
WHAT THE PUBLIC EXPECTS OF LOCAL NEWS: VIEWS ON PUBLIC AND TRADITIONAL JOURNALISM

By Don Heider, Maxwell McCombs, and Paula M. Poindexter



A survey found the public does not strongly endorse traditional journalism norms of watchdog and rapid reporting. Furthermore, when opinions of survey respondents and journalists were compared, survey respondents were significantly more likely to say providing a community forum, a public journalism principle, was extremely important. African Americans, Hispanics, women, and adults with less education and income strongly endorsed the public journalism principle of offering solutions to problems. A factor analysis of thirteen public and traditional journalism roles and characteristics revealed four dimensions of journalism as perceived by the public: good neighbor, watchdog, unbiased and accurate, and fast.

What does the public need to know? What role should news play in local community life? What are the central characteristics of good journalism? Debates and discussions about these fundamental questions primarily have been limited to journalists and those who study journalism. But what about consumers of journalism? This study set out to discover what everyday citizens think about journalistic practice and the role of journalists in reporting local news.

For decades, a few journalists and many scholars have wondered how journalistic practice may affect the public. For a decade and a half, a smaller group has wondered whether journalistic practice has contributed to Americans' dwindling interest in news and declining participation in civic life. This concern led editors and reporters in Wichita, Kansas; Charlotte, North Carolina; Columbus, Georgia; Bremerton, Washington; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Portland, Maine, to introduce new journalistic techniques to re-engage the public in news and civic life.

Davis "Buzz" Merritt, then editor of the Knight-Ridder-owned *Wichita Eagle*, spearheaded one of the first journalistic projects to re-engage the public in local news and civic life. Concurrently, New York University journalism scholar Jay Rosen, then director of the Project on Public Life and the Press, began asking pointed questions about the role of journalists and journalism in public life. Eventually these efforts led

Don Heider and Paula M. Poindexter are associate professors in the School of Journalism, University of Texas at Austin, where Maxwell McCombs holds the Jesse H. Jones Centennial Chair in Communications.

to a new journalistic movement and scholarly area called civic or public journalism that connected journalistic practice, the public, and the fabric of civic life in new ways.¹

What does the public think of journalism practice in general and civic journalism in particular? What does the public expect of local news? By gaining greater insight into the public's expectations of local news, it may be possible to identify key issues that could, in the long run, increase the public's interest in news and civic life.

A review of forty-seven public journalism studies conducted from 1995 through 2001 revealed that public journalism has primarily been studied in three areas: content, journalists, and effects of public journalism on the audience.²

Content and Public Journalism. Studies have found that public journalism content has distinct characteristics. For example, McGregor, Comrie, and Fontaine studied coverage of a New Zealand election campaign, comparing papers that endorsed public journalism and papers that did not,³ and found the public journalism papers covered the race more constructively.

By comparing the *Seattle Times* Front Porch Forum Project coverage with the coverage by the *Times* in earlier years as well as content in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*,⁴ Blazier and Lemert found that among eleven public journalism traits, providing mobilizing information was the most distinguishing factor between the public journalism project and earlier coverage by the paper and coverage by the competition. Moscowitz also found mobilizing information in a study comparing coverage of homelessness in the Knight-Ridder-owned, civic journalism-oriented *Charlotte Observer* with the Gannett-owned, traditional journalism-oriented *Indianapolis Star*. The *Charlotte Observer* was also less likely to use official sources and more likely to include solutions to problems in its coverage.⁵ Seeking out citizen sources rather than relying solely on official sources has been identified as a characteristic of public journalism. By comparing two papers, one civic, the other not, Kenamer and South found the civic-affiliated paper had a much greater number of unaffiliated sources than the other.⁶ Kurpius also studied sources and found that local television news stories, employing public journalism techniques, used a larger percentage of African American sources than represented in the general population. Furthermore African American, Latino, and female journalists were more likely to use minority and female sources in their stories.⁷

Rather than focus on the text of a story, Coleman compared the visual elements in public journalism and traditional journalism content. Although for the most part, visual elements did not distinguish public journalism and traditional journalism, Coleman did find that public journalism stories were significantly more likely than traditional journalism stories to include visual elements that facilitated contact of the media by the public.⁸

