Local News Audiences: Qualitative Research

Research Report
August 2018

Designing a more human world
Methodology & Approach
Research Findings
Insights & Opportunities
WHAT WE DID

Methodology & Approach
Project

Objectives

Understand the needs, behaviors and attitudes of local news audiences.

Uncover opportunities to create new products, services and business models.
INSITUM employed a Human-Centered Design approach in order to inform the development of new products, services, technologies and/or business models solving for key issues facing local news audiences.

Through a mix of mobile diaries and in-home qualitative home interviews, INSITUM identified key needs, behaviors and attitudes of local news audiences, including highly engaged subscribers and non-subscribers. This helped us uncover the role and value of local news in their daily lives as well as what is missing in the experience.
**SECONDARY**
Locally aware consumer

- Consume local news several times a month.
- They consider local news to be somewhat important or neutral to them.
- Consume either Chicago Tribune, San Francisco Chronicle or Indianapolis Star depending on market.
- They follow 3-5 specific topics, like local politics or local sports.

**NON-USERS**
Low engagement non-subscriber

- Don’t consume local news.
- They don’t subscribe, pay or donate to any local news publishers.
- They might consume at very low frequency.

**PRIMARY**
Locally engaged subscription junkie

- Consume local news frequently, multiple times a week.
- They have at least one paid subscription to a local news publisher.
- They consider local news very important to them.
- They are highly engaged, they tend to consume news actively, participate in civic life, share local news, get notifications and/or are long-time followers.
- They donate to one or more news organizations.
- They follow 5 or more topics.
Methodology & Approach

dscout online diary

1 week mobile diary study

~ 50 participants

~25 SECONDARY  ~25 PRIMARY

Objective: Understand current local news behaviors and interaction moments.
Methodology & Approach

In-home

60 min interviews
18 total

7 NON-USERS 4 SECONDARY 7 PRIMARY

Objective: Understand key challenges and attitudes towards local news.
WHAT WE SAW

1. Defining local news
2. Challenges faced by local news audiences
3. Who are local news audiences?
4. How do audiences interact with local news sources?
5. How do the different Media Mentalities interact with local news sources?
6. What do audiences wish for local news?
1. Defining Local News

During our research, we found that local news audiences have different definitions of what local news means to them. Overall, people perceive local news to have 5 key characteristics.
Defining Local News

Focuses on a community, city or area close to me.

“I define local news as things that are going on in my city…”

“News coverage for the major metropolitan area I live in and surrounding suburbs.”

“…is everything that’s going around me and the surrounding areas…”

Puts news into context for people in the community.

“The news focus is on nearby happenings and gives a local focus to national / international news.”

“Things occurring in my city or town and the surrounding communities as well as touching on national and international things that might affect us in our little world.”

Creates connection and builds a sense of community.

“Local news is the important stories for the city. Then there are small interest pieces to give people smiles and a sense of community.”

“Provides [the] type of information to people living in local area to feel more engaged with the local community.”

Keeps communities informed and aware of what is going on.

“The heartbeat of the community. It’s how I find out what is happening around me.”

“A snapshot of the local community.”

“News that pertains to things happening in our community.”

Is embedded in the communities it serves.

“News that broadcasts from a local community…”

“Local news is news produced in and about the community in which I live.”

“News shared by or about people from your community.”
2. Challenges faced by audiences.

Local news audiences were able to express key pain points and challenges they experience while interacting with local news. Uncovering these are key to be able to understand what local news organizations might do to address the challenges audiences face.
People feel overwhelmed by media, resulting in a lack of engagement.
FEELING OVERWHELMED

People are exhausted by negative news constantly portrayed in the media.

“People perceive that local news lacks meaningful content, and they must find ways to filter out the “fluff.”

People often feel hopeless that they can’t make a difference about what they learn from the news.

“People are exhausted by negative news constantly portrayed in the media."

“People often feel hopeless that they can’t make a difference about what they learn from the news."

“People are exhausted by negative news constantly portrayed in the media."

“I actually stopped actively listening to the news probably 20 years ago because it was just so depressing. You never hear good stuff. Ever. Hardly ever. It’s mostly sensationalized. If I listened to the news in this area, I would never leave my house. I’d think there was someone being stuck up on the corner every day. So I just stopped listening.”

“I want to take action but I don’t know how. Makes me feel better not to pay attention, keep myself in a bubble or not, but not to engage as much.”

“It depends, if it’s mugging or killings, it’s not great for my state of mind. If it’s about a chocolate festival or new restaurants, Peruvian restaurant opening, that makes me happy. It all depends what the content of the news is. It’s usually bad but not always.”

“I am overwhelmed by this point. I don’t know what to think anymore.”

“If more people got involved and knew that it was coming, then maybe it wouldn’t have been enacted in the first place.”

“Oh yeah, I’ve had the Chronicle, I’ve had the paper before, absolutely. So much crap and the inserts and so much stuff that’s just not pertinent to you.”

(people’s benefits of getting news on his device) “Well I’m able to filter a lot of crap and fluff, well I call it fluff: the American world is full of it. Sometimes it’s nice, it’s cool. But if I want to specifically get news, I want to go into it and not have to hear about the new house that was built […] I can customize stuff and know what I want.”

“I know I should be more worried about them but in my opinion, there is nothing I can do about it. I am one vote.”
People feel like local news lacks convenience, forcing a trade off between speed, quality, & seamlessness.
People trust their social networks to inform them of what is happening, instantly.

