A Better News Organization: Can nonprofits improve on the commercial news organizations from which they arose?

By

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Abstract

This dissertation focuses on the provision of public affairs journalism by nonprofit news organizations. Specifically, I develop the idea that public affairs journalism throughout much of the 20th century was a byproduct of commercial journalism, enabled by subsidies that have since eroded. Today, a new subsidy is arising: philanthropic funding flowing to news organizations that are being founded by former mainstream journalists concerned by a perceived erosion of public affairs journalism. I employ the theory of strategic action fields[1] to situate these news organizations against the other fields that together comprise the field of journalism, and ask how these organizations are different. To address this question, I conducted ethnographic work at three nonprofit news organizations: the Center for Public Integrity, the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism, and MinnPost. Unlike many journalistic reform movements, these organizations are not focused on challenging norms and practices of traditional journalism; rather, they aim to bring back the investigative, public-interest oriented journalism that they perceive has long been a mainstay of traditional news organizations, and which they say has eroded. Their revenue is connected to their ability to help democracy, rather than coming from the sale of access to content; this gives them an incentive to strive for as broad a readership as possible, rather than walling off their stories from those who don't pay. As a result, I found that they make explicit a long-standing but unacknowledged newsroom behavior, one that I call "news sharing." I observed four major variants of news sharing in the newsrooms I studied: collaboration, sharing through distribution, being mentioned and offering commentary. The organizations engaged in these behaviors with the goal of

[1] Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*.

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achieving "field repair" [2] – that is, improving the journalistic institution from within both by producing quality journalism and by creating infrastructures that encourage other organizations produce this kind of journalism. The economic crisis in journalism and the rise of a collaborative environment on the internet have helped make these behaviors ever more common.

[2] Graves and Konieczna, "Sharing the News: Specialization and Symbiosis in the Emerging Media Ecosystem."

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That initial project was eventually folded into this academic one, and benefitted from the guidance of each of my committee members: Lewis Friedland, my advisor; Sue Robinson; Lucas Graves; Robert Freeland; and Phil Napoli. I am grateful for a fellowship from my department and a Mellon-Wisconsin summer fellowship, both of which allowed me to push aside other commitments and focus on writing. This project, of course, would never have gotten off the ground if not for those journalists and others in the newsrooms of the Center for Public Integrity, the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism, and MinnPost, who graciously allowed me into their newsrooms and shared with me insights about their work. In particular, the leaders of those organizations, Bill Buzenberg, Andy Hall and Joel Kramer were endlessly supportive of this project.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation is about public affairs journalism – that kind of journalism that provides information that is essential for democracy to function. It is common knowledge that this kind of journalism is, in the 21st century, in decline to the point of being endangered.[3] This work focuses on the response to this decline by a particular group of people: journalists who have been leaving commercial journalism because of the decline in public affairs reporting, taking with them the belief that the market is not able to adequately produce that kind of journalism, and creating a particular type of nonprofit news organization that they hope will help fill that gap. The major questions I address are how these organizations differ from the commercial journalism from which they arose, and whether and how those differences enable them to produce public affairs journalism while the commercial media increasingly struggles to do so. In an attempt to address these questions, I examine the motivations behind the journalistic reform movement that led to nonprofit journalism, and the ways in which those motivations are being translated into an emergent set of journalistic practices – practices that, as we'll see, create a tension between these nonprofits and the commercial journalism from which they arose, distancing the two groups while at the same time tying them together. In essence, this dissertation is an examination of a set of emergent practices, which I call news sharing, that arose as a result of the particular goals of journalists who left commercial journalism to create what they hoped would be a new journalistic institution more responsive to the needs of democracy.

[3] See, e.g., McChesney and Nichols, *The Death and Life of American Journalism*.

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In the remainder of this introductory chapter, I introduce the idea of public affairs journalism – the kind of journalism necessary for democracy – and explain why that forms the focus of my work. I examine what has been a significant decline in the production of that kind of journalism, and explain why some believe that nonprofit news organizations can offer some remedy for that decline and why I choose to focus on a particular type of nonprofit news organizations. I examine the state of such nonprofits and they way in which they rely on philanthropy, and discuss some of the concerns around the structure they have created to produce journalism.

What is public affairs journalism?

Plenty of studies tell us that journalism can affect the nature of democracy. One group of researchers found that the more informed people were, the less corrupt were their politicians – both across countries and across states in the U.S.[4] – and another concluded that areas of Los Angeles that were not covered by a newspaper had lower rates of voter turnout.[5] An examination of political participation from 1869 to 2004[6] found that one additional newspaper increased local turnout at presidential and congressional elections by 0.3 percentage points. Similarly, following the closure of the *Cincinnati Post*, a paper with a circulation of just 27,000 by the time it was shuttered in 2007, voter turnout dropped, fewer candidates stood for election, and more incumbents were elected.[7]

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[4] Adserà, Boix, and Payne, "Are You Being Served?"

[5] Filla and Johnson, "Local News Outlets and Political Participation."

[6] Gentzkow, Shapiro, and Sinkinson, "The Effect of Newspaper Entry and Exit on Electoral Politics."

[7] Schulhofer-Wohl and Garrido, Do Newspapers Matter?.

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Scholars, journalists, audience members and citizens have a variety of expectations from journalism. Merritt and McCombs, for instance, argue that for democracy to work – that is, for people to engage in social issues with the aim of solving them – society needs a body of information and a forum in which to discuss that information – and that it is incumbent upon journalists to help provide that.[8] Journalists and scholars often talk about "hard news" as that part of journalism that is desirable. For instance, the 2004 edition of Louisiana State University's annual Breaux Symposium focused on news in the public interest, and the goal of the meeting was to promote the production of hard news;[9] similarly, one study of the *Times-Picayune* used the amount of hard news as a metric of quality.[10] Defining "hard" and "soft" can be complex and subjective (this is in fact one of the criticisms leveled by *Times-Picayune* management against the study, which found that after converging the paper and digital versions of the newspaper, the organization produced significantly less hard news). Instead of using that hard-to-define metric, I choose instead in this project to focus on the idea of "public affairs journalism," which I define as that type of journalism that is necessary for democracy to function. This is, of course, hardly an operationalized definition. Since, however, the focus of this particular study is on journalistic *practice* rather than content, I do not examine news stories to determine whether or not they serve democracy; instead, I focus on my informants'

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[8] Merritt and McCombs, The Two W's of Journalism: The Why and What of Public Affairs Reporting.

[9] The Breaux Symposium: News in the Public Interest -- a Free and Subsidized Press.

[10] Mayer and Media Analysis Class, The Times-Picayune Before and After Digital Decision 2012.

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understanding about what kinds of journalism are important to democracy, and examine the ways in which they go about creating those kinds of journalism.[11]

Public affairs journalism in 2014

Problems with the financial model for commercial journalism in the United States are by now old news, though the most recent State of the News Media report from the Project for Excellence in Journalism, in particular, offers some reasons for hope. Online organizations are having an ever-larger impact while entrepreneurs and philanthropists continue to show interest, and young people in particular are accessing growing amounts of journalism online. The report found that in the United States, 5,000 people were employed at 500 digital news outlets – the first such count ever done.[12] And there are some reasons for optimism in traditional journalism as well. Newspaper circulation revenue remained steady in 2012, as it has for 20 years (although this is partly as a result of the fact that some newspapers have been increasing subscription costs and thus sacrificing readership volume), and traffic to news websites was increasing – 7.2% in 2012 to the top 25 news sites.[13] For the first time since the financial crisis in journalism became acute in 2007, experiments in new revenue streams – particularly charging for online content – were showing signs of stabilizing revenue, share prices were rising, and advertisers were returning, at least to some degree. The authors of the 2014 report

[11] Of course, in terms of journalism's impact on democracy, content matters, not just newsroom practices, as argued for instance by Carpenter ("A Study of Content Diversity in Online Citizen Journalism and Online Newspaper Articles."). This study, focused as it is on practice, should be followed by a study of content produced by nonprofit news organizations. Indeed, I have begun to examine content at nonprofit news organizations, using questions raised by my earlier ethnographic work (Konieczna, 2013).

[12] Pew Research Center's Journalism Project, State of the News Media 2014.

[13] Pew Research Center's Journalism Project, State of the News Media 2013.

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acknowledge, though, that what they see as hope is in fact tiny pinpricks given the scale of the problem; but, they argue, it could all add up to the beginnings of a groundswell of change.

Still, the big picture remains grim. The vast majority of original reporting continues to come from the newspaper industry, where jobs and revenue remain insecure. The number of professional jobs in newsrooms shrunk another 6.4% in 2012, and that decline likely continued in 2013.[14] In all, there were 30% fewer newsroom employees in the U.S. in 2012 than there were in 2000,[15] and the industry was almost half the size it had been at its peak. In 2012, 40% of content on local television was weather and traffic. CNN, the original 24/7 news channel, cut the length of its news packages in half between 2007 and 2012. Revenue brought in by newspapers and magazines has continued to slide, and advertising revenue in particular was in trouble in 2012, with digital advertising revenue going up $1 for every $16 loss in print advertising revenue, and overall newspaper advertising revenue at 60% of what it was 10 years ago. "Controlling costs, while trying to minimize damage to news reporting and other essential functions, remained a critical component of managing newspapers for profitability in 2012," the 2013 report summarized. And, we know from past work that the difficulties are not evenly spread across all genres of journalism. As Downie and Schudson wrote in their seminal report: "What is under threat is independent reporting that provides information, investigation, analysis, and community knowledge, particularly in the coverage of local affairs." [16]

[14] Pew Research Center's Journalism Project, State of the News Media 2014.

[15] Pew Research Center's Journalism Project, State of the News Media 2013.

[16] Downie and Schudson, The Reconstruction of American Journalism.

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It is harder to look beyond industry metrics and determine the impact of the financial crisis and other changes on the quality and quantity of news available, though several studies attempt to do so. In terms of sheer quantity, one study of the news system in Baltimore found that in 2009, the *Baltimore Sun* produced 32% fewer stories than it had in 1999, and 73% fewer than in 1991.[17] That same study examined a single week of reporting in 2009 and found that newspapers in the Baltimore area produced a third as many stories about budget cuts as they had in a similar political climate in 1991, with the *Sun* producing a fifth as many. An examination of election reporting around the country[18] found 33% less coverage – by proportion of the news hole allocated – about the 2012 election compared to the 2008 election. (The report concedes that a large part of this could be attributable to the fact that in 2008, both parties were embroiled in complex nomination battles, whereas in 2012, there was no Democratic primary.) Another study, the American Journalism Review's Project on the State of the American Newspaper, tracked the number of reporters tasked with full-time coverage of particular government agencies five times between 1999 and 2010.[19] The 2010 report found that coverage of nearly every agency examined was lower than it had been in 2003, with the exception of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, which went from no reporters to two, and the additional possible exception of those agencies for which data was not available. The drops were often significant – from 23 to 10 reporters covering the Department of Defense, for instance.

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[17] Project for Excellence in Journalism, How News Happens: A Study of the News Ecosystem of One American City.

[18] Pew Research, "This Time Around, Less News from the Campaign."

[19] Enda, "Abandoned Agencies."

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A few other studies have tried to measure the quantity of particular (desirable) types of journalism, often "hard news" and often in the context of changes happening as newspapers converge their print production with digital. Mayer and her class of undergraduates at Tulane University[20] examined content produced by the *Times-Picayune* before and after its decision, in 2012, to focus on digital – which took the paper from a traditional seven-day-a-week operation to one that printed and home-delivered a broadsheet three times a week, produced a tabloid three times a week that was available only in stores, and generated a steady stream of content for the website, cellphone and iPad. That study operationalized quality as the number of hard news stories and the number of sources in each story, the latter on the premise that stories with fewer sources were more quickly put together. The students found that, after convergence, there was less hard news on the digital platforms, especially on the iPad, where 83% of homepage stories focused on sports or entertainment, and fewer sources per story – in stories prepared for digital platforms as well as in print stories. Newsroom managers raised concerns about the study, some of which may be valid; in any case, its findings, though troubling, are the result of a single study of a single newspaper.

Another study[21] also examined the effects of convergence, in this case at the *Tampa Tribune*, and followed an earlier study's definition of quality to do so. Huang et al. used the following as criteria of good journalism, operationalizing all but the last point, which

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[20] Mayer and Media Analysis Class, The Times-Picayune Before and After Digital Decision 2012.

[21] Huang et al., "Converged Journalism and Quality."

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they dropped because they said it was hard to operationalize, and finding that convergence had no discernible impact on quality:[22]

- Covering the whole community;
- Being significant and informative;
- Demonstrating enterprise and courage;
- Being fair, balanced and accurate;
- Being authoritative; and
- Being highly local.

Of course, there is no inherent reason for which it should be possible to define or measure journalistic quality in the first place – an argument supported by noted media economist Robert Picard, who argues that it is "nearly impossible" to express what leads to journalistic quality. "As a result, quality tends to be defined not by its presence but its absence and observers are in the position of saying 'we can't define good quality, but we know bad quality when we see it.' "[23] Picard adds that this difficulty is especially concerning because journalistic quality is not just about providing a valuable product to consumers; instead, quality is key to achieving the goals we outline for journalism in a democratic society.[24] As such, he argues for measuring quality by evaluating journalistic practices, which, he says, makes sense because journalism is not a product or service, but

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[22] They follow criteria developed by a panel of 14 local television news professionals assembled in the development of a Pew Research Center report ("Does Ownership Matter in Local Television News?".).

[23] Picard, "Measuring Quality by Journalistic Activity," 97.

[24] Picard, "Measuring Quality by Journalistic Activity."

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rather "the mental activity of journalists that produces value in the forms of news, features, commentary, photos, and entertainment." [25]

As for what readers think of the changes occurring in mainstream journalism, 31% of respondents to a recent study[26] reported leaving a particular news outlet because it no longer provided the information they were looking for; and 61% said had they noticed a decline in story quality, compared to 24% reporting a decline in the number of stories.

An unclear picture emerges from all these studies: inconsistent results about the changes in journalism produced by inconsistent measures of quality. The studies use an eclectic collection of questions, based on a variety of definitions and operationalizations, and not surprisingly find an inconsistent assortment of answers. Overall, though, the data seems to point to the fact as the industry suffers financially, those challenges are reflected in the amount of reporting, as well as its depth, and that readers are picking up on the slide. And while new ways of doing things may be on the rise, those changes have yet to make a large dent in the overall trajectory of decline.

Why nonprofits?

The crisis in journalism has a variety of causes and, thus, will likely require a number of solutions. Certainly for the moment, in the United States at least, we have seen a proliferation of experiments, and suggestions and ideas have been flowing from scholars, pundits and journalists over many years, ever more rapidly as the crisis has become more

[25] Ibid., 100.

[26] Enda and Mitchell, Americans Show Signs of Leaving a News Outlet, Citing Less Information | State of the Media.

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apparent and entrenched. It is not within the scope of this project to evaluate or even examine all the possible solutions; instead, I will explain here why I am studying news nonprofits as one part of the solution.[27]

Commercial news organizations, while slow to evolve, have certainly not been blind to changes in the information ecology that have led to an erosion of support for journalism, and especially public affairs journalism. Although commercial journalism operates with a profit imperative, it is also mission driven. Journalists and editors care about more than just the bottom line. News organizations have been experimenting with change in the face of crisis, looking for a new structure to enable them to continue producing quality journalism. Experiments have ranged from new editorial structures to funding models, perhaps the most prominent of which is the porous paywall. Newspaper Next represents one of the most institutionalized and programmatic of solutions,[28] based on the work of Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen, who explained why legacy firms have difficulty adapting to changes in technology or their broader environment[29] and whose ideas were adapted by the American Press Institute to create a plan to revitalize the news industry by diversifying the things that news organizations do.[30]

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[27] Accepting this prognosis offered by Shirky: "No one experiment is going to replace what we are now losing with the demise of news on paper, but over time, the collection of new experiments that do work might give us the journalism we need" (Shirky, "Newspapers and Thinking the Unthinkable.").

