”

Poutry explained that she was looking to hire a reporter for her paper in February 2021 and listed the position on Indeed.com. She received forty-seven applicants from all across the country, many she believes were interested in moving to a small, rural county in Vermont because of the state’s low COVID-19 rates. But none of these applicants had any relevant experience for the position. Though her current staff may be small, they boast a wealth of local
knowledge and journalism expertise. Her lead staff reporter is a journalism veteran with 45 years of experience, the majority of that time with dailies in the surrounding counties. Around Vermont, he’s affectionately referred to as “The Scoop.” Poutry herself started as a graphic designer at The Islander in 2001, and she learned about the importance of the newspaper’s transparency and accountability to her community along the way.

Because of their engagement and connection to the community, Poutry believes that The Islander serves and represents the demographics of Grand Isle County very well. She said, “some of our staff volunteers on local boards or organizations. Some are life-long Islanders, and all understand the challenges that small communities face. They all deal with the same issues that residents of our communities encounter.” She thinks that her newspaper covers municipal meetings, crimes, environmental issues, social features, and events most successfully. This regular coverage of local meetings is something that other smaller papers, such as Clarke Monthly, wish to emulate.

David Lillard, Clarke Monthly’s editor and publisher wishes he had the resources to hire a reporter to cover Clarke County’s government and Virginia’s state government. Since his paper is monthly, instead of weekly or daily, he views the Clarke Monthly’s articles as providing further context to issues rather than just straightforward informational updates. Additionally, since he and his associate publisher are the only staffers (who only work part-time) of the paper, he often relies on guest contributors from the community to write articles. Therefore, the community members have a more active role in deciding what stories and news values appear in the paper every month.

Lillard values local journalism and local ownership of newspapers because of its ability to hold itself more accountable to its readers. He said in his experience running local
newspapers, “you begin to see people as your neighbors. That includes your advertisers and
business owners and your readers. And while you sometimes disagree with them or they see that
they disagree with one another, more often than not, you feel a responsibility to elevate civil
dialogue rather than constant conflict.”

He hopes the *Clarke Monthly* can help facilitate more difficult, yet respectful,
discussions within Clarke County—something he finds that the community-run Facebook pages
often lack—and present a variety of voices of those in the community. He described, “in a purely
demographic sense, Clarke County has a blend of some fairly wealthy people, horse people. But
also, there's a really cool back-to-the-lander—we used to call hippie—crowd, so there's some
grunge and those people all co-exist pretty well.”

He also admitted that *Clarke Monthly* “didn't always do a really good job of covering
or having stories from people who are African American. But now we're doing guest
commentary from [African American] ministers, covering Black Lives Matter [public rallies in
the county], and covering [more African American students through their June 2020 articles on]
high school graduation to really say, ‘Hey, we're committed to this [our African American
community].’ This is not describing a paper full of white high school students graduating. We
really wanted to make sure it was more inclusive.”

Lillard said the only demographic he refuses to include is the political extremists and
conspiracy theorists. He also said that he is not sure how well-represented the suburban
conservative Christian community is in the paper. Interestingly enough, his editorial style seems
to be in direct contrast to that in Humphreys County’s paper *The Belzoni Banner*.

Though I did not have the opportunity to speak with any of the staff members from *The
Belzoni Banner*, I learned about the business and owner through a 2017 article from the *Clarion*
According to the article, The Belzoni Banner is part of a group of businesses that also includes Banner Printing Company and an office supply firm. This business group has been in the Toney family for over a century. Currently, the business is run by the eldest sibling of the Toney family, Julian “JuJu” Toney III. Julian Toney runs his group of businesses alongside his wife, Tootie, and has been editor and publisher of The Belzoni Banner for 42 years. Toney attended Mississippi Delta Community College for electrical engineering but dropped out when his grandmother offered him ownership of the family business. In the article Julian Toney says, “As far as I know, not the first one of us [the Toney family] have ever seen the word journalism except on a piece of paper somewhere. None of us went to school for journalism” (Stowers 2017). Instead, he learned the ins and outs of the newspaper industry through a makeshift family apprenticeship. This puts into question the value of a journalism degree from an accredited institution and whether or not the same news values, ethics, and accurate community representation can be learned and applied through on-the-job experience.

