THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MODEL TO EXAMINE CRITICAL INFORMATION NEEDS ON LOCAL TELEVISION NEWS

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Urban Affairs and Public Policy.

Spring 2015

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is my greatest professional accomplishment thus far. I am indebted to so many for their hard work and continuous support. First, I must thank my mentor and primary investigator on this project, Dr. Danilo Yanich. I am so lucky to have someone like him in my corner—his brilliance is admirable, his heart is incomparable. I look forward to many more years of collaboration, music, and laughter.

The School of Public Policy and Administration certainly has knocked it out of the park with their faculty. While many of them have helped shape the student I am today, I owe a special thank you to two professors who have had a profound impact on me throughout my time at the University of Delaware—Drs. Daniel Rich and Andrea Sarzynski. I cannot thank them enough for pushing me past my intellectual boundaries, inspiring me to make the most out of my studies, and encouraging me to pursue a career in public policy. You both have been an integral part of my education. It was a “no-brainer” to ask you both to serve on my thesis committee. Thank you for graciously accepting my request.

This work would not have been possible without the continued support of Dr. Steven Peuquet, director of the Center for Community Research & Service. His constant encouragement and eagerness to collaborate has propelled much of our media research at the University of Delaware forward.

A very special thank you goes to Johanna Lukk, Luis Lauer, and Russell Sonenclar for serving as coders on this project. This thesis would not have been
possible without your hard work and dedication. It was a pleasure to work with all of you. Additionally, thank you to Dateline Media for providing us with the broadcasts that were in our sample.

Lastly, I absolutely could not have completed this without the support and cheering on of my loved ones. To my friends: there is no doubt someone was looking down on me when they placed you in my path. Your humor, encouragement, coffee breaks, and constant attention to making sure I eat were a breath of fresh air and appreciated more than you will ever know. To my grandparents: you are the ultimate pillars of strength, love, and inspiration. To my sister: every day I wake up and I thank G-d for giving me the most wonderful role model and partner-in-crime I could have ever asked for. You, my dear, are an absolute force to be reckoned with. To my parents: there is no amount of words that can express my gratitude to you. Simply, you have given me the world. The greatest gift I have ever received (including Luna and Rambo!) is having you two as parents. You make everything I do possible and I am forever grateful.

While I am beyond fortunate to have an army of people who have provided me with endless support in all of my endeavors, this thesis is dedicated to my grandmother who has the most brilliant mind out of anyone I have ever met, but was born in a time where it wasn’t socially acceptable for women to pursue their academic aspirations. Her life experience, pure soul, unconditional love, and unnerving wisdom have served as my greatest motivators because, unlike her, I have had the opportunity to nurture my curiosity and pursue my dreams of earning a degree in higher education.

“Ah shtileh hazen maknish aleben- a silent cantor has no voice”
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ABSTRACT

Critical information needs (CINs) are essential areas of public concern about which citizens should know in order to function in their daily lives, both on the individual and community level. In large measure, people turn toward local television news to fulfill those needs. Currently, there is no mechanism that can evaluate to what extent, if any, local television news addresses CINs. This thesis developed such a model. The “Broadcast News CIN Model,” includes two crucial variables, information level and CIN category, which together assess if a news story fulfills a critical information need. Using content analysis, the model was tested in the Columbia, South Carolina television market. The findings from this research, while illustrative in its specifics, demonstrate the validity of the “Broadcast News CIN Model”. The development of this model adds to media policy theory, has wide and immediate policy implications on media consolidation, and is a tool for policymakers and citizens, alike, to assess effectiveness of local television news in addressing critical information needs across the United States.
“The cornerstone of democracy rests on the foundation of an educated electorate.”

- Thomas Jefferson
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

“The smarter the journalists are, the better off society is. [For] to a degree, people read the press to inform themselves—and the better the teacher, the better the student body.” —Warren Buffett

News media is critical in the development of an informed electorate. It is the source for citizens to access information about their communities, which is essential for them to become active and engaged in society. Specifically, local news informs citizens on the issues and politics that directly affect them and their families. When searching for local news, the number one resource for consumers is local television (Mitchell, 2014; Graber 2010). Other news platforms such as the Internet and cable television, while often utilized, are known as “‘common-carriers’ (or) channels that carry information compiled by others rather than originating their own information,” which makes local television and newspapers the originators of information (Graber, 2010, p. 42). This means that the content local television news programs produce is all the more important. Not only is it critical for empowering the public, but it is also crucial in the dissemination of information across media platforms.

As the “primary authority for communications law,” the Federal Communications Commission (the Commission or FCC) is tasked with maintaining a
media landscape that protects the public interest through its expressed power as the arbiter of ownership and licensing agreements (Federal Communications Commission, 2015). The Commission, bound by Section 257 of the Communications Act of 1934 and the Telecommunications Act of 1996, is required to review the effect that ownership laws have on the media ecosystem every four years and report to Congress whether or not they are consistent with the public interest, convenience, and necessity (47 U.S.C. § 257; “Statement of work,” 2011). Ownership and licensing agreements, which serve the public interest, can be understood as those that promote news that is local, diverse, and competitive (Federal Communications Commission, 2015).

In an effort to fulfill this requirement for 2010, the Commission initiated “The Pilot Test of Research Design for a Multi-Market Study of Critical Information Needs.” According to the Commission’s statement of work for this project, the pilot test is a necessary step if any policy action is going to take place in reference to market entry barriers. It states, “[i]n order to develop a policy that would eliminate market barriers and advance the goal of diversity and competition, the Commission needs to conduct or commission research that illuminates the relationship between market entry barriers and the critical information needs of local communities” (“Statement of work,” 2011, p. 1). This test is the logical step to take in understanding the relationship between media outlets and critical information needs.

The study began with contracting the University of Southern California Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism to produce an in-depth literature review that determines if regulatory action is necessary to eliminate barriers into the
media market and to also evaluate the effect, if any, that these barriers are having on citizens’ critical information needs (CINs) (“Statement of work,” 2011). In an effort to produce a review that was as comprehensive as possible, the Commission also partnered with the University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for Communication and Democracy and the Communication Policy Research Network, a group of leading media research scholars and journalists. Together they generated the Review of the Literature Regarding Critical Information Needs of the American Public to create a foundational understanding of citizens’ critical information needs and propose a framework for a practical assessment of those needs.

Because such an extensive review was an ambitious task, the Commission, following the suggestion of the review that further action be taken to evaluate CINs, identified a group of 25 experts in the media field and brought them together in Washington, D.C. for a meeting to determine the next steps in studying citizens’ critical information needs (“Statement of work,” 2011). Those in attendance, including a representative from the University of Delaware, were asked to devise proposals to build on the theoretical underpinnings that the literature review provided. Collectively, these proposals were to provide a holistic overview of media ecology in the United States.

Proposals fell into one of two categories: the supply side and the demand side. The supply side, or rather the media market census component, included broadcast news content, newspaper content, radio news content, Internet content, and a qualitative analysis of media providers. These content analyses set out to analyze CINs
across their respective media platforms over the course of one constructed week (See: “Methodology” section for explanation of constructed week). The qualitative analysis of media providers focused on how local media services meet CINs by conducting a series of interviews and examining ownership characteristics, employment data, and demographics (“Statement of work,” 2011).

The demand side, also referred to as the community ecology study, included a general population survey, diary study, and in-depth neighborhood interviews. The general population survey aimed to provide a lens into CINs by measuring both perceived and actual critical information needs. In a similar manner, the diary study sought to measure actual experiences with CINs by tracking citizens’ exposure to CINs and the decisions media entities that provide CINs make. Lastly, to elevate the analysis from the individual level to the neighborhood level, the neighborhood interviews component planned to study individuals within diverse neighborhoods (“Statement of work,” 2011). In addition to identifying the populations/universes in which to assess CINs, both the media market census components and the community ecology studies were tasked with creating a detailed research design to evaluate CINs within their respective research areas.

The research began in late 2013; however, a few months into the research, the Commission terminated the study. Many leading Republican officials protested the research, citing the community ecology component as an infringement on the First Amendment, arguing that the study told media providers what type of news to produce (the diary study). Chairman Fred Upton and the rest of the members of the House
Energy and Commerce Committee, the committee that is responsible for the congressional oversight of the Federal Communications Commission, wrote an open letter noting that the free speech of citizens and the freedom of the press of broadcasters were jeopardized because of the study (“Open Letter To”, 2013). The Republican commissioners on the Federal Communications Commission also advocated for the termination of the study; they too cited the study as an infringement on the First Amendment.

Moreover, with the degree of political contention surrounding the study, continuing with the research would have required spending a significant amount of political capital. In addition to the controversy surrounding the CIN study, the Commission had a number of “high-stakes” rulings on the horizon, specifically the upcoming decision on net neutrality¹. Ultimately, continuing the CIN study was not worth the political consequences. Republican Commissioner Ajit Pai released the following comment to the press about the cancellation of the study:

I am pleased that the FCC has canceled its Critical Information Needs study. In our country, the government does not tell the people what information they need. Instead, news outlets and the American public decide that for themselves. I look forward to working with my colleagues to identify and remove actual barriers to entry into the communications industry. This newsroom study was a distraction from that important goal (2014).

Commissioner Pai’s statement exemplifies the politicization of the CIN study.

¹ Net neutrality refers to maintaining a free and open Internet. The FCC was presented with a controversial case on February 26, 2015 that decided if local municipalities have the power to regulate the delivery of Internet service.
By the time the Commission cancelled the study, the University of Delaware had already developed the model and collected data from the test market. Researchers chose to continue with the work and the model created and analyzed in this thesis is the model developed for the purposes of the research initiated by the Commission. The objective of this thesis is to test the validity of what we have deemed the “Broadcast News CIN Model.” The examination of the broadcasts in the Columbia, SC television market affirmed both the internal and constructs validity of the model.

Chapter Two of this thesis provides an overview of the media landscape in which this model could be applied. It explores the role media plays in a democracy and highlights the importance of local television in citizens’ newsgathering. In addition, it details the scholarly literature that provided the theoretical underpinnings for the development of the “Broadcast News CIN Model”.

Chapter Three reveals the findings that resulted from the application of the model. These findings are illustrative, but they reinforce the “Broadcast News CIN Model’s” effectiveness in evaluating critical information needs. Chapter Four explains how these findings are attributable specifically to the variables created in this model.

Lastly, in Chapter Five, I argue that the “Broadcast News CIN Model,” provides a sound methodological basis for the Federal Communications Commission to examine the performance of local television newscasts in meeting citizen’s critical information needs.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

“The media has changed. We now give broadcast licenses to philosophies instead of people. People get confused and think there is no difference between news and entertainment. People who project themselves as journalists on television don't know the first thing about journalism. They are just there stirring up a hockey game.”
- Gary Ackerman, former U.S. Congressman

Media is fundamental to America’s democracy. While its function in society has changed over time, media is integral in informing citizenry. The U.S. media system is unlike any other in the world because it is protected by law under the founding principles of the United States. The First Amendment of the Constitution is revolutionary in its guarantee of the right to freedom of the press. Freedom of the press is a source of empowerment and provides a voice for the people that is independent of the government. Media serves as the people's connecting thread to the government by providing a lens in which people can utilize to become informed on the issues that mean the most to them. The phrase “means the most to them” is deliberately arbitrary in its meaning because a platform which states what public policy issues people need to know about to function in their everyday lives does not exist. Furthermore, there is no research model which determines whether or not media is serving as that connecting thread and acting as the resource for such information.
This thesis is innovative in its development of such a model for local television news and instrumental in its implementation.

