Hyber-local: Glocalized rural news

Abstract
Purpose – To interrogate the potential for hyper-local news websites to support and sustain peripheral rural communities by extending and developing the public sphere(s) in which they engage locally and globally.

Design/methodology/approach – Theoretical understandings of communicative spaces, monitorial citizenship and ‘liquid life’ and journalism developed by Jurgen Habermas, Michael Schudson, Zygmunt Bauman and Mark Deuze inform this pilot study of a hyper-local project undertaken by a UK media corporation. Data sets comprising documentation; news-website content; interviews with journalists; ‘knowledge café’ exploration of audience interactions and questionnaires are analysed to identify themes and sub-themes in production and use of media content.

Findings – The hyper-local project was found to have been put in place without engaging effective community involvement and its initial conceptualisations, predicated on assumptions of an inward-looking community, did not recognise the importance of communicative networks which supported sustainability and situated that community within a wider social, cultural, economic and media dimension. As such the project tended to reinforce, rather than mitigate geographical isolation.

Research limitations/implications – This is a small scale pilot project exploring new forms of media/community engagement and, while the results can be regarded as indicative, further research is needed to investigate the development in a wider contextual field.

Originality/value – This paper addresses an important but little-researched emergent issue: ‘hyper-local’. It explores in detail some of the complexities that are beginning to be theorised in broad terms and extends understandings of local-level practices and processes.

Keywords Hyper-local; journalism; rural communities; public sphere.

Paper type: Research paper

Introduction

Media organisations and enterprises across Europe and North America are developing new internet-based ‘hyper local’ news sites dedicated to small communities (UK Press Gazette August 9, 2007; August 4, 2006; Foster, 2009 p213; Flew & Wilson, 2010, p136). While these act as ‘town criers’, informing communities about local affairs, they inevitably position those communities within global interconnected perspectives – a process which has been conceptualised as ‘glocalization’. George Ritzer defines glocalization as “the interpenetration of the global and the local … resulting in unique outcomes in geographic areas” (Ritzer, 2003, p193) and the concept has been used as a means to “analyse the ways in which social actors construct meanings, identities and institutional forms within the sociological context of globalization” (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2006, p171 ). Herman Wasserman and Shakuntala Rao (2008, p163-4), using the concept to explore the process in which debates and issues in journalism practice – specifically ethics - are resolved, found a nuanced, two-
way relationship between global and local epistemologies and practices, rather than a one-way traffic from the centre to the periphery.

This pilot study interrogates the processes of emerging ‘glocalities’ in the context of the (re)invention of hyper-local journalism by a major media organisation which is replacing a struggling hyper-local print medium (village and small-town newspapers) with the globally interconnected and interactive medium of the internet. A ‘local’ paper, radio or TV station today would usually serve a city and its suburbs – ‘hyper-local’ has gained currency as a term referring to a news website, sometimes accompanied by a printed paper, serving a city suburb, small town or village, or even a housing estate or post-code (US zip-code) area. The hyper-local focus of national and multi-national media companies is part of a wider strategy to adapt business models to the spread of the internet and cultural shifts in the ways audiences access, use, create and reshape media. Many local weekly newspapers around Britain have closed in the past 60 years (Franklin 2008, p71); ownership of local papers has concentrated in national and multinational companies (Murphy 1998, McNair 2003, Williams and Franklin 2008); and newspapers and broadcasters have concentrated in metropolitan centres. But in recent years the New York Times has launched hyper-local sites (Jarvis, Feb 2009). DM&GT, owner of Britain’s national Daily Mail and Northcliffe regional newspapers, launched hyper local sites in 2009 (Luft, 2009). Amsterdam-based PPF is expanding community newspapers and hyper-local websites in the Czech Republic (Pfanner, 2009). Local and hyper-local journalisms were central themes of the 2010 European Newspaper Congress (April 25-27) in Vienna2.

There is a substantial literature documenting processes of marginalisation in the development of cultural, economic and political disadvantage which rural communities suffer through isolation, poor transport, lack of employment, lack of leisure opportunities and a contested construction (in part by the media) of the ‘rural idyll’ (for example, Cloke et al 1997, Little, 1999). Development media theory (Reeves 1995; Sparks 2007) suggests that the public sphere can be a valuable resource to rural communities and work in Australia (van Vuuren 2006, Forde et al 2003) supports this view.