Through my analysis of The Belzoni Banner, I found that the frequency of the most common news values on their front page—exclusivity, entertainment, and news organization’s agenda—do not seem to differ much from the other newspapers. However, I did notice that there seems to be less transparency with the authorship of this paper than with the others I studied. Through some strategic Google searching, I was able to access one full pdf e-edition of The Belzoni Banner from April 8, 2020. The masthead on the second page of the paper is a small square and contains only one name: Julian Toney III – President & Publisher. None of the articles on the front page or within the paper have author bylines except for two articles sponsored by local businesses and one article about gardening written by a horticulturalist from Mississippi State University (The Belzoni Banner April 8, 2020). Additionally, there is not a staff page on The
Belzoni Banner’s website. Even under the “Contact” page, there are no names listed. Based on my interviews with Lillard and Smith, I can assume that Toney might write all of the articles without bylines himself, but I have no way to verify that assumption.

The other concern with The Belzoni Banner is that they do not seem to represent the demographic makeup of their county. Approximately three quarters of Humphreys County’s 8,000-person population is African American, and in the 2020 election 72.53% of the population voted for the Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden (Thorson et. al. 2020). However, as evidenced by The Belzoni Banner’s support of Republican Supreme Court Justice nominee Amy Coney Barret, the paper seems to have a Conservative lean and the majority of people featured within the front-page headlines tended to be white. This ideological contrast, as well as the paper’s subscription paywall, may explain why The Belzoni Banner only has a circulation of 950 while its public Facebook page has over 3,500 likes. Since previews of the first page of their newspapers are available on their Facebook page and website, that may be the only page that many of Humphreys County’s residents access. This raises further questions about the transparency of the newspaper past its front pages. If the majority of the newspaper’s viewers only see the front page, does the newspaper publisher have freer reign in choosing the types of content and sponsors within the paper? This could further remove the Belzoni Banner from accurately representing and serving the county’s demographics.

COVID-19 Pandemic’s Effects

Ironically enough, for the local newspapers that could survive the financial strain of the pandemic and reported on the health updates, Black Lives Matter debates, and the elections, their
relevance actually benefitted them. All of the editors I interviewed shared similar stories of financial hardship during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States and their newspapers’ surprising revitalizations in recent months.

Kim Smith became the managing editor of the *The Copper Era* and *Eastern Arizona Courier* in March 2020—just days before Arizona’s governor declared a Public Health Emergency for COVID-19 ([Doug Ducey 2020](https://www.dougducey.com/)). She was brought on board because the two papers were not performing up to Wick Communications’ expectations. The quality of their articles was in decline, and they were losing subscribers to online-only and radio news competitors in surrounding counties that disseminated their news for free. As the new editor, Smith was supposed to attend a large gathering to meet all of the “movers and shakers of the community…in one fell swoop,” as she described it. But the rapidly evolving COVID-19 restrictions halted that plan. Even over a year later, there are still many influential community members and local business and organization heads that she has yet to meet in person. She said it is challenging to build a rapport with these people purely over phone calls. But even more challenging was the loss of their advertising revenue in the early stages of the pandemic.

Smith said, “[We lost a lot of national and local advertisers] so there had been discussions for a while of folding *The Copper Era* into the *Eastern Arizona Courier*. But it would be a huge disservice to do that to the readers of *The Copper Era*. Just like in any other part of the United States, each community has its own personality. Things that would be of interest to readers of the *Courier* would not be of interest to the readers of *The Copper Era* and vice-versa. So we [toiled] long and hard to make sure that we survived.”

Come to find out, one of the keys to their success would actually become the pandemic. Smith explained, “Oddly enough, the pandemic was an opportunity for us…We took COVID-19
as an opportunity to become the preeminent force of information for both of our communities. We hit every angle of the pandemic as hard as possible in the hopes of bringing readers back to us, and making sure that they had the most important information in a timely manner.”

David Lillard, of the Clarke Monthly, also underwent a financial loss and revitalization with his paper due to the pandemic. Since the Clarke Monthly is fully financed through advertising revenue, his paper felt the effects of business shut downs and local event cancellations almost instantaneously. He said, “right before the pandemic hit, we were really out hitting. We had a growth plan, and we were on track. Then the pandemic hit, and we lost like forty percent of our advertising in one week.”

