TV STATION OWNERSHIP AND LOCAL NEWS CONTENT:

A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE AUSTIN, TEXAS

TV MARKET

by

Daniel F. Seed, B.S.

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Committee Members:

Ray Niekamp

Bruce Smith

Vanessa de Macedo Higgins Joyce

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation - Description

FCC - Federal Communication Commission

DMA - Designated Market Area

O&O - Owned and operated

ABSTRACT

This study examined the ownership characteristics of the four, English-language, broadcast network affiliated television stations in the Austin, Texas designated market area to understand if there is a relationship between ownership and the amount of local news content aired during each station's late, local newscast. This content analysis, which took place during the November 2013 and November 2014 ratings sweeps period, and using agenda-setting as a theoretical background, sought to explore which stations are giving Austin viewers the most local news content. In addition, this content analysis explored whether or not a change in ownership at the city's ABC affiliate from a smaller, Texas-based ownership group to ownership by the media conglomerate Gannett, would have a significant difference on the station's local news product. One change in local news content, specifically the proportion of local stories against total stories in its newscast, resulted in a significant difference following the station's sale to Gannett. Other measures of local news content experienced no significant change. This research is intended to add to the scholarly discussion and the body of knowledge on the evolving regulatory debate regarding television station ownership, and how changes to regulation can, if at all, affect local news and thus the civic discourse among citizens in local markets.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Austin, Texas television market is the fourth largest in the state and the 39th largest in the nation. Four broadcast network-affiliated television stations serve the market, and in March 2014, for the second time in a little more than a year, one of the four stations learned it would be undergoing a change in ownership.

LIN Media, LLC, the Austin-based company that owned Austin's NBC affiliate, KXAN, the CW affiliate, KNVA, and the city's MyNetworkTV affiliate, KBVO, announced in March 2014 that it would merge with Media General, Inc. of Richmond, Virginia as part of a $1.6 billion acquisition (Swiatecki, 2014). On December 12, 2014, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) approved the merger, expanding Media General's television portfolio to 71 stations in 48 markets, with those stations reaching 23% of all American television households ("Media General and LIN Media to Close on Merger Transaction on December 19, 2014," 2014). With the approval of the deal, Austin, the state capital of Texas, no longer has a network-affiliated broadcast television station that is owned by a company based in Texas.

Sixteen months before KXAN learned it would have new owners, KVUE, the Austin ABC affiliate, was one of 20 television stations sold by the Belo Corporation of Dallas to Gannett as part of a $1.5 billion deal, excluding debt, that at the time increased Gannett's portfolio to 43 television stations across the country ("Belo shareholders approve deal with Gannett," 2013). This marked the second time in its history that KVUE would be owned by Gannett, which previously sold the station to Belo in 1999

(Swiatecki, 2013). The deal received final approved from the FCC on December 23, 2013 (Davidson, 2013), giving Gannett control of the largest portfolio of CBS and NBC affiliates in the country, and the fourth largest number of ABC affiliates (Lieberman, 2013). In addition, with the purchase of the 20 Belo stations, Gannett owned stations would now reach about 30% of all television households in the United States (Lieberman, 2013).

Upon completion of the Belo purchase, Gannett stock closed up nearly 3% to $28.61 per share (Davidson, 2013). The news, however, was met with far less excitement from critics.

Craig Aaron, chief executive of Free Press, a nonpartisan organization that seeks to protect press freedom and curb media consolidation, told the *Los Angeles Times* that deals like the Gannett purchase of the Belo stations "shutter newsrooms and silence competing viewpoints, harming local service, diversity and competition in media markets across the country" (James, 2013).

While the scenario that Aaron laid out has yet to happen in Austin, it is, in fact, happening across the country. In 2013, nearly 300 full-power television stations changed hands at a cost of more than $8 billion (Potter & Matsa, 2014 (2)). Stations owned by the same company regularly share news content, and in some markets, local news services produce coverage for two or more competing stations (Potter & Matsa, 2014 (2)). According to the Pew Research Center, the economic benefits of station consolidation are "indisputable," but "the effect on the quality of news coverage consumers receive is far more complicated to assess" (Potter & Matsa, 2014 (2)).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Informed Citizenry

In a democratic society there is an expectation that an informed citizenry is crucial in maintaining a functioning and accountable government (Graber, 2008). President John F. Kennedy, in the convocation address at Vanderbilt University on May 18, 1963, noted the importance of an informed public when he stated, “The educated citizen knows how much more there is to know. He knows that knowledge is power, more so today than ever before. He knows that only an educated and informed people will be a free people, that the ignorance of one voter in a democracy impairs the security of all” (Kennedy, 1963).

In the United States, keeping citizens informed is the responsibility of the media, and that responsibility is so widely regarded and understood, that the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution strictly forbids Congress from making any law that abridges the freedom of the press, with that freedom now extended beyond print to the wider concept of media, including radio and television.

A Free Press

The conventional view of why freedom of the press is necessary, and how it is believed to work in the United States, is that a private citizen should have the right to gather and produce news material or opinion that can be critical of the government without fear of government censorship or control. Further, it is widely believed that freedom of the press means information, opinion, and communication is provided by competing businesses, seeking a profit, and that the system functions without intervention, control or censorship by the government (McChesney & Schiller, 2003). This ideal is a noble notion, but one that is not entirely correct as is illustrated in government regulation of the broadcast industry, which has existed in some form or another since the advent of radio in the early 20th century (Walker & Ferguson, 1998).

Regulating Radio and Television

Music and speech were first broadcast using radio in 1906, and by 1912 there was a need for regulation in the United States resulting from interference caused by unchecked radio transmissions ("Basic Elements of Spectrum Management: Who Regulates the Spectrum," 2013). This led to the Radio Act of 1912, which required the registration of transmitters through the Department of Commerce, but did not provide for the control of radio frequencies, operating times, or ownership ("Basic Elements of Spectrum Management: Who Regulates the Spectrum," 2013).

