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The urban information environment in which city magazines operate is changing dramatically, with the decline of local newspapers and the growth of user-generated local content. City magazine editors are re-envisioning their purpose as local information providers. This study provides a qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with senior editors at 15 award-winning city magazines. The editors' responses speak to the changing role of their publications today; the function of new technologies in informing local communities; and the public service that local journalism organizations offer in a constrained economic situation.

Today's global magazine industry is adapting rapidly to incorporate new technologies, changes in readers' habits, and opportunities newly available due to shifts in complementary media industries. In particular, city magazines in the U.S. face serious competition from digital media, often based on user-generated content, that now supplant the magazines' traditional local functions. However, city magazines also have new possibilities for public service journalism due to rapid changes in other local news outlets, particularly the decline of newspapers and the loss of much of their "watchdog" function within their communities. City magazines may in fact be developing into local news sources that can challenge the dominance of newspapers as providers of in-depth local journalism. Editors of these magazines express a blend of fear and excitement brought about both by this change and by the shifts in power among local information providers and audiences.

This study is part of a larger research project regarding the function of the U.S. city magazine (Sivek, 2014). The current study examines these magazines' production processes through a qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with senior editors at 15 award-winning city magazines. These magazines represent a mix of ownership, readership, and geographic circumstances. The editors' responses reveal the current and

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developing roles of old and new technologies in informing local communities; the nature of local journalism in a shifting media environment, especially as audiences now can inform each other directly through social media; and the public service that local media can offer in a tightly constrained economic situation. More broadly, this study provides additional insights into the production and distribution of geographically focused journalism in a time of instability for the profession and industry.

Literature Review

The Role of City Magazines Within Local Communities

Many local media provide both information and emotional connections for citizens within cities. The role of journalism within geographically defined communities has been studied extensively, though scholars' engagement with the term "community" has varied widely (Lowrey, Brozana, & Mackay, 2008). As these authors note, "community" may refer to shared physical location or to shared interest in a specific identity or symbols (as in "imagined" or "interpretive" communities) – or to both of these.

In examining a wide variety of publications, magazine researchers have often analyzed the role of the magazine medium in creating the latter type of community. As Frith states, existing research supports "a shared belief that magazines can play a role in creating and reflecting community" (2012, p. 234). For example, Frau-Meigs (2000) examines the construction of the "netizens" in the early years of *Wired* magazine; Sender (2001) argues that *The Advocate* magazine crafted an imagined community of gay consumers through its gradually shifting content; and Théberge (1991) demonstrates how magazines for musicians in the 1980s represented musicians both to each other and to marketers as consumers of music products.

The present study unites both approaches to "community" because it addresses a media product that is primarily relevant to the needs of individuals within a physically defined location, but that can also be consumed by others outside that location. Thanks to digital technology, the community constructed by these city magazines is simultaneously based in both geography and imagination, without regard to where the individual audience member is located. This study examines how city magazine editors construct a shared understanding of this community through selection and representation of the locale's primary symbols, stories, and concerns, all while responding to rapid changes in the local media environment. With this construction, city magazines, just like other local news media, highlight and define key local symbols, bring specific narratives to public attention, and even attempt to provoke action among citizens with regard to significant issues.

Most research in this area has focused on newspapers' performance of these functions, but as Hatcher and Reader (2012) describe, there are now a wide variety of community information providers in traditional and digital media, including city magazines. For the purpose of this study, city magazines are defined along the lines used by the City and Regional Magazine Association (2014): general-interest consumer publications packaged in a traditional print magazine format, usually published on a monthly or bimonthly basis. Magazines that focus on specific topics within an urban area (e.g., parenting and family life, business) do not meet the "general-interest" qualification.

Typical general-interest topics include travel and local attractions, food and dining, local personalities and leaders, local culture, business, and shopping. Additionally, like the CRMA, this study considered only magazines that "demonstrate a commitment to editorial independent of advertiser interests"; in other words, magazines created by chambers of commerce or similar promotional publications would not qualify. These magazines represent community journalism through their focus on a specific, defined physical location, as well as through their presentation of a local identity in their depiction of key people, places, and issues within their cities.

Though city magazines of this type have come and gone over the years, the genre has persisted. Two of the magazines included in this study are notable examples of this longevity: *Honolulu* has been published since 1888 (under its original title *Paradise of the Pacific*), and *Philadelphia* since 1909 (Riley & Selnow, 1991). Riley and Selnow's encyclopedic 1991 volume of profiles of regional and city magazines found that 920 such magazines were published between 1950 to 1988; 470 remained in operation in 1991 (Riley & Selnow, 1991). A similarly comprehensive survey of these magazines has not been repeated since Riley and Selnow's book, but the city magazine genre still appears to be going strong.

