

2010

In search of state government: the lack of state legislative coverage in local television news

German Adolfo Alvarez

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses



Part of the [Mass Communication Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Alvarez, German Adolfo, "In search of state government: the lack of state legislative coverage in local television news" (2010). *LSU Master's Theses*. 2264.

https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses/2264

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Master's Theses by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.

**IN SEARCH OF STATE GOVERNMENT: THE LACK OF STATE LEGISLATIVE
COVERAGE IN LOCAL TELEVISION NEWS**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Mass Communication

in

Theanship School of Mass Communication

By
German Adolfo Alvarez
B.A., Louisiana State University, 2006
December, 2010

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Regina Lawrence, Dr. Rosanne Scholl, and Dr. Johanna Dunaway. Your patience, insight, and advice shaped this thesis every step of the way. Without your help, this thesis could not be possible. Thank you.

Dr. Dunaway, I would like to especially thank you for your faith in me. At times, the demands of this project seemed impossible. Without your encouragement, support, and friendship I would not have been able to finish this thesis. The phrase ‘thank you’ doesn’t do justice to the amount of gratitude I have for you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
INTRODUCTION.....	1
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	4
NEED FOR INFORMED CITIZENRY?.....	4
STATE GOVERNMENT AND THE CITIZEN.....	5
STATE GOVERNMENT COVERAGE.....	6
GUBERNATORIAL COVERAGE.....	8
PROXIMITY AND COVERAGE.....	9
LOCAL TELEVISION NEWS.....	10
SOCIOLOGY OF NEWS.....	12
POLITICAL ECONOMY OF NEWS.....	12
ETHNOGRAPHICAL STUDIES OF NEWS MEDIA.....	14
NEWS MEDIA AS INSTITUTIONAL.....	15
INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF LOCAL MEDIA.....	17
THEORY.....	20
METHODOLOGY.....	23
RESULTS.....	29
DISCUSSION.....	47
IMPLICATIONS FOR NEWS WORKERS.....	50
WHO DETERMINES STATE LEGISLATIVE COVERAGE?.....	51
REFERENCES.....	54
VITA.....	59

ABSTRACT

This study examines how the institutional characteristics of local television news stations affect the stations' coverage of state legislative news. Focusing on the state of Louisiana, the researcher conducts in-depth interviews with news workers from the seven media markets in the state. The interviews were focused toward the decision makers in the newsroom in order to examine the process that determines the newscast the audience receives. The interview discussions centered on the news making process. In addition, the interviews focused explicitly on the effect of proximity to the state capitol; coverage of state level news versus community level or national level news; and the effect of gubernatorial coverage on the topics within state legislative news. The findings suggest that local television news media hold distinct institutional characteristics that determine the extent of legislative news coverage provided. Proximity affects commitment to state government news. Also, news workers tend to cover the governor more than state legislative news. Finally, the findings of this study suggest that the structure of local television news is not optimal or even sufficient for serving the public in state legislative news.

INTRODUCTION

Scholars have suggested that local news media provide insufficient coverage of state legislatures (Wolfson, 1985; Graber, 1993; Delli Carpini, Keeter, & Kennamer, 1994). This is problematic as the more information the public receives about their various levels of government, the greater their opportunity to hold their political officials accountable (Arnold, 2004). This study builds on the notion that public needs information about their state legislatures in order to hold this particular governing body accountable. Therefore, this study examines the situational constraints that influence the extent to which news workers cover or do not cover state legislatures, and how these news workers' decisions affect the balance of topics within state legislative news and the balance of state level versus community level or national level news.

The news media have several constraints that affect their coverage of state political actors. Foremost, news is a business. While the degree of responsibility news workers feel towards the public may vary, any news outlet must remain in business. Due to this environment, arise several predictable behaviors of news media. Many ethnographic studies have illustrated the various norms and routines that shape and affect the news the public ultimately receives (Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978; Kaniss, 1992). These studies led some researchers to argue these journalistic norms and routines provide the news media with a political role in the government (Cook, 1998; Sparrow, 1999). Cook contended that the news media are a political institution because news media have "social patterns of behavior identifiable across the organizations that are generally seen within a society to preside over a particular social sphere" (Cook, 1998, p.70). Cook (2006) revisited this argument with specific attention to the notion that the news media is not a single political institution, but instead a set of political institutions. For example, a small privately owned newspaper might share similar behavior patterns with other privately owned

newspapers across the country. Conversely, a small privately owned newspaper might have distinctly different behavior patterns from a large corporate owned newspaper. Cook asserts that future studies of the news media as an institution should understand that news media are a set of “varied and potentially permeable” institutions.

This study examines one layer of the news media as an institution. Local television continues to serve as the public’s most commonly used source of information about public affairs (Gallup Poll, 1998, Newport and Saad, 1998, Pew Research Center for People and the Press, 2000; Pew Research Center for People and the Press, 2009). Still, research on television news shows that the information provided lacks substance compared to some other forms news media (Postman, 1985; Arnold, 2004). A common explanation for the lack of substantive coverage is that local television news has a shorter window with which to provide information and the demands of other kinds of news stories shape how local television covers public affairs (Berkowitz, 1990; Graber, 1993; Klein, 2003). Still, the news media arguably serve to promote a debate on public issues. This study examines the local television news coverage of state government news.

Researchers have described state government news as hidden or invisible to the public (Wolfson, 1985; Roeder, 1994). This level of government is not likely to receive coverage in national news media, because national media is tasked with covering the entirety of federal government (Arnold, 2004). Thus, the majority of state government coverage rests in local newspapers and local television news. Still research shows that state government news coverage lacks quality (Wolfson, 1985; Graber, 1993; Delli Carpini et al, 1994).

This study examines the news workers making the decisions about what to cover in the state legislature and what to run in the newscasts. If information is the currency of democracy,

then news workers are the bankers (Cooper and Johnson, 2006). Survey findings showing polar opposite assessments of state governments suggests that something happens in news making and news delivery that prevents substantive information that fosters public debate. This study conducts a series of in-depth interviews in order to identify the institutional constraints of local television news and how this affects state government coverage.

The impetus for this research begins with the simple inquiry into how local television news provides the public with the opportunity to receive political information. Moreover, this study is concerned with the extent of information the public potentially receives about their state legislatures, as state government receives minimal attention in the media (Delli Carpini et al, 1994; Wolfson, 1985; Graber, 1993). Still, state legislative information is necessary for the public to hold their state legislators accountable. Arnold (2004) provides a rubric for what kind of information the public needs to hold their representatives accountable. Two kinds of information he describes are: 1) citizens profit by knowing what positions legislators have taken on the important issues of the day; 2) citizens benefit by knowing how representatives have contributed to policy making beyond supporting or opposing other legislators' proposals. The public cannot receive this kind of information if there is no legislative news provided. This study examines the factors that prevent or allow news workers to cover state legislative news.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Need for Informed Citizenry?

With every passing election cycle, the public has the opportunity to hold their representatives and political leaders accountable for their performance. Scholars argue that this act of voting is the quintessential part of political participation (Bennett, 1986; Conway, 1991). Voting is a proactive political behavior that citizens use to influence their government. The ability to vote a politician in or out of office is measure of political accountability (Arnold, 2004). In addition, Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) show data that associate high levels of political knowledge with political participation. According to this research finding, the more information provided to the public potentially increases the health of democracy.

Nevertheless, the United States' democracy has endured without a highly informed citizenry calling in to question the need for a politically knowledgeable public (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). In response, scholars have argued that the United States' democracy has evolved and adapted to function without an informed public (Schumpeter, 1942; Berelson, 1952; Nueman, 1986; Zaller, 1992). Some arguments hold that real democracy involves strong elite control by those in office, where a small informed citizenry expresses the general will to the elites in government (Schumpeter, 1942, Schattschneider, 1960). Other scholars contend that the public, while not necessarily informed, uses heuristics and information shortcuts to arrive at political decisions (Popkin, 1991; Zaller, 1992). Furthermore, Page and Shapiro (1992) assert that collective public opinion is still rational because over time the random views of uninformed individuals cancel each other out, allowing the rational choices to dominate overall public opinion. All these different arguments support the notion that a democracy can function without a highly informed public.

Nevertheless, these studies tend to show how citizens ‘get by’ without information, instead of reconciling the problem of an uninformed and subsequently inactive citizenry. “The paradox of modern democracy,” Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) argue, “cannot be resolved by eliminating the need for a broadly and equitably informed citizenry” (p.49). In their seminal work, Delli Carpini and Keeter contend that campaigns and elections are periods of public deliberation and a referendum on the state of American society. In this period, political actors and the public engage in a dialectic where each informs the other its position on policies and issues. Importantly, Entman (1989) contends that the level of the public’s political knowledge sets the parameters of this discussion. In addition, information is even more important in between elections (Lemert, 1992; Arnold, 2004). The policies and actions of government in between elections will reflect the public interest with greater public participation. The American democratic system has the potential to be very responsive to the public, if the public takes advantage of all their resources (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). One major resource is political information.

So far, this discussion examines the need for informed citizens. Yet, an integral component to an informed citizen hinges on the availability of political information. Moreover, this study focuses on the political information a citizen has the opportunity to receive about their state level government. Arguably, the expanding power of state governments makes coverage of this level of government worthy of investigation.

State Government and the Citizen

The power of state government has increased over the course of the late 20th century. In the last 40 years an important shift took place where the federal government relegated many of its powers to the state governments often called ‘devolution’ (Bowman and Kearney, 1986;

Reeves, 1985; Roeder, 1994; Van Horn, 1989). This shift included revisions of state government constitutions, legislative reapportionment and professionalization, a strengthening of the executive authority, and increasing fiscal authority (Bowman and Kearney, 1986; Lynch, 2000; Reeves, 1985; Roeder, 1994; Van Horn, 1989). At the state government level, lawmakers tax and spend billions and are responsible for implementing policies that affect the public's lives in very direct ways (Delli Carpini, Keeter, and Kenamer, 1994). In addition, reductions of federal financial support to the states, coupled with state government's increasing responsibilities, have led to new financial problems (Delli Carpini et al. 1994). This only adds more to the power and importance of state government. Furthermore, many state Governors are involved in shaping the agenda of national issues (Lynch, 2000). For example, Governor Bobby Jindal of Louisiana appeared on *CNN* presenting alternative forms of health care reform.