The Radio Act of 1927 transferred the regulatory responsibility over radio from the Department of Commerce to the newly created Federal Radio Commission ("Basic Elements of Spectrum Management: Who Regulates the Spectrum," 2013). The five-person FRC was charged with granting and denying licenses based on the idea that licenses were held in the "public interest, convenience, or necessity" (Goodman, 1998, p.1). The Radio Act of 1927 established broadcasting not as another commodity that should operate on the principles of the free market, but as a public trust that would be protected.

The basic tenets of the Radio Act were further expanded on by Congress through the Communications Act of 1934, which established the Federal Communications Commission, also known as the FCC, as the regulatory body that would create and enforce regulations on the radio industry (Walker & Ferguson, 1998). The Communications Act of 1934 was later amended to include FCC oversight over the broadcast television industry (Walker & Ferguson, 1998).

As part of its authority, the FCC is also charged with regulating ownership of radio and television stations through the granting of broadcast licenses and the approval of transferring those licenses from one station owner to a new owner (Walker & Ferguson, 1998). Borrowing from the FRC mandate to issue broadcast licenses based on the public interest, convenience, or necessity, the FCC determined early on that it would not be in the public interest for a single entity to hold more than one broadcast license in the same community. The FCC reasoned that the public would be better served from diversity in ownership because it would lead to a diversity of programming and viewpoints. This early determination set the course for the FCC's ownership regulations for much of the 20th century. This framework helped establish the ideals of fostering competition, localism and diversity of voices, all three of which are long held goals of media policy in the United States (Goldfarb, 2009).

Regulation of Newspaper Cross-Ownership

Before the establishment of the FCC in 1934, the ownership of radio stations in the United States was largely the domain of electrical and radio manufacturers and dealers, educational institutions, and newspapers (Compaine, 1979). The electrical and radio manufacturers owned nearly 40% of the nation's radio stations, operating the stations as a means of entertainment to attract listeners who would need to purchase a radio from the company that owned the radio station (Compaine, 1979). Perhaps the most famous example of the manufacturer of the actual home radios owning stations was the Radio Corporation of America, which created the NBC radio network in 1926 (Compaine, 1979). While RCA and its competitors ruled the radio roost, newspapers and other publishers owned 12% of the nation's radio stations (Compaine, 1979). Newspapers bought into the new medium as a way to monopolize their audience, build prestige, and operate a larger news gathering operation (Compaine, 1979). One early example of a newspaper buying into the radio business was the *Chicago Tribune*, which took control of WDAP in Chicago in 1924 and changed the station's call letters to WGN, which was a call-sign for World's Greatest Newspaper, the *Tribune's* own nickname.

As television came onto the scene in the years after World War II, newspapers moved to purchase television stations, for much of the same reasons they had purchased radio stations 20 years before (Compaine, 1979). By 1965, 31.8% of all television stations in the United States were owned by newspaper companies (Compaine, 1979). It wasn't until 1969 when the Justice Department urged the FCC to break-up the existing newspaper-broadcast combinations and stop allowing these ownership groups to form (Compaine, 1979). That year, the FCC denied the license renewal of WHDH in Boston, which was owned by the *Boston Herald-Traveler* newspaper (Compaine, 1979). The FCC turned the license over to an independent local ownership group that changed the call letters to WCVB. The local, independent owners transformed the station into a model of local ownership done right. WCVB consistently produced more hours of local programming than any other major market station in the country (Compaine, 1979). Beginning in 1975, the FCC officially banned newspapers from owning television stations in the same market, although some existing cross-ownership situations were grandfathered and allowed to continue (Goldfarb, 2009). An example of a cross-ownership situation that was grandfathered and allowed to continue was at WGN-TV in Chicago. The station was established in 1948 by the aforementioned Tribune Company, which owned the *Chicago Tribune* and WGN radio. The recently renamed Tribune Media Company, which still owns the *Chicago Tribune* and WGN-AM, owns WGN-TV to this day as the result of a cross-ownership waiver.

The Duopoly and 7-7-7 Rule

While it took until the 1970s for the FCC to regulate the cross-ownership of newspapers and television in the same market, they had already done the same with radio and television before World War II. Under the diversity of viewpoints premise, the FCC, in 1940, banned companies and individuals from owning more than one broadcast station in a single market, including AM and FM radio and television stations (Sadler, 2005). Owning more than one station in a single market became known as a duopoly. In 1964, the FCC enacted the TV Duopoly Rule, which prohibited any single owner from owning more than one television station in a single market (Sadler, 2005).

With regulations in place about duopoly ownership within a single market, the FCC set out to control the number of stations a company or individual could own across the country. The 7-7-7 Rule was established in 1953, and it capped the number of stations an individual or company could own at seven television stations, seven AM radio stations, and seven FM radio stations across the country (Sadler, 2005). In addition, a single owner could not have a group of television stations that reached more than 25% of American households (Sadler, 2005). The 7-7-7 Rule was upheld by the Supreme Court in the 1956 case of *United States v. Storer Broadcasting Co*. (Sadler, 2005).

Deregulation

With 30-plus years of increasing regulation on the television broadcasting industry, the late 1970s saw the beginning of deregulation, which continued in earnest under President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s (Walker & Ferguson, 1998). In 1985, the FCC revised the 7-7-7 Rule to the 12-12-12 Rule (Sadler, 2005). This deregulation set off what was termed "merger mania" (Walker & Ferguson, 1998). By 1987, all three major networks would be bought and sold, with both NBC and CBS having new owners for the first time since they were founded as radio networks in the 1920s (Walker & Ferguson, 1998).

Deregulation continued into the 1990s with the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which was the first major overhaul of the Communications Act of 1934 (Schaefer, 2007). The Telecommunications Act allowed owners to own as many television stations as they wanted and increased the allowable reach for an ownership group to 35% of all American households (Howard, 1998). That 35% cap was increased to 45% in 2003 when the FCC commissioners, along party lines, voted 3-2 for the increase ("FCC Adopts Media Ownership Rules," 2003). Next on the deregulation chopping block was the 1964 TV Duopoly Rule that forbid one station from owning another station in the same market. After 35 years on the books, the TV Duopoly Rule was loosened to allow companies to own two television stations in the same market under conditions that included considering market size and the number of stations in the market (Sadler, 2005). Four years later, in 2003, the restrictions on duopolies were loosened even further with the practice banned in only the smallest markets in the country (Sadler, 2005).