Part of city magazines' resilience may be attributed to the fact that they typically appeal to an upscale local audience that interests advertisers. A 2010 presentation by the CRMA offers some internal and external data on the medium. The presentation should be regarded with some skepticism, as its goal is to convince prospective advertisers of the value of city magazine advertising, but the presentation does at least reveal how the medium desires to present itself. The presentation claims that the association's member magazines reach "an affluent, active audience" of over 18 million readers that is about 55 percent female, with a median age of 45 and a median household income of about $83,000 (CRMA, 2010, pp. 6-8). CRMA ranks its members' publications, considered in aggregate, at 12th on a list of 15 U.S. magazines with "most affluent" readerships (CRMA, 2010, p. 17). Finally, CRMA cites an Erdos and Morgan study to argue that city magazines matter to local opinion leaders, claiming that "better than 8 of every 10…[read] one or more of the last four issues of their city magazine" (CRMA, 2010, p. 22).

This CRMA sales pitch provides some rare comprehensive data currently available on city magazines. This medium is undergoing a great deal of change at present, just like other news media, and few current studies have sought to explore their production, content, or reception. Three decades ago, a set of studies was published in *Journalism Quarterly* that provided insights into city magazines. Their findings are still relevant to the current research because they explored the attitudes of city and regional magazine publishers regarding the perceived function of the city magazine. For example, Hayes (1981) found that magazine publishers believed that readers were "champions" for their cities; readers were thought to be interested in city magazines because the publications supported their pride in the cities. The editors Hayes surveyed also felt their magazines were popular because their service stories helped "educated, upwardly mobile, credit-card-carrying adults" effectively use their "increased leisure time and money" (1981, p. 295).

City magazine editors also wanted to offer readers a visually attractive, upscale, and lasting medium that addressed the city in an authentic, knowledgeable local voice:

"Metropolitan or city magazines provide the only medium which has the capability of establishing the 'identity and flavor' of a market … to capture the true 'picture' of the market it serves" (Fletcher & VandenBergh, 1982, p. 14). Of greater specific relevance to this study, city magazines were found by Hynds (1979) to be unique providers (during that study's time) of perspectives and information newspapers didn't offer, specifically entertainment, food, and lifestyle coverage. Hynds also asked editors about their perceptions of the city magazine's function in its community, and found that most expressed "some interest in pointing out local problems and needs … about half see themselves as possible alternative voices to local newspapers" (p. 622).

A somewhat more recent study by Greenberg (2000) provides a critical look at city magazines that combines an analysis of their content and design with insights into their ownership. Greenberg's analysis found that when major media companies purchased city magazines from their formerly independent publishers, the magazines lost their unique local feel. Instead, their design and content began to match that found in the other city magazines already owned by the major companies. That formula usually provided "toned down and reduced editorial content, increased pages of advertising and lifestyle reporting, new 'special sections' filled with consumer reports, and encyclopedic high-end listing sections at the back" (Greenberg, 2000, p. 251). Greenberg argues that this formula addresses local readers not as active citizens of their cities who might be concerned with significant local issues, but rather as consumers of products and services made available by magazine advertisers.

These older studies suggest that city magazine publishers and owners may primarily seek to advocate for their cities and to profit from advertising within the pages of a generally promotional publication — as opposed to seeking to provide serious local journalism. This study explores whether these findings from decades ago continue to represent correctly today's city magazines. Though it may be tempting for the casual viewer to dismiss city magazines as more entertainment than journalism, these publications do represent a prominent way in which citizens learn about their communities. Though she focuses on local newspapers and television, Kaniss (1991) argues that local news media define urban issues and influence policymaking through their definition of local identity. City magazines also play a part in this process. City magazines claim a particular kind of authority over local identity within their communities. They typically use their cities' names in their titles. They assess local businesses, personalities, and events in the creation of "best of" lists or local awards that they adjudicate. They are highly visible on newsstands in stores and suggest through their covers what is of value in the local community, based upon their assertion of local expertise.

Moreover, although this study focuses on American city magazines, insights here may also speak to similar publications offered in other countries. For example, Cook and Darby (2013) found that British "county magazines" tended to construct an idealized vision of life in their areas in order to present a positive environment for readers' encounter with advertising; however, they also argue that the magazines represented a missed opportunity to "fill the news gap" left by weak local newspapers.

City Magazines and the Changing Local Information Environment

Cook and Darby (2013) suggest that space may be opening for city magazines to become more robust local information providers, especially as newspapers' resources for original, in-depth reporting diminish. In addition, city magazines' presentation of certain types of information may be best positioned to compete with user-generated media in terms of its innate authority and credibility.

Though local newspapers continue to provide the foundation of original reporting upon which other local news media typically rely (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2010), they have also suffered deeply in recent years. Economic turmoil and increased competition from digital media have led to shrinking papers and dramatic layoffs. Between 2000 and 2012, U.S. newspapers reduced their editorial staffs by roughly one-third, from 56,400 to 38,000 (Edmonds, 2013). Decreased resources have limited the amount of in-depth coverage that newspapers can provide. The Federal Communications Commission's report on the information needs of local communities (2011) found that newspapers' coverage of local and state politics, crime, and health has diminished the most, though these remain issues of significant public concern.

