POLICY PAPER

An Information Community Case Study: Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN

Adapting business models to digitalized information demand

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Historically, a robust media ecosystem in Minneapolis-St. Paul has supported residents' demand for large and diverse quantities of information on both political and quality-of-life issues. Today, the demand for quality journalism in the Twin Cities remains high, but many local media outlets struggle to deliver it sustainably. The digital age has presented significant challenges to a media landscape centered around a print format; however it also presents new opportunities.

This paper evaluates the quality or "health" of the Minneapolis-St. Paul information environment through a study of its challenges, opportunities, and

Downtown Minneapolis (Photo Credit: Jeremiah Peterson/flickr)

existing institutions. To guide our investigations, we have relied on the report of The Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy, *Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age*. The report provides a series of indicators for assessing three important elements of "information health":

- the availability of relevant and credible information to all Americans and their communities;
- the capacity of individuals to engage with information; and
- the individual engagement with information and the public life of the community.

As the Knight report highlights, it is crucial to consider these elements as we analyze media and democracy in today's world. Through the lens of Minneapolis-St. Paul, we assess the potentials and successes of numerous types of institutions in adapting to the digital age to serve local information needs.

In 2010, as the Twin Cities move into the digital age, institutions of journalism need to adjust business models in order to continue delivering quality information. In addition to the two major newspapers, the Twin Cities are home to an extensive market of neighborhood-specific papers. Many of these local outlets show signs of growing online readership, a trend encouraging to an information ecosystem only if institutions can adapt their strategies accordingly. Unfortunately, tight budgets and operating costs largely constrain innovation and experimentation; nevertheless, a number of nonprofit, online-only publications have launched in Minneapolis-St. Paul in recent years, some of which have met considerable success in building audiences. Additionally, several local nonprofit organizations provide public access television and others analytical reporting on both television and radio. The strong institutional framework and market demand already present in Minneapolis-St. Paul afford a crucial opportunity to develop sustainable, pragmatic models of media for the 21st Century.

Central branch of the Minneapolis Public Library (Photo credit: Schu/Flickr)

Introduction: A robust demand for information

Time-honored traditions inherent in the Twin Cities generate a powerful demand for quality, accessible information. The area is home to a variety of reader audiences with a broad diversity of interests, supporting a robust and complex ecosystem of information providers.

Several levels of government preside over Minneapolis-St. Paul. These "Twin Cities" comprise a single metropolitan area but are administratively treated as two distinct cities divided by the Mississippi River. The cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul each have independent legislatures and bureaucracies, and each is the seat of a state county with their own separate governmental institutions. Above them, the State of Minnesota operates another government independent of its municipalities. The multiple layers of government and legislation drive a need for forceful political journalism that delivers a combination of news analysis and beat reporting.

The Twin Cities have long supported a vibrant political culture. Minnesota has roughly equal numbers of Democrats and Republicans[1] and has historically been a "swing state" (e.g., in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, the state's electoral votes were decided by a margin of less than 4 percent[2]). Minnesota has led the nation in voter turnout in the past several presidential elections,[3] achieving 77 percent turnout for the 2008 presidential election, compared with 61 percent nationwide.[4] The split of political opinion between the cities (i.e., Hennepin and Ramsey counties) and the surrounding suburbs (e.g., Dakota, Anoka, and Wright counties[5]) further strengthens the demand for journalism with a diversity of viewpoints.[6] Additionally, the cities' large number of nonprofit organizations devoted to community-building and political activism represent not only a substantial demand for information but also an eagerness among residents to engage with that information.

Residents of Minneapolis-St. Paul have several culturally established interests that motivate consistent media coverage. The area is one of the largest markets in the country for live theater and has one of the highest national rankings for theater seats per capita.[7] The Twin Cities have a number of historic companies with large audiences; accordingly, arts reviews and entertainment news constitute highly demanded content. A culture of devotion to state sports teams—and the national prominence of the Minnesota Twins and Vikings—also encourages demand for information in the form of up-to-date, contextualized sports coverage.

The Twin Cities are also home to a critical mass of ethnic minority, immigrant, and refugee populations that generate unique segments of information demand.

Minnesota's Somali and Hmong populations, a combination of first-generation immigrants and their descendants, comprise some of the largest such populations in the United States[8,9] The Latino community also plays a significant role in this ecology due to its size and prominence (see **Demography** below). These communities have significant needs not only for localized news on the issues affecting them, but also for quality international news providing information about their countries of origin.

This report will assess the success of existing players and institutions in fulfilling the information needs of Minneapolis-St. Paul in the digital age. The Twin Cities offer a wide range of different

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models of journalism and communication with varying levels of success. Combined with the cities' robust demand for quality, accessible information, we believe that the observations and conclusions about this information landscape provide valuable insight into media and information ecology more generally.

Demography

The Twin Cities are a major metropolitan area with the size and demographics to support considerable media enterprise. The metropolitan area comprising Minneapolis, St. Paul, and their southern neighbor Bloomington has a population of approximately 3.175 million, according to a 2006 estimate of the United States Census Bureau.[10] Minneapolis had a 2007 population of 358,896[11] and St. Paul of 269,188 individuals[12] for a total of 628,084 residents in the cities proper. The metro area has a population density of 489.7 persons per square mile.[13] The cities' populations have shrunk substantially. However, in the past decade (e.g., in Minneapolis, by 4.6 percent between 2000 and 2006).[14] Concurrent growth in greater Minnesota (e.g., by 5 percent between 2000 and 2006), growth in Hennepin County,[15] and only minimal population decrease in Ramsey County[16] suggest an ongoing demographic shift from the heavily urban metropolis toward suburban and rural areas.

Minneapolis-St. Paul is home to several of the largest immigrant communities in the United States, creating significant demand for media that serves them expressly. Approximately 14.8 percent of Minneapolis and St. Paul residents (92,985 individuals) are foreign-born, the majority of whom—57,210 individuals or 9.1 percent of total population—are not U.S. citizens, according to U.S. Census data.[17] Close to 4.8 percent of the metro area (628,084 individuals) reported that they "speak English

less than 'very well.'"[18] Most foreign-born residents come from Asia (5 percent of the cities' combined population), Africa (3.7 percent), and Latin America (4.7 percent). Of Minnesota's Latino population (208,052[19]), an overwhelming proportion (148,404 individuals[20]) resides in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. The state also contains the nation's second-highest Hmong population, an ethnic group originating in China and Southeast Asia, estimated in 2008 at 53,261.[21] Most Hmong-Minnesotans are concentrated in the Twin Cities area, where they have developed a number of local media outlets serving their communities. Minnesota additionally has the largest Somali population in the country, though estimates vary greatly. A 2007 estimate of 50,000 residents in the state is near the median of available numbers.[22] By all accounts, the Somali population in Minnesota continues to grow rapidly due to a combination of high birth rates and an influx of refugees.[23] Similarly, the state's Laotian population, who have emigrated or fled Laos and Thailand, rapidly increased from 6,381 in 1990 to 11,561 in 2010, according to the Minnesota State Demographic Center.[24] Overall, ethnic minorities comprise significant segments of Minneapolis-St. Paul population; 15.7 percent of the cities' population is black or African American, 8.1 percent is Asian, and 9.1 percent is Hispanic, as defined by the U.S. Census. [25]

Levels of education and income are roughly comparable with national averages. Approximately 87.5 percent of Minneapolis-St. Paul residents 25 years and older have attained high school degrees or higher levels of education,[26] compared with the national average of 84.5 percent.[27] Minnesota has a literacy rate of 94 percent, one of the highest in the country.[28] Median household income in Minneapolis-St. Paul is $46,863, slightly below than the national average of $52,175.[29] But per capita income is $28,342, in comparison with $27,466 nationally.

The vast majority of Twin Cities residents work white-collar jobs. Approximately 42 percent of Minneapolis-St. Paul residents work in "management, professional, and related occupations," while 24 percent work in "sales and office occupations," according to the U.S. Census.[30] The largest industries are "educational services, and health care and social assistance" (26 percent) and "professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services" (13 percent).[31] A number of Fortune 500 companies locate their headquarters in Minneapolis-St. Paul and the suburbs, including Target, 3M, and General Mills. Around 6.4 percent of metro area residents are unemployed, according to May 2010 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.[32]

Print Media

Two newspapers based in each of the Twin Cities currently dominate most of the print media in the area. The *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* and *The St. Paul Pioneer* *Press* are the only general-interest, daily newspapers serving Minneapolis-St. Paul.[*] Both for-profit publications retain large, full-time staffs that specialize in specific coverage areas. Each has a significant online presence with some regular updates, though the *Star Tribune* has more effectively integrated multimedia features into stories and features blogs more prominently.

The two papers employ similar content choices and resource models, defining themselves as "one-stop news sources." Both endeavor to cover metro, state, national, and international news, along with separate sections for arts, sports, and commentary. With content spanning

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multiple aspects of life and scopes of geography, each paper seeks to establish itself as the only source that readers need to read regularly to obtain essential information. This strategy may not be optimal for delivering high-quality civic information, as it thinly spreads staff resources over a large number of content areas.

Though they report on news affecting the whole metro area, stories rarely cover specific neighborhoods or communities in a "hyperlocal" manner. A study we conducted to quantify content and staff distribution in major news outlets found that less than 1 percent of *Star Tribune* stories and less than 3 percent of *Pioneer Press* stories report on a specific neighborhood or community (See **Fig. 5** in **Appendix I**). The bulk of coverage takes place on the state, national, and international levels, comprising more than three-quarters of content in either newspaper. Specifically, the outlets devote writer personnel primarily to covering metro area and some state news, relying on wire services, especially the Associated Press, and national outlets for nearly all national and international stories.

The *Star Tribune* has had an especially tumultuous financial history in the past five years. In December 2006, Avista Capital Partners, a multibillion-dollar private equity firm, bought the *Star Tribune* from The McClatchy Company.[33] The paper, like many other newspapers in the United States during that time, almost immediately encountered financial crisis. Within two years, the company slashed $50 million from its operating budget, cutting 610 full-time employees while reducing page

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[*] The *Minnesota Daily*, while considered "general-interest," is published only Monday through Thursday; *Finance & Commerce*, while published daily, is a business publication and is not considered "general-interest."

counts and salaries.[34] In January 2009, the *Star Tribune* filed for bankruptcy in an effort to restructure and reduce its $480 million debt while continuing to publish daily issues.[35] The newspaper's parent became the [Star Tribune Media Company LLC](#), independent from Avista and owned by private lenders such as Credit Suisse, General Electric, and CIT Group.[36]

A sharp decline in advertising and revenue—a trend that continues today—was a central reason for the *Star Tribune*'s Chapter 11 filing. Earnings before interest, taxes, and debt payments had decreased $89 million or 77 percent between 2004 and 2008 to an unsustainable $26 million of earnings in 2008.[37] Although the *Star Tribune* remains the most widely read paper in the area, print circulation continues to decline steadily, a trend common to newspapers nationwide. In 2007, the newspaper averaged weekday circulation at 336,697.[38] Within two years, daily circulation had dropped close to its current 295,438 readers,[39] an approximately 12 percent decrease. However, Web readership has increased steadily during this time. In 2007, the *Star Tribune*'s websites recorded 4.95 million unique visitors, increasing nearly a third to 6.49 million in 2010.[40] Between 2007 and 2010, the site gained 68,255 weekly "online readers" in the paper's Newspaper Designated Market (NDM), more than making up for its loss in circulation during that period.[41] It should be noted that substantial increases in online readership did not occur until the last reporting period, September 2009 to March 2010. These data may mean exciting news for the *Tribune*'s ability to retain readers in the digital age, but it has caused considerable financial loss to the institution.