The Consequences

Between 1996 and 2010 there was a 33% drop in the number of television station owners across the country, despite the number of stations in the United States increasing from 1,130 to 1,302 during that same time period (Waldman, 2011). Media ownership in the United States is now more concentrated than at any time over the past 40 years, and estimates show that five media companies control 75% of the prime-time programming offered in the United States (Scott, Gobetz, & Chanslor, 2008).

Much of this consolidation of ownership is a result of changes in 1999 and 2003 when the FCC relaxed most of the restrictions it had previously placed on media ownership, including its prohibition on newspaper and television station cross-ownership, and the number of stations that one company could own in a single television market (Yanich, 2010).

In 2013 alone, nearly 300 full-power local television stations changed owners with more than $8 billion moving from owner to owner as part of those acquisitions (Potter & Matsa, 2014 (2)). In comparison to 2012, 195 more stations were sold in 2013 and the sales that year resulted in nearly four times the dollar value of the 2012 deals (Potter & Matsa, 2014).

What made 2013 such a boom year for the acquisition of local television stations? The answer is a combination of deregulation and new revenue streams.

Stations airing local news, whether it is news produced in-house, or news fed to them through a shared services agreement within their consolidated station group, get more advertising revenue (Potter & Matsa, 2014). News generates almost half of the revenue for the average local television station and under a typical joint operating agreement, the station that provides content for another will keep about one-third of that station's advertising revenue (Potter & Matsa, 2014).

Local television stations also saw their value increase as a result of political advertising following the Supreme Court's 2010 decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*. The Court ruled that the government cannot ban political spending by corporations in elections. *Citizens United* essentially threw out part of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act that banned the broadcast, satellite, or cable transmission of advertisements paid for by corporations or labor unions in the 30 days before a presidential primary, or 60 days before a general election (Liptak, 2010). Following the Court's decision, local television stations saw a record $3.1 billion spent in political advertising during the course of the 2012 presidential race, which was the first presidential campaign following *Citizens United* (Potter & Matsa, 2014).

As a result of this multi-billion-dollar influx of political advertising cash and deregulation, companies are champing at the bit to add local television stations to their portfolios. Perry A. Sook, the chairman, president, and CEO of Nexstar Broadcasting Group, in announcing his company's purchase of two stations in Iowa, stated that

Nexstar's entrance into Iowa television was, in part, because Iowa is "an important state for political advertising activity" as it holds the nation's first caucus every presidential election cycle ("Nexstar, Mission Buying 5 Stations For $103M," 2013).

Consolidation and Local News

As part of their relaxation of ownership rules, the FCC believed the new rules would allow commonly owned stations to operate more efficiently financially as a result of combined resources, which would then result in an increase in local news and public affairs programming (Waldman, 2011).

In written Congressional testimony in 2007, a prepared statement on behalf of the National Association of Broadcasters stated that "local stations provide a wealth of local news and public affairs programming, political information, emergency information, other locally produced and responsive programming, and additional, unique community service" (*Localism, Diversity, and Media Ownership*, 2007, p. 63). The NAB statement further reported that "studies almost too numerous to recount have shown that local service is enhanced if local broadcasters are able to jointly own media properties in the same market" (*Localism, Diversity, and Media Ownership,* 2007, p. 63*).*

However, in a 2011 review of the relaxed ownership rules, the FCC found that local television stations on average have cut personnel, with nearly one-third of stations running news produced by another station out of market, and that more than 60% are involved in some sort of cooperative newsgathering or coverage agreement with another station or medium (Waldman, 2011). Consolidated stations save on overhead by moving in together, thus cutting costs by sharing office and studio space, and by combining engineering and sales operations. News generates nearly half of the revenue for the average television station in the United States and in a typical joint operating agreement, a station that provides services for another gets to keep about one-third of that channel's advertising revenue (Potter & Matsa, 2014 (3)). In Bryan, Texas, the ABC affiliate, KRHD, is an example of consolidation as KRHD employs only a few journalists whose stories are then inserted into newscasts that are produced by, and originate from, their sister station KXXV in Waco (Potter & Matsa, 2014 (3)). Viewers in Bryan who watch KRHD will see a quasi-local newscast that uses the same graphics package, set, anchors, and many of the same stories that air during KXXV's newscast in Waco.

The FCC found that as many as half of the local television stations in the United States no longer have a local newsroom (Waldman, 2011). Further, on average, local news has become thinner, not deeper, and "the amount of coverage dedicated to important public issues—like education, health, or government—remains tiny" (Waldman, 2011, p.113).

Even in this day and age of the Internet, local television remains the way that 55% of Americans prefer to get their news and political information *(Frank N. Magid Associates, Inc., 2010)*. In the scope of television news as a whole, 71% of Americans reported watching local television news, compared to 65% who watch broadcast network news, and 38% who watch cable news (Olmstead, Jurkowitz, Mitchell, & Enda, 2013).

Localism

Localism is one of the tenets of communication policy in the United States and is directly related to enhanced political participation and better informed decision making (Napoli, 2001).

Broadcasters may be affiliates of national networks like NBC or FOX, but individual stations are licensed to operate in local communities. In order to keep their broadcast license, these local stations must, as stated in the Communications Act of 1934, create and broadcast programming that meets the needs of the communities or markets they serve (Walker & Ferguson, 1998).

The FCC's own researchers in seeking a definition of local news, determined that a local story was of at least marginally greater importance to the average individual residing within the Designated Market Area (DMA) and that the individual would be able identify the story as local (Alexander & Brown, 2004).

Theoretical Background and Previous Research

The FCC's own findings that local news coverage, which is of at least marginally greater importance to people within a DMA, has become thinner, goes hand-in-hand with the agenda-setting theory. Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw investigated the agenda-setting capacity of the news media in Chapel Hill, North Carolina during the presidential campaign of 1968 (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The study found that consumers of media not only learned about a subject from the media, but assigned importance to that subject based on how much information was given and based on the prominence given to the story (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

The agenda-setting theory began as a way to explain media impact on the political behavior and attitudes of voters during election years, specifically the ways that the news media prioritized issues (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). The theory has inspired hundreds of studies, in both mass communication and political communication research, into the ways the media frame issues for their audience, thus influencing public opinion (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009).