“That’s a great thing about Twitter is that the news spreads even before the reporters get it.”

“I got an update from my phone last night about someone walking their dog in a park nearby, and their dog got attacked by another dog. Everyone was kind of scrambling to see where this dog walker was. People were just posting what their dog looks like and description of this dog.”

“I hear about local news from people. When they talk about it. [I talk about it] with everyone, someone will bring up something, [for example] a teenager drowned in the beach, but I never read an article about it....”

People feel that local news organizations are trading off quality.

“It seems weird that the news is on for more. When I was younger, 30 minutes local, 30 minutes national. Now CNN, Fox broadcast 24/7. More people are talking but you’re getting less information. I don’t even watch the evening news anymore. Not that impactful. I can get information faster and quicker for the 4 things that I want.”

“I do think [journalists] need to vet their sources. They need to slow down... Before, journalists’ integrity was intact... It’s like what you tell your kids, you can’t lie. Once you start lying... they will look at everything you say from now and [what you have] said in the past. That holds true for everyone, even as an adult and especially as a journalist.”

People are drawn to media that seamlessly fits into their life.

“If something happens on CNN, I get notifications on my watch and my phone, so I can see it really quick and know something is going on {...} if I feel it is vibrating, I look, know what is going on and I can read or swipe away. It is really quick.”

“I don’t mind email for breaking news because you can read the headline and delete it. I do get emails, and it is easy to delete it if it isn’t important.”

“As for local news, the way my particular cable is set up, all channels are in the 100’s. All local channels are like 4.1. It doesn’t cross your mind because its so far away. You never think to go to the beginning.”

Knight Lab + INSiTUM | Confidential | © Copyright INSiTUM 2018
People feel like the abundance of sources and players in local news makes it difficult to navigate.
People can easily access news in different ways, making consumption more layered and complex.

“There kind of is a pyramid of how the information comes. You see what people are talking about on the Lebanon Chatter, [Lebanon Indiana’s Facebook group] or what’s trending on Twitter and then you narrow that down to where the actual information is coming from. Then you click on link to see where that information is coming from.”

“I like Twitter because it bundles it all together, instead of having Tribune app, ABC app, etc. It just makes it easy for me to want to go through and look through all that stuff. Whereas if I saw a newspaper, already mentally I’m thinking this is going to be exhausting to go through this whole sheet of paper.”

People have difficulty determining which sources are trustworthy

“I try to take it all with a grain of salt. It’s always going to be a little skewed […] Even The New York Times is skewed. I look at what site I’m reading and try to figure out where they’re coming from.”

“I do like the idea that it’s not from a single source. I don’t want this always coming from one person, that’s why I try to follow different outlets. There needs to be some form of credibility”

“When I go to Twitter for the news, I am definitely paying attention to the source and who is sending it. There are so many polarized news sources, so I try to stay as in center and unbiased as possible. I will look at different tweets of what is breaking and then choose the source with the original article to go to that and read it directly online.”
People have a hard time separating fact from opinion - the line is blurred

“All of the news stations sensationalize things nowadays because it’s 24/7 but before you turn on your news at 6 or 9pm to know what’s going on, and now they need clicks. That’s how they sell their ad revenue. They sensationalize everything so therefore, they have thrown away some of their binding guiding principles.”

“I listen for news. I guess what I’m looking for is unbiased news. Just give it to me, straight no chaser. I don’t need all the fluff. I don’t need all the sensationalized hoopla that comes along with it.”

People crave control over news they consume and are more selective about what they engage with.

“I want something real or solid, as opposed to just people bickering or complaining. So I’m getting more news from a Facebook or Twitter, because I can sort of control the content opposed to me just watching the TV - there’s a fire. You know what, I’m going to mute it and go get a cup of coffee.”

“That’s why I like my newsfeed more than anything because local news can be depressing. My Google feed is set up to the point where I don’t really get the depressing stuff. I get stuff that interests me and hypes me up.”
People have limited resources to invest in local news and often can’t justify the cost.
People feel like there is too much information and not enough time to invest.

“If I do have time, I will read the articles and go through that. I think it’s more so you have that quick information so you’re not completely out of the loop but you could use more information if you wanted to. So yeah I guess I could if I had more time i could have more information than just those quick Twitter updates.”

“I just look at enough sites. I already have my go-to sites, so I don’t need another site to weave into the mix.”

“But CNN, they give you a wealth of information. Sometimes just too much. And I don’t have time to read it.”

People are not willing to pay for news because they can always find it elsewhere.

“I think there is competition. If I am not reading a NYTimes article about it, I can guarantee you one of my friends did, and I can still see it for free. Maybe I am not gonna be as educated on it, but I also think there are definitely other ways people can access that news. If you set a price on it, that’s gonna turn me away.”

“It’s not that conscious. If it seemed real important, I can go back to Google and find it from the AP Wire feed. So I really need to know I can do something to figure that out.”

"Why? I’m a poor person. I’m not going to spend an extra couple dollars a month on my newspapers. I’d rather put it in the piggy bank. I like finding my news for free, laying around.”

People would rather spend their time or money on something else.

“I don’t really have time. My day is so crazy. If I sit and have an hour to watch TV at the end of the day, I want to watch something relaxing. Lately we’ve been watching The Blue Planet 2 on BBC. Or HGTV. I don’t want to watch something serious.”

“If I have free time, [I’d] rather watch a show on Netflix, I rarely want to read the news.”