In addition to receiving more powers, the state government has another increasing power – namely public support. A survey research analysis showed that 61% of people polled believed that their state government runs better than the federal government (Blendon, Benson, Morin, Altman, Brodie, Brossard, and James, 1997). This kind of support has the potential to continue the devolution of power from the federal government to state governments (Hetherington and Nugent, 2001). Yet, support for devolution by a chronically low informed public (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996) begs inquiry into how much information the public has on their state government. As a starting point, an examination into how much news coverage state government receives is necessary.

State Government Coverage

Research shows that typically state government receives very little news coverage (Delli Carpini et al, 1994; Wolfson, 1985; Graber, 1993). Delli Carpini et al (1994) contend that state

government tends to disappear entirely from news coverage. Similarly, Wolfson (1985) describes the state government as the “hidden layer of government, the stepchild of American politics” (p. 137). The scarce coverage of state politics may affect the public’s seemingly ambivalent feelings toward state politics.

Hetherington and Nugent (2001) argue that the public holds favorable views of state government as a result of the relatively little coverage state governments receive compared to the national government. The tendency to frame news stories within conflict leads to negative perceptions of government institutions (Capella and Jamieson, 1996). Thus, extensive coverage of the national government allows for more negative or critical views about the national than state level politics. Other scholars have argued that lack of media coverage drives public opinion towards state government as well. Roeder (1994) explains that state governments are “invisible” to public opinion due to the lack of coverage. Hetherington and Nugent (2001) assert that the lack of coverage in state politics leads the public to hold more trust in their state government over national politics. Yet, this trust arguably exists as a naïve trust. More trust in state level government may in part explain the lower levels of participation because citizens may find it less important to change the status quo at the state level.

The extensive coverage of federal politics compared to state politics has the potential to create a sense of urgency in citizens that they lack toward their state government. Hetherington and Nugent’s (2001) study shows that even heavy consumers of news are less likely to understand the effect state governments have on their lives. Their results show that the more a citizen watches information about national level politics the more he tends to recognize national government as the level of government that has the most effect on his personal life. Uslander (2001) argues that race, political ideology, and fear of big government cause citizens to monitor

their federal government more than their state government (see also, Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). In addition, citizens that pay more attention to the news will feel more emotions toward national government.

The issues stemming from this array of research are two fold. First, lack of coverage of state government leads the public hold ambivalent views towards their state government. Second, extensive coverage of national politics creates an environment where the public holds critical views towards their federal government, but is less cognizant of the impact state government has upon their lives. The lack of opportunity to receive state government news suggests an environment where the public will hold their federal government more accountable than their state government. In addition to this problem, the information the public does receive about their state government appears to revolve heavily around the Governor.

Gubernatorial Coverage

Hamman (2006) contends that when the media focus on state level politics, governors and their policies tend to receive most of the coverage over the state legislatures. These findings lead to a problem in the public's ability to hold their state legislators accountable because most of the news coverage involves coverage of the Governor as well. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995) contend that the public is uncomfortable with the intricacies involved in policy making in the legislative branch of state governments, thus leading to less intricate news coverage. Yet, the effects of this kind of coverage may lead the public to hold a specific branch of government accountable instead of their individual representatives. For example, Hamman (2006) and Karp (1995) argue that when citizens seem to hold state legislators accountable, they are likely making a judgment on the state government or the most familiar political actor – the governor.

Gubernatorial coverage may be a result of the news media's tendency to personalize news stories (Bennett, 2009). As Bennett explains, the media focus on the people involved in political issues instead of the processes behind the political issues. This tendency to personalize story may increase audience attention, but lacks substantive information that potentially increases the public's critical understanding of political processes. Moreover, scholars assert that news media look for powerful spokesman for the different branches of government to satisfy the need to have authorities' opinions (Gans, 1979; Fico, 1983; Cook, 1996). In addition, Fico (1983) contends that the best spokesmen are politicians with the largest constituencies. In state government, this is the governor as he is elected statewide, while state legislators are elected regionally (Fico, 1983).

Proximity and Coverage

Previous research suggests that news organizations closer to events or issues provide more coverage due to their proximity (Martin, 1988; Adams, 1986; Branton and Dunaway, 2009). Branton and Dunaway (2009) argue that local media focus political news coverage with regards to proximity and relevance. In regards to the issue of immigration, they found that U.S. geographic proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border increased news coverage of immigration issues. Moreover, Hamilton (2004) argues that the economics behind local television news broadcasts affect what receives coverage. He cites relevance as a major determinant of local news coverage. Ideally, the state legislative coverage is relevant due to the fact that the legislators' actions affect the entire state. Nevertheless, Hamilton implies that proximity to the state capitol will likely produce more coverage.

Traditionally, bureaus assigned to cover the state capitols mitigate the issue of distance from the state capitol. However, scholars show that a significant amount of local television

stations and newspapers are downsizing or eliminating these bureaus (Johnson, 2010). As the average number of reporters and bureaus to the state capitol shrinks, the attention to overall state politics shrinks as well (Howard, 2007). Alvarez (2009) showed evidence of this shrinking attention as his results showed significantly less coverage of the state legislature in media markets farther from the state capitol.

Coverage of state government holds consequences for the citizens' ability to receive political information conducive to a democratic society (Entman, 1989; Lemert, 1992; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Arnold, 2004). This discussion necessitates inquiry into where citizens receive most of their political information. Television is still the largest source of news information for the public (Gallup Poll, 1998, Newport and Saad, 1998, Pew Research Center for People and the Press, 2000). Thus, this medium has the greatest chance of exposing the public to political information (Griffin, 1992; Klite, Bardwell, and Salzman, 1997). Arguably, newspapers provide the highest quality of political information to the public (McLeod, Daily, Guo, Eveland, Bayer, Yang, and Wang, 1996; Arnold, 2004). Nevertheless, "use of local newspapers is a somewhat better indicator of community knowledge and participation, but local television [has] a decided edge in affecting local political interest" (McLeod et al, 1996, p. 202). Therefore, this study focuses on local news television broadcast.

Local Television News

When accounting for the hours of daily programming (Papper and Gerhard, 1999) and the size of the viewing audiences for local newscasts (Hess, 1991), it becomes evident that local television is the most utilized medium for public affairs information. Judging from this research, the public's greatest opportunity to receive political information lies with local television news. Nevertheless, research on television news shows that the information provided is less than ideal

(Littlewood, 1972; Gormley, 1979; Kaniss, 1992; McManus, 1994; Rosenstiel, Gottlieb, and Brady, 2000; Klein, 2003; Arnold, 2004).

“I believe the epistemology created by television,” Postman (1985) argued, “not only is inferior to print based epistemology but is dangerous and absurdist” (p.27). Postman’s contention is that television serves only to entertain; thus television cannot provide necessary quality news information. Some of the reason the quality is generally low is due to the structure of local television news. Excluding commercials, a typical television newscast has twenty-two minutes to broadcast news, weather, and sports (Lynch, 2000). Research shows that most of the “news” portion of the twenty-two minute broadcast covers crime or violent events (Graber, 1993; Kline et al, 1997; Klein, 2003). An observational study found that accident and crime stories are the top two categories of news aired, with political stories usually falling in third (Berkowitz, 1990). This research would suggest that the poor quality of local news would lead to low levels of political knowledge. In addition, these low levels of political knowledge would lead to low levels of political participation (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). In fact, McLeod, Scheufele, and Moy’s (1999) survey research showed that television news has no direct impact on political participation. Still, this conclusion assumes that television is the only media outlet the public uses to get political information.

However, while McLeod et al (1999) found television news to have no direct impact on political participation, the study did show that an indirect impact does exist. This research accounted for the various media outlets an individual encounters everyday. The researchers constructed a path analysis that shows how attention to one media outlet will likely lead to another media outlet that may culminate in political participation. For example, television news had no direct path correlating to political participation, but television news did correlate with a

higher interest in local newspapers. As the study shows, higher interest in local newspaper does lead to political participation. Therefore, television still plays a pivotal role in the enhancement of the public's political knowledge.

Despite the issues arising from the structural constraints of local television news, for the purpose of this study a discussion about local television news is incomplete without inquiry into how journalists make local news. How news workers decide what receives coverage, what position the story receives in the newscast, or what receives no coverage can suggest many explanations for citizens' political knowledge, political participation, or even their feelings toward politics (Entman, 1989; Lemert, 1992; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Capella and Jamieson, 1996; Blendon et al, 1997; McLeod et al, 1999; Uslaner, 2001; Arnold, 2004).

Sociology of News

Many researchers have studied the news making process (Tuchman, 1978; Gans, 1979; Schudson, 1978, 2006; Kaniss, 1992; McManus, 1994; McChesney, 1999; Cook, 1998, 2006; Hamilton, 2006; Sparrow, 1999, 2006). These studies shed light on the common issues that all news media face that affect the news making process. Still, these studies of news production vary in their final conclusions as to the central determinants of news production. Schudson (2003), in an attempt to provide clarity, divides the study of news production into three general approaches. The political economy research focuses on the patterns of media ownership and the behavior of news institutions (McManus, 1994; Sparrow, 1999; Hamilton, 2004). In addition, sociology of news research examines social organization of news work and relates news content to the normalized patterns of interaction between journalists and their sources (Tuchman, 1978; Gans, 1979; Cook, 1998). The cultural approach of news research examines news as a product of cultural forces; where belief systems, assumptions, and values unconsciously shape the news

(Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm, 1963; Schudson, 1978; Hallin and Mancini, 2004). All three of these research approaches provide distinctive insight into the news making process.

Nevertheless, this study focuses on the sociological and political economy research.

Political Economy of News

McManus (1994) explains that profit motives lead local news stations to cover relatively accessible and inexpensive stories. News workers prefer inexpensive stories because less money spent in the production of news stories means more money the news outlet owners retain (Hamilton, 2004). In addition, soft news stories are generally low cost, yet preferred by television audiences. Therefore, soft news stories increase audience viewership, which increase advertising revenue, all while increasing profit (Hamilton, 2004). This profit motive tends to create a consonance of coverage as stations share video and information to reduce cost. As ownership of television news continues to shrink to a handful of owners, the possibility for even more consonance exists (Fratik, 2001). In addition, McManus (1994) contends that market forces determine the routines of broadcast journalists. He argues that low cost, easy to produce information while maximizing audience viewership is the main routine that leads broadcast journalists to gravitate to certain stories. Ultimately McManus concludes that news content has very little variation across media markets and media environments because the market drives the content.