Newspapers also have not performed well online in terms of constructing strong visual and content linkages to their local areas. Funk (2013) found that newspapers' websites do not express a strong sense of local identity or of their specific communities, sometimes omitting the names of their communities entirely from the banners of their websites in favor of more "professional" images. As such, online audiences may not sense the newspapers' local contribution as deeply, experiencing them only as yet another website to be surfed, not as a distinctly local resource. In contrast, city magazines cannot help but proclaim their local connections, given that most of them are titled with some variation of their cities' names both in print and online.

New media consumption patterns, such as digital magazine editions, social media, and mobile reading, could generate more audience interest in such strongly local magazine content, while public interest in print newspapers declines. The Project for Excellence in Journalism (2012) found that almost three quarters of survey respondents followed local news "closely"; this audience generally preferred the local newspaper for their news. However, younger local news enthusiasts – the city magazine subscribers of the future – paid attention to a wider variety of local news sources, including traditional media, websites, and/or social media (PEJ, 2012). Younger local news users gather local information from varied sources, which may include city magazines' print and digital products, both today and in the future. This shift in audience preferences may represent a concern and an opportunity for city magazine editors.

City Magazine Structure and Management

City magazine editors may be relatively well positioned to guide their publications' efforts during this time of change. Although, like newspapers, they must address rising printing expenses and diminishing advertisers' support, magazines can often better compensate for economic challenges and technological innovations. With non-unionized employees and a significant reliance on freelance writers, magazines can shed staff when resources are tight, rehire new employees with up-to-date technological skills, and assign

and pay for work on a more flexible basis (Ekinsmyth, 2002). They do not have to fill a daily news hole. Magazines' designers are also better equipped to create visual products suited for digital media distribution, such as tablet editions, than most newspaper designers; the print magazine format is easier to translate to digital media.

While adaptation to this new context will always be subject to publishers' and advertisers' desires, editors maintain some power to shape their magazines' futures. While they know their print publications may be imperiled, they are also attempting to innovate so that their publications remain profitable and useful within their communities (e.g., Carr, 2013; Landau, 2014; Mickey, 2013). Editors are particularly critical to this development. They are "community connectors," with both personal and professional interests in their local communities, fitting Hatcher and Reader's description (2012) of community journalists. These editors respond to the changes in their local environment and audience based on those interests; they then conceptualize the right blend of content to accommodate those changes and allocate resources accordingly. For some magazines, this transformation has involved a greater investment in investigative public interest journalism; for others, audience engagement and community outreach, in both online and face-to-face forms, have become paramount.

City magazine editors may now choose to move beyond the narrow range of lifestyle topics upon which their coverage has traditionally focused. They may also be motivated to explore new topics by the fact that some of their "turf" — the restaurant and entertainment information for which they have been known — has now been encroached upon by online sources. Over half of Americans, and especially those ages 18-39, use online sources for such information, according to a 2011 survey (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2011); that statistic is likely now much higher. Moreover, city magazines themselves are no longer limited to the print format, and can reach audiences at all times, instantaneously, through their own websites and through social media — tools for which they may already be better prepared, in terms of staffing, than newspapers. Clearly, this is an intriguing set of circumstances for city magazines; "creative destruction" of the old model of city magazine publishing is possible, but the degree to which these publications will choose to shift their mission and format is as of yet unknown.

Though city magazine editors may represent just one genre of journalism, their perspectives reveal larger insights about the impact of changing economic and technological structures on the production of journalism as a whole. To determine whether and how citizens are informed about their cities, it is important to understand how each local information provider develops and distributes its own unique contribution to a city's information environment.

Given the existing knowledge about the state of city magazines today and the various market and technological forces to which they are subject, this study explored the following research questions:

RQ1. What do city magazine editors perceive to be the role of city magazines in their communities today?

RQ1a. How do the city magazine editors differentiate their magazines' journalism from that provided by other local news organizations?

RQ1b. Whom do city magazine editors perceive to be the audience for their publications?

RQ1c. What are city magazine editors' criteria for selecting the major stories their magazines will cover?

RQ2. Are city magazines trying to use new digital technologies to engage their audiences in significant local issues, and if so, how?

RQ3. What are city magazine editors' strategies for developing their medium in the future?

Method

This study explores these questions through interviews with editors at a number of U.S. city magazines. The selection of these magazines began with the compilation of a list of winners of City and Regional Magazine Awards (CRMA, 2013) from 2008 to 2012. CRMA award-winning magazines were selected because these would presumably be magazines doing the "best" work in the field, with regard to satisfying the journalistic norms valued by their peers. This list included magazines receiving awards in these specific categories: General Excellence, Reporting, Personality Profile, Feature Story, Reader Service, Civic Journalism, Community Service Project, Excellence Online, and Multimedia. These award categories are all specifically relevant to editorial content and the magazines' community engagement. Additionally, all of these awards are given across three different circulation ranges, permitting the inclusion of publications in cities of various sizes.

This initial list was then reduced to include magazines focused on specific cities, as opposed to state or regional magazines. This narrowed list included just 20 magazines for further analysis. This shortened list of magazines also represents diversity in other key factors, including city size, geographic region, circulation, and ownership (independent vs. chain). Magazines' content, technological savvy, and resources may differ based on city size, ownership, and popularity. The final list of magazines in the study represents variation in these factors.