**The Role of Media in a Democracy**

Robert McChesney (2008) in his book, *The Political Economy of the Media*, affirms that “journalism in any meaningful sense cannot survive without a viable democracy” (p. 34). A democratic society not only provides a forum for journalists to act, but it also delivers journalists an audience to listen (McChesney, 2008). However, to that same effect, democracy cannot survive without viable journalism. At the core of a democratic society is a self-governing public and the public cannot govern properly without an entity to provide insight into the actions of the officials that they have elected.

The role of media is a fundamental component of a democracy. It is often referred to as the “Fourth Estate” or fourth branch of government, arguably, elevating it to the same prestige as the expressed government branches. Media has earned the reputation as a "watchdog" for citizens—a role that has not been taken lightly. McChesney (2008) aptly describes the great significance of this phenomenon and the function that media plays in a democratic society:

“Democratic theory generally posits that society needs a journalism that is a rigorous watchdog of those in power and those who want to be in power, can ferret out truth from lies, and can present a wide range of informed positions on the important issues of the day…”
However, fostering this type of system is filled with complexities and faces a multitude of challenges. McChesney continues:

…Each medium [TV, radio, newspaper, etc.] need not do all of these things, but the media system as a whole should make this caliber of journalism readily available to the citizenry. How a society can construct a media system that will generate something approximating democratic journalism is a fundamental problem for a free society, as powerful interests tend to wish to dominate the flow of information” (p. 25).

Expanding on this framework, Shanto Iyengar (2011) details how journalism serves the needs of the people in a democratic society:

1) Provides a forum, before a national audience, where candidates and political parties can debate their qualifications for office;

2) Educates citizens by providing a variety of perspectives on the important issues of the day;

3) And, serves as a watchdog that scrutinizes the actions of government officials on behalf of citizens, “most of whom do not have the opportunity to closely follow the actions of politicians and the government” (p. 20)

The expectation of media to scrutinize government officials is acknowledged by a number of communications scholars. Doris Graber (2010) affirms that “[i]f media surveillance causes governments to fall and public officials to be ousted, democracy is well served” (p. 17). This reinforces the idea that the news media is the entity that holds the government accountable to the public. This not only encourages investigative journalism, but it also provides a sense of security for the public.

However, media’s tendency to nurture the status quo has led to the contention that media’s role as a “watchdog” is one that is carried out in theory and not in practice. Rather, the news “media limit their criticism to what they perceive as
perversions of the public’s basic social and political values…and rarely question the widely accepted fundamentals of the political system” (Graber, 2010, p.18). Phrased differently, media covers “newsworthy” stories as long as they fit into a particular lens that pushes a greater agenda forward. For example, media organizations are significantly concerned with maintaining relationships with their sources, who are often people of power, and increasing their organization’s profit. As such, the press may shy away from publishing certain stories in order to avoid portraying one of their sources in a negative light.

Journalists, therefore, face a multitude of challenges. Not only are they tasked with producing stories that are for the public good, but they must also generate stories that suit the needs of their organization’s corporate influences. If sources, specifically government officials, become alienated because of a media organization’s negative coverage, that organization can potentially lose out on future profit-producing information that that source can provide. This propensity to appease corporate influences contradicts the traditional role of media in a democracy as discussed above because media organizations’ “self-interest [conflicts] more than [coincides] with serving the common good” (McManus, 2012, p. 81).

Lance Bennett (2012) characterizes the U.S. media system as one with a shifting balance of power between the people, the press, and politicians. He argues that the assumption that a free press means quality information is a false one and portrays America’s media system as a carefully crafted construction. First, there is a symbiotic relationship between the press and politicians—politicians cannot survive
without the press and the press cannot survive without politicians. The news media is
the megaphone through which officials push their agendas. Without the attention of
the press, politicians’ cannot communicate their messages to the public. If a
“conversation” is not established between officials and the public, policy agendas do
not gain traction and elections are lost.

Likewise, the news media rely on government officials for access and as
sources for their stories. If those things are lost, the press can no longer operate as a
watchdog for citizens. The people provide both the audience and the voting pool for
the press and politicians, respectively. In this depiction of America’s media system, it
is clear that the power lies not with the people as the Founders intended, but rather
with the interests of the government elite and the news media.

With the people primarily serving as a function of both the news media and
politicians for viewership and votes the question emerges: Is the public receiving the
information that best serves its needs when the main goal of both the press and
politicians is to manufacture messages that capture the public’s attention and not act as
a resource. Many media experts contend that the answer is “no” and that news has
shifted from this idea of a resource for information to one of “infotainment,” where
entertainment camouflages itself as “need-to-know” information for the public or
news that is presented in a sensationalized, dramatic manner (Bennett, 2012;

Journalists, editors, media executives, and politicians employ a number of
techniques to construct the “infotainment” or news they wish to communicate with the
This construction of news is, at times, motivated by the desire to increase viewership. However, the motivation behind this packaging of news is increasingly becoming more clandestine. News organizations are sacrificing the “public interest to [maximize] the private profit” (McManus, 2012, p. 83). This commercial bias transforms the news from a public good to a private one, in the sense that it serves the profit motives of the firms.

Bennett (2012) highlights four information biases that are utilized in news production: personalization, dramatization, fragmentation, and authority order—disorder bias. These biases, often utilized in conjunction with one another, create a specific lens through which consumers view stories. This lens is meant to form a connection with viewers, attempting to decrease the likelihood that they will shift their attention elsewhere.

Personalization refers to media’s tendency to include a personal element in stories, making the viewer feel like the action of the story could have happened to them. This involves coverage of the feelings/opinions of individuals rather than an analysis of the issue(s) at hand. Bennett (2012) deems this as “surface” coverage (p. 45). Dramatization works alongside the personalization narrative where the most dramatic elements of a story are emphasized to create a sense of urgency, implying that citizens need to act immediately or fostering a sense of doom. Fragmentation is the “isolation of stories from each other and from their larger contexts,” making it difficult to gain a full scope of the bigger picture and often providing confusion for viewers (Bennett, 2012, p. 47). The last news property that Bennett outlines is the
authority order—disorder bias where the capabilities of officials are brought into question. In this bias, journalists cover the actions of officials and speculate if they can return a sense of normalcy to the community rather than the details of the story (Bennett, 2012). These biases are not inherently bad or good. More so, they provide a conceptual understanding of news production in the United States.

News production in the United States is affected by an inherent dilemma because the news system is based on the delivery of a public good (news) by private means. The tension is how do news producers present information that is both in the public interest and profitable. Media reform advocates claim that profit trumps public interest, while media executives assert precisely the opposite reality. Reformers contend that when citizens are overwhelmed with spin, infotainment, and news packaging, they opt out of the news market. It becomes too difficult for citizens to uncover the facts of a particular story and the easiest response is not to engage. News producers challenge that this disengagement arises when news does not capture consumers’ attention. Media executives claim that news produced in an entertainment framework provides citizens with the media system they want, which means that news is in fact serving the public interest, as the Federal Communications Commission mandates.

Navigating America’s media system to determine how the major players interact often results in the inability to gain an accurate picture of the media landscape because there is such a varied array of factors at play. Bennett (2012) captures this exchange among the actors:
Given such diverse forces shaping the future of news and public information, it seems reasonable to ask how we might promote the best possible outcomes for democracy. Many Americans seem to live with the false sense of security that the First Amendment and the Constitution will somehow guarantee a quality press…there is no overarching plan to keep an ideal democratic information system in order…The irony of this is that the First Amendment with its protection of press freedom was intended to enable an independent press to stand up to government power. While the press freedom remains a crucial protection in democracy, it has also become a shield for corporate media to avoid social responsibility (p. 26).

The First Amendment is a central consideration regarding the operation of the media system in the United States. It provides the press with the autonomy to produce content without any regulation by the government. There is a difference, though, between regulating the content that a media organization produces and regulating the manner in which it is distributed. Within America’s broadcast media system information is a public good, but it is delivered by private firms. To avoid market monopolization, the Federal Communications Commission was created in 1934 as the primary regulatory body of communications throughout the United States. It is an independent governmental agency that is charged with regulating communications through the information dissemination methods of radio, television, wire, satellite, and cable (U.S. Senate, 1934; Federal Communications Commission, 2015).

The Commission regulates based on three principles: diversity, competition, and localism—which together foster a broadcast media system that serves the public interest. It is also seen as the pathway to achieving a broadcast media environment that is filled with independent voices, informed debates, diverse viewpoints, and unbiased, factual information.
In order for stations to produce news and broadcast their content within this system, they must have access to the electromagnetic spectrum. This spectrum, owned by the public, yet controlled by the Commission, is finite. The only way for stations to gain access is to acquire a license from the Commission. Licenses are granted to stations for free. Initially, the licenses were accompanied by a specific requirement that ten percent of the station’s broadcasting would be public affairs programming. In 1984, the Commission voted to rescind the ten percent requirement.

The next year, private firms bought the three major news networks—ABC, NBC, and CBS—that dominated the airwaves. These firms had no experience in producing news and they had little concern for accommodating the information needs of the public. This deregulation effectively resulted in a market failure in which the profit motive of these firms overtook their public interest obligations. As such, an information asymmetry developed in which information providers increasingly reduced the public interest aspects of the news they produced for citizens (McChesney, 2008; Graber, 2010; McManus, 2012). The passing of the Telecommunications Act in 1996, which transformed media ownership laws, making it much easier to consolidate media entities among companies, exacerbated this market failure.

Arguably, this deregulation and move toward media consolidation has led media scholars to question if the Commission has abandoned its obligation to serve
the public interest. For instance, stations are required to re-apply for licenses\(^2\) every 8 years and the Commission has the authority to deny the renewal on the grounds that the station has not met the public interest requirement. Since its founding, the Commission has granted over 100,000 license renewals and has denied only four applications (Waldman, 2011).

The number of licenses that one entity can own is deliberately limited under FCC law to preserve a competitive, diverse, and local broadcast media system. Congress and the Commission decided to grant licenses on a local basis, not nationally, in an effort to promote locally oriented content (Waldman, 2011). Moreover, the more companies that have licenses in a market, the stronger the competition and the greater the number of viewpoints. Research has shown, however, that the current broadcast media system does not reflect these principles (Bennett, 2012). In the abstract, these three principles act together in meeting the public’s needs. In actuality, though, these principles only provide a framework for serving the public interest and do not address what it means to meet the needs of communities.