“We stopped getting the paper because we didn’t read it and it was a waste of money.”
People feel that they have a deteriorating relationship with local news organizations.
People are nostalgic about the role local news played in their life but struggle with combining sentiment and practicality.

"I don’t know if it is just a connection when my mom was alive. [My daughter] would sit on her lap, and she would read the newspaper to her to teach her how to read."

"Being in LA and growing up in LA, it was more organic - the news sources were the LA Weekly, the LA Times, I just grew up with them and they were kind of there."

"I enjoyed reading the news in print and newspapers. They present things in a clear, concise, direct manner, but they are antiquated…"

People’s expectation for journalists to keep them informed has shifted towards their social network.

“My friends on social media I would probably trust more than a journalist, for the same reason that I - there’s pressure on them to present information in a certain way."

“If a friend shared it and I know them, especially a family member or close friend. It is like say my favorite aunt. If she thinks something is important and she even shares it on my feed or tags me in it, I will definitely read it."

“I follow ABC Chicago and the Chicago Tribune so I generally get my big Chicago updates from there. I’m also part of a Portage, [my] neighborhood’s Facebook group. It’s like general information that’s a little closer….normally stuff within about a mile. […] That local news probably won’t get to, like, those big outlets like ABC."

People feel distrust when they find mistakes in local news publications.

“By the time you get the newspaper, everything is updated on Facebook and WISH television, so by the time you get the written part, something probably changed. It is irrelevant these days to have an actual newspaper."

“I know from experience that the news doesn’t always get the facts straight."

“I’m sort of getting some news on Facebook and Twitter. I also follow The Economist because they’ll have unbiased information as opposed to he-said, she-said unlike the fake Fox News."
People don't feel like local news accurately represents their community

“I feel like most news is just... not necessarily fake, but it’s so biased. And intentionally presented in a way to make you feel disenfranchised. Just the way that it’s presented is very off-putting for me. It’s meant to stir up something and what that something is is different for everybody and that just leaves a poor taste in my mouth.”

“The things I’m reading in the news, like the way people are trying to handle things that are going on in my city and community aren’t necessarily the people in need of help really want or things that would actually help them. I just see a lot of confusion.”

People are increasingly aware of bias in the news, including local sources.

“I like to critically think about things. I want to know someone’s opinions that I don’t agree with and why they feel that way rather than someone writing an article and it’s completely shifted one way.”

“When I go to Twitter for the news, I am definitely paying attention to the source and who is sending it. There are so many polarized news sources, so I try to stay as in center and unbiased as possible.”

“I think people are just trying to stay employed a lot of the time. And it seems repetitive. It doesn’t seem like the local news is that much different from all other news, if I were to look somewhere else.”
3. Who are local news audiences?

To identify key behaviors and attitudes for local news audiences, we analyzed how people interacted with local news sources.

Based on what we learned, we created a framework that defines why people decide to interact with local news and what role it fulfills in their life.
Attitudinal Framework

We uncovered an attitudinal framework that helps define the four main attitudes showcased by our participants.

The framework’s x-axis defines what motivates people to interact with local news?

The y-axis defines what role does local news have in their lives?

We are calling each of these key attitudes Media Mentalities.

ASPIRATIONAL
“News can help make me a better person.”

PERSONAL
“I want to stay informed.”

SOCIAL
“I want to stay engaged with others.”

UTILITARIAN
“News helps me make decisions.”
Media Mentalities

There are four key media mentalities:

- **Learners** are motivated to stay informed in order to become a more knowledgeable person.

- **Connectors** are motivated to stay engaged with others in order to feel connected to their community.

- **Achievers** are motivated to stay informed to help them make decisions for their success.

- **Sharers** are motivated to stay engaged with others in order to make decisions about their social life.

ASPIRATIONAL

- **Learners**
  
  “News can help make me a better person.”

- **Connectors**
  
  “It makes me feel like I’m connected to my community and also to the world around me.”

PERSONAL

- **Learners**
  
  “I want to stay informed.”

- **Connectors**
  
  “I want to stay engaged with others.”

- **Achievers**
  
  “It just makes me a better well-rounded person when I know what’s going on in the place I live.”

- **Sharers**
  
  “It’s something that I talk to with my co-workers my wife... because it’s important and you want to find out what’s going on.”

SOCIAL

- **Learners**
  
  “It’s something that I talk to with my co-workers my wife... because it’s important and you want to find out what’s going on.”

- **Connectors**
  
  “I like to be informed at all times because you may never know what is currently happening that could affect your day.”

- **Achievers**
  
  “I want to stay engaged with others.”

- **Sharers**
  
  “It just makes me a better well-rounded person when I know what’s going on.”

UTILITARIAN

- **Learners**
  
  “News helps me make decisions.”

- **Connectors**
  
  “It makes me feel like I’m connected to my community and also to the world around me.”

- **Achievers**
  
  “I want to stay engaged with others.”

- **Sharers**
  
  “It’s something that I talk to with my co-workers my wife... because it’s important and you want to find out what’s going on.”
LEARNERS

“It just makes me a better well-rounded person when I know what’s going on in the place I live.”

BEING KNOWLEDGEABLE

Learners are motivated to be knowledgeable and educated about topics that they are interested in and issues that surround their communities.

Engaging with local news allows them to feel like a better citizen by keeping them educated about things that might affect them or others who depend on them.
LEARNERS

“It just makes me a better well-rounded person when I know what’s going on in the place I live.”

KEY BEHAVIORS

How do they interact with local news?