[28] The second report on the project (Gray, *Making the Leap Beyond "Newspaper Companies."*) includes case studies from 24 newspapers and seven newspaper companies that adopted some Newspaper Next principles.

[29] Christensen, The Innovator's Dilemma.

[30] American Press Institute, Blueprint for Transformation.

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These attempts at change on the part of commercial journalism assume that a solution can come from within the market structure; there are, however, serious arguments suggesting that the market simply cannot adequately produce public affairs journalism. For instance, the market incentivizes news organizations to exert ownership over their content because it serves as a source of revenue – an incentive *not necessarily* aligned with the goals of producing good journalism. In Chapter 2, I describe in detail the economic arguments that conclude that the market cannot produce adequate amounts of public affairs journalism. I also examine the ways in which public affairs journalism was insulated from the market throughout much of the 20th century in the United States, and how those insulating features have dissolved since. These arguments begin to suggest that non-market solutions to the crisis are key to the continued production of public affairs journalism.

The environment surrounding the crisis in journalism is of course one of rapid change and thus a rich and fertile space for new opportunities, a situation that has allowed for a proliferation of alternatives to commercial journalism, both by organizations operating in the marketplace and those operating outside of it. Suggested solutions have ranged from volunteer-driven, citizen journalism initiatives to the creation of a "fund for local news" supported by fees the FCC would get from telecom users, broadcast licensees, or internet service providers.[31] This dissertation focuses on the piece of the solution proffered by one type of nonprofit news organization – self-standing, professional nonprofit newsrooms founded by professional journalism frustrated with the state of commercially produced

[31] Downie and Schudson, The Reconstruction of American Journalism.

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public affairs journalism.[32] These organizations are particularly interesting because, as I will describe in Chapter 2, they constitute a response to the crisis by creating a separate strategic action field[33] of nonprofit journalism, a field that acts in support of but is always in tension with other forms journalism – particularly commercial journalism. This tension is the focus of this dissertation. Furthermore, while the internet has enabled a proliferation of volunteer and loosely constituted news organizations, my research focuses on professional news organizations because of the important function the institution of journalism plays in society. Specifically, the act of reporting regularly on social institutions, such as the school district or city hall or assorted subcommittees – those institutions key to democracy – relies on news as an institution, and nonprofit news organizations represent a major non-market, institutional option for a solution to the crisis in journalism.

Other types of nonprofit news organization

As I described above, this project focuses on one type of nonprofit news organization: the kind that arose in response to perceived gaps in mainstream journalism, and that employs professional journalists. There exist, however, plenty of other types of nonprofit news organizations in the United States, and nonprofit news organizations are some of the oldest news organizations in the country. The differences among them result from their histories and the problems each was created to solve.

[32] As I show in Chart 1.1, below, most of these organizations have been founded since the crisis in mainstream journalism became acute; some, though, such as the Center for Public Integrity, are older. What connects them is not whether they were founded in response to this most recent crisis, but rather the fact that they were founded to fill a perceived gap left by mainstream journalism.

[33] Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*.

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The Associated Press may be the first nonprofit news organization ever founded, created in 1846 by five newspapers in New York to split the cost of transmitting news of the Mexican-American war. In the early days of radio in the 1920s, colleges and universities ran non-commercial stations offering educational programming. The Public Broadcasting Service was created in 1969, and National Public Radio in 1970. Other nationwide public radio organizations include Public Radio International, American Public Media and Pacifica Radio. In 1967, Congress created the nonprofit Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which covers 15 to 20% of the cost of running public broadcasting stations. Pacifica Radio is a network of non-commercial radio stations funded, like many of non-commercial news organizations in the U.S., in large part by audience donations and underwriting. Public access television is the television equivalent of community radio, often managed by nonprofits and giving access to members of the community.

There also exists a group of nonprofit newspapers in the United States owned by trusts, foundations or schools trying to maintain local ownership and independence.[34] The most prominent of these are the *Christian Science Monitor*, funded by but independent from the First Church of Christ, Scientist; and the *Tampa Bay Times*, formerly the *St. Petersburg Times*, owned by the nonprofit Poynter Institute – an arrangement that was for a long time unique. Less prominent is the *New Hampshire Union Leader*, which was donated to a school of communication at a nearby university when the owner died in 2000. The newspaper's publisher explained in court proceedings in 2003 that if the owner had not been able to donate the stock to the school, the inheritance tax would have been

[34] Dunlap, "A Study of Nonprofit Ownership of News Media."

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so high that the newspaper would have to be sold to a national chain.[35] Similarly, *The Day* of New London, Conn., one of the first newspapers with successful nonprofit ownership, was turned over to a trust in the will of the newspaper's founder at his death in 1939. That will stipulated that the profits from the newspaper should be redistributed to the community.[36]

Another response to the crisis in journalism and the increasing space for niche information offered by the internet is the growth of subject-specific, foundation-funded news nonprofits, such as Kaiser Health News, Inside Climate News – which won a Pulitzer for its reporting – and InsideScience.org, which is unusual in that it is supported by the American Institute of Physics, rather than a foundation.

Organizations such as the Twin Cities Daily Planet work to increase voice and access, and Madison Commons has worked to create a place where different aspects of the community could intersect[37] – with both relying on citizen journalists to report on their communities. This type of organization helps broaden the number and type of people who have a voice, as well as the diversity of issues and viewpoints available to readers.

There also exists a group of organizations that eschew easy definition, perhaps because they have evolved over time.[38] The Better Government Association, for instance, was founded in 1923 to fight corruption in municipal politics in Chicago under the belief that

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Robinson et al., "Madison Commons 2.0: A Platform for Tomorrow's Civic and Citizen Journalism."

[38] Indeed, this is the case with the Center for Public Integrity, one of the cases at the heart of this dissertation. I describe that organization's evolution from research to news organization in detail in Chapter 5.

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"public officials under close scrutiny would serve the public better; that the best voter was an informed one and the best citizen was an involved one." [39] Initially, BGA worked on voter education, lobbied for better legislation – petitioning Congress to investigate corruption in Chicago in the 1920s[40] – and hired largely former bureaucrats to conduct its own investigations into corruption in municipal and state politics.[41] It wasn't until the 1960s, with the launch of a program called "Operation Watchdog," that BGA first partnered with a journalist, a reporter at the *Chicago Tribune* who was investigating corruption in municipal sewage processing. The group continues to operate today, conducting its own investigations and partnering with commercial news organizations. Today it is sometimes referred to as a "non-profit, non-partisan group," [42] a "government watchdog group," [43] and "a nonprofit consumer watchdog group that frequently works with the news organizations investigating government corruption." [44] Although it is registered under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue code – as are the nonprofits examined in this project – and its investigative unit partners with mainstream news organizations, it is not actively involved in the organizational structures of the nonprofit news organizations studied here, not joining the Investigative News Network, and having few journalists on its board of directors, even though today, many of its employees are former commercial journalists.

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[39] "BGA: History."

[40] "Plan Campaign in Chicago."

[41] King, "Private Inquiry Group Stirs Both Parties in Illinois."

[42] "Patronage Politics Alive and Well."

[43] Placek, "Watchdogs Ask Quinn to Delay Signature."

[44] Schwartz, "CBS Station Challenges ABC's '20 20' Arson Report."

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Apart from self-identifying as members of a the same group, the thing that differentiates the organizations I am studying is that they emerged out of commercial journalism, being founded by traditional journalists hoping to solve a perceived problem in commercial journalism. Unlike many news reformers, founders of these nonprofit news organizations are not focused on fixing the processes and values of commercial journalism; instead, they tend to believe that those processes and values are not being applied sufficiently stringently – at least partly as a result of the revenue problems created by the crisis in journalism. Thus, the goal of the founders of these nonprofits is to create institutions that allow for the production of quality public affairs journalism in a way in which, often, they perceive that it was produced throughout the 20th century – a time during which, as I will explain in Chapter 2, public affairs journalism in commercial news organizations was at least partly insulated from the market. In other words, they have created individual organizations, which over time have coalesced into a movement, that focus on producing the kind of journalism that market-oriented organizations were once able to produce, but no longer are. For these nonprofits, their insulation from the market differentiates them from traditional commercial journalism; their privileging of the norms of commercial journalism ties them to the institution of journalism. This means that they hold on to some norms of commercial journalism, while figuring out how to bend them into a different shape.

How nonprofits arose from commercial journalism

The organizations that are the focus of this dissertation are professional news organizations that emerged from commercial journalism, founded by former commercial journalists frustrated with what they perceived as shortcomings in the production of

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public affairs journalism within commercial news organizations, employing professional journalists and working to improve democracy from within the traditional journalistic institution. These organizations employ largely the same micro norms as commercial journalism does – the same news values, the same idea of what makes a news story, the same understanding of sources and of what journalism is for. But, as I describe in Chapter 2, their founders and employees harken back to a perceived golden age of journalism during which, they argue, news organizations invested in and produced high-quality public affairs journalism, and they are working to create a news institution and structure that they hope will allow them to do that.[45]

Early organizations of this type were the Center for Investigative Reporting in California, founded in 1977, and the Center for Public Integrity, founded in Washington, D.C., in 1989. CIR was started by three investigative journalists who would hire out their skills to commercial news organizations, collecting fees from their clients and funding from foundations. Daniel Weir, a founder and early executive director, was aware of the problematic economics of investigative reporting (which I discuss in detail in Chapter 2) from the start. He told the *New York Times* that "An investigative reporter can't afford to do all his research alone. The economics of investigative reporting are so bad that even

[45] Scholars disagree on whether there ever existed a golden age of journalism. In discussing the changes in the news organizations he studied over 25 years, Gans writes of the perception that the situation was much worse in 2004 than it was in 1979 when the first edition of "Deciding What's News" was published. "Golden ages are nostalgic constructs created in a pessimistic present and offer more insight about that present than about the past. The golden age communicates mainly the journalists' feeling that their profession is currently in decline and suffering from collective downward mobility" (*Deciding What's News*, 2004, xvi.). Schudson, similarly, looks at criticisms made by Lippmann and Mencken in the 1920s and points out that these should suggest to us not to fall for nostalgic memories of supposed past golden ages ("Political Observatories, Databases & News in the Emerging Ecology of Public Information."). Even so, it is certainly true that what was a steady and robust stream of funding through a large part of the 20th century has all but dried up, and that drastic change, in technology and social structures, has made it hard for news organizations to invest in quality content.

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profitable daily papers are reluctant to get involved. Here, we sort of specialize – politics, environment, business – but we help each other on projects." [46] CIR staff would initiate stories, but were also available to be called in to do extra reporting or research, sometimes contracting their skills out to a commercial news organization for a year at a time. In its first story about CIR, the *New York Times* referred to it as a "journalists' collective" [47] that operated on $300,000 a year (almost $700,000 in 2013 dollars) from fees, grants and royalties and explained that it moved to collaboration with television as a way of creating a new revenue stream when foundation money began to dry up. The Center for Investigative Reporting, like the Better Government Association, operated largely in its own space for some time; unlike BGA, CIR has always been rooted in professional journalism. Also unlike BGA, CIR has recently built connections with the burgeoning group of nonprofit news organizations similar to it, working to constitute the field of those nonprofits and helping to write the statement that in 2009 created the Investigative News Network, which today acts as something of a professional association for nonprofit news organizations.

The Center for Public Integrity plays two roles in this dissertation. It is one of the three cases of nonprofit newsrooms that I examine in this work and, as such, I have much to say about it in subsequent chapters. At the same time, it represents an early foray into nonprofit journalism, in a sense acting as a precursor to the three cases I examine here – even though it itself, in its more modern form, is one of those cases. Its history and its evolution have helped form the field of self-standing, nonprofit investigative journalism

[46] Quoted in Prial, "Coast Freelance Unit Thrives on Reporting for TV."

[47] Ibid.

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centers. It is in that capacity that I am discussing the organization, along with CIR, in this chapter. In subsequent chapters I discuss details of how it works today and how it fits into the evolving world of nonprofit journalistic centers. CPI was founded by Charles Lewis, a former ABC News investigative reporter and a producer of 60 Minutes, who left journalism to start the center in 1989 out of a frustration that existing news organizations weren't asking hard questions. At that time, the center saw itself as an organization conducting investigations – though not necessarily journalistic ones – into important and interesting topics. In its first report, it described itself as "…a new educational, non-profit organization examining public service and ethics-related issues in Washington, with a unique approach combining the substantive study of government with in-depth reporting." [48] In those days, CPI conducted investigations that took months or a year or more, and published the results in reports – sometimes hundreds of pages long – that center staff hoped would prompt stories in the news media.

Today, as a result of changes in the publishing environment generally and journalism specifically, CPI has re-conceptualized itself as a news organization. I discuss this process in detail in Chapter 5, but for the moment the important point is that CPI evolved from a social scientific organization that did investigations and provided raw reports to a journalistic organization in line with the burgeoning group of nonprofit news organizations that came together in 2009 to create the Investigative News Network (details below), a group of organizations that see themselves as having a common identity that includes evolving out of the two original centers, CPI and CIR. Some members of this group are self-standing investigative centers like CPI, while others act more like

[48] Lewis, America's Frontline Trade Officials.

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online newspapers, creating a bundled package of news they publish regularly. As I observed the operations of these organizations, these distinctions turned out to be highly important. The most important thing constituting this group of organizations, though, is that they emerged from commercial journalism as a result of perceived issues in that journalism.

Philanthropy

Philanthropy – both from individuals and from foundations – is an essential and key player in the world of these nonprofit news organizations. It offers much-needed financial support for these organizations – supporting them but also legitimizing the field – but is also key in the way in which it creates demand for quality public affairs journalism and contributes to shaping the field, perhaps most significantly by encouraging the adoption of impact-based measures increasingly common in the foundation world in general, bringing a kind of market logic to the nonprofits studied here. Indeed, in his examination of contributions made by the Knight Foundation, discussed in greater detail below, to the field of journalism, Seth Lewis argues that influential institutions such as the Knight Foundation have the capacity to alter the boundaries of a profession, "altogether creating the space and providing the capital for innovation to flourish." [49] While these issues are not at the heart of this dissertation, the organizations studied here would exist in a much different form, or not at all, if not for foundations.[50] In this section I offer a descriptive

[49] Lewis, "Journalism Innovation and the Ethic of Participation: A Case Study of the Knight Foundation and Its News Challenge," 182.

[50] One major concern, for instance, is that if foundations were to change their interests and stop funding journalism, the entire sector would vanish. An instructive example comes from civic journalism, which was robust while supported by the Pew Foundation, and evaporated when that foundation told news organizations it was time for them to fund it themselves.

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overview of foundation funding of journalism in the United States; some of the other questions associated with foundation funding and outlined above are discussed in the concluding chapter, where they can be informed by the data gathered for this dissertation.

Foundation funding for journalism in the United States has a long history, becoming prominent with the Rockefeller Foundation's funding of communication research after the outbreak of the Second World War, and with the Ford Foundation's involvement in creating the American educational television system in 1952, which ultimately evolved into the Public Broadcasting System and continues to be heavily supported by Ford.[51] Any analysis of funding specifically for the modern, self-standing nonprofits studied here, though, must begin with the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, which is the largest funder of nonprofit journalism projects outside of public broadcasting. Unlike the majority of foundations supporting nonprofit news organizations, Knight's *primary* focus is on improving journalism and access to information, and engaging communities.[52] Between its founding in 1950 and 2006, the foundation had given out more than $1 billion, much of that to support journalistic endeavors.[53] Knight's most relevant contribution to the kind of work studied here is through its Institute for Interactive Journalism, also known as J-Lab, which has implemented various programs funding journalistic startups, including the Knight Community News Network, which offers training for citizen journalists; the New Voices Project, which offers grants for citizen startups; the Knight News Challenge, which funds projects that deliver local news and

[51] Note that while foundation involvement in public broadcasting is part of the context for funding of the type of organization studied here, it is not directly relevant, and thus will largely be left out of this analysis.

[52] "About the Foundation."

[53] "History."

