Diversity from Duopolies?: An Exploratory Analysis of Broadcast News Content in Small Television Markets with Virtual Duopolies

Sara Magee
Loyola University, Maryland
scmagee@loyola.edu

Mary T Rogus
Ohio University
rogus@ohio.edu

Janice Collins
University of Illinois
collins0@illinois.edu

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Abstract: Diversity of coverage and sources in local television newscasts has been a contentious issue for years, especially in smaller markets where shared service agreements (SSAs) create ‘virtual duopolies.’ In light of the recent FCC crackdown on joint sales agreements, and commitment to study SSAs, for similar limitations, this paper examines the impact of SSAs which create virtual duopolies. It analyzes content from local newscasts in three small markets, two with virtual duopolies and one control market with three independently-owned stations. Results show a clear difference in story repetition and diversity of sources in the co-operated markets when compared to the control market.

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Introduction

What is the future of television news? It is a question asked often in the fast-changing, fragmented news industry where the buzzwords are mobile, Internet, and social networking. However, even with more people getting their news from mobile devices and the Internet, year after year, studies show that television news is still the main source of local news for people everywhere (PEW, 2012). Providing news, sports and weather, as well as emergency information and community coverage specific to a local market is something television news has always done well, but in recent years the quality of that coverage has come under scrutiny on many fronts.

One of those fronts has sparked heated debate between broadcasters and regulators, ending with tough new enforcement from the FCC, and court cases and Washington lobbying from broadcasters. The heart of the issue is—agreements for sharing news, sales, marketing, and management services among local stations in the same market area, thus potentially skirting media ownership rules. Those rules clearly state that a company may only own one television station among the top four rated (according to Nielsen ratings) stations in any single designated market area (DMA) ("FCC Adopts Media Ownership Rules," 2003).

Critics of these joint sales and shared services agreements, including current FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler, say they are another step toward more media consolidation, and nothing more than a way to circumvent media ownership rules. Media consolidation, especially within a designated market area cuts down on diversity of voices represented in news stories, reduces competition which could potentially increase advertising rates for local businesses and impacts localism by degrading the quality of the content produced in a non-competitive

atmosphere. Supporters counter with the idea that jointly run companies will allow for more news and content production, more efficient sales and management, and keeps stations open—especially in markets where resources are limited and no news coverage is the only other option (Bachman, 2010; Blevins & Brown, 2010; Obar, 2009; Schatz, 2011; Stetler, 2011).

In March, 2014 the FCC issued a new ruling that no more joint sales agreements would be approved, and any existing JSAs in which one station in a market sold more than 15% of another station's advertising created co-ownership, and violated media ownership rules. Stations with JSAs that exceeded the 15% rule would have two years to dissolve the agreement or seek a waiver. The FCC further initiated the 2014 Media Ownership Quadrennial Review, including a review of shared service agreements as well.

With the issue of shared service agreements center stage and only likely to heat up in the coming months as the FCC investigates their impact on local television, what becomes obvious is that little in-depth research has been done on the actual content produced in markets with SSAs, especially those in which the SSAs create virtual duopolies. There is little hard data to support or disprove either side of the argument, especially in those smaller markets where there are fewer news options and most people get a majority of their information from local television news content produced by two to four stations.

This study tackles these questions by examining television news content in small markets where two or more top rated stations produce news out of the same newsroom, and then comparing that data to a third, similar sized market where all the broadcast stations produce their local news independently. The data gathered reflects some informative yet disturbing trends in the actual diversity of content among markets with shared service agreements that create 'virtual'

duopolies, including a large percentage of repetition of stories, video and text, and fewer different sources used to cover those stories.

Importance of TV News

Television news is a media staple and has been for decades. Despite the growth of the Internet, mobile, and web applications in recent years that have created a fragmentation of the news audience, studies show that local TV news is still the place audiences choose for their information. Pew Research Center's annual State of the Media 2012 report found that viewership of morning and evening news grew about 4.5% in the previous year and despite a 17% growth in the digital news audience, local television news still dominated with the audience identifying it as their main source of information. In profitability, local TV news rebounded with more than 60% of local newscast directors stating their newscasts made a profit in 2011 and more than two-thirds of news directors saying they did not have to make budget or staffing cuts for the year and expected to add staff in 2012 (Pew, 2012).

