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Does Ownership Matter? Localism, Content, and the Federal Communications Commission


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Abstract

This study examines the impact of ownership structure on localism research (see FCC, 2004 and the Local Telecommunications Act of 2007). The unit of analysis is ownership only (station-level) and part of examining ownership profiles positively affected local content. Market level factors that indicated more

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consolidation negatively affected the proportion of local news presented in the entire designated market area.

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Notes

¹Source: Nielsen Media Research. There are 210 designated market areas (DMAs) in the United States. The number of television households in the DMA determines DMA rank. There were approximately 106.7 million TV households in the United States in 2002.

²The specification of whether a story was local or not local was central to the research question. It formed the dependent variable for the regression equations. Therefore, it was absolutely necessary that we were consistent in its specification. Our definition of local was very straightforward: (a) The story had to take place within the designated market area (DMA), and (b) the story had to be seen as “local” by the average viewer in the market. The first part of the definition (the “location” criterion) was readily verifiable, and it was the main criterion for the local-non-local decision. For stories that took place in the core city or any of the larger cities or towns in the DMA, their location was easily identified. For those stories that took place in smaller towns or areas in the DMA where the local-non-local factor was not immediately clear, we consulted maps of the DMA. To make sure that we properly specified the location as local or non-local, we downloaded maps of each DMA with the delineation of all of the counties. Then, we entered the names of the counties in the Google™ search engine to determine if the

location was an objective measure. Therefore, it was possible that the local-non-local decision was not central to the research question. However, we believe that this problem is unlikely to have been

^aAll v

^bDMAs w

*p = .05

*p = .05



**p = .01.

³All of the independent variables were examined for collinearity using the tolerance value and the variance inflation factor. None was found to be collinear. Further, only two of the days on which the broadcasts were presented were statistically significantly associated with the amount of local news, but the effect (negative) was very small at less than 1%.

*p = .05.

⁴Three variables that appeared in the station-level equation (No. of markets in which owner owns radio stations, No. of TV stations owned by owner, and No. of radio stations owned by owner of TV station) were removed from this analysis because they were highly collinear with each other, with variance inflation factor scores between 5.4 and 14.2.

*p = .05.

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