**Local TV’s Role**

The first step in meeting the needs of communities is recognizing that each community has individual concerns. This is precisely why television markets across America are geographically based and reflect a local population distribution. In an age

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\(^2\) The Telecommunications Act of 1996 changed the renewal time period from 3 to 8 years.
where news is rapidly becoming digitized, most assume that local TV news is no
longer relevant to the everyday lives of citizens, but that is not the case. There is no
question that the Internet plays a huge part in the delivery of news in America;
however, that fact is not synonymous with local TV news losing its significance or
impact on democratic societies. Local TV, “in many ways…is more important [today]
than ever [before]” (Waldman, 2011, p. 13).

PEW’s State of the News Media 2014 report highlights that “[l]ocal
television…remains the primary place American adults turn to for news” (Mitchell,
2014, p. 3). Local TV not only reaches 9 out of 10 Americans, but it is also the
number one starting point for conversations about the news of the day among citizens
(Mitchell, 2014; TVB, 2013). Local TV has seen “its audience increase for the first
time in five years,” making it the “the single most visible presence in the news space”
(Mitchell, 2014, p. 3; Mitchell & Holcomb, 2015, p. 1). Simply put, local TV is just
as, if not more, pertinent to meeting the needs of citizens as it has ever been.

It is also imperative to note that local television news programs are the leading
source for original content (Graber, 2010). That is, when consumers see news on the
Internet, social networking sites, or their mobile devices, the content of the story often
originates somewhere else, most frequently local news outlets. Most commonly, the
Internet, social networking sites, and mobile phones are methods of information
dissemination and not producers of news.

Steve Waldman’s (2011) extensive report, *The Information Needs of
Communities*—a study on the media landscape requested by the Federal
Communications Commission—substantiates these conclusions. He first observes that 78 percent of Americans cite local TV news as their main source of news and remarks 50 percent of Americans consume local TV news on a regular basis (Purcell, 2010; Rosenstiel, 2010). Moreover, he notes that the number of local news hours produced have increased 35 percent between 2003 and 2009 (Papper, 2010). The most recent version of this study, the “TV and Radio News Staffing and Profitability Survey,” confirms that this trend is continuing, citing that “the average television station set a new record for the amount of local news aired” (Papper, 2012, p. 1).

Stations are expanding the way in which they disseminate their information. In addition to broadcasts, local TV stations are now utilizing the Internet and mobile phones to reach citizens, making the content that local TV stations produce all the more significant (Waldman, 2011). This reinforces the argument that even if a citizen is not using local TV broadcasts as her main source of news consumption, the sources she does use are still greatly influenced by local TV news.

Despite the fact that the availability of local TV news content is greater than it has ever been and viewership has increased, it is necessary to note that there has been a decrease in the original content produced by stations. Pew’s 2014 State of the Media reported, just about a quarter of the 952 television stations in the United States do not produce their own content. This means that in multiple markets across America, consumers are seeing the same presentation of news on multiple channels. Waldman (2011) attributes this consolidation to the pooling of resources among local TV stations through the use of managing service agreements (Yanich, 2011). The research
on managing service agreements is extensive and has an immense impact on the state of local TV news production, particularly in examining the competitive edge of stations. This is outside of the scope of this thesis, however, and is not directly related to how consumers meet their information needs. Briefly, it is important recognize that if stations that are not engaged in these agreements are not meeting CINs, then there is no reasonable expectation that stations involved in consolidation would be meeting these needs either because they are airing news that was packaged for multiple markets rather than addressing the individual needs of the community it is serving.

In sum, based on all of the literature reviewed, it is clear that local TV news remains an integral part of citizens’ everyday lives and access to local TV content has become more readily available. But because of the reduction of original content, there is question to whether this information is meeting citizens’ needs.

**Defining Critical Information Needs**

“The Review of Literature Regarding Critical Information Needs of the American Public (CIN Review)” provides the theoretical framework for the development of the “Broadcast News CIN Model”. It acted as the catalyst for the Commissions’ initiation of the “Pilot Test of Research Design for a Multi-Market Study of Critical Information Needs,” in which the “Broadcast News CIN Model” is a component. In addition to Waldman’s “The Information Needs of Communities,” the principle investigators of this review examined an extensive amount of scholarly
literature to fulfill the Commission’s Request For Quotation, close to 500³ sources. These sources spanned across multiple disciplines ranging from communications, to urban planning, economics, library and information sciences, and geography. In similarity to the sources evaluated above, the review maintains that:

In a federal democracy, the challenge of communication participation begins in local communities, and must stay rooted in local communities. Despite the vast amount of information, entertainment, and basic human connection that the Internet provides, it cannot by itself substitute for meeting the local information needs of American communities” (Friedland, Napoli, Ognyanova, Weil, & Wilson, 2011, p. xii).

When citizens’ are faced with an issue that directly affects them, such as a sick child, they are going to look to their communities’ resources for answers and not towards national media outlets. This need for local news echoes the sentiments of numerous media scholars and highlights the void that exists because of the lack of studies which assess how citizens meet their information needs and the role that media plays in the process.

The review notes that the “information needs of local communities are…unique and specific” (Friedland, et al., 2011, p. xii). This point is crucial because it illustrates the complexities involved in producing a general research model that aimed to examine a concept that varies so greatly in its specifics. The resulting research model, while expansive, was broad in the needs that it identifies, but specific in the concepts it examined. Information needs were defined as those that people

³ More information about both sources and the methods used for the CIN Review can be found in the annotated bibliography.
require “to navigate the course of their daily lives…areas in which individuals need to make informed decisions, both as consumers…and as citizens” (Friedland, et al., 2011, p. 6).

Driven by three core questions, the study outlined eight information areas that the researchers believe were integral to citizens’ welfare. These areas were evaluated on multiple societal levels, including the local, state, and national scales. The core questions that guided this research are:

1) How do Americans meet critical information needs?

2) How does the media ecosystem operate to address critical information needs?

3) What barriers exist in providing content and services to address critical information needs (Friedland, et al., 2011)?

While all three of these questions were key factors in developing the “Broadcast News CIN Model,” the most pertinent one was how the media ecosystem operates to address critical information needs. Central to answering this question was the admission that information must be made available to citizens in a “timely manner,” an “interpretable language,” and through a media source that is “reasonably accessible” (Friedland, et al., 2011, p. v).

Investigators declared information a need if the information fell into one of eight categories: 1) Emergencies and Public Safety; 2) Health; 3) Education; 4) Transportation Systems; 5) Environment and Planning; 6) Economic Development; 7) Civic Information; and 8) Political Life. Researchers conducted an in-depth analysis of
these eight categories, which directly informed the (Broadcast Media CIN Model” (See: Methodology). Below is a brief summary of the information needs from the report. The methodology chapter (Error! Reference source not found.) details how those needs were applied to the “Broadcast News CIN Model”.

**Critical Information Need Areas**

**Emergencies and Public Safety:** This need “is clear and incontestable,” according to the review (Friedland, et al., 2011, p.7). It was defined as anything that could pose imminent danger or threatens the well-being of citizens. This included public safety threats (i.e. terrorism, and amber alerts), natural disasters, dangerous weather alerts, and hazardous outbreaks. Waldman noted that "local TV station[s are] often considered to be as vital a part of the local community as the police and fire departments” (Waldman, 2011, p. 79).

**Health:** The focus of this area impacting health behavior, both by promoting healthy practices and discouraging unhealthy ones. The category, though, was not limited to health behaviors and wellness. It also included information on the spread of diseases, health services and costs, vaccinations, and local health campaigns (i.e. smoking prevention). Waldman (2011) highlighted that this need is the most apparent when there are epidemics such as the H1N1 flu or the Ebola outbreak.
**Education:** Investigators faced difficulties in defining this need because there was “a surprising lack of scholarly literature addressing local educational communication” (Friedland, et al., 2011, p. 17). Most often, research covered the politics of education, rather than curriculum substance. The description of this need, however, remained inclusive. The authors identified anything from school performance/assessment, to enrichment program, curriculum, educational opportunities, charters, decision-making, and resource allocation as an educational need.

**Transportation Systems:** Similarly to education, there was a significant lack of literature on transportation information as a need in communities. The resulting description in the CIN Review was, therefore, straightforward. It focused on providing citizens with timely information on transportation systems across multiple platforms from the neighborhood, city, and national level. This included updates on traffic reports and road conditions, as well as policy debates/actions in transportation.

**Economic Opportunities:** Economic needs of communities were addressed on multiple levels, both as individuals and businesses, and community and nation-wide development. A summation of past research was inconclusive. The CIN Review defined the need as information on job trainings, apprenticeship, skill development and availabilities; in addition, for businesses, any information on start-up assistance, capital resources, and development initiatives. This included national policy initiatives.
Environment and Planning: The need of communities to be informed about the state of the environment was rooted in sustainability and conservation. Additionally, it included natural resource development, promoting healthy water and air standards, alerts about possible hazards, and, similar to the other information needs, all discussions about environmental policies.

Civic Participation: Broadly, civic life was classified in two categories: resources and participation. In terms of resources, civic life referred to information on libraries, non-profit organizations, and civic institutions. Civic participation was all-encompassing in its definition. It referred to community-wide programs, recreational opportunities, cultural and arts events, and religious institutions’ programming.

Political Life: Citizens’ need to be informed about political life lies at the center of democracy. Therefore, the review mandated that it is crucial for them to be informed about the happenings across all units of government: local, state, and national. This need comprised of the actions of officials, both voluntary and elected, candidates for office, school board and community councils, voting information, town hall meeting locations, and local and national policy formation.

The CIN literature review revolved around two main points, identifying what citizens’ critical information needs look like and evaluating research, which assessed
how media platforms address those needs. The core conclusion from the review was that an expansive study of critical information needs across media platforms be conducted, using the description of the information needs provided by the CIN Review. Past research on these areas is inconclusive, disjointed, and lacks a comprehensive view.

Generally, needs were broken into two types: those that are fundamental to the everyday lives of individuals and those that affect the community as a larger group (Friedland, et al., 2011, p. 40). More specifically, the review concluded that, as marginalized populations, women and minorities’ information needs were being disproportionately served. This finding spurred the formulation of the review’s mandate that critical information needs be made available to the public in a timely manner, understandable language and on an easily accessible media platform. This increases the likelihood that impoverished and/or non-English speaking individuals meet their information needs.

The review underlined, once again, the great importance of local television in addressing community needs. The review posited that information needs were inadequately met, both in airtime and resources. It also questioned the extent to which local stations fulfilled their public interest requirements, challenging that these requirements have “largely been eliminated” because of “the process of FCC oversight over broadcast licensees” (Friedland, et al., 2011, p. 48). This exposed the link between media consolidation and citizens’ critical information needs.
However, examining such a link is beyond the scope of this thesis and a point for future study. The goal of this thesis was to develop a research model that begins the discussion surrounding if/how broadcast television addresses citizens’ critical information needs.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

“Most people I’ve talked to are convinced that they’re not getting valuable information from news media anymore. I’m not talking about tinfoil-hatters either, these are intelligent people who believe their news media has failed them.”