Because interactivity lends itself to citizen involvement and public journalism principles, Choi compared public journalism and traditional

journalism newspapers in an online environment, expecting that online public journalism newspapers would exhibit more public journalism characteristics. Content analyses of online stories from the *Rochester Democrat*, *Charlotte Observer*, *Orlando Sentinel*, online versions of public journalism-oriented newspapers, and the *Buffalo News*, *Winston-Salem Journal*, *Florida Times Union*, online versions of traditional journalism-oriented newspapers, found little difference in the content of online newspapers that represented public journalism and traditional journalism newspapers.⁹

Journalists and Public Journalism. Because a decision to practice public journalism usually rests with a senior editor or producer, Kurpius examined the relationship between management and content. In two separate examinations of local television news, Kurpius found that visionary managers were the key for the civic-model of successful issues coverage at local television stations, but he also discovered that market forces may hinder civic reporting efforts in local media in the long run.¹⁰

Factors that may influence journalists' attitudes toward public journalism were studied by scholars in New Mexico. After journalists at the *Albuquerque Journal* and *Albuquerque Tribune* and journalism students at the University of New Mexico completed self-administered questionnaires as part of a convenience sample, the results showed "a progression of socialization that begins with students supporting civic journalism."¹¹

Journalism students without newsroom experience appeared to be more supportive of civic journalism than practicing journalists and journalism students with newsroom experience. The authors suggested that civic journalism appeared to be inconsistent with autonomy, an attribute greatly valued by practicing journalists and journalism students with newsroom experience.

Indiana University scholars asked journalists directly about civic journalism in their most recent national survey.¹² Although their previous national surveys of journalists, which were conducted in 1982 and 1992, had documented the backgrounds, attitudes, and values of journalists, the latest national study represented the first time that specific questions about public or civic journalism practices were asked. According to "The American Journalist in the 21st Century," 72% of journalists approved of giving ordinary people a chance to express their views on public affairs and 58% endorsed providing possible solutions to society's problems. Only 32% approved of convening meetings to discuss public issues.¹³

Effects of Public Journalism on the Audience. The sixteen audience-centered studies identified in the Massey and Haas review examined the effects of civic journalism on the public rather than the public's expectations of journalism.¹⁴ For example, one study reviewed by Massey and Haas found evidence that public journalism produced positive results. In a study of broadcast and print media that included Wisconsin Public Television and Radio, WISC-TV, the *Wisconsin State Journal*, and the Wood Communications Group and their collaborative effort to provide a more civic-oriented approach toward election cover-

age, Denton and Thorson found respondents in Madison said the project made them more knowledgeable about the election, encouraged them to vote, and gave them useful tools to assess campaign information.¹⁵ Although the literature found civic journalism practices improved public attitudes and increased knowledge of election issues, overall, the Massey and Haas review of public journalism studies found mixed audience effects. Public journalism was found to both increase and suppress voter turnout, to both increase participation in civic projects and have no impact on civic participation, and to produce both strong and weak agenda-setting effects.¹⁶

After reviewing forty-seven empirical studies, Massey and Haas criticized the public journalism literature for its lack of methodological rigor and for narrowly focusing on “jewel box” civic journalism projects that were conducted at the *Wichita Eagle*, *Charlotte Observer*, and *Wisconsin State Journal*. Only one of the authors’ six recommendations for future research involved the public and that was to conduct laboratory experiments that “could prove more useful for more convincingly identifying whatever causal factors may be behind any public-journalism influence on news audiences.”¹⁷

Surprisingly, none of the recommendations that resulted from this comprehensive review of public journalism studies focused on the public as an independent, active, and integral component of the communication process with opinions and expectations about a new type of journalism that ventures to re-engage the audience in the civic arena.

Although civic journalism has been discussed, practiced, debated, and studied for over a decade and a half, the public’s perspective on civic journalism has not been studied empirically. Understanding the public’s view of local news and civic journalism is important for the practice and business of journalism as well as society as a whole. Without an assessment of what the public expects of local news, it will be virtually impossible to identify journalism practices that may help reverse declining attention to news, restore dwindling public trust in news as a whole and journalists in particular, and bring back the vanishing participant in civic affairs. Unlike much of the research on public journalism, which has focused on the effects of specific public journalism projects on voting rates and other measures of civic participation, this study explores the public’s views about journalism as well as the public’s expectations of local news and the underlying dimensions of those expectations.

Specifically, the following research questions will be answered:

RQ1: What do survey respondents regard as the important attributes and roles of journalism and how does that compare with the norms of traditional and public journalism?