- Purposefully access local news as part of their daily routine.
- Highly engaged with paid subscriptions
- Determined trustworthy local news sources that they constantly engage with across multiple channels.
- Primarily engage with information about local government activities and/or politics.
LEARNERS

“It just makes me a better well-rounded person when I know what’s going on in the place I live.”

KEY VALUES

How do they feel about local news?

- Have built a relationship with the sources they access, they feel like they fill a gap for them
- Seek quality over quantity
- Believe that knowledge and learning can make you a better person or better at your job
- Believe that by learning they become better, engaged citizens.
- Develop their own point of view about topics they learn about.
To feel sophisticated and savvy about topics relevant to their community.

“I truly believe that knowledge is power and being informed about my neighborhood makes [me] a better well-rounded person when I know what’s going on in the place I live.”

“You know when I can find time constantly trying to make sure that I’m educated and I’m up to date.”

To keep their community leaders accountable.

“Local news is important because I care [about] and am invested in my community. If I am paying ridiculous taxes I want to make sure I have a voice and knowledge of what’s going on in my backyard.”

“I like to be informed and know how what’s going on in my community because I am a taxpayer here and it’s important that I know about the issues and the political ramifications of what things will hold us for the future here.”

To satisfy their responsibility towards others in their community.

“Any breaking news that I need to listen to or to stay knowledgeable about... [I need to know] kind of what’s going on in my city and so that when I’m interacting with clients I’m able to really understand maybe some of the issues that they have and some of the things that they’re dealing with in their own private lives.”

“Especially being a teacher you want to come to school aware of certain events that happened, you want to not only know about it but be knowledgeable about them.”
MEET ESHAN

“When I was a child my family actually subscribed to the print edition of [the OC Register] newspaper. That connection has now transformed into my devotion to their website.”

Eshan is an attorney and describes himself as having a “voracious appetite for reading and consuming news.” His daily routine consists of going to work and then finding activities to relax and “turn off his brain.”

He enjoys professional and fantasy sports as well as video games, going to the movies, binging on TV shows and educating himself as much as possible.

HE SEeks out and monitors news sources

As an avid consumer of information, Eshan’s routine is strict. He wakes up and checks Twitter and blogs for any news that he missed. Eshan likes to be in the cutting edge when it comes to news, so he has established a very specific schedule of when he accesses certain publications.

On Monday afternoons he engages with the OC Weekly. On Sundays, when he has more time to invest, he is able to do a deep dive on the OC Register. However, during the work week, he is always “filling time by consuming news and learning more about happenings in the world around me.”

“But more to the point I just like to come here [OC Register website]. Really every day but you know especially on a Sunday morning I can do more of a deep dive into reading different articles…”

“I’m willing to go out of my way to find local news (Facebook posts from the city; scouring blogs for relevant articles) and I realized that I spend more time and effort looking for local news than I do with any other news source… it is harder to find relevant local news that amounts to more than simply a list of crimes or local government announcements…”
LEARNERS HABITUALLY SEEK OUT AND MONITOR THEIR NEWS SOURCES. THEY ARE DEEP DIVERS.

Learners spend most of their time monitoring their sources and searching for news. Because their main motivation is to continuously learn, they like to constantly keep up with what’s happening around them.

Learners are very proactive about how they engage with and consume news. They are always seeking information, and as such, enjoy deep diving into key topics.

Learners often carve out time at the end of the day or during their free time to deep dive into longer form articles, even if this means reading them long after they were published.

Learners, more often than not, are playing catch-up with the news. They constantly feel like they are missing out and that there is always something out there that they should learn about.
BEING IN TOUCH

Motivated to **stay in touch** with what is happening in their communities and having a general sense of what is going on around them.

Engaging with local news allows them to engage in conversation with others, building a feeling of connection and belonging to their community.
CONNECTORS

"It makes me feel like I'm connected to my community and also to the world around me."

KEY BEHAVIORS

How do they interact with local news?

- Seek out activities to do and places to explore
- Focus on topics that interest them both for entertainment and information.
- Focused on hyperlocal, neighborhood-centric news.
- Higher interaction with social networks, including Facebook Groups and nextdoor.com
"It makes me feel like I'm connected to my community and also to the world around me."

**KEY VALUES**

*How do they feel about local news?*

- Seek to connect with others through community events and information
- Believe that being involved in the community makes for a more fulfilling life.
- Value the variety of sources and places to find things to do.
WHAT KEEPS CONNECTORS MOTIVATED TO INTERACT WITH LOCAL NEWS?

To explore where they live and find things to do with others.

"The stories and updates I’m looking into are interesting and enlightening. I feel like being in-the-know allows us to look out for others in our community and be helpful... Local news is extremely important when it comes to helping me plan the day out and plan future activities with my family."

“I like to get a recap on what happened the evening before. I also review traffic updates in the morning. In the evenings and throughout the day I’ll periodically check to see what’s happening in my community like upcoming events or any crime updates.”

To feel connected to and part of their community.

“I use the [CNN] app, and I received a push notification about an article that voices an opinion on fireworks and the ordinance about them in the state of Indiana...And it was definitely a hot issue based on things that I’ve seen on my Facebook profile and in my social media accounts. So I definitely wanted to read it [push notification] and the article.”

“I discovered that I am a person that feels community engagement is paramount towards living a happy and satisfied life.”
MEET BETHANY

“Local news provides a way for me to stay up-to-date on what is going on in my immediate vicinity. It helps me to be well-informed about current issues, and helps me to engage in conversation with coworkers, acquaintances, and friends.”