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information using digital platforms; and the Knight Community Information Challenge, which offers grants to community foundations to help them provide information and help build community engagement. Through these initiatives, Knight gives more funding to journalism than any foundation. This is especially important given the fact that, unlike other foundations providing support for journalism, Knight's focus is on journalism, making it less likely than other foundations to move on to a different cause. Indeed, Seth Lewis describes Knight as "*the* leading nonprofit funder of journalism education, mid-career training, and (lately) innovative experiments and virtually all major news startups." [54]

Other prominent foundations funding journalism include the Ford Foundation, which was the second largest foundation, by assets, in the United States in 2007; and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, which has awarded grants to media organizations for more than 25 years, focusing in large part on funding public broadcasting documentaries.

Of course, critics are concerned about foundations' impact or potential impact on the nonprofits they support. One of the most prominent lines of criticism argues that the suggestion that there exists a "public interest" common to both journalism and foundations is problematic, suggests that we need to examine the instrumental aims behind foundation funding of journalism, and expresses concern about the fact that readers aren't always aware of the foundation support behind particular pieces of

[54] Lewis, "Journalism Innovation and the Ethic of Participation: A Case Study of the Knight Foundation and Its News Challenge," 182.

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journalism.[55] Nonprofit news, Browne argues, faces the same problems that commercially funded journalism does – serving hidden agendas and keeping close to ideologies permitted by the establishment – while augmenting those problems with its own, including encouraging journalists to chase the whims of funders, creating potential conflicts of interest, and subsidizing the very news organizations whose failures have led to the crisis in journalism in the first place.

More specifically, criticisms have arisen of CPI's relationship with advocacy groups. In one situation, the center collaborated with Television for the Environment, a documentary unit created by organizations including the World Wildlife Fund. *New York Times* reporter Andrew Revkin praised the series, which examined causes behind the devastation of Atlantic bluefin tuna, but drew attention to the collaborative effort behind it, writing: "The relationship of the television production to a United Nations agency and an environmental group can prompt questions about objectivity, but the package, over all, appears robust," [56] and added a comment from the World Wildlife Fund stating that the organization's involvement was limited to offering the kind of suggestions it does in any relationship with the media on any story. Another criticism centered on a series about cigarette smuggling, promoted by an advocacy organization called Tobacco Free Kids, which also helped organize funding for the series.[57]

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[55] Browne, "Foundation-Funded Journalism: Reasons to Be Wary of Charitable Support."

[56] Revkin, "Report Reveals Forces Destroying Atlantic Bluefin Tuna."

[57] Hagey, "CPI's Other Coordination with Advocacy Groups."

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Critical academic studies of the social impact of foundations are rare;[58] those who do engage in this kind of work, though, argue that foundations uphold the systems that create the injustices those foundations are working to correct,[59] that foundations represent "the new feudalism" by supplanting democracy,[60] and that they are a tool of globalization.[61] Arnove has argued that foundations such as Ford, Rockefeller and Carnegie "represent relatively unregulated and unaccountable concentrations of power and wealth that buy talent, promote causes, and, in effect, establish an agenda of what merits society's attention," [62] preventing, he argues, more radical change, and maintaining systems that benefit ruling classes and work against minorities.

All of these criticisms should be taken to heart when thinking about nonprofit news organizations. If we take seriously the argument that one of the functions of news organizations is to produce the type of journalism necessary for democracy, then we must examine any entity that is working to ensure the success of those organizations – be it foundations, the market, government, or any other source. What are the interests of those entities? What mechanisms do we have to encourage an alignment between those interests and the interests of democracy? How would we know if those interests did not line up, and what recourse would we have as a society if that were the case? Of course, any source of funding for journalism has the potential to be problematic. Indeed, one of the promising features of digital journalism is that it enables a variety of funding models

[58] "Note on This Special Issue of Critical Sociology."

[59] Arnove and Pinede, "Revisiting the 'Big Three' Foundations."

[60] Roelofs, "Foundations and Collaboration."

[61] Guilhot, "Reforming the World."

[62] Arnove, Philanthropy and Cultural Imperialism, 1.

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to exist, with nonprofits as just one piece of that broader ecology. Otherwise, though, this dissertation does not directly address these questions, though they remain of course ever present in the background when thinking about the viability and impact of a foundation-funded journalism on democracy.

Nonprofit news organizations in 2014

The Investigative News Network is the largest professional association of nonprofit news organizations in the United States. It was founded in 2009 by 24 nonprofit news publishers who got together to write the so-called Pocantico declaration,[63] which identified, perhaps for the first time, the existence of the field of self-standing nonprofit news organizations. I describe the significance of INN in more detail in Chapter 2, but for now, we can look to INN membership to better understand the state of nonprofit journalism. By early 2014, INN had 90 members around the United States. Chart 1.1, showing the birth of nonprofit news organizations over time, demonstrates that the 2000s saw a big jump in the number of news nonprofits being founded, as awareness of the crisis in journalism grew and as more and more examples of alternatives became available.

[63] "Pocantico Declaration."

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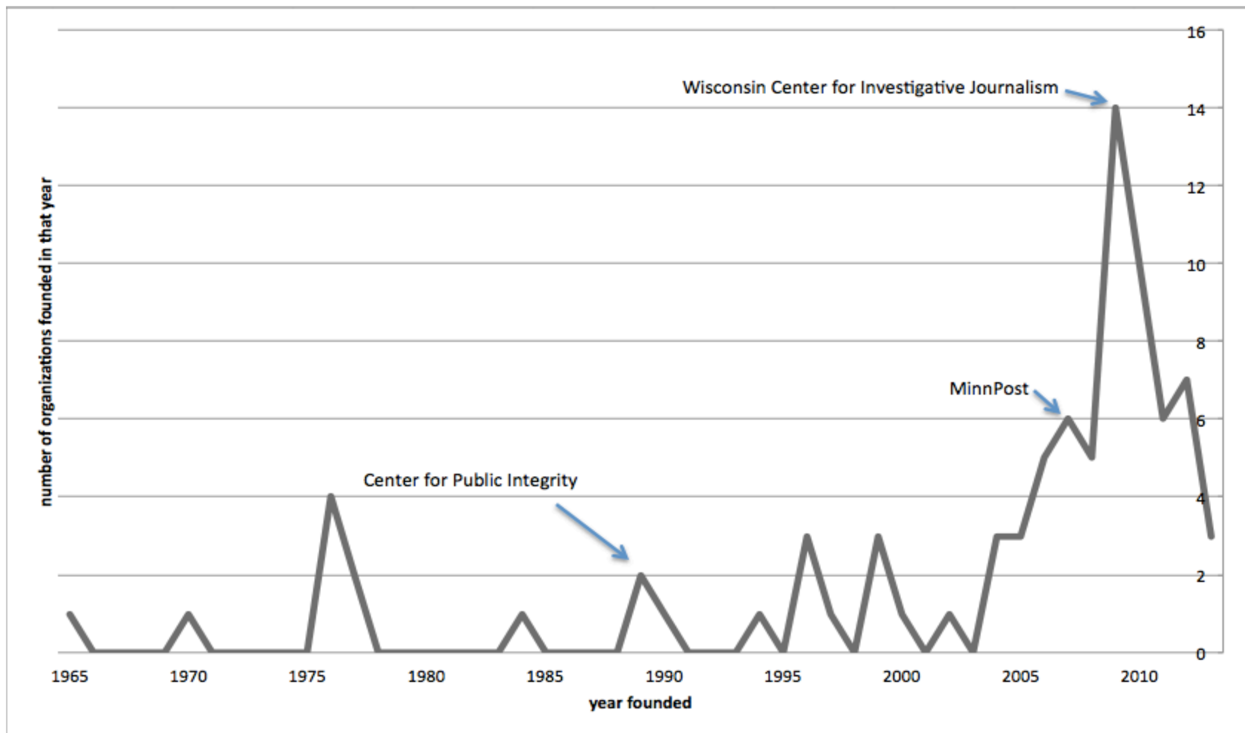
Chart 1.1: Births of INN members over time



(This data comes from INN's member directory, supplemented, where necessary, with information from the organizations' own websites.)

The State of the News Media report offers helpful indications of current trends, and simply the existence in the 2012 edition of the report of a section called "How Community News is Faring," [64] focused at least partly on nonprofit news organizations, shows that nonprofits have become recognized as a key part of the national news ecology. The report refers to the "emerging world of community online news, less than a decade old" – a category that includes but is not limited to nonprofits – arguing that this emerging world is maturing as seed grants run out and some organizations close, leaving a better sense of what's needed. Themes arising from interviews with leaders in the field suggest that revenue needs to come from a variety of sources as startup grants from national foundations expire; that journalistic skills themselves are not enough – technical

[64] Remez, How Community News Is Faring | State of the Media.

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capability and familiarity with business and fundraising are important; that more niche sites are coming; that journalism schools are becoming news providers; and, finally, that the future depends on increased networks and partnerships.

Several reports examining the state of nonprofit news organizations have found that while the number of organizations has been increasing quickly, and while there are reasons to be optimistic, many of the organizations rely heavily for funding on a small number of largely foundation sources, and report a lack of resources to deal with the business of sustaining themselves. "Amid the disruption of traditional local journalism in the United States, emerging nonprofit news organizations promise to fill important community information gaps – if they can sustain themselves," says one report.[65] Overall, news nonprofits (defined, in one case,[66] as "nonprofit organizations with modest-sized professional staffs that provide news online about important local civic issues in geographically defined communities") have a growing readership, up by 50% in 2011 over 2010, and continue to come up with new strategies to increase their audiences.[67]

The seven organizations examined in the Community Wealth Ventures study, though, report that they received more than 90% of their revenue from contributions, of which 57% was from foundations; 54% of organizations surveyed by another report[68] identified business, marketing and fundraising as the area of greatest staffing need – over editorial – and 55% said they were facing major challenges from increased competition for grant

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[65] Community Wealth Ventures, Getting Local: How Nonprofit News Ventures Seek Sustainability.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Pew Research Center, Nonprofit Journalism: A Growing but Fragile Part of the U.S. News System.

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money. Indeed, 61% of responding organizations said they began with a single startup grant representing at least a third of their original funding, and only 28% reported that the funder had agreed to renew that grant. Additionally, for at least half of the surveyed organizations, three-quarters of their income came from a single revenue stream, generally foundations. In other words, little revenue is coming from journalism, with the bulk instead coming from donations, often from a small number of funders, raising the risk of funding fatigue that comes with not have a diverse stream of revenue.

The Community Wealth Ventures report also attempted to count all the "digital nonprofit news outlets" founded since 1987, and came up with 172 such organizations, existing in all but nine states, many of them small – 78% with five or fewer paid employees and 26% with none – 21% generating less than $50,000 in revenue in 2011, and half producing 10 or fewer pieces of original content in the two weeks studied. Overall 81% of those responding to the survey (representatives of 93 of the 172 organizations identified) said they were somewhat or very confident that their organization would remain financially solvent for five years, though many identified that they were facing challenges in trying to diversify their revenue. That report concluded that most organizations are not trying to replicate or replace traditional news organizations, but are instead aiming to work in a niche, most commonly investigative journalism or focusing on government, public or foreign affairs.

Another key finding of the Pew report[69] is that only one-third of the 172 organizations surveyed were independent; the remainder were sponsored by another organization. Part

[69] Ibid.

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of the reason for this, according to the report, is the fact that the IRS has slowed down its approval of nonprofit status for news organizations, with some waiting years to be approved.[70] Indeed, a report by the FCC found that roadblocks presented by the IRS are putting the sector at risk, with some recommending the IRS create a new category specifically for nonprofit media and others arguing that the current rules simply need to be clarified.[71] A group of tax and journalism experts responded to the FCC report by recommending that the IRS modernize by shifting its focus from maintaining distinctions between nonprofits and for-profits rendered irrelevant by changes in communication technology, and ask instead whether a given news organization engages primarily in education that provides a benefit to its community, rather than advancing private interests, and whether it's managed as a nonprofit.[72] The IRS has yet to change course as a result of the dialogue.

Looking ahead

This dissertation focuses on the questions, described in greater detail in the next chapter, of whether and how the organizations studied here differ from commercial journalism. Specifically, I examine what norms and practices enable them to produce the kind of journalism that economic theory tells us cannot be supported by the marketplace. I study three organizations in particular, which I describe in much greater detail in Chapter 3: The Center for Public Integrity, a national and international self-standing news nonprofit

[70] Chittum, "Nonprofit News and the Tax Man."

[71] Waldman, "Information Needs of Communities."

[72] Nonprofit Media Working Group, The IRS and Nonprofit Media: Toward Creating a More Informed Public.

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in D.C. that publishes on its own website and gives content away to others to republish; MinnPost, a locally focused online newspaper in Minneapolis-St. Paul that distributes through its own website; and the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism, a state-wide, self-standing newsroom that distributes its content primarily through newspapers around the state.

I begin, in Chapter 2, by describing the theoretical basis for this work. I describe the decline of public affairs journalism and the way in which the organizations studied here position themselves relative to that decline. I explain how economic theory concludes that public affairs journalism cannot be adequately produced in the marketplace, the subsidies that allowed it to be produced in the 20th century, how those subsidies have dissolved today, and how philanthropy represents a new form of subsidy, essentially reconfiguring the economic core of public affairs journalism. I show how the nonprofits studied here have foregone that market structure and instead focus on trying to produce journalism outside of the market by creating a niche for public affairs journalism. I introduce the idea of "news sharing," which is one way in which these organizations forgo the market to produce public affairs journalism, and forms a large part of my examination throughout the rest of this dissertation. I invoke Fligstein and McAdam's theory of strategic action fields[73] and introduce the idea of "field repair," [74] arguing that the organizations studied here are working to repair what they see as broken elements in the field of journalism – and begin to explain the connections between field repair and news sharing, connections that form a large part of the discussion throughout the rest of

[73] Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*.

[74] Graves and Konieczna, "Sharing the News: Specialization and Symbiosis in the Emerging Media Ecosystem."

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this project. I offer a sketch of the field of nonprofit journalism, including the relative positions of the emergent organizations engaging in repair of the field. Finally, this is where I introduce my research questions:

- How do these organizations differ from the commercial media from which they arose?
- Do those differences enable them to produce public affairs journalism while the commercial media increasingly struggles to do so? If so, how?

In Chapter 3, I describe my three cases, explaining that they span the available range of the emergent behavior of news sharing, with one sharing very little, another relying heavily on sharing, and the third falling in the middle. I point out that each exists on a different scale – local, regional and national – and offer some suggestions for how that could impact my findings. I also describe my method of participant observation and how I used grounded theory to allow themes and patterns to emerge from my observations.

Chapter 4 begins to unpack the notion of news sharing. I explain that it has long existed, in some form, in commercial news organizations, but that the economic contingencies of 20th century journalism meant that it had to occur tacitly. Nonprofits, with their focus on field repair, are able to make news sharing explicit, a key norm of the kind of journalism they engage in, and a major difference between them and the commercial journalism from which they arose.[75] In Chapter 4, I offer a typology of the norm of news sharing at nonprofits, arising out of my fieldwork. I also explain the ways in which these organizations harness that norm to achieve their goals of repairing the field of journalism

[75] Ibid.

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by providing public affairs journalism. Here I also explore two of the minor types of news sharing, offering commentary and being mentioned. The two major types, distribution and collaboration, are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Chapter 5 focuses on distribution as a type of news sharing. I explain how the Center for Public Integrity started out as a research organization operating on social scientific principles without seeing itself as producing journalism, adding publishing venues over time and ultimately evolving into an organization that distributes through sharing – and I illustrate how that change occurred as CPI staffers saw themselves, increasingly, as journalists, and produced work increasingly reminiscent of journalism. I also describe how WCIJ and MinnPost engage in this behavior, ultimately showing the tension produced by the way in which distribution through sharing differentiates nonprofits from commercial journalism, while also connecting them to it.

Chapter 6 focuses on collaboration as a type of news sharing. Here I describe how each of the three organizations engages in collaborative reporting – that is, working with partners to produce stories, rather than simply producing stories and giving them away. I show that this actually requires less attention to commercial journalistic norms on the part of the partnering organizations than does distribution through sharing, and I discuss how willingness to collaborate is impacted by business model.

