American-Indian Media: The Past, the Present, and the Promise of Digital

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AMERICAN-INDIAN MEDIA:
THE PAST, THE PRESENT, AND THE PROMISE OF DIGITAL

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
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The Manship School of Mass Communication

by
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Abstract

This dissertation explores how digital media are changing the rich cultural act of storytelling within Native communities. The norms and routines of the non-Native press often leave consumers with a stereotypical view of American-Indians. The researcher interviewed key Native journalists identified through the Native American Journalists Association. She also observed journalists at a primarily Native newspaper and Native radio station. The study conducted interviews with more than 40 Native journalists around the country to understand how digital media possibly advances the distribution of storytelling within the American-Indian community.

KEYWORDS: Native, American-Indians, Indian Country, digital media, emerging media, norms and routines, stereotype
Chapter 1
Introduction

Storytelling is very important still to Native communities and the fact that Native stories aren’t told by the mainstream media. You know, if we don’t tell them who will? (Peggy Berryhill, President/General Manager, KGUA, personal communication, January 3, 2012).

Storytelling is overall a key part of American-Indian culture, ritualistically passed-down history from one generation to the next (Merina, 2005). The difference between a Native story and a non-Native story is American-Indian stories are often oral and rich in detail and language (Shoemaker, 2002; Duncan, 1998). Breadth and depth is important when telling Native stories as, historically, American-Indian stories served as a form of recording history (Shoemaker, 2002; Duncan, 1998).

Stories become a part of everyday Native life, included in music, dances, festivals, medicine, and art. Each story has a reason --- history, moral tale, and even a community’s place in society (Duncan, 1998). Each American-Indian tribe is unique with its own history and therefore with its own stories. Some storytellers argue that the stories themselves are living artifacts, just one generation from being extinct if not spread by word of mouth any longer (Duncan, 1998).

Digital media, which includes the overall internet, social media, and mobile applications, allow for the extension of this storytelling. The overall Native community now has opportunities to create and discuss content online. Native people do not have to rely on non-Native people for inclusion in history or news coverage. I to gain understanding in how Native journalists are extending their stories and coverage through digital platforms by evaluating Native newsrooms norms and routines.
A story in itself makes up the heart of the journalism profession. American-Indians understand the importance of the oral process of storytelling to share perspectives and record history (Meness, 2012; Shoemaker, 2002, Cook-Lynn, 1996). While the number of American-Indian journalists has grown of late, this group is still underrepresented in non-Native newsrooms – with most Native journalists working within tribal media (Avila Hernandez, 2012). Some Native scholars and professionals argue that most American-Indians do not even consider journalism a career choice because of entry barriers such as language, culture and education (Avila Hernandez, 2012).

Scholars argue that it is important for Natives to tell their own story (Mihesuah, 1996; Swisher, 1996). Historically, American-Indian history has been written by non-Natives, primarily white males (Meness, 2012; Sanchez, 2012; Watson, 2012; Keever, Martindale, & Weston, 1997; Wilson, 1996; Swisher, 1996). When American-Indians have been available to interview or cite, the media and scholars rely on other races as experts on American-Indian history (Swisher, 1996; Wilson, 1996).

Research on American-Indians includes a bevy of scholarly knowledge that focuses on stereotypes, history, and health. Yet, American-Indians are an oral community (Merina 2005). Scant work exists on the ritual of storytelling within this culture much less its key connection with journalism. Scholars have not specifically discussed how the changing digital media landscape is altering the ancient art of storytelling while debunking stereotypical representations. This research will explore how digital media may be advancing the collective Native voice.

American-Indian and minority organizations provided an outpouring of support for this study, enthused that a Native person was conducting Native research. I interviewed and observed key storytellers identified within Indian Country by Native and minority organizations such as
the Native American Journalists Association. The interviews included visiting multiple Native news organizations to observe the use of digital media within daily news coverage routines.

**Growth of Native Visibility**

“American-Indians are often described as the most invisible minority,” (Phillips, 2012, p. 50). The Native community is so invisible that American-Indians are often placed in research’s “other” category with minority groups, making it hard to specifically extract information on Native issues. The most common way people who are non-Native learn about Native culture is through mass media, and, unfortunately, mass media often focus on stereotypical images (Sanchez, 2012). American-Indians are often displayed as being part of the “other” or as non-Natives “playing Indian.” Media depict American-Indians as not exactly like the reader, instead distant and exotic (Phillips, 2012, p. 41).

The United States contains 566 federally recognized tribes (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2012). The latest U.S. Census American-Indians and Alaska Natives grew by 1.5 percent totaling 6.3 million people (McDonnell-Smith, 2013). The U.S. Census projects by 2050, the Native population number will grow to nearly 9 million American-Indians and Alaska Natives (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Over the past 10 years, American-Indian and Alaska Native populations have increased by nearly 27 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). When breaking down Native populations in the United States, California, Oklahoma, and Arizona have the largest noted populations ranging from 482,000 to more than 353,000 - totaling some 700,000 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Fifteen states have more than 100,000 American-Indians and Alaska Natives; these include California, Oklahoma, Arizona, Texas, New York, New Mexico, Washington, North Carolina, Florida, Michigan, Alaska, Oregon, Colorado, Minnesota, and Illinois (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Twenty-two percent of American-Indians and Alaska
Natives live on or in a combination of Indian areas or Alaska Native villages (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Nearly 29 percent of Native Americans live in poverty compared to 15 percent for the overall United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). The median income for Native families is around $35,000 in comparison with $50,000 for the overall United States.

In comparison to other communities, the Native population may seem small, but digital media are allowing for a small group to have a mighty voice. For example, American-Indians had a particular interest in the 2012 re-election of President Barack Obama. Support for the president grew after his 2008 election because Native people started seeing a growth in federal trust and improved tribal gaming relationships (Indianz.com, 2012; Cherokee Phoenix, 2012). The result four years later was a social media campaign to show their support. On Facebook, Native news and political organizations posted updates on a “get-out-the-vote” movement for President Obama.

During the 2012 Presidential election, the Native American Journalists Association (NAJA) constantly updated social media sites. On Facebook and Twitter, members and followers received overall election numbers and information on Natives re-elected across the country (Rhonda LeValdo, President, Native American Journalists Association, personal communication, November 6, 2012). The day after the 2012 presidential election, the Navajo Times reported Navajos helped President Obama get reelected. In two counties the vote was 2-1 for President Obama (Navajo Times, 2012). The overall social media outcome: Natives increased their visibility by increasing Native voter news coverage within social media.

With the expansion of Native information and images also comes the opportunity for Natives to respond. Leading up to Thanksgiving 2012, headlines such as this one appeared on CNN: “White Girls Play Indian” (Grinberg, 2012). The article displayed a Victoria Secret’s
super model in a full-length mock feather headdress, turquoise clothing, and a scant leopard-looking bikini for the company’s December 4, 2012, holiday fashion show. The show turned out to be the highest-rated program of the night across the networks with 9.3 million viewers (Petill, 2012). Prior to this incident, the music group No Doubt also released a music video “Looking Hot,” which contained stereotypical images such as teepees. Both groups apologized and the incident led to coverage, such as the CNN article on people “playing Indian” for profit. While the internet allowed for the “White Girls Play Indian” story to circulate quickly and to receive unfavorable responses from Native organizations, websites also allowed for the clear lack of understanding toward the Native community to emerge. Comments under CNN’s story illustrated the clear lack of understanding by non-Native readers:

Native Americans shouldn't be so sensitive. What's so sacred about how they dress or a sexy woman in a skimpy Indian outfit?? If it offends your delicate sensitivities...get over it (Bleaux, 2012).

You certainly have no problem taking advantage of our capitalist culture and tax benefits...I know Europeans screwed you over BIG time, but wearing one of your symbols is not inherently a disrespectful thing (Kramer, 2012).

While the internet allows more information and images as well as response and discussion of inappropriate images and narratives, society still needs an education in debunking old views and myths about Native culture. Stereotypical, false images of American-Indians demean this culture and ignore the suffrage endured - suffrage which is a part of American-Indian history (Trahant, 1995). Entman and Rojecki (2001) note that American-Indians have suffered much like African-Americans; both ethnic groups have endured slavery and stripping of not only land, but language and even families.

For non-Native media to move toward more inclusivity and away from the stereotypes, journalists need an overall awareness of the Native community (Trahant, 1995). Non-Native
must understand each tribe is unique. Change will come to non-Native media if they become inclusive with American-Indian coverage from multiple Native perspectives over the long term (Jeff Harjo, Executive Director, NAJA, personal communication, March 16, 2012; Bryan Pollard, executive editor, Cherokee Phoenix, personal communication, February 14, 2012, Trahant, 1995). Journalists and scholars alike argue mainstream media need to consider a holistic approach toward marginalized groups. For example, mainstream media should avoid covering minority groups just when there is a negative story. Non-Native newsrooms instead should view the American-Indian community as a beat – visiting and following-up with the Native communities they are covering (Chavez, 2012; Bryan Pollard, Executive Editor, Cherokee Phoenix, personal communication, February 14, 2012; Marley Shebala, Senior Reporter, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012).

**Content Control**

Another issue facing Native news outlets and in fact all content creators is who controls the media. In non-Native news, advertisers, corporate ownership, government officials, and even consumers vie for content management (Dunaway, 2008). Tribes often are like media ownership groups; the content on tribal sites depend on what the tribe allows for publication – essentially censorship of content (Kemper, 2010; Anderson, 2003).

Research on the norms and routines of Native media is non-existent. Norms and routines are tied closely to the gatekeeping of news content, where news workers have a patterned way of covering and producing news content whether it is through beat, sourcing, and/or other forms of news coverage (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Overall, most Native news organizations are advocates of civic, also defined as community, journalism, providing information from and about the community. Tribally independent Native media report on the tribal government to keep
public officials in check and citizens informed. Tribal councils have shut down Native news organizations for questioning authority (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, July 19, 2012). In the 1980s, the Navajo tribal council closed the *Navajo Times* during what Navajo people still refer to today as a civil war (Marley Shebala, Senior Reporter, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, July 20, 2012). Months after this riot, the paper reopened and is now a free and separate press from the tribe (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, July 19, 2012).

Some Natives have started their own news outlets because of their frustration with editing of their work on Native sites.

I was writing for *Indian Country Today*. I did write for them— they had published a few of my articles. They would limit my word count. They would edit my stuff. So, I just wanted to get away from this….I had the idea doing of doing a bigger scale thing (Chase Iron Eyes, Creator, LastRealIndians.com, personal communication, January 13, 2012).

However in efforts to stop censorship, in 2000 the Cherokee Nation passed an Independent Press Act, allowing for a separation between the Nation and the editorial function of the *Cherokee Phoenix*. The tribe still funds the paper, but no branch of government can try to censor the news (Bryan Pollard, Executive Editor, *Cherokee Phoenix*, personal communication, February 14, 2012).

In fact, we have had several papers that have come to me to talk about our press act and to find ways to implement something similar with their tribe. The Osage Nation has an independent press act that is modeled after ours. The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians has a press act modeled after ours and there’s a couple of other tribes that have done that as well. Just a couple months ago, I spoke to a tribe in California and they are looking to do the same thing. It is starting to slowly catch on in Indian Country and I’m hoping it continues to move in this

**Growth of Native and Overall Ethnic Media**

Native media are part of an overall group classified as ethnic media. While some news audiences are declining, ethnic media users have grown in news consumption including digitally (Allen, 2009; Srinivasan, 2006). In a survey conducted by New American Media in 2009, ethnic media increased their reach by 16 percent over four years. This reach included 57 million African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans. Media growth included overall ethnic radio stations and specifically Asian-American television, with growth by 30 percent (Guskin & Mitchell, 2012; Allen, 2009).

Ethnic media consumers will find a different angle in their news versus mainstream news coverage (Wilson, Gutierrez, & Chao, 2013, p. 244). Ethnic media focus more on the effects to the minority audience. Minority media cover issues and events connected to people of color and support understanding a multicultural world (Wilson, Gutierrez, & Chao, 2013).

Ethnic media have a different news coverage role than the overall mainstream media (Izard, 2008). Minority media are mostly small to medium market sized and are dependent on advertising from small businesses – which means less resources compared to mainstream media with large investors (Izard, 2008). Traditionally, ethnic media reflect roles of advocacy, community, and international/multicultural perspective (Izard, 2008).

Ethnic media also give visibility to groups that often are invisible in the mainstream press (Allen, 2009; Srinivasan, 2006). Minority media are often local or regional and allow for coverage of events the mainstream press may not cover. While social media groups stress community by providing opportunities for individuals to build on conversation through posts,
ethnic media have been stressing the collectiveness of the overall Native community and group long before Facebook (Izard, 2008).

The Cherokee Phoenix serves as an example of growing online ethnic media. While non-ethnic newspapers are dwindling, ethnic media are increasing (Allen, 2009). The Cherokee Phoenix is the oldest American-Indian newspaper on record and now publishes still in its traditional form and through an electronic newsletter, on the web, and by SmartPhone application (Bryan Pollard, Executive Editor, Cherokee Phoenix, personal communication, February 14, 2012). The paper started back in the 1800s to spread news from one Cherokee region to another until the state of Georgia, with the support of the United States government, forced this nation to disperse and eventually for southeastern tribes to relocate in what is identified as the Trail of Tears (Cherokee Phoenix, 2012).

Two hundred years following the American-Indian Removal Act of the 1830s, American-Indians can find out the latest in news and sports as well as listen to Cherokee radio and read the original Cherokee nation language, GWV (CherokeePhoenix.org, 2012).

Overall our audience is definitely growing. I think that with all the different products we have available, the number of people we can potentially reach is so much greater, but we want to be able to reach everyone...here in Cherokee Nation we have still have many citizens that live in rural areas that it may not have an internet connection, may not have a computer in their home, and some of them may not have running water so the challenge for us is finding ways to reach every citizen (Bryan Pollard, Executive Editor, Cherokee Phoenix, personal communication, February 14, 2012).

Bryan Pollard, executive editor of the Cherokee Phoenix, rose in the ranks to bring the newspaper into the digital age. Pollard, hired in 2007, explained his first initiative was to launch a website, which he did within three to four months of becoming executive editor. From there he said everything flowed, the mobile Cherokee newspaper app, and the Facebook page.
We had the newspaper and we already knew the newspaper was very popular that we had a very steady audience of newspaper readers but we wanted to reach all those thousands and thousands of Cherokees that didn’t read a newspaper…If we are going to continue to be an important publication to Cherokee people, we of course have to retain our current audience, but we also have to reach out to our future audience, younger people who are going to continue to rely on the Cherokee Phoenix, as they become adults and progress through life and start their own families and all those things. (Bryan Pollard, Executive Editor, Cherokee Phoenix, personal communication, February 14, 2012).

With infrastructure issues on reservations, some Natives have skipped a step with digital media and instead have moved on to connecting through mobile devices (Guskin & Mitchell, 2012). Moving on to mobile is not unusual and has also occurred in other countries such as Chile (Guskin & Mitchell, 2012). SmartPhone ownership in Chile is nearly to the ratio of 1 phone to 1 person (Guskin & Mitchell, 2012). The move to mobility allowed many Native news organizations to focus on creating content for mobile applications and in training its staff in this latest technology (Guskin & Mitchell, 2012).

Presently, Indian Country and the Associated Press have had a renewed interest in developing a partnership. With this potential partnership, history truly could repeat itself (Trahant, 1995). In the late 1800s, the first American-Indian woman who owned a newspaper was Cherokee, Myrta Eddleman; Eddleman advanced the business of her paper by contracting with the Associated Press; her paper was able to publish developing stories outside of Indian Country and therefore, gained nearly a thousand paid subscribers (Trahant, 1995). There are talks within Indian Country today to create a wire service with the Associated Press (Jeff Harjo, Executive Director, NAJA, personal communication, March 16, 2012). The service would be a sharing of tribal newspaper and Native radio news (Jeff Harjo, Executive Director, NAJA, personal communication, March 16, 2012).
Digital Divide and Native Communities

While the culture is rich with storytelling, Indian Country does not have equal access to technology creating what scholars identify as a digital divide (Mossberger, Tolbert, & Stansbury, 2003). The younger Native generation has a desire for information faster than the traditional weekly and monthly publication of Native news. Meanwhile many reservations still do not have running water or electricity much less computers (Jeff Harjo, Executive Director, NAJA, personal communication, March 16, 2012; Noel Lyn Smith, Reporter, Navajo Times, June 2012).

Generational and infrastructure digital barriers remain in Indian Country (Boney, 2012). The Navajo Nation, for instance, has little digital access; “A lot of those folks do rely on that tribal newspaper to understand what is going on.” Jeff Harjo, who is currently running for Chief of the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma and was NAJA Executive Director at the time of his interview, said that when he visits his mother in Oklahoma, he stands on the northwest corner of her carport to gain internet access (Jeff Harjo, Executive Director, NAJA, personal communication, March 16, 2012).

The Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence (Guskin & Mitchell, 2012) finds that 43 percent of Natives have broadband access at home compared to the overall national number of 65 percent. American-Indians and Alaska Natives live typically in remote, rural, and isolated areas; connectivity for the nation’s rural areas is 50 percent, 7 percent higher than the connectivity for the overall Native community. In comparison to other ethnicities, more than 67 percent of Asian Americans have broadband, 59 percent of African-Americans and 49 percent of Latinos. Less than 10 percent of reservation and tribal lands have broadband.

Overall, word of mouth, newspaper, and radio are still the most used media in Indian Country. Both radio and TV saw growth in 2011 (Guskin & Mitchell, 2012). Meanwhile,
challenges remain for print except for in rural areas which include Native reservations. During 2011, a large Native paper switched to magazine and another to an online only publication (Guskin & Mitchell, 2012).

Some reservations such as Navajo, Hopi, and Pasqua Yaqui Nations have brought fiber optic cables to their land and are sharing wireless. The Minnesota Shakopees have a strong economic development system and generously help other tribes that have digital needs (Jeff Harjo, Executive Director, NAJA, personal communication, March 16, 2012). Meanwhile, California’s Yurok Tribe created a “super” Wi-Fi that allows for long-distance connection.

The younger generation of Native media consumers want information faster than a monthly or bimonthly newspaper (Jeff Harjo, Executive Director, NAJA, personal communication, March 16, 2012). To begin this process, tribal leaders asked the Federal Communications Commission to approve the increase in broadband, wireless, and radio services in rural Indian Country (ICTMN, 2011).

**Road Map to Future Chapters**

This study hopes to overcome barriers such as the digital divide, stereotypical portrayals, and invisibility supported by the overall mainstream press’s norms and routines. This research will address how Native journalists are advancing storytelling through emerging digital platforms. Research on American-Indian storytelling and the connection to journalism is sparse at best. To date, there is no research on how digital media are impacting Native newsrooms, much less how digital media may be increasing positive portrayals of the Native community.

The next chapter, the literature review, will explore Native digital media through a lens informed by storytelling, digital divide, and debunking stereotypical views. This study will
further this exploration by evaluating newsroom norms and routines and this theory’s connection to researching scholarly topics that are emerging within understudied communities.

Chapter 3, the method, will describe how data were collected for this qualitative study. I had the pleasure of interviewing Native journalists from all over the country – some in person, some by phone, and some through digital platforms. Being American-Indian, this project turned into a two-year labor of love to record and provide a scholarly foundation for continued studies of Native news and digital media.

Chapter 4, the analysis, will answer the study’s research questions that focus on how Native storytelling is changing with digital media. Within this chapter, detailed information will be provided on how Native journalists see storytelling evolving within the Native community and within non-Native media.

The discussion and conclusion will describe this study’s key findings. This final chapter will explain findings in comparison to past scholarly research. This section also outlines what future scholars should consider when conducting research related to Native storytelling, digital media, and stereotypes.
Chapter 2
Literature Review

Communication existed in America long before Christopher Columbus arrived in 1492. “Inca, Aztec, and Maya all had elaborate systems of recording, transferring, and storing records, including the work of scribes who wrote on bark tablets” and stone carvings (Wilson et al., 2013, p. 244). Tribes in both the North and Southern hemispheres used a complex maze of trails that spanned the continents for runners to disseminate messages and network with other tribes; Aztecs used a combination of color banners in highly populated areas to communicate with mass audiences (Wilson et al., 2013). Another common medium, an oral tradition of storytelling, was popular among the tribes for distributing and preserving knowledge. Many ways of life, to put it mildly, changed for American-Indians post European colonization; but ritualistic Native storytelling changed little – one of the few pluralistic threads that helped those communities survive. Digital media may be possibly changing the social fabric as well as norms and routines of Native storytelling. Thus, this research will use norms and routine theory to inform and guide the study’s research questions.

Native Storytelling and Digital Media

Traditionally, storytelling has been the primary instrument for historical record keeping among most Native communities (Shoemaker, 2002; Duncan, 1998). While there are some similarities among American-Indian communities, each American-Indian and his/her tribal community has its own unique story, which is why it was essential for the individual histories to be recorded. The stories contain lessons that helped individuals and families make sense of how they and the tribe fit into the larger collective world (Shoemaker, 2002; Duncan, 1998).

American-Indians orally shared these authentic stories with their children and grandchildren – from one generation to the next. Authentic stories are defined as oral
communication from people who are connected to a language through “heritage and expertise” (Piller, 2002, p. 179). Not telling these stories threatened a key part of the community’s history.

The ritualistic sharing of stories within American-Indian communities is how journalism is connected to Native storytelling. Carey (1992) posits that “a ritual view of communication is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of stories in time” (p. 18). This ritualistic view of communication aptly describes American-Indian storytelling because there is a similar thread between both ritual and Native storytelling; a collective view of communication, which includes preservation of history, community, religion, and fellowship, fits both Native culture and ritual communication (Carey, 1992). Digital media present variables that may change and enhance the nature of ritualistic storytelling in American-Indian communities.

Currently, scholarly research addressing Native news and digital media is extremely sparse. However, research on mainstream media and digital platforms may provide insight into how digital media may or may not advance Native storytelling. In an examination of four convergent newsrooms, newspapers, all of which are with partnerships with a television and web news organizations, print journalists had concerns that immediacy of relaying information through digital platforms would outweigh effective storytelling (Singer, 2004). As expected, the print journalists noted that they went to school to produce ethical journalism - not to multitask uploading video and updating the web. Many of the journalists had a difficult time with the constant apprising of information digitally.

Social media allow for the visibility of breaking news stories before the mainstream media have yet had a chance to report on them. With tragic events such as the 2012 Colorado theatre shooting, which resulted in 12 people dead and 58 injured, eyewitnesses turned to social
media to give first-hand accounts and to even upload video on YouTube (Schwarz, 2012; Warren, 2012). Hashtags even alerted friends and family that those they knew were killed (Schwarz, 2012).

Through posts on Facebook and Twitter, social media covered critical events that mainstream media chose to ignore; norms, routines, and gatekeeping are the primary contributors that determine what stories are covered (Singer, 2001). In 2011, a Twitter user unknowingly tweeted the military operation killing Osama Bin Laden after the user noticed a helicopter hovering in the middle of the night (Gross, 2011). In 2009, the United States asked Twitter to delay a network upgrade to its network so that there was no down time for Twitter users who wanted to protest the presidential election (Grossma, 2009). During a natural disaster in Japan, Twitter users broadcast crisis messages faster than any professional news medium; tweets about the Japanese earthquake occurred within a minute and 20 seconds (Sakaki, Okazaki, & Matsuo, 2010).