Sparrow (1999) adds to the economic argument concluding that market forces lead to the institutionalization of news media outlets. He argues that news media exists in an inter-organizational field with other political communicators and market actors (Sparrow, 1999). For media outlets to survive this uncertain political and economic environment, they must stabilize their position among the market. Thus, media outlets develop set practices toward the political

and economic actors on whom they depend. In addition, Sparrow lists professional and informational uncertainties facing media outlets; nevertheless, their greatest concern is finding their niche in the market (Cook, 2006). For example, Sparrow (1999) contends that information is not what media supply; instead, a major priority of news media is to supply audiences to advertisers. News outlets that flourish in the inter-organizational develop common practices; hence becoming part of the news institution. These economic arguments illustrate how market forces affect behavior; yet, ethnographic studies provide a distinct perspective of journalistic norms and routines.

Ethnographical Studies of News Media

Tuchman (1978) is one the earliest scholars to refer to the news media as an institution. She argues that news media follow an institutional method of making information available to the public (Tuchman, 1978). She further observes that news is the product of professionals working in an institution following similar practices and routines. Due to their professional organization, the information news media disseminate both circulates and shapes public knowledge (Tuchman, 1978, p.2). She concludes that news media construct reality for the public. As a real world occurrence is transformed into a news event, that news event becomes a news story, and the outcome is a constructed information product.

Similar in style to Tuchman's (1978) work, Gans' (1979) study shows how norms and routines create news that fails to accurately represent nation and society. In his assessment, Gans contends that news media contain set values that span across the news media and motivate journalists' story selection. He argues that these values stem from middle class progressive values; yet these values do not represent the nation or society as a whole. Instead, this value system means that the news media filter news content through values that represent a small

portion of the population. Moreover, Gans explains how norms and routines develop due to expediency in order to meet deadlines. This fast paced environment leads journalist to gravitate toward certain kinds of news sources. Gans describes political actors as the quickest, most reliable, and productive sources of news. These sources satisfy the source considerations for authoritativeness and productivity; while their accessibility satisfies their time constraints. Nevertheless, journalists' reliance on political figures with advantages that the average individual lacks.

News Media as Institutional

Cook (1998) argues news media are a single political institution. Central to his argument is the notion that similarities among news media outlets' practices, structure, and content suggests institutional behavior. Cook argues that news media developed norms and routines in order to become stable institutions. He explains, "outside politics, uncertainty, and professionalization," pressured news organizations to behave collectively (1998, p.76). Cook explains similarities in political news reports as a result of several factors. One factor Cook points to is that reporters receive the same press releases. In addition, uncertainty over what constitutes news leads journalists to consult with each other in order to justify newsworthiness. Journalists risk credibility, jobs, or respect if they miss a news story because of attention given to a story deemed less newsworthy. More importantly, journalists need for story credibility results in a pattern of seeking out government officials as sources. In turn, officials use the relationship to send messages to the public. Still, Cook describes this relationship as symbiotic, because the politicians need the journalist to cover their positions. The patterns and practices lead Cook (1998) to conclude that the news media are a political institution.

Sparrow and Cook revisit their arguments in later research and revise their assertions (Cook, 2006; Sparrow, 2006). Both scholars hold that news is still homogenized with regards to the fact that they all face similar pressures. Moreover, they hold that several factors still push journalists toward certain stories: the need for professional consensus, comparable norms and routines of news making, the need to reduce the uncertainty as to what is news, the reliance on agenda setting outlets (i.e. *New York Times*), and how political officials accommodate journalists as a distinct group (Cook, 2006). Still, Sparrow (2006) refines his argument by acknowledging possible contradictions to this theory. He agrees that while news media outlets' still share similar uncertainties that lead to institutional behavior, situations may arise when news outlets' behavior may differ. First, he concedes that any given media firm in attempts to advance or retain its position in the competitive market may take positions contrary to their own interests or those of their advertisers. Second, Sparrow asserts the need to account for micro foundations of news media, such as the differences in regional and local media. "Explanations of news media," Sparrow concludes, "need to be grounded in theories of and based on evidence from organizational and individual actions" (p.152).

Cook (2006) warns against discussing the news as a single institution; instead he argues that the news media is better described as an intermediary institution similar to the system of interest groups. He concedes that news media have a vast range of differences. For example, some media outlets' main concern is profit gain, while others focus on the public interest. Cook (2006) encourages researchers to study all the various kinds of news media operating in the United States. Only this kind of research will provide a full understanding of the news media's institutional characteristics and at the same time chart the variations among the different media outlets. Both Cook (2006) and Sparrow (2006) agree that research in news media

institutionalism should move forward in this direction. In fact, there is recent research that examines the different levels of news media; specific to this study is the emergence of scholarly work that examines the institutional characteristics of local media (Arnold, 2004; Hamilton, 2004; Dunaway, 2008).

Institutional Characteristics of Local Media

Some of the studies that cover local media use an economic argument to show variations in local media coverage. Kurpius (2003) disagrees with McManus' argument that little variation exist in news media content across media markets and media environments. Kurpius argues that local news markets cross over different cities and counties, leading stations to focus on the central city in their market and broad regional issues in their coverage. Kurpius suggests some variation in local television news coverage, Hamilton's (2004) research further elaborates this point.

Hamilton (2004) introduces an economic theory of news production that does predict variation. His main argument is that specific economic characteristics of information goods affect the supply and demand of news products (Hamilton, 2004, p.1). In terms of local television news he found variation dependent on audience demographics, ownership and location. For example, a market found within a capitol city will likely have more state workers, thus an increase in state political news. Conversely, a market that falls within an area that prefers soft news will show an increase in soft news or entertainment news. In addition, corporate ownership has more soft news and generally has more consonance across a given state. The consonance of news stories is likely due to the low cost of transmitting information to stations owned by the same company. The variation evident in Hamilton's research speaks to

Cook's (2006) argument that scholars need to study different layers of the news media. At the same time, Hamilton's findings suggest distinct institutional constraints of local news media.

Dunaway (2008) study shows results that support Hamilton's (2004) findings. Dunaway (2008) argues that the type of ownership and market pressure affect the quality of both local newspaper and local television coverage. Her study shows that corporate ownership and high levels of market pressure negatively affect issue coverage of the 2004 national elections. Conversely, privately owned local news media with low market pressures showed the best quality of coverage. In addition, her study also found that larger sizes of reporting staff and political newsbeats increase the quality of news coverage in local newspapers. The findings in this study illustrate how the institutional characteristics (i.e. market, ownership, and reporting structures) have independent effects on local news coverage.

Arnold (2004) also finds evidence that local media show behavioral variation from the national level news media, yet at the same time show similarities among the local level news media. He examines local newspaper coverage of the members of the House of Representatives over a Congressional session. His results find that different considerations in smaller newspapers generate significantly different coverage than a large national newspaper (i.e. *The New York Times*).

Kaniss' (1991) study mixed interviews with journalists and various quantitative analyses of local media. Her study found strong commercial pressures on local television news. She explains that the pressure emerges from conflicts between local business (potential advertisers) and the stations. Moreover, Kaniss found that local media, especially television, tend to cover 'symbolic' instead of substantive issues. By 'symbolic,' she means issues that all the residents of a given market have in common. This finding is consistent with more recent research that

shows that local television aims to maximize the audience demographics within their media market (Friedland, 2000; Hamilton, 2004).

More importantly for the purposes of this study, Kaniss (1991) explains that the high cost of anchor salaries and station promotion leaves a small budget for the local television news reporter to gather news. This leads to employment of a small reporting staff, with few if any to work as beat reporters. In addition, local news reporters have a high turnover rate because as they gain experience they move to larger media markets. According to Kaniss, the turnover rate and low staff leads the assignment editors to search for story ideas. She explains that they rely on five main sources: police and fire scanners, press releases, wire services, tips from viewers, and local newspapers (p. 107). Kaniss' study illustrates the differences and similarities in local news media compared to national news media. For example, market pressures affect local and national media (Sparrow, 1998; Hamilton, 2004). Conversely, the issues arising with the budget and the local television news reporter are dissimilar from national news media and even local newspapers (Kaniss, 1991). Ultimately, this study intends to extend the research on the institutional characteristics of local television news.

THEORY

As cited in the literature review, Cook (1998) asserted that the news media are a single, powerful political institution. His argument is that similarities among news media outlets' practices, structure, and content suggest broad institutional behavior. In subsequent work, Cook (2006) refines this argument and contends that news media is more comparable to intermediary institutions, such as interest groups, or that the media can be thought of as a media system or set of nested institutions. His point is news organizations found within the larger media system show distinctive variation.

Recent empirical research illustrates the institutional variations and/or similarities in news organizations dependent upon factors such as proximity, staff size, financial resources, and market competition (Arnold 2004; Dunaway 2008; Hamilton 2004; Alvarez, 2009). However, few recent studies use the in-depth interview approach to explain the institutional patterns and constraints in local television news. This study examines local television broadcast stations and their coverage of state government through that lens. The interview discussions focus on how the following institutional characteristics affect news workers decision to cover state legislative news: the internal (i.e. staffing, budgets) and external constraints (i.e. audience preference, proximity) in local television news, the balance of state legislative news versus national level news or community level news, and how gubernatorial coverage affects the balance of topics within state legislative news coverage.

Research shows that local television news has specific external and internal constraints. For example, Hamilton (2004) shows that preferences of news audiences constrain the news making behavior. For example, he explains that local television tends to focus on soft news to entertain the viewer. Audience preference is a large consideration in deciding the news. Local

television news also has distinctive internal constraints such as fewer reporters. Kaniss (1991) found that local television news has significantly fewer reporters than does newspapers. Considered in the context of the present study, this could potentially explain why state government receives little coverage because previous research suggests fewer reporters correlates with poor news coverage (Dunaway, 2008; Cooper and Johnson, 2010).

This study also examines the effect proximity to the state capitol has on state government news. As previous literature illustrates, proximity to issues and events affects the extent of coverage given to said events (Bendix and Lieber, 1999; Branton and Dunway, 2009; Alvarez, 2009). In addition, research contends that proximity to the state capitol increases how much local television covers state government (Hamilton, 2004; Kaniss, 1991). One argument in these studies is that local television stations closer to the state capitol have audiences interested in state government news. Moreover, it is more costly for distant news organizations to cover state government issues because they try to avoid the time and costs of travel, moving equipment, and other expenses that come with covering a far away capitol (Hamilton, 2004; Kaniss, 1991). This literature leads to the following research question:

RQ1: What are the various internal (i.e. staffing, budgets) and external constraints (i.e. audience preference, proximity) that influence news workers' decisions that affect the extent of legislative news coverage their stations' provide?