Bethany is a busy mom of two who also works full time at a public school as an English teacher. She enjoys reading, going outdoors, and cooking. A typical day for her starts with getting up and ready for school, shuttling her kids to their extracurricular activities, and sometimes having a moment for herself!

SHE RELIES ON SOURCES TO NOTIFY HER AT THE RIGHT MOMENTS

Bethany typically interacts with the news when she has a moment of free time. Often, she is triggered by push notifications to access a news story, and if the notification is in the right time and place with the right topic, she will be intrigued and click on it.

Bethany feels like nowadays we are wired to seek information at all times. She feels like she needs to fill in time by engaging her brain with information, when she’s not busy with her kids and work. She tends to check her social media, the weather and local news during those slow intervals in the day.

“I was sitting in the living room of my in-laws house, and I received a pop-up notification on my phone. The push notification was from the NWI Times app, and it said that a small child was in critical condition after drowning at a local water park.”

“I realized that I engage with the news much more often because of the push notifications from my local news app. I definitely check in regularly on my own, by opening the app during slow times during the day. However, I definitely engage with the news when a headline is delivered as a push notification. It definitely draws me into wanting to know more about a situation that I might not have even heard about.”
Connectors seek personal relevance, served at the right moment.

Connectors are more often being notified about news or searching for it. Because they proactively seek for ways to connect, they depend on their social media and local news sources to ping them when something might be relevant. They also try to search for events or community activities they might want to attend.

Connectors like to act upon the news they read, either talking to others or actively participating in solving a problem in their communities.

Connectors are more often than not interest-led. This means that they are more likely to be prompted by or search for news related to specific interests or topics that they find directly relevant.

Although it is important for them to have information real-time at their fingertips, they are often reading push-notifications and diving deeper only on those that relate directly to their interests.
SHARERS

"It's something that I talk to with my co-workers my wife... because it's important and you want to find out what's going on."

BEING IN-THE-KNOW

Motivated to be in-the-know and gain insider information about social events and happenings that they can talk to others about.

Engaging with local news allows them to hold an influencer status within their social group, always aware of anything that might affect and influence his/her social activities.
KEY BEHAVIORS

How do they interact with local news?

- Mainly use social media as an entry point towards local news sources
- Typically engage during down-times or while winding down at the end of the day
- Primarily engage with information about community events, local businesses and crime.

"It's something that I talk to with my co-workers my wife... because it's important and you want to find out what's going on."
SHARERS

"It's something that I talk to with my co-workers my wife... because it's important and you want to find out what's going on."

KEY VALUES

How do they feel about local news?

- Sharing with others through conversations about what impacts his/her surroundings
- Having insider information that allows them to have influence over their social group
- Value how others might react or perceive the information they are sharing
- Seek quantity over quality of information
**WHAT KEEPS SHARERS MOTIVATED TO INTERACT WITH LOCAL NEWS?**

To gain social capital by having insider information

“My motive is to essentially gossip with friends but smartly. I am barraged by information all day; social media, clickbait news, advertisements. Any way I can filter it all that noise and get the facts is helpful. I see my involvement in local, neighborhood focus only increasing as I get older.”

“I have the Chicago Tribune bookmarked on my laptop so I click on it at least once a day. I find myself coming here to see breaking news/top stories and what’s happening in my area / city.”

To elicit reactions and have conversations with others.

“I like it [the news] in the mornings so I can start my day off knowing the most recent news... maybe to talk with others or inform them. Other times I may just be curious.”

“I think that’s also why I like to get my social media because I like hearing what you have to say when they present news. And it doesn’t matter if I agree with their opinion or not. I still like to see other perspectives.”

To satisfy their social media addiction and fear of missing out.

“I realized that I feel fairly informed of local news and I’m happy Facebook allows me to do so and I know not to let fake news get to me”

“I feel like a lot has happened during the day that I’m not aware of because I’m so busy with work and life...But since I also read my Facebook feed (where I get most local news from) at night too, I often spend a good amount of time at night catching up on local news”
Mitchell typically interacts with multiple sources of local news during his down-time. His routine is to check social media as soon as he wakes up, and ask Google home for the weather and traffic information before going to work. Mitchell likes to have an organized day, and being in-the-know about useful information prior to going to work really helps him get a picture of what his day is going to look like.

When he comes back from work, Mitchell likes to wind down by either watching the news or browsing on his phone or laptop. He routinely checks the Chicago Tribune at least once a day, and watches TV news every night before going to bed.

“I was motivated to read it because as a season ticket holder of the Chicago Cubs I was worried if I’d be affected by the protest happening on the North side next Thursday Aug. 2nd. This will be a peaceful protest but I’m always concerned for my safety…”

“I’ve realized [the importance] of [how] local news affects my life on a regular basis. Whether it’s weather, traffic, sports, politics, arts/culture, or breaking news it will have an impact even though it may be minor it can be meaningful. For instance, going to Cubs game next Thursday, I could be right in the middle of the anti-violence protest. I would of only known this by reading it or watching it on the news.”

Mitchell is a 33 year old account manager for an IT company. He is married and is an avid sports fan, he plays softball and basketball, and has season tickets to the Chicago Cubs and Blackhawks.

Mitchell likes to engage with information that might affect any of the social activities he’s got going on, specifically music or sports.

“Meet Mitchell
“But it’s something that I talk to with my co-workers my wife and me and my wife they actually sit down and watch news together because it’s important and you want to find out what’s going on.”
Connectors are more often than not interest-led. This means that they are more likely to be prompted or search for news related to specific interests or topics that they find direct relevance.