– Drew Curtis, founder of Fark.com, author

The purpose of this study was to develop a research model which evaluates citizens’ critical information needs in local television news programming. To create this model, we used the data gathering method of content analysis as our basis (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005). Content analysis is the process of systematically turning qualitative observations into quantitative data points. It utilizes a set of instructions referred to as a “coding scheme” or “coding mechanism,” which assigns numbers to correspond with individual content attributes. This allows “coders” to assess information content in a numerical manner. To determine the accuracy, reliability, and validity of the model, the coding scheme was tested in the Columbia, South Carolina designated market area (DMA).
Research Questions

The guiding question for creating this model was as follows:

**RQ1:** In the Columbia, South Carolina local television news market what was the distribution of stories across critical information needs and information level between November 11th, 2013 and December 29th, 2013?

Subsequently:

**RQ2:** Did local television stations provide citizens with information that fell into a *CIN category*?

**RQ3:** Did local television stations provide citizens with a level of information on which to act?

**RQ4:** Is there a relationship between the level of information a CIN story provides and the presentation *mode* of the story?

**RQ5:** Is there a relationship between the level of information a CIN story provides and the location of the story?

The Sample

The Federal Communications Commission was in charge of choosing the market that was the test case for measuring CINs. In choosing a market the FCC identified a number of areas that they considered representative of media markets across the United States. Ultimately, the Commission decided on Columbia, South
Carolina citing its diverse demographic makeup and medium size. Colombia, South Carolina is one of 210 designated market areas (DMA) in the United States. DMA’s are ranked by size, which is defined by the number of television households in the market (The Nielsen Company, 2013). According to the Nielsen Media Company (2013), the Columbia, SC DMA ranks number 77, reaching 398,510 households in 2013. In Columbia, SC there are four stations that deliver daily newscasts: WOLO (ABC affiliate), WIS (NBC affiliate), WLTX (CBS affiliate) and WACH (FOX affiliate). WOLO, WIS, and WACH also produce a daily morning show. Morning shows were included in the sample and treated differently than newscasts because they were produced in a different format. The treatment of newscasts and morning shows is explained the “Coding Mechanism” section.

We examined the newscasts on broadcasts provided by Dateline Media, a media monitoring organization that possesses an extensive television news archive. The University of Delaware has worked with Dateline Media on previous research studies, which made it a natural partner for this study (Ruiz, 2013). The sample time period formed a constructed week and was randomly drawn to begin on November 11th, 2013 and extended until December 29th, 2013. A constructed week consists of broadcasts gathered over a span of time; the sample time frame includes the Monday of the first week, the Tuesday of the second week, the Wednesday of the third week, and so on and so forth until a full week is “constructed” (Yanich, 2011). To pick the broadcasts, we took the highest-rated broadcast on each station and randomly chose two other broadcasts from all of the newscasts aired on the stations that day.
Additionally, we stratified the sample by separating morning shows from newscasts and breaking them down into half-hour blocks. A half-hour block was randomly chosen from each station that aired morning shows on the days included in our sample. In total there were 77 broadcasts, 62 of which were newscasts and 15 of which were morning shows.

**Unit of Analysis**

The unit of analysis was individual news stories. In its entirety, there were 2,101 story observations in the sample. Each story observation was classified by *story* type. *Types* were chosen from a mutually exclusive and exhaustive list: crime; health issues; business & economy/stock; environment; education; public issues; soft news/human interest; city government; county/state government; federal government; political campaign/politics; consumer news; fires/accidents/disasters; international story; entertainment; Afghanistan/Iraq hard news; Afghanistan/Iraq soft news; war on terror hard news; war on terror soft news; traffic; weather; sports; promos for news/station/network; and commercials. News stories were defined as any story observation that was not classified as a commercial, promo, weather segment, or sports segment. There were 1,190 individual news stories.
Developing the Model

A study like this has not been conducted before. The greatest obstacle we faced in constructing the model was determining the most effective way of operationalizing a concept as complex, subjective, and as varied as citizens’ critical information needs. As a natural starting point, we used previous media research conducted at the University of Delaware as the framework for our model. The coding model used in *Local TV News & Service Agreements: A Critical Look* (2011) was adapted for this research and then modified to complete the task.

CIN Coding Instrument: Operationalization

The operationalization of all the variables in the “Broadcast News CIN Model” can be found in Appendix A. For each broadcast the station; network; and type (newscast or morning show), time, length, and date of broadcast were recorded. These were considered identifying aspects of the broadcast as a whole. Individual attributes of stories were measured through story identifiers, CIN elements, production factors, and locational variables. Story identifiers included *story type*, as discussed in the “Unit of Analysis” section and *topic*. *Topic* was the narrative of the story, which was recorded verbatim (i.e. man shot, restaurant opening, weather segment, etc.). *Topic’s* main function was to assist researchers in identifying stories during the analysis.
‘CIN’ Category and Information Level

The first step we took in tailoring the Local TV News model to our research questions was to conduct a thorough assessment of critical information needs as defined by the CIN Review. Once there was a sufficient grasp of the concepts and each individual “need area” involved, it became clear that we needed to include CIN issue areas in the model. Appendix B provides the description of the CIN issue areas that coders used as reference and Table 1 provides examples of typical stories that fell into CIN issue categories.

Table 1: CIN Story Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CIN Area</th>
<th>Story Examples*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emergencies and Public Safety</td>
<td>Robberies; Shootings; Missing Person Reports; Security Breaches, Dangerous Weather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Flu Shots; Medicaid/Medicare Policy; Disease Awareness; Scientific Discoveries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>School Budgets; Cost of College, Administrators Status; Contract Talks; New School Policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation Systems</td>
<td>Traffic Updates; Travel Information; Airports Finances; Public Transportation Costs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Economic Opportunities
- Business Expansions; Stock Updates; Minimum Wage Protests; Saving Tips; Economy Updates; Unemployment Rates

### Environment and Planning
- Land Deals; Conservation Updates; Going Green Efforts

### Civic Participation
- Fundraisers; Drives; Holiday Events; Vigils; Ceremonies; Restaurant Specials

### Political Life
- Polls; Town Meetings; Search Committee Efforts; Law Passing; Policy Debates

*Note: These are just examples of stories from the sample, they are not meant to be exhaustive in their description.*

A dichotomous variable was created to determine if a story presented CIN information. If it contained such information the story was then applied to eight contingency variables, which corresponded to the eight CIN issue areas: emergencies and public safety; health; education; transportation systems; economic opportunities; environment and planning; civic life and political life. These variables were also dichotomous (information was present or not), but not mutually exclusive, as a story observation could fit into more than one category. For example, a health outbreak could be categorized as both an “emergencies and public safety” issue and a “health” issue. This version of the coding scheme was tested and intercoder reliability demonstrated that this was not the best way to measure CINs.
Instead of using eight separate variables that corresponded to the eight CIN areas, we resolved to construct one variable called *CIN Category*, with the CIN issue areas as the possible attributes. Coders were instructed to place every story observation, with the exception of sports, weather, promos, and commercials, into a CIN category. Sports, weather, promos, and commercials are structural features of a news broadcast and do not have any effect on CINs. Through testing, we arrived at the conclusion that *CIN category* did not apply to every single broadcast unit. For instance, a story about the new apple phone did not fall into a CIN category, and should therefore, not be forced into one. This clarification refined the model and produced the intercoder reliability statistics stated below in “The Final Version”.

Simultaneous to the development of the *CIN category* variable, we also created a variable defined as *information level*. We recognized that it was not sufficient to simply acknowledge a topic that a citizen should be informed about. That is, merely providing an information category did not fully answer the question of whether citizens’ information needs were met. The charge behind the CIN study was to create a model that assessed whether citizens’ CINs were met in order to be *active* in their communities. We, therefore, needed to create a variable that assessed whether the information being provided by local television news programs was *active*.

*Information level* consisted of three attributes: episode/surveillance, context, and actionable. The description of each attribute that was provided to coders is below:
1) **Episode/Surveillance**—a snippet of a topic or issue; lacks a connection to a larger set of issues; the most basic form of news presentation; at the very least a story observation is at this level;

2) **Context**—presents the broader picture, encompasses why the story is being presented, provides a connecting thread between the facts;

3) **Actionable**—story provides next steps for consumers, based on the information that they receive citizens can now take mobilizing steps.

To define “actionability” we looked towards James B. Lemert et. al’s (1977) piece, *Journalists and Mobilizing Information*. The article identified mobilizing information as “information which allows people to act on those attitudes which they might already have,” and detailed three different types of mobilizing information: locational, identificational, and tactical (Lemert, Mitzman, Seither, Cook, & Hackett, p.721). Locational information was defined as anything that dealt with time and place of a potential activity; identificational, typically included locational information in addition to an identification such as a name, physical description, or brand; and tactical referred to any information that concerns explicit or implicit behavioral models. These descriptions were given to coders before the coding process began.

Coders were instructed that every story observation must be assigned an *information level*, or be labeled as missing or not applicable, such was the case with weather/sports segments, promos, and commercials. The operationalization of *active* information for the purposes of this research model was story observations that were marked as “actionable”. Information that was marked “actionable” was required to be placed in a *CIN category*. Therefore, if a story was “actionable” then citizens’ CINs
were met. This included any information that told the consumer what to do, whether it was advice on how to act or mobilizing steps to be taken. To be clear, this variable solely assessed the information provided by the news program and does not provide any insight into whether citizens were taking the steps suggested by the newscast.

Production Factors: Place, Block, Mode, Reporter Local

It is imperative to examine the production factors of a broadcast. *Local TV News & Shared Services Agreements: A Critical Look* (2011) articulates, these factors illuminate the “economic calculus” that is central in the making of a news broadcast. Economic pressures both impact and inform which stories air, when they air, how they are depicted, and in what manner they are shown. These pressures include, but are not limited to, the need to breakeven in terms of cost, the desire to increase profit, and the responsibility of satisfying corporate influences. These are strategic factors that are taken into account in the construction of a newscast.

Place and Block

*Place* and *block* refer to the location of a particular story within a broadcast. For *place*, every unit of observation was assigned an individual number within the broadcast. The numbers increased continuously. *Block* refers to the time between commercial breaks (Yanich, 2011). The first block begins with the opening of the
broadcast and spans until the end of the first commercial break. When the broadcast returns, the second block begins. This continues until the end of the newscast.