The core theoretical tenet in agenda-setting research is that media concern with, or coverage of, objects such as issues, organizations, and/or people leads to increased public concern with those same objects (Wu & Coleman, 2009). This core tenet is the first-level of agenda-setting (Kiousis, Motrook, Wu, & Seltzer, 2010). Research has stressed the need to look more closely at the process by which media salience, or the importance the media places on coverage of certain stories, is brought about (Kiousis, Motrook, Wu, & Seltzer, 2010). Gandy (1982) asserted that research should go beyond agenda-setting to determine who sets the media agenda, how and for what purpose it is set, and what the impact is on the power and values in society. Further, McCombs (1997, p. 433) stated that the "agenda-setting role of the news media is an awesome ethical responsibility."

Through the agenda-setting theory, if local television stations are replacing local news content, as the FCC itself has indicated, with pre-packaged, syndicated, and out of market news, then what becomes important to viewers aren't local matters.

Of the several hundred studies done using agenda-setting, experimental research has shown that agenda-setting effects exist for televised content, in addition to newspaper and other print content (Cobley & Schulz, 2013).

A year-long study in Germany in 1986 analyzed the newscasts of four major German television stations for the entire year and compared the content in the newscasts with 53 weekly national opinion polls (Brosius & Kepplinger, 1990). The study found there were significant agenda-setting effects across five issues (energy, East-West relations, European politics, defense, and environmental protection) and concluded that the news media exert significant influence on which issues are on the public agenda (Brosius & Kepplinger, 1990).

Conway and Patterson (2008) sought to examine the intersection of audience recall and agenda-setting involving television and online news. Participants had a higher recall for the top stories on television news broadcasts when compared to online news. Nearly half of the participants recalled seven out of the ten television stories they viewed, while just one of the online top stories was remembered by more than half of the participants (Conway & Patterson, 2008). Even in a more developed Internet landscape that includes pictures and videos on news websites, many of the salience cues are not as prevalent as they are on television or in a newspaper (Conway & Patterson, 2008). Stories online are presented as a series of hypertext headlines that are written in a similar font and similar size and users must physically click on the headlines to learn more about the stories (Conway & Patterson, 2008). Television news, meanwhile, has been found to have a higher salience because it relies on story order, length, and production values to relay significance to the audience (Conway & Patterson, 2008).

A more recent study using agenda-setting as a theoretical framework, examined the relationship between television coverage of natural disasters and the fundraising efforts of non-profit, charitable relief organizations (Waters, 2013). Using broadcasts following the 2004 Asian tsunami, Hurricane Katrina, and the Haitian earthquake of 2010, Waters found that when the disasters were covered during generic news coverage there was little increase in the amount of donations to the relief organizations. When the relief organizations were specifically mentioned on a broadcast, however, there were noticeable same-day spikes in donations (Waters, 2013). Further, when these relief organizations were able to place a spokesperson in the newscast, those organizations that had a spokesperson on the news saw an increase in donations (Waters, 2013).

Since 2000, there have been a number of studies on the correlation between station ownership and local news content. In one such study in 2007 (Napoli & Yan), the authors specifically stated that the relaxation of ownership rules did not appear to encourage the production of local news programming (Napoli & Yan, 2007). It was found that duopoly ownership was negatively related to the quantity of news programming stations provided and that the relaxation of ownership rules would be unlikely to promote the airing of additional local news programming (Napoli & Yan, 2007). Further the study showed that local ownership is more likely to offer local news, as are the owners of larger stations groups (Napoli & Yan, 2007).

A 2008 content analysis of local news in the Tulsa, Oklahoma market described the correlation between ownership and the amount of local news aired on the three network affiliates in the market (Scott, Gobetz, & Chanslor, 2008). The authors used the Tulsa market because it represented a cross-section of station ownership qualities including a station owned by a large group (KJRH), a station owned by a midsize group (KTUL), and a station owned by a small, local group (KOTV) (Scott, Gobetz, & Chanslor, 2008).

Using 87 broadcasts and 2,527 total news stories between September 1, 2003 and October 9, 2003, the authors found that KOTV, the station owned by the small, local group, aired more local news as a proportion of their newscast than the stations operated by larger media groups (Scott, Gobetz, & Chanslor, 2008). The authors concluded that the results of their study contradicted the assertions of former FCC Chairman Michael Powell regarding the quality and quantity of local news provided by larger media groups (Scott, Gobetz, & Chanslor, 2008).

The Tulsa study also states that its findings are consistent with an internal FCC report conducted in 1998 that found local ownership of television stations added almost 5 ½ minutes of total news to a broadcast (Scott, Gobetz, & Chanslor, 2008).

The Tulsa study was followed in 2010 by another content analysis that analyzed local news broadcasts across 17 television markets, using newscasts from March through May of 2002 (Yanich, 2010).

The results found that stations that were neither network owned and operated (O&O) or part of a duopoly, produced the highest proportion of local news, but produced less total news as a proportion of their broadcasts (Yanich, 2010).

The study stated that it was clear that ownership did matter with regard to the proportion of local content on newscasts, with the average proportion of broadcast time devoted to local content at 72% (Yanich, 2010). Of the stations owned by firms that operated duopolies, only those owned by Hearst-Argyle had a proportion of local news, at 74% of the total broadcast, above the average (Yanich, 2010). Stations owned and operated by FOX, presented the only newscasts in which local content accounted for less than half (48%) of the broadcast time (Yanich, 2010). FOX owned stations also presented non-local news stories that were, on average, 23 seconds longer than their local stories (Yanich, 2010).

The Austin Market

For the 2014-15 television season, the Austin television DMA, which is made up of 12 counties, is currently the fourth largest market in Texas and the 39th largest in the United States (Nielsen, 2014). Nielsen states that there are 729,300 television homes in the Austin market, which constitutes .641% of all the television homes in the United States (Nielsen, 2014).