**Native Connectivity and Community**

American-Indians with basic internet connectivity have been able to spread their stories to millions online through social media (Boney, 2013). There is a range of Facebook and Twitter accounts for tribes to reach Native news organizations about specific Native causes. While not everyone has connectivity, the essence of the digital divide, there are facilities at schools and libraries to help people connect and share their information (Boney, 2013).

American-Indian websites have increased since 1994 (Daniels, 2006; Roy & Raitt, 2004). Sites include education, PowWows, events, language, business, tribal, and genealogy resources (Mitten, 2003). Within the past five years, Native news organizations have added newscasts and
podcasts to their sites and mobile applications to offer users the latest news from Indian Country (NV1, 2012).

While there has been an increase in Native information a digital divide continues within this community. The digital divide is “an unequal access to information technology based on income, race, ethnicity, gender, age, and geography” (Mossberger et al., 2003, p. 1). Compared to the rest of the United States and other minority groups, American-Indians have a lower broadband penetration. Word of mouth,” print, and radio are still the overall preferred forms of communication (Guskin & Mitchell, 2012).

The digital divide specifically affects minorities and their advancement economically (Mossberger et al., 2003). Scholars argue that having technology available to women and people of color would help bridge this gap. They suggest that along with availability to include instruction on using technology.

Mobile is beginning to narrow the digital divide (Pew, 2012). Demographically, this includes minorities, young adults, and SmartPhone users. African-Americans and English-speaking Latinos are as likely as whites to own any sort of mobile phone and are more likely to use their phone for a wider range of activities (Pew, 2012).

With the growth of minorities in the U.S. and the growth of digital media, technology provides the opportunity to portray this nation in a more diverse manner (Wilson et al., 2013). Providing a diverse view digitally not only affects who gets news and who is heard, but also how the world views the United States.

**Norms and Routines**

Academic knowledge of how Native news organizations produce their daily, monthly, or weekly news is meager to non-existent. This study will rely on mainstream and overall ethnic
media norms and routines to understand how Native news organizations may differ and may be changing with digital platforms.

To understand how the news ends up in its final published or aired form, scholars have studied the internal and external influences in producing news including a journalists’ routine. Shoemaker and Reese’s (1996) model include five “hierarchy of influence” levels: ideological, extra-media, organization, routine, and individual. In the center of this model is the individual journalist, influenced by all other factors. The relationship between the journalist, Shoemaker and Reese (1996) define as the patterns journalists go through daily to create content.

Journalists learn to see in certain ways that can then be covered through work routines in order to process materials (Wilson et al., 2013; Berkowitz, 1997). The judgment of “what is news” is considered sacred knowledge that differentiates journalists from other “common” people (Tuchman, 1978). The mainstream media do not have the same news coverage routines as ethnic media. Most journalists in mainstream news operations have not taken the time to understand the inner-workings of minority communities, explaining, in part, why stereotypical mainstream news continues (Wilson et al., 2013). Journalists are supposed to possess news values to be successful, but few can define these routine elements that consistently exclude minorities (Hall, 1982). News workers depend on what they know as newsworthy and often the “who” and “what” does not include minority audiences (Wilson et al., 2013; Campbell, 2012).

Media organizations look to each other to confirm and validate decisions (Cook, 1998). While journalists evaluate others, these professionals do not invite criticism from the public or outside groups (Eliasoph, 1986). Newspapers cater to their news audiences by being able to provide more lengthy detailed content (Dunaway, 2008). Overall, paper readers tend to be more educated compared to broadcast. In contrast, local television journalists have the largest time and
news-whole size constraints; these television journalists try to turn stories quickly that will fit very short segments (Dunaway, 2008).

Patterns of media may be compared to tribal ownership of Native media. Ownership influences the news that media consumers receive (Page, 1996). Researchers tend to shy away from the fact that news stories tend to mirror the policy preferences of media ownership groups; news organizations hire staff that fits their policy; give stories to people who will cover the “policy-way,” and edit stories in a manner to fit the “policy” (Wilson et al., 2013).

Some journalists undermine their job as “watchdogs” when they elevate the newsworthiness status of elite sources. Journalists, in turn become “lapdogs” – in part because of newsroom constraints, but this influences the type of coverage news consumers receive (Cook, 1996; Gurevitch, & Blumler, 1981). Officials and business representatives oftentimes have greater access to news media than those with less power (Molotch & Lester, 1974).

Continuing diminished resources force journalists to rely on official, or “elite,” sound bites more often because journalists do not have as much time to search for other sources that may have a different interpretation (Kurpius, 2002). To some, official sources equal an accurate view of the truth (Bennett, 1990). Official voices essentially set the barometer for how a community should act and feel about an issue and often those who are ignored are women and people of color (Kurpius, 2002).

Journalists rely on mostly white males as sources; thus, marginal groups become invisible (Kurpius, 2002). Sources are often chosen because of that person’s position and/or authority within the community (Kurpius, 2002). Consumers therefore see one race as powerful and the other not (Poindexter, Smith, & Heider, 2003; Jha-Nambari & Izard, 2005). Minority groups distrust mainstream media and white officials and rely instead on more personal forms of
communication for information such as community organizations and churches (Campbell, 2012).

Jha-Nambiar and Izard (2005) find that coverage included primarily white sources even within diverse communities. These racial findings are consistent with research from Katrina and the Deepwater Horizon disaster (Miller & Bemker LaPoe, 2011; Miller & Roberts, 2010). During Katrina, media showed visuals of whites as powerful and African-Americans as negative (Ben-Porath & Shaker, 2010; Miller & Roberts, 2010; Kahle, Yu, & Whiteside, 2007). Whites were officials helping African-American victims. Miller and Roberts (2010) conducted an open-ended survey that asked respondents the images they remembered from Katrina and compared the responses to media images of the hurricane. The most memorable content was those associated with race and gender and were the same images that media repeatedly displayed (Miller & Roberts, 2010).

Mainstream media have not consistently portrayed minority audiences within news stories (Wilson et al., 2013). Historically, the mainstream media excluded minorities all together, included minorities only when they were perceived as a threat to their “white” audiences, addressed minority groups when there was a conflict, and/or presented minorities through stereotypes (Wilson et al., 2013). Simply mentioning race can negatively impact how non-minorities feel about the individuals mentioned in a news stories, providing heightened pressure on how journalists report on an ethnically related story (Reeves, 1997). Therefore, the hope for the future is a more concerted effort to include multicultural voices within the news (Wilson et al., 2013; Campbell, 2012).

One answer to the lack of diversity within news sources may be found with digital media and community journalism. Kurpius (2002) posits that community or civic journalism
counteracts the mass media focus on white, male, elite sources. When evaluating community reporters’ news coverage, Kurpius (2002) finds non-minority journalists progressed in including more diverse audiences within their stories and were able to incorporate more minority sources. Civic journalism engages those within the community who are seeking change and speaking out about community topics - allowing for a greater understanding of overall citizen values and issues (Kurpius, 2002). The goal of civic journalism is for reporters to speak with everyday citizens instead of the overreliance on elite officials found in mainstream coverage (Kurpius, 2002).

News organizations search for sensationalized characters that will improve ratings (Hamilton, 2004; Aufderheide, 2004; McManus, 1995). Media prioritize stories revolving around drama, conflict, and controversy (Allan & Zelizer, 2004). News directors make decisions on what will air, known as gatekeeping, based on what they feel their viewers will watch that will translate into advertising dollars (Hamilton, 2004). A concentration on profit makes some people more vulnerable, including viewers watching, sources interviewed, advertisers, and journalists who are at times controlled by their ownership groups.

**News Routines and Ethnic Audiences**

The norms and routines of mainstream journalism contribute to misrepresentation of ethnic audiences and, specifically, American-Indians (Seymour, 2012). Mainstream news coverage often ignores social problems, covers through a conflict frame, and simplifies complex situations into stereotypes. In two trusted national papers, *New York Times* and *Los-Angeles Times* from 1999-2000, Seymour (2012) finds that journalists placed terms that are normally acceptable, such as American-Indian, tribe, and reservation, out of context and in an offensive manner. For example, noting that the Census Bureau records some “reservations as rancheras”
Seymour (2012, p. 77) writes “Silly Indians. Why would they object to their national territory being likened to a cattle pen? Noting that the writer “fell into a self-made trap as it attempted to describe 4.1 million American-Indians (as of the U.S. Census of 2000) as a single group” (p. 77).

Seymour (2012) argues that this was careless journalism instead of outright racism – essentially lack of knowledge about the community since it is not necessarily considered an important beat. The manner in which journalists reported on stories displayed little understanding or concern about Native identity and law – lumping all American-Indians together. The news coverage the journalists produced perpetuated stereotypes and misrepresentation of the Native community to non-ethnic audiences.

Journalists, when faced with unknown territories, engage routine modes to cover stories, including the use of historically negative stereotypes (Wilson et al., 2013; Ettema, 2005). The deployment of routine allows journalists to know what stories, sources, and frames they should incorporate within news to fit the standards of success (Ettema, 2005). Stereotypes reinforce images of a group and serve as shortcuts in a person’s head to understand a complicated matter - for example, the conflict frame typically positions minorities as dark villains that are threats to white ideologies (Wilson, et al., 2013; Lippmann, 1922; Entman, 1993).

Stereotyping is a “conventional, formulaic, and oversimplified conception, opinion, or image,” a way to bring a large, collective, audience in agreement (Wilson et al., 2013, p. 54). New consumers have a structure system in their heads that serve as schemas (Lippmann, 1922; Entman 1993). Individuals are confused, often ignoring the narrative if is constructed in a manner that does not fit the preconceived schema. The same stereotypes and stories are accepted and told over and over again within our society (Lule, 2001; Berkowitz, 2010). Coverage is
efficient, cognitively, for non-Native news consumers to think of American-Indians in stereotypical ways (Wilson, et al., 2013).

Since the 1600s, the way non-Natives have learned about American-Indians is through media (Sanchez, 2012). Natives were mostly commonly categorized as barbarian (Watson, 2012; Keever et al., 1997). The barbarian was typically categorized as non-Christian and placed in the “them/other” category. A noble savage was a Native person who agreed with ideology which supported the beliefs of the settlers at this time (Watson, 2012; Keever et al., 1997).

Today mainstream media continue to show American-Indians as noble savages and/or barbarians (Merskin, 2001). These stereotypical views of Natives are oftentimes placed within two media categories. American-Indians are often portrayed in “zoo stories” or “frozen in the past” (Wilson et al., 2013). Zoo stories are those in which the media place a group on display. In the case of American-Indians, these stories are often cultural events such as PowWows (Wilson et al., 2013). The other category in which Natives displayed is “frozen in the past;” this makes American-Indians appear stuck in either poverty, alcoholism, and/or other problems detrimental to society (Wilson et al., 2013).

The overall medium of television focuses on visuals and often stereotypical images for entertainment (Wilson et al., 2013). Viewers are often shown dramatic, seductive, and not always accurate images (Grabe & Bucy, 2009). The good news is that some progress is evident in television and movies concerning imagery depicting American-Indians. Hollywood, now, tries to embrace American-Indian actors and directors and appears to be working toward an accurate portrayal of history (Pond Cummings, 2012).

Entertainment programming has been a stereotype breeding ground over the past 100 years (Wilson, et al., 2013). Highly educated and often young audiences turn to entertainment
programming as information sources (Feldman, 2007). Television’s goal is to entertain and amuse as much as it is to inform (Postman, 2006). Television programs, with embedded symbols of value and morality, craft an exaggerated stereotypical view for those who watch it heavily (Gerbner, Gross, Singorelli, & Morgan, 1980). For example, in the 1930s, the noble savage reared its stereotypical head in the radio show, “The Lone Ranger,” which later moved to television. Tonto was the “faithful Indian companion” who dutifully supported the white status quo (Wilson, et al., 2013, p. 84).

American-Indians are not the only minority group depicted through stereotypes. From the 1930s to 1950s, Hollywood casted African-Americans in entertainment roles and inferior roles for “comedy” (Wilson, et al., 2013, p. 76). Meanwhile, Latino stereotyping was centered on economic relations. In Latin American countries, sales of movies grew so large Hollywood created characters it hoped appealed to both the U.S. and foreign markets (Wilson, et al., 2013). The overseas sales shifted the “greaser” stereotype from the 1920s to the Latin Lover of the 1930s (p. 74).

Media reinforcement of racial stereotypes hinders a multicultural, democratic society (Entman & Rojecki, 2011). Media determine a certain voice is more authentic, and subsequently more important, than another while omitting others and casting them as inferior. Thus, the American-Indian becomes marginalized to the views that society has already said are accepted, and the group becomes naturalized within society in stereotypical roles (Sanchez, 2012; Entman & Rojecki, 2011).

Entman and Rojecki (2001) posit that the visual nature of race accounts for people’s awareness; in other word, most people don’t centrally process (Zaller, 1992) race on a frequent basis, rather when it becomes portrayed visually or when issues connected with those races are
narrated in implicit and explicit forms. Typically, individuals view others who are racially
different from them and try to gauge if they intend to inflict harm and then whether they have the
ability to follow through with those intentions (Fiske et al, 2006). Historically, minorities are
either framed negatively within television news or ignored all together; thus, non-whites are
typically presented as a barrier to white safety (Wilson et al., 2012; Sloan, 2011, Entman &

Cultural meanings of what race means are socially constructed (Hall, 1995). How a
person represents, interprets and make sense of race helps build a personal ideology; other
factors include family, community, education, and geographic location. Ideology is an
individual’s reality-interpreting lens crafted by their values and beliefs (Hall, 1995). In the case
of minorities, there is often a “white of the eye” ideology, in which minorities are viewed
through a white lens (Hall, 1995).

Hall (1995) identified two types of media articulations of race – overt and inferential
racism. Overt racism is direct, negative, obvious castigations of race; for instance, the use of
common derogatory racial slurs would be overt. Inferential racism, on the other hand, can be
more insidious. Because our society now desires more egalitarianism (Mendelberg, 2001),
overtly racist messages are normally rejected by the audiences because they undermine our
culture’s hope for equality. However, inferential racism, subtle racial messages with hidden
racial undercurrents and cues, go unnoticed and trigger previously dormant racial attitudes those
in the audience didn’t know they possessed (Mendelberg, 2001).

Historically, these overt and inferential messages have plagued mainstream media
coverage of minorities, leading to many inaccuracies and destabilizing mainstream media’s
primary function of reporting truth (Wilson et al., 2013). For example, while covering crime,
media often have an anti-black perspective. African-Americans are typically shown as the group committing the crime and whites as victims, even though, statistically, these portrayals are not proportionately accurate – far fewer African-Americans commit the crimes the news coverage proportionally suggests they do (Dixon, 2008; Entman, 1994; Gerbner et al., 1980). An explanation for this misrepresentation is two-fold: 1) majority of media managers are white and 2) the managers are catering to a primarily white audience (Dixon & Linz, 2000).

Women are also not equally represented in the newsroom. Newsrooms typically do not employ nor promote women in newsrooms much less multiracial women (Wilson et al., 2013). Minority female journalists noted that they feel treated unfairly compared to their male counterparts and that there is a hostility towards them in the newsroom (Wilson et al., 2013). Minority women journalists have said that they focus on their goals and not the discrimination (Wilson et al., 2013). Women and minorities have expressed hopes that digital media may ameliorate some of these tensions (Wilson, et al., 2013).

Digital media provide an opportunity for diversity, but depending on the content producer it may also reinforce stereotypical roles and images. In a study examining images on YouTube, Kopacz and Lawton (2011) coded for the role of American-Indians speaking. While American-Indians spoke within clips, most American-Indians were not introduced to their audience and therefore their visibility was considered anonymous. Along with no acknowledgement, more than 84 percent of the videos did not mention the discrimination of the culture (Kopacz & Lawton, 2011). The images shown of American-Indians were predominantly male, and the authors said mainstream needed to dump images of American-Indians that rely on the barbarian and noble savage stereotypes to socially construct American-Indians as savagely inferior and as excess baggage.
Advertising contributes to this degradation as well. American-Indian stereotypes often are used as brands designed to sell products. A culture as a product encourages non-Natives to treat Native people as objects not as people (Sanchez, 2012; Merskin, 2001). By treating American-Indians as objects, society judges them as a possession that can be bought at will and discarded when no longer valuable (Sanchez, 2012; Merskin, 2001). For example, the Land O’Lakes logo is a stereotypical image of a woman kneeling to a lesser power position in society (Wilson, et al., 2013; Merskin, 2001). From the PowWows to the sports mascot to the “cigar Indian,” these accepted images become naturalized within white culture; if not, the images’ use would not be permitted (Kopacz & Lawton, 2011; Merskin, 2001).

Images of American-Indians in advertising also include the reader “playing Indian” or the image of the Indian to portray something “exotic” (Wilson, et al., 2013, p. 40; Phillips, 2012). Both of these images distance readers by having them “play” a culture or an unnatural role. Therefore, the concept of the American-Indian becomes again an experience to sell (Phillips, 2012).

American-Indians are so forcefully exploited by advertising because the profit-driven industry is concerned with targeting the mass audience, not the one percent (Wilson et al., 2013). However, this group is relatively young and growing. Native growth rate had a 17.2 percent purchasing power gain compared to other minorities such as African-Americans (10.2 percent) and whites (7 percent). American-Indians are a relatively young group with median age of 32 compared to whites at 39.2 (Wilson et al., 2013). Purchasing power for American-Indians currently is 0.6 percent and equals $64.7 billion. By 2014, Native purchasing power is expected grow to $82.7 billion (Wilson et al., 2013).
If advertisers and the media want to stay relevant, these groups will have to adjust to the changing demographics (Wilson et al., 2013). The racial composition of the United States is changing so that the white majority will be minority by 2050 (Lieber, 2013). Over the past ten years, people of color added 27 million persons to the overall population (Wilson, et al., 2013).

Mass media treat minority audiences as a “fringe audience”- an audience that does not directly affect their financial bottom line (Wilson, et al., 2013; Sanchez, 2012). The goal of the mainstream media is to produce content to attract a large similar group of people – hence the term “mass.” Mass media cover stories in a way that will attract the largest number of news consumers (Wilson, et al., 2013; Sanchez, 2012). The mainstream media reinforced the dominant European Colonial ideology that has been around since the 1600s instead of challenging this view of American-Indians and running the risk of alienating the mass audience (Wilson, et al., 2013; Sanchez, 2012).

**Countering Stereotypes: Increasing Native Journalists and Improving Education**

One proposed solution to counter stereotypical images of American-Indians in mainstream and non-Native media is to increase the number of Native media professionals. In mainstream media, there were 292 American-Indian newspaper journalists of 56,200 (McAuliffe, 2000). The reason there are not more Native journalists in the mainstream press deals with “complex cultural, social, educational and linguistic barriers erected and welded into place by our history” (McAuliffe, 2000, para. 5). Some scholars note that because of these barriers, Natives do not even consider journalism as a career (Avila Hernandez, 2012).

Another proposed solution is improved education, such as multiculturalism courses in college journalism schools that would require more American-Indian inclusion in journalism. Some scholars have argued that those who are American-Indian should focus on producing
research rather than being a subject in a non-Native person’s project (Mihesuah, 1996; Swisher, 1996). Native scholars relaying their experiences and their way of life allow for a more accurate depiction of American-Indians to future scholars and to students (Mihesuah, 1996; Swisher, 1996).

Critical to education is a clearer understanding of American-Indian history. To understand the importance of Native stories, non-Native readers must understand whose history is recorded within the United States (Meness, 2012). When the “founding fathers” drafted the Constitution, groups like women and minorities were not part of “We the People.” When the “founding fathers” wrote about “all men” this meant white men (Watson, 2012; Keever, et al., 1997).

Clearly, “the founding fathers,” in the Constitution, established an in-group of white men and, subsequently, an out-group, comprised of the “others” or minorities (Keever et al., 1997). For instance, not one United States treaty has been completely honored with those who are Native; American-Indians have been the only group that the United States government actively sought, and legislated, to “exterminate” (Watson, 2012; Keever et al., 1997). Nearly 60,000 people died as a result of the Indian Removal Act of the 1830s which resulted in the Trail of Tears (Watson, 2012; Keever et al., 1997). During the 19th century, the United States designed schools to “Kill the Indian, save the man” (Meness, 2012, p. 96). The last of these residential schools operated as late as 1989 (Meness, 2012). Children were placed in schools often run by churches to “civilize” them and to rid them of their Native culture. These children were starved, sexually assaulted, forced to work, and tortured. Survivors often relied on alcohol and other drugs to cope and some committed suicide (Meness, 2012). The trauma from these schools passed down from one generation to the next, and some believe resulted in spousal and child
abuse (Meness, 2012). This history, packaged quickly here in a few paragraphs for the sake of clarity, is essential for non-Native media professional to understand to improve representations of American-Indians.

Historians have written about what they feel is the unfair treatment of American-Indians, but no set norm and routine for addresses this community (Fixico, 1996). Institutional Review Boards at some universities consider American-Indians a sensitive research group such as young children and pregnant women because this group has been treated so poorly (University of New Mexico, 2013). The sensitivity of this ethnic group also extends to how Natives are exploited in the press and should address how the media should cover/not cover sacred events such as ceremonies and typically open events such as PowWows (Fixico, 1996).

The history of American-Indians has been written mostly by white males who haven’t asked those who are Native what they think (Wilson, 1996; Swisher, 1996). Since Colonial times, Native history has been written by non-Natives - recording their interpretation of American-Indian history for American-Indians (Meness, 2012; Wilson, 1996). This has affected how people view American-Indians and even how Native people view themselves and their surroundings (Meness, 2012).

Excluding Native people in the recording of Native history may raise a moral and ethical dilemma (Fixico, 1996; Wilson, 1996). Authentic perspectives allow more accurate research and depictions of minority communities – counteracting the outsiders’ perspective (Mihesuah, 1996). Some historians have treated Native people as the “other,” different from writers and readers. These same historians did not interview Native people for historical records (Fixico, 1996; Wilson, 1996).
The stereotypical and invisible display of American-Indians goes back to the first paper published in the United States, *Publick Occurrences*; the first issue reported on the “savages” that threatened their existence (Sanchez, 2012; Keever et al., 1997). Reporting about “savages” represented a Colonial view that assumed the reader was part of the dominant societal group (Watson, 2012; Keever et al., 1997).

The painful past, often ignored by whites, sets the stage for continuing impact on communities. For example, one of the worst crimes against Natives occurred during the 1862 “Dakota-U.S. Conflict.” On the Dakota reservation in Minnesota, thirty-eight men were hanged and thousands of people were placed captive (Minnesota Historical Society, 2013). The United States abolished the Dakota reservation area and forced the tribe into Nebraska and South Dakota (Minnesota Historical Society, 2013).