This study draws on Habermas’s concept of the public sphere (1989, 1996) to explore the ways in which one rural community uses, engages with and informs the development of a hyper-local news website established and hosted by a metropolitan subsidiary of a national media corporation. The hyper-local project involved an English municipal authority (‘County Council’) administering a largely rural area and a regional newspaper publisher (‘Media Company’), a subsidiary of a larger media corporation. The series of hyper-local news sites was developed specifically to support community

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1 The 1,306 paid-for weeklies in the UK in 1948 had fallen to 526 in 2005 (Franklin 2008)
sustainability and democratic engagement. John Myles has explored ways in which community internet sites can help and sustain communities in Manchester (UK), but argues that the

‘... meaning of community in community networks is the outcome of relations of power and there needs to be critical awareness of this in local authority community telematics policy formation. This critical awareness may well be threatened in partnerships with the commercial sector, and the priority must be ... putting the networks more thoroughly in the hands of the community of use.’ (Myles, 2004 p487)

In the project under investigation here, Media Company sought to recruit ‘community journalists’ and gave them editorial control over the material they posted on the hyper-local site which, would seem at first reading to have addressed Myles’s demand that ‘the priority must be ... putting the networks more thoroughly in the hands of the community of use’, even though this is clearly a partnership with the commercial sector.

**Theoretical perspectives**

Jurgen Habermas’s concept of the ‘public sphere’ (Habermas 1989; 1996) is of a communicative space that affords openness and plurality and allows active participants in public life to generate an ‘influential and informed’ public opinion. He described the ‘bourgeois public sphere’ which grew out of the 17thC and 18thC coffee houses as a ‘realm of our social life’ in which ‘public opinion’ is formed (Habermas, 1989 p73). As this public sphere developed, the political press emerged as a ‘mediator and intensifier of public discussion’ (ibid p76). Habermas’s conceptualisation is contested on the grounds that he viewed the public sphere as a unified entity; that his concept excluded many (on grounds of gender and class, for example); that it failed to theorise difference and contestation and emphasised consensus in political discussion. The range of criticisms is expounded in the collection published by Craig Calhoun in 1992, but the public sphere remains a strong model to inform understanding of what creates a deliberative democratic culture. Peter Dahlgren holds that it remains compelling in the internet age, but redefines it as ‘a constellation of communicative spaces in society that permit the circulation of ideas, debates – ideally in an unfettered manner – and also the formation of political will (ie, public opinion).’ (Dahlgren, 2005 p148).

Dahlgren offers a valuable analytical model of the public sphere(s) as constituted in three dimensions: structural, representational and interactional. The structural has to do with media institutions and their political economy, ownership, control, regulation and legal frameworks which define freedoms and constraints on publication and thus relates to dynamics of access and exclusion. This bears directly on the manner in which hyper-local sites under scrutiny here are configured to allow/ encourage/ discourage participation. The representative dimension has to do
with the output of the media and relates in this investigation to the ‘pluralism of views’ and
‘ideological tendencies’ in the communicative space. Interaction relates to citizen’s encounters with
the media – and how they make use of, meaning of, and engage with that output. But Dahlgren says
that when civic communication goes online, ‘empirically, the categories of representation and
interaction on the Net often blur into each other’ (ibid, p149). This resonates with the
conceptualisation of Mark Deuze and others of media production and media texts as, respectively,
collaborative processes and artefacts (Deuze, 2007, p48). But this is not necessarily collaboration
between institutional media and individual citizen. It can equally develop as collaboration between
ordinary citizens. The fundamental product which social media sites such as Twitter, MySpace, Face
Book, Linkedin deliver is connectivity - Dahlgren’s ideal of ‘a constellation of communicative spaces
in society that permit the circulation of ideas, debates’. In the dimensions of
representation/interaction, there is no place specifically reserved within such socially networked
spaces for a media institution, no role as content-provider (collaboratively or otherwise) which it
alone could fulfil. An important dimension of the current inquiry is to explore what the media
institution is able to offer a community which that community would find valuable and which it
might not find elsewhere. Manuel Castells (2010; Vol1, p. xliv) defines a networked society as one in
which the organisational arrangements of humans in relation to everyday life-issues such as
production, consumption, and experience are made of networks. What might the consequences of
this networked, horizontally and vertically structured society be for the manifestations of citizenship
– central to Habermas’s public sphere? Michael Schudson found in 1999 that the normative model
of the ‘informed citizen’ - conceived of by politicians, journalists and scholars (such as Habermas) as
those who sought to inform themselves, or needed to be informed, about political issues in order to
make rational political decisions - was contested by his empirical inquiries. He discovered that the
citizen acted in reality in what he termed a ‘monitorial’ manner. In a clarification of his findings in
2000, he defends this ‘monitorial model’:

‘... it does not imply that citizens should know all the issues all of the time. It implies that
they should be informed enough and alert enough to identify danger to their personal good and
danger to the public good. When such danger appears ... they should have the resources—in
trusted relationships, in political parties and elected officials, in relationships to interest groups
and other trustees of their concerns ... to jump into the political fray and make a lot of noise.’
(Schudson, 2000 p16)

These ‘trusted relationships’ and ‘trustees of their concerns’ offer, in hyper-local journalism,
places once again for the institutional media and professional journalist in a collaborative
representational/interactional relationship with the active citizen - if the citizen finds reason to engage with them in such a relationship. This bears on the ‘professionalism’ and skill set of the journalists involved, their routines of working and the access they have to democratic and commercial institutions. However, the community which took part in this inquiry took none of these elements at face value. Schudson’s research further suggests that this relationship, should it develop, would be one of a number of such trusted relationships upon which citizens and communities could draw. In a ‘glocalized’, networked society, even relatively isolated communities will have a large range of networks and sources of information, from direct social interaction, business, professional and civic contacts and customers; to regional, national and global networks occupying numerous channels of communication, some one-way, but most two-way. Expanding on Schudson’s concept of the ‘monitorial citizen’ Deuze (2008, p848) suggests: ‘This individualized act of citizenship can be compared to the act of the consumer, browsing stores of a shopping mall.’ And, citing Zygmunt Bauman’s concept of ‘liquid life’ (2000), Deuze holds that in order adequately to service the networked society, to find acceptance in a ‘trusted relationship’ the role of journalism and the journalist has become ‘liquid’. ‘Living a liquid life involves a complex dance between work, play and life in the context of a rapidly-changing “glocal” environment, which life gets enacted in and through media,’ (Deuze, 2007, p42). Liquid journalism, he says, ‘deeply respects the rights and privileges of each and every consumer-citizen to be a maker and user of his own news, and enthusiastically embraces its role as, to paraphrase James Carey, (1989) an amplifier of the conversation society has with itself’ (Deuze, 2008, p848).

The concept of the hyper-local news site is one in which control and ownership is shared between journalist and community. In the case explored by this inquiry, ‘Media Company’ hosted the sites and added content to them, but also directed to them content provided by County Council and offered direct access and editorial autonomy to councillors representing communities and to people recruited as ‘community journalists’. The architecture of these putative public spheres was therefore designed and intended to support collaborative media production and civic engagement, but it emerged in the course of this study that the degree of interactivity and collaboration between each group, the ‘conversation society has with itself’ within this sphere was limited.

Methodology
This study interrogated five data sets to explore the conceptualisation of the hyper-local project; its development; roles of professional journalists in this enterprise and ways in which the community concerned engaged with the sites – and with their wider media environment.
1) Documentation surrounding the 2008 tender by the authority for a system of communication with communities and the successful bid for the contract allowed an exploration of how the project was conceived and the intentions behind it.

2) Intensive semi-structured interviews with the three journalists tasked with creating and maintaining the 20-plus hyper-local news sites explored how intention compared with practice and how the project was put in place on the ground.

3) Gathering all content posted on one of the hyper-local sites from January 1, 2009 to December 31, 2009 enabled the cross-referencing of interview data and exploration of further complexities relating to the manner in which the project was put in place.