However, similar to Smith, he found opportunity in his paper’s new found relevance. Under Virginia’s Stay-at-Home Orders from late March to June 2020, Clarke residents looked to the Clarke Monthly as another point of community connection. Lillard said, “Especially in the earlier months, we felt like everything, almost everything was pandemic related. On the other hand, [the pandemic has] also helped raise our credibility. Because we support the community so strongly, I feel like it also gave us the credibility to say, ‘Hey, we're gonna talk about some other stuff.’ So, we published on Black Lives Matter and things like that, which are probably unusual for a rural Virginia County.” These harder-hitting articles paid off, and Lillard said, ironically, their March 2021 issue was actually the biggest yet in terms of revenue.

In Grand Isle County, Vermont, the early stages of the pandemic left The Islander in a similar financial flux. Their editor, Tonya Poutry, said, “In May of [2020], with a major loss to revenue, I was unsure if we were going to be able to continue. The communities we serve primarily make their revenue during three or four months out of the year as it is an area mostly sustained by tourism. The impact of COVID-19 closing down these establishments directly
affected the newspaper’s ability to provide coverage, and we were forced to temporarily lay off staff and cut hours.”

Additionally, *The Islander* closed their office in May 2020. The staff they were able to keep continue to work from their homes nearly a year later. In order to recover from their financial losses, Poutry said she had to find new, creative ways of generating income for the newspaper. She began to see her paper as more of a product and capitalized on her photojournalist’s work. *The Islander*’s website now features a tab called “The Islander Boutique” where prints, coffee mugs, and calendar’s featuring her photojournalist’s photography is available for purchase (*The Islander Boutique*). With this additional revenue stream and the gradual revitalization of her local economy, Poutry was able to keep her newspaper financially afloat.

**Conclusion**

Though established news values are important for media scholars’ analyses of news, news values are a lot more intuitive and less formulaic for the editors and reporters of local newspapers. To determine what news is important to include in their newspapers, local editors and reporters must connect with influential organizations, businesses, and individuals as well as everyday citizens to understand what they care about and what is happening in the community. Since every community has its own geography, personality, and interests, the news within local publications in Arizona, Virginia, Mississippi, and Vermont would ordinarily be very diverse. However, the timeframe in which I collected headlines—July 2020 to January 2021—was not an ordinary time. Local newspapers all across the country were united by three major topics: the discussions of systemic racism following the death of George Floyd, the 2020 national election, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of the colossal impact of all of these issues, it could be
argued that every article headline that included these topics (which I often categorized as exclusivity) could apply to Harcup and O’Neill’s news value of relevance.

I found that exclusivity, news organization’s agenda, entertainment, audio-visuals, and good news were the most frequent of Harcup and O’Neill’s news values (2017) for the local newspapers I analyzed. However, I also realized that they did not capture the nuances of local journalism to their fullest extent. Because of this, I revised Harcup and O’Neill’s national news values to more accurately reflect the news values of local publications. I propose these local news values are as follows:

- **Local exclusivity**: Stories and press releases written by the news publication or by local businesses, organizations, or governments as a result of exclusive interviews, polls, updates, investigations, etc. May also include stories that localize state and national issues.

- **State exclusivity**: Stories and press releases written by the news publication or by state organizations or governments as a result of exclusive interviews, polls, updates, investigations, etc. May also include regional businesses that operate within the state.

- **National exclusivity**: Stories and press releases written by the news publication, national organizations, or the national government as a result of exclusive interviews, polls, updates, investigations, etc.

- **Good News**: Stories about events, awards, local happenings that are positive in nature.

- **Human interest**: Stories highlighting the accomplishments of local residents. (Replaces Harcup and O’Neill’s (2017) celebrity news value.)
Bad News: Stories about events, local happenings, deaths, and other topics that are negative in nature.

News organization’s agenda: Stories that present the newspaper or the editor’s ideologies (such as in Letters from the Editor) or advance the mission of the newspaper. Also includes the standard sections of newspapers such as the classifieds, legal notices, etc.

Conflict/drama: Stories about crime, court cases, protests, accidents, etc.

Surprise: Stories that focus on out-of-the-ordinary topics that are occurring in the community.

Audio-visuals: Stories made up of multimedia content such as photographs or (if online) videos.

Entertainment: Stories about lighter topics such as nature, arts events, food, fun or interactive content such as puzzles, horoscopes, trivia, etc.