Following the company's restructuring, News Editor and Senior Vice President Nancy Barnes declared the paper would increase its suburban coverage substantially, the *American Journalism Review* reported.[42] The few assignment reporters remaining were reportedly given beats exclusive to the suburban areas surrounding Minneapolis-St. Paul, such as Bloomington and Roseville. This strategy may have represented an attempt to capture advertising revenue from small businesses serving suburban residents, a market hitherto dominated by hyperlocal suburban-neighborhood newspapers.[43] This may have been successful as circulation data show the *Tribune*'s significant market penetration in suburban and even rural counties surrounding the Twin Cities. For example, more than 17 percent of households in Rice County and McLeod County each subscribe to the weekday *Tribune*, each of whose county seats reside 50 miles away from Downtown Minneapolis.[44] StarTribune.com offers pages of local news based on vicinity in the metro area, which report on the suburbs with originally generated, regularly updated stories.[45] However, the website does not always highlight them as the most noteworthy stories of the day; indeed, we found that less than 4 percent of stories on the homepage of StarTribune.com reported on the suburbs of Minneapolis, compared with over 11 percent on Minneapolis proper. Nonetheless, the *Star Tribune* has allocated significant resources toward reporting on a broad portion of the metro area, providing it with a readership base in many outlying regions.

The *Tribune*'s content distributions further reflect an attempt to appeal to a broader audience of readers. It currently reports heavily on Minnesota sports teams and stories of crime and loss-of-life, topics likely to attract readers unengaged by political content. These types of stories occur with much greater frequency than articles on local politics, our content analysis found. Close to 18 percent of stories we analyzed in the *Star Tribune* reported on sports, and 19.4 percent of *Pioneer Press* stories reported on crime or loss-of-life, compared with 15.4 percent and 11.8 percent on local politics respectively. The *Star Tribune* has also sought to adapt to Web-oriented readers. StarTribune.com currently features 32 blogs—a plurality (13) of which cover sports—though their frequency of posting varies widely.[46] The paper quickly developed an electronic newsletter, SMS news alerts, social media updating, and recently, smart phone and Kindle formats.[47, 48]

It is clear that in the past several years, then, the *Star Tribune* has struggled to adapt to media-industry changes on two fronts: embracing Web-based readers and fighting declining advertising revenues by broadening its readership base. The *Tribune* has successfully adapted its content to the Internet and has impressively—even if only temporarily—succeeded in expanding core readership during a time of plummeting demand for print journalism.

While the *Pioneer Press* continues to exert a significant force in this ecology, its future is uncertain in light of similar financial difficulties. Saddled with hundreds of millions in debt, [Affiliated Media](#)—parent of [MediaNews Group](#), a conglomerate owner of 54 daily newspapers including the *Pioneer Press*—announced its bankruptcy in January 2010.[49] Despite slight upticks in circulation, plunging advertising revenues have kept the *Press* unprofitable in recent years.[50] Print circulation of the *Pioneer Press* has risen slightly the past five years in defiance of nationwide trends. Circulation currently averages 193,054 weekday readers,[51] an increase of approximately 3.3 percent since 2005, when circulation averaged 186,753.[52] However, continually declining advertising revenue since 2006 has strained the paper's and company's sustainability, according to internal memoranda.[53] The *Press*' state of financial crisis crippled its resources for effective news coverage and mass delivery of quality journalism. Since 2006, multiple rounds of layoffs reduced the newsroom staff from 205 to 129,[54] in addition to mandatory furlough days and pay cuts.[55]

In terms of the geographic concentrations of their readerships, the *Star Tribune* has more successfully captured market share than the *Pioneer Press*. In reports of the Audit Bureau of Circulations, the *Pioneer Press*' Newspaper Designated Market (NDM) is restricted to seven counties on the east side of the metro area,[†] while the *Star Tribune*'s NDM comprises fourteen counties in both the eastern and western vicinities,[‡] five of which overlap with the *Pioneer Press*' market.[§] Within the half of the metro area in which each paper is based, circulation proportions are roughly comparable; approximately 24 percent of "West Metro" households subscribe to the *Star Tribune*, while 29 percent of "East Metro" households subscribe to the *Pioneer Press* (See **Fig. 1** below and **Fig. 4** in **Appendix I**).[56] But the *Star Tribune* has slightly greater market share across the "entire metro area," as we have defined it; 19 percent of "metro area" households subscribe to the weekday print edition of the *Star Tribune*, whereas 12 percent subscribe to the weekday print *Pioneer Press*.[57] Moreover, the *Star Tribune* retains greater readership in the area where the *Pioneer Press* is based (St. Paul and the East Metro) than the *Press* does in the area where the *Tribune* is based (Minneapolis and the West Metro). A full 10.5 percent of households in the "East Metro" area subscribe to the *Star Tribune*, but only 1.5 percent of households in the "West Metro" area subscribe to the *Pioneer Press*.[58] Despite dropping overall circulation numbers, the *Star Tribune* has reached a geographically wider market than the *Pioneer Press*.

Fig. 1: Newspapers' Circulations in the Metro Area

Newspaper	East Metro	West Metro	Whole Metro
Star Tribune	10.5 %	24 %	19 %
Pioneer Press	29 %	1.5 %	12 %

Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2009.

The area's two major newspapers share several geographically overlapping audiences and compete for readers within only a few of the same counties. In an effort to index competition further, we calculated the difference between household circulations of the *Star Tribune* and that of the *Pioneer Press* for a given county (See **Fig 4** in **Appendix I**). We divided that number by the number of households in the county that read either/both papers to obtain a rough indicator for the difference in circulations as a proportion of newspaper readers per county. Discarding those counties with insignificant market penetration (i.e., counties in which neither paper has more then 1,000 household subscribers), we arbitrarily labeled as "competitive markets" those counties in which the difference in the papers' circulations was less than 50 percent of the county's newspaper-subscribing population. The index found that in only four counties do the papers appear to compete for readers. Three of them are contained within the NDM's of both and Goodhue County lies adjacent to the overlapping area. This index found Ramsey and Washington counties, the other parts of the overlap, to be on the fringe of market competition. Calculating the metro area as a whole, our metric indicated significant competition, predictably more pronounced in the East Metro, where the NDMs overlap.

Each newspaper has considerable numbers of sub-markets that it monopolizes, and in only a small proportion of Twin Cities areas is choice competitive among print media sources. It is not quite the case that Minneapolis and St. Paul each constitute self-contained, monopolistically dominated newspaper markets. Rather, the entire Twin Cities metro area should be viewed as a market, within which two newspapers do compete for readers—but in only a handful of counties. Our content analysis data confirm the geographic division in target audiences, as the proportion of Minneapolis coverage in the *Star Tribune* is equal to the proportion of St. Paul coverage in the *Pioneer Press*, and vice-versa (See **Fig 5** in **Appendix I**). This lack of aggressive competition between the two papers in the vast majority of Twin Cities counties results in limited access to a diversity of viewpoints and competitive choice, posing problems for the ecosystem's "information health." Moreover, as both papers remain challenged as they seek to harness revenue their ultimate sustainability remain uncertain.

Hyperlocal Media

Aside from the two dailies, Minneapolis-St. Paul has a large industry of weekly and monthly neighborhood-specific print newspapers. These "hyperlocal" outlets cover small geographic sectors of the Twin Cities area, reporting on community organizations, municipal government, and highly specific changes to a neighborhood. These sources contain very little, if any, content repurposed from wire services or other outlets. A large number of hyperlocal sources cover the surrounding suburbs, especially those of Minneapolis. [Sun Newspapers](#), for example, owns and publishes 42 weekly

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[†] Ramsey, Dakota, Washington, Chisago, Polk, St. Croix, and Pierce counties.

[‡] Wright, Carver, Hennepin, Scott, Anoka, Sherburne, Isanti, Chisago, Washington, Ramsey, Dakota, Pierce, St. Croix, and Polk counties.

[§] To measure market penetration more fully, we expanded both newspapers' NDMs by the immediately adjacent counties. We thereby define the "entire metro area" as: Chisago, Dakota, Dunn, Goodhue, Pepin, Ramsey, Washington, Barron, Burnett, Pierce, Polk, and St. Croix counties ("East Metro"), in addition to Anoka, Benton, Carver, Hennepin, Isanti, Kanabec, Le Seur, McLeod, Meeker, Mille Lacs, Renville, Scott, Sherburne, Sibley, Stearns, Wright, and Rice counties ("West Metro").

newspapers, in the suburbs of the Twin Cities, even reaching into heavily rural areas some 40 miles away from the cities proper.[59] Urban neighborhoods are also covered by hyperlocal media, such as by *East Side Review News*, reaching the eastern neighborhoods of St. Paul.[60]

The neighborhood press' business model in many ways resembles the traditional strategy of newspapers. Most hyperlocal outlets surveyed are for-profit, privately owned enterprises that rely primarily on advertising and secondarily on subscription payments for revenue. Publishers distribute the newspapers free-of-charge at various locations throughout neighborhoods, such as libraries and convenience stores.[61] Print editions heavily feature advertisements, mostly for local small- to medium-sized businesses. Our study of Twin Cities media found that on average, nearly 50 percent of space in neighborhood-specific newspapers we surveyed is devoted to advertisements. Few of these outlets are independently owned; despite their success in covering stories with a high degree of localization, most hyperlocal outlets we found are owned by larger companies. Sun Newspapers is itself owned by American Community Newspapers, a nationwide publisher of 100 papers total.[62] Minnesota Premier Publications, another outlet, owns four publications serving urban Minneapolis, as does St. Paul Publishing Company with respect to St. Paul.[63] The combined weekly circulation of Sun Newspapers is 389,791,[64] Minnesota Premier Publications has a combined circulation of 222,400 between its two biweekly and two monthly publications,[65] and Lillie Suburban Newspapers of 119,000 weekly among its six newspapers.[66]

The hyperlocal press appears committed to a print format and for the most part does not have a sophisticated online presence. In recent years, many cities in the United States have developed blogs to deliver hyperlocal news, addressing neighborhood issues and reporting on stories not far-reaching enough for citywide outlets. Seattle, WA, for example, is home to Next Door Media, a network of neighborhood-based blogs, along with dozens of other neighborhood-specific sources, while Washington, DC, is home to at least 60 digital local and hyperlocal news sources, according to case studies on Seattle and the District of Columbia issued by the New America Foundation.[67] On the contrary, Minneapolis-St. Paul has maintained a tradition of paper news for its neighborhood press and shows little evidence of widespread or serious efforts to transfer hyperlocal resources online. Some outlets, such as *Uptown Neighborhood News*, covering Uptown Minneapolis, and *The South St. Paul Voice*, covering the suburbs of South St. Paul, web-publish only PDF versions of their monthly print editions.[68,69] With the exception of Sun Newspapers, which aggregates stories from its 42 newspapers and sorts them according to neighborhood, the websites of hyperlocal outlets are often limited to reproductions of textual stories, listed sequentially, with occasional photos. The sites usually do not contain multimedia features, blogs, or sophisticated layouts, and very few websites of hyperlocal outlets we surveyed feature extensive online-only content. Hyperlocal outlets' websites are not marked with a level of sophistication that would indicate a shift of resources from print to digital.