4) A Knowledge Café workshop was held with engaged and participative members of one community - ‘Market Town’ - served by a hyper-local site to explore the communicative spaces - public spheres - in which they engaged and wished to engage. The knowledge café is a useful tool for ‘cultural probes’ (Gaver, Dunne and Pacenti, 1999) and a creative and inclusive technique for sharing knowledge and stimulating new thinking (Involve, 2007). For three weeks before the café, participants had made themselves familiar with Media Company hyper-local news site and others serving their community. Discussion groups formed round tables and at 20-minute intervals dispersed and reformed in differently-constituted groups at other tables. Each café table had a menu exploring a particular theme: Ideally, what could a local website offer? What can community members contribute to such a site? ‘Media Company’s’ hyper-local website. Professional / amateur collaboration and issues of ownership. All tables groups then discussed issues relating to metro-centred media and peripheral communities. This event generated 16 X 20-minute discussions by differently constituted groups of three or four, each generating fresh discourses around four themes related to the community’s media use and its engagement with the hyper-local project. It generated a further 4 X 10-minute discussions on media provision in peripheral rural areas by metropolitan institutions. The dynamics of the discussions tended, however, to converge into two overarching themes: the development of public spheres of engagement in a glocalized media environment and the groups’ local and global interests and concerns; and collaborations between amateur and professional media producers in construction of these spheres.

5) Participants completed questionnaires on their backgrounds and media use to provide additional context to the investigation.
Data was also drawn from the 2001 Census and research by ‘County Council’ to explore the community’s economic and demographic characteristics and relationships within and beyond the region. This provided a more detailed and complex context for the inquiry and informed both the design of the interviews and ‘knowledge café’ questions and the analysis of the data collected.

A ‘framework’ approach (Richie et al, 2003) was adopted to analysis of the datasets relating to the conceptualisation of the hyper-local sites, interviews with the journalists and knowledge café discussions. This allowed the construction of a framework of emerging themes and subthemes concerning engagements between the institutions and those between journalists and communities. It allowed the identification of themes and sub-themes in terms of the journalists’ conceptions and performance of their role and those within the community of their engagements with and relationships within their local and global media environments. However, the investigation into Market Town site and its community, while it is indicative and reveals important themes, cannot necessarily be taken to show that the site is typical or representative of all those in the series or of their performance or popularity. Such comparisons would require further research.

**Conceptualising the hyper-local sites:**

This investigation took place during a period of turmoil and transformation for ‘Media Company’ and ‘County Council’. Between late 2007 and early 2010, the company imposed several rounds of redundancies and local government was reorganised. Several district councils with responsibilities and functions in defined areas and a county council with supplementary responsibilities and functions spanning those districts were replaced by a unitary authority, ‘County Council’, which took over all municipal functions and responsibilities in the area.

Fourteen months before the change, in January 2008, the council invited companies to bid for a three-year £750,000 contract to facilitate better communications between the council and its communities and within those communities. Media Company’s bid was successful, local government transformation took place in April 2009 but in June the new council ended the contract because of ‘our need to look for savings’. Media Company decided, however, to maintain the hyper-local sites and began publishing a free weekly newspaper in the county.

Media Company has, like others in Britain, Europe and North America, seen its newspaper circulations fall substantially over 20 years, that decline accelerating at the start of the recession in 2007. County Council covers an area which is largely rural, with industrial pockets. The community (‘Market Town’) served by the hyper-local site is centred on a town with a population of almost 2,000 in 881 households which falls into the definition of ‘rural’ developed for use by UK government departments in 2004 – population below 10,000. (CRC 2006, p15).
Market Town, which is economically dependent on agriculture and tourism, is 72km (45m) from the nearest city, 16km (10m) from a main highway and 25 minutes by road from the nearest railway station and substantial towns. Like many rural areas, it is undergoing migrational changes. ‘Out-migrants, who may be pulled by the attractions of urban employment, education, or bright lights, or pushed by the lack of affordable housing,’ (CRC 2006, P7) are usually younger people, those moving in usually older people. An influx of retirees to the English countryside is cited as a factor pushing rural house prices beyond the reach of local people – and pushing out 20-35 year-olds. (Johnstone and Hutchinson, 2005).