The Austin market is served by four English language stations that are affiliates of the four broadcast networks (NBC, CBS, ABC, FOX) and at the time of this analysis, the four stations were owned by four different media groups, which owned a combined 279 stations across the country.

KEYE is the CBS affiliate in Austin and is owned by the Sinclair Broadcast Group, based in Hunt Valley, Maryland. KEYE is the only station owned by Sinclair in the Austin market, but it is one of 162 stations owned by Sinclair across 79 DMAs. Sinclair-owned television stations cover approximately 37.5% of all television households in the United States. Sinclair Broadcast Group is one of the largest group owners of television stations in the country, and in the Austin market is the largest ownership group, both in actual number of stations and station reach.

KVUE is the ABC affiliate in Austin and is one of 46 Gannett stations across the country. Gannett, based in Tysons Corner, Virginia, became the largest independent TV station group of major network affiliates in the top 25 U.S. markets following their December 2013 purchase of Belo's television stations. While Gannett's station portfolio is not as large as Sinclair, it is a powerful network of affiliates, with Gannett owned stations reaching 30% of all television households in the country.

KTBC was the first television station in Austin, signing on for the first time on November 27, 1952. Lyndon and Lady Bird Johnson once owned the station. It is now owned by FOX Television Stations, and is one of 17 FOX O&O's across the country. FOX owns a total of 28 stations (11 are under the MyTV banner) in 17 markets across the country. Stations owned by FOX Television Stations cover 37.28% of television homes. FOX, based in New York City, has owned KTBC since 1997.

KXAN is the NBC affiliate in Austin and is currently owned by Media General, based in Richmond, Virginia. Media General now owns KXAN and KBVO in the Austin DMA, and operates KNVA. KXAN is part of a duopoly in the Austin, TX market because Media General owns and operates more than one station in the market (Fiske, 1999). KXAN airs a newscast at 9 p.m. on KNVA, the CW affiliate in the market. However, at the time of the content analysis for this study, Media General's purchase of KXAN, KBVO and KNVA had not been finalized and Austin-based LIN Media owned and operated KXAN, KBVO and KNVA. At the time of the content analysis in 2014, LIN Media owned 43 stations, in 23 markets, with its stations reaching 10.5% of television homes across the country. LIN Media ceased to exist on December 18, 2014, more than three weeks after this analysis was conducted.

Each station was assigned an ownership profile based on how many television stations its parent company owned, how many television homes those stations reached, how many markets its parent company was in, and if its parent company owned newspapers, or other media entities. Gannett (KVUE), Sinclair (KEYE), and Fox Television Stations (KTBC) were all considered large ownership chains. LIN Media (KXAN) was considered a locally-owned, small ownership chain.

In a previous, unpublished analysis (Seed, 2013), using a constructed week from October 31 through November 27, 2013, the late, local newscasts of the four broadcast network affiliate stations in the Austin, TX market were observed and coded to measure the proportion of news time dedicated to local news. The 20 broadcasts were also coded to measure the total number of stories that were local and the subject nature of those stories.

The analysis intended to find out if there was a relationship between the ownership characteristics of each station and the amount of local news aired in their newscasts. The analysis also sought to find out if local news was prominently featured in the first block of the late, local newscasts.

KVUE, which was then owned by Dallas-based Belo, used 94% of its total news time for local news and 91% of its story count (the total number of stories in the newscast) was local. KVUE had the highest proportion of both time dedicated to local news and the highest proportion of story count that was considered local news.

In contrast, FOX owned and operated KTBC had the lowest proportion of time devoted to local news during their late broadcast at 9 p.m. KXAN, part of the lone duopoly in the market, and owned by LIN Media, who had recently moved their headquarters from Providence, Rhode Island to Austin, had the second lowest proportion of time dedicated to local news. Local news also accounted for just 72% of KXAN's story count, which was the lowest in the market.

All four stations analyzed in the Austin market provided more local news, as a proportion of their news time, than the national average of 72% (Yanich, 2010). Further, ownership qualities that were found in previous studies to affect local news content, either positively or negatively, were consistent in Austin.

Examining the effects of ownership qualities on local news content, following in the footsteps of the 2010 Yanich study and the 2008 Tulsa study conducted by Scott, Gobetz, and Chanslor, the following research question is posed:

RQ 1: Is there a relationship between ownership characteristics and the amount of local news content broadcast on each of the stations in the Austin, Texas television market?

In describing agenda-setting, McCombs and Shaw (1972) found that the media cannot tell people what to think, but they can tell people what to think about. Part of that agenda-setting process comes about as a result of story placement. Stories given more prominence, or a higher placement in a newscast, should have an indirect effect on what the audience thinks about by increasing the probability that individual audience members are exposed to the story (Watt, Mazza, & Snyder, 1993). Prominence should be included in measures of media coverage (Watt, Mazza & Snyder, 1993).

RQ 2: Is local news prominently featured in the first-block of the late, local broadcasts in the Austin, Texas market?

With its purchase by the larger Gannett chain, from the smaller Dallas-based Belo chain, it is especially important to note differences, if any, in the news content of KVUE. Previous data collected on KVUE newscasts in October and November 2013, showed it aired the highest proportion of local story count and proportion of local news in the Austin market. With previous studies showing (Scott, Gobetz, & Chanslor, 2008) that large-corporate ownership is detrimental to the principle of localism in news coverage, the author hypothesizes that:

H 1: KVUE will feature fewer local news stories, both in count and as a proportion of total story count, than it did one year ago.

In the previous analysis of news content in the Austin market in October and November 2013, it was found that KTBC had the lowest proportion of time devoted to local news during their late broadcast at 9 p.m. KXAN, one half the lone duopoly in the market, had the second lowest proportion of time dedicated to local news. Local news also accounted for just 73% of KXAN's story count, which was the lowest in the market. Prior research (Yanich, 2010) has found that stations that are owned and operated by a network (KTBC), or run as part of a duopoly (KXAN), produced a lower proportion of local news than stations that did not fall into those categories. As a result, the author hypothesizes that:

> **H 2:** The stations owned either by a broadcast network (KTBC) or run as a duopoly (KXAN) will air the lowest proportion of local news in relation to their total news time.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The method used for this research was content analysis. Content analysis is a method that produces a systematic, objective, and quantitative description of the content of communication (Berelson, 1952).