I conclude in Chapter 7 by discussing the implications of sharing and the ways in which it is enabled by both the growth of the internet and by foundations.

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Chapter 2: Theory

Any discussion of journalism and the role of journalists puts significant value on their contribution to the fulfillment of the "informational needs of citizens in a democracy" [76] – that is, when journalists and scholars talk about the work performed by journalists, they often focus on the production of public affairs journalism. As I explained in Chapter 1, public affairs journalism is the kind of journalism our democracy needs to function, providing people with the information they need to be democratic citizens,[77] at its most basic including information about candidates running in an election or about a decision being made at city hall. News organizations have long been driven at least partly by the mission to produce quality public affairs journalism. Indeed, newspapers created a special structure, the firewall separating editorial decisions from business decisions, to allow a focus on fulfilling that mission without worrying about whether or how that focus would affect the bottom line.

In this chapter I explain the subsidies that, throughout the 20th century, enabled the production of public affairs journalism in the marketplace. I show how those subsidies have eroded and explain why, without them, public affairs journalism cannot adequately be produced. I describe the way in which the news reformers who set out to start the nonprofits studied here have responded to that argument seriously by creating a new space, insulated from the market, in which public affairs journalism has value. They aim

[76] Zaller, "A New Standard of News Quality," 109.

[77] Gans, "What Can Journalists Actually Do for Democracy?".

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to use that space to begin repairing the field of journalism,[78] and have developed a newsroom practice, which I refer to as news sharing, to work towards that goal. Finally, I introduce the concept of field theory – briefly examining the Bourdieusian approach and dealing in more detail with the strategic action field approach developed by Fligstein and McAdam – as a lens through which to examine the process of field repair.

Subsidies and the free rider problem

Public affairs journalism was relatively vibrant in the United States throughout the 20th century because of a clear and stable funding stream coming in large part from subsidies that were a result of three factors: family ownership of newspapers, bundling, and regulation.[79] Families and locally focused owners, eager for prestige and to affect the political process, were willing to spend money on public affairs journalism without necessarily expecting that investment to yield a return.[80, 81] Bundling of content meant that even if all you wanted from the newspaper was a sports score or crossword, you still

[78] Graves and Konieczna, "Sharing the News: Specialization and Symbiosis in the Emerging Media Ecosystem."

[79] In this section I introduce an economic argument that suggests that public affairs journalism cannot be adequately produced by the marketplace; I argue that it was always subsidized, and today the nature of that subsidy is changing toward a reliance on philanthropically funded journalism. There is little analysis of economic arguments in the other parts of this dissertation; here, though, these arguments help bring to light why there is a crisis in the production of public affairs journalism today, and what role the foundations that support public affairs journalism are playing.

[80] Hamilton, *All the News That's Fit to Sell*.

[81] Absentee owners are less aware of the community's needs and less likely to make a serious commitment of resources than are local owners, Bagdikian argues (*The Information Machines: Their Impact on Men and the Media*.). He concludes that the "tradition of the personally involved owner is strong and, while it produces numerous cases of entrenched morbidity, it also is the most important single factor in papers of excellence" (117). Similarly, Meyer ("The Influence Model and Newspaper Business.") argues that newspaper owners managed to attain monopoly or near-monopoly positions by working to gain the respect of their local communities. That involved making decisions using a longer time horizon and focusing more on market share than on profitability. That has eroded, he argues, as the "personally involved owner" has become a thing of the past. He also cautions, though, that the personally involved owner can behave in incompetent or irresponsible ways, for which the community has little recourse.

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had to buy the whole thing; that is, the more profitable portions of the newspaper subsidized the less profitable, e.g. public affairs. Indeed, before the internet, there was no precise way to know which stories were being read, and thus what was contributing to the bottom line. The effect of bundling applies in both a direct and an indirect way: directly in that people who buy the newspaper to read sports stories also help pay for city hall reporting, and indirectly in that by buying the newspaper for the sports scores, readers increase the incentive for companies to buy advertising, which then supports the whole news package, including public affairs journalism. Indeed, bundling is what enabled news organizations to operate on a large scale and attain dominance in local communities since it allowed them to serve a mass but heterogeneous audience with a single, mass-produced product.[82] A third form of subsidy came through federal government's role in broadcast regulation throughout much of the 20th century. In exchange for the ability to use the publicly owned broadcast spectrum, broadcasters were required by the government to produce some programming in the public interest. In other words, private broadcasters were being compelled to sacrifice some of the profit they earned from the use of the spectrum to subsidize public affairs journalism. These three forms of subsidy helped insulate the production of public affairs journalism from the market. Indeed, the demand for public affairs journalism in the 20th century may have been much lower than supply – though there is no way to know precisely.

It is important to note that this particular structure of subsidies meant that public affairs journalism was being produced incidentally by the marketplace, through provisions that tacked it on to the commercial production of other kinds of journalism. In other words,

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[82] van der Wurff, "The Economics of Online Journalism."

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the subsidy structure meant that throughout the 20th century, public affairs journalism was a byproduct of commercial journalism.

This 20th-century system of supporting public affairs journalism was an exception to the rule. Economics tells us that public affairs journalism cannot be profitably produced by the marketplace because of two characteristics that make it different from other goods: the fact that it produces positive externalities, and the fact that it is a public good. Positive externalities are those benefits that are paid for neither by the producer nor the consumer, meaning the producer does not get compensated for all of the benefit he or she produces.[83] For instance, good journalism can lead to more informed voters who make better voting decisions and vote out corrupt politicians.[84] That less corrupt political situation benefits those who bought (i.e. paid for) the newspaper and used the information gained from it to elect better leaders – but, importantly, it *also* benefits those who did not pay for the newspaper, thus not supporting the journalism that led to better politicians. This means the producer does not get compensated for all of the social benefit he or she produces and, as a result, will produce less public affairs journalism than is socially optimal.[85] Those who benefit but don't pay are labeled by economists as *free riders*,[86] and, in the case of public affairs journalism, they produce a *free rider problem* because they lead to a situation in which public affairs journalism is financially under-supported and thus under-produced in the free market.

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[83] Hamilton, *All the News That's Fit to Sell*.

[84] And studies confirm this theoretical hypothesis; Adserà et al. (2003), for instance, have found that where people are more informed, governments are less corrupt.

[85] Hamilton, *All the News That's Fit to Sell*.

[86] One classic example is that of people who do not pay union dues, but benefit from the representation the union offers.

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The free rider problem is further exacerbated by the fact that the news is increasingly a public good. Public goods have two key characteristics: they are non-rival, meaning that one person's consumption does not prevent others from consuming; and they are non-excludable, meaning that one person cannot prevent others from consuming.[87] The information contained in news stories was always a public good: nothing could prevent me from sharing with you the information I read in the newspaper, and sharing it with you didn't mean I could not share it with someone else. Today, however, with news increasingly becoming a commodity online, ubiquitously available and often free, it is more public good than ever before – and that applies to actual stories, not just to the information contained within. Public goods are also susceptible to the free rider problem because people can consume them without contributing. These two features – the fact that news produces positive externalities and the fact that it is a public good – mean that the free rider problem is inherent to journalism. That is, in the free market, public affairs journalism will tend to be under-produced.

The effect of the free rider problem was mitigated throughout much of the 20th century by the subsidies discussed above – those offered by families, those afforded through bundling, and those imposed by government regulation – insulating public affairs journalism from the marketplace. Additionally, a strong advertising rate provided a robust revenue flow for newspapers, making it easier to justify those providing those subsidies – if justification ever became necessary. Today, though, several key things have changed: the vast majority of newspapers are owned by large public companies, which are less likely to sacrifice profit in the way that families once did; the internet has led to

[87] Hamilton, *All the News That's Fit to Sell*.

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an unbundling of content – you can now read sports stories without stumbling across, and thus helping pay for, public affairs stories; and the FCC repealed the Fairness Doctrine in 1987, and officially struck it in 2011.[88] On top of those changes, the internet has seriously depressed advertising rates (by one count, newspaper advertising revenue increases by $1 online for every $16 lost in print[89]). In other words, a unique situation created subsidies for public affairs journalism in the 20th century, insulating it from the marketplace and allowing it to be produced in greater amounts than the market supported; today that unique situation has eroded, leaving us with an under-production of public affairs journalism.

The erosion of the subsidy presents a particular societal problem. By definition, public affairs journalism is key for a democracy to function. But, economics tells us that it will tend to be under-produced in the marketplace, and those factors that have at times insulated it from the marketplace have eroded. In essence, the generalist news space has restructured in response to changing media conditions in such a way that public affairs journalism is being forced to stand on its own. Economically, though, we know this is not possible. As we shall see throughout this dissertation, nonprofits represent one reconfiguration of the subsidy. In the nonprofit model, instead of being subsidized by the bundle, by families and through public policy, public affairs journalism is being subsidized through philanthropy – which promotes the production of that journalism by

[88] The Fairness Doctrine required broadcasters to spend some time discussing matters of public interest, and to provide multiple viewpoints on issues – essentially requiring them to subsidize public affairs journalism in exchange for the right to use the public airwaves.

[89] Pew Research Center's Journalism Project, *State of the News Media 2013*.

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nonprofits, but also makes that journalism available, for free, to traditional commercial news organizations, as we shall see throughout this dissertation.

Re-insulating and creating value for public affairs journalism

The dissolution of the 20th-century subsidy for public affairs journalism forms the context for the journalistic reformers who are the focus of this dissertation. Unlike many other reform movements in journalism, the non-profit movement I am studying is not focused on redefining the practice of journalism. In many ways, the people leading this movement are traditionalists, coming from within commercial journalism and harkening back to what they perceive as a golden age of journalism. Their self-professed goal is to keep on producing “old school journalism driven by old school rules.” [90] The problem they are working together to address is the fact that, for the reasons described above, support for this type of journalism is eroding. As a result, these journalists have set out to create a new structure that would allow them to strengthen the production of that “old school journalism” by re-insulating it from the marketplace, and/or finding it a new space in which it has value.[91, 92]

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[90] Bill Lueders, talk at Wisconsin Academy, Madison, Wisconsin, Sept. 2013.

[91] Of course, the actors studied here did not set out to change the wider field of journalism; rather, they simply knew things weren’t working in their local contexts, and wanted to find a way to create more public affairs journalism in the media ecologies in which they were operating. Unwittingly, the aggregate of their actions seems to be adding up to a movement with the potential to lead to evolution in the field of journalism, as I will describe later in this chapter.

[92] While I contend that these journalists are not trying to reform the practice of journalism, I will describe, in Chapters 4-6, findings that show that because of their focus on providing public affairs journalism outside of the marketplace, these journalists have led to the emergence of a new type of journalistic practice – news sharing. The distinction to keep in mind is that while they did create a new form of journalistic practice, this happened incidentally and was not what they set out to do.

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There is a key difference, though, between this new model and the system that allowed for the creation and provision of public affairs journalism throughout the 20th century. As described above, one effect of 20th century subsidies for public affairs journalism was that this kind of journalism, though insulated from the market, was being created incidentally by it, enabled by the profit coming from various types of un-subsidized, commercial journalism. Journalists whose individual actions together created the nonprofit structure that is the focus of this dissertation took seriously the argument I advance above, that the market cannot properly provide public affairs journalism. Instead of creating another structure that produces public affairs journalism as a byproduct of commercial journalism, they decided to separate public affairs journalism from commercial journalism, and connect it financially instead to entities that support it directly precisely *because of* its public service mission.

In their model, those entities are foundations and audience members. The foundations that support public affairs journalism do so because they think this type of journalism is important for democracy and thus for the wellbeing of society. They support this journalism by giving money directly to the organizations that produce it.[93] They have a variety of missions and goals, but common is their desire to increase the amount of public affairs journalism available in the news ecosystem, and by doing so to improve the quality of democracy. Some examples, from the spring of 2014, of foundations' reasoning for funding news nonprofits:

[93] While this part of what they do is consistent across foundations, the way in which they give differs, and can in fact be contentious. The major variation lies in the fact that some organizations give money for general operations, while others give for particular projects or sometimes even stories. This last type of giving especially raises concerns about the potential of foundation interference in journalistic content (Browne, "Foundation-Funded Journalism: Reasons to Be Wary of Charitable Support.").

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- The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the single biggest philanthropic funder of journalism in the U.S., says in its mission statement that "We believe that democracy thrives when people and communities are informed and engaged." [94]
- After enumerating problems in American journalism, the Ford Foundation explains on the website of its media and justice initiative that "This challenging environment has provided a unique opportunity for the foundation to support principled news reporting in the United States that illuminates social problems, sparks accountability and inspires action." [95]
- The McCormick Foundation's mission statement says that the foundation is "committed to fostering communities of educated, informed and engaged citizens" – with a focus that includes journalism and the First Amendment.[96]

It is important to note that foundation funding can be fickle, and little clarity exists around how long foundations might remain interested in funding journalism. I address some of this in Chapter 7.

The other group of funders supporting public affairs journalism directly in this nonprofit structure consists of audience members who donate to these organizations because they believe these particular organizations are performing an important service in their communities, or because they like the kind of journalism produced (this second reason is the rough equivalent of newspaper readers paying for the newspaper because they want to read the stories – which, in the U.S., has long been a relatively minor source of revenue

[94] "About the Foundation."

[95] "Media and Justice."

[96] "About Us."

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compared to advertising). Researchers studying nonprofit news organizations have found that audience members donate when they appreciate an organization's quality and depth of coverage[97] – that is, when they feel the product is quality journalism. Furthermore, the State of the News Media report[98] tells us that readers have been leaving news outlets precisely because they find stories to be less complete than they once were – suggesting an appetite for the kind of more comprehensive journalism produced by the nonprofits studied here, among others.[99]

In sum, leaders of the news nonprofit movement studied here are separating news from the marketplace. Instead of having the socially beneficial portions of journalism supported incidentally, they are resting their journalism on a different pillar – one that puts explicit value on the way journalism provides those things necessary for a functioning democracy. This not only changes the *source* of the subsidy – from families, bundling, and regulation to philanthropy – but also creates a different funding structure and a different structure of incentives and expectations, with foundation funders, and at least some readers, aiming to improve democracy through their participation in the organization.

In other words, to create a situation in which public affairs journalism *itself* has value, these organizations have created a niche for public affairs journalism, separating it from

[97] Powers and Yaros, "Supporting Online Nonprofit News Organizations: Do Financial Contributions Influence Stakeholder Expectations and Engagement."

[98] Pew Research Center's Journalism Project, *State of the News Media 2013*.

[99] This portion of the study found that 31% of respondents said they had deserted a news outlet because it no longer provided the information they were interested in. Of that, 61% said they left because stories were less complete, compared to 24% who said there were too few stories. The study concludes that this means people put more value on quality than on quantity (Enda and Mitchell, 2013).

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the generalist space in which it used to reside. That niche operates by a new set of logics, with its own funding structure focused on promoting democracy – the goal of foundations – and producing quality journalism – what reader-donors want – that enables it to be less concerned, for instance, about branding. It has also created its own market – with cultural capital coming from the generalist news organizations that print its stories and economic capital from foundations. In essence, this change represents an outsourcing of public affairs journalism into the niche of nonprofit news organizations.

From within that context, this project focuses on questions about how and whether these nonprofits differ from mainstream, commercial journalism. What norms and practices do they assume that allow them to provide the very journalism that economic theory tells us cannot be supported by the marketplace? How have those norms and practices evolved over time? Are those norms being cycled back into commercial journalism?

Below, I introduce and discuss some sociological theories that reflect in an interesting and helpful way on the emergence of the news nonprofits that are the focus of this dissertation, and offer suggestions on how to begin to address these questions.

Field theory

In Bourdieu's conception of field theory, society is made up of fields, each of which is a "separate social universe having its own laws of functioning independent of those of politics and the economy," [100] a "space in which the various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field," [101] made up of entities that "are led,

[100] Bourdieu, The Field of Cultural Production, 163.

[101] Bourdieu, On Television and Journalism, 40.