*Mode*

Presentation mode is the manner in which a news story is communicated to the audience; specifically it is a “system of professional broadcast techniques” that convey “the narrative and/or images of the stor[y] to the” viewer (Yanich, 2011, p.14) It is the most cost sensitive factor in news production because the greatest resource expense of a news station is its personnel, namely the anchor(s). To offset this, more newscasts are employing less reporters to cover stories because dispatching a reporter to cover a live story requires significant more expenditures than broadcasting live in the newsroom. Stories coded under the “Broadcast News CIN Model” were classified as one of the following modes: anchor read, voiceover by anchor, package, live location, panel/speech/editorial, reporter live in newsroom, or other. See: Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anchor Read</strong></td>
<td>Anchor presents the story with only a picture juxtaposed next to his or her face. The anchor’s face does not disappear from view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Voiceover by Anchor</strong></td>
<td>Anchor presents the narrative of the story while video footage or a series of pictures air on screen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Package</strong></td>
<td>Anchor introduces the story and then tosses it over to a reporter who delivers the narrative for a pre-recorded story that was previously produced for the newscast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Live Location</strong></td>
<td>Anchor introduces the story and then tosses it to a reporter who is live at the location of the story. The reporter then delivers the story from a live shot, not a pre-recorded story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Panel/Speech/Editorial</strong></td>
<td>A discussion piece presented to the audience. Players include either the anchor delivering the piece by him or herself, or as a conversation between the anchor and a guest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reporter Live in Newsroom</strong></td>
<td>Anchor introduces story and tosses it to a reporter who presents the story from a location within the newsroom. It is similar to voiceover by anchor, in that the reporter provides the narrative for the story while video footage and/or a series of pictures are shown onscreen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td>Any story delivery that was not described above.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Reporter Local*

*Reporter local* assessed whether or not the reporter delivering the story was on the staff at the station. In an attempt at cost saving there has been more news sharing between station affiliations. For instance, an ABC affiliate in San Francisco, California can share a story with the ABC affiliate in Columbia, South Carolina, thus cutting the cost of producing a story in half. *Reporter local* allowed researchers to
ascertain if the story was produced by the Columbia, SC station or outsourced to a station from another media market in the United States. In this model reporter local was measured as a dichotomous variable—the reporter was either local or was not local.

**Locational Variables: City/Place, In/Out DMA, County, State/Country**

The “Broadcast News CIN Model” contained four variables, which determined the location of the story. These variables were constructed to examine, to what extent, newscasts fulfilled their obligation to provide local information to communities. They were key factors in the model because they directly correlated to the Commission’s localism mandate. While the theory of localism was integral in developing this research, it was not indicative of a fulfilled CIN. Rather, localism assisted in creating the broadcast environment for stations to meet citizens’ CINs.

The most crucial locational variable was *in/out DMA*. DMAs, designated market areas, are determined based on localities. It was a necessary element of news stories to examine because it identified the community in which the newscast was directed toward. For the purposes of this research, coders were provided with a list of counties that fall in the Columbia, South Carolina DMA (Appendix C).

*City/place, county, and state/country,* were incorporated into the model in an effort to be as precise as possible with the location of a story. News stories varied in the level of locational information they provided. If the specifics of the location was
not given in the story, but a place (i.e. building) was coders were instructed to search the place in Google and record the details of the location. The variation of location content (i.e. some stories only gave the city, others provided the county) resulted in 
in/out DMA being the only locational variable used in the analysis. In/out DMA was the only locational variable that consistently applied to the units of observation in the model. In/Out DMA was measured as a dichotomous variable.

The Final Version

In total there were four versions of the coding scheme. For each version of the model, we applied it to a randomly selected broadcast to see if it met the needs of the market. Modifications were continuously made to the coding scheme until we felt that the current model assessed CINs in local communities in the most effective way possible. Once we felt the model met the needs of the market, we conducted intercoder reliability tests to arrive at the final version of the coding instrument.

Four students served as coders for this project. Three were undergraduate students in either the digital marketing and entrepreneurship department or communications department. I served as the director of the coding process and as the fourth coder. Coders were provided with a thorough description of all of the variables, specifically CIN category and information level (Appendix B). The coding training process took place over the course of a month. There were three rounds of intercoder reliability conducted, using a new, randomly drawn episode from the sample each
time. The third round of intercoder reliability results produced the statistics found in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Reliability Statistics</th>
<th>Fleiss’ Kappa</th>
<th>Cohen’s Kappa</th>
<th>Krippendorff’s Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Story Type</td>
<td>.856</td>
<td>.856</td>
<td>.858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Level</td>
<td>.765</td>
<td>.765</td>
<td>.767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIN Category</td>
<td>.733</td>
<td>.734</td>
<td>.736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In/Out DMA</td>
<td>.863</td>
<td>.864</td>
<td>.864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>.9</td>
<td>.902</td>
<td>.902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporter Local</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We ran reliability statistics on six of the variables: story type, CIN category, information level, in/out DMA, mode, and reporter local. Intercoder reliability statistics were run on only 6 variables because those variables were subjective observations, whereas the rest of the variables were observable facts (i.e. the beginning/ending time of the broadcast). Once the intercoder reliability statistics proved strong, the coding period began. Coding of the 77 broadcasts took five weeks. Following which, the data was cleaned for two weeks and verified, with the finished product resulting in the dataset analyzed in Chapter 4.
The Application of the Model on Morning Shows

As mentioned above, morning shows are included in the sample. This is because morning shows are classified as “news programs” by all of the stations. In order for us to accurately assess CINs in the Columbia, SC market we need to ensure that our approach in creating the “Broadcast News CIN Model” is reflective of how the market identifies itself. However, morning shows are often produced in a different format than straight newscasts. As such, the “Broadcast News CIN Model” required some alterations when applied to a morning shows. These alterations came only in the form of clarifications on how a specific story observation—conversations amongst anchors about various stories—should be coded. The anchors’ thoughts about a particular topic were not considered news, which is why coders were instructed to code these instances as “(topic of story) chat.” The “type” variable was coded as a human interest/soft news story; “information level,” “CIN category,” location variables, and “reporter local” were not applicable; “mode” was coded as a panel/speech/editorial. The above reliability statistics and training process included the morning shows.

Operationalizing the Research Questions

In order to determine if the coding instrument we created did, in fact, measure CINs on local television news programming, the model must first allow researchers to
determine what it means to fulfill a CIN need. This question is answered by **RQ1**, **RQ2** and **RQ3**

**RQ1**: In the Columbia, South Carolina local television news market what was the distribution of stories across critical information needs and information level between November 11\(^{th}\), 2013 and December 29\(^{th}\), 2013?

*This question was answered by creating a dichotomous variable to ascertain if a story contained CIN information. In addition, another dichotomous variable was created to identify if a story contained “actionable” information.*

**RQ2**: Did local television news programming provide citizens with information that fell into a CIN category?

*Information that was about citizens’ critical information needs was measured by the CIN category variable. If this variable could be applied to a story observation, meaning that it was not coded as “missing/not applicable,” then the story observation provided consumers with information regarding their critical information needs.*

**RQ3**: Did local television news programming provide citizens with a level of information on which to act?

*Every news story on a broadcast was required to have an information level. Active story observations were those that were identified as “actionable.”*
With the operationalization of **RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3**, one could then answer if CINs were met. Story observations, which were “actionable” and provided information that was applicable to *CIN category* fulfilled CINs. If a story observation was identified as anything other than that, then CINs were not met.

**RQ4:** Is there a relationship between the level of information a CIN story provides and the presentation mode of the story?

*RQ4* aimed to determine if there was a relationship or trend among “actionable CIN stories” and the manner in which a story was presented.

*Story presentation included the variables* mode and reporter local.

**RQ5:** Is there a relationship between the level of information a CIN story provides and the location of the story?

*Location in this sense referred to whether the major event of the story occurred “within the DMA”. The other locational variables in the model were not used in the analysis. DMA was the only locational variable that was consistently measured across stories.*
Chapter 4

FINDINGS

“Our job is only to hold up the mirror - to tell and show the public what has happened.” - Walter Cronkite; news anchor, journalist

The findings below confirm that the “Broadcast News CIN Model” did in fact evaluate citizens’ critical information needs. It also examined the relationships between CINs, production factors, and locational elements. In total there were 2,101 broadcast units. However, in accordance with the coding instructions, a “99” was coded when the variable did not apply to a story observation. Missing values were not included in the analysis. All of the variables in the model were nominal; as such, crosstabs, chi-square, and Cramer’s $V^4$ were used to identify the existence of a relationship between variables and, if the relationship existed, the strength of it.

To begin, I first looked at general findings, which determined the existence of news stories that met citizens’ critical information needs. Next, an analysis was conducted of the specific variable attributes of CIN category and information level and

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4 **Crosstab:** table that displays the multivariate frequency distributions of two or more variables;  
**Chi-square:** statistic which verifies if there is a significant relationship between variables, defined as $P \leq .05$;  
**Cramer’s V:** statistic which determines the strength of the relationship between variables, ranging from -1 to 1. The closer the statistic is to one in either direction, the stronger the relationship.
their respective relationships with production factors and locational elements. A complete compilation of the raw data can be found in Appendix D.

**Distribution of CINs and Information Level**

Local television stations met citizens’ critical information needs when the stories they produced fell in a *CIN category* and was identified as containing “actionable” information. As such, *CIN category* and *information level* were recoded into dichotomous variables to establish the presence of fulfilled CINs’ stories. Stories were identified as either “in” or “out” of a *CIN category* and as either an “actionable” or “not actionable” *information level*. Table 4 shows this distribution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In CIN Category</th>
<th>Not Actionable</th>
<th>Actionable</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>324</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>556</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Statistically significant at a chi-square of $p \leq .05$ and a strong relationship with a Cramer’s $V$ of .526

There were 1,191 stories after structural features (i.e. commercials and weather segments) were eliminated from the data. Only 556 of those stories in the sample were classified as “CIN stories,” which means that less than half (47%) of news stories aired did not provide relevant information to meet the criterion of CINs. Only 232 of those stories were identified as “actionable,” and subsequently met citizens’ critical...
information needs. That is, “actionable” stories made up 42% of CIN stories and 19.5% of all stories.

Table 5 displays the distribution of “CIN” and “actionable” stories across stations. While grouped together in the table, the analyses of both variables and their respective relationships with stations were conducted separately. In both cases, there was no statistically significant relationship between station and either variable, meaning that the station on which the news stories were presented did not have an effect on whether the story met the CIN criterion or whether it was “actionable”.

Table 5: Distribution of CIN and Actionable Stories Across Stations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Station</th>
<th>Not in CIN Category</th>
<th>In CIN Category</th>
<th>Not Actionable</th>
<th>Actionable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WACH</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIS</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WLTX</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOLO</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Not statistically significant; N = 1,191

Similarly, the same analysis was performed for the distribution of “CIN” and “actionable” stories across story types (See: Table 6). In this instance, the relationship between these variables and story type was statistically significant (p ≤ .05). In order to conduct this analysis the 20 story types identified in the coding scheme were collapsed into 6 logical categories: crime, public issues, government action/politics, soft news/human interest, and other (entertainment, consumer news, and fires/accidents/disasters). Crime was identified as its own category because it is the most covered story type on local television news (Yanich, 2004). Commercials,
promos, weather and sports segments were eliminated from the data because by definition, they could not have had CIN information in them.