To this day, while the Dakota community health and living conditions have improved, the community is still recovering (Trahant, 2011a). The latest U.S. Census numbers on the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota are more than a decade old, which is telling in itself. Demographic data collection on American-Indian communities is not always reliable in part because of inconsistent definitions (Trahant, 2011b). Pine Ridge is considered the nation’s poorest reservation, located in three of the poorest counties in the U.S. Nearly 40,000 people live here with an average income of $4,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Individuals living on this reservation are eight times more likely to get diabetes and/or tuberculosis, five times more likely to get cervical cancer, and twice as likely to get heart disease (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). One in four newborns have fetal alcohol syndrome, and the infant mortality rate is three times the rate of the rest of the nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The suicide rate is twice the national rate, four times higher for the rate for teens. Pine Ridge has the lowest life expectancy rate in the
United States; Haiti being the only place in the Western Hemisphere with lower life expectancy (U.S. Census Bureau s, 2000).

With greater access, organizations such as NAJA have been training Native journalists in advancing coverage through digital media. The University of Oklahoma, along with the NAJA, has held annual new media conferences for Native journalists (Jeff Harjo, Executive Director, NAJA, personal communication, March 16, 2012). In 2012, the focus of the one-day conference was on hearing from those within Native media who provide news by social media such as Tom Arviso, executive editor and publisher of *Navajo Times*, and Bryan Pollard, executive editor, *Cherokee Phoenix* (Jeff Harjo, Executive Director, NAJA, personal communication, March 16, 2012). In the second year of the conference, twenty-two participants learned a more hands-on approach to digital media such as how to use programs such as PhotoShop and InDesign as well as social media (Jeff Harjo, Executive Director, NAJA, personal communication, March 16, 2012).

Another proposed solution to rectify false images of American-Indians is to incorporate Native media and Native voices. The history of the United States, and the relative exclusion of the American-Indian side of that narrative, has been unsettling for the American-Indian community - even more reason why many call for Natives to write about Native topics whether in journalism or scholarly work. The inclusion of these Native voices, both in journalism and education, would allow for a breadth and depth concerning the stories told about this community (Cook-Lynn, 1996).

…how the Indian narrative is told, how it is nourished, who tells it, who nourishes it, and the consequences of its telling are among the most fascinating -- and, at the same time, chilling -- stories of our time  (Cook-Lynn, 1996, p. 57).
Voices from those who are Native are missing from history and from present research (Wilson, 1996; Swisher, 1996; Wilson et al., 2013). Non-Native authors are often cited and noted as the “experts” on Indian issues even though others who are Native are available. For this to change, tribal and family historians as well as other Natives should be asked about how they feel about what has been written and still needs to be discussed (Swisher, 1996; Wilson, 1996).

Natives writing about Native issues provide an intellectual voice beyond stereotypes (Cook-Lynn, 1996). Even though American-Indians proportionately served in the military at higher rates than any other minority group, when assessing images from World War II, the savage stereotype still remained (Wilson, et al., 2013). The one exception to this rule was the Navajo Code talkers who were the anti-thesis to the savage stereotype (Wilson et al., 2013). Clearly, the barriers described here, a lack of desire for diversity in media, a lack of educational understanding of American-Indian history, and a lack of Native voice inclusion influence what decisions American-Indians make about journalism as a whole (Avila Hernandez, 2012).

Some attempts have been made to incorporate American-Indian attitudes toward journalism. To provide American-Indians with journalism opportunities, universities in Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin hold summer programs for Native high school students interested in journalism (Hamilton, 1996; McAuliffe, 2000). The Freedom Forum, a non-partisan foundation which supports free press, speech, and spirit, hosts the annual American Indian Journalism Institute, in hopes to provide tools for young people to learn more about the discipline (Freedom Forum, 2013). The University of Montana, at one time, had the largest number of American-Indians in a journalism program. The University of Minnesota held a 10-week training and newspaper internship for those with a four-year degree in journalism; the students took classes for three days a week and then worked in area newspapers as reporters for
two days (McAuliffe, 2000). The Native American Newspaper Career Conference held in South Dakota had more than 70 high school students and created a mentoring programming with South Dakota newspapers and students. Many of these students will be the first generation in their family to go to college (McAuliffe, 2000, para.5).

Summary

This dissertation seeks to understand how digital media are, or aren’t, changing American-Indian storytelling. Tethered to that question is how American-Indians perceive their role in breaking stereotypes. Thus, based on past research on minority and digital media this exploratory study seeks to answer the following questions:

RQ1: How is the cultural ritual of Native storytelling connected to reporting by Native media?

RQ2a: How are digital media changing the routine of reporting on Native issues?

RQ2b: How are digital media changing Native reporters’ news coverage routine?

RQ3: How can the use of digital media break down barriers between mainstream and Native media to advance the visibility of this community?

RQ4: To understand the future of Native news, how did current Native journalists become interested in the profession?

RQ5: As digital platforms change, what do Native journalists recommend that young Native people learn to become effective professional storytellers?

The following chapter discusses the methodology for this study; essentially, how I information to answer the theoretically informed research questions. Questions which address the impact of digital media on advancing the American-Indian community beyond stereotypical views.
Chapter 3
Method

This research seeks to understand how digital media may be changing storytelling by Native news organizations. The study conducted in-depth interviews with Native journalists and observed Native newsrooms. To identify which news organizations to observe and which Native journalists to interview, I relied on professional organizations such as the Native American Journalists Association and snowball sampling. I conducted interviews of Native journalists on the phone, in person, over email, and through messages on social media.

In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews are appropriate as digital media are still evolving and therefore research in this area is exploratory. Digital media research, coupled with a focus on American-Indian media, adds to this exploratory study because little research has been conducted on American-Indian media. To understand where to begin on a topic not yet fully studied, in-depth interviews enabled me to gather comprehensive background and develop a variety of inclusive topics relating to Native digital media.

The strength of qualitative interviews lies in the researcher’s ability to immerse him/herself into a research setting and to provide detailed description (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Detailed description is built by the researcher conducting interviews as a “conversation with a purpose” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 171). For this study, I created a guideline which I used while conducting interviews (see Appendix A).

In-depth interviews typically contain smaller sample sizes, but provide great detail about the interviewees’ opinions such as “values, motivations, recollections, experiences, and feelings” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 135). The interviews are typically long, unlike survey research questions that may take only minutes to answer. In contrast to survey research, in-depth
interviews may take hours for the researcher to gain a full understanding of the answers given (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006).

Another divergence from survey research is that in-depth interviews are not generalizable to the overall population. The sample is typically non-random and the data are used not to make statements about the entire population, but instead to generate insights on a topic that has been underexplored (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). This study hopes to provide as much detail, depth, and understanding possible on American-Indian digital media so that perhaps more generalizable research may be conducted in the future.

This research is exploratory and concerned with what the interviews mean culturally, not necessarily looking for overtly categorized quantitative descriptions. Therefore, qualitative thematic categories are a more conducive instrument for exploring Native storytelling within the context of digital media.

**Snowball Sample**

I relied on snowball sampling within the American-Indian community. Snowball sampling is contacted as the “researcher randomly contacts a few qualified respondents and then asks these people for names of friends, relatives, or acquaintances…” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 99). I attempted to effectively speak with a variety of people within the American-Indian community.

It was interesting that the research produced a surprising outpouring of American-Indians contacting me - noting that they wanted to participate with an American-Indian student conducting American-Indian research. Journalists and families from across the country contacted me by email, Facebook, Twitter, and Google +. American-Indian news and professional organizations were especially supportive in recruitment. Native publications posted online the
reviewer’s request for interviews. She also contacted Native journalists with whom she had relationships and connected with several individuals through Native pages on Facebook.

As I spoke to Native journalists, I was referred to other American-Indians who have made strides in the communication discipline. The snowball sample led her to contact the Native American Journalists Association (NAJA), of which she is now a member. I attended the Unity/NAJA conference in August 2012, the month after I conducted most of my interviews. At this conference in Las Vegas, I was able to interview additional journalists about the future of Native media. Having a large number of American-Indian and other ethnic journalists all in the same conference hall, attending this event allowed me to be inclusive in who I interviewed.

Multiple minority organizations, Native and others, had enthusiasm about this study and assisted with interview recruitment. Minority-focused research organizations such as Howard University and the Minority and Communication division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) placed this study’s information on their organizations, email circulation. Specific individuals from Howard and AEJMC also e-mailed me to offer support and/or ideas about the research.

I contacted multiple mainstream news organizations to seek out assistance in finding research interviewees. I emailed the Poynter Institute, Knight Foundation, Scripps Research Institute, McCormick Foundation, and Pew Research Center for guidance in recruitment. However, the main response and assistance from this research was within Native and minority organizations.
Research Process

My goal was to interview tribally independent Native news organizations and to speak with journalists from newspaper, radio, and television. I was able to visit and/or interview Native journalists from each of these mediums, which resulted in 41 American-Indian journalists. Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 3 and ½ hours.

I conducted interviews of Native journalists on the phone, in person, over email, and through messages on social media. I spent a week in New Mexico/Arizona where two main Native news organizations are located. The Manship School of Mass Communication as well as Larry and Susan Patrick of Patrick Communications helped fund the research travel.

Telling to this study, Facebook was a crucial method in reaching Native journalists. If I had a hard time getting in contact with a person by phone or email, replies were nearly instantly on Facebook. Instant Facebook replies also occurred when I conducted follow-up questions for this study.

Thematic Analysis

To provide a transparent audit of my research process, firstly I transcribed each interview. Secondly, after transcription I printed all of the interviews. Thirdly, I placed the printed copy of the interviews into themes. Fourthly, the themes were then rechecked electronically by searching for key terms within the word file and by placing each of the hard copy themes in an overall organized folder with sections for each theme. While the research is not quantitative the themes were checked and rechecked so that accuracy could be insured.

I tried multiple qualitative computer programs to evaluate the transcribed interviews; however, found the most fruitful analysis process was to listen to the interviews and type each one up myself. The interviews for this study resulted in 162 pages of transcription. The unit of
analysis for this study was each interview. The frequencies for each theme are the following: history/context = 12, storytelling = 10, digital media = 10, and youth/future = 9. The operationalized definition for each category along with an example from the data is included below:

**History/context.**

History/context includes the background of American-Indian and American-Indian media which also details the importance of tribes, community, and culture.

One of the most basic things that I think a lot of mainstream journalists miss is that each tribe is unique. They have their own history. Their own traditions. They have their own ways and their own cultural identity is succinct from all the other tribes. There may be similarities here and there (Bryan Pollard, Executive Editor, Cherokee Phoenix, personal communication, February 14, 2012).

If something positive, you are going to have something negative so there is a lot of history here in journalism (Marley Shebala, Senior Reporter, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012).

**Storytelling.**

Storytelling consisted of the importance of the role of language, storytelling, and authentic Native voices (Native people speaking about Native issues).

Storytelling is always changing by technology. Just the idea of the written word - as opposed to writing it down - has changed the nature of storytelling. The internet is just another example of that (Mark Trahant, journalist, Trahant Reports, personal communication, April 10, 2012).

Storytelling is very important still to Native communities and the fact that Native stories aren’t told by the mainstream media. You know, if we don’t tell them who will? I think that it is really important to people that they are accurate and authentic Native stories about our communities whether they are urban or rural, as opposed to the kind of iconography that has developed around Indians (Peggy Berryhill, President/General Manager, KGUA, personal communication, January 3, 2012).
Digital media.

The category of digital media discussed the impact of technology and digital platforms such as websites, podcasts, mobile applications (including live streaming), Facebook, and Twitter. The digital media category also noted how this platform may allow for American-Indian voices to surface within non-Native media and therefore, combat Native stereotypes.

I think it is getting a little bit faster paced. With technology, everyone can go online and get whatever they want, but for the Navajo Times in particular, I think it is steady (Shondiin Silversmith, Intern, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012).

For one thing new media, new technology allows us to tell our story quicker (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012).

With the development of new technology, a lot of the stations are podcasting so we just upload all our programs on there so they can download them (Will Kie, Associate Producer, Native America Calling, personal communication, June 2012).

Youth future.

Lastly, the category of youth/future emerged from the discussion of digital media and digital media/stereotypes. Native journalists noted the importance of Native youth voices in tribal and non-Native newsrooms as media move to digital platforms.

More youth must be encouraged to learn what I know, although I have personally trained 20 editors and they are now working elsewhere (Jeanie Greene, Reporter/Anchor, “Heartbeat Alaska”, personal communication, December 7, 2012).

We started another young lady this morning. She is going to the University of New Mexico. She has good writing talent. So I said let’s take a chance on her. Let’s see what we can do. We have three interns here. College interns working now. Actually four. We hired another lady working in our graphics departments. So we have four students here, all Navajos, that we think really have talent and basic ability to write and do their graphics so we are encouraging them to stay in the field so that’s a big part of what we do (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012).
Interviews

For this study, I had a guide for interviews (see Appendix A), but, as qualitative scholars suggest, I approached interviews with a delicate balance of asking questions and then asking follow-up questions which arose from the interview (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The questions included in the guide probed journalists about their thoughts on how Native media may be changing with digital platforms and how this may or may not be advancing understanding of the Native community.

Participant Observation

Along with interviews, I attempted to be a “fly on the wall” as I visited Native news organizations. At the Navajo Times, I had my own desk which was located among the reporters. I was able to witness how journalists went about covering stories and hear how stories changed before publication. While I spent most of my time at the Navajo Times, I also attempted to take in the surroundings of Koahnic Broadcast Corporation’s Albuquerque offices.

I attempted to be a “participant-as-observer” where I was aware of the actions that took place within a newsroom, but did not become fully involved in the routine (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 147). Lindlof and Taylor (2002) posit that a major part of participant observation is to understand the language used within the scene. Since I worked in newspaper, radio, and television and is from a Native background, I feel my experience and cultural awareness allowed her to grasp some of the routines observed within American-Indian media. I took diligent notes during the interview and observation stages of the research. As Lindlof and Taylor (2002) recommend, I kept multiple journals filled with notes as I conducted this research.
Native Journalists Interviewed

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) explain that it is essential that a researcher receive at least a tentative agreement from a gatekeeper in a newsroom. I contacted news managers at the *Navajo Times*, Koahnic Broadcast Corporation (KBC), and *Indian Country TV* for permission to visit and interview employees. Within these organizations, I interviewed Native journalists who had influence on the overall Native news product (see Appendix B). I believe that it is crucial to interview not just journalists with bylines or experience in front of the camera, but also as many news workers as possible to understand why news is produced in its final form. Journalists interviewed included news managers, reporters, producers, anchors, photographers, graphic design artists, and news production. For a full list of those interviewed and images of news organizations web sites please see Appendix B and C.

**Researcher obligation.**

I understand that I have an obligation when it comes to project transparency (Singer, 2009). This obligation is especially important with the American-Indian community since it has often been misrepresented. I received Institutional Review Board approval before conducting interviews for this project. I emailed those I interviewed with study information and a confidentiality statement (see Appendix D).

**Main Native Organizations Visited**

*Navajo Times.*

The *Navajo Times* is a for-profit newspaper that is tribally independent located in Window Rock, Arizona. The Navajo Tribal Council along with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Department of Education started this paper as a newsletter in 1959. A year later the council published it in a newspaper form (Navajotimes.com, 2012). While the paper started as a weekly,
it did publish daily for three years and because it couldn’t financially survive in this form, returned to a weekly publication. This *Navajo Times* has the largest circulation of *all* American-Indian papers at close to 25,000 subscribers. The paper estimates that with the electronic edition and website it has around 150,000 readers a week.

The paper’s mission is first to inform the Navajo people, the Native community, and then the rest of the world (Navajotimes.com, 2012). The Navajo Nation does not control the news content or editorials in the paper (Navajotimes.com, 2012). However, the newspaper operates and adheres to the laws of the Navajo Nation, which include equal rights for men and women and “freedom of religion, speech, press, and the right of assembly” (Navajo Nation Code, 2009, p. 2).

The *Navajo Times* executive officer and publisher, Tom Arviso, recommended that I visit during the “Healing the Earth Gathering” held the third week of June 2012. This was scheduled to be in Flagstaff, Arizona, near the San Francisco Peaks at one of the Navajo Nation’s four sacred mountains (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, February 14, 2012). However, because what is believed to be issues with the water settlement in the area, the annual festival did not take place (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, February 14, 2012). The cancellation of this festival did not occur until after I was already on the reservation. The cancelling of the event may be just as an important part of this area’s story as if it had taken place and will be discussed later in this research.

The *Navajo Times* staff includes 30 people. The staff consists of eight reporters, two of whom are non-Native and freelance for the paper. Prominent Native journalists interviewed include Tom Arviso, Navajo, CEO and Publisher, and Marley Shebala, Navajo, an award-
winning senior reporter. Arviso, a graduate of Arizona State University, is known for separating the *Navajo Times* from tribal control and Shebala for her investigations of tribal presidents’ misuse of funds (BusinessJournalism.org, 2011). Additional *Navajo Times* journalists interviewed for this study are included in Appendix B.

**Koahnic Broadcast Corporation (KBC)**

Burt Poley is a Hopi/Laguna radio journalist and former Network Manager at the Koahnic Broadcast Corporation’s (KBC) Native Voice One (NV1) distribution network located in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Through the snowball sample, he contacted me (Burt Poley, Network manager, NV1, personal communication, December 28, 2011). I received permission from Poley to visit KBC’s Albuquerque facilities. KBC’s headquarters are in Anchorage, Alaska, and its mission is to be the leader in bringing Native voices to Alaska and the nation. I visited KBC’s downtown Albuquerque facilities when I visited the *Navajo Times*, since these two media organizations are geographically within three hours of each other by car.

KBC’s satellite office operates two national news services, and a national program distribution service serving Native radio stations across the country (Joaqlin Estus, News Director, KNBA, personal communication, June 18, 2013). KBC produces the daily 5-minute news program *National Native News*, and a one-hour daily call-in show *Native America Calling*, and a weekly one-hour music/talk show *Earthsongs*, as well as occasional one-hour radio documentaries (Joaqlin Estus, News Director, KNBA, personal communication, June 18, 2013. NV1 distributes these programs to more than 200 radio stations across the country (Joaqlin Estus, News Director, KNBA, personal communication, June 18, 2013.

NV1 enables Native people, especially those who do not have access to the many reservation and village-based Native owned and operated stations, to stay connected. Many
Native stations and independent radio producers contribute Native-oriented programs to NV1 for inclusion in the NV1 program service (NV1.org, 2012).

In Albuquerque, there are six permanent KBC employees (KoahnicBroadcast.org, 2013). Three employees are American-Indian, with multiple tribal bloodlines including Pueblo and Navajo. The other three employees are non-Native (Will Kie, Associate Producer, *Native America Calling*, personal communication, May 16, 2013).

Koahnic Broadcast Corporation is a non-profit Alaska radio station located in Anchorage. ""Koahnic"" is an Athabascan word in the Ahtna dialect meaning "live air"" (KoahnicBroadcast.org, 2013, para. 2). KBC has nearly 20 paid employees, and, at its Anchorage-based radio station KNBA, 21 volunteer radio hosts (KoahnicBroadcast.org, 2013). The primary KBC journalists interviewed are the following:

- Antonia Gonzales, Navajo, Anchor/Producer *National Native News*, University of New Mexico graduate, former reporter KBIM/Carlsbad Bureau
- Will Kie, Pueblo, Associate Producer *Native America Calling*, Southwestern Polytechnic Indian Institute and University of New Mexico graduate
- Joaqlin Estus, Tlingit, news director, KNBA (KBC station based in Anchorage, Alaska), former public relations director for the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, reporter KTOO/Juneau and Minnesota Public Radio, and jobs in coastal management, history, and archives for federal and state agencies, and for tribal organizations

**Indian Country Communications: News from Indian Country and IndianCountryTV.com**

The last organization I had planned to visit was Indian Country Communications in Hayward, Wisconsin; however, the week before her visit there were multiple arson fires and the visit was canceled (Paul DeMain, Executive Director and Publisher, NFIC/IndianCountryTV.com, personal communication, July 17, 2012). Indian Country Communications publishes the newspaper *News from Indian Country* (NFIC) and
IndianCountryTV.com. NFIC is a national Native newspaper and has 14 issues a year, each available electronically. The sister media component to NFIC is IndianCountryTV.com, which includes an online news site, daily video news segment distributed through social media and email, and a mobile application.

Executive director Paul DeMain recommended that I visit during the “Honor of the Earth PowWow,” as there is a huge gathering during this time (Paul DeMain, Executive Director and Publisher, NFIC/IndianCountryTV.com, personal communication, February 3, 2012). The fires burned down DeMain’s RV that served as his home as was covered with wigwam structure sat outside of the news organization (Paul DeMain, Executive Director and Publisher, NFIC/IndianCountryTV.com, personal communication, July 30, 2012). DeMain was hunting in the woods at the time of the fire and was not harmed (Paul DeMain, Executive Director and Publisher, NFIC/IndianCountryTV.com, personal communication, July 30, 2012). The building that housed Indian Country Communications also had fire damage as well as a ceremonial lodge and trading post (Paul DeMain, Executive Director and Publisher, NFIC/IndianCountryTV.com, personal communication, July 30, 2012). Overall, the fires destroyed three buildings and severely damaged another. The night before this set of fires another fire burned down the Golden Eagle sweat lodge (Sawyer County Record, 2012). In replacement of this trip, I interviewed DeMain on the phone and corresponded with him and his staff through email and social media.

Paul DeMain is a well-known Native journalist and past president of the Native American Journalists Association; he is well respected by the Native American Journalists Association who recommended that this researcher visit his news organization. From Indian Country Communications staff the following journalists were interviewed:

- Paul DeMain, Oneida/Ojibwe, Executive Editor and Publisher of News from Indian Country/IndianCountryTV.com. Past-president of the Native American Journalists
Association, and member of several Native ceremonial societies (BusinessJournalism.org, 2011)

- Josh Pearson, Ojibwe, Web Producer/Editor, student at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay

### Additional Journalists

In addition to interviews conducted with Navajo Times, Koahnic Broadcast Corporation, and Indian Country Communications, below is a list of other key journalists interviewed. A full list of all journalists interviewed may be found in Appendix B.

- Mark Trahant, Shoshone-Bannock, writer, author, speaker, and Twitter poet. Past instructor at University of Idaho and University of Colorado at Boulder, former editor for the Seattle Post-Intelligence, former columnist at The Seattle Times, publisher of the Moscow-Pullman Daily News in Moscow, Idaho; Executive News Editor of The Salt Lake Tribune; a reporter at the Arizona Republic in Phoenix; and has worked at several tribal newspapers. Chairman and Chief Executive Officer at the Robert C. Maynard Institute for Journalism Education and past-president of Native American Journalists Association

- Patty Talahongva, Hopi, multimedia producer including documentaries for HBO and the National Museum of the American-Indian, 30 years as journalist, including working as reporter for KOOL-TV/Phoenix (local CBS station) and past-president of Native American Journalists Association

- Bryan Pollard, Cherokee, Executive Editor, Cherokee Phoenix, co-founder/ former managing editor of Street Roots, monthly tabloid focused on poverty issues in Portland, Oregon, photo editor at Oklahoma Institute for Diversity in Journalism. Board Member at North American Street Newspaper Association, and Louisiana State University graduate

- Shirley Sneve, Sicangu Lakota, Executive Director of Vision Maker Media (formerly Native American Public Telecommunications, Inc.), whose mission is to share Native stories with the world that represent the cultures, experiences, and values of American-Indians and Alaska Natives. Board member for The Association of American Cultures and the Arts Extension Institute and former producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting

- Peggy Berryhill, Muskogee Creek, General Manager KGUA/Pomo, California, award-winning producer and founder/president of the Native Media Resource Center, a nonprofit organization that produce Indigenous educational content to promote cross-cultural harmony
• Rhonda LeValdo, Acoma Pueblo, President of the Native American Journalists Association, Faculty in Media Communications at Haskell Indian Nations University, Producer for Native Spirit Radio at 90.1 FM-KKFI/Kansas City, MO, and reporter for National Native News and Native News Network.