Media Ownership History

The media ownership and consolidation debate has a long and twisted history. The Communications Act of 1934 set the stage for telecommunications regulation decades ago and informed legislation and development of these systems as competition and technology in the marketplace changed throughout the mid-1900s (Bauer & Wildman, 2006; Howard, 2006; Klinenberg, 2007). Newspapers that had once been owned by independent families during the 1950s and 1960s had been taken over by large corporations by the 1980s. Deregulation emerged as a powerful force during the Reagan administration in the 1980s as the FCC began to relax ownership rules under the mantra of increasing competition and developing the economic marketplace (Aufderheide, 1999; Howard, 2006). In 1984, the breakup of the AT&T monopoly

and the Cable Act that deregulated that industry seemed clear victories in the debate over monopoly power in the telecommunications industry.

The 1990s marked the most intense period of concentration in the media because of the 1996 Telecommunications Act. The Act set new standards for all areas of the telecommunications industry, including even more loosening of the regulations on media ownership. All ownership restrictions on radio were removed, and a single owner was allowed to buy television stations that reached up to 35 percent of the national audience, plus station license renewals were all but guaranteed (Aufderheide, 1999; Bauer & Wildman, 2006; McChesney 1999). The Act gave more power to the FCC to determine regulatory rules and mandated an every four-year review of media ownership and policy, all with the goal of creating a more competitive marketplace.

In 1999, the FCC again significantly relaxed ownership rules, allowing a company to own two television stations in a market as long as eight independently owned stations remained. In 2003, after months of debate, the FCC in a controversial, split-party vote of 3 to 2 passed a set of rules relaxing media ownership rules even more. Companies were now allowed to own two television stations in a market as long as they were not among the top four stations as determined by Nielsen's television ratings, and three stations in larger markets where there were at least 18 television stations. The new rules also allowed companies to own stations reaching 45 percent of the national audience rather than the previous 35 percent ("FCC Adopts Media Ownership Rules," 2003).

These rulings immediately raised public concern over the impact they would have on diversity and local content among markets with co-owned and/or operated media outlets. To get their voices heard, citizens and media organizations began using email and phone campaigns to

flood Washington offices with their worries (Scott, 2004). In an effort to try and capitalize on the public voice and deal with these accusations, the FCC conducted a series of public hearings on the matter. These drew huge crowds in 2004 and 2005, but attention soon diminished and it was not until late 2006 that the Commission re-started the process with six more public meetings in 2007.

The FCC also commissioned 10 independent studies throughout the mid-2000s that looked at everything from television and radio ownership structures, to diversity in local news programs to the actual rules and regulations themselves. One study showed "scant evidence that local media ownership changes media competition or localism" (Rennhoff, 2011: 15). Another showed that the "representative consumer values more different viewpoints in the reporting of information on news and current affairs" (Savage & Waldman, 2011: 1). A study on diversity in television news suggested that there was "little evidence for a robust influence of market structure on diversity, and that changes in diversity have little impact on local news viewing" (George & Gee, 2011: 2). FCC Commissioner at the time, Michael Copps, lobbied strongly to have joint sales and shared service agreements studied as part of this research, but heavy counter-lobbying by the National Association of Broadcasters kept JSAs and SSAs out of the research agenda (Chavkin, 2013). Referring to media consolidation and joint sales agreements, Copps was quoted as saying, "Localism has suffered and the quality of our news and information has suffered. I don't think we have another two years of dumbing down our civic dialogue and expecting the American people to be informed." (Chavkin, 2013: 2).