The aforementioned literature on state government coverage contends that news media tend to cover national news extensively (Graber, 1993; Hetherington and Nugent, 2001; Uslander, 2001). In addition, resource and financial constraints leads news organizations to focus on easily accessible and inexpensive news stories. This research coupled with studies that suggest relevance and proximity affect the extent of legislative news coverage (Hamilton, 2004; Alvarez,

2009) lead to the following research question regarding how this affects state government news coverage:

RQ2: How do institutional constraints influence news workers' decisions to cover state legislative news versus national level news or community level news?

This study also examines how gubernatorial coverage affects the balance of topics in state legislative news. The literature review asserts that most state government news usually involves discussion of the governor (Hamman, 2006; Karp, 1995). Research suggests this patterns exists because of the news media's necessity for authoritative and recognizable political actors (Cook, 1998; Fico, 1983). Moreover, the news media focus on the individuals involved in the political process instead of the overall process to engage the audience (Bennett, 2009). This constraint is examined by the following research question:

RQ3: How do news workers' decisions to cover the governor influence the balance of topics within state legislative news coverage?

METHODOLOGY

In order to examine the institutional characteristics of local television news stations, I conducted in depth interviews with broadcast stations found in the seven Louisiana media markets. The in-depth interview method allows the people involved to share their experience of the news making process (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). This method uses a conversational style, yet the conversation had an intended purpose. The purpose of the interviews was to understand the processes and patterns journalists use to determine the coverage of state legislative representatives. In this study, I interviewed individuals working in the following broadcast media markets: New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Lafayette, Lake Charles, Shreveport, Monroe, and Alexandria. Allotted the time, the population would include 112 different people to interview. Due to time constraints, however, the number of interviews for this project is 12 different news workers ($N=12$). In addition, I interviewed at least one person from each of the 7 different media markets ($N=7$). Interviewing at least one person from each media market provided the ability to examine the geographic proximity to the state capitol and media market variation. This provides insight into the news organizational structure variation found within the different media markets. The following table shows the number of interviews conducted in each market along with the total number of stations per market:

Table 1 (Number of Interviews per Market)

Media Market	Interviews	Stations in Market
New Orleans	1	4
Baton Rouge	3	4
Shreveport	2	3
Lake Charles	1	1

(Table 1 continued)

Lafayette	1	2
Monroe	2	3
Alexandria	2	2
Total	12	19

This study followed the respondent form of interview style (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). This form of interview asked the respondents questions that prompted them to explain their thoughts on an issue or situation, or their thoughts or feelings about their social world (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The individuals I wanted to interview are those that will shape or determine the content of their stations' newscast. In consultation with LSU professors,¹ I narrowed the possible people to interview down to the news director, assistant news director, assignment editors, and political reporter. The majority of the people I was able to interview were the news directors and assignment editors. None of these individuals are necessarily experts of news production; yet, their roles give them the influential power as to how the extent of legislative news coverage their station provides.

In my initial contact with these individuals I asked to conduct the interview in person at their station. When the interviewee refused or avoided setting an interview date, I offered to conduct the interview over the telephone. My preference toward an in person interview is that it allowed me to establish better rapport. I worried the impersonal nature of the telephone may prevent the conversation from developing trust. Still, research shows that phone interviews can

¹ Dr. Judith Sylvester and Dr. Andrea Miller, both professors listed in order the most important decision makers of news content in order from news director, assistant news directors, assignments editor, and political reporters.

be as intimate for the interviewee and productive for the researcher as interviews conducted in person (Bird, 1995; Sunderland, 1999). Furthermore, this study asked interviewees at the beginning of each interview if they are comfortable with having their responses recorded. I also informed the interviewee that if at any moment they wished not to be recorded, I would stop the recorder at their request.

I asked the interview questions with the intention not to directly assert the reasoning behind my questions unless questioned by the interviewee. The purpose for this action was to prevent the speaker from feeling apprehensive. The goal was to develop a conversational trust so that the interviewee would feel comfortable explaining their experience in the construction of legislative news coverage. I constructed the following questions with the research questions in mind as follows²:

RQ1 Interviewee questions:

- A. (Opening questions) What is your name? What is your job title? Can you explain your job's role in coverage of political news?
- B. How does your station cover the state legislature when it is in session? (purposeful broad question with hopes that the interviewee will divulge information important to this study)
- C. Do you consult your regional representative, the governor, a news bureau, the wire, etc?
 - a. Are there difficulties in communication between your reporters and the state representatives?

² I entered each meeting with a printed sheet of these questions in my folder, I did not have asked each question verbatim.

- D. If you could change something at your station to make legislative news coverage better, what would it be?
- E. Does your distance from the state house have an effect on your ability to cover state legislative news?
- F. What methods do you use to compensate for your distance from the state house? Do you use a Bureau? Do you rely on the AP wire? In your opinion, what does your station do to that makes your state legislative coverage good despite your distance?
- G. Do you have a relationship with the state legislators from your area? Why or why not? Do you feel that a relationship is/would be helpful?

RQ2 Interviewee questions:

- A. For example, if there is an accident in the _____ (insert major local city, e.g. Baton Rouge, Shreveport) area, would it compete with your state legislative news coverage? Why?
 - a. Is the coverage in this example in consideration of audience preference? Level of importance?
- B. Example, if there is a national news story, such as further development in Health care reform or the War in Afghanistan, does it compete with your state legislative news coverage? Why?

RQ3 Interviewee questions:

- A. When the state legislature is in session, does coverage of the governor conflict with your coverage of the state legislature?

- a. What reasons lead to your coverage of the governor? Audience preference?

Proximity to the statehouse?

I used grounded theory to analyze the interviews (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2000). First, I analyzed the data using open coding. This method consisted of reading through the texts and marking sections that suggested a category. Next, I conducted vivo coding as I read the transcripts. Vivo coding is a form of coding in search of the terms used by the recorded journalists. For example, terms such as “my job is to...” are identified as word tracks that signal a kind of category or pattern. This type of coding anchors the conceptual categories created, and also serve as the category names (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). In conclusion of this process, I constructed a codebook of conceptual categories. In the final two parts of this process I conducted the final two stages of grounded theory: integration and dimensionalization. Both these processes allow the researcher to reshape the categories and produce deeper meanings for these categories. In integration, the process collapses categories into broader categories with more meaning. For example, initial categories I developed such as “Local impact” or “Local audience” were collapsed to form a broader category of “Localization.” Ultimately, the goal of this process was to change the categories from collections into theoretical constructs (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The next step, dimensionalization, involved examination of the theoretical constructs I developed with close attention to the variations among them. Finally, I developed interpretative claims about what the collection of theoretical categories mean.

The processes of grounded theory rely heavily on the transcribed text from the interview discussions. Therefore, the results developed out of this method focus on what the interviewees explicitly stated during an interview session. While at times, the researcher may have felt that

some of the interviewees were disingenuous, careful attention to grounded theory prevents most implicit impressions of the interviewee to affect the results of this study.

RESULTS

- **RESEARCH QUESTION I**

What are the various internal (i.e. staffing, budgets) and external constraints (i.e. audience preference, proximity) that influence news workers' decisions that affect the extent of legislative news coverage their stations' provide?

The news workers in this study were practical, efficient news workers who developed innovative ways to provide news several times a day, every day. Their work environment is perpetually in flux, due to factors such as cuts in staffs, and economic pressures. In addition, they expressed audience preferences as a major determinant to the nature of their state legislative news coverage. Also proximity coupled with other factors such as staff size, financial resources, access to an affiliate, or media markets extending over state lines affected the extent of coverage local television stations provided of the state legislature.

One common issue these news workers expressed was the lack of staff and the economic problems facing the United States and the news industry. In my field notes, news director B (Baton Rouge) gave me a tour of their news facility. Initially I asked to speak with the news director and the assignments editor at his station. Upon my arrival, I learned that the role of assignments editor, among others, were responsibilities of the news director. He explained that he lacked the resources to hire another staff member to handle those responsibilities. As the tour continued, he showed me a room that he described as a "one-man show." The room, allowed a single person to use a camera and film him or herself to do a story. The room illustrated the common issue in many news stations that staffing and budget issues are affecting how these news workers produce news. These staff issues seemed at the very least exacerbated by current economic issues.

An Alexandria news director explained that her station conducted all their state legislative news coverage online. In the interview, I later asked if her stations' online methods were due to a lack of a reporter. "No, it was just easier," she said. Still, while this news worker seemed to have no real staffing issues, her own work hours suggested differently. As we worked to schedule our meeting, she explained that she worked only a few times a week. My inquiry into that obstacle went as follows:

All right and actually you said that you were part time, is it due to where you work at, or how you feel like doing things nowadays? (Interviewer)
Well it's due to the downturn in the economy. (news director B, Alexandria).

Inferably in our discussion were two issues. This news worker seemed to be responsible for the state legislative news. Yet, her working hours were reduced to less than a full week due to the economic problems. Therefore, her role at the station was a staffing issue due to the economy.

The news workers expressed a major concern for audience preferences when determining the extent of coverage to devote to state legislative news. Every news worker interviewed expressed this issue no matter how far their station was from the capitol or the size of their budget. When covering state legislative news, these news workers expressed many times that state legislative news and political news is not a great interest to their public. For example, news director B (Baton Rouge) explained what he thought the public tunes into his stations' broadcast:

The Tom, Dick, and Harry sitting at home want to know if it's going to rain tomorrow? If it'll be cold? Did the tigers win? Did the saints win? And they want to know, they want to know about legislation that's going to impact their lives.

Expressed in this news director's assertion is that the public holds political information second to other kinds of news stories. Many other news workers argued that the potential impact of legislation could determine if something becomes a news story. Nevertheless, this presumes that

the news workers have the proper tools and training with which to comprehend the potential impact of legislation on their audience. In their discussion of the state legislature, the news workers seemed to have a competent understanding of the state political process. Yet, while they cited local impact as the most important legislative stories, the news workers also described a different kind of news worthy legislative story.