The *Minnesota Daily*, a nonprofit publication produced by students of the University of Minnesota, may be considered hyperlocal not in its coverage, but in its readership. While the paper reports on citywide and state capitol news, thus differentiating it from neighborhood-specific publications, it is distributed only in the immediate vicinity of the university's campuses, where its audience primarily resides.[70]

The *Daily* is a sweeping organization with impressive resources, in spite of recent financial problems. The paper is run entirely by students, 140 undergraduate and graduate students who are compensated at all levels.[71] Its budget and revenue both exceed $1.8 million, including $550,000 in university support.[72] It also maintains operating reserves of about $687,000 that grow yearly with investments.[73] Additionally, the *Daily* appears to have a sophisticated organizational structure, consisting of multiple departments, including human resources and information systems.[74] It has captured a large readership, distributing 20,000 copies Monday through Thursday during the academic year (with a return rate of 26 percent).[75] In the Fall 2009 semester, the *Daily*'s website received approximately 4,200 unique visitors per day, a nearly 9 percent increase from the previous year.[76]

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However, in the past two years, the *Minnesota Daily* has struggled to remain sustainable. The organization received nearly $2 million in income at the end of the 2010 academic year toward an expense budget of nearly the same amount.[77] While this is a remarkable figure for a student-produced newspaper, it is a considerable decline from past years. Advertising revenue has plunged for the *Daily* since 2007—mirroring a trend of newspapers nationwide—falling more than one-third since 2007 with no expectation of recovery by the organization's projections.[78] In January 2009, months following a shortfall in net income almost equal to the previous year's net gain, the paper cut its Friday edition, printing only Mondays through Thursdays.[79] The organization has cut its budget at least twice since December 2008, primarily taking aim at staff compensation.[80] Despite recently harrowing years and presently unsustainable revenue

streams, the *Daily* maintains resources sufficient to offset the danger of closure at least temporarily. Its net assets of $1.4 million (in 2009) and growing operating reserves of $687,000 should provide it ample room for experimentation and innovation, especially with new business models and revenue sources compatible with a digital age.[81] Instead of addressing financial crisis with repeated budget cuts—mere stopgap measures—the organization could use its sizeable assets to search for a business model that will sustain the paper's impact on the ecosystem.

Online Media

Numerous online-only outlets have emerged in the past few years, due in part to the financial difficulties of the *Star Tribune* and *Pioneer Press*. MinnPost.com, operated by an independent, nonprofit foundation of the same name, is the most prominent and wealthiest of these. The two-year-old online publication covers statewide and citywide politics closely with mostly original reporting and a straightforward, no-nonsense format.

MinnPost has gained nationwide attention for its nonprofit approach and recruitment of former newspaper devotees. Joel Kramer, editor and CEO of MinnPost, was publisher and president of the *Star Tribune* until its sale to McClatchy in 1998. The outlet was formed in the wake of massive layoffs by the *Star Tribune* and *Pioneer Press*, comprising an endeavor not only to close gaps in Twin Cities coverage left by shrinking newspaper staffs, but also to devise a sustainable business model for political journalism in the digital age. When Kramer founded MinnPost in 2007, he contracted 25 professional journalists, 18 of whom had been newsroom employees of either the *Star Tribune* or *Pioneer Press*.[82] The organization began with $1.2 million dollars in funding, primarily (approximately $850,000) from four families and secondarily (approximately $250,000) from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation (also a major funder of the New America Foundation).[83, 84]

MinnPost is well funded in comparison to nonprofit online newspapers in other cities. It currently operates with an annual budget of $1.1 million, over 60 percent of which was raised independently, compared with VoicesofSanDiego.com at $800,000 annually[85] and The St. Louis Beacon at $600,000 in 2008.[86] Having survived its birth-year, MinnPost now receives diminished levels of foundation funding—it received $205,000 from the Knight Foundation in the two years subsequent to its initial grant of $250,000—and is filling the gap by generating substantial revenue from advertising and individual donors.[87] The firm has earned an estimated $300,000 annually over the past three years and has approximately 2,000 member donors.[88] Advertising, sponsorship, and individual donations have climbed each year, according to the organization's 2009 Year End

Report.[89] Kramer has called these revenue streams "the key to long-term sustainability," a goal of fully independent operating revenue he aims to achieve by 2012.[90]

Controlling operating costs has been crucial to the outlet's financial viability. MinnPost.com retains only 18 full-time employees,[91] and at $50,000 to $60,000, their salaries are not competitive with local newspapers.[92] It relies on a 40-person pool of paid freelance contributors, contributing to low and controllable operating costs.[93] MinnPost spent $1.12 million in expenses in 2009, down 20 percent from the previous year. The organization ran a deficit of $605,000 in 2008, its first full year, but reduced it to $125,000 by 2009.[94]

Joel Kramer at the MinnPost launch party. (Photo credit: Chuck Olsen/Flickr)

originally generated political coverage. MinnPost.com produces a much larger proportion of stories on local politics, and about an equal proportion of stories on the metro area, than the *Star Tribune* and *Pioneer Press*, our content study found. About 32.3 percent of the website's content during our analysis period covered local politics and municipal government, more than double that of either newspaper (See **Fig. 5** in **Appendix I**). MinnPost.com had by far the most original content—70.7 percent of analyzed stories were original pieces written by professional journalists during our analysis period, compared with 61.2 percent at the *Star Tribune* and 45.1 percent at the *Pioneer Press*. MinnPost retains a single Washington, D.C. correspondent, Derek Wallbank, who reports on Minnesota's congressional representatives and the federal politics relevant to the state.[95] For broader national and international news, the website relies on outside outlets, such as GlobalPost and the Christian Science Monitor News Service. The website republishes most national and international stories—constituting approximately 27.8 percent of stories we analyzed—"as a service to people who don't have time to read that much," Kramer told New America in an interview. MinnPost.com aims for a balance in its level of localization, he said: "No

matter how many resources we have, we're not going to do national."

In addition, MinnPost.com has experimented with different content formats. The website hosts a number of fact-oriented blogs written by professional journalists, on subjects ranging from urban design to public health, many of which are supported by foundation grants.[96] MinnPost.com considers user submissions for publication in its Community Voices section, which is comparable to an op-ed section of a newspaper.

Other online outlets have directed resources toward encouraging community and citizen participation. The Twin Cities Daily Planet (TCDP), a nonprofit, online-only publication, delivers state and local news largely through the use of "citizen journalists," independent, non-staff writers without professional journalistic training. TCDP also publishes unsolicited, uncompensated articles written by citizen journalists on all parts of its website. The site attracts 50,000 visitors each month, according to TCDP's own estimates.[97] TCDP's content has a strongly localized focus in relation to other major media of Minneapolis-St. Paul, but not in relation to hyperlocal newspapers. Our analysis found that 21 percent of TCDP stories are hyperlocal or community-focused, in comparison with nearly zero in the *Star Tribune*, *Pioneer Press*, and MinnPost.com, and an average of 68 percent of stories in hyperlocal newspapers (See **Fig. 5** in **Appendix I**). The Daily Planet also delivers almost three times as much content on Minneapolis than the *Star Tribune*. Approximately 21 percent of TCDP stories we analyzed reported on local politics, higher than the *Star Tribune* and *Pioneer Press* but lower than MinnPost.com. The outlet's priorities are currently "education and education policy, environment, immigration and immigrant communities, and health care policies," according to its website.[98] But the site publishes only a slightly higher percentage of health and education stories (3.23 percent each) than other media outlets we measured; the plurality of content type is arts and entertainment (29.03 percent). Additionally, the website prominently features coverage of minority groups, though many of these stories are reproduced from other outlets.

TCDP relies on contracted freelancers and unpaid user-writers for a great deal of coverage across all sections. TCDP lists 33 writers as "regular contributors" of articles.[99] Payment is not competitive, at $20 to $50 for a 200- to 400-word story and $100 for an 800-word story.[100] The organization pays writers only for assigned stories, allowing TCDP editors to retain control over coverage priorities. Editorial guidelines state a primary interest in impartial news reporting,[101] and articles are edited and fact-checked.[102] The website's "Free Speech Zone" is an exception to both these rules, providing an unedited space for all types of user contributions.[103] The site also allows users to publish original blogs, and TCDP offers dozens of original and republished blogs, many of which are single-author.

Despite its participatory thrust, many articles within a particular field of coverage are either externally repurposed or opinion pieces. It is true that TCDP provides more user-generated content than other Twin Cities outlets we surveyed; approximately 34 percent of the stories we surveyed in TCDP were user-generated, compared with under 10 percent in the *Star-Tribune*, *Pioneer Press*, and MinnPost.com. But TCDP also publishes far more externally repurposed stories than the *Star Tribune* and MinnPost.com (and approximately the same number as the *Pioneer Press*). On average, 43.5 percent of stories we examined on TCDP had been repurposed, compared with less than 30 percent in the *Star Tribune* and MinnPost.com. International and national stories that are originally reported are usually opinion pieces. Furthermore, many stories are written by the same author, such as TCDP Arts Editor Jay Gabler, who writes a large portion of arts articles.

> The UpTake is another nonprofit news website that relies on user participation and content creation, delivering content in the form of streaming video.

TCDP is funded primarily by nonprofit foundations and member donations, and secondarily by advertising. Nearly all ($222,860) of the total revenue of its parent organization, Twin Cities Media Alliance, for 2008 ($238,288) came from "contributions and grants."[104] With the exception of the Institute for Interactive Journalism at the University of Maryland ("J-Lab"), major foundation funding comes from organizations based in Minneapolis-St. Paul.[105] The organization spent almost all its revenue ($207,160) in expenses in 2008.[106] TCDP also solicits advertising, at rates between $50 and $100,[107] though advertising occupies little visual space on its web pages. The outlet retains a full-time staff of only two editors, along with three managers of Twin Cities Media Alliance and the Alliance's ten-person board of directors.[108]

The UpTake is another nonprofit news website that relies on user participation and content creation, delivering content in the form of streaming video. The UpTake is a nationwide organization that offers user-driven coverage of Washington, D.C., Colorado, Iowa, and Florida, in addition to Minnesota. Coverage is largely unmediated, as it consists entirely of user-uploaded videos, occasionally accompanied by transcripts. Videos depict legislative hearings, community meetings, speeches, and other events, including occasional ad hoc interviews. They are sometimes edited for length and/or be accompanied by short, written summaries. The website is updated frequently, often with several new videos posted every day.

Though unsuited for investigative journalism or more abstract stories, The UpTake fills a niche of consistently updated, scrutinizing, low-cost coverage of live political events and campaigns.