In 2011, the FCC allowed a triopoly in the Honolulu television market, citing that it would take a closer look at the media ownership debate in an upcoming review (Eggerton, 2011; Yanich, 2013). The same year a circuit court overruled an FCC ruling relaxing media ownership

rules (Carter, 2011) and in June 2012, the United States Supreme Court rejected an appeal by media companies that would have looked at cross-media ownership regulations and restrictions (Puzzanghera, 2012). In November 2012, the FCC had begun circulating a proposal to Commissioners to streamline and modernize media ownership rules by December 2012, but that was postponed until early 2013 in order to get more critical responses and comments (Bachman, 2013; Wyatt, 2012).

In November 2013, cable and telecom industry leader Tom Wheeler was appointed chairman of the FCC (FCC, 2013) and within six months the debate had shifted from changing media ownership rules to targeting joint sales agreements (JSAs) and shared service agreements (SSAs), which the chairman claimed were nothing more than a way to get around those rules (Needleman and Coleman, 2013). On March 31, 2014, the FCC limited JSAs to no more than 15% of advertising, or the station is considered to have an ownership stake in the other station, violating media ownership rules. The FCC also initiated the 2014 Media Ownership Quadrennial Review, including a review of SSAs (FCC, 2014). In May, 2014 the National Association of Broadcasters sued the FCC, asking the U.S. Court of Appeals, D.C. Circuit, to rescind an earlier release of guidelines on shared service agreements because the March 31st rule specifically stated that SSAs would be left alone for now, and then studied further as part of the 2014 quadrennial review (Eggerton, 2014).

Local Marketing/Management, Joint Sales, and Shared Service Agreements

While the FCC ownership rules debate has raged over the years, broadcast companies developed ways to “work with” other stations in the same market. For more than 20 years prior to the 1999 ownership rules update, the FCC allowed stations to enter in contracts, called Local Marketing/Management Agreements (LMAs) in which one station would provide services, such

as selling advertising time, or other management functions to the other station. But the company listed as the licensed owner of the station was supposed to retain control of the station's programming, personnel and finances (Lovelady, 2011). With the 1999 and 2003 ownership rules updates, allowing legal duopolies, the FCC put limits on LMAs. In addition, many stations wanted the economic savings of combining resources for their largest expense, local production of news, or spreading that cost out by producing news for a station in the market that did not have a newsroom (Hatch, 2011). Thus was born the Shared Service Agreement (SSA), which unlike LMAs, involved contracts for producing content and managing personnel and/or facilities. While the FCC has not formally dealt with SSAs in any of its rules or regulations, it has reviewed some individual agreements and found them acceptable. Critics however claim these SSAs have created "virtual duopolies" (Lovelady, 2011).

As per the 1996 Telecommunications Act, the FCC is required to revisit its broadcast ownership rules every four years. Its 2010 review found there were 1,302 commercial television stations with 303 owners, a 33% drop in the number of owners since the review rules were established in 1996 (FCC, 2010). The report also found 175 stations in 83 markets that had some type of JSA, LMA or SSA. In 2013 research from the University of Delaware's Center for Community Research and Service, Yanich, (2014) found that the number of local television markets with some form of SSA had jumped to 111, more than half of the 210 markets, in just three years.

The purpose of these LMAs or shared service agreements was "to achieve economies of scale in the production and distribution of news" by consolidating previously competing news operations into one news production entity that provided content for all stations' newscasts, or to expand news coverage by producing newscasts for a station that did not have a news and

production staff (Yanich, 2011). This is seen most often when local network-affiliated stations (ABC, CBS, NBC) have SSAs to produce newscasts for FOX, CW, or MyTV affiliates, or independent, unaffiliated stations, which do not have newsroom staffs. In many of these cases, the same news on-air talent and news content is used although there might be a slight difference in news sets, and/or graphics. These SSA produced newscasts are usually marketed as a product of the station producing the news, so there is no attempt to deceive the viewer that while this newscast is airing on the local FOX station, it is produced by the local CBS station. Proponents of SSAs often point out the positive expansion of news coverage in a market, because the newscasts are usually offered at alternative time periods in which local news is not currently available, especially in small and medium size communities (Hatch, 2011).