Table 6: Distribution of CIN and Actionable Stories Across Story Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story Type</th>
<th>Not in CIN Ctgry</th>
<th>In CIN Ctgry</th>
<th>Not Actionable</th>
<th>Actionable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Issues</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gov’t/Politics</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int’l</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft News/Human Interest</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Statistically significant at a chi-square of $p \leq 0.05$ and a Cramer’s V of $.177$ & $.389$; N = 1,191

The condensed classification of story type illustrated that a substantial portion of the stories that were identified as “government action/politics (72%),” “public issues (71%),” or “crime (56%)” provided information that fell into a CIN category. However, even those these stories met the threshold criterion for CIN information, less than half of them 42 percent ($n = 232$) provided actionable information in the story. The story types that had the greatest number of “actionable” stories were “soft news/human interest (27 %),” “public issues” followed at 20 percent and “crime” was at 17 percent. Understanding the basic distribution, meaning presence or not, of CIN and “actionable” stories allowed for a more in-depth analysis of the specific variable attributes of CIN stories.
CIN Categories: Detailed Findings

In total, there were 556 stories that contained information that pertained to citizens’ critical information needs. *CIN category* differed from the term CIN story. CIN story referred to any news story that contained any CIN information (meaning any of the eight issues areas), whereas *CIN category* referred to the specific type or category of the CIN information. Figure 1 displays the distribution of stories that fell into specified *CIN categories*.

Figure 1: Distribution of CIN Categories

- Civic Participation: 32%
- Emergencies and Public Safety: 27%
- Political Life: 9%
- Health: 12%
- Transportation Systems: 12%
- Economic Opportunities: 5%
- Education: 3%
- Environment and Planning: 1%

*Note: N = 556

In terms of providing information to consumers, local news programs in the sample covered all eight information areas. However, there were noticeable differences between the information categories and how much coverage each CIN area was given. “Civic participation” and “emergencies and public safety” received the most attention, accounting for 59 percent (32% and 27% respectively) of the total
number of CIN stories that aired. “Political life” and “health” both individually made up 12 percent of CIN stories. Lastly, the four remaining CIN categories—
“transportation systems (9%),” “economic opportunities (5%),” “education (3%),” and “environment and planning (1%)”—comprised 18 percent of CIN stories, with “environment and planning” receiving the least amount of coverage.

Narrowing down focus only to CIN stories (N=556), an analysis of the distribution of CIN categories across stations proved statistically significant (p≤.05). Figure 2 illustrates this distribution and it is statistically significant.

The distribution across stations made it apparent that some CIN categories received more coverage than others. Generally, there was a trend where, depending on the station, two or three CIN categories comprised a noticeably higher percent of stories
in comparison to the other categories. These categories were classified as “high percent” CINs.

Reinforcing the findings in Figure 1, “civic participation” and “emergencies and public safety” were consistently the two CIN categories that were most prominent across all stations. WLTX (42%) and WOLO (30%) most frequently aired CIN stories that were classified as “civic participation”. Similarly, WIS (34%) and WACH (27%) most often aired stories that were characterized as “emergencies and public safety”.

The general distribution of CINs in Figure 1, it was evident that “environment and planning” accounted for an exceedingly low percent (1%) of CIN stories. It was then expected that it would be the CIN category least covered across individual stations. That was not the case; WACH produced more “environment and planning (4%)” stories than “education (1%)” stories. This finding appeared to be an outlier. Two stations, WOLO and WIS, featured no stories that fell into “environment and planning,” and the only other station to air “environment and planning” stories was WLTX with it being only one percent of all CIN stories aired on the station.

In two instances, there was a third high percent CIN category (in addition to “civic participation” and “emergencies and public safety”). WACH dedicated substantial reporting to “health” stories, which accounted for one fifth (20%) of WACH’s CIN stories. WOLO aired a considerable number of stories that pertained to “political life,” with 18 percent of their CIN stories attributed to the category. In both of these cases, there was a sizeable distance in percentage between the percentage of the next most featured CIN category.
The distribution of CIN categories was also examined across story type. Figure 3 shows this relationship with a statistical significance of p ≤ .05. “Emergencies and public safety” was the only CIN category that accounted for the majority percent of CIN stories across multiple story types. Such was the case when looking at the frequency of “emergencies and public safety” CIN stories across “crime (88%)” “international (100%),” and “other (44%)” story types. “Political Life” consisted of 65 percent of “government action/politics” stories and “civic participation” was responsible for 94 percent of CIN stories in “soft news/human interest”. CIN stories across public issues were more evenly distributed, with the “health” category being the most featured CIN category at 34 percent. This made it the only story type that did not have a specific category account for the majority of CIN stories.

Figure 3: CIN Categories Across Story Type

*Note: N = 556*
There were four CIN categories with total percents that were too small, according to Figure 1, to be the most frequent CIN category across any story type: “transportations systems,” “economic opportunities,” “education,” and “environment and planning”. “Transportation systems” made up 29 percent of “public issues” stories and 13 percent of “other” stories. “Education” comprised of seven percent of “public issues” stories, four percent of “government action/politics” stories, and one percent of “soft news/human interest” stories. “Environment and planning” was the only CIN category to solely be featured across one story type and that was three percent of “public issues” stories.

Information Level: Detailed Findings

All of the 1,191 stories were assigned an information level. Story observations that received an information level were those news stories that were not structural features of broadcasts (i.e. weather segment, commercial). It is clear from Figure 4, which displays the frequency of information level, that the variables’ attributes were not evenly distributed. The information level of over half of the stories (58%) was identified as “episode/surveillance”. “Context” was applied to 22 percent of stories and 20 percent of stories were identified as “actionable”.
Our sample shows that there was a strong, statistically significant relationship between information level and CIN category. The chi-square was $p \leq .05$ and Cramer’s $V$ was .530, which indicates that the relationship was positive. This relationship is shown in Figure 5. “Civic participation” was the only CIN category, which had more “actionable (74%)” stories than “episode/surveillance (13%)” and “context (13%)” combined. “Economic opportunities” and “health,” also had more “actionable” stories than the other two information level attributes; however, “actionable” stories for both categories were only 41 percent.
“Environment and planning” was the only CIN category with “context” as its leading information level, with three-quarters or 75 percent of stories identified as such. There were no “environment and planning” stories that were considered “actionable,” which resulted in the last 25 percent of the category being coded as “episode/surveillance”. This was the only instance where a CIN category did not contain all information levels.

The most frequent information level recorded for the remaining four categories was “episode/surveillance”. “Transportation systems (76%),” “political life (54%),” and “education (53%)” had more stories in “episode/surveillance” than in “context” and “actionable” combined. “Emergencies and public safety” did not have an information level that accounted for the majority of stories; rather
“episode/surveillance” comprised 43 percent of its stories, making it the plurality in the category.

The same analysis was conducted for information level and its relationship to story type (Figure 6). It, too, was statistically significant at p ≤ .05 and had a Cramer’s V of .178. For every single story type, the greatest number of stories fell into the “episode/surveillance” level. Respectively, the distribution was as follows: “other (75%),” “crime (63%),” “public issues (58%),” “international (57%),” “soft news/human interest (53%),” and “government action/politics (49%).”

Figure 6: Information Level Across Story Type

*Note: N = 1,191

“Soft news/human interest” was the only story type that featured “actionable” as the second most frequent information level with 27 percent of its stories being labeled as such, while “context” was the second most frequent information level for the rest of the categories. For both “government action/politics” and “international” categories, 40 percent of stories contained “contextual” information. “Public issues”
featured 22 percent and both “crime” and “other” featured 20 percent of stories as “context”. Notably, the story type with the least amount of “actionable” stories was “international” with three percent of stories.

In comparing CIN category to the recoded information level variable the distinction between “actionable” CIN categories and “not actionable” CIN categories became more apparent (Figure 7). The relationship held statistical significance with a chi-square of $p \leq .05$ and a Cramer’s V of .496. In only one category—“civic participation”—did “actionable (74%)” stories outweigh “not actionable (26%)” stories. In all other cases, the majority of stories were revealed to be “not actionable”.

![Figure 7: Actionable v. Not Actionable CIN Stories Across Categories](image)

*Note: N = 556

More specifically, 59 percent of stories in both the “health” and “economic opportunities” categories were “not actionable”. The portion of stories that were “not actionable” increased for the rest of CIN categories:
• 68 percent of “emergencies and public safety” stories fell in the category;

• “Education” followed with 73 percent of “not actionable” stories;

• “Transportations systems” contained “not actionable” information in 90 percent of its stories;

• Similarly, “political life” featured 91 percent;

• And, none of the stories in “environment and planning,” contained “actionable” information (100%)

**Production Factors: Impact on CIN Category and Information Level**

A statistically significant relationship only existed between mode and CIN stories when the sample included CIN stories across all information levels. When the sample was aggregated to contain only “actionable” CIN stories, there was no statistically significant relationship between the two variables. Figure 8 represents the relationship between all CIN stories (N = 556) and mode, where the chi-square was p ≤ .05 and Cramer’s V was .150.

*Note: N = 556*
With the exception of “environment and planning,” the most frequent form of story delivery for *CIN categories* was “voice-over by anchor”. In these CIN categories, “voiceover by anchor” accounted for over 60 percent of stories. It comprised:

- 66 percent of “civic participation” stories;
- 67 percent of “emergencies and public safety;”
- 69 percent of “economic opportunities”;
- 71 percent of “health;”
- 72 percent of “political life;”
- 74 percent of “transportation systems;”
- And 80 percent of “education” stories

“Civic participation” and “health” were the only categories where all seven modes of presentation were represented. In both instances “package” was the second most common form of news delivery, behind “voiceover by anchor,” with ten percent of “civic participation” stories and 17 percent of “health” stories attributed to “package”. These two categories were also the only categories that had any stories that were presented in the mode considered “other.” For both “civic participation” and “health,” “other” yielded 2 percent of stories.

There were two *CIN categories* where stories were only presented in two modes. In addition to the 80 percent of “education” stories that were delivered through a “voiceover by anchor,” 20 percent of “education” stories were also presented in a “package”. Additionally, “package” stories made up 75 percent of “environment and
planning” stories and “live in newsroom” accounted for the remaining 25 percent of stories.

An unexpected finding occurred in the CIN category, “economic opportunities”. “Panel/speech/editorial,” which typically was not a common mode of presentation (Yanich, 2004; 2011; 2015) was the second most frequent delivery method (14%) of “economic opportunities” stories. It was also unusual for only three percent of “economic opportunities” stories to be attributed to “package” stories (Yanich, 2004; 2011; 2014; 2015).

An aggregated sample of “actionable” CIN stories was used to analyze the relationship between information level and reporter local. Figure 9 shows the frequency of reporter local and “actionable” CIN stories. Overwhelmingly, a “local” reporter delivered 97 percent of “actionable” CIN stories. Since there were no “actionable” “environment and planning” stories, “environment and planning” was not included in the aggregated sample.

Figure 9: Local and Not Local Reports Across Actionable CIN Stories

![Actionable Stories](image)

*Note: N = 232*
Figure 10 examines *reporter local* across specific “actionable” CIN categories. It was statistically significant at \( p \leq 0.05 \) and had a Cramer’s V of .224. “Local” reporters delivered all of the stories in four categories: “civic participation,” “economic opportunities,” “education,” and “transportation systems.” The remaining three categories contained stories that were delivered by “none local” reporters. “Political life” contained the largest percentage of “reporter not local” stories,” with 17 percent of its total stories falling into the classification. “Reporter not local” accounted for seven percent of “health” stories and six percent of “emergencies and public safety” stories.