The UpTake's executive director has publicly described it as a "progressive organization," and content focuses on Democratic-Party politicians and activists.[109] Indeed, most posted videos show full speeches given by politicians affiliated with the Democratic Party or Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party (DFL), and most showing Republican Party politicians are clipped from hostile question-and-answer sessions (See **Fig. 2** in **Appendix I**). Of the 29 videos posted to the Minnesota page between July 4 and July 25, 2010, 17 showed Democratic or DFL politicians, and only 5 showed Republican politicians, all 5 of which were clipped, our content analysis study found. Furthermore, 11 videos showed full, unedited speeches given by Democratic or DFL politicians, while no videos showing full speeches of GOP affiliates were posted during this time. This trend has not gone unnoticed; a request for press space within the Minnesota Capitol recently generated controversy after two news outlets raised accused The UpTake of partisanship.[110]

The UpTake has gained distinction for its consistent coverage of noteworthy political events in the Twin Cities. It first gained prominence providing live footage of protests at the 2008 Republican National Convention in Minneapolis-St. Paul.[111] It entered national spotlight again during the disputed 2008 U.S. Senate race in Minnesota, when it provided live video streams of the election recount proceedings, accompanied by a live chat feature for users to discuss the action.[112] These real-time aspects of the election's coverage not only drove and maintained substantial web traffic on the site—the site received 620,000 views between January and May 2009[113]—but also kept the state Canvassing Board transparent and accessible to Internet-connected citizens across the world. Today, The UpTake covers campaign stops and speeches of the Minnesota gubernatorial race with videos on a regular basis.[114] Many of the original, user-produced videos from the site are rebroadcast through other news outlets.[115] The UpTake appears to maintain an audience of viewers "addicted" to nonstop political coverage, who may then engage with the information externally.

Digital training and literacy programs constitute an important part of The UpTake's impact. The organization provides free, volunteer-run classes for basic digital literacy, Internet-browsing skills, and video editing and production. Volunteers from The UpTake have also provided technological assistance to community organizing campaigns, Community Manager Cirien Saadeh told the New America Foundation in an interview. In the next six to twelve months, the organization plans to open a series of "hubs" for broadband access across Minnesota to provide free Internet access and video production classes, Saadeh said. Sources of funding for this project remain unclear.

The organization operates on a very low budget, as revenue constraints prevent long-term saving or endowment. In 2008, the organization's first year, The UpTake raised almost $170,000 in contributions and grants but spent $100,000 on "professional fees and other payments to independent contractors,"[116] and during the 2008-2009 Senate recount, The UpTake operated with expenses of $8,000 each month ($96,000 per year if extrapolated), MinnPost reported.[117] The organization is run almost entirely by unpaid volunteers from across the world, with only a handful of mostly unpaid full-time staffers. Major operating expenses are travel expenses and Web operations.[118] The organization's funds come primarily in small amounts from individual donors, along with contributions from the Harnisch and Industrial Telecommunications foundations.[119] Advertising also constitutes a form of revenue; original video feeds on the website begin with a short advertisement, often of a major corporation such as Jeep or Chase. While its costs are low, similarly low revenue keeps The UpTake living hand-to-mouth.

A few online outlets provide coverage of Minnesota state politics but include little content local to Minneapolis-St. Paul. Politics in Minnesota publishes extensive reporting on the Minnesota governor's race and on state legislators, but stories specifically on the Twin Cities are intermittent. Similarly, The Minnesota Independent, a nonprofit outlet funded by the American Independent News Network (AINN, formerly the Center for Independent Media), offers original reporting on a number of political issues and minority groups with a statewide, rather than city-level, thrust.[120] The Minnesota Independent provides consistent coverage of Capitol politics, especially of upcoming elections, and offers content in a diversity of sections, including economic, environmental, and health-related news. AINN has significant resources, with $2.03 million in net assets at the end of 2008,[121] though these funds are spread over outlets in eight states other than Minnesota. The Minnesota Independent plays an important role for Twin Cities residents' political decisions—one that requires further research—but it does not report on the local-level issues that are sometimes of greatest importance to Minneapolis-St. Paul residents.

Commercially Televised Media

Outlets owned by nationwide media corporations deliver most of the televised local news in Minneapolis-St. Paul. Four of the seven television outlets that produce original, localized news in regular segments are franchises of national broadcasting corporations: WCCO-TV, owned by CBS Corporation; FOX-9 of FOX Broadcasting Company; KARE-11, owned by media giant Gannett and affiliated with NBC; KSAX-TV/KRWF-TV and KSTP-TV, owned by

Hubbard Broadcasting Company and affiliated with ABC. With the exception of WCCO, they all retain at least 20 full-time newsroom staffers and anchors.[122] Some outlets have adapted content to online users, such as WCCO, which employs 13 bloggers, though it has a smaller TV news staff compared with its competitors.[123] These outlets deliver originally produced local news several times daily to both their websites and television broadcasts. The outlets rely greatly on wire services for coverage at all levels of government—local, national, and international—meaning that stories are often repeated across outlets.

KSTC-TV is one of the only "independent" television stations we identified broadcasting news within the Twin Cities proper.[**] The outlet maintains a secondary affiliation with ABC, however, and is owned by national media conglomerate Hubbard Broadcasting, a private company that also owns three Twin Cities radio stations and several television stations nationwide, including KSAX-TV and KRWF-TV in affiliation with ABC.[124] KSTC retains a competitively sized news staff of over 20 anchors and reporters[125] but relies heavily on the Associated Press for content. Operating on a single broadcast channel (Channel 45), the station airs original news programming twice daily, along with a once-a-day news show rebroadcast from Hubbard-owned and ABC-affiliate KSTP. KSTC also airs *Teen Kids News*, a weekly, 30-minute program that delivers educationally relevant news targeted for 13 to 16 year olds.[126]

Public Television

Residents of Minneapolis-St. Paul have access to one public television station (Twin Cities Public Television [TPT]), and a small number of "public, education, and government access" channels (known as PEGs), (St. Paul Neighborhood Network [SPNN], and Northwest Community Television [NWCT]). Both PEG stations are nonprofit operators of several stations each that produce a great deal of localized content. Aside from these locally based operators, some Twin Cities residents may have access to more distantly located stations, such as Lakeland Public Television of Bemidji, MN or WTVS of Detroit, MI, depending on their location and television service provider.

Twin Cities Public Television has significant production capacity, with which it achieves substantial political and community-level coverage. It operates four stations, two of which are owned by the nationwide Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), and its website provides streaming video of full episodes for some programs.[127] TPT's subsidiary, TPT National Productions, regularly produces several programs for the national PBS schedule and has won hundreds of awards.[128] TPT rents production

facilities and services to private enterprises for a fee,[129] potentially posing a barrier to full public accessibility. TPT's stations do not provide originally produced, headline news programs on a daily basis, instead offering a combination of internationally broadcast news services (e.g., *BBC World News*, *PBS Newshour*) and community-based programming. The Minnesota Channel, operated by TPT, delivers local-level programs produced by or in conjunction with Twin Cities nonprofit organizations (e.g., Minnesota Creative Arts and Aging Network, University of Minnesota).[130] A fiber optic network currently connects all public television stations in Minnesota, allowing them to broadcast The Minnesota Channel over-the-air simultaneously.[131] One of its programs, *Capitol Report*, is produced by Minnesota Senate Media Services and provides weekly updates and interviews from the Minnesota State Capitol. Other programs—many in foreign languages such as Hmong or Somali—supply information relating to public health, criminal justice, and personal finance.[132]

SPNN truck filming on location (Photo credit: Michael Hicks/*Flickr*)

While TPT possesses impressive financial resources and revenue, its expenses are also substantial. In FY 2009, the organization had a $5 million shortfall between its $23 million revenue and $28 million in expenses.[133] Individual donations comprise slightly more than half of all operating funds, while corporations and foundations account for 16 percent, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting for 11 percent.[134] In FY 2009, TPT received about $5 million in federal government grants and $448,000 in State of Minnesota grants.[135] The organization receives hundreds of thousands of dollars from Fortune 500 corporations based in Minneapolis-St. Paul, such as Land O'Lakes and 3M Foundation, in addition to foundation support from The McKnight Foundation and The Saint Paul Foundation.[136] TPT appears well positioned to continue its mission of public service television.

[**] FCC regulations define an "independent station" as one carrying less than ten hours of primetime network programming per week.

The St. Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN), another nonprofit television operator, affords significant opportunities for public access programming. The organization operates five cable-only channels that offer PEG, religious, news-oriented, and youth programs and reach 52,000 households in St. Paul.[137] SPNN opens its facilities and video equipment to anyone who has completed its introductory videography course and paid a fee to become an SPNN member.[138] The network then airs these productions as part of its public access programming.[139] The organization provides more advanced courses in production and editing, all available for $40 and under,[140] and its dozens of pieces of equipment for approved use.[141] Furthermore, SPNN is a partner of the AmeriCorps Community Technology Empowerment Project (CTEP), a $1.4 million, three-year federally funded project to engage in local digital literacy training.[142, 143]

In addition to public access content, SPNN channels feature programs supplying valuable social service information and educational material. Comcast's Channel 16 is reserved for St. Paul Public Schools educational and children programming,[144] and Channel 19 is devoted almost entirely to SPNN productions and community-based programs. Indeed, citizen journalism has become a major part of the network's programming. "It's a good way to ensure that we have an appropriate representation of reality in local media," SPNN Executive Director Mike Wassenaar told New America in an interview. "We can better represent the life of the community." Supported by the Institute of Interactive Journalism ("J-Lab"), SPNN reserves a weekly timeslot for *St. Paul News Desk*, a citizen-produced news program consisting of short segments of community-level news.[145] A great number of the pieces, available online, focus on minority and ethnic groups in the Twin Cities. While an evaluation of SPNN's funding and ongoing financial viability requires further research, it is clear the station plays an important role in achieving openness in the delivery of quality journalism.

Northwest Community Television (NWCT) brings public access, noncommercial programming to the northwest suburbs of Minneapolis. Based in Brooklyn Park, MN, NWCT operates five cable-only channels via Comcast (Channels 12, 16, 18, 19, 20).[146] The nonprofit organization receives public, municipal funding collected from franchise fees paid by the cable service provider (currently Comcast) and subscriber fees paid by cable users.[147] A municipal commission representing nine suburbs of Minneapolis, the Northwest Suburbs Cable Communications Commission (NWSCCC), appoints a board of directors to oversee NWCT and its budget of $3 million.[148] On at least one channel (Channel 16), each local government retains the privilege to "pre-empt" NWCT's signal with its own municipal content.[149]

Channel 12 is perhaps the most influential of NWCT's stations. It offers a news program produced once daily and replayed throughout the day that includes segments on family life, business news in the northwest suburbs, and consumer advice.[150] Another program, *Community Corner*, provides information daily about upcoming community-level events, profile features, government services (e.g., motor vehicle registration[151]), in addition to regular interviews with the cities' mayors.[152] Archived videos are available online, an important feature for a cable-only information provider. Though the station retains a tiny full-time newsroom staff of only six anchors and reporters,[153] its program content is originally reported and produced. "It's known as the place to get local coverage of an issue in the suburbs." SPNN Executive Director Mike Wassenaar told us in an interview. "Legislators know Channel 12." Channel 12 appears to provide valuable, localized information free-of-cost and on a mass scale; further research is required to determine its level success in attracting viewers.