Where media consolidation critics decry these agreements is in certain markets where top-rated, major network affiliated stations (ABC, NBC, CBS affiliated local stations) on paper are owned by separate entities with LMAs and/or SSAs in place, but in reality are run from the same facilities using the exact same staff, budget and newsrooms, with no acknowledgement of that fact to viewers (freepress.net, 2013; Hatch, 2011; Chavik, 2013).

Research on Duopolies, LMAs, SSAs

Ownership impact on television news programs and content has been the focus of a few academic studies in recent years. Craft et. al. (2003) examined of one of the nation's first duopoly markets, in Jacksonville, Florida, and found that after stations were consolidated, the change in quality of local news coverage was mixed, with an increase in coverage of local government, politics, construction and growth but decreased coverage of public safety and non-dominant groups (Craft, 2003; Mason, Bachen, & Craft, 2001). Yanich (2013) examined the shared services agreement among three of Honolulu's five news stations and found SSA's had a

"profound effect" on local news content most specifically in the fact that the co-operated stations tended to duplicate newscasts, most often by simulcasting (pg. 254). Alexander and Cunningham's (2007) study of unique local content on each broadcast network (ABC, CBS, NBC) resulted in the conclusion that "concentrated media markets exhibit more homogeneity in the information conveyed to consumers" (p. 93-94). Wildman and Lee (2007) suggested a checklist be formed to track and measure diversity in local broadcasting, while Webster (2007) focused on the audience aspects involved in examining diversity and suggested ways be found to study the audience effect specifically.

The most relevant study to the current research is Danilo Yanich's 2011 Local Television News Media Project at the University of Delaware. Yanich's researchers did content analysis for a week of newscasts in eight television markets, ranging in size from #17 Denver to #143 Wichita Falls, where one station controlled news content for at least one other station, and produced profiles of the news coverage in those markets.[1] Yanich found that SSA/LMAs had a profound effect on local news broadcasts, most notably that the stations took advantage of the agreements to present the same stories on a combination of their stations. Yanich found at least half of the stories on SSA stations in six of eight markets were repeats. The highest percentage of repetition was 98% between the SSA stations in Dayton, OH and the lowest was only 30% in Wichita Falls, TX. This repetition included stories sharing copy, video, anchors and reporters leading to what Yanich called a reduction in the number of separate news voices in the market (Yanich, 2011, 2014).

[1] Market size is measured by population in the Designated Market Area as determined by the Nielsen Media Research company which compiles ratings for television markets—the largest market is #1 New York City and the smallest, #210 Glendive, MT.

This research replicates some of Yanich's work, but focuses on the smallest television markets in communities that have the fewest alternative news sources. It only examines markets in which the shared services agreements have created virtual duopolies in which one station facility and newsroom produces all local content for two or more stations. It expands on Yanich's findings by focusing less on the production and formatting of the news, and more on the diversity of stories covered and sources presented, as well as the level of repetition from exact duplication to only the same topic. This study also adds a control market for purposes of comparison to determine if the repetition of news content found among stations with SSAs or LMAs is substantially different from what one might find anyway in a small community where even though the television stations operate independent newsrooms, there likely is a limited number of stories to cover. And finally this study compares two weeks of coverage, controlling for ratings periods when stations might do more unique stories than normal by examining one week during ratings and one week outside the ratings period.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Based on the previous research, particularly Yanich's 2011 study, and the arguments for and against duopolies and SSA/LMAs the following research questions and hypotheses will be explored.

RQ1: Is there a difference in news quality as defined by a diversity of local stories and sourcing, in small television markets with virtual duopolies versus markets with all independently owned and/or operated stations?

H1: There will be more unique local stories covered on any given news day in a market with independently owned and operated stations than in markets with SSA/LMAs.

H2: More unique local sources will be used in covering stories in a market with independently owned and operated stations than in markets with SSA/LMAs.