• Chase Iron Eyes, Lakota, founder of LastRealindians.com, and attorney, graduate of law at University of Denver.

The next chapter, analysis, will answer the theoretically informed research questions guiding this study. The analysis section will describe the themes discovered through the data collection process and will place these themes within the context of scholarly research in ethnic and digital media.
Chapter 4
Analysis

To discover how digital media may be influencing Native media, this analysis first seeks to understand the connection between the ritual of Native storytelling and Native news coverage. Second, this research explores whether digital media are advancing the ritual of storytelling. Third, the research addresses whether Native journalists feel digital media are increasing American-Indian voices as part of the storytelling ritual. Finally, this study discusses how digital media may help provide a more multi-faceted view of the Native community: (a) by providing more voices from this community and (b) by digital media possibly increasing the number of Native journalists working in the business. This analysis begins with organizational details of the Native media included in this study to convey the diversity of Native news outlets and the similarities and differences with mainstream media.

I wanted to first understand who comprises Native media to set the scene for the rest of the analysis. Below are details on ownership and staff size for each Native organization as they may affect the news produced and therefore the news consumers receive. An interesting note, most Native news organizations are non-profit, and these organizations define profit as providing authentic Native news to its community.

Observation: Inside the Native Press

To answer the study’s overall research questions, a story must be told first about the journey of visiting, observing, and interviewing Native journalists across the country. This story begins with the primary Native media outlet interviewed for this study, the Navajo Times. The newsroom is approximately three hours from Albuquerque, New Mexico, in Window Rock, Arizona. On this drive, the interstate was surrounded by colors of the sun – orange and red
mountains in the distance. In juxtaposition to this natural scene, billboards line the sky, one with an advertisement that promotes the *Navajo Times* website.

The interstate that leads to the newspaper is a straight road that is I-40 west. Twelve miles from the newspaper drivers find a fork, forcing a decision to go left or right. Steering left connects to Indian Route 12 where the Navajo reservation is located. The newspaper’s office is on the right side of the road at the entry of the reservation. Across the street from the paper is a flea market where residents sell clothes, books, bikes, and treats such as snow cones and golden pine nuts or pinons. Pinons are popular on the reservation. Historically they were traded as currency at posts. The significance of the flea market is later understood on this trip, as the market brought up childhood memories for those working at the paper. Alastair Bitsui, a *Navajo Times* reporter, shared a story of gathering pine nuts at his grandmother’s home. Another *Navajo Times* reporter, Noel Lyn Smith, had a good-humored childhood rule – she only bought snow cones at the flea market and candy apples at the trading post.

Back across the street from the flea market, the *Navajo Times* is located in a small strip of businesses. The front of the newspaper building holds a dusty *Navajo Times* sign. As I pulled up to the newspaper in my silver rental car, I noticed a horse had been in that same parking spot before me. The newspaper had recommended getting a rental car that could handle the rougher reservation roads – the choice between a generic silver-looking car or a small sporty red car was an easy one.

Outside on the right of the paper is the reservation’s Indian Health Clinic. Behind the newspaper, the sky is lined with red sandstone rock. Window Rock actually gets its name from a circle-like window in the middle of a large piece of red rock behind tribal offices on the Navajo reservation. As you hear the assembly line of the press running at the *Navajo Times*, the back
The door of the paper opens up to reveal the red clay colored rocks that line the sky. A very symbolic scene reminiscent of the Navajo journalists’ discussion of the sacred mountains in Flagstaff. Perhaps this is a natural reminder of the community’s sacredness, as the paper’s printing press records the Navajo people’s history.

We are here to provide a service to our people. To be a communication source. To let them know what is going on with their government, their schools, their communities, what’s going on in the outside world. That’s our first and foremost reason for why we exist (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

To give a sense of the atmosphere at the *Navajo Times*, when you enter the newspaper you hear the sounds of Navajo language on the radio. The receptionist is listening and sometimes singing along in Navajo. At the time of my visit, the *Navajo Times* had a partnership with the radio station through which it recorded news headlines in the morning that were aired several times throughout the day.

The newspaper serves as more than a source of information, it also is a communal gathering place. Every morning, Navajo residents come in to sell items to newspaper employees. Little girls sell apples dipped in red cinnamon candy for a dollar. Vendors also sell in the newsroom a Navajo staple, blue mush, for breakfast that is even sold at the reservation’s gas stations. Reporters recommended that I add some sugar to the mush that vendors kept hot in coolers and then sell in a styrofoam cup with a spoon. Some journalists preferred the blue grit-like staple cooked with ash, as it reminded them of their grandmother’s food. Other mornings for breakfast you could buy homemade tamales wrapped in corn silks. The tamales would make you never eat this food again in a restaurant or from a can because they taste much better. There were also jewelry vendors. One artist sold me a bird necklace and gave me the earrings that matched because I was visiting the Navajo Nation. “They feel comfortable selling to us, but they also
visit” (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

Sometimes elderly people also would come in to the newspaper because they were lonely, while other residents would visit to size up the paper’s operation to evaluate if they wanted to share a potential news story (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012). Along with having an open door to the community, the paper also supports the reservation by giving free subscriptions to military away from home. “It is the least we can do to send them the *Navajo Times* so they have that connection at home” (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012). The military has a strong connection to the Navajo tribe with the Navajo Code Talkers who were integral during World War II. The paper also sends free subscriptions to prisoners who can’t afford it as “they are paying the price for whatever they have done wrong, but they still have that connection to us” (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

Budget cuts have left most of the schools on the reservation without a newspaper. At one time, the *Navajo Times* printed all of the school newspapers. Many at this press were saddened that media weren’t as prevalent on the reservation as it used to be. The *Navajo Times* attempts to bridge the gap that the budget cuts have left by working with schools to give them a discount on the paper so that youth can learn about local current events.

Inside the *Navajo Times*, the newsroom looked quite new. The current office is the paper’s second location. The former location was across the street near the flea market. Much like a mainstream newsroom, the newspaper’s space is compartmentalized. To the right, you will find the publisher, human resources and circulation. To the left, the reporters and the editor have
their desks. Down a hall and behind them, the editor sits essentially in the center of the overall building. In the back of the newspaper are the locations of the graphic, photography, sales, and printing departments.

The *Navajo Times* is the largest Native American paper and the only Native newspaper that has a printing press in-house. The paper has subscribers around the world with a paid circulation of 25,000 readers. The paper said its paid circulation really isn’t that much considering there are more than 300,000 Navajos; however, it estimates that with the *Navajo Times*’ electronic edition that subscribers receive via email and its website it has is close to 150,000 readers a week.

The paper’s coverage area is large, essentially the size of the state of West Virginia. The area includes the widespread Navajo Nation and the four corners that make up the border towns touching the reservation. There is symbolism in the paper covering these four corners. The Navajos have ceremonies for each of the four seasons (Franklin Yazzie, Human Resources Manager, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012). The paper had the first four-color system in the area, and the first item printed was a specialized cartoon by Charles Schulz on Christmas day 1982 (Leonard Sylvan, Press Operator *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012). The overall Native flag includes four colors - red, white, yellow, and black; each color represents the compass directions, north, south, east, and west (Healy & Orenski, 2003).

The paper has ten delivery drivers who leave early Thursday morning and drop off papers throughout Arizona, Utah, New Mexico, and Colorado. Once the paper is printed, carriers line the paper’s hallway that is between the circulation department and the printing press. Navajo music played on a boom box radio and the smell of ink filled the rooms as women and male
teens wear rubber gloves to avoid ink-stained hands as they placed advertising inserts into each of the papers.

A journalist, who has been at the *Navajo Times* longer than its current printing press, was nicknamed “Mr. *Navajo Times*” by the staff. Head photographer Paul Natonabah went to school in Chicago and studied commercial art for two years. He then returned to the reservation to work at the office of Equal Economic Opportunity (EEO) and his work led him to the *Navajo Times.* Natonabah designed posters and pamphlets at the EEO. He helped a man named Chuck McCrory who was producing the newsletters with photos - taking pictures on a Polaroid camera. After the 1970 national election, that same gentleman hired Natonabah at the *Navajo Times.*

Natonabah’s newspaper office reflects the history of the paper. Behind a closed door to the right of Natonabah’s desk is the old darkroom he designed himself. The darkroom’s door has long been shut and Natonabah crops and color-corrects photos digitally on his computer.

Time had not only changed how Natonabah edited pictures, but also the enterprise of the paper. “The good thing that happened was the paper finally separated from the tribe” (Paul Natonabah, Head Photographer *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012). Natonabah said the tribal government separation increased the paper’s circulation and therefore revenue. He explained that before the separation, the paper had to submit its budget to the tribal council. “All the money we made went back to the tribe. If we needed equipment or something we had to go through all this red tape…” (Paul Natonabah, Head Photographer *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

The *Navajo Times* started in 1958 as a newsletter. The Bureau of Indian affairs, the department of education, and tribal officials thought it should start a newspaper to let the community know what was going on (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, *Navajo
In 1960, the newsletter became a newspaper and was actually copyrighted as the “Navajo Times.” The first issue came out in August of 1960 and cost ten cents. Today it costs ten times this much - a dollar.

Starting in 1984, the paper was a Monday-through-Friday publication and changed its name to the Navajo Times Today. Three years later it changed its name back to the Navajo Times when it went back to being a weekly (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012).

The Navajo Times survived what several call the 1989 Civil War in Window Rock. Allegations against then Chairman Peter MacDonald caused a deadly riot in the streets of Window Rock (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012; Marley Shebala, Senior Reporter, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012).

Our newspaper was critical of Peter MacDonald. How he campaigned and some of his business dealings he had had in prior administrations so he wasn’t too crazy about us. One of the first things he did when he got in office was he had our finances looked at investigated and basically used that to shut us down (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012).

The paper received threats, including burning down of its building. “When the riot happened that was one of the saddest days in the history of our Navajo people – we are actually killing each other over politics” (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012).

The paper reopened after three to four months. When the paper started printing again, MacDonald hired a new staff. “It started as a publication where he could do no wrong. A newsletter just for him” (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012).
After the Navajo tribal council placed MacDonald on administrative leave, the paper was restaffed again, adding Tom Arviso as executive officer and publisher (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 18, 2013).

I was in the right place at the right time. I then changed the Navajo Times back to being a real newspaper, covering all sides of stories and promoting free press (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 18, 2013).

MacDonald was later sent to federal prison on crimes connected to fraud and bribery (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

With the history of the paper and the battles it has fought to publish, as a researcher I attempted to establish trust before the interviews for this research even began. The first thing the publisher and I did was sit down with two additional news gatekeepers – the newspaper editor and the human resources manager. The three men and I sat around a table in the publisher’s office where the resume that I sent to the paper months earlier laid on the table.

To provide some transparency to this research, I grew up understanding Cherokee culture from my Cherokee grandfather, but not Navajo communities. Back to the *Navajo Times*, I sat with men the same age or a little older than my father and I sat as an outsider. Even if you are Native and/or grew up aware of Native culture, if you did not grow up in the community you are visiting, you are still an outsider.

A connection I instantly felt at the *Navajo Times* reflected a different in-group community – the newsroom. I had worked as a journalist for thirteen years, including newspaper. I also had worked in television consultation for six years where I visited stations across the country and worked with international networks.

Sitting in this meeting at the *Navajo Times* reminded me of the first time I would go into a television station for consultation. In the industry, consulting is synonymous with people
getting fired. Often the anchors, who tended to be seasoned and have had more years of experience, would cautiously look at me and wonder what I was going to say. Even then our mutual goal was for information to be clearly communicated to an audience as digital platforms changed and therefore the staff soon realized I was not a threat.

In Window Rock, the three news gatekeepers and I discussed the goals of my research. A goal of my research process was to provide transparency within a community which historically has been mistreated. I had spoken with the publisher several times before my visit. I offered to share anything that I wrote with those in the newsroom to make sure I recorded the information in the correct context.

Today the Navajo Times has a staff of more than 30. Before I conducted my first interview, the publisher walked me through the newsroom and personally introduced me to every person in the building. He explained who I was and the type of research I was hoping to conduct. He noted that I wasn’t being offensive if I was staring or watching the newspaper workers as they went through their daily routines.

I personally felt by the end of the week that I was able to witness the inner-workings of the paper and was accepted as an outside visitor. Following my week at the paper, the journalists whom I had observed arranged a lunch for me at the flea market. We all walked across the street and ate fry bread, mutton, squash and for dessert, a snow cone. What we didn’t eat we set outside to feed the reservation dogs that roam freely around town. The lunch was an adventure in itself as one of the long-time senior reporters bought a purple bike at the flea market and whizzed past us as we walked back to the paper following the lunch. My stay on the reservation, appropriately, went full circle - an outsider just seeing the flea market across the street from the paper to having a good-bye dinner here with the Navajo Times staff.
The Strong Cultural Meaning of Community

Unlike mainstream media, Native media focus on the entire community. The word community is not isolated to one person or one neighborhood. A larger thought is in place, and the overall Native community belief is that behavior happening at the microlevel affects the macro universe. Culturally it is understood that one incident is not isolated, the incident is connected to all living things. An example, discussed further in this analysis, is a story about the reservation water shortage and how horses are not receiving adequate water. The suffering of the horses will come full circle back and hurt the entire community and culture that allows for this to occur (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012).

The Navajo people historically were sheep herders. The Churro-sheep are included on the Navajo flag and seal (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012). On the reservation, this image appears on many tribal government vehicles. The importance of this animal is deep rooted and conveys the connection with nature.

People who really have a concern and take care of their animals of course they understand the relationship with the animals and animals understand their relationship with the human people. It comes from both sides. And all livestock, all animals are like that. They can tell when someone cares about them. When there is an actual relationship going on (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012).

The importance of animals was visually clear around the reservation. For example, the Navajo reservation has a zoo and even a veterinarian and livestock program.

The connection with community, nature, and life also lies in religion. The religious experience or church for many Native people is stepping outside and connecting with Nature. Nature is what some outsiders may consider American-Indian people’s place of worship with all
its balanced elements. Not doing what is best for all things on this world means essentially harm not only to the community but the Creator.

Everything is connected – Father Sky, Mother Earth, the sun, and all the elements – earth, air, fire, and water (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012; Marley Shebala, Senior Reporter, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012). All these natural elements make up the world in which Native people live in every day. These elements are part of who a person is and even what he/she writes about as a journalist. Even saying “God Bless America,” *Navajo Times* senior reporter Marley Shebala said is interesting to think about because the Navajo people believe in blessing the entire universe, supporting the full circle collective thinking.

Even within the Native media, the overall good is so understood that there is concern for those who are being reported on and how they connect to the state of the community. In mainstream media, the focus is on breaking stories and putting an individual face to a story. Story coverage, however, is different in Native media. For example, the Navajo community understands if an everyday person commits a crime such as sexual assault, a safe place to heal this event is in a tribal ceremony, not in the media. In terms of privacy, families are respected if a tragic event occurs, and it is culturally understood that there will be an “airing out of events” in a ceremonial way (Marley Shebala, Senior Reporter, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012). This cultural community style of reporting will be further discussed later in this analysis.

In a society, where everything is moving fast and media overall are moving toward personalized news for monetary and user/rating growth, Native communities appear to use digital media differently. The use is more about publishing or airing multiple Native voices by Native people rather than financial gain. As you read through the examples in this study, you’ll
see that most Native organizations are non-profits. Even more profitable papers such as the *Navajo Times* state that its goal is not money. Instead the *Navajo Times* said it feels rich by providing in-depth community information as it understands that the community is what is culturally important.

Media usage is different in Native communities than that of non-Native areas. Older generations rely on word of mouth, newspaper, and radio, while younger and more urban Native people go online and on their phones to connect. While oral storytelling is the oldest form of recorded history, ironically, Native journalists believe it is digital media that will extend and resurrect the knowledge of language and detail of storytelling. Generational and media shifts make this time a fruitful ground for research in how digital platforms may be extending Native voices.

Digital media allow for authenticity of Native voices. In the debate about the Washington Redskins name, if non-Native media really want to interview and gain a Native person’s perspective, digital media create access to sources. The choice to add an authentic Native perspective and to present non-stereotypical news is really in the hands of those who are reporting. The material is available. The question is whether news organizations want a point of view from a person directly affected by the debate and whether they take the time to educate, reach out, and perhaps accept a different point of view.

**Other Native News Organizations Interviewed**

Native media, while a part of overall ethnic media, are diverse themselves. Native news organizations range from one-person newsrooms, which reach hundreds of people in rural areas, to national news distributors that reach hundreds of thousands of people in rural and urban areas. In-depth analysis of the Native news industry illustrates the importance of truly understanding
the individual and the collective American-Indian community. While there are overarching views in Indian Country, communities that Native news organizations cover can be vastly different. Because of this diversity within a diverse group, the following Native news organizations were also interviewed for this study:

**Koahnic Broadcast Corporation (KBC)**

A national Native radio distributor observed for this study was Native Voice One (NV1), which is part of the Koahnic Broadcast Corporation. Native Voice One distributes programs such as *National Native News* and *Native American Calling*. *Native American Calling* is produced in Albuquerque, New Mexico. In juxtaposition to rural reservation media, this office is located in downtown Albuquerque. In front of the building, traffic was heavy and if you aren’t paying attention you will pass the building altogether. Six staff members work in the Albuquerque office. Half of the staff are Native with multiple tribal bloodlines and half are non-Native. The audience for KBC’s program is anyone interested in Native news. The programming for KBC is distributed across Native radio stations in the United States and reaches urban and reservation areas. An estimate of how many people are listening to KBC programs is difficult since many of the listening areas are rural (NV1.org, 2013).

Similar to some reservation media, there is a security door in the front of the KBC newsroom has a security door where a visitor must ring to get in. However, once inside the newsroom the influence of the American-Indian community is visible. For example, hanging on the wall there are awards from the Native American Journalists Association as well as a book from the historical Washington, D.C., National Museum of the American-Indian. Because of summer holidays and other vacations, some of the interviews for the radio station were later conducted via email or phone.
KNBA

Over the phone, I interviewed a journalist from KBC’s non-profit radio station in Anchorage, Alaska. KNBA-90.3 FM is the first Native urban radio station in the country and similar to most Native media, it is a non-profit media outlet. The coverage area for KNBA is across Palmer to across Hope, Alaska. Listeners can listen to this station 100 miles north and south of Anchorage, with approximately 14,000 listeners weekly. “This differs from many states due to the fact that Alaska has so much open space between ‘cities’” (Loren Dixon, KNBA Program Director, personal communication, May 29, 2013).

The radio station is a one-woman newsroom managed by news director Joaqlin Estus. Estus, a member of the Tlingit tribe, said KNBA is utilizing digital media as a virtual beat to aggregate the American-Indian online conversations, which include voices from the 26 Alaska-Native communities. Digital media are especially helpful because the station’s coverage takes a different mode of effort from that of journalists who cover nearby towns in the lower 48 states. Flying to cover a story is more likely to occur when covering a Native story than in other Alaska newsrooms as most Alaska-Natives live in rural parts of the state. Instead of driving to interview a source in a neighboring town, an Alaska journalist may have to rent a plane to interview a source in a village, which may cost hundreds of dollars.

“Heartbeat Alaska”

KNBA’s news director recommended contacting the producer of “Heartbeat Alaska” for this study. This broadcast program features Alaska Natives telling stories from their perspective. Jeanie Greene is the solo producer and reporter for this program (JeanieGreene.net, 2013). She and her husband also are the primary videographers (Jeanie Greene, Reporter/Anchor, “Heartbeat Alaska”, personal communication, June 6, 2013). Greene is Inupiat and from Alaska.
She has been a broadcast journalist for more than 20 years. Greene states on her website that she covers everyday stories of people who are Tlingit and Haida, Aleut, Inupiat, Yupik, Athabascan, and Tsimshian (JeanieGreene.net, 2013).

“Heartbeat Alaska” is aired on Coastal Television and published on Greene’s web and Facebook pages. Greene does not have rating numbers for her program as it is broadcast in mostly rural areas, and she said Nielsen ratings numbers are not available for these geographical locations (Jeanie Greene, Reporter/Anchor, “Heartbeat Alaska”, personal communication, June 6, 2013). Perhaps another measurement for “Heartbeat Alaska” is social media. On Facebook there are currently more than 5,000 users follow the program. Telling to Greene’s digital focus, the entire interview for this study was conducted through Facebook, where Greene constantly is posting news stories and even weather alerts that she feels may not be getting out through mainstream media.

**KGUA and The Native Media Resource Center**

KGUA is a project of The Native Media Resource Center (Peggy Berryhill, President/General Manager, KGUA, personal communication, June 5, 2013). Peggy Berryhill, Muskogee Creek, started The Native Media Resource Center (NMRC) in 1997 in Gualala, California. She has worked in public broadcasting for close to 40 years (KGUA.org, 2013). The organization consists of three founding members and its goal is to create content about Native people to promote racial harmony and cross-cultural understanding. NMRC provides content to organizations such as the National Museum of the American-Indian, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Koahnic Broadcasting Corporation, Northern California Cultural Communications, Inc., and Native American Public Telecommunications, Inc. (KGUA.org, 2013).
Berryhill launched KGUA as a branch of NMRC in January 2012. The radio station’s audio logo is “where we believe that we all have so much in common” (Peggy Berryhill, President/General Manager, KGUA, personal communication, June 5, 2013). KGUA’s primary signal coverage is 85 miles and reaches close to 100 miles along the coast of California from Manchester to Salt Point (Peggy Berryhill, President/General Manager, KGUA, personal communication, June 5, 2013).

Over the past year, Berryhill’s staff has grown to three part-time volunteers and the vice-president of NMRC volunteering to manage the radio station’s finances. KGUA is not aware of its exact number of users since it is a rural non-profit radio station and does not receive official usage ratings. Berryhill reports that her community is around 2,500 residents, and she believes that 25 percent of these listeners have discovered her station (Peggy Berryhill, President/General Manager, KGUA, personal communication, June 5, 2013). The station is seeking more volunteers in order to program in Spanish, English, and Native languages (KGUA.org, 2013).

**KIDE**

KIDE 91.3 FM is the first solar-power community radio station in California. Unlike the other media in this study, KIDE is a tribal affiliated radio-station. The word K’IDE is a deer antler that the Hoopa Valley tribe use as a tool or as a decorative ornament (KIDEfm.org). A fourth-grade student in a Hupa language class chose the call letters in 1977. The focus of the radio station is tribal and community news.