With this list in hand, highly placed editors at each magazine were contacted via email and asked to participate in an in-depth interview regarding their magazines. These were editors-in-chief, managing editors, or senior editors of long tenure at their magazines. Editors were appropriate interviewees for the gathering of insights about these magazines. They possess unique insights both into the construction of their magazines and into their publications' perceived functions in their communities. As Holmes and Nice describe, magazine professionals "must have a keen sense of audience and market imperatives and a finely tuned understanding of the culture and power nexus in a specific subject matter" (2012, p. 52). These established professionals know their magazines, their audiences, their communities, and the needs of each. As such, they were able to characterize their magazines' content, functions, goals, and opportunities.

Of the 20 magazines contacted, interviews were completed with 15, resulting in a 75% response rate. Magazines whose editors participated were: *5280* (Denver), *Atlanta Magazine*, *Boston*, *Charlotte*, *Cincinnati*, *D Magazine* (Dallas), *Evansville Living*, *Honolulu*, *Indianapolis*, *Madison*, *Memphis*, *MPLS St. Paul*, *Philadelphia*, *Portland Monthly*, and *Washingtonian*. Table 1 provides additional detail on participating magazines' circulation, city population, and ownership.

Table 1
City Magazine Circulation, Local Population, and Ownership

Magazine Name and State	Circulation	U.S. Census Local Population	Ownership
5280 (Denver, CO)	77,027	610,345	Independent
Atlanta Magazine (GA)	66,996	540,922	Emmis Publishing
Boston (MA)	110,390	645,169	Metrocorp
Charlotte (NC)	35,000	704,422	Independent
Cincinnati (OH)	37,426	333,012	Emmis Publishing
D Magazine (TX)	22,000	1,299,542	Independent
Evansville Living (IN)	13,000	116,584	Independent
Honolulu (HI)	35,000	390,738	Independent
Indianapolis Monthly (IN)	41,000	820,445	Emmis Publishing
Madison (WI)	20,833	235,419	Independent
Memphis (TN)	22,500	676,640	Independent
MPLS St. Paul (MN)	17,710	2,968,806	Independent
Philadelphia (PA)	116,840	1,547,297	Metrocorp
Portland Monthly (OR)	52,892	566,143	SagaCity Media
Washingtonian (DC)	137,002	599,657	Independent

"Independent" ownership refers to local ownership, versus ownership by a larger, national magazine publishing group. Magazines marked "independent" may be one of a few magazines published within their cities by the same publisher, but the publisher focuses solely on one metropolitan area. (Complementary publications often include a business- or family-focused magazine.) Circulation and census data gathered at time of interviews (spring/fall 2012).

The researcher conducted these interviews during spring and fall 2012 by phone. Interviews averaged 30 to 45 minutes in length. The interviews followed an informal format, structured by an outline of key questions (see Appendix), but not confined exclusively to those questions (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Such interviews permit the researcher and respondent to together explore the respondent's experiences and the issues they represent: "The subjects not only answer questions prepared by an expert, but themselves formulate in a dialogue their own conceptions of their lived world …

[gaining] knowledge that can be used to enhance the human condition" (Kvale, 1996, p. 11).

The editors' interview responses were then summarized and analyzed to answer the research questions above. All interviews were transcribed by the researcher, and portions of responses representing the issues identified in the research questions were gathered for analysis. Among those responses, common themes, as well as points of divergence, were noted and developed for presentation here by the researcher. To encourage greater freedom of expression in discussions of business and editorial strategy, editors were promised that their interview responses would not be attributed to them by name.

In combination with the other components of the aforementioned larger research project on city magazines, the interviews provide insights into the editorial and business concerns of these magazines, and illuminate the findings of other portions of the study, such as the magazines' content and their uses of social media. The triangulation provided through the application of these multiple methods will lead to a deeper understanding of all aspects of today's city magazines in the U.S.

Results and Discussion

City magazine editors are aware of and are responding to the changing status of their publications in their local information environments. They are actively working to adapt both the format and content of their magazines to take advantage of new opportunities in ways that will still represent their defining attributes and appeal to their key audiences. Editors were able to clearly articulate a distinct function for their publications within their cities, which included the provision of not only service journalism, but also, in many cases, in-depth, long-form journalism on substantive local issues. The editors offered nuanced descriptions of their audiences that revealed a thorough understanding of their readers, beyond simple demographic descriptions that advertising sales staff might use. Editors also provided detailed story selection criteria that reflected their desire to continue to improve the journalism offered in their publications, while maintaining the types of coverage for which they were known. This blend of the new and familiar was thought to be most likely to sustain their publications during technological change.

Finally, the editors were both excited and daunted by the ways their staffs were working to engage more readers in the magazines' coverage through social media and other digital tools, and they recognized the possibilities for the transformation of their publications through these media. Though experimentation with these methods varied greatly among the 15 magazines included in the study, the range of uses offered an intriguing snapshot of the opportunities offered by digital media for the reinvention of today's city magazine.