RQ2: How do survey respondents compare with journalists on the importance of practices and norms associated with traditional and civic journalism?

Research Questions

RQ3: What segments of survey respondents as defined by race or ethnicity, age, income, education, and gender are more likely to endorse civic journalism and traditional journalism norms?

RQ4: What are the underlying dimensions of survey respondents' expectations of local news?

Method

As part of a research project for a local newspaper and local NPR-affiliated public radio station that was starting up a local news division to complement the national news broadcast from NPR, the authors worked with the radio station managers to design a research study that would ascertain public opinion about local news. A Pew Center for Civic Journalism grant provided funding for the audience study. The radio station manager believed that understanding the public's expectations of local news was a prerequisite to building a radio news division that would report local news of importance and meet the public's needs. The spring 2001 survey, conducted in a southwestern metropolitan area by a professional telephone survey unit, used random digit dialing to select the sample. Interviews were completed with 600 adults, representing a response rate of 62.2%. Calculation of the response rate was based upon the number of completed interviews ($n=600$) relative to the number of completed interviews plus refusals ($n=286$), incomplete interviews ($n=37$), and persons contacted but not interviewed due to illness, language barriers, or other impairments ($n=36$).

Answers to the four research questions were based on survey respondents' ratings of roles of local news media and characteristics of news coverage. Respondents were asked: What do you think is the most important role of local news media? Rate each on whether you think it's "extremely important," "somewhat important," or "not very important." The roles were (1) report the widest range of news; (2) concentrate on certain topics; (3) provide a forum for community views; (4) be a watchdog of powerful people and the government; (5) highlight interesting people and groups in the community; and (6) offer solutions to community problems. Respondents were also asked the following: What is the most important characteristic of news coverage you want? Rate each on whether you think it's "extremely important," "somewhat important," or "not very important." The characteristics were (1) accuracy; (2) rapid reporting; (3) understand the local community; (4) unbiased reporting; (5) care about your community; (6) be inclusive of different points of view; and (7) provide explanation of issues and trends.

To determine how survey respondents compare with journalists, the survey respondents' opinions about practices and norms associated with traditional and civic journalism were matched with journalists' opinions from "The American Journalist in the 21st Century" national survey.¹⁸ Specifically, the opinions of survey respondents and journalists were compared in four areas: offering solutions, providing a community forum, being a watchdog, and rapid reporting.¹⁹ Although both

studies used random sampling and “extremely” on the measurement scale, there were several methodological differences. The question wording in the national survey of journalists differed on the four opinions that were compared. For offering solutions, the national survey asked journalists how important it was “to point people toward possible solutions to society’s problems.” For providing a community forum, the national survey asked journalists how important it was “to convene meetings of citizens and community leaders to discuss public issues.” For being a watchdog, the national survey asked how important it was to “investigate claims and statements made by the government.” For rapid reporting, the national survey asked journalists how important it was to “get information to the public quickly.”

In addition to the difference in wording, the present study relied on a three-point scale to measure opinions about journalistic norms while the national survey of journalists relied on a four-point scale of “extremely,” “quite,” “somewhat,” and “not really important.” The difference in question wording and the number of points on the measurement may have affected the number of respondents that chose “extremely” as an option. The final methodological difference was that the present study was conducted in spring 2001 in one southwestern metropolitan area while the national survey of 1,149 journalists was conducted summer and fall of 2002.²⁰

The survey questionnaire also included questions about socio-economic backgrounds and media use. Standard survey questions were asked to ascertain number of years lived in the area, marital status, level of education, income, age, and race or ethnicity. Respondents were also asked if they had children living at home and their gender was recorded.

To establish media use, respondents were asked if they read the primary daily newspaper 4-6 times a week, 1-3 times a week, less frequently, or never. Similarly, respondents were asked if they read the primary Sunday newspaper 3-4 times a month, 1-2 times a month, less frequently, or never. Respondents were also asked how often they heard news on the radio, which TV stations they watched for local news, and how often they obtained local news from the Internet.

Bivariate analyses with appropriate statistics were used to determine if opinions about public and traditional journalism practices and norms differed by race or ethnicity, age, income, education, or gender. A factor analysis was used to identify underlying dimensions of survey respondents’ attitudes about the roles and characteristics of public and traditional journalism.