The sample broadcasts for this research consisted of a constructed week of the late, local news broadcasts from Austin's four broadcast network affiliates. A constructed week is a widely used and accepted method of sampling that has been shown to be more efficient than both random sampling and consecutive day sampling in content analysis of traditional media, including broadcast television (Hester & Dougall, 2007). The constructed week began on Thursday, October 30, 2014 and concluded on Wednesday, November 26, 2014. These dates were chosen in order to align with the dates of the previous constructed week content analysis of the Austin market conducted for an unpublished research paper, between October 31, 2013 and November 27, 2013 (Seed, 2013). The dates in the 2013 analysis occurred during the November sweeps period and therefore, the dates for the constructed week in 2014 were chosen because they too fell during the November sweeps period. The broadcast week was limited to Monday through Friday to eliminate the possibility of weekend sporting events or specials that might preempt newscasts.

In all, 25 newscasts and a total of 330 stories, covering 6 hours 30 minutes and 58 seconds, were analyzed. The broadcasts that were analyzed were broadcast over AT&T U-verse and recorded using a DVR.

Two independent coders and the author coded the broadcasts. To ensure higher reliability, the independent coders selected were familiar with television news practices as a result of having formerly worked in the television news industry. The coders and the author, while all are former television news professionals, have never worked in the Austin market, but are familiar with its geography and therefore familiar with the boundaries of the DMA. Examples of newscasts from outside of the Austin DMA were used during training to familiarize the coders with the coding rules and variables.

Each coder recorded a series of variables using Excel. Those variables are listed below. One coder was assigned the task of timing each story, in order that there be a single, uniform time for each story. The time was kept using the stopwatch on an iPhone and was read aloud and recorded at the end of each story. If, in the course of reading the time out loud, a discrepancy arose regarding the length of a story, the story was re-timed for accuracy purposes.

Inter-coder reliability was attained using the coefficient of reliability, which is a ratio of coding agreements to the total number of coding decisions (Holsti, 1969).

$$C.R. = \frac{2M}{N_1 + N_2}$$

In this formula, *M* is the number of coding decisions on which the two coders are in agreement, and $N_1 + N_2$ refer to the number of coding decisions made by coder 1 and coder 2, respectively (Holsti, 1969). Inter-coder reliability percentages, using this method, ranged from a low of 88% to a high of 100% on key variables, with this range exceeding the minimum standard of 80% (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998).

The units of observation for this research are the individual stories that appeared on the broadcasts, outside of the promotions and teases for the station or network, the regularly scheduled weather segment (including in-broadcast weather teases), the regularly scheduled sports segment (including in-broadcast sports teases), and commercials. The portion of the newscast excluding promotions and teases, the weather segment, the sports segment, and commercials is known as the total news time. Exceptions to the exclusion of weather and sports were made for "weather as news" reports and "sports as news" reports that fell outside of the regularly scheduled weather and sports segments.

With regard to the "weather as news" category, for example, a series of stories or graphics warning viewers that a freeze was imminent was considered "weather as news." The justification for this is because, in this particular case, it was the first freeze of the season and disregarding or not issuing a freeze warning could have an economic impact on the local agricultural industry. The weather report on the freeze was not a short tease of the longer weather segment, but was a separate report in and of itself. In the 2013 analysis, "weather as news" played a prominent role as the result of heavy rains and widespread and destructive flooding. In the case of the flooding in 2013, weather reports given outside of the regularly scheduled weather segment that conveyed information on the flooding and rain were considered news because it was potentially life-saving information.

In order for a story to be considered local it must have originated from within the 12 counties that make up the Austin DMA. Those counties are: Travis, Hayes, Bastrop, Caldwell, Williamson, Burnet, Mason, Llano, Blanco, Gillespie, Lee, and Fayette.

Each broadcast was coded using the following variables:

1.) Was the story local, yes or no? Did it originate from the 12 county, Austin DMA?
2.) If so, what county did the story originate from?
3.) Did the story happen in Austin?
4.) Where in the newscast was the story (i.e., first segment, second segment, etc.)?
5.) What was the length of the story (in minutes and seconds)?

The original data were transformed to a ratio-level measure by using percentages based on story time length. Each story was timed in minutes and seconds and converted to seconds, thus each broadcast had total length in seconds. This allowed for a sum total, in seconds, of both local and non-local news stories. To produce a percentage average, or proportion, the sum total time of the local news stories (in seconds) was divided by sum total time of the total news time (in seconds). The total news time of each broadcast fluctuated on a daily basis as a result of many factors (commercial time, more or less time allotted for weather and/or sports) and it was felt that a percentage-based comparison would allow for a more accurate comparison between stations per broadcast as opposed to a frequency count.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Research Question #1

The first research question posed sought to find if there was a relationship between ownership group characteristics and the amount of local news broadcast on each station. As a proportion is a more accurate measurement as opposed to a frequency count, and this was the measurement used in the 2010 Yanich study and the 2008 Tulsa study by Scott, Gobetz, and Chanslor, it is what was used in this analysis as well.

Two stations, KTBC and KXAN indicated relationships between ownership group characteristics and the proportion of local news broadcast on each station.

KVUE, which is owned by Gannett, had the highest proportion (M=89.9%, SD=.04318) of local news time in the market. When Belo owned KVUE in 2013 the station was also the market leader in proportion (M=93.8%, SD=.11245) of local news time, but with a much greater proportion of time devoted to local news. There was no statistical significance ($p \leq .05$) between KVUE's proportion of local news time as a Belo station in 2013 to 2014 when it was a Gannett station.

KXAN, which was a locally-owned duopoly, had the second highest proportion (M=89.5%, SD=.06063) of local news time in the market. This is in direct contrast with Yanich's findings in 2010, which reported that local news made up, on average, 72% of the total news time on duopolies. However, it has also been found that a small-chain television news department would air more local news as a proportion than news departments run by larger chain owners (Scott, Gobetz, & Chanslor, 2008). In the Austin market, KXAN would be considered a small-chain station, as LIN Media's television stations reached 10.5% of television homes across the country, which was by 19.5%, the lowest total in the Austin market. There was no significant difference between the mean proportion of local news time for KXAN when compared to the 10 p.m. newscasts of the three larger chain stations in the market.