Although it is important for them to have information real-time at their fingertips, they are often reading push-notifications and diving deeper only for those that spark their interest.

Connectors like to act upon the news they read, either talking to others or actively participating in solving a problem in their communities.
ACHIEVERS

"I like to be informed at all times because you may never know what is currently happening that could affect your day."

BEING UP TO DATE

Motivated to constantly be up to date about the most recent information so they can plan accordingly.

Engaging with local news allows them to be successful at their job or social life. They want to know what is currently happening that can affect their day or work.
ACHIEVERS

“I like to be informed at all times because you may never know what is currently happening that could affect your day.”

KEY BEHAVIORS

How do they interact with local news?

- Use the news to plan ahead and help them feel prepared for their day or job.
- Interact with the news in the morning and throughout their day, seeking constant updates.
- Interact with a favorite source that has proven valuable overtime.
- Focus on being up to speed about certain topics of interest that are relevant to their job or daily activities.
ACHIEVERS

“I like to be informed at all times because you may never know what is currently happening that could affect your day.”

KEY VALUES

How do they feel about local news?

- Making better decisions after being informed by the news
- Constantly being on the pulse with the most up to the minute information
- Having information that allows them to succeed at their job
WHAT KEEPS ACHIEVERS MOTIVATED TO INTERACT WITH LOCAL NEWS?

To succeed at their jobs with the help of useful information

“The Coloradoan. [It is a] local newspaper that I read on my phone, [I] paid 99¢ a month for unlimited [use] on my app. I read it because I need to know what’s going on in the city for my job in local gov.”

“Pretty much when I wake up. First off, I take my phone. I have news things that pop up on my phone which comes from a news app such as CNN. I scroll that, I check the stock market, I check my Forex… I listen to audiobooks, podcasts; a lot of motivational things pertain to Forex and money”

To navigate their day-to-day with actionable information

“I like to be informed at all times because you may never know that what is currently happening could affect your day.”

“I rated it this way because I park my car in the area where this car was burglarized so this is very important and impactful news to me. I am going to start looking for another street to park on that’s safer”
MEET SARAH

Sarah is an IT analyst for city government. Data is pretty much what she does every day and she enjoys it. In her free time, she loves to try new recipes at home and use new gadgets while doing so. She considers herself to be an avid reader, who likes to be informed on what’s going on in the world and in the literary scene.

SHE OFTEN MULTITASKS WHILE CONSUMING NEWS

Sarah rides the BART every day, so she takes advantage of her commute to get updates on what is going on. Sarah gets most of her news from social media and Flipboard, reading headlines most of the time. However, she follows links and hashtags or will search on Google to get to the source of articles when something catches her attention.

Sarah wants to stay up to the minute about anything and everything that might affect her day, including things like her commute and job. For that reason, getting the news has to be easy and convenient. Searching and looking up information is a chore, multitasking allows her to be efficient about how she gets news.

“I’m usually commuting or at work when I’m listening to an NPR podcast and reading about local news through my news app, Flipboard. At work, my colleagues let me know what’s going on with the local government when we are chatting.”

“I like that I’m well informed and engaged in the city I live and work in. The future of local news feels like a circus sometimes. People assume things and act upon it before getting informed.”

“And I usually just drive through to see what is important and I’ll just read the headlines. If an article really intrigues me or catches my attention, I’ll click on it.”
Achievers read headlines, time is always of the essence. Achievers are more likely to be notified by scrolling or monitoring their news sources. They might also be made aware of news through colleagues, social media or news apps.

Achievers are constantly consuming tidbits of usable information to help them feel like they are on the pulse of local happenings. Feeling removed, blindsided or out of touch is their greatest pain point.

Achievers are typically prompted about specific news that they find value in. They opt for personalizing their consumption so that they know what they are reading is relevant to them.

Achievers are constantly checking the news multiple times a day. They prefer accessing the news in real-time, however, they optimize their time by mostly looking at short headlines.
4. How do audiences interact with local news sources?

Audiences interact with local news sources and information depending on their context and needs at that moment in time. Participants documented moments where they interacted and consumed local news and we were able to uncover 4 different dimensions.
Modes of Interaction

We identified 2 main dimensions for interaction with local news sources.

The first dimension is the **HOW:**

How were people triggered to interact with the news source, from **Prompted** to **Purposeful.**

The second dimension is the **WHAT:**

What where people looking to see, from a **Specific** topic or **General** content.

**PROMPTED**

“I was alerted to or something caught my attention.”

**PURPOSEFUL**

“I am deliberately looking for local news.”

**SPECIFIC**

“Looking for a specific topic or news.”

**GENERAL**

“Looking to see what’s new or sparks my interest.”
We also identified 2 main dimensions of how people consume the information once they have accessed a news source.

The first dimension is the **LENGTH**:

What is the length of the information they typically consume?

The second dimension is **SPEED**:

How fast do they tend to consume information?

**SHORTER**

“Short bursts of information.”

**REAL-TIME**

“Current updates of what is going on.”

**DELAYED**

“Catching-up on what I missed.”

**LONGER**

“Deep diving into articles with more detailed information.”
“I was alerted to or something caught my attention.”

- Triggered to consume news through notifications or emails
- Find it passively while making the rounds on social media
- Wouldn't necessarily interact with the source if they were not notified

“The news source is NWI Times. I use the app, and I received a push notification about an article that voices an opinion on fireworks and the ordinance about them in the state of Indiana.”