Follow up: Stories that continue the coverage of a previously reported topic.

Power elite: Stories about influential individuals, organizations, businesses, or other groups within the community.

I believe these news values more accurately represent the local news scene. However, for future research it would be beneficial to test these news values during a less internationally chaotic timeframe. Additionally, it would be interesting to further analyze the citizen-run social media pages that operate as rudimentary news sources for small communities and see if their news values differ to those of local newspapers.

The national statistics of the decline of local newspapers and expansion of news deserts is alarming. However, the findings of my overview and my interviews with editors seemed to
provide some hope for the future of local newspapers. For the newspapers that were able to
survive all of the trials and tribulations of 2020, reporting on the essential health updates of the
pandemic, facilitating conversations about racial injustice, and reporting accurate information
about candidates and election results seemed to boost the credibility of local journalism. This
renewed faith in local newspapers may signal the beginnings of a brighter future for the local
media landscape.
Appendix

Examples of my data collection of local newspaper headlines and my categorization of the headlines under Harcup and O’Neill’s news values

*Image 1: The Clarke Courier’s final edition*
Image 2: News values key

- **Ex**: exclusivity (39)
- **BN**: bad news (3)
- **C**: conflict (3)
- **S**: surprise (1)
- **AV**: audio-visuals (1)
- **E**: entertainment (6)
- **D**: drama
- **F**: follow-up
- **PE**: power elite (2)
- **R**: relevance
- **C**: celebrity
- **GN**: good news (4)
- **NOA**: news org’s agenda (1)

(60 articles)
Clarke County, VA

Clarke Monthly (formerly The Observer)

Retitled July 2017

(clarkecountyobserver.issuu)

(Clarke Monthly – Serving Clarke County, Va., and the surrounding area [clarkeva.com])

6 months? July 2020 – January 2021

July 2020 (16 pgs) – 10 articles

Ex • “Capability Brown business lives up to its namesake” pseudo-ad/article for local landscaping business

NOA • Around Clarke County—calendar of events in CC

EX • “Love at First Bite catering & events among the best in the Commonwealth”

PE • “Time to vote for REC [Rappahannock Electric Company] directors” by REC Board of Directors chair

E • “Don’t be afraid of cicada killers”

E • As the Crow Flies: “Chasing a Leaf Across the Sky” informational story about Martins in backyard with illustration by author

R • “Clarke County community gathers to learn and show unity”—BLM rally in Berryville park; features quotes from the speakers at the event (4-page feature)

PE • Picture of newly elected mayor of Berryville getting sworn in @ govt center

PE • “Felecia Hart to lead economic development and tourism”
  o Who writes the pieces with no byline??

E • “Harpischord comes to Barns of Rose Hill”

August 2020 (16 pages) – 11

E • As the Crow Flies: “Butterfly Weed: Outstanding in our Field”

B • “Fly On, Captain Lee”—obituary

NOA • Around Clarke County

GN • “Fourth Annual Geneva Jackson pie baking contest benefits Laurel Center”

E • “Iconic Dinosaur Land represents six decades of childhood memories”

BN & EX • “Reunite with fence that built Clarke’s lovely stone fences” – slaves built them

E • Plans for Clarke school reopening

E • “CCHS alumni navigate college during COVID-19” by myself (aka conflict of interest?)

Community News

• “Jim Barb honored by town council” for decades of service to Architectural Review Board
Image 4: The Islander data

- July 8-14, 2020 (24 pgs) - 21 articles
  - Law firm and real estate companies moving to new locations in the islands, COVID adaptations for workers/clients
  - Fall Rummage Sale cancelled by COVID, so drop off goods to Good Will instead
  - Mini sports: spitz on nuti, sports
  - Annual Independence Day parade cancelled by COVID, so 2 hr impromptu drive by parade by fire station members for elderly man who jokes its for his bday
  - “Lawsuit filed in final [Dec 2019] crash with Highgate School Leader”
  - Prepping for Vermont college reopens for Fall semester
  - No mandatory masks in Vermont
  - “South Hero considers junk ordinance”
  - [articles from the Stowe Reporter]
    - “Civil Rights, Social Justice [BLM]: Debbie Ingrum runs for Lt. Gov”
    - “Housing, Climate Change and Cops: [Tim] Ashe’s Sights on Lt. Gov”
  - Multiple pages w/ comics, crossword puzzles, sudoku, trivia, maze
  - Yesterdays in the Islands: 1945 photo with brief history from local resident
  - North Hero News w/ memorial services, obituaries, church services
  - Letters to the Editor
  - Astrology horoscopes
  - “Fish with a warden sessions offered”—educational fishing session
  - “Academic Kudos” with Dean’s list/honor roll/scholar athletes
  - Legal notices
  - Classifieds
  - Rob Swanson photojournalist pics around the islands