KEYE, which is owned by Sinclair, the largest ownership group in the market, had the third highest proportion (M=83.5%, SD=.089364) of local news time. Yanich (2010) reported that the stations owned by the largest media firms, which included Sinclair, presented significantly smaller proportions of local content than smaller ownership groups. There was no significant difference ($p \leq .05$).

KTBC, which is owned and operated by FOX Television Stations and is the only O&O in the Austin market, had the fourth lowest proportion of local news time (M=62.8%, SD=.09562) during their 10 p.m. broadcast. The hour-long KTBC 9 p.m. broadcast had the lowest proportion of local news time (M=60.1%, SD=.12770) in the market. There was a very statistically significant difference $t(3)=6.6275$, ($p \leq .05$) between KTBC's proportion of local news time in 2014 and its proportion of local news time in 2013 (M=76.6, SD=.12879). Yanich (2010) reported that stations owned by FOX, presented the only newscasts where local news accounted for less than half (48%) of their broadcast time. KTBC's 10 p.m. average and 9 p.m. average were each above the 48% mark, but were, like other FOX owned stations, the home to the lowest proportion of local news time in the market.

Table 1. Comparison of Proportion of Local News Time by Station From 2013 to 2014

	KVUE 10 p.m.	KXAN 10 p.m.	KEYE 10 p.m.	KTBC 9 p.m.*	KTBC 10 p.m.
2013	M=93.8% SD=.11245	M=81.2% SD=.11150	M=88.9% SD=.09098	M=76.6% SD=.12879	N/A
2014	M=89.9%, SD=.04318	M=89.5%, SD=.06063	M=83.5%, SD=.089364	M=60.1%, SD=.12770	M=62.8%, SD=.09562
* p ≤ .05					

Research Question #2

The second research question sought to answer if local news was prominently featured in the first-block of the late, local broadcasts in the Austin, Texas market. Across the market, nearly three-in-four (72.2%) of all the local news stories aired (231) were presented in the first-block. 194 (M=38.8, SD=10.42593) total stories were aired in the first blocks of the five late, local newscasts and of those, 167 (M=33.4, SD=8.59069), or 86.1%, were local. In 2013, 89.8%, or 160 (M=40, 5.6685) of the 178 (M=44.5, 8.18535) first-block stories, were local. There was no significance ($p \leq .05$) in the difference between the local first block story count from 2014 to 2013 and there was no significance ($p \leq .05$) between the total first block story count from 2014 to 2013. In addition, there was no significance ($p \leq .05$) between the proportion of local first block stories and total first block stories between 2014 (M=86.9%, SD=.12834) and 2013 (M=90.7%, SD=.10276).

Table 2. Comparison of First Block Local News Stories in the Austin DMA From 2013 and 2014

Year	Local First Block Story Count	Total First Block Story Count	Local First Block Story Count Proportion
2013	160	178	M=90.7%, SD=.10276
2014	167	194	M=86.9%, SD=.12834

<u>Hypothesis #1</u>

The first hypothesis predicted that KVUE would feature fewer local news stories, both in count and as a proportion of total story count, than it did one year ago, before its sale to Gannett was finalized. This hypothesis was partially supported. In 2014, KVUE ran 42 total local stories versus 51 in 2013, but despite this numerical difference in local story count, there was no statistical significance ($p \leq .05$) between KVUE's 2014 local story count (M=8.4, SD=2.50998) and KVUE's 2013 local story count (M=10.2, SD=1.48323). There was, however, a strong statistical significance in the proportion of local story count against the total story count with $t(8)=2.57$, ($p \leq .05$, one-tailed). In 2014, the proportion (M=77.7%, SD=.08984) of local story count against total story count dropped significantly from 2013 (M=91.9%, SD=.08417).

In order to paint a clearer picture of any differences between KVUE before it was sold to Gannett and after, a statistical analysis of the station's total local news time was also completed. In 2014, KVUE ran an average of 628.8 seconds (10.48 minutes) of local news per newscast, which was down slightly from an average of 646 seconds (10.76 minutes) in 2013. There was no statistical significance ($p \leq .05$) between KVUE's total local news time, as measured in seconds, from 2014 (M=628.8, SD=18.36300) to 2013

(M=646, SD=103.77379). Further, there was no statistical significance ($p \leq .05$) between the amount of time KVUE devoted to local news as a proportion of its total news time between 2014 (M=89.9%, SD =.04318) and 2013 (M=93.8%, SD=.11245).

Table 3. Comparison of KVUE pre-Gannett sale (Nov. 2013) to post-Gannett sale (Nov. 2014)

Year	Local Story Count	Local Story Count Proportion *	Local News Time (in sec.)	Local Story Time Proportion
2013	51	M=91.9%, SD=.08417	M=646, SD=103.77379	M=93.8%, SD=.11245
2014	42	M=77.7%, SD=.08984	M=628.8, SD=18.3630	M=89.9%, SD=.04318
* $p \leq .05$				

Hypothesis #2

The second hypothesis stated that the stations owned either by a broadcast network (KTBC), or run as a duopoly (KXAN), will air the lowest proportion of local news in relation to their total news time. This hypothesis was partially supported.

There was a statistical significance between the stations in the market and the proportion of local news times x^2 (4, N=23458) = 2155.59, $p < .05$, Φ_{Cramer} =.3031. KXAN, KVUE, and KEYE were more likely to have higher proportions of local news time than both KTBC's 9 p.m. (M=60.1%, SD=.12770) and 10 p.m. newscast (M=62.8%, SD=.09562). For KTBC's 9 p.m. newscast it was indicated that the observed frequency was 18.4% smaller than the expected. For KTBC's 10 p.m. newscast it was indicated that the observed frequency was 113.2% smaller than the expected. KXAN (M=89.5%, SD=.06063), however, showed an observed frequency that was 21.5% greater than the expected, which was tied with KVUE for the market lead. KEYE showed an observed frequency that was 12.9% greater than the expected, placing it third behind KVUE and KXAN, but ahead of both KTBC broadcasts.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This research was conducted to determine the potential relationship between the content of local news broadcasts and ownership characteristics. Specifically, it was concerned with finding any differences in local news content during KVUE's 10 p.m. newscast following its sale from a local ownership group, Belo, to one of the country's foremost media conglomerates in Gannett. Lastly, this research was conducted to see if ownership characteristics would have an impact on how much local news KTBC and KXAN would air as a proportion of each station's total news time.