“So I was just relaxing in bed after lunch and I was checking my email on my smartphone and I got a notification from nextdoor.com. And what piqued my interest was that on the subject line it had the name of my neighborhood and that there was a found dog. So I opened it and then clicked on the link it took me into nextdoor.com.“

“So I'm at my office computer and it was on Twitter and came across this article here talking about Phil Murphy governor of New Jersey his accomplishments what he's been doing with his agenda... [NJ.com] Isn't the source I always go to but I follow him on Twitter which is why I was able to access the site and read about this article.”
“I am deliberately looking for local news.”

- Begin with a search on Google, opening previously bookmarked news sources or TV or radio
- Carve out moments during their day to purposefully interact with news
- Stop what they are doing to search or already have an established monitoring routine

“I’m in our office. My family is at home with me. I’m searching the Internet for local news to see if there are festivals this weekend in the area.”

“I went to fox4kc.com because I wanted to read about a story about an apartment complex that is being investigated for safety.”

“It is a Monday morning and I am laying in the bed contemplating my travel route to work. There are different ways I can take so I watch every news channels traffic to see where the congestion is.”

“I’m at home right now, by myself, and partaking in a weekly Monday ritual of visiting the website for OC Weekly, a news and culture blog and magazine that covers my county. I visit them on Mondays because their content output is sporadic and I like to let the articles pile up before I go in for a deep dive.”
“Looking for a specific topic or news.”

- Actively search for key local news topics that interest them.
- Have interest in following a key story that has direct impact on their life.
- Follow-up on something they heard during the day.

“I rated high today because there were articles with updates on a couple local crime stories I have been following since last week. There are a shooting in a generally nonviolent area, and I’m particularly following the trial of a man who shot two young men who were breaking into his car.”

“At work everyone was talking about the Underground Music Showcase (UMS) that’s happening this weekend. I have tickets but I haven’t decided on who all I’m going to see each day yet. Decided to turn to a couple local newspapers/magazines to see who they suggest via their Facebooks and websites.”

“I am using the Los Angeles Times website, I often take a look through the web pages and also the physical Los Angeles Times Pages as well. I wanted to check out the information on a fire that I had vaguely heard about.”
“Looking to see what's new or sparks my interest.”

- Passively coming across the information they find
- Happenstance plays a big role in the types of news they find intriguing or sparks their interest
- Looking for general updates on what is going on around them

“I am looking through my Reddit thread for the days recap in what is trending. There is not usually a specific topic, rather I usually want to get up to speed quickly on the day that I missed while working.”

“I’m in my car taking a break. Yeah I have some downtime like this. I like to just look through Twitter and see what I’ve been missing because the world just goes on and on and on while you’re so busy trying to catch up to things.”

“So I’m just hanging out in the living room laying on the futon. Just after dinner sitting here looking through Facebook saw a post about my hometown in a housing development. It wouldn’t be something I normally seek out to look through like my local news sources are KVOA MTV. The only reason I see it is because somebody shares it that I follow on Facebook.”
“Short bursts of information.”

- Consume short, headline type content
- Feel like short bursts is enough to keep them informed or up to date
- Often entry points to longer form news, or more extensive searches

“I wanted to be able to get more details on what the fare on the subway was going to be. I heard about it in the first place because I saw a tweet from Cynthia Nixon who’s running for governor of New York state saying that this is outrageous that the subway needed more meaningful work rather than fare hikes.”

“I am looking through my Reddit thread for the days recap in what is trending. There is not usually a specific topic, rather I usually want to get up to speed quickly on the day that I missed while working.”

“And I usually just drive through to see what is important and I’ll just read the headlines. If an article really intrigues me or catches my attention, I’ll click on it.”
“Deep diving into articles with more detailed information.”

- Looking to invest time in exploring a story or reading about something more in depth
- Might click through links to explore a topic even further

“The news source is the local paper for my area called NWI Times. I was prompted to engage with them after seeing a post they made on Facebook, which was noticed while I was scrolling my social media feed. It mentioned that a woman from the area was returning, or attempting to return to the area, after being involved with ISIS. I had never heard of anyone in the area having any kind of connection to a terrorist group like that, so I was intrigued.”

“Really every day but you know especially on a Sunday morning I can do more of a deep dive into reading different articles and just sort of find out what’s going on where I live. Business openings and closings, crime, political news. I’d just like to be informed as or as Orange County is concerning my city Rancho Santa Margarita is concerned this is the best funded you know most up to date source that there really is and without the Orange County Register.”
“Definitely like to follow that it was right on top of this lightning storm turned into a fire down some power lines people are without power. That is why I watch the local news gives me updates current right here in my neighborhood a couple of miles away.”

“So was casually scrolling through my Instagram feed and I happen to come across one of the apps, Insert City Now which is major because like I stated before it’s important for keeping you up to date with current festivals current new restaurants things to try. Current events also local businesses and things that are being built and brought to the city.”

“So because I was busy with yard work I didn’t do my normal lunchtime news roundup so I’m on mlive now and all of the new stories for the day are pretty much up and any big breaks.”

“Current updates of what is going on.”

- Looking for up-to-the-minute information that might affect their day
- Keen to current events, happenings and updates
- Want to have the most relevant information
“Catching up on what I missed.”

- Accessing information and news after it is published
- Let articles and updates pile up before accessing them
- Daily life often gets in the way of being able to continuously be up to the minute

“I'm in my car taking a break. Yeah I have some downtime like this. I like to just look through Twitter and see what I've been missing because the world just goes on and on and on while you're so busy trying to catch up to things.”