NWCT's other principal programming consists of local government coverage and public access. Channel 16 offers government access programming from the nine suburbs, including footage of their respective city councils and commissions. Channels 19 and 20 are reserved for public access shows created by "citizen producers." Their lineups include religious programming, foreign-language news, public health discussion, and documentaries.[154] Video equipment rental and subsequent airtime is available for all residents of the network's nine suburbs who become organization members. Residents must attend an orientation and at least one television production course to become a member.[155] NWCT's role of affording public access to television production is important to the Twin Cities ecosystem; however, the unabridged format in which it broadcasts legislative meetings limits its potential to implement local government transparency.

Radio Media

Minnesota Public Radio (MPR), a nonprofit operator, dominates the radio news media in the Twin Cities. MPR offers three channels of content, News, Classical Music, and The Current (another music channel), that are rebroadcast on 39 stations throughout Minnesota and parts of the Midwest. The Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area has access to all three of these channels.[156] Minneapolis-St. Paul's news station, KNOW at 91.1 FM, is ranked eighth-highest in the metro area in terms of market share.[157] The station broadcasts a combination of locally produced, national, and international programs, focusing mostly on news analysis and interviews.[158]

MPR's online news service, MPRNewsQ, publishes a significant proportion of localized content in a variety of formats. MPRNewsQ, like the MPR News radio channel, distributes the same material across all of Minnesota, as it

publishes content on a single website unsorted by city. Accordingly, much of its news has a statewide thrust, emphasizing reporting on Capitol affairs and the state's congressional delegation.[159] MPR's website features a section called Minnesota Today, wherein editors manually aggregate stories from local outlets and sort them by region of Minnesota.[160] Users can search stories by content tags on Minnesota Today, and the site links directly to stories' external web pages. Many of the stories aggregated from the Twin Cities area derive from local television newsrooms.[161] Minnesota Today also offers political discussion forums for users[162] and an opinion-driven blog of original content, Statewide, that focuses on local real estate development and natural wildlife. Additionally, MPRNewsQ offers five original blogs, regularly updated and written by professional journalists, which offer perspectives on state-level political, economic, educational, and health-related news.

MPR has the resources to remain financially sustainable in the long run. At the end of FY 2009, MPR held $101.7 million in net assets—having earned $68.2 million in revenue and support—a decrease of $9.3 million from FY 2008, when the outlet gained net assets.[163] The decline in assets was due in part to the economic recession (i.e., investment and property depreciation) and in part to a $10 million decline in public support.[164] Very little of the outlet's revenue comes from governmental agencies or the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (accounting for only 7 percent of FY 2009 net assets), compared with Twin Cities Public Television (TPT), which receives 13 percent of operating funds from CBP, PBS, and the state of Minnesota combined.[165] Rather, the largest single sources of revenue are individual donations and memberships (almost 15 percent) as well as broadcasting activities (more than 12 percent).[166] Little funding originates from foundations or businesses (accounting for 5 percent and 0.7 percent respectively),[167] especially compared with TPT, where corporations and foundations account for 16 percent of the TV station's operating funds.[168] MPR is a wholly owned subsidiary of American Public Media Group, a nonprofit organization that owns public radio operators nationwide.[169] Aside from MPR's operating assets, American Public Media Group holds an endowment for the benefit of MPR, valued at $104.5 million in June 2009.[170] Not only is MPR capable of generating considerable revenue, but its endowment from its parent company is more than double its net assets.

The Twin Cities area is home to only a handful of independently owned radio stations, such as KFAI (90.3 FM in Minneapolis and 106.7 FM in St. Paul). KFAI is a nonprofit "community radio station...providing a voice for people ignored or misrepresented by mainstream media," according to its website.[171] The station broadcasts music, talk-show-type discussion, and independently produced news, such as Democracy Now! and Free Speech Radio News.[172] The station also broadcasts originally produced

metro news, such as Truth to Tell, a weekly discussion program on Minnesota public affairs.[173] Most notably, KFAI retains a News Department that produces an original nightly news program with a local perspective. The show delivers significant amounts of content relating to environmental activism, arts and entertainment, and community-based organizations.[174] The site's news section is updated infrequently, though a podcast and some program content is available for download.

Screenshot of MPR homepage (Photo credit: Chuck Olsen/Flickr)

KFAI is a nonprofit, volunteer-run organization with substantial, though declining, resources. Its annual budget for 2008 was approximately $1.4 million, over half of which was donated by the station's 3,400 members.[175] KFAI also receives public funding, from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the State of Minnesota, and foundational support from the McKnight Foundation and the Bush Foundation.[176] A number of medium-sized local businesses underwrite some programming costs as well.[177] KFAI is run by 400 volunteers, a small full-time staff, and a board of directors.[178]

KFAI's ratings cast doubt on the station's ability to provide valuable, sought-after information to listeners, and, consequently, on its viability. KFAI ranks near the bottom of Twin Cities radio stations, with only 167 AQH (average quarter-hour persons, i.e., the average number of individuals listening for at least five minutes during a 15-minute period)[179] and close to zero market share (0.1 percent).[180] The station has been losing listeners since 2005; between April and July 2009 alone, the number of weekly listeners decreased by 40 percent to 18,100.[181] Further decline of the station risks a loss of public funding, a 2009 quarterly audience report suggests.[182] "The station is not meeting the listener's needs nor is it perceived by listeners as providing a valuable community service," the report concluded. KFAI launched an overhauled program schedule in July 2010, moving public affairs programming to a morning schedule and broadcasting music 17 hours per weekday.[183] The station

will feature programming oriented toward a broad variety of Twin Cities immigrant communities on Sundays.[184]

At least one radio station has established its mission as serving a particular "niche" of the Minneapolis-St. Paul population. KMOJ (89.9 FM) has broadcasted music and public affairs programming oriented toward the metro area's black community for more than 30 years.[185] The station states its mission as two-fold: to provide broadcasting training to underprivileged youths and, similar to KFAI, to deliver programming "not typically voiced on mainstream media entities."[186] KMOJ engages in broadcasting education primarily through internship programs that recruit from local universities.[187] It offers a number of talk show programs that provide a valuable combination of local civic and life-supporting information, including a number of public health and community forum programs.[188] Additionally, the station's owner, the Center for Communication and Development, recently received a $20,000 grant from the Northwest Area Foundation to expand personal finance programming for low-income audiences.[189] The Center is a nonprofit foundation based in Minneapolis with substantial cash flow. Its 2008 revenue was about $559,000, with expenses of $527,500 that left net assets of $201,000.[190] Though the capacity of KMOJ to reach a critical mass requires further study—as its listenership currently represents less than 1 percent of market share[191]—the station provides numerous types of information crucial to a "healthy" information community.

Other news-oriented stations we identified offer very little local news programming. Two radio stations in the metro area offer conservative talk radio programming. KTLK-FM (100.3 FM) and The Patriot (WWTC, AM 1280) broadcast nationally syndicated talks shows, such as Glenn Beck and Michael Savage.[192,193] These stations offer minimal, if any, localized programming. Similarly, KYCR (AM 1570), a business-news station that broadcasts nationally syndicated content, also provides very little local programming,[194] most of which is relegated to weekend timeslots. However, the station supplies valuable economic news to Twin Cities residents.

Media of Minority and Historically Underrepresented Populations

Minneapolis-St. Paul is home to significant proportions of ethnic minority populations, and these communities have established a variety of forms of media serving the needs of their respective communities. We surveyed the Twin Cities media landscape for sources in foreign languages or with news specifically relevant to a particular ethnicity, especially with regard to the Somali, Latino, and Hmong communities. While each community has built numerous media outlets, none have fully adapted to Internet-based distribution.

Somali-Minnesotans have developed forums for information dissemination primarily through television. Somali TV of Minnesota and the Somali American Media Association produce and reproduce content relating to both news in Somalia and issues relevant to Somalis living in the metro area, some of which is available online.[195] Some footage produced in Minneapolis-St. Paul

> We surveyed the Twin Cities media landscape for sources in foreign languages or with news specifically relevant to a particular ethnicity, especially with regard to the Somali, Latino, and Hmong communities.

is sent out to other Somali communities across the United States, said Mike Wassenaar, Executive Director of St. Paul Neighborhood Network, which has produced and broadcast Somali-community material extensively. A number of public access broadcasters, including St. Paul Neighborhood Network, air features on Somali life in Minnesota as well (e.g., Mukhtar Gaaddasaar's *Egal Shidad Stories of Somali Health*[196]). KFAI, a local nonprofit radio station discussed above, broadcasts two Somali-oriented shows: *Somali Community Link*, a Somali-language talk show, and *Somali Voices* weekly and online,[197] in addition to occasional documentaries on the Minnesota-Somali community (e.g., *Minneapolis to Mogadishu: Somalis at a Crossroads*).[198] Though producers are volunteers, often communicating by word of mouth, the Somali community has one of the largest capacities for television production among Minnesota diaspora communities.

Despite a formidable television and radio presence, the Somali community has struggled to share information through online media. *The Warsan Times*, a bilingual Somali-English newspaper, publishes independently in Minneapolis, and the paper's website is limited to a short list of textual stories. The site is updated frequently, thus demonstrating an eagerness for web production, though images and advertisement links do not work.[199] This type of website reflects a dearth of resources, in terms of both the knowledge and the money requisite to online production. These two problems combine to limit capitalization of online potential.

Hmong residents of Minneapolis-St. Paul have built media presences across all platforms. We identified two major newspapers serving the Hmong community: *Hmong Times* and *Hmong Today*. *Hmong Times* is a biweekly newspaper based in St. Paul that features local news and commentary. The paper, owned by L & W Communications, is distributed free-of-charge and available for a $75-per-year subscription.[200] Its stories are mostly products of original reporting, often by "citizen journalists," such as those about community

organizations that are written by communications staff representing those organizations. Most content focuses on issues relevant to daily life, such as schools and residential financing. A lack of Web expertise and financial resources seems to hinder its online presence, as only two online sections out of eight have been updated in the past year.[201] *Hmong Today*, also based in St. Paul, consists of original writing; its content centers primarily on profiles of Hmong individuals and businesses, and secondarily on local crime. Few to none of its stories report on local politics. The website, seemingly updated approximately every two months, heavily features advertisements for local Hmong services. In addition to Hmong-specific outlets, the community has access to *The Asian American Press*, a weekly, pan-Asian newspaper with a circulation of 15,000 copies.[202] Distributed for free, and funded by subscriptions and advertising, the paper retains a small, full-time staff who edit, write, and publish. The newspaper's content is regularly published online in a user-friendly format, accompanied with graphics and sorted into multiple sections.