Socio-economic Background and Media Use. Survey participants had established roots in this southwestern metropolitan area. The median number of years lived in the area was twelve; 55% were married and 42% had children at home. Although education was high, different educational levels were represented: 21% had a high school degree or less, 27% had some college, 28% were college graduates, and 24% completed at least some graduate school. Different income groups were also repre-

Results

TABLE 1

% Public Saying Roles and Characteristics of News Are Extremely Important

Accuracy	94%
Unbiased Reporting	84%
Include Different Points of View	69%
Understand Community	68%
Care about Community	60%
Offer Solutions to Problems	51%
Report Widest Range of News	50%
Provide Community Forum	49%
Be a Watchdog	49%
Explain Issues and Trends	44%
Highlight Interesting People	36%
Rapid Reporting	35%
Emphasize Certain Topics	34%

Note: Sample size equals 600.

sented: 34% had a household income of less than \$40,000; 31% had incomes between \$40,000 and \$69,000, and 35% had incomes of \$70,000 or higher. Slightly more than one-third of the respondents were ages 18 to 39; 31% were ages 40 to 69; 35% were 70 years or older. Respondents were fairly diverse: 68% were white, 19% were Latino, 7% were African American, and 5% were Asian American or other. The remaining 1% did not specify race or ethnicity.²¹

When asked how many times a week they read the primary local newspaper, 30% said never or less frequently than 1-3 times a week, 25% said 1-3 times a week, and 44% said 4-6 times a week. Survey participants were more devoted to the Sunday newspaper with 64% reporting they read it 3-4 times a month. In addition to the newspaper, survey participants relied on other local news sources: 80% watched one of the five local TV news outlets, 59% often heard news on the radio, and 18% often turned to the Internet.

The Public's Views on Journalistic Norms. The ratings of thirteen characteristics and roles of news coverage that are displayed in Table 1 were examined to answer **RQ1** (What do survey respondents regard as the important attributes and roles of journalism and how does that compare with the norms of traditional and public journalism?). The overwhelming majorities said that accuracy (94%) and unbiased reporting (84%) are extremely important, but two major tenets of traditional journalism did not receive strong endorsements. The traditional journalistic norm of being a watchdog of powerful people and the government was supported by only 49% of survey respondents and rapid reporting was endorsed by only 35%.

The Public's Views on the Role of Local News. Table 1 also displays survey respondents' views on journalistic practices associated

TABLE 2

A Comparison of the Public and Journalists on Specific Civic and Traditional Journalism Norms (% Saying Extremely Important)

	Respondents	Journalists ^a	Z-score	p
Offer Solutions to Problems	51%	58%	0.002	n.s.
Provide Community Forum	49%	32%	10.429	<.05
Be a Watchdog	49%	70%	-14.375	<.05
Rapid Reporting	35%	59%	-14.650	<.05

^a David Weaver, Randal Beam, Bonnie Brownlee, Paul S. Voakes, and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, “The American Journalist in the 21st Century: Key Findings” (paper presented at the annual convention of AEJMC, Kansas City, MO, 2003). Sample size for national survey of journalists equals 1,149; sample size for survey of the public in a southwestern metropolitan equals 600.

with civic journalism such as offering solutions and providing a forum. Slightly more than half (51%) said offering solutions to community problems was extremely important, and 49% said providing a forum for community views was extremely important. To answer **RQ2**, these views were compared with journalists’ views about civic journalism practices (see Table 2).

Comparing the Public and Journalists. Although the survey of the public was conducted in a southwestern metropolitan area and the survey of journalists was conducted nationally, results from the two surveys were compared because both studies used random sampling techniques, included similar questions about characteristics of traditional and public journalism, and incorporated “extremely important” on the measurement scale. A difference in proportions test on independent random samples was used to determine if survey respondents were significantly different from journalists in their endorsement of two civic journalism norms and two traditional journalistic norms.²²

Even though the majority of survey respondents strongly endorsed the fundamental characteristics of journalism, accuracy and unbiased reporting, there was a statistically significant gap between survey respondents and journalists on two roles that are an integral part of traditional journalism: watchdog and rapid reporting. Only 49% of survey respondents said being a watchdog of powerful people and the government is extremely important, but 70% of journalists said that traditional journalism role is extremely important. Survey respondents were also significantly less likely than journalists to say that rapid reporting was extremely important (35% vs. 59%).