Editors' Perception of the City Magazine's Local Role

Research question 1 concerned editors' perceptions of their magazines' role in local communities. Editors were asked to describe what they believed their magazines did or should do for their local audiences. A frequent, broad response to this question included variations on the concept of the city magazine as an "owner's manual" for the city.

Editors said their goal was to help readers "get the most out of living in their city" and "decipher the city they live in." The editors were somewhat divided on how true this representation of their cities ought to be to reality. For example, one editor said that the magazine offered "generally a positive picture" of the city, a sentiment echoed by others; yet some editors felt that the representation of the city in the magazine ought to include "what's good about the city and also what's bad … we also do a lot of critical stories because we want to call it like we see it." As one editor put it, "We certainly don't want to be like a Chamber [of Commerce] piece … [we think,] 'Is this [story] going to help folks live their lives better here?'" Unlike Hayes' findings (1981), the city magazine editors interviewed for this study appeared to be interested in presenting a well-rounded picture of their cities, even if it challenges readers' pride.

Specific topics mentioned by these editors as recurring within their coverage included "our lifestyle coverage, whether that's dining or travel or restaurants" and "everything from politics to sports to business to style to health … that kind of broad view." Another editor noted the magazine's use of content "that's, frankly, more geared toward conspicuous consumption … that's part of the equation … of what city magazines do." Another type of content perceived by an editor to be essential to the city magazine was the usual "'best of,' 'top docs' [stories] — the things you have to do to sell the magazine."

These findings resemble those of Hayes (1981) and Fletcher and VandenBergh (1982), revealing little change in this aspect of city magazine coverage in three decades. The "formula" of service content described by many of the editors also sounds quite similar to the model articulated by Greenberg (2000), which appears to be concerned primarily with readers' role as local consumers. Yet many editors strove to venture beyond this familiar formula of service content in their publications. Regarding this content, one editor explained,

> The analogy I've always given for it is in Hollywood: you'll see stars doing a blockbuster movie, or they can do the indie project. That's what I see us doing. We do the 'best restaurants' [story]. It helps pay the bills and it sells on newsstands, but right next to it … we're tucking a serious investigative piece about a business, or government, or politician, that is paid for by that other story.

That type of substantial content was not often mentioned as a primary purpose of the city magazine, but editors did feel it was important and sometimes indirectly rewarding from a financial perspective:

> The journalism is what resonates with people … The fact that we're putting such clear attention and thought, heart, soul, money, resources into the journalism tells the community, 'You are important to us. This place is important to us. We're not just phoning this in.' … You get that back in advertising dollars because your advertisers know people are paying attention; it's being discussed.

Finally, one editor noted that the city magazine was more resilient during difficult economic times because it is "tied to local, not national, advertising accounts," permitting a wider variety of coverage even when market conditions would seem to encourage an emphasis on easier-to-sell content.

Differentiating the city magazine from other local information sources.

Research question 1a addressed how editors differentiated their publications from other local information sources. First, it is worth noting that most of the city magazine editors felt little competition from their local newspapers in terms of coverage or advertising. Newspapers were uniformly recognized to be struggling, and that struggle had varying effects on the city magazines. One editor stated:

> 15 years ago, 12 years ago, we worried a lot about what the newspaper might do before we started to do a story. Now we don't even really consider it … recognizing they're not doing the kinds of stories they used to do.

Newspapers were perceived to lack the resources to investigate and promptly break major investigative stories. Moreover, the editors believed city magazines could cover those stories differently, and perhaps more effectively. The city magazines could offer the "context and perspective in a way that newspapers don't"; they "can do a more in-depth story that would give more perspective"; they "might not break the news, but … can tell [readers] what news matters and what it really means"; they "do the how and the why, whereas newspapers really focus on the who, what, where, and when."

City magazines' ability to build stories during a slower news cycle and to publish longer-format stories allows them, as one editor stated, to "pick up the accountability function that newspapers offered," though within some limits. Constantly providing fast-paced, breaking news was beyond the scope of the city magazines' structural and staff resources. But they could do in-depth service 'packages' on topics "no one else does, that require work and time other local media don't have or aren't willing to invest in, whether the best breakfast in town or a full-scale look at [the local] start-up economy." In general, while newspapers' decline was apparent to these editors and they welcomed the opportunity to engage with some of the stories newspapers might once have covered, they also expressed civic concerns about their ability to "fill the role that daily newspapers do and take up their slack," given their different structures, publishing pace, and advertiser and audience expectations.

This mode of differentiation from newspapers is distinct from that seen in the responses from editors interviewed by Hynds (1979), revealing change in the perceived function of the city magazine in the interim. Hynds found that only 61 percent of the city magazine editors in his survey felt it was important for their magazines to provide "an alternative viewpoint to that of the local newspaper" (1979, p. 621). In contrast, the editors interviewed in this study could readily articulate the relationship between what their city magazine produced and what the local newspaper produced, offering clear explanations of the two information sources' complementary roles. As media enterprises' economic situation has become direr and new technologies have offered challenges,

perhaps it has become more pressing for city magazines to contemplate their position as local information providers and to determine the best way they can serve audiences and advertisers in this volatile time. As mentioned above, Cook and Darby (2013) describe the growing "news gap" in many communities resulting from newspapers' decline. It seems city magazine editors are quite aware of this dilemma. Many are actively working to find ways to help fill the gap, within the constraints of their audience's and advertisers' expectations.