In terms of broadcasting, Hmong producers generate content primarily through Hmong-oriented outlets. Hmong Minnesota Radio is an independent, Hmong-language station. Its website contains extensive archives of weekly programs, though its live streaming may not be functional. The station encourages listener participation through on-air calls to program hosts.[203] In addition, some nonprofit organizations, such as the Center for Hmong Arts and Talent and Asian Media Access regularly produce documentary material relevant to the community. The Hmong community has capitalized on Web-based publication with *I Am Hmong TV*, a Hmong-language, online broadcast based in St. Paul that provides original reporting on local news. The website echoes the problems discussed above, as it contains broken streams and incomplete content.[204]

The scope of outlets serving the Latino community is limited, especially in relation to different forms of media. Nearly all Latino-oriented journalism is disseminated in print. We identified three Latino-oriented newspapers, but we found no television programming and very limited radio news programming exclusive to Latinos. *Latino Midwest News* is a free, biweekly English and Spanish newspaper with a circulation of 10,000 copies.[205] Its website provides full articles and photos, though in a disorganized fashion. The content available online reports on news both from the metro area and from Latin American countries.[206] The site also has an extensive directory of Hispanic-oriented services and links throughout the Midwest. The Latino Communications Network, a local conglomerate that owns Spanish-language publications and a Spanish-music radio station, publishes two different newspapers designed for different sectors of the Latino community. *Gente de Minnesota* is geared toward an audience of recent immigrants from

Mexico—those "who have lived here eight years or less," according to its website.[207] Accordingly, it is written in Spanish and focuses heavily on immigration and other "border politics" issues. On the other hand, *La Prensa de Minnesota* targets multiple-generation, U.S.-born Latinos of Minnesota. *La Prensa* is fully bilingual (i.e., each story is written in both English and Spanish) and reports on a broader array of international and local news. *La Prensa* has double the number of pages, but both newspapers distribute 15,000 copies for free each week[208, 209]

Broadband Access

The City of Minneapolis has made considerable, though incomplete, progress promoting an inclusive and accessible telecommunications infrastructure. The city government currently provides free, municipal wireless throughout Minneapolis' 59 square miles, a network that required significant construction and investment. In a "public-private partnership," the city contracted with USI Wireless, a private Internet service provider, to build and own the wireless network, of which the city government is its anchor customer.[210]

> **The city government currently provides free, municipal wireless throughout Minneapolis' 59 square miles, a network that required significant construction and investment.**

The agreement, a ten-year contract committing the city to $1.25 million of network usage annually, allowed USI Wireless the use of municipal property to install the approximately 2,000 wireless devices necessary for citywide service.[211] The contract requires net neutrality and obliges USI Wireless to offer "wholesale pricing" of the network to other private ISPs.[212]

Network construction was reportedly completed in December 2009, though some gaps in service may remain. The city currently offers 117 wireless hotspots, many within 10 to 15 blocks of each other (between 3,300 and 5,000 feet).[213] In theory, these signals carry only 600 feet from a marked hotspot,[214] meaning wireless coverage is less than ubiquitous in some areas. Any user with a credit card can access unlimited Internet for one hour and can then log on repeatedly for extended access.[215] Service is available only outdoors, and residential service is available at the contractually fixed rate of $19.95 per month.[216] USI Wireless representatives have estimated that the number of paid subscribers is currently greater than 19,000 and will reach 30,000 within five years.[217]

The public-private contract includes a community benefits agreement aimed at closing the "digital divide" through increased broadband access. Over the next ten

years—the duration of the contract—USI Wireless must spend $500,000 and 5 percent of its annual profits toward a "Digital Inclusion Fund" that funds nonprofit organizations to offer free Internet service, technology training, and/or computer-distribution programs.[218] The Minneapolis Foundation, a private nonprofit organization, administers the fund's distribution. Combining 2007 and 2008, the fund awarded $392,676 in grants to 15 nonprofit organizations, including St. Paul Neighborhood Network ($40,000), Twin Cities Media Alliance ($27,100), a number of community centers, and an Employment Action Center.[219] A large portion of funding has also been earmarked specifically for Hmong-language, Somali-language, and Spanish-language programs.

Similarly, the City of St. Paul has assembled plans to build a Community Fiber Network, but the project has stalled due to lack of funding. The city conducted several studies of broadband needs in the metro area between 2005 and 2007.[220,221,222] The city ultimately recommended "a partnership of public institutions" construct an open-access community fiber network, which would be owned by a private nonprofit or a public organization.[223] The city did not rule out a municipal wireless network, privately provided, but recommended it augment and rely on the fiber infrastructure.[224] Subsequently, the City of St. Paul, Ramsey County, and the City of New Brighton—a northern suburb of the Twin Cities—have coalesced to form the Ramsey Broadband Coalition.

Working with private-sector partners Unitek Global Services and Minnesota Fiber Exchange, and assisted by the Knight Center of Digital Excellence—part of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, a funder of the New America Foundation—the Ramsey Broadband Coalition applied for two grant opportunities. First, the Coalition applied for federal funding from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) at the Department of Commerce.[225] As part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, NTIA holds $4.7 billion earmarked for broadband access through its Broadband Technology and Opportunities Program (BTOP). The Ramsey Broadband Coalition's request for network funding, submitted 26 March 2010, is still pending. At the same time, the Coalition applied for a grant from Fiber for the Communities, a trial project of Google to deliver universal broadband to a small number of cities.[226] Google states it will announce the funding recipients by the end of 2010.[227]

A small number of Internet service providers currently provide connectivity to the Twin Cities metro area. The most firmly established of these is Comcast, which also provides most cable service to Minneapolis-St. Paul residents. Comcast provides Internet service advertised at 12 Mbps at $19.99 per month for current cable customers

for a trial period, rising to $42.95 after 6 months.[228] Qwest offers lower rates of $14.99 per month for existing cable customers and $24.99 per month for others at a slightly lower advertised speed of 7 Mpbs.[229] Similar to Comcast the monthly price rises by an additional $30 pe month after 6 months. Higher speeds are available for additional fees from Qwest (12 Mbps is an additional $5 per month more expensive).

Average residential download speed in the metro area is between 6 and 10 Mbps.[230] (It should be noted that quoted price/speed combinations may vary by area and over time.)

The digital divide is a tangible phenomenon in Minneapolis-St. Paul, one that not only severely limits information access, but also does so disproportionately to low-income residents. The Twin Cities metro area has higher rates of broadband access and computer ownership than rural parts of Minnesota, but many metro figures are nonetheless below national averages. Approximately 6 percent of Minnesotans statewide do not have any access to broadband, according to the Minnesota Ultra High-Speed Broadband Report, issued in 2010 by a government-formed task force.[231,232] This places Minnesota slightly above the national average for household broadband access (93 percent).[233] Nearly 37 percent of metro households have not adopted broadband, the same as the national average,[234] compared with almost 48 percent in the state's rural areas, according to the 2007 Minnesota Internet Survey from the Center for Rural Policy and Development.[235] Furthermore, 23 percent of metro households report not owning a working computer, according to both reports.[236] These statistics correlate strongly with income; according to the 2007 Minnesota Internet Survey, computer ownership is a mere 26 percent and Internet connectivity 23 percent among metro households earning less than $25,000 per year.[237] Increases are small even with incomes doubly high, such as metro households between $40,000 and $49,000 per year, only 60 percent of which have Internet connectivity.[238]

> **The digital divide is a tangible phenomenon in Minneapolis-St. Paul, one that not only severely limits information access, but also does so disproportionately to low-income residents.**

State and local laws remain one of the most durable obstacles to municipal broadband. Though state government passed a measure in May 2010 setting standards for broadband speeds of 10 to 20 Mbps and adopting as its goal universal broadband access by 2015, the bill does not allocate funding.[239] Furthermore,

Minnesota law requires a referendum winning a supermajority in order for any city to own and operate a "telephone exchange," a type of telecommunications system that has been interpreted to include municipal broadband infrastructure.[240] Some municipalities have overcome this obstacle (e.g., St. Louis Park and Monticello), but others in the metro area, such as North St. Paul, could not successfully pass referenda on the issue.[241] A bill to reform the process was introduced to the state legislature in February 2010, but activists point to a chronic lack of political will on the state level for public broadband infrastructure.

Several local nonprofits are committed to bridging the digital divide and lobbying for universal broadband, and a number have been awarded BTOP funding from the federal government. Most recently, the Connect Anoka County Community Broadband Network received $13.4 million in partnership with Zayo Bandwidth, a private enterprise, to build an extensive fiber broadband network.[242] The project will build a fiber optic backbone connecting hundreds of anchor and government institutions in Anoka County, one of the poorest in the metro area.[243] The plan relies on private ISPs to deliver service on the network to residents and local businesses.[244] Separately, the Blandin Foundation recently received $4.9 million of BTOP funding for its Minnesota Intelligent Rural Communities Initiative, which aims to bring digital literacy training and computer distribution to the residents of, and broadband to the schools and health care facilities of, Minnesota's "rural" counties.[245] The Institute for Local Self-Reliance, furthermore, operates a New Rules Project that conducts research and lobbies for community-owned fiber networks across the state.[246] Another organization, Twin Cities Community Voicemail, provides thousands of low-income residents of Minnesota with free voicemail service, facilitating job searches dependent on phone access.

Libraries and Community Anchor Institutions

Both of the Twin Cities have extensive library systems that supply free Internet access. Hennepin County Library system's 41 library branches, serving the West Metro, offer free access to wireless Internet and computer stations equipped with Internet access, word processing, and printing.[247] These locations are concentrated in the city proper but spread throughout the suburbs, as far as Maple Grove, St. Bonifacius, and Brooklyn Park.[248] Most Hennepin County Library locations are not open on Sundays and/or Mondays due to budget constraints, although some are open past normal business hours on weekdays.[249] The St. Paul Public Library offers 13 locations with free wireless access[250] in the central East Metro, and the Ramsey County Library system has seven

locations in the suburbs north of St. Paul.[251] St. Paul's libraries also provide computing classes, job search assistance, and assistive technology for people with disabilities.[252,253] All of these library systems offer access to dozens of electric resources and databases.[254] Though a full assessment requires closer study, it appears the convenience and density of library branches and their ample staff sizes position them as enablers of equal access.[255]

St. Paul Public Library (Photo credit: Martin Kalfatovic/Flickr)

Aside from libraries, a handful of community technology centers (CTCs) are located in the Twin Cities, primarily concentrated in Downtown Minneapolis.[256] Often, these points of public broadband access also provide community programs and outreach, especially in the form of digital literacy education. The Waite House Neighborhood Center and Project for Pride in Living, for example, provide Internet-connected computer access in addition to technology classes and job search assistance.[257,258] A December 2006 survey found that on average a CTC user travels approximately 4.7 miles to reach it, and many are within walking distance from users.[259] While this news is encouraging, other barriers may be limiting accessibility. The same survey found that, on average, CTCs with the most users have the fewest number of computer workstations. Hours of operation are another limiting factor, as CTCs are open an average of 7.6 hours on weekdays and 1.5 hours on weekends. Close to 22 percent of users responded as "less than satisfied" with CTC hours.[260]

Some local universities allow the general public access to their libraries' computers and Internet, though priority is usually given to university students and staff. Concordia University in St. Paul and the University of Minnesota, for example, both provide free Internet access to the public.[261] Furthermore, the Urban Research and Outreach/Engagement Center (UROC) at the University of Minnesota has developed a Business & Technology Center (known as the "B-Tech Center") to provide temporary office space and Internet access to local

businesses, in addition to digital literacy and computer distribution programs.[262] UROC has also developed a $3.6 million project to expand broadband access in low-income neighborhoods and minority communities.[263] Funded by a three-year, $2.9 million BTOP grant from the Department of Commerce and $741,000 from the University, UROC will build two new public computer centers and add over 140 workstations to ten existing ones.[264] UROC has committed to providing at least 16 Mpbs of broadband to those locations.[265] The Center will also provide translation services and digital literacy training to an estimated 17,000 individuals.[266] Libraries constitute the majority of points of public access to Internet in Minneapolis-St. Paul.