The radio station has four full-time staff members and five volunteer hosts which include four sports anchors (KIDEfm.org, 2013). The radio station has four main programs connected to health, medicine stories, and language. The station’s audience is comprised of about 400 listeners out of a population of 3,500 people (Joseph Orozco, Station Manager, KIDE, May 1, 2012).
KIDE is located in a shopping center behind a food market off of highway 96 in Hoopa Valley, California. On the radio station’s website, the station notes that it is located in an isolated part of Northern California that makes up the Hoopa Valley Indian Reservation (KIDEfm.org, 2013). The reservation is situated in a valley between two mountain ranges and the emerald green Trinity River flows through the community. “To reach the community, you must drive along a narrow road that hugs a mountain range 300-600 feet above the Trinity River on the valley floor” (KIDEfm.org, 2013, para.2). The radio station’s website explains that Hoopa is a physical gateway, connecting to the Yurok and Karuk tribes. Multi-cultural villages surrounded the radio stations listening area (KIDEfm.org, 2013).

**Indian Country Communications: News from Indian Country/IndianCountryTV.com**

A staple of Native journalism is Paul DeMain. DeMain is executive director and publisher for *News from Indian Country* (NFIC). This paper is produced by Indian Country Communications, Inc. and has a sister-publication online, IndianCountryTV.com (Paul DeMain, Executive Director and Publisher, Indian Country Communications, personal communication, February 3, 2012). Indian Country Communications’ publications have close to 6,000 subscribers and employs four journalists - including the executive director/publisher. Indian Country Communications is an independent, Indian-owned, reservation-based business. The business is located on the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe reservation in Hayward, Wisconsin (Paul DeMain, Executive Director and Publisher, Indian Country Communications, personal communication, February 3, 2012).

Indian Country Communications has eight stockholders and notes that it is one of the few tribally focused publications that is not owned or politically connected to a tribe. Indian Country Communication has published *News from Indian Country*, the independent Native National
Newspaper for more than twenty years (Paul DeMain, Executive Director and Publisher, Indian Country Communications, personal communication, February 3, 2012). NFIC is the oldest national Native newspaper in the United States. The paper publishes 14 issues a year in print and electronic form (Paul DeMain, Executive Director and Publisher, Indian Country Communications, personal communication, February 3, 2012). It includes national, cultural and regional sections and special-interest articles on entertainment.

*Cherokee Phoenix*

The *Cherokee Phoenix* was the first newspaper published by American-Indians and the first published in Native language. The paper started in 1828 as a symbol of renewal (Bryan Pollard, Executive Editor, *Cherokee Phoenix*, personal communication, February 14, 2012). Originally the Cherokee Nation started the paper to keep the people united and informed as the government tried to move Cherokees from their land as it was rich with resources. In its inception and today, the paper serves as the main form of communication for Cherokee people across multiple states in the southeast, allowing for authentic information (Bryan Pollard, Executive Editor, *Cherokee Phoenix*, personal communication, February 14, 2012). The *Cherokee Phoenix*’s circulation is 12,000 across the United States, and it currently has a staff size of 12 people (Bryan Pollard, Executive Editor, *Cherokee Phoenix*, personal communication, June 8, 2013).

**Native American Public Telecommunications/Vision Maker Media**

I interviewed journalists from Native American Public Telecommunications in 2012 (Nativetelecom.org, 2013). At the start of the 2013 New Year, the organization changed its name to Vision Maker Media (Shirley Kay Sneve, NAPT/Vision Maker Media, personal communication, May 15, 2013). Vision Maker Media is housed at the University of Nebraska-
Lincoln and has 25 people including student workers listed on its staff. The organization works with Native television and radio producers to create and distribute educational content across the country in urban and reservation areas. Vision Maker Media reaches 240 million people through PBS and 10,000 users through social media and email (Shirley Kay Sneve, NAPT/Vision Maker Media, personal communication, June 5, 2013). The distribution company has a strong relationship with tribal nations and Native communities to share Native perspectives across the world (Nativetelecom.org, 2013).

**Trahant Reports**

Mark Trahant is the solo journalist behind “Trahant Reports” – a blog complemented with a Twitter feed. He has more than 2,000 followers on Twitter. Trahant notes that anyone may cite the material in his columns located on his blog (Trahant Reports, 2013).

Trahant himself is a blogger, author, and former newspaper editor (Trahant Reports 2013). He is a member of Idaho’s Shoshone-Bannock Tribe and former Native American Journalists Association president. He posts daily news poems on Twitter and is currently writing a book about austerity. Recently Trahant appeared on ESPN as an expert to give a Native perspective on the debate about renaming of the Washington Redskins.

**LastRealIndians.com**

LastRealIndians.com (LRI) is powering a digital rebellion, allowing for Indigenous voices from across the world to be expressed online. Chase Iron Eyes, a Lakota lawyer, was freelancing for Native media when he decided he’d like to provide a platform through which Native voices across the world could be heard. Until 2012, Iron Eyes was writing under the moniker “Last Real Indian.” On New Year’s of 2012 at midnight he launched the website LastRealIndians.com. An updated version of the site launched on New Year’s Day 2013.
LRI began with four founding writers - identified on its site as renegade scholars. Today the site has grown to dozens of Indigenous contributors across the globe (Ruth Hopkins, Founding Writer, LRI, personal communication, June 18, 2013; LastRealIndians.com, 2013). LRI reports that user hits vary week by week; however, during peak times it has more than a million hits on Facebook and 80,000 to 120,000 hits on its websites. Founding writer Ruth Hopkins, Sisseton-Wahpeton/Mdewakanton/Hunkpapa, said “during those times we're the most popular Native media site out there (Ruth Hopkins, Founding Writer, LRI, personal communication, May 30, 2013). In the future, Iron Eyes wants LRI’s website to host live reporting across Native communities, highlighting Indigenous people in the United States, Africa, Europe, Asia, “whoever is willing to share their stories with us and who has a strong message” (Chase Iron Eyes, Lakota, Creator, LastRealIndians.com, personal communication, January 13, 2012).

Before the research questions are answered, I wanted to add an additional important point that addresses how I approached this analysis. American-Indian voices have been marginalized for hundreds of years. This analysis will allow Native voices to breathe as they answer the study’s research questions. The concept is that society has consistently shut out or ignored Native voices. This study will not do that. I want the readers to experience the unfolding, in-depth conversations with these authentic voices.

RQ1: How is the cultural ritual of Native storytelling connected to reporting by Native media?

Three key themes emerged in how Native reporting is similar to Native cultural storytelling. These themes include privacy, detailed meaning, and descriptive language. Each of these elements are connected to the overall Native culture and community.
Private or Public Reporting

When examining privacy, Native people understand that not all stories are for all people and the same is true when covering stories in a Native newsroom. Tied to cultural and spiritual beliefs, some stories culturally should not be reported or should be reported on at another time.

Concerning digital platforms, the Native media will extend some of its news coverage online while other coverage will not be included. Stories such as death are often not detailed within a Native newspaper like the *Navajo Times*. The CEO and Publisher of the *Navajo Times*, Tom Arviso, said his staff is continually cognizant that its reporting tends to incorporate the traditional Navajo beliefs. Navajo beliefs impact how the paper covers death, funerals, and domestic violence.

We are taught that there are certain things that you don’t let the public know. Even our own ceremonies… There are still things we hold sacred. And, it is because of our Navajo beliefs and culture. We stick with that (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

Arviso explained that if a person or family doesn’t want the newspaper at the funeral the paper does not attempt to cover this story. He said the paper will try to make arrangements to speak to the families involved with the funeral later on, if the families accept this idea. There are also times when people stop by the *Navajo Times* with stories about difficulties occurring in their lives. Within Navajo culture, ceremonies are held for people having hard times. Thus, even if the event is covered, that portion of the story will not be reported.

…we’ll leave it out of the story. Even though it is an important part. There are certain things we still respect. I think that is another one of our strengths (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

Senior *Navajo Times* reporter Marley Shebala noted the role of these healing ceremonies. She said the whole Navajo community is involved, again, because one person’s behavior can
have a far-reaching effect on a lot of people. Each ceremony, includes specific ways through which the victim and the perpetrator are viewed (Marley Shebala, Senior Reporter, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012). Each individual is expected to speak openly about what has happened. Shebala compared it to the “western way” of talking about a problem – talking about it “releases it.”

We always understood that that is part of our healing…and it is like oh, what a relief. I finally told everyone what I did or oh, what a relief to know everyone knows why I am acting ill or suffering… (Marley Shebala, Senior Reporter, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

Ceremonies allow for the understanding of what was done wrong so that the community knows how to pray for all involved. The community understands that when topics are addressed in ceremony it does not need to be dealt with again in the press. A ceremony allows for the airing out of information in a supportive environment versus the press.

Unlike mainstream media, Native media focus more on the privacy of the collective community than mainstream press. However, when it comes to sourcing if a person is a public official, Native journalists note the official is then serving the community and should be reported on. The officials have chosen to put themselves and their families into the public eye (Marley Shebala, senior reporter, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

Sourcing matters in tight communities. Senior *Navajo Times* reporter Marley Shebala said public officials will say to her that in the Navajo-way she is their little sister, big sister, mother, or grandmother. She said officials often ask why she is reporting negative news.

And, I tell them I was taught a long time ago when each of the clans would come together that there would be a person that would tell what was going on in the community. So the community knew what was going on….when there was something good, they were happy and everyone shared in happy. If there was something not good, everyone shared in that. They didn’t shy away from talking about sexual deviancy and I said, everything was open and even the leadership -especially leadership (Marley Shebala, Senior Reporter, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).
The history of the clans and their openness support Shebala’s feelings that public officials, as well as tribal meetings, should be open for discussion by the press and community. Historically, she said, officials didn’t “hide” in meetings when something serious happened. Noting that even if there were serious matters such as sexual deviancy, when the tribe still had organized clans, it would have a person who served as a reporter to speak openly with officials. Official information was then spread throughout the tribe.

**Detailed Meaning – Tied to Beliefs**

The reporting by the Native press also is different from the mainstream press in how reporters construct detailed stories. Storytelling within the Native community is a loaded word and has a complex connotation. Meaning goes beyond a definition and includes the Creator history, and lessons on how to live in the present and future.

There’s different types of stories that people talk about. The beginning of the Navajo life, all the way through changing woman to birth of changing woman to white shell woman, and the different worlds we have lived in. I think we are going into our fifth world. The different ceremonies, they all have significant meaning to it. How it started, the purpose of the ceremony, and the end results of those ceremonies is of course the well-being of the patient (Franklin Yazzie, Human Resources Manager, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

This meaning-making matches the overall Native culture perfectly with journalism – crafting narrative in a manner to understand a story and a phenomenon. Native news masters a main element within journalism and that is telling stories that connect to life and communities.

There is more emotion (in covering Native stories). There is more of a human element – attachment to the animals and vice versa. So when we have a problem like with what is going on with the horses, there is an abuse there (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

Details are important in stories such as abuse because these stories reflect a larger cultural story. For example, discussing roaming horses not receiving enough water is more than an investigative
story in the newspaper. The abuse reflects how Navajo lives might be changed in the future because the land and animals are lacking essential survival resources.

In the Navajo culture, you aren’t supposed to do that. If you have horses running wild and starving and they are getting all chewed up and dying, that is really disrespectful to them and ultimately it will come back and hurt us as a people (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

The tragedy surrounding horses may appear as a sad isolated story if viewed from a mainstream media perspective. However, the story is tied to violations of Native beliefs. Abuse is not just a violation of law, but has a greater effect on the overall community and therefore the world.

Bill Donovan, a non-Native reporter from Kentucky who freelances for the mainstream local paper and has worked for the *Navajo Times* off and on since the 1970s, explained the differences between when he writes a story for the *Navajo Times* versus the *Gallup Independent*.

I can’t get the people at the *Gallup Independent* to understand. A lot of time when I write a story for the *Independent*, they rework it. They say it is not in the traditional journalism mode. But when I write a story for the *Navajo Times*, it is better with more detail… you see me write a story for the *Independent* and the newspaper here on the same subject, it is sometimes different because of that (Bill Donovan, Freelance reporter, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

Reporting from the perspectives of different communities took some research by Donovan. In 1968, Donovan was a police reporter covering civil rights at a mainstream paper in Kentucky and met a Navajo man he called by his last name “Triplett.” Triplett was working in the police department and also was covering civil rights issues. The Navajo man told Donovan to “go cover the Navajos because no one else is” (Bill Donovan, Freelance reporter, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012). Donovan said that he didn’t know anything about the Navajo community.
“Triplet” had what Donovan called a Native sense of humor. Scholars have cited Native humor as essentially teasing of an outside group about Native culture because there is such a lack of understanding about it (Meness, 2013; Welsch, 1996).

When I went and told him I got the job, he said you realize Navajos don’t speak English. He started speaking Navajo and I said I’m never going to understand that…Don’t worry because all Navajos know sign language. So I bought a book…and all the way on the drive here I was studying that book trying to learn sign language. I have yet to find one Navajo who knows sign language. So shows you how naïve I was here (Bill Donovan, Freelance reporter, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

This good humored teasing was memorable to the Navajo staff because more than one *Navajo Times* reporter mentioned that I must hear this story before I left. The story had been passed down from staff generation to staff generation and now to me.

Radio station manager for the California Hoopa Valley tribal radio, KIDE, Joseph Orozco said he believes Native media are so important he wishes the press would have been established as a “sovereign right” in the treaties with the U.S. government. Orozco noted that he understands why it wasn’t in the treaties because at that time there wasn’t media, as we know it, much less digital media.

We didn’t have television, radio and all that…if it was a sovereign right and if the federal government had a mandate to sensitize media in Indian Country – where they have a radio station or just a newspaper or both - it would make media a viable career choice. (Joseph Orozco, Station Manager, KIDE, May 1, 2012).

**Descriptive Language – Oral and Written**

Native journalists noted that digital media are changing the ritual of storytelling by honoring the detail that resides in Native storytelling. For instance, the Navajo language is very descriptive.

I’ll have editors and it depends if they know Navajo language or not. They’ll say oh, your stories are too detailed and I say I guess that is the Navajo in me coming out. They’ll look
at me sideways and say what? I say inside joke (Marley Shebala, Senior Reporter, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

Description beyond the written word engenders an attempt to include meaning in reporting. One newspaper reporter said the use of video along with her story helps to express a deeper meaning (Marley Shebala, Senior Reporter, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

When asking newspaper employees about writing in the mainly oral language of Navajo, one older newspaper employee said he did not know how to write down the words in which he spoke. To him and others, Navajo is an oral language designed to describe and explain (Franklin Yazzie, Human Resources Manager, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012; Leonard Sylvan, Press Operator *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012). As an example of not being able to write down a word spoken is the paper’s name itself, the Navajo language translates the name of the newspaper into a “newspaper that gossips.”

When you talk about it in Navajo there is no other way that we’d translate. It is just like that – the newspaper that gossips, that talks about other people and things. In a way it can be looked at as a good thing or looked at as a negative thing (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012). Native journalists hope that digital media may help bridge the gap between the oral and written Navajo word - including between those Navajos who live on and off the reservation. The only senior reporter at the *Navajo Times* would like the paper to be able to digitally record the Navajo language and provide it as an option next to the online news stories.

You click on a button and it’ll pop up into the Navajo language and you click on another button and you’ll hear it in Navajo - being read to you because a lot of our elders they speak Navajo, but they don’t read it (Marley Shebala, Senior Reporter, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

Beyond the oral and written word, the *Navajo Times* also is attempting to create a platform for those with access on the reservation and for those in mobile areas. The tradition of
language may be changing depending on where American-Indians live. *Navajo Times* human resource manager Franklin Yazzie said his children, who live in a city, have a different need for information compared to his step-children on the reservation.

They have their jobs and they are doing well versus my step-daughters that’s income level are not as high but they know more of the Navajo language and culture versus my own children. My son says I’d rather be out here earning some decent wages. He has a home. Runs his own business. He says I don’t have to know the language. I don’t have to know the traditions as long as I get a paycheck every week. Then, versus over here, my step-daughter she says I’d rather take care of the livestock – sheep being sacred to the Navajo people. She always makes ends meet somehow. She has a part-time job. It has its checks and balances (Franklin Yazzie, Human Resources Manager, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

To address the rural-versus-urban information gap, the *Navajo Times* provides content in a weekly subscription electronic edition launched last year as well as on its website, mobile application, Facebook page, and in the traditional hard copy of the paper. The different platforms allows for Navajos, no matter their access, to be able to connect with the community coverage.

We are trying to use all (digital platforms) to draw back to our print. We are hoping our e-edition is going to kick off and bring extra funding to our paper. The way I really see it going is because of our location and our lack of infrastructure on the Navajo Nation our print edition is going to continue to be more appreciated and more needed for our local Navajo people. However, we are trying to push further out. We have 320,000 Navajos. The majority of those are 18 and under, but those are going to be the ones that start utilizing computers a lot more. So in time we are hoping it is going to kick up our e-edition subscriptions because again those are going to be the ones living out in the metropolitan areas Phoenix, Albuquerque, Denver – beyond the boundaries we are not going to be able to deliver the paper (Bobby Martin, Production Manager, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

As Native media outlets look to the future, it is the Native culture that still guides its media decisions. Stories are written and told in detail and in a descriptive manner. While this culture is rooted in history, ironically it is the new media platforms that allow a once primarily oral group to express its stories through media. Audio, video, social media, along with print
provide a fruitful multimedia platform through which Native people can produce detailed stories and share them across the world.

**RQ2a: How are digital media changing the routine of reporting on Native issues?**

No research exists that specifically discusses the norms and routines of American-Indian media. Yet, Indigenous people were the first to live on the land that now houses one of the most powerful media systems in the world. Observations from this study, as well as journalist interviews, will provide a starting point to understand Native norms and routines to facilitate understanding of how digital platforms may be impacting them. The reach of Native news is changing with digital platforms and Native journalists have their own routines in deciding what sources are credible online.

The most popular way for American-Indians to receive news is by word of mouth, radio, and/or newspaper (Guskin & Mitchell, 2012). The more rural the area in which a Native person lives the more like he/she relies on newspaper and/or radio; however, mobile and the internet are changing how even non-urban Natives receive news (Guskin & Mitchell, 2012).

Our goal is to reach everyone…whether they are living in a rural community without access to the internet or whether they have every device you can imagine. That was actually one of the reasons we started the radio show. We found that many of people who live in areas that don’t have internet connection, they listen to the radio so we felt like that was a very cost effective way to reach a huge audience of people that we were never going to reach through our website (Bryan Pollard, Executive Editor, *Cherokee Phoenix*, personal communication, February 14, 2012).

Digital media are changing the role of Native reporting by redefining how reporters produce and distribute content. Digital platform audiences have shorter attention spans and require shorter and more frequent updates (Doyle, 2010). The Native news process is no longer a waiting game for receiving or distributing information. The internet allows Native news
organizations to get information out across multiple platforms beyond the newspaper’s press run or radio air time.

**Native News Reach**

American-Indian journalists understand their community and that there is a divide, but to a degree the divide is changing. Seventy percent of those who are Native live outside the reservation, which means they may have greater access to the internet and access to digital forms of media (Williams, 2013). Meanwhile, the growth of mobile allows for residents on the reservation to rely not only on its infrastructure for internet and wireless capabilities, but to be able to log on where cell phone towers are available.

Many Native people live in rural locations. This often means an infrastructure which is not as capable of housing internet service. The infrastructure for many Native communities is one that supports the newspaper and radio media system (Guskin & Mitchell, 2012).

On the reservation itself not too many people have computers. Both radio and the newspaper are the information that is sent out to other people and received. I have a brother who lives out in White Corn. He lives maybe 30 miles from the Trading Post. He says every Thursday morning he gets his paper and at the same time he has his radio (Franklin Yazzie, Human Resources Manager, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

**Radio.**

Native Voice One (NV1) is a national radio company that distributes Koahnic Broadcast Corporations live call-in, news, and music programs. The turnaround time for completely pre-produced programs is typically two weeks. “If we want to replace a show, if something happens on Monday, we can replace it on Friday. So we are not as fast as mainstream in that sense” (Will Kie, Associate Producer, *Native America Calling*, personal communication, June 2012).

The company that owns NV1 is Koahnic Broadcast Corporation (KBC). The broadcast corporation’s office in downtown Albuquerque, New Mexico is where NV1 produces most
programs (Will Kie, Associate Producer, *Native America Calling*, personal communication, June 2012). KBC also owns the only American-Indian owned-and-operated radio station in an urban environment - KNBA in Anchorage, Alaska.

*Utilizing digital platforms for content and sourcing*

Joaqlin Estus is the news director at KBC’s KNBA and the only employee at the radio station. Estus said she had to adjust to working in a one-person newsroom. She came from Minnesota Public radio where the station had other journalists in the newsroom and they could brainstorm on stories. She also had a station vehicle that she could use to cover stories.

In comparison to Minnesota, if Estus wants to report on an Alaska village outside of Anchorage she gathers her information by phone or online. She said some Alaska reporters take commercial flights to cover sources, but because of the financial limitations of travel she spends hours a day looking for stories on the internet. She said this is a change from when she first started working in radio and received most information by phone or fax. Now she said she can get a year’s worth of information in minutes online versus just a two-to-three page fax.

She has her own routine in how she manages information from social media. If the information is provided by a public information source she will report on it – treating it as if she received that information through more traditional routes such as email or phone. However, if information is in the format of a personal social media post or Tweet she will not include this information on the radio.

I think it is unethical actually to just rely on other people’s reporting. If I read something like Alaska dispatch, which is an online news source I’d use it. We go to them for a lot of good stories. I always go back to the original source and quote the document that they might have also used, or I’d interview the people that they talk with and basically write my own story. Now the only thing I actually take off the internet is the Associated Press or from the Alaska Public Radio Network (Joaqlin Estus, News Director, KNBA, personal communication, July 17, 2012).
Estus, the sole content gatekeeper in the newsroom, struggles when deciding what stories to cover. She said she is constantly checking the rundown of content she puts on air because she doesn’t want it to be her own news agenda. She also said she had to come to grips with covering stories that other Alaska radio journalists would also report within her on organizational network. Her station is a part of the Alaska Public Radio Network and she said she would be concerned when she’d actually go out on stories and there would be other reporters from the same network; then she realized that being Native she had a different concept of covering news:

My perspective as an Alaska Native is completely different than that as a non-Native. My mission is different so if I go to a statewide event like suppose I go to a candidate’s forum and all kinds of reporters are there and they are all asking the candidates all these types of questions, everything from oil and gas developments to revenues to state agencies and that sort of thing. Well, I will listen to everything they say and if I ask questions, it’ll be related to Alaska-Natives so I think no matter what the event I’m pulling out something different than the other reporters are (Joaqlin Estus, News Director, KNBA, personal communication, July 17, 2012).

An example of the difference between Native and mainstream coverage lies in story selection. For example, Estus notes in Alaska climate change is affecting Native people’s lives. Alaska Natives live mostly in rural areas and depend on a consistent lifestyle of gathering food from the land and water (Joaqlin Estus, News Director, KNBA, personal communication, July 17, 2012). Changes with the climate influence decreasing food supply, which is a huge part of the rural economy. Alaska villages house regional centers where 70 percent of the community gathers food from the wild versus other villages where 90 percent of the community gets food from the wild. In the Arctic, where the permafrost is melting and the infrastructure is lacking, the villages don’t have running water, piped water, and/or flushable toilets (Joaqlin Estus, News Director, KNBA, personal communication, July 17, 2012). Instead, the villages contain a central location from which residents can haul water to their homes (Joaqlin Estus, News Director, KNBA, personal communication, July 17, 2012). Estus explains that this is lifestyle that some
mainstream news organizations may have a hard time understanding and thus reporting about. Again, this is another example of the circle of life and connection to all things in nature that most non-Natives do not understand.