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consciously or unconsciously, to take into account the same pressures and effects, because they belong to the same world." [102] At the same time, fields are not completely independent of external laws.[103] A Bourdieusian analysis of the field of journalism can help bring particular characteristics of journalism to light.[104] It suggests, for instance, that journalism, like other fields, has its own laws, meaning it cannot fully be understood solely by looking at external factors – instead, the logics from within the field must be examined as well.[105] Bourdieu sees journalism as a subfield within the field of cultural production, which is itself, like all fields, constituted by its relations to the economic and political fields. Bourdieu explains that "…it remains true that, like other fields, the journalistic field is based on a set of shared assumptions and beliefs, which reach beyond differences of position and opinion." [106] This notion provides an important insight about the nonprofits studied here and how they differ from some other reform movements in journalism: though my nonprofits work to distance themselves from some of the economic pressures affecting commercial journalism, they maintain many of the "shared assumptions and beliefs" of commercial journalism – a closeness that helps constitute the space within which they exist. In other words, they maintain many of the micro norms of journalism, things such as news values,[107] while distancing themselves from the

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[102] Ibid., 41.

[103] Bourdieu, "The Political Field, the Social Science Field, and Journalistic Field," 33.

[104] Benson, "News Media as a 'Journalistic Field.'"

[105] Bourdieu, On Television and Journalism.

[106] Ibid., 47.

[107] Bourdieu describes an interview with a television program executive who, when asked why he scheduled news items in a particular order, said "It's obvious" (*On Television and Journalism,* 26). These "obvious" decisions are among the things that constitute news values. Some journalistic reform organizations push back against that obviousness, arguing that certain viewpoints are underrepresented in

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economic structure that devalues public affairs journalism. This, too, is where the usefulness of field theory becomes apparent: in an attempt to understand the elements that help constitute the interactions between the organizations studied here and the broader field of journalism.

Despite the useful insights gathered by Benson and others from applying Bourdieu's theories to journalism, in this dissertation I have chosen to focus instead on an alternative form of field theory: Fligstein and McAdam's theory of strategic action fields.[108] Fligstein and McAdam define strategic action as "the attempt by social actors to create and maintain stable social worlds by securing the cooperation of others." [109] Their strategic action fields are units of collective action whose actors have common understandings of their field and its rules – as do actors in Bourdieu's fields – while vying for advantage against other actors. Their theory helps bring into focus particular features and relationships in journalism, just as the Bourdieusian lens does. Specifically, the theory is helpful when examining nonprofit news organizations for four major reasons, which I discuss briefly below: it explicitly allows, even encourages, a nesting of fields; it approaches with skepticism the traditional field theoretic notion of stability and the existence of a taken-for-granted reality within fields, focusing instead on what it posits is a constant jockeying for position within fields; it encourages a focus on the strategic element of how fields form and operate; and it makes salient the idea of Internal Governance Units.

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the media, and that traditional news values promote a disengagement from journalism. That is not the case with the nonprofits studied here, though.

[108] Fligstein and McAdam, "Toward a General Theory of Strategic Action Fields"; Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*.

[109] Fligstein and McAdam, "Toward a General Theory of Strategic Action Fields," 7.

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Nesting

In Fligstein and McAdam's theory, collective actors interact with fields larger and smaller than their field, and when they do, those other fields also become strategic action fields in their universe, creating a situation in which fields are nested into other fields like Russian dolls. They offer an example of an office, which is a strategic action field, within a division – also a strategic action field – within a company – again a strategic action field. The nonprofit news organizations studied here can similarly be examined as nested fields within the larger strategic action field of journalism, illustrated in Figure 2.1, below, along with as other types of journalism, some of which I described in Chapter 1. Note that Figure 2.1 breaks the nonprofits studied here into two categories: the strategic action field of producer-distributors (those organizations that both produce and distribute their content), which overlaps significantly with the field of commercial journalism, since they follow very similar norms and practices; and the strategic action field of producers (those organizations that produce content and give it away to others to distribute), which overlaps less, though is in some ways more dependent on, the field of commercial journalism – overlaps less because it has its own sets of logics based on sharing, and more dependent because it produces content that it feeds back into commercial journalism. The distinction between these two fields within the field of nonprofit journalism is examined in greater detail later in this chapter.

What's missing from Figure 2.1 is the external fields with which these organizations interact – economic and state fields of course, but, significantly, also the field of philanthropy, which in many ways *enables* the existence of the field of nonprofit journalism, as well as strongly imprinting the field, as we will see later on.

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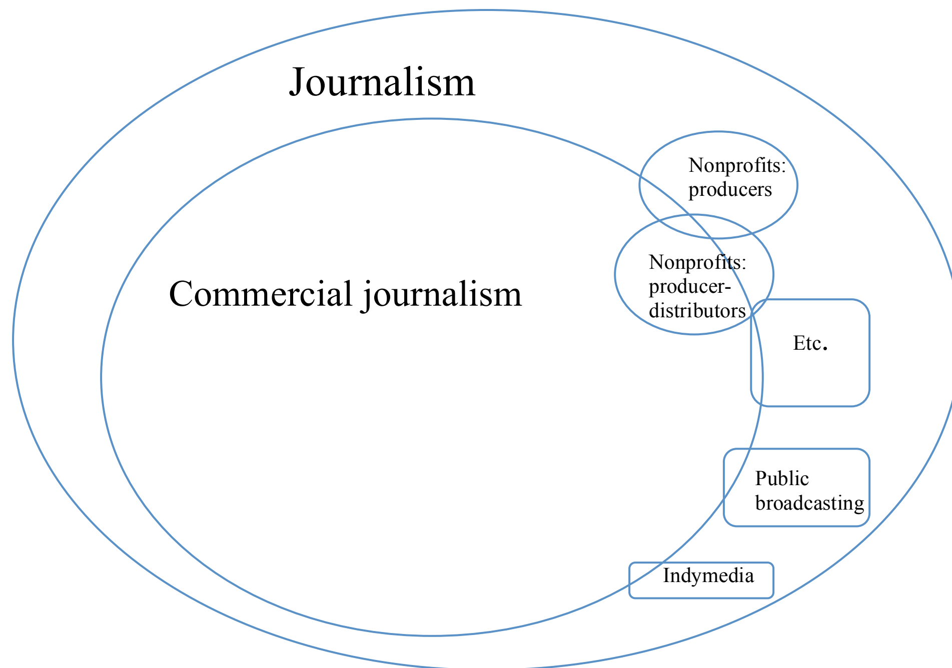
Figure 2.1: A visualization of the nested strategic action fields of journalism.



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Constant jockeying for position

Fligstein and McAdam argue that theories such as Bourdieu's offer ways to explain why fields are static; empirically, though, we know that fields do change and evolve. As such, a key distinguishing feature of their theory is that, unlike Bourdieu, they do not believe that fields are built around a taken-for-granted reality – instead, they argue, fields are constantly contested because of an endless jockeying for position by their key players, so the field is always changing, and consensus rarely exists. This account, they say, does a better job of describing and explaining sources of change, as well as of stability, in social life. In their theory, incumbents are those long-standing, powerful actors that constitute and reproduce the field. Challengers are in tension with incumbents, calling into question the rules of the field. Exogenous shock, field rupture, and onset of contention begin the process of field change. Contention arises, in the Fligstein-McAdam model, when change leads an actor to perceive new threats or opportunities, when actors collect the resources they need to mobilize, or when they violate the rules of the field. This onset of contention is followed by episodes of contention, which are characterized by uncertainty and mobilization and ultimately lead to settlement, in which a new status quo is reached. In their theory, though – unlike Bourdieu's – attainment of a new settlement does not mean an end to contention and a return to taken-for-granted realities. Instead, the new status quo involves a return to the earlier state of contention in which incumbents and challengers were constantly jockeying for position and each advocating for their own roles and rules.

This helps us understand the field change in journalism that led to the emergence of the nonprofits studied here. It is not hard to imagine the constant – and heightening – jockeying in commercial journalism between a focus on quality journalism and a focus

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on keeping costs low. That tension came to a head in the late 2000s with an exogenous shock – the financial crisis in journalism. Newspapers closed, chains declared bankruptcy, and thousands of journalists around the country were laid off,[110] as I describe in Chapter 1. Still, commercial journalism remained in the position of incumbency, with those favoring an increase in investigative and public affairs journalism in the position of challengers. Episodes of contention ensued, with journalists becoming frustrated with the state of their industry and, ultimately, some of them opting to leave commercial journalism to start the new journalistic organizations that are the focus of this dissertation.

The fact this state of constant flux is built into the theory of strategic action fields is a result of Fligstein and McAdam's initial premise, which postulates that scholars of social movements and organizations are interested in the same thing: collective strategic action. Both groups, they argue, are at base interested in the ways in which collective actors vie for strategic advantage by interacting with other groups through strategic action fields, which are a type of social order. By intertwining a social movement focus with organizational research, they arrive at a fundamentally change- and strategy-focused orientation toward the study of organizations, unlike Bourdieu's focus on stability in the study of organizations.

Strategy

This constant jockeying is a result of the strategic nature of these fields: there is a strategy in how these social orders define themselves and how they conceive of their relationship relative to others within or outside of their social order. Fligstein and McAdam encourage

[110] More than 42,000, according to the website NewspaperLayoffs.com.

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an understanding of strategic action fields as places in which players vie for advantage. They also allow for a constant redefining and realignment of fields, depending on what actors in those fields feel is strategically necessary. Further, they posit that actors have a particular power relation to other actors in their field – and that they are aware of what that relation is. That is, actors know who occupies what roles in the field, and what the rules are. For Fligstein and McAdam, this rule awareness reflects a cultural understanding of what moves are legitimate for players – in other words, allows actors to take up a strategic position.

Internal governance units

Fligstein and McAdam's theory includes the idea of internal governance units, or IGUs, which, among other things, mediate much of the interaction between strategic action fields and fields associated with the state. IGUs, they explain, are entities whose goal it is to ensure stability and order within the field. In the case of the organizations studied here, the IGU is the Investigative News Network (INN). Indeed, it became apparent that nonprofit journalism was coalescing into a strategic action fields when 24 publishers of nonprofit news organizations got together to write the Pocantico Declaration[111] in 2009, which created the INN. It legitimizes the field, creates links to neighboring fields and oversees compliance with field rules. Fligstein and McAdam's IGU is strongly impacted by incumbents while at once freeing those incumbents from the role of leadership that they played as the field was emerging. By referring to themselves in the Pocantico Declaration as "we, representatives of nonprofit news organizations," those present at the 2009 meeting made explicit the links between the various organizations there, some of which had operated in their own space for years or decades (such as the Center for Public

[111] "Pocantico Declaration."

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Integrity and the Center for Investigative Reporting, the clear incumbents in the room), and some of which were brand new (the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism, for instance, was just months old), effectively acknowledging the formation of the strategic action fields. They laid out the challenge at hand ("investigative reporting, *so crucial to a functioning democracy* (added emphasis), is under threat. There is an urgent need to nourish and sustain the emerging investigative journalism ecosystem to better serve the public") and came up with a plan to address it hinging on three types of collaboration: editorial, administrative and financial. With regards to editorial collaboration in particular, the declaration suggests "joint accountability journalism projects" and same-day publishing with partners, leading to efficient and shared information and reporting. Administrative collaboration, the declaration states, could include exchanging information about "back office" operations such as liability insurance, and financial collaboration could entail exchanging information, fundraising together, or even "pioneering new economic models to help to monetize the shared, combined content of the member organizations, in order to achieve a more sustainable journalism."

The Investigative News Network, now five years old, also lays out the rules of nonprofit news organizations – both producers and producer-distributors. To be a member of the network, an organization needs to be certified under section 501(c)(3) of the IRS tax code, or be affiliated with an organization thus certified;[112] must be transparent about donors in the ways outlined by the INN, including posting policies around fundraising,

[112] Some organizations operate under nonprofit status belonging to others. This is often the case with organizations on university campuses, many of which use the nonprofit status of their home university. As described in Chapter 1, this has become increasingly common as the IRS has slowed approving nonprofit certification for news organizations, opting to study the situation more carefully.

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disclosing the names of donors, and posting tax returns online; must produce nonpartisan information and news, as defined by INN; and must avoid conflicts of interest.

Types of nonprofits: Producers vs. producer-distributors

The nonprofit news organizations studied here fall into two broad categories: those that distribute their own content (which I call producer-distributors) and those that don't (which I call producers). Each of these has taken up its own place in the evolving field of journalism. Those that rely on others to distribute their content[113] have developed new, meso-level norms and practices to enable their collaborative mission – tending to keep steady micro norms and practices such as news values in a way that enables them to produce "old school journalism driven by old school rules." [114] This is in contrast with those organizations that focus on distributing their own content, which behave in a way that is much more similar to traditional commercial news organizations, effectively acting as online newspapers. Producer-distributors are more similar to traditional news organizations than are producers, which differ from commercial journalism in several ways:

- Producers focus on public affairs, watchdog or investigative reporting – the kind of journalism that is being cut because of financial trouble and which economic theory tells us cannot be supported by the marketplace; and
- Producers operate in a collaborative way, employing the norm of news sharing.

[113] Of the three cases I study in this dissertation, the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism and the Center for Public Integrity are producers and MinnPost is a producer-distributor; in the larger body of non-profit news organizations, there are many of each type.

[114] Bill Lueders, talk at Wisconsin Academy, Madison, Wisconsin, Sept. 2013.

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But, there are also many similarities between producers and commercial journalism.

- Journalists working at producer organizations aim to do a kind of work they believe to have been a key part of commercial journalism, but from which commercial journalists have stepped back; and
- They cycle their work back into commercial journalism, because that is where the readers are – meaning they need to be aware of and in line with the norms of commercial journalism.

Producers, despite following many of the micro norms used in commercial newsrooms, follow a particular set of logics that is – at least in some ways – in tension with those of traditional news organizations: logics of news sharing. This is one reason for which they are more external to the strategic action field of commercial journalism than are their producer-distributor cousins. Figure 2.1 also shows other groups and emerging organizational types that are responses to commercial journalism, and that are also trying to change the field either from within or from without: alternative news organizations, citizen journalism, public broadcasting, Indymedia, etc.

News sharing

As I describe in subsequent chapters, sharing is one of the major new logics that characterizes the strategic action field of those nonprofits that act mainly as producers of content, relying on others to distribute what they have produced. It is an emergent behavior used by these news organizations to fulfill their goal of spreading their journalism as broadly as possible – in contrast to the goal, often implicit but always present in the work of commercial news organizations, of earning money for the

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journalism they produce. In essence, it involves loosening the reins of ownership over content, a result of prioritizing getting a larger readership over concerns with revenue – something that is *enabled* by the decoupling of readership size from revenue, which comes when funding is associated with improving democracy, rather than coming from selling access to content.

Of the three cases studied in this dissertation, MinnPost is largely a producer-distributor, while WCIJ and CPI are more focused on producing content, and leaving the distribution to other entities. The fact CPI and WCIJ explicitly take up the norm of sharing is something that distinguishes them from the commercial journalism from which they arose.[115] It also, however, ties them into commercial journalism because, in order to successfully share content with commercial journalists, they need to produce content commercial journalists understand as a news product. In this way, as the norm of news sharing separates these nonprofits from commercial journalism, it also forces them to remain close to commercial journalism. This tension becomes particularly evident when examining decades of change at the Center for Public Integrity, which evolved from an organization that provided information to journalists to one that acted as a news organization, producing stories that it worked to have published by partnering publications – an evolution I describe in greater detail in Chapter 5. On the other end of the sharing spectrum, MinnPost operates much like a commercial news organization, producing a bundle of news that editors hope will attract readers and advertisers who over time become loyal to the brand, in much the way in which commercial journalism

[115] Commercial news organizations have sometimes engaged in some forms of news sharing as described, for instance, by Crouse (1974), but those behaviors have been largely implicit. I deal with this in more detail in Chapter 4.

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operates. This behavior also allows MinnPost to raise money from readers and advertisers, similarly to the way commercial news organizations do, unlike CPI and WCIJ, which largely raise money indirectly from organizations and individuals concerned about improving democracy.