The editors also noted two other key differences between their publications and other local information sources. One of these was their writing and visual style. The city magazines felt they could provide a point of view and storytelling structure in their stories that newspapers could not. Magazines can "have a voice … and not worry with objectivity in the same way" that newspapers must. Magazines can even choose to advocate for a specific position on an issue: "It's OK to pick a side as long as you can intellectually and emotionally defend it, and prove beyond a reasonable doubt that it's the right side to be on." Magazines' writers can have "recognizable individual voices … it makes the stories memorable regardless of topic." One editor also suggested that when newspapers did long-form articles, they tended to be "badly edited and clichéd" and didn't "really tell stories." Multiple editors also mentioned the appeal of their magazines' "beautiful design" that could appeal to readers and represent topics in visually attractive and informative ways: "A magazine … it's just prettier. It's glossy. The photos look much more clean and clear, and the color sparkles in a way that you never get out of a newspaper."

A second important difference from other local information sources was the degree of authority that city magazines could assert in their content. For example, one editor argued that user-generated online content about topics like local destinations or dining (as on Yelp or similar sites) couldn't replace the city magazines' "unbiased" and trustworthy critical analysis of service information. That analysis offered a "curated or authoritative edge" that other media couldn't provide. That distinctive quality was a key feature of the city magazine, one editor said, and "is certainly something we've played up in recent years because it's such a singular thing," not found in other information sources. As one editor said, "User-generated content is awesome, but there's still a place for someone who tells me where the best restaurant is this month, or five things I've got to put on my calendar this month."

Perceived audience for the city magazine

Research question 1b asked about editors' perceptions of their audience, which the editors described in relatively similar terms. Beyond simple demographics of relatively high wealth and education, editors often described readers similarly: "the leaders of the city"; "smart … sophisticated … we're aiming for their brains"; "free time and free cash"; "curious about the city." Editors also often made statements like "great stories transcend demographics … they resonate with everyone." The editors believe their readers are enthusiastic about the city ("all magazines are enthusiast publications") and about journalism. They also see themselves as similar to their readers, at least with regard to their shared attitude about the city. In other ways, they were rather different from the readers: "None of us who work at this magazine are anywhere near the demographic of

it." Therefore, they tended to use their own values and preferences to shape the magazine. Many editors suggested their staffs aimed to create "a magazine we'd want to read."

Editors' story selection criteria

Research question 1c asked about the criteria editors use when selecting the major stories their magazines choose to cover. The editors gave a variety of responses when asked about the criteria they used to select specific stories — particularly long-form or investigative stories — for their magazines to cover. These criteria incorporated assumptions about the audience, as described above, but also basic storytelling, competitive, and financial considerations. The editors often first responded that they just wanted "good stories," which, upon elaboration, they explained meant "human stories" that "transcend just the people involved," stories with "existential" significance, and stories that created "an emotional connection between us and our audience." The stories needed to have strong narratives and contain suspense so that readers asked, "Oh my God, what's going to happen next?" Stories also had to have true, not just tangential, local connections that deepened readers' understanding of the city: "It's easy to fall into a trap of what looks like a really interesting story, but when you're done with it, your understanding of the city isn't improved … Our big stories tell a story about the city."

In order to maintain their differentiation from other local information sources, the city magazines also sought to be ambitious with their stories, but not too ambitious in terms of the investment required for any one story. Generally, articles needed to "advance the story" beyond the newspaper's coverage, if any existed: "We're choosing stories we know we can do in our own way, put our imprint on … really bring more nuance and depth to than anyone else in our market." One editor said that rather than commissioning long-form stories, the city magazine was planning to publish excerpts of recently published books on locally relevant topics. This approach was "overcoming the challenge in producing some coverage without resources."

Finally, one editor mentioned the key role of visual components to the city magazine's stories, and stated that stories with strong "visual storytelling" opportunities would be more likely to be covered in the magazine. For example, this editor wanted to create more infographics, though it had been difficult to "find an illustrator who could translate what we wanted in an easy-to-understand graphic."

Digital Technologies for Audience Engagement in Local Issues

Research question 2 addressed the extent to which city magazine editors use digital technology to reach their audiences. Perhaps the most clearly transformative issue for city magazines today is their engagement with digital media. Both their actual social network accounts, such as Facebook and Twitter, and their own websites provide opportunities for the immediate publication and distribution of content. Readers can respond to magazines' content through comments and conversation, share their own "user-generated" content, and interact with the magazines' staff and with each other.

While the city magazine editors often noted the "challenge of keeping up with new innovations," they also described many ways in which the web and social media provided new opportunities to serve readers. The editors saw other websites as potential

competition for some of their content, particularly service content about dining and travel, but recognized the opportunities for reporting and engaging with readers that the web and social media offer. They also mentioned that digital media could generate "more eyeballs" for advertisers, making digital outreach potentially profitable.