Natives are more likely to see and report on issues differently because, to some degree, they live in the culture on which they are reporting. Whether in Alaska or in the lower 48 states, Indian Country overall comprehends the diversity within this community. American-Indians digest the range of lifestyle differences between Natives in rural and urban areas.

Newspapers.

Meanwhile, Native newspapers publish information at a different pace from KNBA’s daily news updates. Most tribal newspapers typically print only once a month, while some are bi-weekly (Jeff Harjo, Executive Director, NAJA, personal communication, March 16, 2012). Independent Native newspapers such as the Navajo Times print weekly. The Navajo Times at one time attempted to produce a daily product, but it wasn’t financially feasible (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012).

Unlike mainstream news organizations, print is still the most popular way to receive information for Native communities, both on the reservation and in urban areas. Most Native reporters work at Native newspapers because it is a connection to their community and their people.

To me, it’s like you have Navajo Times in the Native American media and it is like the equivalent of the New York Times in a sense. I never had the desire to going to New York Times or Washington Post or any major papers. Some journalism students do they have that ambition. But to me it was like I will go to the Navajo Times. I think that is where I can do the best, as far as I am concerned (Noel Lyn Smith, Reporter, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012).
In 2013, the Native American Journalists Association (NAJA) includes Native journalists in traditional and emerging news media. The organizations said that, unlike mainstream press, the numbers appear steady for Native print journalists. The organization has 230 members, with most members working for tribal print media. NAJA feels the print model seems to work well for many Native audiences.

Publication costs are often picked up by individual tribes, making it easier for them to survive, even in a digital age (Rebecca Landsberry, Membership and Communications Manager, NAJA, personal communication, April 17, 2013).

In addition to producing printed news content, NAJA noted that many of its members also shared messages via social media sites. NAJA has its own Facebook group on which many post questions, news, and employment needs. The organization explained that social media make it convenient for Native journalists as they can share their messages in a timely manner. This allows them the same freedom as other online formats without an associated cost (Rebecca Landsberry, Membership and Communications Manager, NAJA, personal communication, April 17, 2013).

Newspaper use.

For non-Natives it is important to understand how Native news consumers read the newspaper. While on the reservation, I personally witnessed readers getting up at the crack of dawn to get their *Navajo Times*. The reading of the paper appeared to be a ritual much like morning coffee. Traditionally, families see the paper as a record extending history (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012). From their experiences, Native journalists explained that the paper isn’t skimmed for headlines, but instead read and re-read. One paper is shared across a family, making it hard to calculate the exact number of Native readers (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).
People will buy the paper and they take it home and it is shared with 7 or 8 other people in the family. It doesn’t just sit there on the counter. It’s read over and over for like a whole month. Most newspapers you can read in 10 to 15 minutes. That is it and they are done, but our newspaper has a lot longer life (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

The weekly *Navajo Times* is hefty –lending it to being read more than once. The paper includes three sections, and each section is 10 to 12 pages in length, containing detailed community stories. The paper appears much thicker than mainstream dailies or even weekly papers, as they are shrinking with economic downsizing.

**Digital Divide and Convergence**

A generational technology divide exists in Indian Country (Boney, 2012). While some reporters feel the Native press is behind ten to twenty years, the younger generation appears to want Native news faster than its traditional form can provide Native reporters are grappling with how to provide news to young and/or urban American-Indians, while respecting those who live where American-Indian culture is thriving: on the reservation.

How do you get it to go towards an audience that isn’t technologically there yet? You go out onto the reservation and you got homes that still don’t have electricity at this time and age. Don’t have running water. How are they going to do that? Yeah, they can use their phone, but our Grandpa and Grandma wouldn’t be interested in using a touch screen to look at news. They are so used to newspapers (Noel Lyn Smith, Reporter, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

Even with limited access on the reservation, the Native press is pushing to publish online, including social media. From what *Navajo Times* reporter Noel Lyn Smith has experienced, Indian Country appears to use social media like Facebook because of its collective quality – almost like community members having a conversation online (Noel Lyn Smith, Reporter, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012). However, it is the younger generation and
the 70 percent of Natives who live off the reservation who are connecting (Williams, 2013; Guskin & Mitchell, 2012)

While community respect remains for older generations and/or those living on the reservation, Native news outlets are trying to balance providing information in the traditional ways and through digital media. With so many Natives living now off of the reservation, urban areas provide opportunities to connect. Many Native newspapers are now increasing their accessibility through mobile applications, electronic editions, and news websites (Jeff Harjo, Executive Director, NAJA, personal communication, March 16, 2012; Elise Bennett, Graphic Designer, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012; Quentin Jodie, Sports Reporter, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012).

To provide information faster to the community in 2011 the Navajo Times started posting daily videos to its website that it started in 1999. With the daily videos to the web, a newspaper reporter functions more like a news anchor recording five-minute headline news through YouTube then uploading. The newspaper’s editor writes the news script for the reporter to read. Because of work schedules, the paper’s editor, who reports to work earlier than reporters, also records these headline stories. The news report airs on KYAT, an all-Navajo language radio channel in Gallup, New Mexico.

Unlike mainstream newspaper, the editor at the Navajo Times writes the headline stories for radio and the web. At the time of my visit, Duane Beyal was the editor of the paper and wrote the morning updates. He recorded them live at 8:30 a.m. so that they could rebroadcast two more times that day (Noel Lyn Smith, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 26, 2013; Duane Beyal, Editor, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012). Beyal said he gets facts for these headlines from several sources. The paper uses the Associated Press wires, checks the in-
coming mail containing press releases, goes through email, however, it prefers original stories that the paper’s journalists discover.

**RQ2b: How are digital media changing the routine of reporting on Native issues?**

**Distribution**

Beyond narratives and writing, how Native news organizations are distributing news is also changing. KBC provides Native programs on the internet and distributes programs for Native radio stations across the country. The organization said that with the development of new technology it has witnessed a growth in podcasting. KBC, itself, uses the internet to upload programs so that its affiliates can download them anywhere in the country. “The way we are distributing things is fast and the way they (the affiliates) are sending information, their stories, is fast (Will Kie, Associate Producer, *Native America Calling*, personal communication, June 2012).

The *Navajo Times* reported its audience as 80 percent print and 20 percent online. The paper said new technology allows the press to give its take on a story faster (NAJA, 2013; Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012). For example, if a story breaks after the weekly paper’s distribution, technology gives the paper an opportunity to cover the story before waiting another week to print.

The print edition is limited in how far it can reach people, but with our online presence we are able to have everybody has access to it, if they want it…That way if something happens up in Fort Hall, Idaho with the Sho-Ban and they put it on their website…I’m able to know what’s happening there and vice versa so it’s really a good thing. It is a positive thing (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

The oldest Native paper in the United States, the *Cherokee Phoenix*, sees the news the paper is publishing in traditional forms mushrooming across digital media. The executive editor
for the paper described Cherokee communities as tightly knit. Because of this, he said, when the paper publishes a story he sees feedback or references across the paper’s multiple digital platforms.

If we publish a story one day on our website, people talk about it and then look for it in the paper. Or, they will listen to it on our radio show or look for it on our Facebook page. So we get a lot of people kind of cross referencing and going back and forth to our different platforms and it creates a broad community conversation about it (Bryan Pollard, Executive Editor, Cherokee Phoenix, personal communication, February 14, 2012).

Much like mainstream media, Indian Country Communications executive director, Paul DeMain, said he sees mobile, video and the element of live as the future for Native media. He said he believes these news coverage components will be how Native news organizations will continue to thrive through digital changes. Paul DeMain runs News for Indian Country and IndianCountryTV.com and is the former president of the Native American Journalists Association. He noted that his news organization uses YouTube to distribute his daily headlines on its website, on Facebook, and through email. He said YouTube is easily visible on mobile phones and provides an accessible live stream. DeMain said he understood that it was important that he have video, but also an effective way to distribute it.

Two years ago DeMain decided that Indian Country Communications needed to include video. He said the communication organization bought IndianCountryTV.com as publishing for Indian Country is the staple of his organizations newspaper and television product (Paul DeMain, Executive Director and Publisher, Indian Country Communications, personal communication, February 3, 2012).

**Technology and Writing**

Technology has changed the writing style for one American-Indian journalist, a former editor of the *Navajo Times*. Mark Trahant was working in mainstream media when he lost his job
in 2009 (Avila Hernandez, 2012). Trahant’s job loss led opening of a new door. The soon to be 2013/2014 Atwood Chair at University of Alaska Anchorage is the first Native news blogger (Trahant Reports, 2013). On “Trahant Reports,” he describes himself as a writer and “Twitter poet.”

The primary way Trahant sees media changing through technology is the “idea of the written word” (Mark Trahant, journalist, Trahant Reports, personal communication, April 10, 2012).

It is just another way to tell a story and in this case trying to get a story down to 140 characters (Mark Trahant, journalist, Trahant Reports, personal communication, April 10, 2012).

When describing the difference from writing in a longer newspaper print format to covering stories in 140 characters online, he said the skill takes practice and he has been practicing since 2009.

I think writing is like anything else. The more you do it, the more you practice, the easier it gets. It is sort of like exercise for the brain (Mark Trahant, journalist, Trahant Reports, personal communication, April 10, 2012).

With the constantly evolving new media, Trahant noted that writers must remember context when reporting in these digital platforms. He said he tries to take advantage of the new tools to get the key stories across without losing the circumstances around the story. On his blog, he has news stories such as “How did Native Americans impact the 2012 election?” (Trahant Reports, 2013). Trahant thinks story coverage is two-fold – the day-to-day account of what is happening and the larger narrative, with the latter being the one to which journalists need to give detailed attention.
Trahant said he has a larger function of how he is using digital media. He is attempting to utilize the new media platform to change the way the Native community thinks about existing narratives.

An example of one (the big story) I’ve been trying to change myself is Indian Health. It is very difficult because the previous story is so deep in our psyche… the story has been for the past 15 years about the Indian Health service and its problem, its shortcomings, and its underfunding (Mark Trahant, journalist, Trahant Reports, personal communication, April 10, 2012).

Trahant said instead of focusing on the negative side of Indian Health he is attempting to shift this story to the systems that seem to work in Indian Country, noting that this positive take is a completely different narrative from the past.

Access

Today, technology assists with covering stories that are developing quickly in the Navajo community. However, *Navajo Times* head photographer Paul Natonabah detailed the leg-work the paper has gone to in the past to receive access to breaking news. One story was prominent in his mind. When I interviewed the serious, yet kind Natonabah and in contrast, carefree press operator Leonard Sylvan separately, they both recounted the story’s facts in the same manner. A story that is still today on *New York Times’* website even though it occurred in 1984 (*Associated Press*, 1984).

A large B-52 crashed in Kayenta, Arizona, 134 miles from Window Rock in October of 1984. The crash happened at night and so Natonabah, Sylvan, and now blogger Mark Trahant (who was the *Navajo Times* editor at the time), all went to cover the breaking news. The three drove to the site in Natonabah’s GTO.

The *Navajo Times* journalists wanted to find the crash site because they felt it was especially newsworthy since B-52s flew frequently from Utah to Phoenix. The officials wouldn’t
tell the journalists the location. Apparently, the plane had flown low and crashed, bursting into flames (Paul Natonabah, Head Photographer *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

Some people tried to jump off parachute, but it didn’t open or something. We drove down the road because everybody heard about it. All this news media (Paul Natonabah, Head Photographer *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

The journalists stopped at a police station to figure out the location. They noticed a non-Native news organization coming toward them to share information.

Then we saw a headlight come closer, closer. Here was that KOB-TV from Farmington. They said, they won’t let you. It is police blocked…This man, he looks like Navajo. To me. He looked like cameraman. Sure enough police were parked down there. You could see their lights. It was still dark. He talked in Navajo to me: (spoke in Navajo and then English) Where are you guys going? (spoke in Navajo). Going home. Where are you guys from? In Navajo, I said we just coming from a school dance and we are going home. Okay. We passed the police line. That’s a long story, you know (Paul Natonabah, Head Photographer *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

The journalists hiked to the top of the mesa. There was military police and a large helicopter flying around. Natonabah had his camera and took pictures.

Mark was thinking. He said quickly, rewind that film. I did that and gave it to him. This was in winter and so it was cold and we wear a jacket. So he put the film and he hid it in his big jacket. We walk up steep. Mark was trying to climb up the rock and he slip and slide down. He had some scrapes. We went up there and then the military guy says stop! We know who you guys are. Now go back. He says oh by the way, you a photographer? Give me your film, he says to me. I’m pretending unwinding. I took it out and let them have it… (Paul Natonabah, Head Photographer *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

Trahant wrote the breaking news story as Natonabah developed the film. The *Associated Press* wanted the B-52 crash story quickly. The journalists made some prints and rushed them to the airport to get them to Phoenix. “The next day it was in the daily paper. That was one of the
highlights of my career” (Paul Natonabah, Head Photographer Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012).

Natonabah’s crash story illustrates the lengths the Navajo Times staff has gone to in the past to cover breaking news. Today the leg work of covering breaking news has changed with digital media. While officials may not support a newsroom having access to a breaking news site, mobile phones and other digital elements provide a different sort of access to stories. If journalists or news consumers witness a story, they can push the boundaries of access and release information digitally.

Community Coverage – Native versus Mainstream Reservation Routine

Along with covering developing stories, community journalism is a staple of the Navajo Times. Native news organizations, much like other ethnic media cover their community which is often left out in the mainstream press. The news organizations focus on their minority audience and cover stories relevant to their audiences, often with a greater emphasis on community. Senior reporter Marley Shebala, who reflects an inquisitive, fiery reporter flare, finds her definition of community is different from mainstream reporters.

You don’t have a lot of community journalists because they really aren’t a part of the community…I was talking to this Washington, D.C., reporter and she said she had been in D.C. for ten years and that was really long for her and I says that is good then you have really made a home there and that’s your community. I’m sure you built sources. She said well, she says, I don’t know if I have built sources, but I do know it is not home she says because she really didn’t know her neighbors in that sense (Marley Shebala, Senior Reporter, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012).

Shebala said she wouldn’t change reporting for her community on the reservation because she has the history and the knowledge that the community truly needs for accurate reporting. However, that doesn’t mean that reporting on such a tight-knit community is easy. Shebala said it can be tough being so connected to the community when it comes to investigative reporting.
She said she has to ask hard questions about people and families that she is culturally connected to and has known for a long time.

Overall, as a Navajo, she said she is able to get more in-depth coverage of her community because she is on the same cultural level as the individuals on whom she reports.

Compared to the *Gallup Independent, Farmington Daily Times*, they have writers and reporters who go out and talk to people and come back, but because they are not Native they don’t see the same type of feedback we do. So again it is something very unique that we have available to our readers (Marley Shebala, Senior Reporter, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

Some Native journalists said there is also a difference between mainstream and Native norms and routines as mainstream media are more structured than Native news.

I think that non-Native media covers stories in a much more strict way. Native media however covers media in a really relaxed way. For instance we (*News from Indian Country*/IndianCountryTV.com) went and did some coverage of the Nagaajiwanaang (Fond du Lac) language camp. We had so much fun with all the activities from the canoe races to the talent show that I forgot I wasn't on vacation (Josh Pearson, Web Producer/Editor, Indian Country TV, personal communication, August 12, 2012).

In the *Navajo Times* newsroom, the feeling is more relaxed than in mainstream news organizations. In contrast to mainstream newsrooms, Native music, conversation, and laughter replaces droning police scanners. Through observation, the newsroom felt more like a community where senior reporters like Marley Shebala groomed younger reporters such as Noel Lyn Smith. When specifically discussing news stories, the focus was more on how to tell the story. At times there would be a collective discussion between the more senior and younger reporters.

For several people in the newsroom, the paper meant more than a job. Several journalists discussed how they remembered touring the paper as a child. They also told stories of their families sending them to the trading post on Thursday mornings to pick up the *Navajo Times*. The paper was not only a connection to current events, but to a community and culture.
Witnessing Shebala during a tribal council budget and finance meeting illustrated her connection to the community. The council debated what to do about issues such as water availability that truly affected people’s lives. During this meeting a proposal was on the table for the Navajo-Hopi Little Colorado River Water settlement; the committee called Shebala by her first name when she asked questions. Other meeting attendees, primarily those who were not a part of the Navajo community, such as a non-Native journalists and a federal government representative, the council addressed formally by their last name.

A difference between Native and mainstream media was also clear during the tribal council meeting in terms of commitment to coverage. When the tribal council wanted to meet privately without non-council in the room, the mainstream press reporter appeared stressed, tired, and ready to get the news and leave, possibly battling a daily news deadline. In contrast, Shebala, with her strong connection and emphasis on total community coverage, stayed the entire meeting and talked to the officials afterward. Shebala said she often goes up after meetings and asks for all the paperwork she can get. She’ll take the large binder, containing hundreds of pages of documents back to the newspaper, copy and return them. She said if she doesn’t get these official documents during the official meetings she may never see the paperwork and it could take months just to get a fraction of that material.

**Technology and Community Coverage**

The routine that honors the time and attention needed to craft a beautifully detailed news story is the same routine Shebala respects in her multimedia journalist role. During the tribal council meeting, Shebala freely roamed taking digital pictures for the paper, checking and double checking her pictures to make sure that she photographed the correct person and in the
correct manner. She said she didn’t want to take a picture that would add false meaning to her story because the person was in mid-sentence discussing another matter.

In a juxtaposition to technology with the digital pictures Shebala took, parts of the reservation have a lack of cell phone service and this included where the tribal committee meeting took place. Reporters were aware that if they sat in the back row in the middle of the room and put their phone in the middle of the window they might get service.

The new digital emerging platforms are changing how journalists’ cover stories for the Native press. Similar to mainstream, journalists have to produce stories faster and in a shorter format; however, unlike mainstream Native news organizations they will still take the time to advance these stories with the cultural descriptive detail online. To enhance this detail, digital media allow Native news organizations to reach out to Indigenous people across the world to provide a complete cultural community story. Multimedia provide Native news organizations the ability to surround print news with elements such as audio, video, and social media interactivity, resulting in news coverage depth that mirrors Native language.

**RQ3: How can the use of digital media break down barriers between mainstream and Native media to advance the visibility of this community?**

To address what more can be done to advance the visibility and positive portrayals of American-Indians through digital media, we must first understand why Native journalists feel stereotypes continue to reoccur. Barriers between mainstream media and Native journalists include lack of knowledge and exposure and a vast geographical coverage area.

Multiple Native journalists cited mainstream coverage as sustaining American-Indian stereotypes (Peggy Berryhill, President/General Manager, KGUA, personal communication, January 3, 2012; Shirley Kay Sneve, NAPT, personal communication, January 3, 2012; Bryan
Bryan Pollard, Executive Editor of the Cherokee Phoenix, said the main step that mainstream media can do is to stop using stereotypes in all their forms, overt and inferential. He said mascots, stereotypes, epithets, and zoo and frozen-in-time stories all need to be eradicated. “It is almost a no brainer. It is hard to believe we are even still talking about it.” (Bryan Pollard, Executive Editor, Cherokee Phoenix, personal communication, February 14, 2012).

Many people know enough about it to know it is not pretty. So when you have that type of blanket denial and that type of desensitivity the only thing that rises through the service is stereotypes the PowWows and all that stuff… I was watching a news show the other night and they referred to the meeting of some of the congressional leaders as a PowWow. I was like you know that just rolled off the persons tongue like it was nothing there - there was no consideration that to Native people… (Bryan Pollard, Executive Editor, Cherokee Phoenix, personal communication, February 14, 2012).

**Stereotypical Coverage**

Native journalists felt that some of the mainstream media stereotypical coverage was not necessarily intentional, but instead an absence of interest in the Native community (Peggy Berryhill, President/General Manager, KGUA, personal communication, January 3, 2012; Bryan Pollard, Executive Editor, Cherokee Phoenix, personal communication, February 14, 2012). Native journalists said they believe non-Native people do not think of Native journalism existing unless it is connected to stories that address non-Native people’s history (Marley Shebala, Senior Reporter, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012; Peggy Berryhill, President/General Manager, KGUA, personal communication, January 3, 2012; Shirley Kay Sneve, NAPT, personal communication, January 3, 2012; Bryan Pollard, Executive Editor, The
Cherokee Phoenix, personal communication, February 14, 2012). In contrast, the Native perspective is not addressed in history. Therefore, a Native’s view of the past, the present, and the future are not part of the non-Native narrative and educational curriculum.

Within the past year, in some Native communities, mainstream media have expanded their news coverage.

Anchorage mainstream media has finally caught on to the fact that Alaska is more than the urban cities. Most of Alaska is rural and until my program, “Heartbeat Alaska”, this giant segment of Alaska was not considered worthy of mainstream news media. Today, you will see the news trying to catch up to what I’ve been covering for 22 years (Jeanie Greene, Reporter/Anchor, “Heartbeat Alaska”, personal communication, December 7, 2012).

Before this expansion, mainstream media frequently assumed that all American-Indians had the same thoughts and feelings and actions across the hundreds of tribes.

A Native organization that employees both Native and non-Native workers said its news company’s goal is opposite of the mainstream press when it comes to Native voices. Instead of providing the same stereotypical script, Koahnic Broadcast Corporation (KBC) attempts to get out as many Native voices as possible. This distribution allows for those tuning in on air and/or online to hear thoughts and feelings from the overall Native community. Hearing the diversity within American-Indian communities helps eliminate the prominent stereotypical script.

Our work here at Koahnic Broadcast stations is to be the leader to get the Native voice heard. Everything we do focus on getting their voices out and their stories heard. I think in mainstream media, especially when I was in television news, that’s not the purpose (Antonia Gonzales, Anchor/Producer, National Native News, personal communication, October 10, 2012).

Unlike how the mainstream media often show American-Indians, not all tribes or persons are the same. Will Kie, associate producer for KBC’s Native America Calling provides a different view from the stereotypes that the media often perpetuate.
I have been honest with the people here I grew up in popular culture. I had a connection to my Native people and my community...Growing up in the 80s, I grew up on Guns-N-Roses. I knew about Metallica...I didn’t listen to PowWow music. I couldn’t tell you which drum group or which style what, so I don’t know that part.

He said he is a country and a rock fan and another person in his company’s specialty is traditional PowWow music.

**Beyond Conflict Coverage - Connecting with Native Communities**

The lack of interest in the community perhaps is the reason why mainstream media cover the Native community only when it views a viable story such as one that contains conflict or drama. KGUA general manager, Peggy Berryhill, said that she recently viewed a television news report about the Pine Ridge reservation in which the reporter did not research the area she was reporting on and instead focused her story on victimization.

There was a really popular news anchor. A well-known national news anchor who went to a reservation and did her story. It left people in tears, but it was once again these poor victims and here are a couple kids that are struggling, you know? And, we are going to hope for the best for them, but really did nothing to help understand the so called plight (Peggy Berryhill, President/General Manager, KGUA, personal communication, January 3, 2012).