Field repair

Placed beside other movements aiming to fill niches or gaps in the field of journalism, the nonprofits studied here – both producers and producer-distributors – appear traditional. Their major focus is not on dealing with a fundamental problem in the norms and practices of traditional journalism; instead, they are focused on producing the kind of journalism they believe has long existed but that they are concerned is on the wane and, by producing this kind of journalism, they hope to improve the field of journalism. The organizations I studied engaged in two types of behavior that together add up to what Graves and Konieczna define as field repair:[116] creating quality public affairs journalism that they inject into the hole left as commercial journalism retreats from that space, and creating new systems that they hope will spread the ability of other news organizations to continue to fill that same hole. As we shall see throughout this dissertation, news sharing is a major tactic the organizations studied here use to help achieve their goal of field repair. As a result, field repair is self-conscious, and, by definition, institutional: by engaging in it, these organizations demonstrate that they believe in the possibility of repairing the field of journalism from within, by creating better journalism.

[116] Graves and Konieczna, "Sharing the News: Specialization and Symbiosis in the Emerging Media Ecosystem."

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Conclusion

As I will describe in subsequent chapters, the success of the new nonprofit news organizations studied here depends on the fact that they operate on different logics of time and attention. The commercial model of journalism monetizes time and attention directly – through sales of the news product – and indirectly – through eyes on advertisements and through bundling. The pioneers of the nonprofit structure studied in this dissertation take seriously the notion that the market cannot produce sufficient public affairs journalism, and instead seek indirect revenue from foundations and individuals concerned about democracy. (This is particularly true of producers; producer-distributors remain able to earn some revenue from their content, since they brand it with their name and thus can attract funding from a loyal readership and advertisers.) When revenue comes from selling newspapers and advertisements, incentives exist for news organizations to exert ownership over the content they produce. In the nonprofit journalistic space, in contrast, the goal is to improve democracy, and financial incentives are tied to achieving that instead. That offers less incentive for ownership – or even disincentive, when collaborating and sharing content could help better achieve the goals of supporting democracy. As I will describe in subsequent chapters, that has led some of the organizations studied here to collaboratively create content and then give it away, cycling it back into commercial journalism through news sharing, with the goal of getting the broadest possible readership for stories, thereby engaging in field repair. In this way, the sharing behaviors discussed in this dissertation are a key and necessary behavior that enables nonprofit news organizations to fulfill their missions.

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Chapter 3: Method and sample introductions

This study is based primarily on participant observation of three nonprofit news organizations in the United States, set against the backdrop of the state of nonprofit journalism in this country. Cottle[117] argues that we are living in what he calls "new(s) times" – in which news permeates every aspect of society and, thus, he argues, the evolving nature of newsroom norms and even the focus on norms itself should be called into question by ethnographers. Enough has changed since the "first wave" of news ethnographies in the 1970s and 80s,[118] he writes, that it's time to go back into the field. This call has been heeded by a "second wave" of news ethnographers[119] who approach their subjects from the perspective of a changing, media saturated world. Methodologically, I follow this tradition; analytically, I look to the grounded theory approach outlined by Strauss and Corbin.[120]

I entered my research sites knowing that I was interested in whether and how the organizations I was studying can produce the public affairs journalism from which commercial news organizations have been retreating, and as a result focused on situations that enabled me to investigate how these organizations' news processes and news products are similar to or different from those of traditional commercial journalism. Before and during each site visit, I collected and read documents, both from the

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[117] Cottle, "New(s) Times."

[118] This "first wave" of ethnographies includes works such as Gans, *Deciding What's News*, 1979; Tuchman, *Making News : A Study in the Construction of Reality*.

[119] The second wave includes projects such as Anderson, *Rebuilding the News*; Boczkowski, *Digitizing the News*; Robinson, "Journalism as Process: The Labor Implications of Participatory Content in News Organization."

[120] Strauss and Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research*.

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foreground – mission statements and news stories for instance – and from the background – financial statements, requests for funding, exchanges with partnering organizations, award applications and the like. At each site I observed newsroom interactions, work flow and prioritization of tasks, and conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with editors, business staff and reporters to explore employees' views of and attitudes toward their work and how it fit into the organization. A semi-structured interview allowed me to hit the same key topics with each interview subject while exploring some of the particularly interesting answers and ideas. The observations and interviews were conducted in the workplace, or, when no alternative existed, by telephone. Interviews were recorded and notes were taken during interviews, meetings and informal discussions. I also shadowed staff in their daily tasks, and attended meetings. I acted as an impartial observer, never getting involved in decision-making or discussions about news-related events. I created memos at the end of every day to capture my developing understanding of the newsroom, and to prepare areas of focus and questioning for the next day.

At MinnPost, I spent a month over three separate occasions in the summer of 2011 and the spring of 2013 – about 120 hours of observation in all – conducted about 35 in-depth interviews and attended many staff and committee meetings. At the Center for Public Integrity, I spent a month in the spring of 2013, conducting about 170 hours of observations in the newsroom, attending most staff meetings, and doing about 18 in-depth interviews and many informal ones. At the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism, I conducted observations over almost two years – 2011-2013 – attending

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many staff meetings (about 40) and conducting several in-depth interviews with the full-time staff at the organization.

Analysis was guided by a grounded theory approach. This is a method in which the researcher does not enter the site with a pre-selected theory; instead, he or she starts with an area of study and lets the data guide the theory,[121] with early observations determining initial categories, which then evolve iteratively. Strauss and Corbin's three-pronged approach was used in analyzing the data, moving from open coding to axial and finally selective coding, to examine interview transcripts, observation notes, end-of-day memos, and other documents collected over the course of the observations. Starting with the entire body of data, I used open coding to identify categories and themes. This involved examining data closely with the aim of categorizing it. I broke the data into small parts and examined each. The key analytic procedures in coding, Strauss and Corbin argue, involve making comparisons and asking questions – and I let these two steps guide me as I examined my artifacts. With each piece of data, I asked what it was and what it represented, identifying phenomena and concepts in the data. The outcome of this step was a collection of data that was labeled and grouped into categories.

In axial coding, subcategories were developed and linked back to their major categories, and those relationships were specified. The product of axial coding was a set of categories with subcategories that give them definition and detail by identifying in terms of causal relationships, context, etc.

This process and the process of open coding mutually informed one another, and so the

[121] Ibid.

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process of going through these two types of coding was iterative, and constantly switching between deductive and inductive thinking by proposing relationships between subcategories and their parent category, then checking those relationships.

Finally, I moved to selective coding. Here, the goal was integration, bringing things together into a cohesive narrative, and relating the categories to one another. Here patterns – that is, relationships between properties and dimensions of categories – begin to emerge. Ultimately, the categories are related to each other in a web, and the goal is untangling this web.

I collected my data over the course of two years, and in that time I went through some version of this process several times with different collections of data, ultimately settling on news sharing as the focus of this project, since it was the most substantial and surprising element in my data, and a concept that went a long way toward addressing the questions I ask in this work: how and why the organizations I am studying are able to produce the kind of journalism commercial news organizations are backing away from.

Note that I also used the qualitative analysis package NVivo to perform some of the coding.

Sample

My sample includes three nonpartisan, professional organizations that produce news. Because I am asking questions about the survival of public affairs journalism – the type of journalism our democracy needs to function, providing information that, for instance, helps people decide how to vote – I excluded from my sample nonprofits that are

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advocacy organizations and that exist for other purposes, for instance to promote environmental causes, and only incidentally produce news. I also excluded organizations that do not publish the names of their donors, because investigations have revealed that many of these organizations have editorial ties to partisan foundations, even if they refer to themselves as nonpartisan.[122, 123] Because my focus is on the creation of news rather than the augmentation of venues for speech, I examined organizations founded by and employing largely traditional journalists, rather than those run by citizen journalists. Because I am examining the changing news ecology, I looked at the new, online-only organizations forged from perceived failures of commercial journalism, rather than older nonprofits such as the *Christian Science Monitor*, *Mother Jones* or NPR, with their complicated histories and deep ties to legacy media. Because I got a sense early on of the dramatic effect of the mode of distribution – that is, whether an organization distributes its own content and thus becomes a draw for readers itself, or whether it gives content away for other organizations to distribute – on the way the organization functions, I made sure to choose organizations that distribute in different ways, one on the extreme of self-distribution, another on the extreme of giving content away, and the third in the middle. And, finally, because I am interested in the effect of media ecology on these

[122] Bice, "Conservative Outlets Write All the News That Fits Their Tilt."

[123] Wisconsin in particular has seen a growth of partisan-oriented or -funded news organizations. Bice (2011) writes that Media Trackers, which calls itself a "conservative nonpartisan investigative watchdog," is sponsored by the Tea Party group American Majority, which, among other things, organized a pro-Scott Walker rally and received money from the Bradley Foundation, a conservative foundation in Milwaukee. Media Trackers, despite referring to itself as nonpartisan, files complaints with regulators and puts out press releases urging candidates to act in particular ways, Bice writes. The Franklin Center for Government and Public Integrity created Wisconsin Reporter, part of Watchdog.org, which, according to its website, is "a 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to promoting new media journalism" (Watchdog.org) – indeed, the organization's "about" page makes no mention of its partisan connections. And the Bradley Foundation also funds the MacIver Institute, which is more open about its political bent, calling itself "the free market voice for Wisconsin" (About: MacIver Institute).

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organizations, I chose organizations operating in media ecologies on a variety of scales – local, regional and national.

Table 3.1: Key characteristics of the organizations studied in this dissertation

	MinnPost	**CPI**	**WCIJ**
Location	Minneapolis	Washington, DC	Madison
Founded	2007	1989	2009
Tagline	"A thoughtful approach to news" A "second read" "high-quality journalism for news-intense people who care about Minnesota."	"To enhance democracy by revealing abuses of power, corruption and betrayal of trust by powerful public and private institutions, using the tools of investigative journalism."	"Protect the vulnerable, expose wrongdoing, seek solutions"
Founder	Former editor/publisher of *Minneapolis Star Tribune*	Former investigative producer for ABC News and the CBS news program 60 Minutes	Former investigative reporter at *Wisconsin State Journal*
Focus	Analysis/second read	Investigative	Investigative/watchdog
Distribution	Stories posted on their own site	Stories posted on own site and shared with other news organizations	Stories shared with other news organizations
Budget, 2012	$1.49 million	$9 million	$497,000
Scale	Local	National	Regional

Below I describe each of my cases, talking about their history, mission, and how they operate.

Center for Public Integrity

The Center for Public Integrity in Washington, D.C., is one of the oldest and largest nonprofit news organizations in the United States. It produces several themed areas of content, perhaps the most prominent of which is its money in politics coverage. It

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publishes stories daily, designed to be picked up by other news organizations (this is described in detail in Chapter 5). That mode of distribution is supplemented by distribution through the center's own website, by a newsletter and by books, which center staffers have been writing since early on, either on their own or as a newsroom. The center generally writes stories with a national scope, though those stories are sometimes pegged to local situations or represent the aggregation of data about particular places, as with the State Integrity Investigation, in which the center hired a journalist in each state to investigate corruption there, and then produced a national story based on that local data. The center also has a prominent international arm, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, which conducts even deeper, longer investigations in partnership with journalists around the world.

Center staffers appreciate their links to traditional media. On the wall in the cafeteria, a display board about the early days of the center shows off letters of support from Carl Bernstein and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., both offering to help the center. Most of the center's journalists and editorial staff had long careers in commercial media although, like other nonprofit news organizations, the center does employ a small but growing contingent of young people whose careers have largely been in non-commercial news organizations.

The center has long been funded by foundations, which today make up over 90% of its budget. In 2011, the center launched a plan to become a destination site – that is, a place where the center would publish its own stories and develop its own readership, rather than relying so heavily on readers to come through other news organizations. That involved producing many shorter and less deeply investigated stories a day and raising

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money from syndication. As I describe in greater detail in Chapter 5, this plan largely failed and the center drew back to its staple of foundation funding for large investigative projects, while continuing to work on boosting individual giving and large grants. In the summer of 2013, for instance, managers hoped that a new employee focused on individual giving would boost income in that category to $1 to $2 million a year by 2015.

As one of the biggest and oldest such centers, CPI has worked to structure the field of nonprofit journalism, and continues to do so. It – along with all the organizations studied here – was a founding member of the Investigative News Network, which has developed into something of a professional association for news nonprofits. Center staffers routinely appear at investigative and nonprofit journalism conferences, are key members of Investigative Reporters and Editors, and regularly interact with other nonprofit news organizations from their position of a well-established, long-standing nonprofit news organization. The center's State Integrity Investigation, for instance, brought together reporters from every state, and the center routinely involves other nonprofit investigative centers in its reporting, for instance by publishing a story about gun control in Wisconsin – produced by the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism – as part of its package of stories on gun control.

The center has been winning journalism awards since 1996, most recently garnering a Pulitzer Prize in 2014 for its reporting on the denial of benefits to coal miners suffering from black lung disease.[124]

[124] "Center Wins First Pulitzer Prize."

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History of CPI

The other organizations studied here are newer and have existed in a fairly consistent media environment. The Center for Public Integrity, though, has evolved significantly over its 25 years, so much so that while the people who work there now very much consider themselves journalists, that has not always been the case. A major reason for these changes, as we shall see, is the fact that the center's mode of distribution evolved as a result of the popularization of the internet – and, with that evolved the center's conception of itself. Here I will outline some of the milestones in the center's history, and throughout the rest of this dissertation I will refer to this history as it illuminates relevant elements of how the center functions.

The center was founded in 1989 by Charles Lewis, who had left 60 Minutes out of a concern that journalists weren't raising important issues and asking difficult questions. Today he points to the fact that, for instance, the Iran Contra affair was not discovered by an American journalist. "I saw a flabby, complacent, smug, arrogant press corps and my mission in life was to kick them squarely in the ass; I didn't mean to compete with them, I thought nobody was doing (the kind of work he wanted to do)." [125] Lewis had two role models at the time he started CPI: the Center for Investigative Reporting and the Better Government Association. The former was a loosely organized group of freelance reporters, and the latter were former government investigators. He was interested in creating a hybrid organization, one that was investigative in the way his work at 60 minutes was, but that also fell into what was "a tradition in Washington dating back at least 20-plus years of reports that named names and made news but weren't exactly

[125] Charles Lewis, interview, March 25, 2014.

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journalism but were sought after by journalists," he explained. This extra dimension in his orientation would enable him, he said, to be "more substantive and in-depth than most journalism."

In the center's early days, it conducted investigations that could take a year or more, publishing its results in reports that could stretch to 200 pages, of which they printed a few hundred or a thousand copies, to hand out at press conferences at the National Press Club with the hope that mainstream news organizations would cite or quote the reports. There was lots of precedent for this, Lewis said, coming from the advocacy group Common Cause. This model of presenting its findings in an event that other news organizations would report on was the center's only mode of distribution for the first three or four years. "Findings make news very dramatically. I would occasionally write an op-ed around it but mostly journalists dined off (the findings)," Lewis said, referring to their work, specifically the story that set off the Lincoln bedroom scandal and the first campaign finance book,[126] as "manna from heaven if you're a working journalist." Lewis said that the fact center staff wrote about things no one else was writing about, based on documents no one else read, plus the fact that he was a former ABC producer who held press conferences, meant "the whole thing had a novelty factor, back when people actually went to the Press Club and listened to people."

Early on, CPI signed a contract with ABC News that lasted seven or eight years, and a one-year contract with CBS. Those contracts gave the organizations early access to

[126] The Lincoln Bedroom story, published in the center's newsletter, Public i, in 1996, revealed that rich donors were being awarded with stays in the White House, and swelled into a scandal for then-president Clinton. That story won the center its first journalism prize, the "Public Service in Newsletter Journalism" award from the Society of Professional Journalists. The center has regularly written books about the financing of presidential campaigns. The first was *The Buying of the President*, published by the center in 1996. That book was a finalist in the book competition of the Investigative Reporters and Editors awards.

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embargoed versions of CPI's work, in exchange for a fee. The contracts were ended soon after one of the stations broke the embargo. Those relationships also formed the early basis for news sharing, right from the center's first study, which was reported on ABC's show 20/20 the day it came out, with Lewis having done an interview with 20/20 that morning, before the report was released.