The news workers argued that non-local impact legislative news stories that made the news all had something that made the story sensational. They provided different names for these stories, such as “talkers” “Buzzworthy” and simply “Big stories.” Early on in this study, I asked a news worker to provide a definition for this kind of story. Political reporter A (Lafayette) responded:

A talker? Just anything that’s going to get people talking, anything that’s going to have people talking about it for a little while. It’s an interesting kind of story; it may not be the most important story going on. Especially like last session, when we had so many budget issues going on. You know we definitely had a few things that we would cover that were talker. For example, like corporal punishment, you know, that came up in last session, and you know it’s not the most important thing, but I think you know it’s a buzzword. It’s one of those things that either has people...they’re so heated...

To be fair, this news worker continues by explaining that there exists a necessary balance between “talker” stories and substantive stories. Rooted in this explanation is a notion that the audience will not enjoy a typical substantive legislative news story. Instead, the news workers must attract the audience to important stories by showing sensational legislative news stories also. This stems from the explanation provided by these news workers that the “average” viewer is not that interested in politics, and watches the news for weather, traffic, and sports. Relative to this notion that the audience is fairly interested in political news is an interesting filtering process.

On a few occasions, some of the news workers would explicitly express their sense that they must not always allow political officials to receive coverage. I provide the next set of quotes as examples:

I would rather talk to the Acadiana delegation than talk to the Governor. I think he tends to slip into his talking points a lot and gets off subject. Even though he'll talk to you, he tends to get off subject and doesn't quite answer your questions a lot. That's just been my experience with him. (Political Reporter A, Lafayette)

I found that a lot of times when they were doing interviews, they were quick to when they didn't necessarily really have to, include in the interview "of course this wouldn't be possible without my colleague so and so from across the river. We never really use that part of it, but they always tried to include it. You know? (News director A, Baton Rouge)

I can't tell you that the elected officials won't do everything in their power to be seen in Lake Charles. And we have to be careful about how we give them that platform... With the only news operational station they recognize the power or the influence that they could potentially have in southwest community of Louisiana. We just have to be mindful of that and we're not always going to give them the platform to uh speak their legislative agendas. (News worker, Lake Charles)

Interestingly, news worker (Lake Charles) explains that if there is a "hot story" and a legislator wants to "talk about it" then they are more than welcome to come into the station. For this news worker, as long as the discussion meets the audience interest, then there is no problem. Still, the overall impression these news workers give is that the symbiotic relationship between journalists and political actors is lopsided when it comes to state legislators. After analyzing the interview data, I deduced that the news workers relationship with the state legislators suggests a symbiotic nature distinct to past research (Tuchman, 1978; Gans, 1979; Cook, 1998; Sparrow, 1999). These news workers rarely need state legislators to fill their state legislative news coverage.

The economic and staffing constraints news workers expressed in providing state legislative news intensifies the farther in distance a station is from the state capital. Several news workers provided examples of the constraints on their stations due to distance from the

statehouse. For example, News Manager A (Shreveport) illustrated some of his station's financial burden in sending reporters to cover the state house:

And it has somewhat to do with manpower. Again, because we are so far away, we have to invest many times in an overnight stay for that crew, photographer, and reporter, perhaps even SAT truck operator too. So we invest going down there and a lot times we go down there knowing that we're going to do that.

Sending a crew to the capitol city also minimizes the staff left in the station's broadcast area to work on other stories. Political reporter A (Lafayette) explained the risks a station takes when they commit staff to cover the state capitol:

you make a commitment if we were to go to Baton Rouge and cover something in session. We're down a reporter and a photographer. And you know, if something goes on back here you want to be able to cover it

The necessity for television friendly news content plus financial and staff constraints provides insight into some institutional characteristics of these local broadcast stations. A local station may have leadership that feels strongly that state legislative news coverage is important to their community. Still, the characteristics surrounding their organization allow for only some variance in the type of coverage their station can provide. For example, a news director may feel that three upcoming issues in the state legislature are very important to cover for their community. Their constraints stemming from distance from the capitol will ultimately lead them to rely on video feeds and affiliates to cover at least two of the three issues. Conversely, a news director that sees little importance in any of the three issues will likely rely on video feeds and news affiliates to cover all three of the issues. The point is that despite any sense of journalistic responsibility a news worker has, forces outside their control will determine the amount and quality of state legislative news coverage.

Distance from the capitol has some effect on the perception news workers have of their local legislators. Moreover, broadcast stations further away from the capitol seemed to perceive

their local area legislators as being important. Conversely, news workers closer to the capitol perceived their local legislators as less important. For example, New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Lafayette are the closest to capitol. Yet, Baton Rouge and New Orleans area news worker seemed to dismiss the notion of covering local legislators. News Director B (Baton Rouge) perceived state legislators as less of a resource to his station's coverage of the state legislature:

well yeah cover a representative, but I mean, who is this shmuck, you know is my thought, you know if you've got a place like me where I'm covering eight parishes in Louisiana, two counties in Mississippi. Like I can't get a representative from every single area

In addition, News Director A (New Orleans) expressed, "the days of the political reporter chasing the legislators around is over. [Now] it's give me the bottom line. I'm on a deadline." Moreover, news director A (Baton Rouge) explained how sometimes he will instruct reporters not to use the all the audio/visual content they gather from state legislators. "I try to encourage them...go over there and talk to lawmakers," news director A said, "but not necessarily have to use the sound that the lawmakers give you, but get the direction of what they're trying to accomplish." News director A (Baton Rouge) explained that he then tells his staff to record the story in an area relative to the issue in order to make it interesting, such as a video record the story in front of a school if the issue involves education. These perspectives suggest that news workers with less distance from the capitol had audiences too large to focus on the legislators in their coverage. In addition, they do use legislators as a resource, yet they frame the story around the issue to appeal to their larger audience. This differs from how news workers farther away from the capitol described their relationship to state legislators.

News workers farther away from the capitol appeared to perceive their state legislators differently. Many reported a greater interest in using their local legislators as news resources.

News Producer A (Monroe) explained that his station schedules interviews with their local state legislators in order to cover the state legislature:

We set up in advance daily phone calls between our staff and our local legislators who are in Baton Rouge. And we do work things out where they will go to the Baton Rouge CBS affiliate and we'll do interviews back and forth with them

When I asked a political reporter from Lafayette to explain his role during session, he replied, “Well typically just sort of keeping [up] with the local legislators.” He explained that they use these legislators as resources to explain to their audience the possible impacts of state legislation. Many of the news workers from markets farther away from the capitol discussed their local legislators as a source they like to go to for state government news.

It's important to note that most of these news workers depend on their affiliates to provide them with their state legislative news coverage, and even though the news workers contend they use their legislators, their main source of state government news is their affiliates in Baton Rouge. Therefore, while news workers in stations farther from the capital may express more interest in using their state legislators more in their coverage; they have little means with which to gather television friendly news video of them. These news workers described the majority of their coverage to be a video feed they receive from a Baton Rouge area news affiliate.

Almost every single news worker from stations farther in distance from the state capitol relied heavily on their news affiliates and video feeds for state legislative news coverage. Assignments manager B (Monroe) and News Director A (Alexandria) both explained that their stations use an independent news production studio in addition to their affiliates. This independent studio is located in the capitol city and privately sells video of local issues to news stations. News Director B (Monroe) was the only one to rely on neither. When I asked her how

her station covers the state legislature when in session, “we do it by computer,” News Director B (Monroe) promptly replied. Later in the interview, I asked whether distance had any effect on their ability to cover the state house. “No, not anymore,” was the response. This conversation illustrates a notion that new technology helps to balance their distance. Several news workers exhibited similar opinions about new technology serving as an equalizer for their coverage. Executive producer A (Monroe) expressed how the Internet helped satisfy their need for visual content for their legislative news coverage:

[In] today’s realm of the Internet there are countless ways where you get video. I mean everyday we get video from across the world... it doesn’t really negatively impact our coverage at all because we might not necessarily be there but we are still covering it because we’re using the resources of our stations

A different news worker illustrates the notion that there is lack of staff and budget, yet cites new technology as the solution to the problem:

Well I’m not saying we can’t, but it’s not secret that most stations are operating with fewer people then they were 15 or even 10 years ago. And when you had that and larger budget you might’ve had someone camped out for a week. Again, but the technology didn’t exist, we didn’t have skype and we didn’t have sling box and other ways of moving video. The technology has made it such that through creative partnership and resource sharing you get to do two things. You get to cover the same stuff, but why if I have 3 reporters, why have 33% of my resources standing right beside someone I should get the material from anyway. You know I’m better serving my audience by providing more content.

This news worker illustrates how staff issues are tempered by new technology. Moreover, news worker (A) Lake Charles further expressed how new technology helped his station receive its content from its affiliate in the capitol city, and also explained how this new method is more efficient:

Absolutely 100 percent successful...we have an easy way of feeding the video and sound to and from each other. So, the process that normally ten fifteen years ago would be...book a satellite window, spend money on the time, to book a satellite window, I mean you’re talking, time consuming, and cost of time of getting the product back to your station

These news workers illustrate a common notion in stations located over 100 miles from the capitol – new technology provides stations with cheap and efficient methods to cover state government news. Their optimism over new technology centered on the ability to create a news story about the state legislature. Their expressed concern, however, rarely included a concern over any change in the quality of their legislative news coverage. These news workers had a bottom line attitude. A station's ability to receive cheap visual content was an apparent determinant for state government to make the local newscasts. These news workers seemed very concerned with the ability to provide some kind of television friendly content to visually engage the viewer. For example, news director A (Alexandria) explained that their station will sometimes show a picture of their legislator as they explain a legislative news story; but he worried this method was “not as television friendly.” The news workers expressed their need for cost efficient visual content as practical response to the constraints stemming from their distance from the capitol.

In conclusion, news workers' decisions on the extent of coverage toward state legislative news is constrained by institutional makeup of local television news. Smaller budgets and staffs lead to a dependence on new technology and news affiliates. Moreover, the lack of financial security leads the news workers to heavily cater to their audiences, since most revenue stems from the advertisers; keeping viewers engaged for the advertisements is paramount. The demand for television friendly news content, financial and staff constraints creates a landscape where stations closer to the capitol shoulder the responsibility of covering the state legislature. Still, the news workers near the capital area expressed the least interest in using their state legislators as a resource for their state legislative news coverage. In addition, even though local legislators attempt to make the news, they may not appear in the newscast. News director A (Baton Rouge)

provides an observation in that state legislators may prefer to speak with their local stations rather than local capitol city stations:

Lawmakers are very savvy and they know which reporters are from their market so they'll seek you out almost. Or you'll note to a lawmaker, say you're from Lake Charles and you try to interview a New Orleans lawmaker they're less likely to come to do the interview. But if it's your local guy, they're there in a couple of minutes, because they know that there are people back home that'll see them, see them working.