The roles and characteristics of traditional and civic journalism displayed in Table 1 were analyzed by five socio-economic characteristics (race or ethnicity, age, income, education, and gender) to better understand survey respondents’ opinions about traditional and civic

journalism roles and characteristics. Although there was no statistically significant difference between survey respondents and journalists in their endorsement of the civic journalism role of providing solutions to problems, there were significant differences when this civic journalism role was analyzed by sub-segments of survey respondents.

Solutions. African Americans and Hispanics were significantly more likely than whites and Asian Americans to say that the civic journalism role of offering solutions to community problems was extremely important. Almost three quarters (72%) of African Americans and 64% of Hispanics said offering solutions was extremely important, but only 45% of whites and 47% of Asian Americans said this civic journalism role was extremely important ($X^2=23.87$, d.f.=6, $p < .01$; Cramer's $V=.14$, $p < .01$).

Segments of survey respondents that made less money and had less education were more likely than wealthier and more educated segments to say offering solutions to community problems was extremely important. Almost three-fifths (59%) of adults who had incomes of less than \$50,000 compared to 44% of adults with incomes of \$50,000 or more said offering solutions was extremely important (Kendall's tau-c=-.15, $p < .01$; Gamma=-.24, $p < .01$). This inverse relationship was also apparent when offering solutions to community problems was analyzed by education. Adults with a high school education or less (68%) were more likely than adults with some college (54%) and adults with a college degree or higher (42%) to say offering solutions was extremely important (Kendall's tau-b=-.19, $p < .001$; Gamma=-.32, $p < .001$).

Females were also more likely than males to attach greater value to the public journalism role of offering solutions with 56% of females compared to 44% of males saying it was extremely important for local news to offer solutions to community problems ($X^2=14.22$, d.f.=2, $p < .01$; Cramer's $V=.16$, $p < .01$).

Watchdog and Rapid Reporting. The traditional journalism characteristics of watchdog and rapid reporting were also analyzed by the five socio-economic variables and three were significantly related. The oldest age group (55+) was more likely than the youngest age groups to value the watchdog role of traditional journalism, with 62% of adults 55 or older compared to 47% of adults 35 to 54 and 45% of adults 18 to 34 saying being a watchdog of powerful people and the government was extremely important (Kendall's tau-b=.09, $p < .05$; Gamma=.14, $p < .05$).

An inverse relationship emerged when the traditional journalistic characteristic of rapid reporting was analyzed by education. Among adults with a high school degree or less, 47% said rapid reporting was extremely important; 30% of adults with a college degree or higher said rapid reporting was extremely important (Kendall's tau-b=-.10, $p < .01$; Gamma=-.16, $p < .01$).

Females attached greater value to rapid reporting than males. Among females, 40% said rapid reporting was extremely important but only 30% of males said this traditional journalistic practice was extremely important ($X^2=7.13$, d.f.=2, $p < .05$; Cramer's $V=.11$, $p < .05$).

TABLE 3
The Public's Expectations of Local News: A Factor Analysis

	I Good Neighbor	II Watchdog	III Unbiased & Accurate	IV Fast
Care about Community	.724	.104	.019	.054
Interesting People & Groups	.601	.026	.032	-.040
Understand Local Community	.528	.274	.045	-.064
Offer Solutions	.518	.177	-.250	.222
Wide Range of News	.426	-.263	.240	.354
Watchdog	.031	.650	.193	-.161
Certain Topics	-.073	.535	-.224	.402
Provide Forum	.324	.532	.074	-.011
Explanations	.265	.517	-.001	.286
Unbiased Reporting	.054	-.012	.807	-.050
Accuracy	-.066	.149	.645	.171
Rapid Reporting	.010	.019	.102	.815
Inclusive	.346	.355	.332	-.037
Eigenvalues	2.54	1.35	1.12	1.06
% Variance	19.6%	10.4%	8.6%	8.2%

Note:

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

Primary loading of a variable on a factor is indicated by boldface type.

Sample size equals 600.

The Underlying Dimensions of the Public's Expectations of Local News. To better understand the underlying dimensions of survey respondents' expectations of local news reporting, researchers factor analyzed the six roles of local news and seven characteristics of journalism. As Table 3 shows, four clearly differentiated dimensions emerged: (1) good neighbor; (2) watchdog; (3) unbiased and accurate; and (4) fast.