H3: There will be more racial diversity among sources in a market with independently owned and operated stations than in markets with SSA/LMAs.

RQ2: How much repetition of local stories is found across stations in small television markets with virtual duopolies versus markets with all independently owned and/or operated stations?

H4: There will be substantial exact duplication of stories presented on stations that are part of SSA/LMA.

Research Methodology

Content analysis of television newscasts was used to perform this study (Riffe, Lacey, & Fico, 2005). This method allows for extensive analysis and comparison of individual stories and content and has been used in numerous studies of local television news broadcasts (Atwater, 1986; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Yanich, 2013, 2014). Independent sample t-tests were performed on the results to determine significance of any differences found.

Stations Analyzed

The 6pm and 10pm or 11pm newscasts of the three network affiliates (ABC, CBS, NBC) in three similar sized small television markets were analyzed over two weeks, one week during the ratings period and one week outside of a ratings period.[2] Two of the markets operate under shared service agreements among two of the three major broadcast affiliate stations, the control market operates all three network affiliates independently:

[2] Fox affiliates in these markets were not analyzed as the affiliates only have a 10pm newscast, and while those newscasts are presented through SSAs, they are done so openly, in Youngstown by the co-owned stations and Erie by the independently owned station. It was determined by the researchers that including these stations would confound the results.

Erie, Pa (DMA: 146 -Lillie Broadcasting operates WSEE (CBS) and WICU (NBC) through a shared services agreement). Since 2009, both affiliates have shared a studio and newsroom and operated under the same news director and one general manager. ABC affiliate WJET is owned and operated by Nexstar Broadcasting.

Youngstown, OH (DMA: 109 – Lin Media operates WKBN (CBS) and WYTV (ABC) through a shared services agreement). Since 2007, both affiliates have been operated by first the New Vision Television Corporation that in 2012 sold its stations to Lin Media. The two stations share studios and a newsroom and operate under the same news director and general manager. NBC affiliate WFMJ is owned and operated by the Maag family, which also publishes Youngstown's daily newspaper, *The Vindicator.*

Champaign, IL (DMA: 132 – all three affiliates operated by three separate media companies). Network affiliates WICD (ABC), WCIA (CBS), and WAND (NBC) are operated by Sinclair Broadcast Group, Nexstar Broadcasting, and Block Communications respectively and do not share programming, studios or personnel.

Broadcast Sample

Two weeks of consecutive Monday through Friday, 6pm and 11pm local newscasts in the Erie and Youngstown markets were recorded and coded. The weeks were randomly selected with the caveat that one week was in a non-ratings month, October 22-26, 2012, and one week was during a ratings month, November 12-16, 2012. Because of technical recording problems, the Champaign 6pm and 10pm (central time zone) newscasts were recorded during different weeks, the ratings week was February 4-8, 2013 and the non-ratings week was, March 25-29, 2013. This allowed for comparisons during a ratings and non-ratings month in all three markets. The newscasts were recorded by DVR in all three markets and coded by the respective researchers.

The 6pm and 10pm/11pm newscasts were chosen because those are generally considered the newscasts of record for local television stations. They were also the only consistently scheduled newscasts across all stations, all markets. The Friday newscasts of the non-ratings week were dropped from the analysis because during October, local stations devote upwards of half their newscast time to high school football coverage. Even though that was not the case in March, when the control stations in Champaign were recorded, the researchers believe that including that Friday data would skew the results. Weekend news broadcasts were not analyzed because they tended to be more sporadic due to sporting events or other network programming preemptions.

Unit of Observation

Individual stories were the unit of analysis for this study and all news stories in a newscast were coded. Weather and sports stories were only coded if they appeared outside regular weather and sports segments. An example of this would be if a story about relief efforts after a tornado was broadcast outside the weather segment, it was coded as a news story. The 892 unique stories broadcast across all stations in all markets were coded for 14 variables including story title, reporter name/race/gender, story topic, story format, story location (local, state, national, world), source soundbites' name/race/gender/role in story, and level of repetition both between newscasts at the same station and among newscasts at the different stations. In coding repetition, special attention was paid to repetition between stations operated by the same company. Level of repetition involved determining whether the story was exactly the same (4), slightly changed in writing or video or sound used (3), substantially changed with different format, different interviews, different video (2), or a completely unique story that hadn't been seen yet (1).