The city magazines' websites were central to their digital strategies. Notably, they saw their websites as "news sources," though not typically as providing breaking news. As one editor stated, "We don't have enough boots on the ground to do [city hall or the state capital]. We have to be more reactive on things like that. We rely on other media," like local television news or the newspaper, to provide initial coverage that could be pursued further on the magazine's website.

The magazines' websites were also places to use their writers' expertise on a daily basis, complementing long-form pieces in the print magazines. One editor explained the relationship between the website and the print magazine:

> Before, they [our writers who are experts on local topics] might only be able to do a story two months down the road, and maybe it's really long. And now they can provide you with constant updates and analysis and commentary on the same topic. So I think they complement each other, the very short [posts on the website/blogs] and the very long.

The city magazines saw their websites and social media outreach as engaging readers between print issues. With these digital tools, "rarely does a day go by that we don't have a connection with our readers." One editor described re-posting stories from the magazine that had been previously published in response to news events. The republication could "make a connection that this was happening in our community today, and we'd published this piece. We already knew this [personality in the news]." This re-posting allowed the no-cost reuse of existing content, connected the magazine's audience to the news, and demonstrated the magazine's authority on community matters.

The websites also serve as hubs for video and other multimedia content to complement print articles. The magazines' online content tended to reach a younger audience than their print editions. That more youthful audience appeals to advertisers. On the websites, the magazines sought to foster interactions with their readers through comments and social media integration. Multiple editors mentioned the value of having conversations with readers about stories on their website, with dialogues and sharing of stories even occurring on a national and international level, well beyond the city magazine's local focus. The interactions were "definitely a two-way operation or a multi-way operation. [The website] isn't just us broadcasting out, for sure." One editor mentioned that a cover story had developed in response to a reader comment on a blog post on the magazine's site.

Social media similarly enabled these conversations between magazine staffers and the public. One editor commented on the natural fit between the typical style of social media communication and magazines' conversational, personal voice. Editors appreciated that social media allowed readers to share the magazines' longer stories widely, and that social media could "reach an audience that the magazine doesn't and prepare them for future digital products" that the magazine might offer. The social media audience likely skews younger than the audience for the print publications, given the PEJ

(2012) findings described above, and so these magazines' digital outreach may indeed be anticipating the youthful audience's future desire for more sophisticated local news products. Some editors also described uses of social media for contests and promotions.

One editor noted the more serious potential for city magazines' social media use: its ability to maximize an investigative story's impact on not only the audience, but also on relevant policymakers. In this case, the magazine's writers followed through with social media activity during legislative action pertaining to an investigative story:

> As that bill was moving through … [we] were tweeting about it like crazy … Those tweets became part of the debate. The state reps started re-tweeting our tweets, which had links to the piece. And … everybody who had anything to do with this decision has read our piece, and it has dramatically reshaped the debate. And that's all because of social media.

This example demonstrates how sophisticated use of social media can enable city magazines to disseminate their work, gain support for a specific perspective, and enable conversations around topics that matter within a local area or region.

As a whole, editors saw digital technology as supporting and maximizing the print publication's circulation and advertising, but also as creating new opportunities for online advertising, interaction with the public, and multimedia reporting. As one editor described, "We try to create a virtuous circle where people are moving back and forth between the website and the print magazine," with references to each medium embedded within the other, and subscription offers everywhere. While the editors felt the impact of their digital efforts on their print circulation was hard to quantify, some were fairly confident that "all these little [digital] touches" through the website and social media could "get a reader committed" to a print subscription. One editor also mentioned the hope that these interactions could serve a mutual benefit, so that readers also could "get something else out of … interacting with us via Facebook or Twitter or Pinterest."

City Magazine Editors' Strategies for the Future

Research question 3 concerned editors' strategies for developing city magazines in the future. Although many of the plans for their publications' futures revolved around digital technology, these city magazine editors also stated their intent to continue developing their print products as well. As one editor stated, "people still value the physical object of the magazine as a luxury good or leisure activity … sometimes people are disappointed to find that they were interviewed for our website and not for the 'real magazine.' Things in the magazine seem more real and valuable." The print magazine still holds a certain social prestige among its audience. Within that print publication, editors often said that a major goal was to continue to improve the writing within the magazine: "I want the magazine to really become known to good writers as their home." That writing would also ideally be applied to a greater variety of topics, for some editors. One editor would like to "put less service on the covers of the magazine and try to do at least two more covers each year that were not service covers … whether it's profiles, or just important investigative stories." This editor noted that some in the city magazine business argue

that service covers are more appealing on the newsstand than serious topics, but still felt that shifting some covers toward serious topics would be a worthy goal.