The good neighbor dimension that emerged included attributes of public journalism: caring about your community, highlighting interesting people and groups in the community, understanding the local community, and offering solutions to community problems. The watchdog dimension was represented by four roles of local news including being a watchdog of powerful people and the government, concentrating on certain topics, providing a forum for community views, and providing explanations of issues and trends. The unbiased and accurate reporting dimension was defined by those two traditional characteristics of news; the fast dimension was represented by the traditional news characteristic, rapid reporting. Providing a wide range of news and being inclusive of different points of view did not load high on any one dimension. In

fact, the inclusive factor loading was similar for the good neighbor, watchdog, and unbiased and accurate dimensions.

Discussion

Although more than fifty empirical studies have been conducted on public or civic journalism, none of the studies has tried to gauge public opinion about this new approach to journalism practice. This study provided insight into a journalistic practice that developed over the past decade and a half in response to the vanishing newspaper reader and disappearing participant in civic affairs. Furthermore, this study provided insight into the public's views on traditional journalistic characteristics. At a time when newspaper readership, participation in civic life, and the credibility of journalism are at all-time lows, this study helped answer broader questions about journalism: Is traditional journalism meeting the public's expectations? Is the civic journalism movement on the right track? The results of this survey suggest that, in many cases, the public and the press, including traditional journalism and the civic journalism movement, are on separate tracks headed in different directions and unless something is done to better meet the public's expectations, civic participation, newspaper readership, and the credibility of the press may continue to decline.

While it is reassuring to know that the survey respondents overwhelmingly endorse accuracy and unbiased reporting, it is important to recognize that these same expectations can cause the public to turn away from the news. When Jayson Blair fabricates the news at the *New York Times* or star foreign correspondent Jack Kelley is accused of inventing parts of stories reported by *USA Today*, the public's trust in the news media is shaken and the reasons for reading the news are threatened. It is also important to note that long-held norms of traditional journalism, being a watchdog and rapid reporting, are not strongly valued by a majority of the survey respondents. Only 49% said being a watchdog of powerful people and the government was extremely important, and 35% said rapid reporting was extremely important. But when the survey respondents were analyzed by age, the press as watchdog was popular in the oldest age group. Over three-fifths of adults 55 years or older said the news media's traditional role of being a watchdog was extremely important.

Offering solutions to community problems, a characteristic of civic journalism, was strongly endorsed by only half of the survey participants as a whole, but when different segments were analyzed, this public journalism practice was found to be more popular than first thought. The popularity of offering solutions is most evident among those who have traditionally been disenfranchised from the power sources of government and business: African Americans, Hispanics, adults with less income and education, and women. Perhaps these groups are looking to news media as a source for help.

Do the public's expectations of local news fit the traditional journalism model, the civic journalism movement, or some other ideal? The factor analysis of thirteen roles and characteristics of journalism revealed four dimensions with being a good neighbor—not watchdog,

unbiased and accurate, or fast—representing the dominant expectation. Being a good neighbor included caring about your community, highlighting interesting people and groups in the community, understanding the local community, and offering solutions to community problems.

The expectation that the press should be a good neighbor may be related to declining trust in the news media and declining attention to news. If the public expects the press to be a good neighbor but the press fails in that role because it sees its professional responsibility as a watchdog, there is clearly a disconnect between the public's expectations and the press' expectations which civic journalism practices may not be able to fix.

Buzz Merritt and Maxwell McCombs argue for an expanded watchdog role of the press that is consonant with the good neighbor perspective:

News media need to be creative watchdogs and agenda setters scanning the horizon for the gaps in current public life. Part of this larger watchdog role is functioning as social radar, not just a chronicler of what government and other institutions are doing right now, whether good or bad. This means discovering the concerns of citizens and defining what the public needs to know in very expansive terms.²³

But for this expanded watchdog role to resonate with the public, the news media must educate the public and even persuade the public that in the role of watchdog, they are looking out for the public in the same way that a good neighbor would.

According to Andrew Kohut, director of the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, a decade and a half ago, which was about the time of the first civic journalism projects,

the public thought the press was "too sensational, too pushy, too rude, too uncaring about people and the public." But most people saw journalists as moral, professional and caring about the interests of the country. Today, the public considers the news media even less professional, less accurate, less moral, less helpful to democracy, more sensational, more likely to cover up mistakes and more biased.²⁴

These are not exactly attributes of a good neighbor.