Digital and Media Literacy

Public schools in Minneapolis and St. Paul supply very few opportunities for digital or media literacy training. The Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) system appears committed to integrating technology into classroom learning, but programs to promote technological literacy in students are limited. In the 2010-2011 year, MPS will make an initial investment of $2.25 million in classroom IT projects and tech support, and funding to technology updates (primarily in libraries) will increase by $1.15 million. Other programs, however, will be reduced, including "Curriculum, Materials and Media Center Updates" by $500,000 to $3.2 million.[267] Although MPS lists benchmark standards regarding media and technology, they are defined vaguely and subjectively, and their implementation remains vague.[268] It is unclear how, or if, these standards will be incorporated into a curriculum or separate courses. Out of nine high schools and twenty-five elementary schools MPS surveyed, only three high schools and ten elementary schools offer classes taught by a full-time "media specialist."[269] Technology education is even more limited in Saint Paul Public Schools, where it is a part of curriculum only for middle and junior-high school students.[270] Even at these levels, the only courses listed are two in video production. St. Paul school district budgeting is limited to "Technology Infrastructure" and "Educational Technology," allocated mostly for administrative use, with no mention of digital or media curricula.[271]

The paltry state of digital and media literacy curricula in public schools demands that nonprofit organizations and institutions of higher education provide strong literacy education programs. A handful of organizations in the Twin Cities area seek to address this issue. The Minnesota Educational Media Organization (MEMO) both advocates for technology education through publication and lobbying and collaborates with educators to develop curricula and evaluative standards.[272]

The Main Street Project provides extensive media literacy programs that are geared especially toward minority and low-income communities.[273] In at least one instance, the Main Street Project has collaborated with the Minnesota Center for Neighborhood Organizing at the University of Minnesota to train organizers of ethnic minority communities to create podcasts and other types of media in order to facilitate storytelling and issue advocacy.[274]

Some public access media outlets, such as The UpTake and St. Paul Neighborhood Network, provide free technology and media education courses, as discussed above. A number of universities in Minneapolis-St. Paul have specialized schools for communications and/or journalism that offer pre-professional training and degrees, such as the University of Minnesota and the University of St. Thomas[275,276]; student-run media outlets from local universities additionally serve as excellent training grounds for future journalists and communications technologists. However, these programs are not a sufficient replacement for comprehenive, well-funded digital and media curricula in Minnesota public schools.

Local Government

Governance of the Twin Cities is divided across a range of levels and geographical areas. At the most local level, the City of Minneapolis and the City of St. Paul operate independent of each other and of higher levels of government. Each has its own legislature, agencies, and respective websites. Minneapolis sits in Hennepin County in the west, and St. Paul resides east in Ramsey County, counties that both function separate from Minnesota's statewide government. Each of these components of government has its own online presence and degree of transparency.

The accessibility of local government's self-reporting is weakest in the eastern metro area, comprising Ramsey County and St. Paul (See **Fig. 3** in **Appendix I**). Hennepin County, Ramsey County, Minneapolis, and St. Paul websites all provide calendars or notices of upcoming legislature meetings, meeting agendas and minutes, live and archived video of meetings, and posted budget materials (and with St. Paul, an extensive array of other official documents). However, only Minneapolis and Hennepin provide summarized news updates of legislative activity. Minneapolis exhibits the greatest evidence of local outreach; links to most of its City Council districts provide ward-specific, monthly newsletters describing the Council's activities with some specificity and notifying constituents of upcoming community-level meetings. Similarly, Hennepin provides summaries of ongoing and past County Board action in a fairly high level of detail, albeit only on a countywide scale. On the other hand, news briefings and updates from St. Paul are limited to coverage of past events and notices of new initiatives. The Ramsey site also has minimal news and few notices of meetings or events.

Neither Ramsey's nor St. Paul's sites summarize or highlight government activity, rendering comparably less information accessible to all citizens.

Government websites exhibit a high degree of transparency in terms of official initiatives and documentation. All four of the sites discussed provide easily accessible and timely reports of legislative activity, including budgeting. St. Paul features an especially extensive directory of official documents. Furthermore, with the exception of Hennepin County's portal, the websites provide reports from various governmental departments, though often only on an annual basis. None of the four websites provide information on Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, but Minneapolis and St. Paul link to their city clerks and archives.[277]

Ramsey County and Hennepin County both have received grades of "C" from Sunshine Review, a wiki-based website that rates transparency with a checklist of available information.[278] Sunshine Review cites missing information on administrative officials, public records, and lobbying on the two websites as the reasons for their low grade.

We conducted a review of the availability of government information and services online through a series of indicators that evaluated their user-friendliness and completeness. As recommended by the Knight Commission's report, the four municipal websites were reviewed for information relating to: driver's licenses and vehicle registration; contact information for government officials; taxes; and social services, including mental health, child protection, hospitals, transportation, the elderly, and the disabled.[279]

As the results of our analysis show in **Fig. 5** of **Appendix I**, the website of the City of St. Paul lacks the most information out of any of the municipalities studied. Indeed, the city fails to offer information regarding all but one social service measured. The website of Ramsey County provides much government service information, but its lack of localization to the City of St. Paul makes the Ramsey website an imperfect alternative. This disparity presents a serious need for intermediary organizations, such as media outlets and community service organizations, to fill the gap with localized information that enhances quality of life.

Conclusion

Serious institutional problems currently inhibit Minneapolis-St. Paul from realizing the full potential of its information environment. The media market as a whole has not optimally adapted to the digital age, whether in terms of business models or content distribution. As the report of the Knight Commission emphasizes, the digital age has altered media economics radically enough to require new paradigms of media

operation. The status quo of non-excludable information and negligible barriers to entry, brought on by the Internet, necessitate new ways of thinking about sustainable journalism.

The two main newspapers of the Twin Cities—the area's most time-honored information providers—have not adjusted their business models to suit the digital age. Both the *Star Tribune* and the *Pioneer Press* face a paradox of increasing readership numbers and plunging revenues, a result of readers transferring from print to online formats and accordingly declining print advertising revenues. The papers, especially the *Star Tribune*, deserve praise for adapting their content delivery to an online format and for growing their readership when many newspapers are shrinking. But their finances are evidence that neither has yet to harness significant revenue potential from this changing readership and that both require further improvements in their business models to do so sustainably.

> The outlets that have achieved some degree of sustainability are primarily "niche publications," or those designed for a particular, segmented audience.

The *Pioneer Press* and *Star Tribune* serve a crucial role in the information ecology, but reductions in their revenue streams have hampered their journalistic capacities. Their staffs are spread thin over a large number of coverage areas. Tight budgets force the papers to over-rely on wire services, sometimes even to deliver state and local content. Furthermore, our data show that readership between the two papers is highly differentiated over geography, and in only a few counties do they truly compete (see **Fig. 4** in **Appendix I**). With more sustainable revenue streams—or conversely, with a more focused audience and scope of coverage—these newspapers could perhaps deliver more locally produced content and thus more significantly contribute to public oversight.

The outlets that have achieved some degree of sustainability are primarily "niche publications," or those designed for a particular, segmented audience. As follows from their definition, none of these sources can completely fill the information needs of the ecology, or even of the population segments for whom they write. MinnPost.com, for example, appeals to a highly educated, politically interested audience by delivering long stories centered on politics and public policy issues. Its coverage is mostly analytical and focused on the state level; MinnPost.com does not endeavor to cover hyperlocal issues or breaking news. Its nonprofit model successfully

fulfills a specific journalistic purpose, but it should not be seen as a panacea for all gaps in the news market.

The same is true of Minnesota Public Radio, which has developed a sustainable business model for delivering quality journalism, but which leaves it limited in many respects. MPR performs a valuable service of analytical discussion of local politics and substantive interviews. Its format is suited to broadcasting news efficiently to a mass audience, but its standardized configuration constrains its localized reporting. Similar to MinnPost.com, MPR's public funds and lack of radio competition do not provide an incentive for breaking news or systematic beat reporting. Journalism organizations like MinnPost.com and MPR have carved out specific sectors of the media market. While they have successfully captured readership, they should not be expected to replace the role of the teetering print media.

The important, "quality-of-life" journalism delivered by other niche publications is severely constrained by budgeting. Hyperlocal newspapers survive by heavily featuring advertising from small, local businesses and keeping costs extremely low. Even those papers benefiting from the economies of scale of conglomeration cannot usually afford large reporting staffs. Their limited capacities would make it difficult to produce in-depth, analytical stories that are not based in meetings and public events.

Community media organizations, such as Twin Cities Daily Planet and The UpTake, suffer from similar problems, though they have succeeded in creating important spaces for citizen participation. TCDP provides much more hyperlocal and metro-area coverage than do the *Tribune*, *Press*, or MinnPost.com, and it produces many more stories fulfilling indicators of vital information listed in the Knight Commission report (see **Fig. 5** in **Appendix I**). While this data demonstrate TCDP's potential for valuable journalism on localized issues, a large proportion of TCDP's stories are repurposed from external outlets, revealing its deficiency of resources. Hyperlocal and community-news outlets require additional revenue streams to continue their critical roles in fulfilling local information needs. New revenue sources—whether public or nonprofit funding—funneled to these outlets would greatly benefit "information health" with minimal market disruption.

The Minneapolis-St. Paul media ecology requires more than business-side adjustments, as problems of equity currently constrain information delivery and engagement. Inadequate digital literacy programs and broadband access, for example, limit the capacities of media representing minority populations. Our study found that the websites of many Somali- and Hmong-oriented news outlets were disorganized and infrequently updated, suggesting a lack of expertise or resources for web development. This problem speaks to the importance of digital literacy programs and production opportunities to ensure equity and diversity in the media landscape. Strengthening digital and media curriculum in public schools as well as existing nonprofits providing such programs is the most obvious and important answer. In addition, existing institutions could help resolve this imbalance; for example, Twin Cities Public Television's impressive resources for public access television production could be directed toward minority communities. TPT could also begin to divert television production resources toward online production capacities and training courses.