Berryhill said instead the mainstream press should have taken the time to understand the history of the reservation, examining the deeper contextual issues. In contrast, she felt the news organizations picked a few young children to interview and didn’t explain the actual progress on the reservation. Berryhill feels it is important for outside journalists to spend time in Native country, not just when conflict occurs. Just as important, Native people need to continue to cover Native stories so that authentic voices are heard within the press.

To have a factually and contextually accurate news story, a journalist must spend time and talk to those in American-Indian communities (Chase Iron Eyes, Creator, LastRealIndians.com, personal communication, January 13, 2012). American-Indian reporters
covering tribal stories know the “movers and shakers” within their own tribes, essentially the credible perceived sources to interview (Jeff Harjo, Executive Director, NAJA, personal communication, March 16, 2012). For a Native reporter who is a community outsider, it can take months to build trust to cover a story. Former NAJA executive director Jeff Harjo discussed his process of covering the Kickapoo tribe in Oklahoma (Jeff Harjo, Executive Director, NAJA, personal communication, March 16, 2012). He said it took him approximately six months to gain the trust of the tribe, by showing up at every news event with a camera. Fortunately in terms of this study, I knew gatekeepers for many of her interviews who carefully introduced her to his/her staff.

Senior reporter Marley Shebala said the way to change stereotypical representations in traditional and digital media is for non-Native organizations to integrate this community within its beat system. She said there is no reason why a person living in the United States should not visit a reservation. She said Indigenous people were the first communities here and journalists should visit and cover them – not just when a controversial or cultural event occurs but instead as part of their daily news routine.

Go out there and cover them and don’t just cover them when something controversial happens: the government is being overthrown, someone commits suicide, or domestic violence. Because you are also not doing fair and balanced coverage of that community and you wonder why they don’t want to talk to you. But, if you are out there from the beginning covering those events – police Olympics, their little races, and not just cultural events either, school events anything that goes on in that community. When something big happens in that community, they are going to call you. Or, when you show up at the doorstep, they are going to say yes, come in. (Marley Shebala, Senior Reporter, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012).

Shebala cites organizations like the Native American Journalists Association and how it stresses diversity within the newsrooms. Shebala noted that mainstream journalists also need to “diversify” their minds.
There is no excuse for them to not come out here and cover the reservation…I don’t care what color they are and if they can’t do that they aren’t good journalists. How many of us, we aren’t mentally or physically challenged, but we cover those events. We cover men, women, we cover everything. I have my radio on. I read news. I’m watching news…I go online. You just have to keep on top of it, if you are going to be any type of journalist (Marley Shebala, Senior Reporter, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012).

While Shebala believes mainstream news organizations should add Native communities as a beat, Chase Iron Eyes has provided access to a digital Indigenous beat online. On LastReal Indians.com, Iron Eyes is attempting to break down barriers by providing an online platform for all Indigenous voices. Iron Eyes believes that the younger Native generation’s connection to the grid gives all media access to a variety of Native sources.

People in our generation – in their 30s in their 20s – it is our turn right now for the next 20 years. We are the generation that has the good and bad connected to the grid, as it is changing the media worldwide (Chase Iron Eyes, Lakota, Creator, LastRealIndians.com, personal communication, January 13, 2012).

KBC utilizes social media to find a variety of Native people to interview for its programs. The network said oftentimes it is faster to get sources through social media than by phone or contacting people by email.

Everyone has a Facebook, a Twitter account…. I know Natives in Florida. I know Natives in Alaska, Maine, and South Dakota. I know all these people. I can see their name on a Facebook page, get their information, and call them up instantly. I find out a little bit deeper about what is going on. Maybe it is something we can put out. (Will Kie, Associate Producer, Native America Calling, personal communication, June 2012).

Concurring with KBC, this study found that it was much easier to get in contact with Native journalists through Facebook compared to phone or email.

Similar to mainstream, executive editor Bryan Pollard said, the Cherokee Phoenix Facebook page is a digital conversation through which a diverse group of users can be visible and give their opinion. On the paper’s social media page, he said, people share, comment, and
like stories. What is unique to Native media is access to the views of a tight-knit community through social media. Pollard said the digital conversation creates an ongoing community dialogue surfacing from the more traditional medium of newspaper (Bryan Pollard, Executive Editor, Cherokee Phoenix, personal communication, February 14, 2012).

Ethnic media overall are turning to these non-traditional platforms to have the “digital conversation” Pollard mentions (Wilson et al., 2013; Guskin & Mitchell, 2012). People of color are now able to express their diverse views online from websites to blogs. Platforms like YouTube allow for an alternative to information about different cultures (Wilson et al., 2013). For example, one of the most watched videos in 2011 was posted by a younger group of Asian Americans. The videos showed Asian Americans in roles that traditional media do not show – a range of Asian-Americans as musicians, artists, and dancers (Wilson et al., 2013).

The lack of Native journalists in mainstream newsrooms creates a lack of knowledge and access to Native people. The inadequate understanding by non-Native communities keeps misconceptions of the American-Indian community alive. Stereotypes and the historical mistreatment of American-Indians have created a divide between those outside and inside Native community. To break the barriers between mainstream and Native media, journalists need to visit and connect with Native communities, understanding the richness of Indian Country’s diversity.

**RQ4: In order to understand the future of Native news, how did current Native journalists become interested in the profession?**

Perhaps an answer to the future of Native media is by examining the road traveled by current Native journalists. As a journalist, stories are understood through a personal filter. This filter is especially important to understand with Native people, who as a community have endured endless discrimination.
This study investigated why leading Native journalists became interested in the profession. Most journalists said it was when they were young and a mentor recommended that they enter the field. Native journalists noted that they typically enjoyed reading, writing, and telling stories in the Native tradition and this naturally connected them to the journalism profession.

**Cultivating Native Media Leaders at a Young Age**

Indian Country considers past Native American Journalist Association president Paul DeMain a leader in journalism and advancing digital information. His path to journalism began as a junior at Wausau West High School in Wisconsin and an assignment by an inspirational English teacher who encouraged DeMain’s poetic style of writing.

One of my English teachers liked how much I wrote. I never have been good at English punctuation and I still struggle with it, but I was a prolific writer (Paul DeMain, Executive Director and Publisher, Indian Country Communications, personal communication, February 3, 2012).

DeMain ran away from home at the age of 16, but his English teacher had him record his writings in a journal. He missed a semester of school, but he gave his teacher the diary and the teacher passed him for the class.

He (the teacher) thought for Native people it would be better for people to be able to write their own stories rather than be held captive by non-Natives writing about us (Paul DeMain, Executive Director and Publisher, Indian Country Communications, personal communication, February 3, 2012).

The woman known as the “First Lady of Native Radio,” Peggy Berryhill, also became interested in telling stories at a young age (NMRC, 2013, para. 1).

I can literally remember writing articles in the third grade and reading them and having the attention of the classroom. When I was in high school, I was on the high school newspaper... (Peggy Berryhill, President/General Manager, KGUA, personal communication, January 3, 2012).
While she said she didn’t feel confident enough to go to college for writing, she has made huge strides in Native media. This award-winning producer founded the Native Media Resource Center, which is a media organization that promotes racial and cross-cultural harmony by producing content about Indigenous communities. The organization works with key Native media networks such as Native Public Telecommunications, Inc., and the National Museum of the American-Indian (NMRC, 2013).

In January of 2012, this “First Lady of Native” radio launched the only Native station in California that provides multilingual programming to the Pomo and Latino communities (KGUA.org, 2012). At this time, Berryhill was the only employee at KGUA. Berryhill worked 60 hours a week to get the station up and running. She started out at a bi-lingual Indigenous newspaper in Deacon, California. The paper was the only international press reporting on Natives in Central and South America. In 1973, Berryhill made the switch to radio and hosted a show called “Indian Time” for five years at public radio station KPFA in Berkeley, California. She said she missed connecting with people in the community and that is why she got back into journalism.

Similar to Berryhill, Patty Talahongva, former president of the Native American Journalists Association and current independent multimedia producer, became interested in journalism as a young woman. She said she read all the time, wrote to pen pals, and her uncle in the military. She said it was her high school counselor that recognized her writing talent.

When I got into a high school, I was very fortunate. I went to a government boarding school in Phoenix…the local paper at the time had a newspaper insert on Saturdays for students. The stories were written by correspondents from all the different high schools in the Phoenix Metro valley. They never had a reporter from the Phoenix Indian High school. My high school counselor said you like to write… you aren’t afraid to talk to people. She got me in touch with the editors at the paper and they were thrilled. They never had correspondence from the boarding school (Patty Talahongva, Independent Producer, personal communication, January 4, 2012).
Talahongva worked for the highest rated CBS affiliate in Phoenix and learned skills from reporting to managing an assignment desk. “It grew from there. Hey, this is something I can do for a living, I can actually be in front of the news, write it, report it and my career took off” (Patty Talahongva, Independent Producer, personal communication, January 4, 2012).

Need for Native News

A need for news and information on reservations led more than one Native journalist to start a communication organization and this included DeMain (Paul DeMain, Executive Director and Publisher, Indian Country Communications. personal communication, February 3, 2012). He started Indian Country Communications after working as a political appointee for Wisconsin’s Governor’s office. He had previously been employed with his tribe on the newspaper, but was appointed to the state cabinet to represent American-Indian issues. In 1986, after four years in politics, DeMain returned to the reservation and noticed that while he was gone the newspaper had gone defunct. He and a small group of people decided to start Indian Country Communications with the goal of becoming a Native News hub (Paul DeMain, Executive Director and Publisher, Indian Country Communications. personal communication, February 3, 2012). Within four to five years, the paper had gone national and ended up providing news to 100 cities across the United States and Canada. At the height of Indian Country’s subscriptions, News from Indian Country received approximately 10,000 subscribers from 17 foreign countries.

Now, Indian Country Communications is a multifaceted business streaming events live online and through its mobile application, providing daily video news stories, continually updating its website and social media, publishing its newspaper, and owning key media property on the reservation such as the Trading Post (Paul DeMain, Executive Director and Publisher, Indian Country Communications. personal communication, February 3, 2012). The company has
produced more than 2,500 digital video programs for Indian Country from 14 seconds to 7 hours (Paul DeMain, Executive Director and Publisher, Indian Country Communications, personal communication, February 3, 2012).

Similar to DeMain noticing the lack of Native news on his reservation, the current station manager for the only owned-and-operated Native radio station in California, Joseph Orozco, returned to his home to start his first journalism job by launching and becoming the editor of a Native newspaper (Joseph Orozco, Station Manager, KIDE, May 1, 2012). Orozco had not lived on the Hoopa Valley reservation in 30 years. He noticed there was not a Native newspaper in his area and he received funding from a local church to launch the paper.

Later, Orozco decided to go into radio and is now the station manager for his tribal radio station. He said KIDE is mostly a public affairs station, sharing news and health information on what the tribal council and its departments are doing. “They are not looking for investigative journalism so we are going to leave that for someone else” (Joseph Orozco, Station Manager, KIDE, May 1, 2012).

In contrast, Marley Shebala is an award winning investigative community journalist. She found her passion for journalism after seeking refuge from racism in a library as a child and reading the adventures of Sherlock Holmes.

I looked back at my childhood and I spent a lot of time at the library. Not because I wanted to be in the library, but because I grew up in northern Utah. Brigham City, Utah. A small, small town, but they had a huge Indian boarding school there...kids can be very mean. They were very mean. Racism is learned and they were taught well. I remember being called a dirty Indian, a smelly Indian. All kind of names. So I didn’t have that many friends and so I went to the library (Marley Shebala, Senior Reporter, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012).

Shebala has witnessed great change in the journalism profession since she went to college in the 1970s at the University of New Mexico - the university surrounded by protests for
American-Indian, Latino, and women’s rights. While she didn’t graduate from college, she started out as a nursing student. Her mother was a registered nurse and so she said she wanted to be a nurse; however, after seeing how some doctors treated the female nurses she decided she didn’t want to be in that profession.

I was busy with my camera. I was running around doing stories. And, then people started asking me when I was going to be graduating from journalism school. And, I kept telling them I was in nursing. And then I realized I was really enjoying what I was doing so I switched my major (Marley Shebala, Senior Reporter, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012).

Shebala was involved in the University of New Mexico’s Kiva club, a Native word that describes an underground area for spiritual ceremonies (Marley Shebala, Senior Reporter, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012). She was elected to the club’s council and asked to confront the student newspaper about why they weren’t covering Native student events, which led to the Kiva club starting its own newspaper called the “Four Directions.”

They asked well how many Native American students on campus? Well, what does that have to do with it? Well there aren’t that many of you...It was really racist, you know? So I, of course, I argued with them. And, then thought that this is a lost cause. There is just no way you are going to change that attitude so I went back, made my report, and told them this is going to be a waste of our energy and time. There’s not many of us. There’s a lot of stuff happening fast, and even if we made them do it, who knows if they’d do a good job. Then we’d have to be questioning their stories. Let’s just start our own newspaper (Marley Shebala, Senior Reporter, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012).

Being a student and in journalism was not easy for Shebala. Not because of the educational work, but because of how this Navajo woman, who has won prestigious awards for investigative and community reporting from both national and state journalism organizations, battled racism in her classes, and never graduated.

I didn’t finish. I was spending way too much time arguing with my professors. I had taken some pictures of some Navajo kids at this National Indian Association conference that was in Albuquerque and they are wearing their traditional outfits. I turned them in
and my professor says, who are these kids in these strange garb? He would just make remarks like that and then finally he pulled me aside and said, you know you need to stop taking pictures of your people and broaden your horizons. I said, you know, I will if you pull over your white students and tell them to stop taking picture of white people and broaden their horizons. And, he was totally shocked (Marley Shebala, Senior Reporter, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

Native journalists endured racism and personal doubt within a society that traditionally has not been supportive of the Native word. Leading Native journalists in print and radio are becoming the leading Native journalists across digital platforms. These now digital journalists bring a wealth of experience, understanding of community, and triumph over adversity.

**RQ5: As digital platforms change, what do Native journalists recommend that young Native people learn to become effective professional storytellers?**

Native reporters are needed not only within mainstream, but within Native media. Native news organizations said it needs young journalists to move through the newsroom ranks; the development of young journalist would provide Native organizations with a person that has a foundation built on a history of covering Native news. Currently Native outlets and journalist organizations are advocating for youth in newsrooms and using digital as a tool for this recruitment.

**Longevity in Newsroom Equals History**

Native journalists are frustrated with training youth who abandon the field. The *Navajo Times* said it is hard to replace a Navajo reporter, and it is important to have longevity in the newsroom. Jeannie Greene of “Heartbeat Alaska” said she personally trained more than 20 editors, and they are now working elsewhere (Jeannie Greene, Reporter/Anchor, “Heartbeat Alaska”, personal communication, December 7, 2012).

*Navajo Times* senior reporter Marley Shebala has trained a lot of young reporters during her 22 years at the newspaper. She said because of longevity in her Native newsroom she is able
to obtain information faster than her younger counterparts (Marley Shebala, Senior Reporter, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

I have a lot of that history and so I end up mentoring and you heard Noel, she’ll ask me questions. Or, you know she is having trouble getting a resolution or something. I’ll just text a council delegate that I know and that knows me, trusts me, probably not completely, but enough to give me a document (Marley Shebala, Senior Reporter, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

Native journalists stressed understanding *history* in covering stories is an essential act for budding young Native journalists. This history includes not only their tribe, but the tribe’s connection to the federal government.

Like this water settlement, it involves the treaties. In 1868 and before and after that. They are always referring to that. With states the water settlements used to be in federal court and then Congress decided that they were going to give that to state courts, but there is this history of rivalries. Really, it is one of the states has been very jealous of the tribe’s relationship with the federal government because they see oh, the reservation is on state land so they should be state citizens and therefore apply to state laws, but the tribes say it is the other way around (Marley Shebala, Senior Reporter, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

**Advocacy to Recruit Young Native Journalists**

Papers like the *Navajo Times* and *Cherokee Phoenix* advocate recruiting young people into journalism. The *Cherokee Phoenix* has a financial fellowship to support young people to come and work for the paper (Bryan Pollard, Executive Editor, *Cherokee Phoenix*, personal communication, February 14, 2012). The *Navajo Times* recruits young people on the reservation to become interns. The paper said it feels this is especially important on the reservation because many schools have had budget cuts and no longer have school newspapers. The paper also said multimedia allows for more creativity and opportunities for jobs.

We’ve always tried to promote journalism as a career that they could look into and now that you got technology, new media, the area is wide open. You aren’t just writing and editing or just being a photographer, you do everything now days. You are doing video,
audio and you are also doing print so the field is so wide open and that’s what we do (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

At the time of this research, the *Navajo Times* had three Navajo interns. Within a week, they had hired an additional intern. The paper said it has had success with training students, essentially growing its own future Navajo reporters. The paper has employed at one time journalists who have become professors to mainstream reporters to those who have started major online Native news networks.

We have seen certain individuals that have started with us real, real young... we’ve seen some really good young people come through here. We have seen them expand with the talents they have been given (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, *Navajo Times*, personal communication, June 2012).

The Native community collectively understands that all things in life are full circle, including in journalism. To extend the Native voice, advocacy must continue within the Native press and communities to recruit future Native journalists. Opportunities through digital media provide a fruitful platform for young journalists to tell their stories. Native stories online are needed, as they provide authentic stories that combat uneducated stereotypical reporting.

The final chapter of this dissertation will include a discussion on where Native media might be moving with future information delivery and the advancement of Native visibility. Chapter 5 will include timely examples within Native and mainstream media.
Chapter 5
Discussion

This dissertation explored how the internet and other emerging media have become critical platforms to provide diverse visibility for Indian Country. Citizens tend to visit sites that fit their ideologies (Prior, 2007); however, online Native storytelling encourages cultural exposure for those who are vested in debunking stereotypical images. Storytelling in itself being an important cultural component of American-Indian life that defines and shapes Native communities (Duncan, 1998). Continuing, expanding, and authenticating Native journalism through digital media builds the rich tradition of storytelling.

Digital media are allowing Native people to take control and increase the visibility of their own narrative. This command includes going beyond an overall tribal point of view. Native people are writing about their own stories; these stories are connected to Native issues and distributed across digital platforms, permitting more exposure to American-Indian communities by non-Native people.

The community quality of Facebook, with its ability to build conversation through one online post after another, appears to be popular with Native organizations and individuals. Individual Native journalists are using Twitter, but mostly to promote blogs and other forms of media longer in form.

Emerging communication platforms provide opportunities for Native people to craft and aggregate their own stories. The availability of these authentic stories makes American-Indians more visible on the web and therefore possibly in mainstream media. Digital media allow for the expansion of the overall American-Indian community and with that comes the voices of that community that can counteract the decades, if not centuries, of stereotypical portrayals.
Native communities across the country have acknowledged the importance of digital platforms. Digitally connected tribes have assisted other Native areas with connectivity. Tribes helping each other connect illustrates how the overall Native community acknowledges the importance of digital media and the spreading of the Native voice. Maintenance of storytelling is ensured through digital media. The Native stories live on forever in this realm.

**Storytelling and Culture – Detail, Language, and Privacy**

The ritual of storytelling can be equated with the ritual or norms and routines of journalism which includes rich language and detail. When a reader picks up a newspaper from a Native press, such as the typical 34-page *Navajo Times*, the content is thick with community and culturally-based stories. The paper doesn’t contain, as many mainstream papers do, mostly national stories and syndicated columns. Instead, Native papers contain detailed, local stories with descriptive language. The expressive narratives attempt to mirror Native language that include detail, context, and connotation.

While Native papers are saturated with community-affecting news, a different norm and routine – that of privacy - is directly connected to the Native culture, its civic role, and sourcing. In these hefty Native papers, a reader will not find stories that are too personal or uncomfortably private; instead, such matters are typically handled through tribal ceremonies, an opportunity for everyone involved to discuss and heal. If a matter affects the entire community, the Native press will discuss it, but, discretely and in a way that ties it to the collective rather than the individuals. For example, family interviews about the death of a loved one will not take place until much later when the family has had time to grieve, and only then with family permission. A reader will not find this kind of restraint in mainstream press. In mainstream, the names of domestic violence victims are reported. Television reporters knock on the doors of the family of homicide
victims and cold-call parents who have just tragically lost a child. The victim is often marginalized and traumatized. An American-Indian community’s beliefs will typically not allow for this type of reporting. Individuals and their beliefs are tied to the collective; if one suffers, the community suffers and beliefs are violated whether laws are broken or not. Because of this, Native news appears to be more thematic, rather than episodic, and more focused on solutions rather than consequences.

What perhaps makes Native press very much unlike mainstream media is its definition of profitability. The lack of concerns over what mainstream defines as profit is tied to cultural beliefs, where money is not the answer to helping a community thrive. Instead, sacredness to all living things is where most Native people truly find “profit,” success, and fulfillment. An example of this is found in why perhaps the Healing of the Earth Gathering did not occur while I was visiting the Navajo Times. There was supposed to be a gathering of all the medicine people to pray and give the respect deserved to the sacred San Francisco Peaks. Instead a conflict surrounded the mountains. The city of Flagstaff, along with the county and the state of Arizona, was working to use wastewater to create snow on these mountains for skiing. The Navajo Times believed this effort derailed the annual healing ceremony. Tom Arviso, CEO and Publisher of the Navajo Times, said all the tribes had united Navajos, Apaches, Pueblos, Zuni, and Hopi to voice opposition to these lifts.

What they are doing is really bad. In the Native eyes, it is one of the worst thing you can do. It is like going and peeing on someone’s lawn or defecating on a church lawn. Then laughing about it and leaving. No respect (Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher, Navajo Times, personal communication, June 2012).

Arviso said when money, fame, and fortune are your priorities, your community will pay the price – supporting Natives beliefs that all things are connected and everything happens for a
reason. Even the drought at the time in Arizona was thought to be a price paid for previous community actions.

**Breaking through Stereotypical Coverage**

Similar digital challenges exist for Native media as mainstream; both media groups are trying to figure out how to reach their audiences through emerging platforms such as mobile devices. However Native media also has to battle a pre-existing, engrained narrative comprised of stereotypes or perhaps, just as bad, the lack of Native narrative at all. The challenges to get voices out is exacerbated by lack of infrastructure, diverging pops (urban and rural), and existing, untrue beliefs concerning Native communities.

More than 550 American-Indian tribes exist in the United States (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2012). Each American-Indian tribe contains its own unique stories, but some similarities in stories do span across Native communities. Besides stories that range from community event stories to environmental stories, Native media and their users enjoy sports stories (Duncan, 1998). Providing a diverse view digitally not only affects who gets news and who is heard, but also how the world views the United States (Wilson et al., 2013).

While conducting interviews at the *Navajo Times*, I observed that sports were comparable to a community gathering. The press operator Leonard Sylvan, who had worked at the paper for more than twenty years, said he didn’t attend all the sports, but felt connected to the games by seeing all the Navajos in the pictures in the paper. Head photographer Paul Natonabah said his busiest time of the year was covering all the sports tournaments. Sports, specifically basketball, are a staple in many Native communities. The shoe company Nike has even noticed this passion, Nike has its own line of tennis shoes for American-Indians, promoted by Native athletes (NikeN7.com, 2013).
A recent story that most Native media outlets, as well as mainstream outlets covered, was the remarkable story of the Schimmel sisters. Shoni and Jude Schimmel, enrolled members of the Umatilla tribe with Paiute and Nez Perce ancestry, are two Native college basketball players who helped lead the University of Louisville basketball team to the Women’s final four tournament (Jodie, 2013). While outsiders looking in may not understand why the Navajo Times, for instance, led with this story on its main page, even non-Navajos who have some education about the passion of the Navajo Nation would understand why the story of these sisters are a salient.