In 1994, the center added a newsletter it called "Public i" that came out roughly every other month through the late 1990s. That gave the center an outlet for stories that were interesting but didn't have the heft of a 200-page report, and enabled the center to start for the first time producing stories that were more journalistic in style and tone, running a few thousand words long instead of dozens or hundreds of pages like the reports did. The newsletter also allowed the center to reach readers on its own for the first time, rather than relying on other news organizations to write about its studies. And, because several news organizations would write stories about the things reported in the newsletter, the center's stories would, ironically perhaps, get more play than if they had been written for a single news organization. It is in that format that CPI broke the story of the White House allowing big donors to stay in the Lincoln Bedroom, which won the center its first journalism prize. "(The newsletter) started organically because we needed another venue," Lewis explained. The first editor was a former reporter at *Esquire* and *New York Times Magazine*, and the newsletter mostly went to journalists, supporters, and the advisory board. Its success, though, as a source of stories journalists might decide to report on depended on center staff not considering themselves journalists, because, Lewis argues, journalists at the time would not report on the work of other journalists. I explore this and its implications in more depth in Chapter 5.

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In 1995 the center added another distribution venue when it put out its first book, *Beyond the Hill*, about where members of Congress went after their terms were up. In 1996, the center published *The Buying of the President*, spurring a successful franchise that landed the 2004 edition of the book on the *New York Times* bestseller list.

Despite the slow move toward journalistic writing and products with the newsletter and, later, with the ability to put its own stories directly before readers online, Lewis says the center keeps some characteristics of its original "hybrid," part-journalism, part-report writing form, producing, for instance, a database of 90 mercenary companies around the world – something he says other news organizations would not likely do.

Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism

WCIJ was founded in 2009 by Andy Hall, a former investigative journalist at the *Wisconsin State Journal* who started conceptualizing the center while still working at the newspaper. It is a statewide news organization whose major distribution is done by other news organizations that pick up its content, though the center also operates a website called WisconsinWatch.org, which draws a small readership. Like the other two organizations studied here, it is a founding member of the Investigative News Network, the professional body that organizes many nonprofit newsrooms. The center is among the smaller nonprofit news organizations in the United States, with four full-time employees who are supplemented by a number of student interns, and a budget of $500,000 in 2012. Along with giving content away, it has collaborative partnerships with commercial media and public broadcasters in Wisconsin, some of which by 2013 were semi-regular. It has also made a name for itself in data visualization, especially mapping, and regularly helps out other organizations, particularly nonprofit news organizations, with such tasks. The

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center was born of moderate aspirations, when the *Wisconsin State Journal* moved Hall off the investigative journalism beat, which he had enjoyed. "Initially I wasn't setting out to change journalism but to get a job I liked. But then I realized I had to have a business model." [127] While CPI keeps up a daily drumbeat of stories, aiming to draw readers regularly to its site, the Wisconsin center publishes much less frequently, producing 145 major reports between its founding in 2009 and the spring of 2014, plus 130 shorter columns.

The center is housed in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Wisconsin-Madison – making it part of a growing group of nonprofit journalism centers housed at universities. The center has some space in the journalism school and, in exchange, hires student interns, which helps it fulfill the portion of its mission focused on training investigative journalists. It also uses space donated to it by the *Appleton Post-Crescent* and the *Capital Times* in the Capitol pressroom. In the summer of 2013, the center weathered perhaps the greatest challenge of its existence when a line was written into the Wisconsin state budget saying that the center should not be on campus and should not receive any university resources, or work with any university employees.[128] The debate forced the center to articulate some of its key goals and motives in a more public way than ever before, and helped the center draw plenty of supporters. In the end the governor vetoed that portion of the budget, allowing the center to remain on the university campus.

[127] Andy Hall, interview, Madison, Wisconsin, 2011.

[128] Golden, "Center's Possible Eviction from UW."

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The center is a regional news organization, covering the state of Wisconsin and distributing its content through news organizations all over the state. It is also firmly embedded in and indeed was born of the media ecology of Madison, which is vibrant but, as in most other places in the United States, shrinking. Until 2008, Madison had two daily newspapers, the *Wisconsin State Journal* and the afternoon *Capital Times*, started in 1917 in opposition to the other daily's pro-war stance. The *Capital Times* has remained the progressive paper, and since 2008 publishes a weekly tabloid as well as posting stories to its website daily. The city and state have a number of public radio and television stations, and the state has several dozen daily newspapers, with the largest being the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*. Several of these, including the *Journal-Sentinel,* have investigative reporting teams. There are also dozens of weekly newspapers that do not produce the kind of statewide investigative reporting that is the center's hallmark, nor did they, before the birth of the center, have regular access to it. That, as we shall see, marks a significant difference between this center and the Center for Public Integrity. CPI produces investigative content on a national scale, as do a (shrinking) number of other organizations; WCIJ, on the other hand, produces investigative stories about and for a region covered by few other investigative reporters.

MinnPost

MinnPost was founded in 2007 by Joel Kramer, who had been editor and publisher of the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* for 15 years until 1998, and his partner Laurie Kramer, out of a concern about layoffs and buyouts of staff at the two Twin City newspapers – which shed about 100 journalists in 2006 and 2007. MinnPost sees itself as a nonprofit website that provides a thoughtful second look at the day's news, offering primarily analysis and in-depth stories on what makes the news, in particular on public affairs and all but

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eschewing traditional newspaper topics such as lifestyles and sports. While MinnPost does occasionally report on issues out-state and has a reporter in Washington focusing on the Minnesota delegation there, the bulk of its coverage is of issues local to the Twin Cities, and of things happening in the state government. Indeed, in a reader survey conducted in 2012,[129] only 14% of respondents said they lived outside of the Twin Cities metropolitan area, and 6% outside of Minnesota – with the remainder living in the Cities or their suburbs. This local focus means that MinnPost likely could not survive as a content provider like CPI or WCIJ, since, despite the vibrant media environment of the Cities, it is unlikely that the number of organizations interested in local content is big enough to support a locally focused center in the Cities.

Compared to other nonprofit news organizations, MinnPost is mid-sized, with a budget of about $1.5 million in 2012. It is a self-standing nonprofit news organization that publishes a bundled selection of content, available primarily on its own website, acting largely as an online newspaper – unlike WCIJ and CPI, which are content providers. It targets not a general audience, but rather audience members who are civically engaged and consume news from multiple outlets – the most engaged news readers, according to Joel Kramer. (The tagline says the organization targets, "high-quality journalism for news-intense people who care about Minnesota.") While its website is its primary product, MinnPost also shares its stories for free with newspapers around the state through the Minnesota News Association, and had at least one major series republished by the Huffington Post. In other words, it does share content with other news organizations – only this is not key to its operations, as evidenced by the organization's

[129] MinnPost staff, "Take the MinnPost Reader Survey."

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focus on pageviews as a key metric, and the fact that it does not track the degree how often its stories get picked up by other news organizations, as I describe in Chapter 5.

MinnPost is strongly tied into the news ecology of the Twin Cities, having been founded by former newspaper staffers from the Cities, and employing mostly journalists who previously worked for commercial media in Minneapolis-St. Paul. The organization is housed in an old industrial building across the Mississippi River from downtown Minneapolis, and is one of the city's most innovative journalistic experiments, one that many people around the country hold up as a model.

More so than the other two organizations studied here, MinnPost has focused on earning direct revenue for its journalism from readers and advertisers – similar to the model of traditional news organizations – to supplement money coming from foundations and individuals concerned about the future of journalism. Indeed, MinnPost founders drive cars with giant decals that say "I'm listening to MPR, but I read MinnPost.com" – drawing attention to the fact that MinnPost aspires toward a funding mix similar to that of public radio's: part foundation sources, part advertising or underwriting, and part audience donations. In order to earn revenue from advertising and reader donations, MinnPost needs to create an identity and a brand. Its attempts to do so are evident in its creation of a daily, well-rounded news package aimed to draw readers regularly – compared to WCIJ on the other extreme, whose website rarely changes because the bulk of its readers come through other news organizations. And MinnPost has had various plans over time to cut or eliminate its reliance on foundation funding, though for the moment that has not happened. Founder Joel Kramer said that one of his goals "was to

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create a sustainable model for high-quality work,"[130] something he links more closely to the marketplace than do founders of the other two organizations. All this means that MinnPost has put a significant focus on dealing with its funding structure, trying not to over-rely on foundations or advertising, and working to boost donations from readers and philanthropists. In 2013, the organization was still partly supported by volunteer labor, with the Kramers not taking a full salary. By 2013 MinnPost had just over 2,200 donating members,[131] and spoke enviously of Minnesota Public Radio's 100,000 donors. The organization hired a membership director in 2011 and worked on signing up "sustaining members" – those who commit to give on a regular basis. They also put on a fundraising event every year, in the style of White House Correspondents Dinner, featuring local celebrities and politicians in skits or singing songs – an event that brings in significant revenue (9% of the organization's annual revenue in 2011[132]) but also helps build the community around the organization. And in 2013, MinnPost began experimenting with crowd-funded beats, having people commit money to particular topic areas of regular coverage – starting the beat only when enough money was received to support it.

Although part of the goal is to prove that it can be sustainable for a nonprofit news organization to produce news, Kramer acknowledges that MinnPost's situation is very market-specific because it depends so heavily on local donors. "We have a reasonable background and connections and we're still scratching and clawing to make it happen. If

[130] Joel Kramer, interview, Minneapolis, July 11, 2011.

[131] *MinnPost 2013: Moving Toward Sustainability (Annual Report)*.

[132] Ellis, "MinnPost Reaches Five Years of Fundraising with MinnRoast."

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you go to a new market you don't have any advantages we have here (so it's not replicable)." [133]

Comparing the cases

As I describe above, my sample was chosen to crosscut a variety of different factors, with the hope that it would provide a useful look at the breadth of existing nonprofit news organizations. I discussed some of the reasoning behind my sample selection at the beginning of this chapter. Here I will examine two characteristics that are key to understanding how these organizations work: how they distribute their content, and the scale of the media ecology within which they operate. I selected organizations that vary on these characteristics, in order to better capture the breadth of nonprofit newsrooms into my sample.

Early on in my preliminary fieldwork, I realized that the mode of content distribution had a huge effect on the operation of each organization. In choosing my case sites, I selected organizations falling on a spectrum of modes of distribution, ranging from MinnPost, which primarily distributes its own content, to WCIJ, which primarily distributes its content through other news organizations, and CPI, which lies somewhere in the middle, giving its content away to be published by others, but also drawing significant readership to its own site.

[133] Joel Kramer, interview, Minneapolis, July 11, 2011.

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Table 3.2: Readership of each organization's stories, on its own website and through the other news organizations that pick up its content[134]

	Own site	**Other news orgs**
MinnPost	12.5 million pageviews, 2012	Not tracked
WCIJ	330,000 pageviews, 2012-13	30 million*, 2009-13
CPI	6 million pageviews, 2012-13	2.8 million, 2012-13

(Note that, as I describe in more detail in Chapter 5, these numbers have been calculated in a variety of ways and across a variety of time periods and thus are not comparable across organizations. They are, however, a useful suggestion of the ratio, within each organization, of readers coming from the organization's own site versus the sites of partners. And, more than that, the numbers offer suggestions about each organization's priorities. The fact that MinnPost does not track readers of its content on other sites, for instance, is an indicator of the organization's focus on bringing readers to its own website.)

As it turns out, the question of whether readers come primarily through the organization's own site or through other news organizations affects many elements of how the nonprofit operates, some of which are summarized in the table below.

[134] WCIJ calculates its readership through other news organizations to be 65% of the paid circulation of those publications. CPI's calculation of having 2.8 million views through the websites of other news organizations comes from a piece of code CPI asks other news organizations to embed into their websites to track readership of CPI's stories on those sites. This figure, though, does not include people who encounter CPI stories in the newspapers or newscasts of partners. Buzenberg (interview, April 17, 2014) explained that the center has tried to add all these numbers from time to time – online hits plus the circulation of newspapers that published a story, plus the audience of a newscast that aired it – and they sometimes come to something in the tens of millions, which funders love but which some find hard to believe.

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Table 3.3: Those characteristics of nonprofit newsrooms that vary depending on whether they publish their own content or give it away to others to publish

	Distribute on their own	**Distribute through existing networks**
Product	News website	News stories
Main pressure	Publish regularly	Create stories that supplement existing news
Audience	Readers	Editors
Funding model	Readers, advertisers (ie. those who recognize the brand) Funders can also include foundations and philanthropists	Foundations, philanthropists (those concerned about quality journalism)

I also selected organizations that differ on the scale of the media ecology in which they operate, choosing one local organization, one regional, and one national. This was done to allow my study to examine how scope helped constitute each organization and its behaviors. As I describe above, MinnPost is a largely local organization. This local focus is evident when examining the organizations that MinnPost interacts with. I observed staff in the newsroom regularly discussing content in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* and, to a lesser extent, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* and Minnesota Public Radio. MinnPost's reporters offer commentary on local radio stations. And although MinnPost does share content with news organizations around the state through the Minnesota Newspaper Association, this is something the organization does merely incidentally, as demonstrated by the fact that it does not track pick-up of its articles.

The Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism is a regional organization, reporting largely on things happening around the state of Wisconsin, including the state legislature. The center's mission statement says that it "seeks to increase the quality and quantity of

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investigative reporting in Wisconsin." [135] From its founding through to the end of 2012, almost 300 organizations had picked up the center's content. Its stories had strong pickup in the *Wisconsin State Journal* – where founder Andy Hall had worked until leaving to run the center – and moderate pickup in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*; small newspapers around the state were also big carriers of its stories. The center partners with statewide organizations such as WPR and WPT, but also with local newspapers, often on statewide stories. One example, described in Chapter 6, is a partnership that included the center and the *La Crosse Tribune* working together to analyze the governor's calendars – a story clearly of interest to readers around the state. (Indeed, the three parts of the story were picked up or mentioned 34 times, mostly by news organizations around the state of Wisconsin, though there was also pickup from national organizations such as the Center for Public Integrity, Huffington Post and Daily Kos.)

The Center for Public Integrity is a national and international news organization, in newsroom conversation comparing its domestic operations to the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and ProPublica – and drawing distinctions between itself and WikiLeaks – and regularly sharing content with national news organizations such as the *New York Times*, *Mother Jones* and Huffington Post. Its stories are also picked up by the Digital First chain of newspapers, meaning they sometimes run in local newspapers – for example the *Fort Bragg Advocate-News* picking up a CPI story about the role of 501(c)(4)s in state elections.[136] During the time of my fieldwork, the organization's international arm, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, was publishing stories about a large leak of data and comparing that portion of its operations

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[135] "What We Do | WisconsinWatch.org."
[136] Beckel, "Judicial Candidate Blames Mystery Nonprofit's Attacks for Defeat."

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to WikiLeaks. Those stories got mentioned or picked up by news organizations all around the world, and had a big effect on government attempts to crack down on the use of offshore tax havens, as I describe in subsequent chapters.

This issue of scale will prove to be a key one in understanding how each organization operates. The small size of the Madison metro area[137] – especially in comparison to the Twin Cities – means that a locally focused site likely wouldn't get sufficient readership to justify foundation investment, and certainly to get the name recognition that could bring significant reader donations. At the same time, we know that state-level reporting has suffered significantly across the country, with the American Journalism Review noting a 30% decrease in statehouse reporters between its last and second-last counts in 2003 and 2009.[138] That study found the number of statehouse reporters had gone down in 44 states between 2003 and 2009, and up in only two. As such, it may be that by focusing statewide, WCIJ is filling the biggest niche in reporting in Wisconsin. There is an important audience-side effect here, too. WCIJ and other nonprofits that operate in a similar ecology share content with news organizations that have rarely, if ever, carried that kind of content before. That is, readers of small newspapers in small cities around the state of Wisconsin are not used to seeing the investigative or watchdog-style reporting in their newspapers that WCIJ now provides. That makes WCIJ not just a smaller version of CPI, since the latter tends to share content with news organizations such as the *New York Times* that have traditionally carried investigative reporting and whose readers are accustomed to seeing that type of reporting.