In January 2008, planning was under way for the new unitary authority and County Council put out a tender, ‘Communication with Communities’. It explained that:

‘In order to establish more sustainable communities, where people want to live and work, the Council is looking at local delivery arrangements in a number of services and needs to increasingly engage with communities at a local level to provide a more joined-up approach. ... consideration should be given to methods which engage and facilitate community discussions and feedback as well as informing at a local level.’ (My emphasis.)

Media Company’s successful bid offered hyper-local websites for 27 belonging communities (defined by the council as ‘places that local people would regard as where they come from if asked by others with a knowledge of the patch ie, townships, rural areas associated with a particular river or valley’); a quarterly magazine and daily promotion of the sites in its newspapers. The sites would ‘contain a mix of useful information on council services, user-generated content, blogs, forums and ultra-local news’. Clubs and organisations would be invited ‘regularly to provide grassroots content’. Beyond the £750,000 contract income, the project offered Media Company the opportunity to reach new audiences and maintain ‘brand awareness’ while rural shops and post offices were closing, hitting newspaper distribution, and younger people were eschewing newspapers for electronic news media.

The documentation reveals, however, that although Media Company was, in Myles’s phrase, ‘putting the networks more thoroughly in the hands of the community of use’, the communities involved were not consulted in the contract bid. The communication strategy ‘to establish more sustainable communities’ was narrowly framed by County Council in terms of its requirements and its need better to engage with communities. Media Company’s solution, within this frame, was to establish structures which allowed County Council to engage reciprocally with communities served by each hyper-local site, as if the council were a hub from which discrete spokes radiated to individual communities. Media Company’s role was to direct to each site council information and
local content, recruit ‘community journalists’ and grant them control over their postings. Although communities concerned were not consulted, Media Company assumed they would produce user-generated content, blogs and forums. The project was thus conceived from top-down, to meet narrow institutional needs, not wider community needs. Project design emphasised communities’ local perspectives, ignored their global networks, interests and engagements and fell short of Ritzer’s conceptualization of the multi-trajectional ‘interpenetration of the global and the local resulting in unique outcomes in geographic areas’ (Ritzer, 2003, p 193). Nor did it free these communities to ‘construct meanings, identities and institutional forms within the sociological context of globalization’ (Guilanotti and Robertson, 2006, p171).

**Putting the theory into practice**

‘Alan’ led the project for Media Company and an experienced reporter (‘Tony’) and trainee (‘Fiona’) were recruited in September to write reports for the sites and recruit community journalists. But the project did not go as planned.

Alan: ‘Once we got to stage of about a hundred community correspondents [we] were really pleased with ourselves and then in the next month only three of them wrote anything. This thing of .. em .. the reality of citizen journalism is that, it’s not just a matter of saying, ‘well, here’s the platforms, you can do it.’ … They don’t have the skills, they might not have the motivation … certainly not without some guidance, and I think I recognised that fairly early in the project and I saw our role isn’t just to provide a platform, but also to provide the skills and the training and the encouragement … And the problem is that resources have got the better of us, the lack of resources…. I think this idea that everyone is a journalist now, isn’t true. (A), everyone doesn’t want to be a journalist and, (b) doesn’t have the skills.’

Fiona was asked if people recruited to write for the sites were invited to the newspaper offices.

‘Never. They were kept at arm’s length... It’s a huge area and we had so many sites. Maybe if we had had more staff or less sites we might have been able to be more in-depth.’

*When you say they were kept at arm’s length, do you mean that was a sort of deliberate policy?*

‘No. it’s just that ... it might have been a bit rushed in the way it was put together.’

All said that if they began again they would give greater support to contributors. When County Council pulled out Media Company decided to keep the series of sites going, but Alan said Fiona was taken off the project, he was almost completely taken off it and one reporter was left to service the sites and write the new free newspaper.
‘While we had the full team there, you know, the traffic was growing pretty steadily. We worked out one month we got to about 20% of the households in the county, which isn’t bad penetration.’