To determine the level of repetition between the independent stations and the co-operated stations, and then within the co-operated stations, for Youngstown and Erie, the independent station's newscasts were coded first, then the dominant co-operated station, and finally the weaker co-operated station. For the control market, Champaign, stations were rotated into the first position for the coding.

Because all the newscasts were coded by the researchers who have a combined 30 years local television news producing experience, inter-coder reliability was extremely high. Four days' newscasts, totaling 330 stories, were re-coded for reliability. Across the 14 variables, for 330 stories, there were a total of 26 mismatches in coding. Most variables had a 100% agreement, only the story topic, role of the source, and level of repetition had disagreements, but still inter-coder agreement on those variables was 98-99%.

Results

The results of the content analysis show a clear difference between markets in which two or more major affiliate stations' news content is produced by one company, in one newsroom, and a market in which three independent newsrooms are operating. **RQ1** asked if there was a difference in news quality as defined by diversity of local stories and sourcing in markets with two co-operated stations verses the independently operated station.

H1: There will be more unique local stories covered on any given news day in a market with independently owned and operated stations than in markets with SSA/LMAs.

H2: More unique local sources will be used in covering stories in a market with independently owned and operated stations than in markets with SSA/LMAs.

Table 1: Unique Local Stories and Sources

Market (all 3 stations)	Total Unique Stories	Avg Stories/ day	Total Sources	Avg Sources/day

Champaign	**321**	**35.7****	**345**	**38*****
Youngstown	**151**	**16.8 (NS)**	**269**	**30 (NS)**
Erie	**121**	**14.3 (NS)**	**243**	**27 (NS)**

****p>.000; ***p=.001**

Table 1 shows the numbers of unique stories and different sources interviewed to tell those stories across the three markets for the 9 days of newscasts coded. Viewers in Champaign clearly benefited from three independent newsrooms covering stories in that market as compared to viewers in Youngstown and Erie where only two newsrooms were operating, with nearly 200 more unique local stories covered in the two-week period. The average number of unique stories per day in Champaign (M=35.7, SD=8.38) was significantly higher than the average in Youngstown and Erie (M=15.55, SD=5.93); t (25)= -7.23, p>.000. There was no significant difference between the average number of unique stories per day in Youngstown and Erie (p=.398). Thus **H1** is strongly supported with Champaign viewers having the potential of seeing twice as many different stories covered in an average news day, than viewers in Youngstown or Erie. Likewise, looking at the number of different sources heard from across the three markets, the average daily sources in Champaign television news (M=38.33, SD=6.57) was significantly higher than in Youngstown and Erie (M=28.78, SD=6.06); t (25)= -3.57, p=.001. And again there was no significant difference between Youngstown and Erie (p=.224). So **H2** is also strongly supported.

H3: There will be more racial diversity among sources in a market with independently owned and operated stations than in markets with SSA/LMAs.

Table 2: Sources Interviewed by Race and Gender

Market (all 3 stations)	White	White Daily Avg	Black	Black Daily Avg	Other	Other Daily Avg	% Minority	Men	Men Daily Avg	Women	Women Daily Avg	% Women
Champaign	322	36	13	1.4	9	1	6%	225	25	121	13.4	36%

Youngstown	**237**	**26**	**32**	**3.6**	**0**	**0**	**11%**	**189**	**21**	**80**	**9**	**30%**
Erie	**229**	**25.4**	**14**	**1.6**	**1**	**.1**	**6%**	**174**	**19**	**67**	**7.4**	**28%**

Table 2 suggests that **H3** is not proved. In fact the racial mix of the sources interviewed is more influenced by the racial make-up of the community. Youngstown has the largest minority population of the three markets, by far. But at 44% African-American, clearly this group is very under-represented as news sources. According to 2010 Census data 14% of Erie's population and 15.6% of Champaign's population is African-American. None of these communities have more than 80% of their population as White, but in all cases 89-94% of sources interviewed were White. Likewise there is not a significant gender difference in sourcing across the markets, with all sources at about a third female.

