

Southern voices telling Northern stories

The importance of local media in coverage of the Crystal Serenity cruise

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Video transcript

Speaker 1: What's the value of local media? Scholars have long tried to quantify the contributions and characteristics of local media. Some believe that reciprocity is a key: Reporters give to a community through the process of gathering news from them. Other scholars feel that local media's vital role is to stimulate public conversation within a community. And connectivity between the media and the community is often viewed as particularly strong in the case of local media.

Much of the work done in community journalism research emphasizes the role of community journalism in areas that are overlapped by mainstream media. But what does community journalism look like in an area that isn't well covered by mainstream media? We set out to explore this question using a case study, the 2016 cruise of the Crystal Serenity cruise ship, the largest cruise ship to ever to transit the Northwest Passage, visited three Canadian communities, carried 1,600 passengers and crew, and, for the time that it was in Canada's arctic, increased the population of Nunavut by 4.4 per cent.

Our research into the coverage of this event started with a search of all Canadian news articles about the cruise published in the year 2016. We found 43 articles, 22 of them from local Northern media sources, 11 of them from mainstream Southern media sources, and ten from the CBC. We broke out the Canadian

Broadcasting Corporation as its own category because it maintains a full time staff in Canada's North as well as serving the Northern residents directly.

Once we gathered all the articles, we analyzed them using straightforward quantitative content analysis. We catalogued all the sources that people quoted, by the articles, and categorized each source as either a local Northern source or a source from Southern Canada. This allowed us to examine just how much local voice was represented in each article.

Here's what we found: Southern media came out on top with the most sources per article. This is sometimes viewed as a measure of overall quality of news reporting. However, the CBC beat even the local Northern media in using the most local Northern sources per article, but local Northern media distinguished itself in using the highest overall number of local Northern sources, quoting Northern residents 29 times in its coverage.

If the CBC used the most local sources per article, how did local Northern media come out as using the highest overall number of local sources? The answer is sheer volume. Local Northern media accounted for 51 per cent of the Canadian coverage overall. And the important thing to realize is that there were only two media organizations in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut covering the cruise with written stories.

So, returning to our question, what's the value of local media? Think about what we would lose if local media didn't exist. In the case of this cruise story, we would lose 51 per cent of the articles, 41 per cent of the local Northern voices, and yet, only lose 24 per cent of Southern voices. The data in this project has shown that local media alone has the ability to talk in-depth to local residents about issues affecting their communities. This stems from local media's physical presence in the community.

In the case of remote communities, this ongoing physical presence often can't be achieved by major market media and that's the value of local media, giving a voice to residents about topics relevant to their community.

References

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