In some cases, news workers seemed willing to prevent their local legislators from having access to the newscasts. As a news worker from Lake Charles explains in the most extreme case:

I can't tell you that the elected officials won't do everything in their power to be seen in Lake Charles. And we have to be careful about how we give them that platform...and with the only news operational station they recognize the power or the influence that they could potentially have in southwest community of Louisiana. We just have to be mindful of that and we're not always going to give them the platform to speak their legislative agendas

Ultimately, these issues make the opportunity for the state legislators to receive coverage very small. These legislators have fewer outlets and evidently fewer reporters covering their actions. Therefore, the local media hold more sway in a local legislators ability to receive television news coverage. The combination of these characteristics found in local news television likely lead to less opportunity for the public to receive state legislative news.

- **RESEARCH QUESTION II**

How do institutional constraints influence news workers' decisions to cover state legislative news versus national level news or community level news?

It's just that our mission is to super serve the community that we serve

- News Director, Alexandria

Analysis of the interview discussions suggests that both state legislative and national news will receive coverage if its relevant to news broadcasts' community audience, or whether the news workers can "localize" the issue. They explained this point from two different

perspectives. These news workers held a strong sense of responsibility toward their community audience. Similarly, they also spoke of serving their community audience in terms of selling a product to consumers. “We always try to use the phrase ‘local news is a mirror of the community’” news director A (Baton Rouge) said to explain his approach in deciding how to cover local, state, or national news stories. This sense of responsibility lead many of the news workers explanation for how they cover community, state, or national news stories. News worker (Lake Charles) expressed great concern due to the fact that the Lake Charles station is the only television news in the area:

We have a lot of loyal viewers and the only news that their going to get – southwest Louisiana news – is from KPLC so there’s a big responsibility, but you know it’s taught me to make sure we’re doing the right stories.

Echoing this sense of responsibility, assignment editor A (Baton Rouge) explained how being in touch with the community helps to decide what issues to cover. Explicit in her contention is a notion that responding to the viewer shapes her station’s coverage:

When you do this job for you know a certain amount of years you kind of talk to everyone in the community. I mean I’m on the phone, e-mails, that sort of thing. So as far as myself I kind of know from our audience [what to cover]. They let us know what they’re interested in.

Moreover, news director A (Alexandria) argued that sending staff down to the capitol city for news that has little community impact betrays their responsibility to their community audience:

It’s not so far that if it’s something that we really want to, you know, cover in great detail, we wouldn’t send our own photographer down there. It’s just that our mission is to super serve the community that we serve which is [the] central Louisiana area

Throughout this research, many of the interviewees provided similar feelings of responsibility toward serving their community. Still, these news workers also discussed their community audience in a manner that suggested they think of their audience as consumers. For

example, the same news workers described above eventually discussed the audience demographics as determinants for news. News director A's (Baton Rouge) explained how the coverage at his Baton Rouge area station differs because many of his station's viewers are state employees:

[For example] it's a big important vote on say state employee pay raises then we know a large percentage of our viewers are state employees so that would be the more important story of the day. Our station being in the capitol city is a little different. Like for instance, when I worked in Lake Charles, or even when I worked in Shreveport, ...coverage of the state capitol wasn't nearly as front and center for some reason. I think it's just...here ... we have so many state employees and there's a big interest in politics and as you branch out it's not as front and center.

News worker (Lake Charles) similarly describes the importance of the audience demographics.

After news worker (Lake Charles) expressed the notion that his station must cover the "right stories," he explained how to determine a "right story" as:

You [have to] know your community, you [have to] know who's watching, the age, white collar or blue collar? What type of income do they have? Are they two or generations living in one household? ...The criteria for the type of viewer...gives us a better understanding of what type of stories we ought to be covering

Assignment editor A (Baton Rouge) argued that her own life helped their station determine how to attract their audience. She explained that she falls into a demographic that their station attempts to garner attention from. After she explained her station's desire for audience input, she described another determinant for the value of a news story:

I fall into an important demographic that we're interested in just based on my age, female, that sort of thing. I'm a mom, you know, worked in this business, professional, that sort of thing. So it's just kind of things that jump out to us, you know pique our interests too.

Beyond these examples, some of the news workers provided even more explicit business concerns when discussing the local audience. For example, news director B (Baton Rouge)

asserted, “Yeah I think it’s more in terms, it’s audience preference, you know. It’s getting those eyes glued to the TV set.” Moreover, news producer A (Monroe) provided the most insight into how his station determines news stories based on his audience:

You know each TV station has a demographic and we hire a firm to come in and tell us what our viewers want to watch and what they think we should cover. This station is the market leader by far. We have more viewers than our competition.

Whether the news workers expressed a sense of responsibility to their community or viewed their community as a news consuming public, they consistently expressed that community impact as a major determinant of choosing what to cover. These news workers used the term “localizing” to explain how they covered national and especially state government news. I inferred ‘localize’ to mean a method of covering a national or state level news story with focus on community impact. In addition, many news workers asserted potential community impact of as a way to decide how much attention and resources to give a story. Several news workers from all over the state provided insight into the importance of the community impact of a state or national story:

How we determine the lead is several factors. The first one would be how much does it appeal to the community? How much impact does it involve? For example, if they’re changing the way that you drive your car each day then... Well most of the people in our community drive cars. (news worker, Lake Charles).

So when we can we do like to send him [their political reporter] down there to cover the legislature. Specifically dealing with any bills that might directly affect our coverage area, which of course is northwest Louisiana. (News Manager A, Shreveport)

It’s a sort of like a dancing routine because you want to cover the national stuff and...my thing personally, I would prefer to localize a big national issue (Political Reporter A, Lafayette)

...there’s no reason for us to put the resources in Baton Rouge unless there is something directly impacting Northeast Louisiana. If there was a bill on the state floor this session that directly impacts our viewers we’d be there. (News Producer A, Monroe)

The examples provided all range from different regions of the state. Nevertheless, the necessity for stories with community impact and the station's subsequent method to 'localize' the issue was consistent among the discussions. Even in the capitol city, a news director asserted the need to focus on the community impact of a story. "For the most part," news director A (Baton Rouge) said, "politics is pretty boring to the average viewer and it's until you can go out and show them...how it's going to affect them." The news director did not finish this thought, but his point was clear. Showing the community impact of a story to a viewer keeps the viewer watching the story. In these different explanations for 'localizing' national and state issues, I inferred the rationale as a blend of attention to audience demographics and journalistic responsibility toward the community. In fact, political reporter A (Lafayette) and news director A (Baton Rouge) continued to explain their method as normative means to end. For example, news director A (Baton Rouge) described having to localize issues for the viewer as "sad" but without this method the viewer would "tune out." Likewise, political reporter A expressed a need to for balance between covering substantively important stories and interesting stories. He argued:

I think you have to strike a balance between what you've done and what people want to see. You know, because you have to cover the most important thing. You have to cover those big stories, but at the same time you want to keep your viewers interested I think that sometimes those talkers [interesting stories] may be the story to do. You definitely have to strike that balance. I think there is that fine line to walk, where you're covering the most important issues, but you're also covering the issues that may just be interesting.

In short, these news workers seemed to argue that this method allowed the audience to receive important political information, while also satisfying to the station's need to garner attention. Still, the localizing method seems to evolve from a norm of personalizing news stories

for television news. This way the public recognizes the news event as something relevant to them.

In conclusion, the balance of state legislative news versus national level or community level news is evidently determined by community impact. This analysis suggests that state legislative news and certain national news has a greater chance of receiving coverage in these stations' political news segments if the news workers can "localize" the issue. This method seems to personalize the news stories in order to make them more entertaining, interesting, or engaging. In addition, while some news workers have a strong sense of journalistic responsibility, they are all ultimately confined to the constraints of their news outlets.

- **RESEARCH QUESTION III**

How do news workers' decisions to cover the governor influence the balance of topics within state legislative news coverage?

In the interview discussions, the news workers consistently described the Governor to have the most power in the state. Moreover, they argued that he held the most power, even when the state legislature was in session. The following is a sample of their explanation for the extent of gubernatorial coverage during legislative news stories:

He is the Governor, and he's like the... in a court room, he would be like the judge. (Assignment Editor B, Shreveport)

well he is like the highest elected official in the state of Louisiana, it's like the president, when the president comes to town everybody is interested. When the president speaks everybody listens, well for the most part. (News Director A, Lake Charles)

...he reaches more people, he was voted for by more people. You know, and in addition to that, he is always there. He's a full time... that's his full time job is to be the face of Louisiana. (News Director B, Baton Rouge):

Well because the Governor has the power of the veto. So no matter what is passed by either house, the Governor can put a stop to it. He is the highest elected official in the statehouse. (News Director B, Alexandria):

Most responses followed this similar pattern, involving analogies or examples of the Governor's range of power. These news workers had a fairly competent understanding of the state's political system. Nevertheless, they lacked political sophistication when discussing coverage of the state legislature. They rarely expressed understanding the powers state legislators do hold. Still, two of the news workers provided alternative explanations worthy of note. The Lafayette political reporter introduced the notion that covering the Governor satisfies the news norm for objectivity by providing an outside perspective. "I think maybe sometimes," political reporter A said, "especially when there's a law or something is being proposed some people tend to look at the governor as, not a neutral party, but just as someone that's removed from it a little bit." In contrast, a Monroe area news producer rejected the notion that the Governor should receive coverage when the state house is in session:

Well, I mean, if there was a legislative issue here, even if the Governor was in town, we'd probably first want to talk to the person locally who's going to be voting on the bill, then talk to the Governor about if he's going to veto it or not... a lot people forget that the Governor might be the high profile but he doesn't really have that much power when it comes to what's being argued on the floor. (News Producer A Monroe)

My discussion with the Monroe news producer was unique. His perspective toward the Governor led to a discussion over why many news workers approach coverage of the Governor differently. He explained that the Governor has a "celebrity factor" to him. Moreover, he argued news workers see him as the "most recognizable person" and equate that with the notion that he has the most "authority on the issue."