“Rez ball,” or reservation basketball, is a passion for many in the Navajo Nation. One social media site defines this style of basketball as “a ferocious, attacking style of basketball, fueled by passion, creativity, and relentless aggressiveness” (Shoni Schimmel Native Woman Basketball Star, Community Page Leadership, 2013). As Indian Country Media Network (ICTMN) writes, “on many reservations across the country, Jude and Shoni Schimmel are shining a new light on a favorite sport, illuminating dreams born on dirt courts with bent, rusted rims” (Minard, 2013, para. 2). ICTMN explains that while these two sisters prepared for the NCAA tournament, 20 high schools on the Navajo Nation were playing in the Arizona and New Mexico championships. The high school gyms for these teams are as large as some on college campuses. Much like in Kentucky where schools are given a day off for the Kentucky Derby or in Louisiana where schools and businesses are given time off for Mardi Gras, the American-Indian community celebrates basketball.

Many Native fans drove across the country to watch the sisters play in the Final Four, even if they had no ties to the University of Louisville, and those who couldn’t make the trip
constructed their support on social media. Athlete fan pages emerged on Facebook noting that
Shoni was a role model.

SO PROUD OF Shoni and Jude. Native American Role Models for our youth. You two
made my Heart swell with Pride. Now My Sonny Boys know that they can also play
college ball. And they can accomplish what dreams they have. NATIVEPRIDE (Shoni

The Navajo Times conducted a phone interview with the two sisters from Oregon and said they
might help challenge stereotypes much like professional basketball player Jeremy Lin did with
the Asian-American community.

The story of the Schimmel sisters attracted attention to Rez Ball and directed American
society’s eclectic eye toward a different image of American-Indians. Emerging media helped
propel the story and one Native news organization expressed excitement about the salience of
“Rez Ball” and how it made headlines the day before the championship game.

The Navajo Times called it the “Schimmel shake,” two college basketball players who are
American-Indian and made it to the Final Four (Jodie, 2013). In a sense, the story became female
versions of Boston Red Sox outfielder Jacoby Ellsbury, and followed in the footsteps of
legendary Native American athlete Jim Thorpe, an Olympic gold medalist and football player in
the early 1900s (Associated Press, 2013).

On Monday, the eve of Louisville's national title showdown with Connecticut, Shoni
Schimmel noted that her mother reared her and her siblings with stories about Thorpe

One thing that my mom has talked to me about is, you have to go out there and show that
you can come off a reservation and you can make it. Not a lot of people believe in Native
Americans because they just get so comfortable with living on the reservation, because it
is very comfortable. We love it there. It's always nice to be there. But at the same time,
you have to get out of your comfort zone (Associated Press, 2013, para. 7).
This example illustrates that Native news is covered only by mainstream media when it is an extreme success story (sports superstar or famous actor) or when there is conflict. But it also shows how mainstream media can break through the stereotypes to celebrate the heritage of two young Native women who play basketball. The sisters’ authentic voices and story can help change views. Unfortunately, these stories are few and far between in the mainstream media. Instead the changing of the tide must come from Native news outlets committed to their community, their heritage, and the craft of digital journalism.

**Native Norms and Routines and Digital Media-Crafting of Content and Distribution**

Digital media are changing Native norms and routines through which these news organizations craft and distribute content. This form of new media provides access to Indigenous people across the world. Native news organizations are now using Facebook to find news stories and sources for these stories. For example, if a person was interested in doing a story on someone traveling in their community to see the Schimmel sisters play in the Final Four in New Orleans, Facebook may be a place where Native news organizations searched for sources within their tight-knit community.

Providing access to Natives across the world may alter the word “community” to include those participating online as well, broadening the community’s scope. American-Indians, such as in the case with the *Cherokee Phoenix*, are having digital conversations spawned by traditional news media. Native newspapers noted that readers extend the conversation of their coverage by discussing stories read in traditional media outlets through social media. The *Cherokee Phoenix* and *Navajo Times* find that users seek out their websites or Facebook pages often to keep a discussion alive online, after readers consume the more traditional form of the news such as a
newspaper. Different angles on stories actually evolve as this discussion continues on the
internet, providing additional authentic Native perspectives and voices.

While a digital divide does exist in Indian Country, the divide appears to be shrinking.
Younger American-Indians want news faster. While the traditional forms of Native media, word
of mouth, newspaper and radio, still serve an older less digitally-connected sector of the
community, younger Natives are used to being able to access information through devices such
as a mobile phone. These younger groups appear to want a quicker turn-around on Native news.
A growing digital audience is extending the authentic Native voice, while serving the niche
audiences within the Native community.

Mobile connectivity provides an opportunity for American-Indian communities to both
experience the language and to help bridge the digital divide. For example, Native American
Public Telecommunications launched a SmartPhone application through which users can hear
four different Native Languages while seeing pictures of 14 animals (ICTMN, 2012). The NAPT
application is just one of many applications online where users can learn and even write Native
languages. Some Native applications even help teach young children how to speak traditional
Native languages. In 2010, the Cherokee Nation worked with Apple and the written form of the
Cherokee language, syllabary, appears now on iPhones, iPads, and is available through the
Cherokee Nation’s website as an added font (Custer, 2013; Boney, 2012). Looking ahead,
connectivity creates an opportunity for news consumers to view community events live from
reservations. Paul DeMain’s, Indian Country TV, provided live streaming for Memorial Day
from Kinnamon School Veterans Memorial site on the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe Reservation
(IndianCountryTV.com, 2013).
Stereotypes of a Forgotten Community

American-Indians are not consistently visible within our society or media. This invisibility leads to a marginalized group becoming more marginalized and a dominant society relying on unrealistic information and images. Native journalists felt that a main reason stereotypical coverage occurs is because the history of American-Indians is painful, a history of oppression, slavery, death, and other mistreatment. An acknowledgement of these communities must involve an educated acknowledgement of the past, including from people who reflect and embody the Native’s point of view. The American-Indians observed and interviewed for this dissertation viewed the internet as a vehicle for offering counter stereotypes and providing more truthful information and images.

A painful past is not to say that the Native community views itself as victims. In fact, “plight” (an unfortunate situation) was a word that one national news organization constantly repeated in recent coverage of an American-Indian community, instead of referring to the history (longitudinal, not isolated) and progress of the community. At the same time that American-Indians are not victims, they also do not fall in categories that are starkly polemic, such as noble savage or barbarian warrior. American-Indians who are nurses, teachers, professional sports athletes, lawyers, writers, journalists, rodeo stars, bodybuilders, bloggers, and the list goes on and on; however, there are only specific times the mainstream media report on the American-Indian community, if they report on it at all. Having a story that runs consistently on Thanksgiving from one Native’s point of view does not equal coverage of a community.

Covering American-Indian communities only when dramatic conflict exists is also not the answer – true of coverage for any community. If one turns on the news at any given moment, lead stories are usually disaster, crime, and other conflicts, then the heartwarming good story
comes later in the newscast or is non-existent. An array of stories in every community can be told from multiple angles. However, the mainstream media craft a perpetual, single narrative of groups that often includes chasing drama and covering conflict-driven stories that demonstrate to readers and viewers that these are the most important narratives. Context, depth, and resolution are reported rarely – and even less when the story is about Indian Country. However, lack of rich reporting is not a problem only with Native coverage, but coverage overall. The effects are heightened only when applied to Native coverage. No solution or peace with tragic events and stereotypes is included, and it puts forth the idea that Natives are victims – which the journalists indicate goes beyond stereotyping and affects who they are as a community and a people.

To truly understand a community to report on it, a journalist must first know in-depth about that community. A shortfall of mainstream media and of most non-Natives is that they have not visited these reservations to note media usage themselves, yet some attempt to report on Indian Country. These non-Natives do not understand the strong bond and connection within this community and more importantly they don’t understand lifestyles on the reservation. If mainstream journalists considered this community as a news beat it would allow for mainstream media to provide more representative, non-stereotypical coverage of this community.

In professional and academic arenas there is a desire to increase American-Indian visibility. For non-Native organizations, attempts should be made to recruit from within Native communities. For example, instead of just advertising or promoting jobs and educational opportunities through mainstream routes, visit reservations and contact Native organizations to promote opportunities.
Answer to Stereotypes: Connect and Grow Native Journalists

American-Indian research tends to focus on well-documented and analyzed stereotypes, an issue that has existed since Europeans first began colonization. This study hopes to move the academic and professional discussions beyond exhausted stereotypes and more toward solutions offered by emerging media. One solution offered by online Native media is an understanding that culture is not synonymous with costumes – a mainstream practice that historically has lent itself to positioning American-Indians as “other” and unimportant.

Coverage of any community should include many angles and inclusive opinions within that community; these perspectives are now readily available online. The mainstream media should be especially reflective of groups who are marginalized within society – not just covering these groups when there is a crisis or negative story; but, instead seeing the community more as a beat – checking on it frequently and visiting the community (Chavez, 2012).

Conclusion

A main finding in this dissertation that helps to build theory within American-Indian media research is that the American-Indian media have a strong connection to culture and community through their storytelling. The Native connection to community and culture is extending online through digital platforms. Much like Native language, Native stories are reported with thick rich cultural detail. Reporters who worked for both Native and mainstream press noted that they could not write in this more detailed fashion when they covered stories for their non-Native newsrooms.

Stories that are considered private and perhaps more appropriate are discussed in a ceremonial setting and are typically avoided by the Native press. This respect does not mean stories are not reported if they affect the entire community; however unlike mainstream media,
the press does not try to bombard families, for example, in the case of death. Instead, reporters will make contact with the family and attempt to speak with its members openly at a more appropriate time.

A digital divide exists within Indian Country; however, the presence and usage of mobile by American-Indians and Native news is shrinking this gap (Guskin & Mitchell, 2012). Native youth have a desire for Native news in a more timely fashion than the tradition weekly tribal publications offer (Jeff Harjo, Executive Director, NAJA, personal communication, March 16, 2012; Noel Lyn Smith, Reporter, Navajo Times, June 2012). American-Indian news consumers are having digital conversations online – spreading Native news found in traditional media and advancing these news stories with circulation and online discussions in social media arenas such as Facebook and Twitter (Bryan Pollard, Executive Editor, Cherokee Phoenix, personal communication, February 14, 2012).

Digital media are changing Native news organizations. American-Indian media are using the internet to distribute programming, to search for sources as well as story ideas. The digital form of media allows anyone who has the desire to seek out and connect with American-Indian perspective. This broadens the scope of Native storytelling, connecting the tight knit community even further while at the same time raising visibility to non-Natives.

The American-Indian population is expected to grow exponentially in the next 40 years and as our society becomes more diverse it is essential to value, respect, and educate oneself about different cultures (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). American-Indian journalists suggest that the answer to combatting the stereotypical views is for non-Natives to connect with American-Indians, whether online or on a reservation and/or both. This connection allows for others to
understand more about the American-Indian culture and to be more aware of the stereotypes that are accepted within our daily society.

One answer to these stereotypes perhaps may be to support and recruit additional American-Indians to enter journalism so connected to storytelling. American-Indian media advocate increasing the number of American-Indians entering journalism. As Native journalists noted, longevity is essential within the Native media profession. Many issues covered within the Native press have a long-standing history and so incoming journalists must understand the history of the culture, community, and perspective.

When the American-Indian news organizations lose a single Native journalist, the result is the loss of much more than an employee. An understanding of history and culture exists with that person. Native journalists spoken in this study said they actively reach out to youth in their communities because they understand the importance of cultivating future Native journalists who will serve as the voices of the next generation.

What this study hopes it accomplished is giving a detailed picture into what Native journalism looks like today. In five or ten years, perhaps the digital divide will continue to diminish as more content on mobile phones and better connectivity increase information transmission to both urban and reservation areas. The goal would be to create news stories that can be accessed from whatever digital platforms have emerged that can cater to the legacy of the reservation and future of urban Natives. An ideal format would be to find a way to bridge the gap between those who are perhaps closer to their Native roots, and those in more urban communities who are trying to form Native communities outside the reservation. A daunting task – as Native press must link to its history and rural and urban Native communities, while attempting to gauge
what is coming next. The goal of the diverse Native media in itself is community coverage and for non-Native views that show diversity and not stereotypes.

Limitations and Future Research

No research is conducted without shortfalls and limitations. A shortfall with this research is time. While this research was worked on for two years, it would have been helpful to have spent at least a year visiting Native communities to better understand the use and norms and routines of Native media. While this study does provide a starting point for future research, the qualitative data here is not generalizable to the overall American-Indian community. Future studies could survey Native journalists about their norms and routines and quantitatively compare the results to other ethnic media and its use of digital platforms. Another aspect of this research would be to survey mainstream journalists about their often misconceived notions of American-Indian press and their openness to connecting with this community as part of a news beat. I hopes to continue this research and to eventually be able to conduct more generalizable research on the greatly understood Indian Country and its many media outlets.
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Appendix A
Interview Guide

- Where do you go to find news?
- What news do you listen, read, watch, etc?
- How did you find out about the news sources you access?
- How have you seen news changing in your community over the past couple years?
- Do you feel that emerging media is extending the ritual of storytelling within your community?
- Do you think there is a difference between the ways American-Indian media cover stories compared to non-native media?
- How do you think mainstream media could serve Native communities better?
- What do you feel are the most important community issues to cover?
- How do Native media cover these important social issues compared to non-Native media?
- What is missing in coverage?
- What do you think is the most important way emerging media can be used in the future within your community?
- As information transmission has changed with emerging media, do you feel American-Indian media are growing online?
- How do resources affect your coverage of storytelling?
- What are the barriers to providing news through emerging media? Resources? Access? Cultural barriers?
- What resources do you find has the greatest impact on your coverage?
- Do you see mainstream media making strides to connect with Native communities?
- How do you feel you serve your community?
- How is covering the story for the radio, newspaper, or television different from covering a story online or through social media?
- Do you feel that emerging media adds or detracts from cultural information provided to news consumers?
- What cultural news is not appropriate for online? Where and how do you find the balance? Who decides? Individual, news organization, or tribe?
- What is the responsibility of a Native journalist in covering stories? How does this extend to emerging media? Do you find it is a collective decision or a societal responsibility of a journalist?

Demographics

- What community do you live in?
- How long have you lived there?
- What is your age?
- What is your gender?
- What tribe/s?
Appendix B
Native Journalists Interviewed

Newspaper

*Navajo Times*

Tom Arviso, Executive Officer and Publisher
Duane Beyal, Interim Editor
Marley Shebala, Senior Reporter
Noel Lyn Smith, Reporter
Alastair Bitsoi, Reporter
Glenda Davis, Reporter
Quentin Jodie, Interim Sports Editor
Cindy Yurth, (non-Native) Reporter
Bill Donovan, (non-Native) Freelance Reporter (also works for *The Gallup Independent*)
Shondiin Silversmith, Intern
LeManuel Loley, Intern
Amber L. Wauneka, Typesetter
Paul Natonabah - Photographer
Elise' L. Bennett, Graphic Designer
Kym Tyler, Graphic Designer
Josephine Carl, Public Notice Manager
Rhonda Joe, Circulation Manager
Franklin Yazzie, Human Resources Manager
Bobby Martin, Production Manager
Ophelia Nez, Production Assistant
Willie Holtsoi, Press Foreman
Leonard Sylvan, Press Operator

_Cherokee Phoenix_

Bryan Pollard, Cherokee, Executive Editor, _Cherokee Phoenix_

_Radio_

Peggy Berryhill, Muscogee (Creek), President/General Manager, KGUA, National federation of Community Broadcasters, Director of Native Station Services, NPR Producer with Specialized Audience Services, Producer for Smithsonian Institution Museum of American History

Burt Poley, Hopi/Laguna, NV1, Former Network Manager

Nola Daves Moses (non-Native), Interim Network Manager, NV1

Antonia Gonzales, Navajo, Anchor/Producer, Koahnic Broadcast Corporation’s National Native News

Will Kie, Pueblo, Associate Producer, Koahnic Broadcast Corporation’s _Native America Calling_

Joaqlin Estus, Tlingit, News Director, KNBA/Alaska

Joseph Orozco, Hoopa, Station Manager, KIDE/Hoopa Valley

_Television/Multimedia_

Paul DeMain, Citizen of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin - Ojibwe/Mohawk/Delaware descent, Executive Officer and Publisher, Indian Country Communications: _News from Indian Country/_Indian Country TV (Newspaper, TV, and digital platform)

Josh Pearson, Ojibwe, Lac Courte Oreilles, Web Producer, Editor, _News from Indian Country/_Indian Country TV (Newspaper, TV, and digital platform)

Patty Talahongva, Hopi, independent multimedia producer

Shirley Kay Sneve, Sicangu Lakota, Native American Public Telecommunications, Inc./Vision Maker Media

Jeanie Greene, Inupiat, Television and Online Producer, “Heartbeat Alaska”
Online Journalists

Mark Trahant, Shoshone-Bannock, Trahant Reports, 2013/2014 Atwood Chair at University of Alaska Anchorage

Chase Iron Eyes, Lakota, Creator, LastRealIndians.com

Ruth Hopkins, Sisseton-Wahpeton/Mdewakanton/Hunkpapa, Founding Writer, LastRealIndians.com

Jodi Rave, Nueta (Mandan), Publisher, Buffalo’s Fire

News Organizations

Jeff Harjo, Seminole Nation of Oklahoma, Native American Journalists Association, 2007 - 2012 Executive Director

Rhonda LeValdo, Acoma Pueblo, President of the Native American Journalists Association, Faculty in Media Communications at Haskell Indian Nations University, Producer for Native Spirit Radio at 90.1 FM-KKFI/Kansas City, MO, and reporter for National Native News and Native News Network.

Rebecca Landsberry, Muscogee (Creek), Membership and Communications Manager, Native American Journalists Association

Art Coulson, Cherokee, Redbird Media & Design, Co-Owner

Additional Native Perspectives:

Ron Leith, Dakota, Ojibwe, Ho-Chunk, Cree, (persepective on regional news)

Alice Hollow Horn, Lakota, Graduate Student in Native American Tribal

Duane Potter, Manchester Band of Pomo Indians and Wappo (youth perspective on news)

Chuckie Verdin, Chief/Chairman, Pointe-au-Chien Tribe

Michelle Billiot Matherne, Secretary, Pointe-au-Chien Tribe

Angele Black, Pointe-au-Chien Tribe

Theresa Dardar, Pointe-au-Chien Tribe
Appendix C
Native News Organization Websites

Newspapers

NavajoTimes.com

CherokeePhoenix.org
Radio

KGUA.org

KohanicBroadcast.org

Kohanic Broadcast Corporation (KBC) is a nonprofit, Alaska Native governed and operated media center located in Anchorage, Alaska. "Kohanic" is an Athabaskan word in the Athnena dialect meaning "village people".

Mission Statement
Core Purpose & Values
Board of Directors
KBC FY07 Budget by Revenue Sources
Community Advisory Board
Copyright

The mission of Kohanic Broadcast Corporation is to be the leader in bringing Native voices to Alaska and the nation. KBC pursues its mission through operation of three projects:

National Programming, a selection of radio programming that is broadcast by public and tribal radio stations across the country. KBC's national programming includes National Native News, Native America Calling, Earthenroots, Stories of Our People, and Native Word of the
Television/Multimedia

News from Indian Country/ Indian Country TV (Newspaper, TV, and digital platform)
Welcome to PattyTalahongva.com

Welcome to my Home Page!
Here you’ll find some examples of my work and my bio and contact information. Thanks for stopping by!

Video Examples:
Documentary: "Veterans 11/11/11"
Welcome to the true video experience, authentically sharing the lives of Alaska Native people from their perspective. Thank you for joining us!

NOW AIRED ON COASTAL TELEVISION STATEWIDE ACROSS ALASKA

Native American Public Telecommunications, Inc./Vision Maker Media
Nativetelecom.org
Online Journalists

Trahant Reports/MarkTrahant.org

LastRealIndians.com
News Organizations

Native American Journalists Association/NAJA.com
Appendix D
IRB Confidentiality Statement and Approval

Confidentiality Statement
You are being asked to participate in a research study on American-Indian Media. Please read this form carefully to decide if you would like to participate.

What this study is about: The purpose of this study is to explore American-Indian media.

What you are asked to do: If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked questions about news coverage.

Risks and benefits: You will not be asked for your personal information. However, you will be asked to indicate demographic information like race, age and gender. This information will be used for research purposes only.

Your answers will be confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. In any report made public, your information will not be revealed, unless you agree, so that you can be identified. Research records will be kept in a locked file or on a password protected computer; only the researchers will have access to the records.

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide not to take part or to skip answers, it will not affect any professional or academic relationships you may have. If you decide to take part in this survey, you are free to withdraw at any time.

If you have questions: The researcher conducting the survey is Victoria LaPoe. If you have any questions about this survey, you may contact Victoria LaPoe vbemkel@lsu.edu or by calling (502) 500-8472. You can also contact her adviser Dr. Andrea Miller at almiller@lsu.edu or (225) 578-3146. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you can contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at irb@lsu.edu or (225) 578-8692.

You can now print off this form to keep for your records.
TO: 
Victoria Berliner
Mass Communication

FROM: 
Robert C. Mathews
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: 
January 31, 2011

Reference: 
IRBM 55119

TITLE: 
"New Media Research"

New Protocol/Modification/Continuation: Modification

Brief Modification Description: Visual experiment added — visuals of the oil spill used to test memory of the event (details attached in an email received 1/20/2011)

Review type: Full ___ Expedited X Review date: 1/20/2011

Risk Factor: Minimal X Uncertain ___ Greater Than Minimal ___

Approved X Disapproved ___

Approval Date: ___ Approval Expiration Date: ___

Re-review frequency: (annual unless otherwise stated)

Number of subjects approved: n/a

Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable) N/A

By: Robert C. Mathews, Chairman

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING —
Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU’s Assurance of Compliance with OHRP regulations for the protection of human subjects

2. Prior approval of any changes to protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of participants in the study.
Vita

Victoria LaPoe is from Louisville, Kentucky. She earned her M.A. (2008) and B.A. (1999) in journalism and mass communication from the University of Iowa as well as a B.A. (1999) in theatre arts.

Victoria is the assistant editor in American Indian studies for the national Media Diversity Forum and is a member of the Native American Journalists Association (NAJA).

Victoria is a co-author in a book coming out this fall on the Media Lessons of Two Gulf Disasters – Hurricane Katrina and the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and has received a book contract for her dissertation.

She is an award winning journalist who worked in television news for over thirteen years. She was a client strategist for two of the top television consultation firms for over six years; here she developed coverage and strategy plans for over 100 stations in the United States as well as networks in England, Ireland, France, Greece, Italy and Spain. While working in research and consultation, she also conducted research for the Pentagon, Department of Defense, Air Force and Army.