During 2009, Media Company updated Market Town website with 290 articles - 102,000 words of text - but fewer articles were posted in the second half of the year. By far the greatest number of articles posted were ‘general news’, sourced mainly from press releases. Council news featured prominently in the first four months leading to the change of authority in April 2009. In May there was no council news on the site and nor was there in August. Least well served categories were those which relied most on audience collaboration: local sports; what’s on; news from schools, clubs and societies and churches. No forums through which ‘communities hold the conversations with themselves’ emerged.

However, ‘Tony’, the remaining reporter, said amateur sports clubs in particular did write and supply photographs to some sites and that similar sites produced by other subsidiaries of the parent company had attracted more contributors as they grew:

‘I’m hoping that one day it [Media Company’s series of sites] will reach critical mass where enough people will know about it, therefore, enough people will want to get involved, which will mean that more people will know about it.’

But, professionally, the hyper-local sites have had beneficial results for him:

‘... I have to say I am only going to say positive things because I am a big convert to this. I think it is a great idea. You haven’t lost any of the old traditional values ... every journalist would just love to go out and just meet people, chat to them. Well, I actually get the opportunity to do that. I think I have one of the best jobs in journalism. And I think it is getting better as well ... Great!’

The communicative community

Fourteen people took part in the knowledge cafe: five men and nine women. They were predominantly in the 40-50 and 50-60 age group and one was retired and one semi-retired. Four worked in agriculture, three owned businesses, one had worked in education and one was a part time teacher, three were administrators and event organisers, two were self-employed. Several combined occupations. There was a high level of commitment to the community in terms of membership of local societies and organisations. All 14 said they relied heavily on word of mouth for local news. But all used the internet for leisure and to keep in touch with others and 11 used it in their working lives. Four used social media such as Face Book, and three ran websites – for business and leisure. All used multiple media platforms to keep in touch with news of their immediate community but a minority used
‘official’ websites. Only three used Media Company’s Market Town site and five, including those three, those of local weekly papers. Of the 14, 10 bought local weekly papers and seven Media Company’s regional paper. They were not statistically representative of the community but did have a rich and textured understanding of their community and its needs. At the beginning it was held to be axiomatic that everybody knew everybody and everything that was going on, but this was soon challenged:

‘It’s not that long since somebody said to me, “What exactly do you do?” I’ve only been in this business for, what, 17 years, and you still don’t know what I do!’

Concerns emerged about elderly people who were not included within key communicative networks and several times knowledge gaps were cited about critically important community matters such as births and deaths.

‘...Thursday sometime I saw a hearse driving down the high street and I am yet to find out who it is because there was, there was .... one of my customers was following and I saw them later on and said, Whose funeral was that?’ She said, ‘I don’t know I just got stuck behind the hearse.’

‘ ... I was just on the way out and I said to this lady “So what are you two up to this weekend?” “You do realise my husband passed away five months ago,” and err honestly.’

It emerged that networks of friendship and kinship spread throughout the county and beyond and there was in play a wider sense of community identity than one confined geographically to Market Town. Word of mouth – and existing media resources – also failed adequately to support and inform cultural life. The participative cultural community within which the group considered themselves situated included nearby villages and more distant market towns with theatres, galleries and cinemas. But finding out what was happening was difficult because there was no single point of reference:

‘I would like to see somewhere a date-orientated events list that covers quite a big area, because so often, you don’t see the notice until after it has gone.’

Discussions also explored the importance of building networks – to showcase the town within the wider world - but also to forge social and commercial connections between the residents and visiting tourists. The Market Town group were comfortable with web-based networks and networking. Their perceptions of the public sphere(s) in which they engaged included spaces for interactions within their own group and with those visiting, potential visitors (tourists) communities located nearby and more distant and communities of interest, such as fell-runners. These interactions took place along economic, social, cultural and political trajectories. Many of the group clearly fitted Schudson’s concept of the ‘monitorial citizen’. They had not turned their back on accessing news through the internet – but no news
site supported the social, economic, familial and cultural networks within which they were positioned and which they sought to develop. Furthermore, Media Company’s Market Town site remained exclusively inward-looking with a one-way traffic from centre to periphery.