I noticed this celebrity factor in how the news workers discussed covering the Governor. When the discussion turned to covering Governor, the news workers expressed how important

this coverage was to their station. In short, it felt as if the general response to my question, “why cover the Governor?” was “why would you not?” For example, news worker A (Lake Charles) provides a positive explanation for his station’s gubernatorial coverage:

Governor Jindal is extremely influential in terms of how government is controlled or run. I mean he has the authority to do things do things that other elected officials are not by the nature of his position...For example he was in town holding a news conference, I think it was last week about new laws that will be introduced in the legislature that was drafted by the assistance of the local DA here, the Calcasieu parish DA, to crack down more on sex predators. Apparently the laws are not as tough as they should be, so the DA here worked in conjunction with the state legislators along with the Governor, all came together and said we need to do more on this because sex predators are a bad thing, which everybody agrees. So you can’t just not go to a news conference where the Governor is introducing new legislation.

In this news worker’s discussion of the Governor he mentions several other political actors involved with the legislation. Still, he closes his discussion expressing that this is the Governor’s legislation. In addition, this news workers discussion is his own example of how the Governor has the authority to do things that other elected officials lack. His assertion that you “just can’t not go to a news conference where the Governor is introducing new legislation” suggests that this news worker sees the Governor as very important to legislation in the state legislature. News manager A (Shreveport) echoed this feeling toward the Governor as he spoke about his station’s coverage of the Governor. Virtually every time he is in town,” he said, “we try and go and cover what the Governor is doing, no matter what.” Other news workers described their gubernatorial coverage as antagonistic. “He kind of hates to see us coming,” assignment manager B (Shreveport) said, “because we ask the tough questions.” This news worker expressed the importance of antagonizing the Governor because of his political position and role during state legislative sessions. In contrast, rarely did any of the news workers express

coverage of the state legislators similar to how they described the importance of gubernatorial coverage.

Coupled with the feeling that the Governor is extremely popular was the fact that he was readily available to cover. News workers provided expressed the accessibility of the Governor. This point is inferable in most the quotes provided in this section. Phrases such as “he’s more there,” “he’s the highest elected official,” and suggestions that governor has a “celebrity factor” explain how he’s easy to cover. In terms of ease, this could mean that there is an abundant supply of news video of the governor, or that he has a larger budget with which to travel the state. Both these issues make the local television stations able to cover the state legislature easier.

In conclusion, the news workers seemed to include gubernatorial coverage extensively within state legislative news coverage. These news workers describe the Governor as a vital piece of the state legislature. The feasibility of covering the Governor, news worker’s perceived importance of the Governor, and their lack of political understanding toward the legislative process lead news workers to potentially provide abundant gubernatorial coverage within their state legislative news coverage.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study suggest several reasons that affect the extent local television stations provide legislative news coverage. Internal issues affecting coverage centers on staff sizes, and lack of resources. Many news workers cited difficulties sending reporters to the capitol because they lack the staff size to lose a reporter to one issue. This result is consistent with the literature that local television stations have very small staffs (Kaniss, 1991; Hamilton, 2004). As Kaniss explains, most of these stations' budgets go to paying the anchors, leaving less money for reporting staffs. Consistent with the economic theories of news that budgets affect news coverage, these results show that many stations outside the capitol must juggle sending a reporter to the state capitol because providing the reporter accommodations and travel expense is judged as too expensive (Dunaway, 2008; Hamilton, 2004). Moreover, many news workers expressed that their staff and budget has dwindled in recent years. The findings of the previous literature suggest that the problem of tight budgets is becoming even more challenging.

External issues facing television stations center on the need to maintain their audiences' interest. Most news stories stem from the news workers' attention to their audiences' behavior. News workers describe a need to cover hot button or buzzword issues in order to hold viewership. Moreover, this leads many stations to alter the delivery of their news in order to make the news story television friendly and engaging. These findings are consistent with the literature that local television tends to cover soft news to engage the audience (Kurpius, 2003; Hamilton, 2004; Rosentiel et al, 2000). This focus on soft news likely leads to less state legislative coverage due to the difficulty of covering the state legislature in a soft news manner (Bennett, 2009).

A station's distance from the capitol lowers the extent of legislative news coverage provided by the station. Distance from the capitol led most stations to rely on their affiliates in the capitol city to provide visuals for legislative news coverage. This creates a situation where most of the legislative news coverage for the entire state rests solely on a handful of stations – those stations located in the capital city. This finding speaks to McManus' (1994) assertion that the need for inexpensive content creates homogeneity in coverage. Nevertheless, state legislative news is not entirely homogenous. There is homogeneity in coverage when the stations far from the capitol use video feeds from their affiliates in their news stories. The coverage is not homogenous, however, because the news workers explain that the affiliate video will run in their news broadcast if they feel the story has community impact.

News stations' goal of providing community area news to their audience also affects their extent of legislative news coverage. Either the journalists found a way to localize a state or national issue or its chance of receiving coverage decreased. As the news workers explained, they felt their responsibility rested with showing the viewers in their broadcast range information that could or would impact their lives. For example, coverage of a legislative issue that the journalists did not perceive to have an effect on their viewing public had little chance of making their newscast.

The majority of the news workers interviewed viewed the governor as an important figure to cover during state legislative news. This finding supports Hamman (2006) and Karp's (1995) research that the public views the governor as the spokesperson for state government. Morse's (1995) argument that the public is uncomfortable with intricacies of the legislative branch should extend to journalists as well. These news workers lacked the political sophistication to critically explain the Governor's role during legislative sessions. While the

Governor plays an integral role in state government, he cannot create legislation. Many of the news workers in this study used the Governor to personalize their legislative news stories. This likely leads to the overwhelming coverage of Governors during a state legislative session.

Before a discussion of the implications of these results it is necessary to confront the shortcomings of this study. First, this study is confined to one state. State governments vary from state to state, as does the news media. Second, this is my first attempt at in depth interviews. Already in hindsight, I see the opportunity to enrich this data with follow up questions or rephrasing certain questions. Moreover, I largely spoke with only the news directors and assignment editors of the local stations. While the goal was to speak with the decision makers, a portion of rich data explaining the full process that determines news is lost by not speaking with people occupying different roles. Despite these limitations, many opportunities exist for future research from this study.

The news workers in this study referred back to technological advances as a suitable substitute for the diminishing staff sizes. Due to this, future research could survey broadcast news workers to examine the effects of new media on their self-evaluation. Kaniss (1991) argues that having reporters close to their sources allows them to develop a relationship and to enhance their political sophistication. The loss of this relationship could prove consequential to information the public receives.

Another study that could advance the findings in this study is a content analysis of the quality of coverage of the state legislature dependent on distance from the capital. In addition to distance, the study should include contextual data such as the station's staff size, ownership of the broadcast station and the audience demographics. Analysis would illustrate the effects these various institutional constraints have on local television news.

Implications for News Workers

The current slogan of news workers in local television news is best described as “do more with less.” Diminishing staff and budget sizes increasingly create an environment where less news workers are doing a job that once took more. While many of the news workers in this discussion lauded the power of new technology, lack of staff size suggests other problems. Fewer staff members likely mean that a station’s reporters have less chance to develop relationships with legislators. Some of the news workers argued “gone are the days of the political reporter.” This could likely create an environment where legislators stick to their talking points, providing less substantive discussions. As reporters and legislators develop relationships, both parties will likely find their interviews more fruitful. In addition, a less experienced reporter could have less faith in the information they are receiving from a given state legislator. Over time, an experienced reporter could likely identify the state legislators that provides insightful context to legislative issues. The loss of the political reporter could also lead to a degenerative understanding of the state political process by local television news workers.

The relationship serves as a way for a reporter to learn about the political process. Many of the discussions with the news workers suggest that they lacked political sophistication in understanding state government news. Developing relationships with state legislators and other political officials will indirectly educate the political reporter about the state level political processes. This education could lead to an increase in overall substantive coverage. As many news workers expressed that local impact is a main determinant for state legislative news coverage, a better understanding of how legislation “impacts” their community is necessary.

Who Determines State Legislative Coverage?

At the conclusion of this study, one fact is certain – local television has distinctive constraints that shape how news workers choose to cover the state legislature. A cynical explanation is that their coverage follows a stringent business plan to maximize both viewership and ratings. Conversely, an optimistic explanation is that local television stations provide an invaluable service to the public by informing them about their daily environment despite ever-tightening budgets. One interpretation stemming from this study is that a mixture of both drives a station's coverage. The personalities across states vary between news workers with intentions to provide substantive news coverage and those that seek to maximize ratings. Nevertheless, all these journalists despite their expressed ideal news coverage are restrained by the fact that they are journalists for local television news. With this distinction, these journalists share institutional characteristics within their medium that determines and shapes how they cover the state legislature. An initial conclusion from this study is that these journalists sometimes fail at providing substantive legislative news and the characteristics of local television are partly to blame.

An alternative explanation is that too much is asked of these stations when it comes to covering the state legislature. They evidently choose to focus efforts in providing information for their local broadcast audience. Whether economic or normative ends drive this goal, these stations do provide a necessary service in this country's ability to self govern. While the focus of this study is state government news coverage, community area news coverage is just as important. Changing this focus would likely hinder these stations' ability to cover community news. The implications from this research and the cited previous research are that local television fails at providing substantive state government coverage. Yet, implicit in the findings of this

study are that the structure of local television best operates to cover community news. Moreover, never did any of the journalists in this study express a strong sense of responsibility for covering state news. Using Cook's (2006) metaphor that the news media operate like "a system of interest groups," these results imply that one group is missing – namely an outlet to cover state government news.

This study and previous research suggests that the overall institutional structure of news media in the United States lacks an outlet that feels that its primary responsibility is state issues. National media attempt to appeal to a national audience. Likewise, local media hold their local audience in consideration when developing news stories. Yet, it becomes difficult to point to distinctive news outlets that focus on state issues. Instead, the responsibility for state government news coverage spreads out to all the different news media, none of whom have strong incentives to cover it consistently and substantively. The conversations with the journalists in this study show practical, efficient news workers that develop innovative ways to provide news several times a day, every day. Their work environment is perpetually in flux, due to factors such as cuts in staffs, economic pressures and audience demand. Moreover, the structure as it stands places immense responsibility on news outlets near the capitol to provide the majority of state news coverage throughout the state. This is wholly inefficient to substantively cover state news, and an unreasonable expectation of television news. Research on the institutional characteristics of local news media and the results of this study suggest that a structural change is necessary in order to provide more substantive legislative news coverage.

