

Public Abstract

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Title:Local Journalism Beyond the Command Post: Journalists as Strategic Communicators, and Citizen Stakeholders in Natural Disaster Recovery

On Memorial Day weekend 2015, between the hours of 9 p.m. and 1 a.m. the Blanco River crested at 42 feet, drowning the town of Wimberley, Texas. The Memorial Day flood resulted in the death of 11 people and damage to more than 300 homes and businesses. Journalists flocked to Wimberley to report the destruction, but as the hype from national news organizations died down, only a few local journalists remained to tell the story of the town's struggle for recovery. Using case study methods and narrative theory this study combined an examination of local news stories, interviews and observations of local journalists, and conversations with community members to evaluate how local journalists consider their role as one that contributes to long-term recovery and resilience. Conversations with local journalists revealed the level of accountability they have to their communities, and the challenges they face to remain critical of events surrounding the disaster. Journalists also expressed a pressure created by geographic proximity, to change the focus of stories as more time passed after the disaster. An evaluation of the narratives expressed by journalists and how those transfer in to their newswork brings a deeper understanding to the tensions created when a journalist is also a citizen stakeholder in his or her community. Through the development of the journalist as citizen model, this study addresses the way local journalists are strategic in the narratives they adopt in the six months after a natural disaster.