![Figure 10: Reporter Local Across CIN Stories](image)

*Note: N = 232*
Locational Elements: Impact on CIN Category and Information Level

Examining the impact of locational elements involved utilizing the same aggregated sample and applying it to *in/out DMA*, which referred to the location where the action of the story took place. “Environment and planning,” was not included in the analysis. Figure 11 displays the results. “Transportation systems” was the only “actionable” CIN category where there was a greater percent of stories located “out” of DMA (80%) than “in” the DMA (20%). “Education” contained the same percent of stories “out” of the DMA as “in” the DMA. One third of “health” stories (33%) were located “out” of the DMA and slightly above a fifth (21%) of “emergencies and public safety” stories were “out” of the DMA. “Economic opportunities” and “political life” stories both had 17 percent of its stories occur “out” of the DMA and 83 percent “in” the DMA. The “actionable” *CIN category* with the lowest percent of stories located “out” of the DMA was “civic participation” with 12 percent of its stories.

Figure 11: Actionable CIN Stories Locational Elements

*Note: N = 232; p ≤ .05; Cramer’s V = .309*
Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

“The press is the best instrument for enlightening the mind of man, and improving him as a rational, moral and social being” – Thomas Jefferson

The results cited in Chapter 4 provide strong evidence that the “Broadcast News CIN Model” does measure the extent to which local television news provide information about citizens’ critical information needs. This model developed criteria to identify the presence of CIN information in news stories. In addition, it established a standard to determine if a news story provided “actionable” information. Columbia, South Carolina was the test case and illustrative of what types of findings the “Broadcast News CIN Model” can produce when applied to television markets.

The Analysis of Actionable Stories

Fulfilling critical information needs in news stories means that the stories contained “actionable” information for citizens. In Columbia, South Carolina one fifth (19.5%; n = 232) of the stories in the sample contained “actionable” information on critical information needs. This seemingly low percentage of “actionable” stories suggests that CINs were not sufficiently met. However, this model does not establish
the threshold for what percentage of “actionable” stories would be considered acceptable. This model provides a basis on which the Federal Communications Commission could establish the threshold. A few key conclusions can be drawn from the data about what type of information the “actionable” component of the “Broadcast News CIN Model” generates:

1. *Mode* exposed the relationship between production costs and “actionable” CINs.

2. Stations located in the Columbia market produced the majority of “actionable” CIN stories.

3. Whether the action of the story was located “in” or “out” the DMA was integral in determining if stations “actionable” CINs assessed the specific needs of the Columbia community.

**Actionable Stories: CIN Category**

This model established “actionability” as a crucial aspect in fulfilling CINs. It is the pivotal attribute of a news story that purports to provide citizens with civic information. An “actionable” CIN story was synonymous with a fulfilled critical information need.

The application of the model allowed for researchers to identify the distribution of CIN stories. The Columbia sample showed an uneven distribution of “actionable” stories across *CIN categories*. In fact, there was an entire category of CIN stories that contained no actionable information (i.e. “environment and planning”).
Essentially, the model provided a baseline for the distribution of “actionable stories,” which can assist policymakers in the determination of an acceptable threshold for meeting CINs.

In light of this sentiment, it is noteworthy that more than half (56%) of the stories in which there was “actionable” information fell into the “civic participation” CIN category. Such a high percentage of “actionable” stories suggested that “civic participation” was the need that was most often fulfilled in the Columbia market.

However, this finding does not imply that “civic participation” is generally the critical information need that is most often met by newscasts. Rather, this is an example of the type of analysis that could be conducted when the model is applied. Illustratively, the CIN Review identified “civic participation” as stories that provided information on programs offered by civic institutions and non-profit, religious, and community organizations. During the creation of the model, a broader definition of “civic participation” was employed to include any story that provided “actionable” information for a community event (i.e. community ceremonies, community plays).

After examining the attributes of the Columbia market, researchers felt that this expanded definition of “civic participation” was necessary to adequately evaluate the CIN area.

Given this definition, it is necessary to acknowledge that the constructed week of our sample spanned November and December, the holiday season. For that reason, there appeared to be a disproportionate number of “civic participation” stories on the newscasts. There were numerous events created solely for the purpose of holiday
entertainment, which received much coverage by local news programs. This proportion of coverage may not be reflective of such attention to community events throughout the year.

Additionally, the sample contained fifteen half-hour blocks of morning shows because stations in the Columbia market advertise and identify their morning shows as news programs. Morning shows characteristically focus on more light-hearted, community-centric stories. As a result, these stories often contained information (i.e. location, time, etc.) for how the public could participate in the event. The model defined “actionability” as information on which citizens can act. By definition, these community-centric events met the “actionability” criterion and could be an explanatory factor as to why there were such a high proportion of “actionable, civic participation” stories.

**Actionable Stories: Mode and Reporter Local**

When news directors construct newscasts their primary concern is cost. Past research has determined that an effective method to evaluate some of the costs of a newscast from available information to the viewer is through measuring production factors such as presentation mode (Yanich, 2011). The “Broadcast News CIN Model” included such production variables and allowed for researchers to examine the relationship between cost factors and critical information needs. Findings from the Columbia market indicated that the anchor(s), or the “brand” of the station delivered
almost three-fourths (74%) of “actionable” stories. The data showed that “voiceover by anchor” (where the anchor narrates the story while images and videos flash across the screen) accounted for close to two-thirds (63%) of “actionable” CIN stories and “anchor read” (where the anchor presents the story, possibly with an image juxtaposed next to her face) comprised 11% of “actionable” stories.

This was not a surprising finding and it is likely that the application of this model to other markets would elicit the same results. Anchors’ salaries are one of the biggest expenditures for stations and, like any business owner, station executives want to realize a return on their investment. The implications that this had on the relationship between “actionability” and mode was that “actionable” stories were more likely to be delivered by someone familiar to the audience rather than a reporter who was not featured as much as the anchors.

The model also provided the measure through which researchers could determine whether “actionable” stories were produced by the television station broadcasting the newscast or by a station in a market located elsewhere in the United States. Reporter local identified if the person delivering the story was on the staff of the broadcasting station. That is, if the station was using its own resources to deliver its “actionable” stories. If the reporter was not on the station’s staff, it implied that a station from another market “packaged” the story to broadcast across multiple markets. Almost all of the “actionable’ stories (97%) in the sample were delivered by a “local” reporter. This signified that Columbia stations largely produced the “actionable” stories in the sample.
Actionable Stories: In/Out of DMA

The variable identified as *in/out of DMA* allowed researchers to determine to what extent stations’ “actionable” stories addressed the principal of localism as addressed by the Federal Communications Commission. If the action of the story was located “in” the DMA, it indicated that the story was tailored to meet the specific needs of individuals in the Columbia, South Carolina community. If the story was located “out” of the DMA, it was likely that the story was critical information for the general public and not a specific community. Over four-fifths (81%) of the “actionable” stories in the sample occurred within the Columbia DMA, which strongly implied that stations addressed the localism requirement mandated by both the CIN Review and the FCC regulatory principles. It is important to note, though, that while the majority of CINs are met at the local level, CINs are not exclusively local. Critical information needs are also areas of public concern at the state and national level.

When the model was applied to the aggregated sample of only “actionable” stories, it made it possible for researchers to easily identify which, if any, “actionable” CINs contained stories that were not local. The relationship between *CIN category* and *DMA* (Figure 11) in the Columbia sample illustrated that there were two *CIN categories* that did not have a majority of stories occur “in” the DMA—50 percent of “education” stories and only 25 percent of “transportation systems” occurred within the DMA.

The ability to identify the proportion of “actionable” stories that was located “in” and “out” of the DMA was a crucial part of both the model and analysis. If a large
portion of “actionable” stories were located “out” of the DMA, it would have indicated that the general information needs of citizens were met and not the specific, critical information needs of individuals in Columbia, South Carolina.

The Analysis of CIN Stories

An uneven distribution of stories was found when the analysis of the data was broadened to all CIN stories. Information level, mode, and in/out DMA provided supplementary information to understanding the attributes of CIN stories. They reinforced the model’s assessment of citizens’ critical information needs. However, because there was such variation in the coverage of CIN stories, there was no “template" of CIN stories across all of the variables in the model. However, some patterns were evident when examining the relationships between specific variables in the model and CIN stories. For example:

1) Information level served as an indicator for the mode of a story.

2) A trend was evident between CIN stories and both reporter local and in/out DMA

CIN Stories: Information Level and Mode

Information level acted as a precursor to how a story was presented. If a story contained an “episodic/surveillance” information level, it often consisted of quick
snippets of information. As a result, the mode of the story was most likely “anchor read” or “voiceover by anchor” because those modes were typically the shortest duration. When the mode changed to one in which the story was “tossed” by the anchor to a reporter (i.e. “package” or “live location”), the duration of the story tended to be longer, an observation that is consistent with previous research (Yanich 2004; 2011; 2014; 2015). Stories identified as providing “context” were more likely to be presented in this manner because there was a greater amount of time to provide a more detailed, comprehensive narration of the story.

*Information level* had a consistent effect for the presentation mode of “actionable” stories. Typically, these stories were delivered with a presentation mode in which the anchor (the “brand” of the station) was prominent.

**CIN Stories: Reporter Local and In/Out DMA**

The application of the model revealed an interaction among *reporter local* and *in/out DMA* and CIN stories. *Information level* did not act as an indicator as it did with *mode*. Instead, there were distinct patterns that existed among CIN stories and *reporter local* and *in/out DMA*. In contrast to *mode*, the model established both variables as dichotomous, which meant that an observation could only be identified as one of two possibilities. Stories in the sample were delivered by either a “local” or “non-local” reporter and located either “in” or “out” of the DMA.
Once the data was gathered, it was clear that most CIN stories generally featured a “local” reporter. Because of the model, researchers could ascertain that 93 percent of all CIN stories were delivered by a “local” reporter and subsequently, produced by a station located in the Columbia market.

The patterns that were identified between CIN stories and in/out DMA were not as stark as those found in reporter local. While seven out of the eight categories had the majority of their stories occur “in” the DMA, the proportion of those stories varied greatly across the CIN categories (51% to 86%).

**Limitations of Research**

The greatest limitation to this research was that the development of the “Broadcast News CIN Model” was derived through the analysis of newscasts in one market, Columbia, South Carolina. Therefore, it is not representative of the critical information needs of communities across the United States. While we designed the model with, what we believe, are the necessary features to analyze critical information needs across a spectrum of different communities, it is merely theory until the model is applied to a variety of America’s media markets. Only, then, can it be said with certainty that the “Broadcast News CIN Model” evaluates the degree to which local television news programs address citizens’ critical information needs.
Suggestions for Future Research

For the “Broadcast News CIN Model” to be accepted as the evaluation standard for determining if local television stations are meeting citizens’ critical information needs it must be generalized to markets across the United States. As such, the first suggestion for future research is to apply the “Broadcast News CIN Model” to multiple media markets throughout the US, incorporating markets of a variety of sizes and geographical locations.