“So because I was busy with yard work I didn't do my normal lunchtime news roundup so I'm on mlive now and all of the new stories for the day are pretty much up and any big breaks. So I have to see lots of new stories and in particular I’m interested in this article. First and foremost because this is the one about the shooting incident I described in an earlier part of this entry. It’s an update on the trial looks like the defendant testified in his own behalf.”
Each of the 4 Media Mentalities behave and interact with local news in distinct ways. By identifying how they interact with sources and consume information, local news organizations can create new products to satisfy each of their needs.
HOW DO THE MEDIA MENTALITIES INTERACT WITH NEWS SOURCES?

PROMPTED
“I was alerted to or something caught my attention.”

PURPOSEFUL
“I am deliberately looking for local news.”

SPECIFIC
“Looking for a specific topic or news.”

GENERAL
“Looking to see what’s new or sparks my interest.”
HOW DO THE MEDIA MENTALITIES CONSUME INFORMATION?

**SHORTER**
“Short bursts of information.”

**REAL-TIME**
“Current updates of what is going on.”

**LONGER**
“Deep diving into articles with more detailed information.”

**DELAYED**
“Catching-up on what I missed.”
6. What do audiences wish for local news?

Although local news plays a key role in audiences' lives today, audiences are also worried that it is slowly deteriorating. As people’s “hunger for cheap info [becomes] insatiable...” they realize how the industry’s lack of funding and resources has threatened their experience.

Still, audiences are hopeful. Because “people are becoming more and more engaged in their local environment” local news organizations will continue to have a role. We uncovered 5 key wishes our participants had for local news.
What do audiences wish for local news?

Leverage online, digital and social mediums

“...more direct communication through social media (posts by local government or local policies on Facebook & Twitter)...”

“...the future of local news is digital media because people are always on the go...”

“Eventually news will be live-streamed on the web...”

“I think they need to continue to be available on social media platforms...”

For it to be Increasingly hyperlocal

“I hope it’s more coverage of the smaller stories. The stories that truly affect the local residents.”

“...there’s more ability to hear about very local issues through non-traditional means...”

“The future of local news will be able to focus primarily on your neighborhood.”

“...people are increasingly becoming more focused on their own communities and how larger scale events impact them personally.”

More personalized and curated

“...perhaps local news should be reported in a podcast form so the user can listen when they want.”

“I think that the future of local news will be something that I pick and choose what I want to hear, and when I want to hear it and it will come to me automatically instead of me proactively getting it.”

“...focusing on stories that people are actually interested in.”

Utilize the strength of the community

“People using their phones and applications to contribute to local news.”

“Utilizing community members and the strength of social media to report more quickly and more widely on the news of the day.”

“Basically crowdsourcing news and curating other people’s reports in one promoted news channel.”

Focus on quick bursts of information

“The future of local news will [be] looking like something like Twitter. Quick bursts of relevant info sent to one’s phone.”

“It’ll be less about long-form articles and more about quick hits on stories.”

“I think that it’s going to continue to be more up to the second. I think that there will soon be the opportunity to be [there] instantly at wherever something occurs.”
WHAT WE LEARNED

Insights & Opportunities
Audiences desire the ability to filter, customize, and take action on the content they receive. There is a desire to have more control over what they read and where it is from, opting in and out based on their context and emotions in the moment.

This falls in line with trends in analogous industries, where audiences have more power and control of access over their experiences.

FROM
FEELING
OVERWHELMED

TO
HAVING
CONTROL
FROM EXHAUSTION TO ENABLING AGENCY

How might local news organizations enable audiences to feel more in control?
News audiences’ need to be in the know has been strongly reinforced by services that instantly provide information, pushing updates across all platforms.

However, not all people are going out of their way to get their news. They want to be informed but without putting in effort to seek it out – to have articles and stories seamlessly fit into their online routines and come from sources they already trust.
FROM LACK OF CONVENIENCE TO SEAMLESS EXPERIENCE

How might local news organizations create seamless experiences across channels?
More than ever, audiences feel overwhelmed by the sheer amount of content to read and engage with. Finding out where to start is as challenging as navigating and determining which sources are trustworthy.

Audiences desire an alternative they can rely on, that makes what they read more accessible, transparent and provides a sense of comfort to make more informed decisions.
FROM DIFFICULT TO NAVIGATE TO ASSURANCE & CERTAINTY

How might local news organizations simplify how audiences get news?
Audiences pay for a variety of different subscriptions and services and find it difficult to justify paying for the news they consume. Some are happy with the status quo: they read for free.

To justify spending the effort, money or time to access and engage with the news, audiences need to perceive that they are receiving value based on their motivations.
How might local news organizations provide value to audiences by fulfilling their motivations?
The relationship between local news organizations and audiences has been highly influenced by technology developments and trends, causing strain as expectations of veracity, honest representation, and reliability struggle to be met.

This relationship can only improve if local news organizations find ways to transition away from a transactional relationship with their audiences and create ways to build shared ownership and trust.
FROM A DETERIORATING RELATIONSHIP TO TRUSTED PARTNERSHIPS

How might local news organizations build meaningful partnerships with their audiences?
Thank you!

This research was conducted June-August 2018 by Insitum and Knight Lab as part of the Northwestern University Local News Initiative.

For any questions please contact:

Joe Germuska, Knight Lab
(joegermuska@northwestern.edu)