RQ2 asked how much repetition of local stories was found across stations in small television markets with two co-operated stations verses the independently operated station.

Table 3: Repetition of Stories Across Stations

Market (all 3 stations)	Total Stories	Stories Aired by at Least 2 Stations	% Repetition	Avg Daily Repeats
Champaign	**369**	**48**	**14%****	**5**
Youngstown	**271**	**120**	**44%**	**15**
Erie	**241**	**123**	**51%**	**14**

****p= .001**

Table 3 shows that clearly the level of repetition of stories is significantly higher in the markets with only two newsrooms (M=46.88, SD=14.11) operating as compared to three (M=13.88, SD=4.58); t (25)= -6.98, p>.000. There is no significant difference between Youngstown and Erie in level of repetition (p= .586). In fact there is more than three times the repetition of stories across the stations in the markets with SSA created duopolies. This

coordinates with Table 1's numbers to indicate that the problem is not that these stations run fewer stories total, they just repeat many more stories, so fewer overall stories are covered by television in the market. The majority of the repetition in the Youngstown and Erie markets came from the co-operated stations. When comparing the stories repeated between the independent station and the two duopoly stations, the numbers are very similar to Champaign's average daily repeats, 6.4 for Youngstown and 8.2 for Erie.

H4: There will be substantial exact duplication of stories presented on stations that are part of SSA/LMA.

Table 4: Exact Repeats between Duopoly Stations

Market (all 3 stations)	Total Stories	Exact Repeats	Exact Repeats Daily Avg	% Exact Repeats
Champaign	**369**	**0**	**0*** **	**0**
Youngstown (WKBN/WYTV)	**271**	**151**	**16.8****	**60%**
Erie (WSEE/WICU)	**252**	**101**	**11.2**	**41%**

*****p>.000, **p=.003**

Table 4 confirms **H4,** Champaign, with no co-operated stations has no exact repetition (M=0, SD=0), as compared with Youngstown and Erie (M=14.00, SD=3.59); t (25)=9.47, p>.000 averaging 14 stories a day. A large percentage, in fact a majority in Youngstown, of stories presented on the stations operated by the same company, working out of the same newsroom, are repeated in exactly the same format, with the same script, video, sound, reporter, etc. A viewer who watched a reporter package on one station at 6pm, would have a high probability of seeing exactly the same package, from the same reporter at 11pm on the other station. In both markets, the co-operated stations have different producers for their newscasts, but that does not lead to different versions of the stories. The most common story that was repeated was the reporter package, because it is the most difficult to change. In this case there

was also a significant difference between the amount of exact repetition in Youngstown (M=16.78, SD=3.34) and Erie (M=11.22, SD=3.53); t (16)=3.42, p=.003. One explanation for the wide difference between Erie and Youngstown on this measure, is based on our content analysis, the anchor/producer for the 6pm and 11pm news on WSEE, tends to run fewer reporter packages, and many more short stories. That station's story count for its newscasts is much higher than WICU, thus the need to find more fresh stories and re-write longer stories, and the lower exact repetition percentage for reporter packages.

The researchers would also note that there were virtually no differences in any market on any of the measured variables between ratings and non-ratings newscasts.

Discussion

In 1998 the Pew Center for Excellence in Journalism worked with a group of television news professionals and researchers to develop a set of quality standards for its Local Television News Project. Those standards included focusing local, creating enterprise stories and using multiple and varied sources in stories (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 1999). After collecting five years of data on local television newscasts across dozens of markets, and analyzing that data along with ratings data, researchers at Pew published a book, *We Interrupt this Newscast: How to Improve Local News and Win Ratings Too* (Rosenstiel, et. al., 2007). One of the major findings of the book was that quality sells. The researchers were able to correlate specific quality measures to certain levels of ratings increases. The measures mentioned above were among the strongest to correlate to small but steady ratings growth.