An important study to discuss in this context is Belt and Just's (2008) study of political coverage of local television news. Their findings suggest that quality news can cause local television news' Nielsen ratings to rise. Their findings imply that local television news can

prosper and provide substantive political information. These stations' existing structure prevents many of these journalists from providing extensive legislative news. Their news stories are not as simple as a matter of choice, but a matter of consequence. Lack of resources, time, and audience demand create a landscape where the structure of local television news will continue to determine the extent of legislative news coverage.

REFERENCES

- Alvarez, G.A. (2009). Who's talking about ethics? An analysis of legislative news coverage in Louisiana. Working Paper.
- Arnold, R. D. (2004). *Congress, the Press, and Political Accountability*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Belt, T.L. & Just, M.R. (2008). The local news story: Is quality a choice? *Political Communication*, 25, 194-215.
- Bennett, W. L. (1990). Toward a theory of press-state relations in the United States. *Journal of Communication*, 40(2), 103-127.
- Berelson, B. (1952). Democratic theory and public opinion. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 16, 313-330.
- Berkowitz, D. (1990). Refining the gatekeeper metaphor for local television news. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic*, 34(1), 55-68.
- Blendon, R.J., Benson, J.M., Morin, R., Altman, D.E., Brodie, M., Brossard, M., & James, M. (1997). "Changing attitudes in America." In Joseph S. Nye, Jr., Philip D. Zelikow, and David C. King, (Eds.), *Why People don't trust Government*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bowman, A. M., & Kearney, R.C. (1986). *The Resurgence of the States*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Branton, Regina P., and Johanna Dunaway. 2009. "Slanted Newspaper Coverage of Immigration: The Importance of Economics and Geography." Forthcoming, Policy Studies Journal Vol. 37, Issue 2 (May 2009).
- Capella, J.N., & Jamieson, K. H. (1996). *Spiral of Cynicism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Conway, M.M. (1991). *Political participation in the United States* (2nd ed.). Washington , D.C.: CQ Quarterly.
- Cook, Timothy E. (1998). *Governing with the News: The News Media as a Political Institution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Cook, Timothy E. (2006). The news media as a political institution: Looking backward and looking forward. *Political Communication* 23, 159-71.
- Cooper, C.A., Nownes, A.J., & Johnson, M. (2007). Interest groups and journalists in the states. *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 7(1), 39-53.

- Delli Carpini, M. X., Keeter, S. & Kennamer, J.D. (1994). Effects of the news media environment on citizen knowledge of state politics and government. *Journalism Quarterly*, 71(2), 443-456.
- Delli Carpini, M. X., & Keeter, S. (1996). *What Americans know about politics and why it matters*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Dunaway, J. (2008). Markets, ownership, and the quality of campaign news coverage. *Journal of Politics*, 70(4), 1193-1202.
- Entman, R. (1989). *Democracy without citizens: Media and the decay of American politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Fico, F. (1983). Search for the statehouse spokesman: Coverage of the governor and lawmakers. *Journalism Quarterly*, 62 (1), 74 – 80, 90.
- Fatrik, M. (2001). State of the television industry: Ownership report: What is owned by whom and where. BIA Financial network, Chantilly, VA, 1-19.
- Friedland, L. (2000). Public journalism and community change. In A.J. Eksterowicz and R. N. Roberts (eds) *Public Journalism and Political Knowledge*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Gallup Poll (1998) 'Media Use and Evaluation'.
[<http://www.gallup.com/poll/indicators/indmedia2.asp>]
- Gans, H.J. *Deciding What's News: A study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, NEWSWEEK, and TIME*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- Graber, D.A. (1993). Swiss cheese journalism. *State Government News*, 36(19).
- Griffin, M. (1992). Looking at tv news: Strategies for research. *Communication*, 13, 121 – 141.
- Gormley, W. (1979). Coverage of state government in the mass media. *State Government*, 52(3) 46 -51.
- Hallin, D. C. & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hamilton, J.T. (2004). *All the News that's fit to Sell: How the market transforms information into news*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hamman, J.A. (2006). Public opinion in the states: Determinants of legislative job performance. In Jeffrey E. Cohen, Ed., *Public Opinion and State Politics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

- Hansen, S.B. (1999). Life's not fair: Governor's job performance rating and economies. *Political Research Quarterly*, 52, 167.
- Hess, S. (1991). *Live from Capital Hill: Studies of Congress and the media*. Washington, D.C.: Brooking Institute.
- Hetherington, M.J., & Nugent, J.D. (2001). Explaining public support for devolution: The role of political trust. In John R. Hibbing & Elizabeth Theiss-Morse (Eds.), *What is it about government that Americans dislike?* (pp. 134-151). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hibbings, J.R., & Theiss-Morse, E. (1995). *Congress as Public Enemy: Public Attitudes toward American Political Institutions*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Karp, J.A. (1995). "Explaining public support for legislative term limits." *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 59(3), 373 – 91.
- Kaniss, P. (1991). *Making Local News*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kaplan, M., Goldstein K., & Hale M. (2005). Local news coverage of the 2004 campaigns: An analysis of nightly news broadcasts. *A report for the Lear Center Local News Archive, A project of the USC Annenberg School and the University of Wisconsin*.
- Klein, R.D. (2003). Audience Reactions to Local TV News. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 46 (12), 1661-1672.
- Klite, P.K., Bardwell, R.A., & Salzman, J. (1997). Local TV news: getting away with murder. *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 2, 102-112.
- Kurpius, D. (2003). Bucking a trend in local television news: Combating market-driven journalism. *Journalism*, 4(1), 76.
- Lindlof, T.R., & Taylor, B.C. (2002). *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications Inc.
- Littlewood, T. (1972). What's wrong with statehouse coverage? *Columbia Journalism Review* 10, 39-45.
- Lemert, J.B. (1992). Effective public opinion. In J. David Kenamer (Ed), *Public Opinion, the Press, and Public Policy*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall.
- Lynch, P. (2000). A little knowledge is a dangerous thing: What we know about the role of the media in state politics. *Perspectives on Political Science*, 29(2), 93.
- Martin, S.R., (1988). Proximity of event as factor in selection of news sources. *Journalism*

Quarterly 65, 986–89.

- McChesney, R. (1999). *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*. New York: New Press.
- McLeod, J.M., Daily,, K., Guo, Z., Eveland, W.P., Jr., Bayer, J., Yang, S., & Wang, H. (1996). Community integration, local media use and democratic processes. *Communication Research*, 23,179-209.
- McLeod, J.M., Scheufele, D.A., Moy, P. (1999). The role of mass media and interpersonal discussion in local political participation. *Political Communication*, 16, 315 – 336.
- McManus, J.H. (1994). *Market-driven journalism: Let the citizen beware?* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Neuman, W.R. (1986). *The paradox of mass politics: Knowledge and opinion in the American electorate*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Newport, F. & Saad, L. (1998). A matter of trust. *American Journalism Review*, 20, 30-34.
- Page, B.I. & Shapiro, R.Y. (1992). *The rational public*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Papper, R. & Gerhard. (1999). *Issues and Trends: 1999 Newsroom Workforce Survey*. Washington, D.C.: Radio and Television News Directors Association.
- Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. (2000). Internet sapping broadcast news audience: Investors now go online for quotes, advice. [<http://www.people-press.org/media00rpt.html>.]
- Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. (2009). Local television a top news source for swine flu news: Internet seen as most useful. [<http://people-press.org/report/514/local-tv-a-top-source-for-swine-flu-news>]
- Popkin, S.L. (1991). *The reasoning voter: Communication and persuasion in presidential campaigns*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Postman, N. (1985). *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public discourse in the age of show business*. United States: Penguin Press.
- Rakove, J. N. (1997). *Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Reeves, M.M. (1985). *The question of state government capability*. Washington, DC: Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations.
- Roeder, P.W. (1994). *Public Opinion and Policy Leadership in the American States*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press.

- Rosenstiel, T., Gottlieb, C. & Brady, L.E. (2000). Time of peril for TV news. *Columbia Journalism Review* 39(4), 84-92.
- Rosenthal, A. (1998). *The Decline of Representative Democracy: Process, Participation, and Power in State Legislatures*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.
- Salmore, S.A. & Salmore, B.G. (1996). The transformation of state electoral politics. In Carl Van Horn, ed, *The State of States*, 3rd edition, pp. 51-76. Washington: CQ Press.
- Schudson, M. (1978). *Discovering the news: A social history of American newspapers*.
- Schudson, M. (2003). The news media as political institutions. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 5, 249-269.
- Schattschneider, E.E. (1942). *The semisovereign people: A realist's view of democracy in America*. New York: Holt.
- Schumpeter, J.A. (1942). *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Siebert, F.S., Peterson, T. & Schramm, W. (1956). *Four Theories of the Press*. Chicago: University of Illinois.
- Sparrow, B. H. (1999). *Uncertain guardians: The news media as an institution*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Sparrow, B. H. (2006). A research agenda for an institutional media. *Political Communication* 23, 145-57.
- Stamm, K.R. (1985). *Newspaper use and community ties: Toward a dynamic theory*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Tuchman, G. (1978). *Making news: A study in the construction of reality*. New York: The Free Press.
- Van Horn, C.E. (1989). The quiet revolution. In Carl Van Horn, ed, *The State of States*, 3rd edition, pp. 51-76. Washington: CQ Press.
- The United States Elections Project. (2009). *2004 general election turnout rates*. Retrieved July 14, 2009. From http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2004G.html.
- Uslaner, E. M. (2001). Is Washington really the problem? In John R. Hibbing & Elizabeth Theiss-Morse (Eds.), *What is it about government that Americans dislike?* (pp. 118-133). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wolfson, L. (1985). *The untapped power of the press*. New York: Praeger.

VITA

German Alvarez was born in Rivas, Nicaragua, and raised in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He graduated from Louisiana State University with a Bachelor of Arts in political science in 2006. He plans to graduate from LSU's Manship School of Mass Communication in 2010 with a Master of Mass Communication.

Following graduation, German will pursue his doctoral degree at the University of Wisconsin.