Second, the model needs to be tested in markets in which managing service agreements are present and markets in which they are not (See: “Policy Implications”). There are over a hundred markets (out of 210 markets in the U.S.) where stations are engaged in managing service agreements (Becker, 2013).

Lastly, the CIN Review listed three requirements for meeting CIN needs, one of which was that news must be delivered in an interpretable language. To incorporate this requirement into the “Broadcast News CIN Model,” a point for future research would be to apply the model to DMAs, which contain Spanish-language stations.

CONCLUSION

The “Broadcast News CIN Model” accomplishes three things. First, it adds to theory in understanding the ecology of broadcast television media, specifically enhancing the theories of localism and diversity in local television news. Second, the model has immediate and significant policy implications, particularly those policies that effect media consolidation (discussed further in “Policy Implications”). Thirdly,
the “Broadcast News CIN Model” is a tool for policymakers, academics, research institutions, think tanks, media reform groups, and importantly, the public to evaluate the extent to which local television newscasts meet citizens’ critical information needs; and subsequently identify the strengths and weaknesses of the newscasts. Not only will this tool enhance the public information function of broadcast media, but it will also foster a more informed and engaged citizenry.

**Policy Implications**

On March 31, 2014, the Federal Communications Commission made a landmark decision in which it declared that it would no longer approve joint sales agreements (JSAs) if the agreement calls for stations to share more than 15 percent of ad sales revenue. Joint sales agreements are contracts between two stations where one station sells some or all of its advertising time to another station in an exchange for a portion of the ad sales revenue. This results in one “brokering” station and one “brokered” station, where the brokering station exerts power over the brokered station and has the capability to influence news content. This consolidation directly challenges the diversity and competition conditions of television markets in the U.S.

The March 31st ruling was the first time the Federal Communications Commission directly addressed the effect that managing service agreements have on local media landscapes and the media environment in the United States, generally. The Commission specifically identified 15 percent as the shared proportion of ad sales
revenue as the ceiling because any ad sales exchange beyond that point is seen as exercising corporate control over the brokered station, rather than promoting the public interest.

This pertains to the “Broadcast News CIN Model” created in this thesis because the ruling also mandated that all existing JSAs must make a case to the Commission that the joint sales agreement is in the public interest. If the Commission does not approve the request, the JSA must be terminated. Currently, the Commission has no model to evaluate the public interest performance of JSAs. This is one of the reasons that the Commission initiated the CIN study—to have an established model that can resolve questions like the ones posed by the JSA ruling.

This ruling was part of the Federal Communications Commission 2014 Quadrennial Regulatory Ownership Review. It was subject to much debate. Opponents to the mandate argued that existing JSAs at the time of the decision should not have to defend the agreements before the Commission because they engaged in these agreements in good faith. Instead, they argue, they should be grandfathered in, with the existing JSAs staying in place. The ruling of the Commission in reference to JSAs was as follows:

We reject arguments that we should automatically grandfather all television JSAs permanently or indefinitely. In these circumstances, we find that such grandfathering would allow arbitrary and inconsistent changes to the level of permissible common ownership on a market-by-market basis based not necessarily on where the public interest lies…Moreover...[current] licensees may seek a waiver of our rules if they believe strict application of the rules would not serve the public interest (“Further notice of”, 2014, p.172).
The timeline for stations to “seek a waiver,” which provides an exception to the JSA rule is December 2016 (“Congress extends television,” 2014). This places the Federal Communications Commission on a deadline to establish an evaluation standard and an acceptable threshold for what it means for a local television station to meet the public interest. We believe that the “Broadcast News CIN Model” could be such an evaluation standard.

**Timeliness and Importance**

On May 4, 2015, *S.1182: A bill to exempt application of JSA attribution rule in case of existing agreements*, was introduced by Republican Roy Blunt in the Senate. The bill is bi-partisan, co-sponsored by Democratic Senators Mikulski, Schumer, and Republican Scott, and it proposes that companies currently engaged in JSAs be exempt from the Federal Communications Commission’s ruling. If passed this bill does not directly change JSA policy because that power lies solely with the Federal Communications Commission. However, this bill does illustrate the enormity of the Commission’s ruling and the magnitude of the political pressure that the Commission is facing to alter the decision.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

BROADCAST NEWS CIN MODEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Operationalization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CoderID</td>
<td>Coder name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID#</td>
<td>Continuous - number of story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadcast number</td>
<td>Continuous -- chronologically number each broadcast that is coded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Station</td>
<td>Call Letters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Type of broadcast | 1=newscast  
2=morning show                                                                                                                                 |
| Time of broadcast | 12=12; 5=5; 530=5:30, etc.                                                                                                                     |
| Time of day       | 1=am  
2=pm                                                                                                                                 |
| Length of broadcast | 1=30/35 minutes  
2=60 minutes                                                                                                                                       |
| Date of broadcast (dates of constructed week based on random sample and availability of raw content) | 1111  
1119  
1129  
125  
1213  
1221  
1229                                                                 |
| Begin minute      | Minute on time counter in which story begins                                                                                                  |
| Begin second      | Second on time counter at which story begins                                                                                                                                 |
| Topic             | Narrative of topic of story; or specification as commercial, promo, sports or weather                                                                 |
| Story type        | 1=Crime  
2=Health issues  
3=Business & economy/stocks  
4=Environment  
5=Education                                                                                                                                         |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Level</th>
<th>1 = Episode/Surveillance</th>
<th>2 = Context</th>
<th>3 = Actionable</th>
<th>99 = N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CIN category</td>
<td>1 = emergency/public safety</td>
<td>2 = health</td>
<td>3 = education</td>
<td>4 = transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>REMEMBER: all information level 3 stories require a CIN category designation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City/Place</td>
<td>Name of city/town in which action of story takes place. If city/town is not mentioned but a place/building etc. is mentioned, search Internet for city/town in which it is located. If no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For these variables, enter "99" as code if story
| **In/Out DMA (location of story)** | 0=Outside of DMA (television market)  
1=inside DMA  
99=N/A |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>County</strong></td>
<td>Name of county in which action takes place if no city is mentioned. If city was provided, enter &quot;99&quot; for county.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>State/Country</strong></td>
<td>Name of US state (use abbreviation) or foreign country in which action takes place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Place</strong></td>
<td>Chronological position of story within newscast: Continuous, 1,2,3 etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Block</strong></td>
<td>Enter block # in which story appears. Blocks are separated by commercial breaks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Mode (Primary mode of presentation)** | 1=Anchor read  
2=VO/Anchor (Anchor presents story with video footage)  
3=Package (Anchor introduces story the tosses it to reporter who presents a pre-recorded story)  
4=Live location (Reporter is live on location of action of the story)  
5=Panel/Speech/Editorial  
6=Reporter live in newsroom  
7=Other |
| **Reporter local (reporter is on staff of station)** | 0=reporter is not local  
1=reporter is local |
| **Appr WACH** | 0=no; 1=yes |
| **Appr WOLO** | 0=no; 1=yes |
| **Appr WIS** | 0=no; 1=yes |
| **Appr WLTX** | 0=no; 1=yes (When coding morning shows enter "99" for WLTX--it presents no morning show) |
| **End minute** | Minute on time counter in which story ends |
| **End second** | Second on time counter at which story ends |
Appendix B

CIN AND INFORMATION LEVEL DESCRIPTIONS

Episode:
- A snippet of a topic or issue
- Lacks a connection to a larger set of issues
- It is the most basic form of presentation
- At the very least a story/segment is at this level

Context:
- Look at the Broader Picture
- Encompasses why the story is being presented
- Only based off what is told in the presentation of story

Actionable
- Provides mobilizing steps
- Offers advice on what to do next (i.e. buy tickets to this event, where to look for more information, take these precautionary steps etc.)

Emergencies and Public Safety

§ Access to emergency information
  ú Information on policing and public safety

§ Includes:
  ú Dangerous weather,
  environmental/bio hazardous outbreaks,
  public safety threats (amber alerts, terrorism)

Health

§ Information on
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Family and public health</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Availability, quality, and cost of local health care</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ Availability of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ú Local public health information, programs, and services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Includes wellness care and local clinics/hospitals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ Timely information on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ú Spread of disease and vaccinations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ú Local health campaigns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Education</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>§ Information on all aspects of local education systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ú Public debates, decision-making, and resource allocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Includes: quality of administration of school system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ Availability of:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ú Educational opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· School performance assessments, enrichment, tutoring, after-school care and programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ú School alternatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Charters, adult education, language courses, job training, GED programs, local opportunities for higher education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Transportation Systems</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>§ Access to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ú Timely information on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Essential transportation services, mass transportation, traffic/road conditions, weather closings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Economic Development</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>§ Access to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ú Employment information/opportunities, job training/retaining, apprenticeship, and other sources of reskilling and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
advancement
§ Information on
ú Small business opportunities-startup assistance and capital resources
ú Major economic development initiatives
  · Toxic hazards, brownfields
§ Access to
ú Environmental regions, activities for restoration, & opportunities for recreation

Civic Life
§ Information on
ú Civic institutions, nonprofits, and associations
  · Access to their services and opportunities for participation
ú Libraries and community-based information services, cultural and arts information, social services & recreational opportunities
ú Religious institutions and programs

Political Life
§ Information on
ú Candidates on all gov’t levels
  · Both elected & voluntary councils
  • School boards, city council/alder
elections, city regions, county elections
§ Timely information
ú Public meetings & issues
  · Including outcomes
ú Where/how to register to vote
  · Including requirements for identification and absentee
ú State-level issues that impact local policy formation
Appendix C

DMA COUNTIES

1. Calhoun
2. Clarendon
3. Fairfield
4. Kershaw
5. Lee
6. Lexington
7. Newberry
8. Orangeburg
9. Richland
10. Saluda
11. Sumter
# Appendix D

## DATA PROFILE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story Type</th>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Stories</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>(N = 2,101)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Attributes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Issues</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business &amp; Economy</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Issues</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft News/Human Interest</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Government</td>
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<tr>
<td>County/State Government</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Federal Government</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political Campaign</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer News</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fires/Accidents/Disasters</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Story</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Story Type (N = 2,101)</td>
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<td>.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Afghanistan/Iraq soft news</td>
<td>.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>War on terror hard news</td>
<td>.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>War on news soft news</td>
<td>.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Traffic</td>
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<td>Weather Segment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sports Segment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promos</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commercial</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Out</td>
<td>46.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In</td>
<td>53.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anchor Read</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voiceover by Anchor</td>
<td>70.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Package</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Live Location</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Panel/Speech/Editorial</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Live in Newsroom</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not Local</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>92.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| In/Out DMA (N = 1,191) | Out | 46.6% |
|                       | In  | 53.4% |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode (N = 1,219)</th>
<th>Anchor Read</th>
<th>6.2%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voiceover by Anchor</td>
<td>70.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Package</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Live Location</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Panel/Speech/Editorial</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Live in Newsroom</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Reporter Local (N = 1,191) | Not Local | 7.5% |
|                           | Local     | 92.5%|