Although this is a small study, only examining three markets, we think it does begin to answer some of the questions about the impact of shared service agreements that create virtual duopolies on the quality of television news coverage in a market. A significantly smaller number

of stories are getting covered in markets where one newsroom provides news content for more than one station. The results of this study are completely consistant with Yanich's (2011) study of eight other markets where virtual or literal duopolies are functioning.

While the arguments in favor of shared service agreements, which point to the extention of news coverage to stations which do not provide it, may well prove true in markets where that actually happens, it is not the case in Youngstown and Erie. In these markets viewers may have four stations that air local news, but only two newsrooms produce that news content. While viewers may be aware that the news on their Fox-affiliated station is produced by another station, there is no indication that news on other stations is produced by a co-operated station except the fact that viewers might see the same reporter, producing the same story on both.

When newsrooms closed at WSEE in Erie and WYTV in Youngstown, and their operations were merged into those of their shared services agreement station, reporters and photographers were fired. However, stations kept the anchors and producers from both newsrooms, mostly to preserve the separate anchor teams of each co-owned station, and maintain an illusion of separate news programs. This meant that the co-owned station news staffs were heavy on anchors and producers but light on reporters and photographers. This makes it easy to comprehend why such a high percentage (40 and 60% respectively) of the stories are repeated exactly on newscasts of co-operated stations. These virtual duopolies have fewer reporters on the street gathering news than their independent competitors making the end result less content to spread across two or even three stations.

In both Youngstown and Erie, the independently owned stations, WFMJ and WJET are strong and traditional number one stations in the news ratings. The average number of different local stories reported in a day by WFMJ was 17.7. The number reported by the other two

stations combined was 18.8. In Erie, WJET reported an average of 15.4 different local stories daily and WSEE and WICU combined do a little better at 20.8. But if we look at Champaign, the three stations averaged 18, 17, and 18 different stories reported daily, and as reported in Table 3, only 14% of those stories on average were repeated among the three stations. This study reinforces that tie between variety of sources, and amount of local reporting to ratings.

There is one interesting point on repetition that requires further digging into the data. Anecdotally, while coding the Champaign newscasts it was noted that while a story might not be repeated on two or three stations the same day, it would show up on another station a day or two later. Since the initial repetition coding focused on stories reported the same day, it may turn out that the Champaign market does not get quite as many different stories covered as originally thought, but certainly the level of repetition will not come close to the 46-50% (Table 3) levels that Youngstown and Erie viewers experienced.

On the question of sourcing, there is a clear and important difference in the market with three independent newsrooms and the markets with only two. There are simply a lot more people heard from on television in Champaign than either Youngstown or Erie. That diversity of voices is another important measure of news quality. The coders who analyzed the Champaign stations noted that not only did they have more sources because they covered more different stories, but even on those stories that multiple stations covered, they were likely to talk to different people. Rosenstiel, et. al. (2007) showed a direct link between stories with multiple sources and ratings increases.

The one discouraging note was the finding that more sources do not naturally lead to more racial diversity in the voices heard from. All three markets showed substantially fewer minority sources than their numbers in the local populations, and also only about a third of the

sources were women. Localism and diversity of voices have always been two key values for the FCC in granting stations' licenses and making decisions on ownership rules. This study shows that much more research on shared service agreements, which create virtual duopolies, is needed on these two areas. Clearly on an exploratory level, the data show that SSAs which limit the number of independent news content producers in a television market, also limit the number of local stories covered and the number of voices heard in those stories. The criticism that all stations in a market cover the same stories, is certainly not true in the case of the market with three independent newsrooms, but is very much the case for the stations with virtual duopolies studied here. This should be the first of several comparison studies of different ownership and co-operating models to determine the impact FCC ownership rules and shared service agreements have, before further rule making is done.

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