- July 15-21, 2020 (16 pgs) - 13
  - Early ballots in high demand for election/info on local races
  - “3 more local COVID cases; [COVID] Grants for farmers coming”
  - “Community input sought” for steering committee on bike/pedestrian safety improvements
Greenlee County, Arizona

The Copper Era

(CE E-Editions | ecourier.com)

Weekly newspaper w/ daily online articles;
Related to Eastern Arizona Courier

Front page headlines:

- July 15, 2020
  - Gila Health Resources offers outdoor coronavirus testing
  - Wildkitten Den employee tests positive for COVID-19
- July 22, 2020
  - Meet Chase: GCSO’s drug-detecting dog
  - Exposed children fine. Back at Morenci daycare
- July 29, 2020
  - Greenlee County Fair to focus on livestock show and auction
  - Volunteerism alive and well, but changes afoot
- August 5, 2020
  - A Duncan-area rancher takes water rights to YouTube
  - Graham, Greenlee well behind statewide U.S. Census averages
- August 12, 2020
  - PJ’s opens its doors: Other restaurants managing to survive as well
  - Greenlee County school not quite ready to reopen
- August 19, 2020
  - Adult Protective Services’ caseload varies by county
  - Sheriff Sumner plans to create new system for tracking discipline
- August 26, 2020
  - MGRMC staff shares COVID-19 experiences
  - Girls ‘friendly’ softball gathering hits a snag
- September 2, 2020
  - First day [at schools]
  - Greenlee County Administrator: No money has been hidden, misused
  - Isolated shows, thunderstorms expected over the next few days
- September 9, 2020
  - Planting seeds for the future
  - Officials: Community partnerships help keep COVID numbers low in Greenlee
- September 16
  - 6th-generation Arizonian Blake selected to fill empty Duncan Town Council seat
  - Civilian weather spotters a boon to meteorologists
- September 23
Image 6: The Belzoni Banner data

Humphrey’s County, Mississippi
The Belzoni Banner
(Home (thebelzonibanner.com))

Contact Us (humphreys.lib.ms.us)

We are a weekly newspaper with a circulation of 950
located at 115 E. Jackson Street in Belzoni, Mississippi,
The Heart of the Delta
&
The Catfish Capital of the World
We publish each Wednesday,
Our news and ad copy deadline is Friday at 12:00 noon
(source)

Always has Pages From The Past column along left with short news updates from the 1950s-90s

- July 15, 2020
  - EX o Wicker leads effort to end child deaths in hot cars
  - GN o First lady elect Reeves launches ‘Christmas at the Mansio’ competition to honor Mississippi essential workers
  - EX o Belzoni rotary club offers Dr. Walter Mack Gorton Scholarship
  - EX o Office of the Governor Writ of Election: To the election commissioners of Humphreys County, Mississippi

- July 22
  - BN o COVID-19 puts brakes on state’s catfish sales
  - F o Belzoni Rotary Club offers Dr. Walter Mack Gorton Scholarship
  - NDA o Church service updates cancellations
  - EX o By Executive Order of the Governor Humphreys County is now under a mandated mask order
  - AV o No Covid: Here—picture of watering a farming field

- July 29
  - S S o MS’s sales tax holiday opportunity to support small businesses
  - EX o Some Mississippians may be eligible for the Extended Benefits Program
  - F o Belzoni Rotary Club offers Dr. Walter Mack Gorton Scholarship
  - GN o Catfish Institute names 2020 Catfish Farmers of the Year
  - EX o New mask mandates business limitations put in place
  - EX o Special Election for Tax Assessor will be held August 4th

- August 5
  - EX o Voters choose Horton for Humphreys County Tax Assessor
Works Cited

Newspaper Archives