An assessment of Minneapolis-St. Paul information sources must take into account the entire ecology and media market. Much of the Twin Cities media know how to stretch a dollar, but a market so hindered by non-existent or low margins has left little room

> **Overall, the digital age presents enormous opportunity for Minneapolis-St. Paul information providers to develop sustainable strategies for delivering quality journalism.**

for innovation or expansion. Many of the most successful media outlets in the Twin Cities have responded to the new landscape of the digital age by developing business strategies suited to specific types of journalism. They aim to fill only partial "niches" in the information market, and their models must be viewed in light of all types of information needs. New business models for the two major newspapers and new revenue streams for hyperlocal and community press are absolute necessities to ensure continued competition, viability, and relevance. Overall, the digital age presents enormous opportunity for Minneapolis-St. Paul information providers to develop sustainable strategies for delivering quality journalism.

A Note on Scope and Methodology

This case study has been developed by a small team in Washington, D.C. We collected much of our initial data by examining local websites and recording observations into a public wiki page. We also conducted a targeted set of interviews and the limited content analysis of local media described in the text and **Appendix I**. Subsequently, we studied Twin Cities information institutions with great detail. To assess the value, weaknesses, and sustainability of a particular information institution, we examined its finances, content distribution, resource distribution, recent history, and business model, among other factors. Our intent has been to acknowledge and identify the role of all media producers, well beyond those considered traditional journalism, such that our analysis provides the best

understanding possible of the Minneapolis-St. Paul information community.

We are eager to expand our research and welcome all feedback regarding additions, omissions, or corrections. Please send suggestions to Daniel Amzallag at mediapolicy@newamerica.net

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Appendix I: Case Study Data

Fig. 2: Content Analysis of The UpTake

Content Type	Democratic / DFL	Republican		
Full speeches	11	0		
Clipped speeches	6	5		
Other*	0	0		
Totals	17	5	7 (other*)	29

* "Other" indicates videos not depicting a political office-holder or office-seeker.

Source: Listing of posts under "Minnesota" on TheUpTake.org. http://theuptake.org/category/states/minnesota/

Fig. 3: Online Availability of Government Information and Services

Type of Information	Minneapolis	Hennepin	St. Paul	Ramsey
Driver's license and vehicle registration	N	Y	Y	N
Elected officials' contact information	Y	Y	Y	Y
Taxes: Procedure and assessment tools	Y	Y	Y	Y
Mental health	Y	Y	N	Y
Child protection	Y	Y	N	Y
Hospitals	Y	Y	N	Y
Transportation	Y	Y	Y	N
Elderly and Disabled	Y	Y	N	Y

Fig. 4: Analysis of Newspaper Circulation and Competition in the Metro Area

County	Metro Area	Occupied Households, 2009	*Star Tribune* subscriptions	*Pioneer Press* subscriptions	Subscriptions, combined	% *Star Tribune* subscriptions	% *Pioneer Press* subscriptions	Competition Index
Stearns	West	55,759	306	272	578	0.55	0.49	
Chisago	East	18,207	2,030	2,954	4,984	11.15	16.22	18.5393
Goodhue	East	18,026	925	1,507	2,432	5.13	8.36	23.9309
Dakota	East	149,311	25,943	43,598	69,541	17.38	29.20	25.3879
Dunn	East	15,963	176	330	506	1.10	2.07	
Kanabec	West	6,387	341	176	517	5.34	2.76	
Ramsey	East	198,586	20,652	67,122	87,774	10.40	33.80	52.9428
Sibley	West	5,696	306	92	398	5.37	1.62	
Washington	East	85,617	9,304	39,008	48,312	10.87	45.56	61.4837
Renville	West	6,404	353	75	428	5.51	1.17	
Anoka	West	122,479	29,491	6,033	35,524	24.08	4.93	66.0342
St. Croix	East (WI)	32,064	970	6,309	7,279	3.03	19.68	73.3480
Rice	West	21,236	3,627	542	4,169	17.08	2.55	73.9986
Barron	East (WI)	19,008	218	1,615	1,833	1.15	8.50	76.2139
Pierce	East (WI)	14,734	423	3,158	3,581	2.87	21.43	76.3753
Isanti	West	14,887	1,994	253	2,247	13.39	1.70	77.4811
Polk	East (WI)	18,292	368	3,216	3,584	2.01	17.58	79.4643
Pepin	East	2,944	2	25	27	0.07	0.85	
Scott	West	45,157	8,827	503	9,330	19.55	1.11	89.2176
Sherburne	West	30,669	1,983	108	2,091	6.47	0.35	89.6700
Meeker	West	9,016	596	22	618	6.61	0.24	
Hennepin	West	468,130	147,012	5,149	152,161	31.40	1.10	93.2322
Mille Lacs	West	10,789	1,324	39	1,363	12.27	0.36	94.2773
Benton	West	15,849	287	7	294	1.81	0.04	
Le Seur	West	11,040	2,288	30	2,318	20.72	0.27	97.4116
Carver	West	31,852	8,327	97	8,424	26.14	0.30	97.6971
McLeod	West	14,848	2,591	22	2,613	17.45	0.15	98.3161
Wright	West	44,797	7,806	50	7,856	17.43	0.11	98.7271
Burnett	East (WI)	7,197	1	655	656	0.01	9.10	
East Metro		579,949	61,012	169,497	230,509	10.5202354	29.226191	47.0632
West Metro		914,995	217,459	13,470	230,929	23.7661408	1.472139	88.3341
Total Metro		1,494,944	278,471	182,967	461,438	18.6275205	12.239054	20.6970
Total Metro, Indexed		1,369,729	276,103	181,313	457,416	20.157491	13.237144	20.7229

A note on the above data:

- Our Competition Index divides the difference between *Star Tribune* and *Pioneer Press* subscriptions by the combined number of both outlets' subscriptions (i.e., an approximation of the total number of newspaper subscribers). This index is intended only as a binary measure, with which counties having a discrepancy between *Star Tribune* and *Pioneer Press* subscriptions that is smaller than half the number of total newspaper subscribers may be deemed markets in which significant competition exists between the two papers.
- Data reflects 18 months ended 31 December 2009.
- Subscriptions data is a combined average of Monday through Friday of "average projected paid circulation," calculated by the Audit Bureau of Circulations.

Fig 5: <u>Media Content Analysis Results</u>: Percentages of analyzed stories

Outlet	Original, Professional	Original, Citizen	Repurposed	Neighborhood / Hyperlocal	Ntnl'l / Intn'l	Greater Minnesota	Metro Area	Minneapolis	St. Paul	Suburbs of Minneapolis	Suburbs of St. Paul
Star-Tribune	61.17	8.51	30.32	0.53	41.49	36.17	21.81	11.17	5.85	3.72	1.60
Pioneer Press	45.14	9.03	45.83	2.78	39.58	37.50	19.44	4.17	11.11	1.39	4.17
MinnPost.com	70.68	1.50	27.82	0.00	37.59	42.11	20.30	8.27	2.26	2.26	1.50
Twin Cities Daily Planet	25.81	33.87	43.55	20.97	17.74	30.65	29.03	29.03	9.68	1.61	0

Outlet	Knight Indicators							Total Knight Indicators	Crime / Death		Sports	
	Local politics	Health	Education	Business	Social services	Arts	Transportation		Total	Original	Total	Original
Star-Tribune	15.43	4.79	1.06	4.26	2.13	12.23	1.60	41.49	10.11	9.57	18.09	15.43
Pioneer Press	11.81	1.39	2.78	8.33	2.08	15.97	0.00	42.36	19.44	12.50	11.11	9.72
MinnPost.com	32.33	2.26	6.02	6.77	6.77	10.53	0.75	65.41	2.26	2.26	0.75	0.75
Twin Cities Daily Planet	20.97	3.23	3.23	3.23	14.52	29.03	4.84	79.03	1.61	0.00	1.61	1.61

Content analysis methodology

With these data, we aim to provide an idea of the content and resource strategies of four major news outlets in Minneapolis-St. Paul. The institutions selected provide regularly updated news on the state and local levels of the Twin Cities in an online, textual format. Television and radio outlets are a crucial facet of an information environment, but we excluded them as they do not provide parallel comparison with textual sources.

The seven "Knight indictors" are derived from the report of [The Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy](#), [*Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age*](#). The report lists six of these criteria as indicators for "ready access to information that enhances quality of life," a measure of "the quality of a local community's information environment." The seventh criterion, "local politics," is an indicator of "civic information," as described in the Knight report. We coded stories for two additional categories (crime/loss-of-life and sports) after our preliminary inspection of outlet websites found a large proportion of those types of stories.

We analyzed the stories by saving the home pages of the online versions of these four news outlets at the same time each morning for three consecutive weekdays: July 26, July 27, and July 28, 2010. We classed each story as: 1) a story originally produced by a professional journalist, a story originally produced by a non-professional citizen, or a story reproduced from an external outlet; and as 2) a story covering a specific neighborhood, a story covering national or international news, a story covering statewide news or news within Minnesota but outside Minneapolis-St. Paul, or a story covering the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area. Consequently, the data in each of these two "sections" add to the total in the first column.

As is the case with any quantitative study, we imposed some limitations on the scope of measurement. Only those stories on the home pages of news outlets were included. We included all stories on the home pages that were textual articles on the outlet's website (i.e., excluding direct links to external sites). Overall, we believe this set of data provides an objective picture of how the major media outlets in Minneapolis-St. Paul routinely concentrate different types of content and staff resources.

Appendix II: Listing of Media Outlets Surveyed

Print media, daily:
- Minneapolis Star Tribune
- Minnesota Daily (Monday through Thursday)
- St. Paul Pioneer Press
- Finance & Commerce

Print media, weekly or biweekly:
- Asian American Press
- Gente de Minnesota
- Hmong Times
- Insight News
- Minneapolis-St. Paul Business Journal
- Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder

Print media, monthly:
- Hmong Today
- La Voz Latina
- Latino Midwest News

Hyperlocal media, weekly or biweekly:
- Bulletin News
- Downtown Journal
- East Side Review News
- Front Lake Press
- Maplewood-Ramsey County Review
- North News
- North Oaks News
- Northeaster
- Oakdale Lake Elmo Review
- Quad Community Press
- Roseville Review
- Shoreview Press
- Southwest Journal
- Southwest Review
- St. Croix Valley Press
- Sun-Current Central
- Sun-Current South
- Sun-Focus
- Sun-Post
- Sun-Sailor
- Vadnais Heights Press
- White Bear Press

Hyperlocal media, monthly:
- Downtown St. Paul Voice
- Park Bugle
- South St. Paul Voice
- St. Paul Voice
- Uptown Neighborhood News

Online media:
- MinnLocal.com
- MinnPost.com
- MPRNewsQ and Minnesota Today (Minnesota Public Radio)
- Politics in Minnesota
- The Minnesota Independent
- The UpTake
- Twin Cities Daily Planet
- Warsan Times

Television media networks:
- FOX-9 (FOX)
- KARE-11 (NBC)
- KSAX-TV/KRWF-TV (ABC)
- KSTC-TV
- KSTP-TV (ABC)
- Northwest Community Television (including Channel 12)
- Somali TV of Minnesota
- St. Paul Neighborhood Network
- Twin Cities Public Television (including The Minnesota Channel)
- WCCO-TV (CBS)

Radio media:
- Hmong Minnesota Radio
- KFAI
- KMOJ
- KTLK-FM
- KYCR
- Minnesota Public Radio (KNOW)
- The Patriot

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