In terms of digital strategies, the city magazine editors described the challenge for small publishing companies of taking risks with digital formats. As one editor said, the current situation is one of "confusion in the market," with many different platforms and tools available to publishers and audiences. Some expressed a desire to let larger publishers "figure it out and make the tools cheap enough for us … without having critical mass, we risk getting caught in between and not being able to keep up." There was some experimentation occurring, as at one city magazine that had chosen to publish a Kindle Single (one long-form story, sold as a standalone digital product through Amazon) of one of its major stories. This magazine was actively thinking about ways to address its "non-paginated economic future" — a future in which a print publication with static paper pages would no longer be central to its business. Along the same lines, another editor referred to the magazine as a "multimedia event company," drawing income from not just the print magazine, but also from its online products and from its sponsorship and organization of local events.

Overall, as one editor stated, these city magazines are well positioned in many ways to serve local audiences and advertisers:

> It's really a great market for city magazines because we consumers increasingly want more and more local content. Advertisers and marketers are continuing to look for ways to drill down and be more local. All that speaks really well to city magazines and to making ourselves relevant across media platforms.

As these interviews demonstrated, city magazine editors are working today to explore their magazines' capabilities in both print and digital media, to differentiate their product from other competing local information sources, to understand and interact with their audiences, and to select stories that serve that audience and take advantage of their medium's distinctive qualities.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated city magazines' ongoing adaptation to changes in the local information environment. As newspapers' resources and influence have declined, digital media have developed to compete with some aspects of their coverage, and with that of city magazines. City magazines have identified key strengths of their own medium and coverage style that can continue to distinguish them to audiences even as this environment and audiences' preferences shift toward digital media. While they remain fairly focused on specific audience segments traditionally targeted by city magazines – the wealthy and the well educated – they also recognize the potential for digital media to bring their content to broader audiences and to affect local and/or regional opinion leaders.

Data on the media preferences and habits of younger media audiences, mentioned above, suggest that these editors may need to accelerate their magazines' movement toward digital and mobile platforms. Younger readers, and especially those with higher

education and income, use mobile and other digital media for local news and information (Caumont, 2013). Some of these media have encroached upon city magazines' traditional topic areas, and have done so with user-generated content that costs nothing to produce. For example, Yelp and similar websites/mobile applications collect crowdsourced restaurant reviews that are free and easy to access anywhere. Other sites/apps offer entertainment and local event information.

These sites have only grown since the 2011 Pew report, cited above, which showed that over half of Americans use these sources for food and entertainment information – particularly those aged 18-39, those with greater education and income, and those who use mobile devices, precisely the demographic that city magazines traditionally target. Moreover, most of these young news users have not developed habits of seeking local information in print media and will need to be convinced of the city magazines' unique utility. Whether these users will consider city magazines' distinctive presentation of this kind of service information to be worth the magazines' cost remains to be seen. The availability and popularity of these digital local information sources should encourage city magazine editors to differentiate their magazines' entertainment and food coverage – along with all of their local content – and to better market their publications' unique qualities.

This study presents a snapshot of the perspectives of a small group of city magazine editors at a time of volatility for the magazine industry and for journalism as a whole. Though the 15 editors represented a variety of publications, the study does not comprehensively cover all American city magazines, each of which faces a unique set of local circumstances and constraints. Additionally, although the editors expressed their own beliefs about their magazines' contributions to local information, these views were not gathered concurrently with those of newspaper or television journalists, nor were they tested within this study against actual analysis of their magazines' content (a final component of the larger research project that is still underway).

Future research should look more closely at these city magazines' content to determine to what degree they are in fact engaging in the kind of investigative or "serious" coverage that many editors mentioned as desirable, versus city magazines' traditional focus on service stories. A longitudinal examination of city magazines' content would document their shift to fill the "news gap" left by newspapers' decline, if that movement is indeed occurring. Finally, contrasting this coverage with that of local newspapers or local digital news providers would illuminate the differences in coverage content and style among these media. As the literature review revealed, most of the research on city magazines prior to this research project is quite outdated. This study can inform additional research on these publications' contemporary status and function.

This study also raises questions about how city magazines form and engage a community of readers within a defined geographic area, suggesting that this medium should also be incorporated into future studies of community journalism. The effects of city magazine readership on local audiences should be examined. Do these local readers actually connect with the magazines' coverage of their cities in the ways imagined by these editors? How does city magazines' print and digital content invite the formation of a community, and who is or is not included in that community, given these magazines' traditionally wealthy and educated readership? Do city magazine readers possess deeper understanding of or stronger emotional connections to their cities? To what degree does

reading a city magazine support a relationship to the city, or to specific communities within the city? An analysis of uses and effects of local information sources that includes these magazines would aid both researchers who seek to understand the changing urban information environment and all local journalists (magazine and otherwise) who must plan effective content and digital strategies.

Overall, extending our analysis and understanding of information providers within cities beyond just newspapers appears to be increasingly important during this time of transformation in the local information environment.

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Appendix

Interview Questions Used in Study

1. What purpose(s) do you think your magazine serves in its area? How does it complement other news and information sources in the area?
2. Who do you imagine as the audience for your magazine?
3. What are your guiding criteria for selecting major stories for the magazine?
4. Do you think your magazine is successful in serving its audience through quality journalism? What could be improved?
5. How is your magazine using digital media (web, social) to create audience engagement around issues you cover?