The most intriguing portion of this study was looking at the differences between KVUE's local news content from November 2013 to November 2014, which marked its transition from Belo ownership to Gannett ownership. The Austin ABC affiliate showed no statistically significant difference in its local news time, proportion of local news time, and local story count from when it was owned by Belo to when it was owned by Gannett. However, KVUE did show numerical decreases in all three categories, but it is difficult to tell if that is a result of the ownership change or the news cycle during the 2014 November sweeps period. While the November 2014 sweeps period contained run-up coverage of the Austin mayoral election, city council election, and the Texas gubernatorial race, the news cycle during the 2013 November sweeps period featured a major local disaster that prompted extensive local coverage. On Halloween 2013, parts of the city and surrounding areas were hit by historic flash flooding. The flooding displaced hundreds of people, destroyed or damaged hundreds of homes, and killed several people. The coverage on all four stations on Halloween night and in subsequent days relied heavily on local coverage of the aftermath of the flooding, including a number of “weather as news” reports.

The only significant change observed between 2013 and 2014, and it was a strong significant change, was in KVUE’s local story count proportion. KVUE ran fewer local news stories as a proportion of its total story count in 2014 than it did in 2013. Despite having a lower local story count proportion, KVUE’s proportion of local news time remained close to its pre-Gannett proportion and showed no significant difference. This suggests that while the station has seen a drop in the local proportion of its story count, its local news stories are now running longer. In fact, KVUE’s local news stories, on average, ran 11 seconds longer in November 2014 than they did in November 2013. It is encouraging that despite a drop in local story count proportion KVUE has made up the difference with longer stories.

While KVUE showed virtually no statistical significance in changes to local news content, KTBC exhibited measurements that would suggest a relationship between ownership characteristics and local news content. As the Fox O&O in the Austin market, KTBC performed better than Fox O&O’s previously analyzed (Yanich, 2010) when it came to proportion of local news time, however it also exhibited characteristics that were found to accompany Fox owned stations elsewhere in the country. Like other Fox O&O’s analyzed previously (Yanich, 2010), KTBC ran the lowest proportion of local news in the market, with its 10 p.m. and 9 p.m. newscasts finishing fourth and fifth, respectively, in this measure. KTBC also exhibited a very significant difference between its proportion of local news time in 2014 and its proportion of local news time in 2013, with 2014 being lower.

KXAN bucked previous findings that showed that local news time accounts for, on average, at or below 72% of the total news time on duopolies (Yanich, 2010). KXAN, which was a locally owned duopoly, had its local news account for an average of 89.5% of its total news time. KXAN at the time of this analysis, however, was a locally owned television station. KXAN's then-parent company, LIN Media, had moved its headquarters from Providence, Rhode Island to Austin, and at the time of this analysis, LIN Media was the smallest ownership chain in the market. According to the results found in the Tulsa study (Scott, Gobetz, & Chanslor, 2008), KXAN should have had a significantly higher proportion of local news time over its competitors who are all owned by larger chain ownership groups. However, there was no significant difference when this was tested. The question becomes, did KXAN's dual qualities as a local, small-chain owned station and a duopoly cancel each other out? KXAN's December 2014 sale to Media General would beg for further analysis of this question because the station retains its duopoly status but is now part of a much larger chain ownership group that is based out of state.

All-in-all, local news viewers in the Austin market have three very good options for local news, with the proportion of local news time at 10 p.m. on KVUE, KXAN, and KEYE all coming in well above the average of 72% as reported by Yanich in 2010.

The November 2014 sweeps ratings closely followed the findings of the analysis conducted in Austin during that sweeps period, in that more viewers watched the stations with the higher proportions of local news time. KVUE, which led the market with the highest proportion of local news time, scored the top rating (5.2) and highest share (11.9), which is the percentage of in-use TV sets tuned to a particular channel. KXAN, which had the second highest proportion of local news time, finished a close second to KVUE with a 4.4 rating and a 10.1 share. KEYE, which had the third highest proportion of local news time, finished a distant third in the November ratings with a 2.6 rating and a 6.1 share. KTBC's 10 p.m. newscast, which had the fourth lowest proportion of local news time, finished fourth at 10 p.m. with a 1.6 rating and a 3.7 share.

Table 4. November 2014 10 p.m. Sweeps Results (source: Nielsen via Austin360.com)

	Rating	Share	Proportion of Local News Time
KVUE	5.2	11.9	89.9%
KXAN	4.4	10.1	89.5%
KEYE	2.6	6.1	83.5%
KTBC	1.6	3.7	62.8%

There were limitations to this analysis as only two November sweeps periods were sampled and it did not analyze the quality of local news content, such as if the story utilized video and graphics, what type of story it was (reporter package, anchor package, voice over, etc.), and what the subject matter of the local content was. A content analysis that includes analysis of the quality of local news would help paint a more vivid picture of the local news environment in Austin, including what kind of local news viewers are getting. Further, future research of the Austin market might include surveying viewers to determine if there is salience based on the kind of news (local vs. non-local, crime vs. politics, etc.) the stations are running, but also where in their newscasts the stories are running. Future research is needed in this market as ownership profiles change and as those new ownership groups begin to take hold. Austin is a city that is continuing to grow and is becoming a hub of technology, economic innovation, and political discourse, but it is a city that is facing a number of harsh realities as the result of its growth. Keeping its growing population informed about the changes happening in Austin will fall on the local television stations in the market. It will be important to measure if Austin's local stations continue to deliver local news at a level its citizens have become accustomed to.

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