In the café discussions, the possible establishment of Schudson’s ‘trusted relationship’ between the individual/community and the journalist was challenged:

‘I would still question whether they were there to serve our needs, or to serve their needs, which would be to sell papers.’

‘You do end up with the “drop the dead donkey” syndrome. They are terribly interested, but then something else comes up in the course of the day and they drop your cause.’

But the potential benefits of collaborations were recognised and the perceived benefits, should ‘trusted relationships’ develop, were valued. Journalists’ skills and knowledge were seen as a potential asset – a potential champion for the community in its dealings with local government and big business: ‘To put it bluntly, they will smell bullshit a mile away.’

Journalists would not be fobbed off. Their expertise was also valued in terms of establishing the reliability of information: ‘There has to be someone who can say, “Just slow down a bit ... are you sure of your facts here?”’

**Metropolitan media and the rural periphery**

Some believed rural communities were ignored, but that distance from metropolitan centres and the size of population made that inevitable. Others concluded that despite its isolation, the area had a relatively wide range of media – two daily and three weekly papers (one free); BBC local radio; commercial radio; two regional TV channels and local websites serving a diverse range of needs, audiences and interests. Importance was placed both on news about and for the local community – and on their locality being globally visible.

‘We do need some sort of news and promotion to make this area be known about to people come and visit, so I think it does matter from that point of view because if it is never mentioned, it certainly, from a tourism point of view ... so yes, it does matter from a financial point of view.’

But a further reason resonates with Wasserman and Rao’s ethical perspective on glocalization – a nuanced, two-way relationship between global and local epistemologies and practices, rather than a one-way traffic from the centre to the periphery.

‘It matters to a community ... it should matter to the people in a bigger area that others are either doing a good job or having problems, shouldn’t it?’

**Conclusions**
This project set out to interrogate processes of glocalization in the context of the (re)invention of ‘hyper-local’ journalism; negotiations over collaborative media-making by journalist and community, and how hyper-local public spheres might interact with global media platforms to support and sustain that community. It discovered a geographically isolated, but widely networked and connected community, keen to know what was happening within its milieu, aware of gaps in that knowledge and keen to extend its networks and to engage regionally, nationally, globally in multiple dimensions. Market Town community recognised the potential of a hyper local news site to position its members advantageously within this glocality in economic and cultural trajectories and in terms of the circulation within the community of news such as births, marriages and deaths, which are critically important to maintaining and sustaining a sense of community and demonstrating relationships of care and concern between members of that community.

This particular hyper local site was set up by Media Company to meet County Council’s wishes to engage with and ‘establish more sustainable’ communities, and to advantage itself commercially. But the site did not in the end empower or engage the community and this can be seen in part to result from its top-down introduction and lack of initial engagement and a clear appreciation of this community’s expectations from such a site. The proposal sought to, in Myles’s phrase, put ‘the networks more thoroughly in the hands of the community of use’. Media Company’s journalists, were both supportive of and enthusiastic about the project but were unable to deliver the ‘liquid’ engagement that would encourage those monitorial citizens to develop the trusted relationships with journalism that they valued. They recognise that this was in part because of a lack of resources, but it was also part because of the manner in which the sites were conceived and their architecture constrained by County Council’s perceived needs. Media Company’s lack of engagement with Market Town community prevented it recognising what its members identified in this study: their need to engage in - and be more visible within - global, networked communicative spheres, as well as those which sustained and supported their relationships which were more readily identified with the place where they lived.

Further research is needed to interrogate the role in emerging glocalities of more entrepreneurial models of hyper local news sites and the nature and extent of the use of such sites by less isolated and by urban communities. But findings in this study suggest that the ‘one-way traffic from centre to periphery’ and the emphasis on the hyper-local perspective and neglect of global perspectives and visibilities tend to reinforce, rather than ameliorate, the community’s isolation. However, these obstacles to ‘the interpenetration of the global and the local’, could begin to be addressed in this instance by changing the architecture of the sites in question from a series linked individually and discretely to a single hub, into an interconnected matrix which could offer a communicative
environment more supportive of the glocalized networks and interactions in multiple trajectories which this community seeks.
Bibliography