Because this study represents only one metropolitan area in the Southwest, additional studies should be conducted in other parts of the country. Because different communities have different characteristics and needs, it is possible that they have different expectations of their local news. It is also possible that even with different community characteristics and needs, the public's expectations of local news are similar, regardless of community size or geographic location. Only by replicating this study in other communities can the public's expectations of local news be determined.

According to a 3 May 2005 *New York Times* article, the 1.9% drop in daily circulation and 2.5% decline in Sunday circulation reported by the Audit Bureau of Circulations represented the “largest circulation losses for the industry in more than a decade, and indicate an acceleration of the decline.”²⁵ The magnitude of the circulation decline for 814 daily newspapers suggests that it is imperative that future studies determine how the public’s expectations of local news relate to readership of newspapers and use of other news media. Future studies should also determine how participation in civic life is related to the public’s expectations of local news. Finally, it is important for future studies to focus on the public’s expectations of news with special attention paid to the concept of the press as a good neighbor. By gaining greater insight into the public’s expectations of local news, it may be possible to initiate a dialogue between the public and the press. This dialogue may lead to a closing of the gap between the expectations of the public and the press that could, in the long run, reverse declining attention to news and waning participation in civic life.

NOTES

1. For accounts of early public journalism projects and commentary, see Michael Hoyt, “The Wichita Experiment: What Happens When a Newspaper Tries to Connect Readership and Citizenship?” *Columbia Journalism Review*, July/August 1992, 42-47; Davis “Buzz” Merritt and Jay Rosen, “Imagining Public Journalism: An Editor and Scholar Reflect on the Birth of an Idea,” Roy W. Howard Public Lecture In Journalism and Mass Communication Research 5 (School of Journalism, Indiana University, 13 April 1995).

2. Brian L. Massey and Tanni Haas, “Does Making Journalism More Public Make a Difference? A Critical Review of Evaluative Research on Public Journalism,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 79 (autumn 2002): 559-86. Public journalism studies published since the Massey and Haas review have primarily focused on content and journalists.

3. Judy H. McGregor, Margie A. Comrie, and Susan L. Fountaine, “Beyond the Feel-Good Factor: Measuring Public Journalism in the 1996 New Zealand Election Campaign,” *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 4 (winter 1999): 66-67.

4. Thomas F. Blazier and James B. Lemert “Public Journalism and Changes in Content of the Seattle Times,” *Newspaper Research Journal* 21 (summer 2000): 69-80. Other public journalism characteristics that were compared included number of staff-written stories; number of sources from citizen organizations and unaffiliated individuals; prominence of citizen sources; number of stories that placed subject in context to answer the how and why; inclusion of issue antecedents or historical context; number of stories that connected issues to related stories; number of stories that included solutions to problems; number of stories that included core values that reflect ideals, goals, and values; number of sto-

ries with mobilizing information to facilitate participation and deliberation; number of stories less likely to emphasize polar opposites but include a range of views; number of election stories that emphasized issues and candidate record over horse race and candidate character.

5. Leigh Moscovitz, "Civic Approach Not So Different From Traditional Model," *Newspaper Research Journal* 23 (fall 2002): 62-75.

6. David Kenamer and Jeff South, "Civic Journalism in the 2000 U.S. Senate Race in Virginia" (paper presented at the annual convention of AEJMC, Washington, DC, 2001).

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8. Renita Coleman, "Use of Visual Communication in Public Journalism," *Newspaper Research Journal* 21 (fall 2000): 17-37; Renita Coleman and Ben Wasike, "Visual Elements in Public Journalism Newspapers in an Election: A Content Analysis of the Photographs and Graphics in Campaign," *Journal of Communication* 54 (3, 2004): 456-73.

9. Young Choi, "Study Examines Daily Public Journalism at Six Newspapers," *Newspaper Research Journal* 25 (spring 2004): 12-27.

10. David D. Kurpius, "Civic Journalism and Commercial Local Television News: In Search of a Civic Model," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 77 (summer 2000): 340-54; David D. Kurpius, "Bucking a Trend in Local Television News: Combating Market-Driven Journalism," *Journalism* 4 (2003): 76-94.

11. Michael McDevitt, Bob M. Gassay, and Frank G. Perez, "The Making and Unmaking of Civic Journalists: Influences of Professional Socialization," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 79 (spring 2002): 87.

12. David Weaver, Randal Beam, Bonnie Brownlee, Paul S. Voakes, and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, "The American Journalist in the 21st Century: Key Findings" (paper presented at the annual convention of AEJMC, Kansas City, MO, 2003). Key results of the American Journalist survey can be found at <http://www.poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=28778> (retrieved 7 October 2005). For previous national surveys of journalists, see David H. Weaver and Cleveland Wilhoit, *The American Journalist in the 1990s: U.S. News People at the End of an Era* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1996); David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, *The American Journalist: A Portrait of U.S. News People and Their Work* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986); John W.C. Johnstone, Edward J. Slawski, and William J. Bowman, *The News People: A Sociological Portrait of American Journalists and their Work* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976).

13. Weaver et al., "American Journalist in the 21st Century."

14. Massey and Haas, "Does Making Journalism More Public Make a Difference?"

15. Frank Denton and Esther Thorson, "Civic Journalism: Does it Work?" (Washington, DC: Pew Center for Civic Journalism, 1995).

16. Although recent scholarship has paid little attention to audience effects of public journalism, examples of studies that focused on the

effects of public journalism on the audience can be found in Massey and Haas, "Does Making Journalism More Public Make a Difference?"

17. Massey and Haas, "Does Making Journalism More Public Make a Difference?" 577.

18. Weaver et al., "American Journalist in the 21st Century."

19. These four areas were compared because similar questions were asked of the public and journalists.

20. Questionnaire, sample size, and survey dates were provided 18 April 2005 by David Weaver through e-mail correspondence with the third author. In response to a follow-up query that noted the word "watchdog" had not been used in the questionnaire, Weaver replied in a 6 May 2005 e-mail that although "'watchdog' was not used in the questionnaire, 'watchdog' was used in the printed report we distributed at AEJMC to refer to the role of investigating government claims, not to refer to the adversary role. It was put in quotation marks in the headline on p. 12 of the Key Findings to indicate that it's not the exact term used in the question, but rather a shorthand label for the role of investigating government claims." Weaver added: "My experience has been that journalists are much more likely to embrace a watchdog role than an adversary one. Many consider 'adversary' to be a synonym for 'bias,' whereas watchdog implies a vigilant journalist but not necessarily a biased or opinionated one."

21. The survey was conducted in a metropolitan area comprised of two counties. The population of the larger county was 812,280; the smaller county's population was 249,967. According to U.S. Census data, in the larger county, 41% percent had a bachelor's degree or higher; in the smaller county 34% had a bachelor's degree or higher. The median household income for the larger county was \$47,000; for the smaller county, the median household income was \$61,000. The median age was 30.4 years for the larger of the two counties and 32.3 years for the smaller county. According to census data in the two-county area surveyed, 72% were white, 8% black or African American, 4% Asian, 16% other, .5% Native American. Hispanic or Latino, representing any race, was 26%. When sampling error of plus or minus four percentage points is factored in, it can be seen that the racial-ethnic composition of the sample was consistent with the census data for whites, blacks, and Asians in the two-county area. Although it is important to remember that appropriate statistical comparisons are with local—not national—census data because the focus of the study was on expectations of local—not national—news, the following U.S. population statistics are noted: 75% white; 12.5% Hispanic/Latino of any race; 12.3% African American; \$42,000 median household income; median age 35.3 years; 24% bachelor's degree or higher. Socio-economic characteristics and news would likely vary by local community. <<http://factfinder.census.gov>> (retrieved 8 January 2004).

22. To calculate difference in proportions for two independent random samples, see James L. Bruning and B.L. Kintz, *Computational Handbook of Statistics* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1968), 199-201. According to Table 2, although journalists (58%) were more likely

than the public (50%) to say the civic journalism role of offering solutions to problems was extremely important, this difference was not significant. But the public (48%) was significantly more likely than journalists (32%) to say the civic journalism role of providing a community forum was extremely important.

23. Davis Merritt and Maxwell McCombs, *The Two W's of Journalism: the Why and What of Public Affairs Reporting* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), 53.

24. "The State of the News Media 2004: An Annual Report on American Journalism" <<http://stateofthenewsmedia.org/>> (retrieved 18 March 2004).

25. Eric Dash, "Newspapers' Circulation Still Going Down," *New York Times*, 3 May 2005, sec. C, p. 4.