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[137] Madison's media market ranks 83rd in the United States, with around 385,000 households (Nielsen, 2013-14).

[138] AJR staff, "Statehouse Exodus."

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On the other hand, MinnPost was founded in response to the Kramers' concern about the quality of reporting in the Twin Cities – coming from watching mass layoffs of reporters there. Given MinnPost's local focus, that organization could not expect wide pickup of its content by news organizations around the state. At the same time, the media market of the Twin Cities is likely not large enough to sustain MinnPost by picking up and distributing MinnPost's stories. As a result, MinnPost had to rely primarily on distributing its own stories, and that is what enabled the organization to raise advertising dollars and revenue from readers, making it less reliant on grants.

Finally, CPI falls in between these two organizations. It operates in a large and vibrant media ecology – national news in the United States – which means that a large number of organizations would be interested in publishing its stories. At the same time, by working to get its own name out through, as I will describe in subsequent chapters, hiring a public relations person and trying to post content more regularly on its own site, the organization is gradually building a brand it hopes readers will donate to.

These analyses make clear the significant differences in the organizations caused by the media ecology in which they operate, which then affects the way in which they distribute their content and, thus, how they can raise revenue for their work as well as how they view their audiences. In the next chapters I will work to make these linkages clearer.

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Chapter 4: An introduction to news sharing

A lot has changed since the early 2000s when the *Los Angeles Times* banned its reporters from a fellowship because the fellowship would have them share story ideas with journalists from other news organizations, something that went against the traditionally competitive attitude of commercial journalism.[139] Today, the *Los Angeles Times* runs stories from ProPublica and works with the Center for Health Reporting at the University of Southern California; this kind of collaborative behavior between news organizations, in particular when one of the news organizations is a nonprofit, is becoming widespread and, as I will show in this chapter, is part of what distinguishes the nonprofit news organizations I study here from the commercial media from which they arose. Sharing and collaboration have a long but unacknowledged history in the commercial news media. The organizations that are the focus of this research do acknowledge and are working to institutionalize a newsroom practice I call news sharing, which includes strategies employed to spread their journalism as broadly as possible by breaking down walls between news organizations – as opposed to guarding it and aiming to earn revenue by selling access, as traditional, commercial news organizations have tended to do.

The acceptance of sharing as an emergent professional newsroom norm in the 21st century has been driven by two changes in the media ecology: the decline of the traditional business model for journalism that has left many news organizations much leaner, hungrier for content and less able to compete, and the parallel rise of a collaborative publishing environment on the internet. News sharing in the United States

[139] Francisco, Lenhoff, and Schudson, "The Classroom as Newsroom: Leveraging University Resources for Public Affairs Reporting."

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has at least in large part been driven by nonprofit news organizations, which produce stories that they offer to other news organizations to publish, and organize collaborations in which journalists from different organizations work together on a story. This is not surprising: because of their nonprofit structure, their revenue does not come from guarding access to their content; rather, these organizations earn money from entities that believe they are helping democracy, and thus, their revenue is tied to their ability to spread their content as broadly as possible.

In this chapter, I examine the largely unacknowledged history of news sharing, going back to early colonial newspapers, which lifted entire passages from one another and from papers coming in from overseas. I discuss the nature of competition between journalists, arguing that those organizations that share through distribution do not engage in competition – of the economic or non-economic variety – in the way that other news organizations do, because they work to achieve their goal of field repair by using the tactic of news sharing. I also define and give examples of the four sharing behaviors I observed in my case studies, and show how the type of sharing each organization engaged in – and even whether it chose to share or not – had a key impact on how the organization behaved. Then, I describe in detail two of the more minor types of sharing – commenting and being mentioned. The two more important sharing behaviors – sharing through distribution, and collaboration – play an even more significant role in the workings of these nonprofits, and thus are addressed in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6, respectively. All four sharing behaviors are similar to but different from earlier forms of sharing because they are foregrounded and explicit, representing one of the tactics these nonprofits use to achieve field repair. Furthermore, unlike collaborations that break down

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the barrier between news producers and readers, the news nonprofits studied here aim to continue working in a professional journalistic sphere; their collaborations are not with readers but rather with other news organizations.

Literature

The unacknowledged history of collaboration

In general, the area of intermedia effects, in its broadest terms, refers to "the question of how different news organizations, genres, and media technologies or platforms interrelate and interact at different moments in media history." [140] These interrelations have long been part of journalism, but generally in an implicit and unacknowledged way, often "bracketed out" [141] of our understandings of journalistic process. The new news ecology puts them in the open, Graves argues, such that they cannot remain unacknowledged; this enables an understanding of how new technology is changing the way in which journalism works.

News organizations have for a long time shared stories and collaborated with one another, though in a way that went largely unacknowledged – certainly to the public, but even within the newsroom, with reporters seeing competition, not collaboration, as a defining characteristic of their own work. Even so, there are plenty examples of this unacknowledged sharing. American newspapers, for instance, lifted entire passages from one another and from European newspapers, particularly after the American Post Office Act of 1792 allowed publishers to send copies of their newspapers to other publishers for

[140] Graves, "Deciding What's True: Fact-Checking Journalism and the New Ecology of News," 9.

[141] Ibid., 10.

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free, giving newspapers access to non-local copy.[142] The flow went in both directions, with newspapers out-state reprinting stories about the goings on in the capital city, and newspapers in capital cities reprinting articles from newspapers in states and territories to inform politicians of public opinion in other parts of the country.[143] As telegraph technology was developed, this relationship grew into news wires and syndicates, which established at least some forms of news sharing as an acknowledged newsroom practice.[144]

More recently, Crouse's *The Boys on the Bus*,[145] about journalists reporting from campaign buses during the 1972 American presidential campaign, is one of the first works that described journalists from different organizations working collaboratively while putting on a competitive face. Crouse wrote about the "pack journalism" of the campaign trail, "the formation of a consensus around the opinions of the most prominent reporters,"[146] coming from a need on the part of journalists and editors working in uncertain circumstances to confirm their work by comparing it to that of others.[147] In Crouse's telling, it started with "(feeding) off the same pool report, the same daily handout, the same speech by the candidate," but led to a situation in which journalists would "believe the same rumors, subscribe to the same theories, and write the same

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[142] Starr, *The Creation of the Media*; John, *Spreading the News*.

[143] Kielbowicz, *News in the Mail*.

[144] Schwarzlose, *The Nation's Newsbrokers Vol. 1. The Formative Years, from Pretelegraph to 1865*.

[145] *The Boys on the Bus*.

[146] Shaw and Sparrow, "From the Inner Ring Out," 325.

[147] Reese and Danielian, "The Structure of News Sources on Television: A Network Analysis of 'CBS News,' 'Nightline,' 'MacNeil/Lehrer,' and 'This Week with David Brinkley.'"

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stories." [148] A former *Newsweek* reporter explained to Crouse that "The editors don't want scoops. Their abiding interest is making sure that nobody else has got anything they don't have, not getting something that nobody else has." [149] This rush to sameness isn't particular to the campaign trail, of course; Kovach and Rosenstiel[150] describe a similar story that occurred the *New York World* in 1913. When that paper's first ombudsman investigated why every story about shipwrecks included a description of a cat that had survived the calamity, he learned of a complicated web of unacknowledged sharing that had started when the *World* reporter wrote a story about a shipwrecked cat, and other reporters were criticized by their editors for missing that detail. Those other reporters wrote a cat – which did not exist – into their next shipwreck story, upon which the *World* reporter was criticized by his editor for missing the cat. Now, the reporter explained, all the reporters always wrote cats into their shipwreck stories, just in case, to avoid the criticism.

This illuminates the fact that many reporters write for one another and their editors, rather than writing for a general public. In Robert Darnton's experience as a journalist at the *Newark Star Ledger* and the *New York Times*, reporters who worked away from their newsrooms – at a state capitol bureau, for instance – became especially connected to their colleagues from other news organizations, meeting after press conferences to filter observations and agree on leads, or playing poker while junior reporters dug up the stories. He concludes that "With specialization and professionalization, they have

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[148] Crouse, *The Boys on the Bus*, 8.

[149] Ibid., 10.

[150] Kovach and Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism*.

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responded increasingly to the influence of their professional peer group, which far exceeds that of any images they may have of a general public." [151] This is a precursor of increasing homogeneity of news in the internet era, which Boczkowski[152] connects to pack journalism, demonstrating how increased monitoring of the competition has led to ever greater imitation online, and attributing this type of story selection and framing to, for instance, risk-averse editors.

This monitoring and imitation is linked to the notion of agenda-setting,[153] whereby the news media has the power to make particular issues salient in the public agenda. One of the mechanisms through which this occurs is media agenda-setting, in which news organizations influence each other's agendas. Reese and Danielian,[154] for instance, examined how television networks take cues from one another in selecting sources, leading to a situation in which many of those interviewed come from an elite group of insiders. This is a result, they argue, of editors and journalists acting in response to uncertainty in the world by checking out and mimicking what others are doing – similar to the scenarios described by Crouse and Darnton.

Some scholars, though, argue that these notions are oversimplified. Shaw and Sparrow,[155] for instance, find that although much of the literature assumes the existence of a news institution that is homogenized through the impacts of elite media on non-elite, the reality

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[151] Darnton, "Writing News and Telling Stories," 192.

[152] Boczkowski, *News at Work*.

[153] McCombs and Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media."

[154] Reese and Danielian, "The Structure of News Sources on Television: A Network Analysis of 'CBS News,' 'Nightline,' 'MacNeil/Lehrer,' and 'This Week with David Brinkley.'"

[155] Shaw and Sparrow, "From the Inner Ring Out."

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is more complex, with elite media and non-elite media often operating in their own ways. Specifically, they take on the assumption made in studies based on just a few news organizations that journalists in situations of uncertainty take cues from their more respected colleagues.

Much has also been written about collaborations between institutionalized news organizations and amateurs, enabled, in large part, by the internet and manifested through something Jeff Jarvis refers to as networked journalism: a collaboration between professionals and amateurs that has people linking across news products, breaking down old boundaries to share facts, ideas and perspectives, something, he says, that "recognizes the complex relationships that will make news. And it focuses on the process more than the product." [156] Anderson[157] adds that the rise of a networked journalism comes out of a problematization of what journalism is in the first place, and what constitutes an audience. This kind of networking decentralizes decision-making, leading to a journalism that is less hierarchical and more diverse.[158] Russell[159] adds that there are three major components involved in the rise of networked journalism in the last 20 years: amateur production, the rising role of niche and special interest groups, and the growing popularity of remix and appropriation. Some of these ideas were put into practice in Jay Rosen's journalistic experiment, NewAssignment.Net,[160] in which "the people formerly known as the audience" worked together to create journalism. All of these processes add

[156] Jarvis, "Networked Journalism."

[157] Anderson, *Rebuilding the News*.

[158] Beckett, *Supermedia*.

[159] Russell, *Networked*.

[160] Rosen, "Introducing NewAssignment.Net."

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up to a more collaborative environment of information production and distribution on the internet.

There exist, evidently, plenty of situations in which news organizations share or otherwise look to one another; even so, these behaviors remain largely backgrounded in the journalism studies literature. And, while many have written about increasing collaboration *within* newsrooms in the last 10 or 20 years,[161] largely stemming from the fact that news organizations are now working in a multimedia environment, which requires journalists with different specialties to work collaboratively within a single newsroom, we know little about the impact of collaborative behaviors on news organizations' relationships with other organizations.

Stearns[162] has created a running catalog of journalistic collaborations, breaking them into five categories based on the *type* of news organization that engages in the behavior: commercial news organizations, private-public partnerships, public and noncommercial media organizations, university news partnerships, and legacy/hyperlocal collaborations. This list contributes a sense of the breadth of projects involving some element of news sharing, as well as the breadth of organizations engaging in it. It also points to the fact that categorization by type of news organization fails to illuminate important patterns in the type and scope of these collaborations. Anderson re-categorized Stearns' catalog of

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[161] See, e.g., Schmitz Weiss, "Collaborative Newsgathering."

[162] Stearns, "A Growing Inventory of Journalism Collaborations."

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news collaborations,[163] coming up with a typology based not on the structure of the collaborating organization, but rather on underlying *behaviors*:

1. sharing resources used in journalism, including equipment or content;
2. collaborations on content: working together to produce journalism; and
3. linking, a type of collaboration that can occur without the consent of the other party, and which can include simply acknowledging that other organizations have done related work.

He then took those ideal types into the field, and examined how the cases he observed in the news ecosystem of Philadelphia reflected on that typology. Like Anderson, I employ ethnographic methods to engage in a practice-based analysis of new behaviors in post-crisis newsrooms. Ethnographies allow scholars to examine "the culture of journalists and their communication in the newsroom" [164] and to study the "manufacturing process and the shared culture of the manufacturers." [165] This method allows a move beyond a simple accounting of collaborative entities and to a practice-based analysis of collaborative behaviors.

Can sharing be competitive?

Media economists have written extensively about economic competition among news organizations, documenting relationships ranging from friendly competition to outright animosity and assuming an antipathy between news organizations that compete for

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[163] Anderson, *Rebuilding the News*.

[164] Schmitz Weiss, *The Transformation of the Newsroom*.

[165] Paterson and Domingo, *Making Online News*.

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revenue and audiences.[166] Of course, economics is not the only basis for competition; indeed, St. Cyr et al.[167] find that the literature describes three types of competition among news organizations: economic, which means competition for revenue; sociological,[168] which is the competition that occurs between, for instance, having two reporters on one beat; and occupational,[169] which describes the way in which different occupations or systems of journalism compete, for instance website writers and commercial journalists. Traditional news organizations exert ownership over their content because it is both a direct income source – people buy the newspaper because of a particular story – and an indirect source – people come to like or trust a newspaper because of its history of reporting, and thus buy the paper, or advertisers believe people will buy the paper, and thus pay money to advertise in it. Nonprofits that produce and distribute their own content, such as MinnPost, operate in a similar way, creating a bundle of content that lets them build a relationship with a readership from whom they can eventually seek donations, which enables them to sell advertising, thereby engaging in economic competition with commercial journalism. Nonprofit news organizations that share through distribution though, produce individual stories that improve the quality of content in *other* publications. Without an obvious way to monetize this – in the absence of being paid by the news organizations to which they offer content – these nonprofits are able to raise revenue only from sources that care about the quality of news – mostly foundations

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[166] E.g. Steiner, "Program Patterns and Preferences and the Workability of Competition in Radio Broadcasting"; Berry and Waldfogel, "Free Entry and Social Inefficiency in Radio Broadcasting."

[167] "Internet Competition and US Newspaper City Government Coverage."

[168] Lacy and Simon, *The Economics and Regulation of United States Newspapers*.

[169] Lowrey and Mackay, "Journalism and Blogging: A Test of a Model of Occupational Competition."

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and philanthropists. As a result, since they are operating in a different market than those organizations – for-profit or not – that both produce and distribute their content, they are not in economic competition with those organizations.

There are, however, other, non-economic ways in which these organizations could compete. Lowrey and Mackay,[170] for instance, noted a form of competition between mainstream journalists and bloggers, who competed even though bloggers did not financially threaten journalists: at the time of their research, Americans didn't get a significant amount of news from blogs, and advertising revenue generated by blogs was tiny. They concluded that there was occupational competition going on, with each group staking out a similar area of expertise: selecting events and issues for attention, and reporting and commenting on these events. Abbott's notion of jurisdictional claims[171] argues that the space professions carve out for themselves can be reshaped by factors he calls objective – ones the profession can't change; these usually come from outside – and subjective – ones over which the profession has control; generally coming from inside. Both Lowrey and Mackay, and, later, St. Cyr et al,[172] found that mainstream journalism changed to reflect the existence of bloggers; the more a newspaper was aware of blogging, they found, the more it changing its operations and tried to reposition itself. As I will show below, this type of occupational competition is not evident between nonprofits and the organizations that carry their content. This is because of an effort on

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[170] Ibid.

[171] Abbott, *The System of the Professions*.

[172] St. Cyr, Carpenter, and Lacy, "Internet Competition and US Newspaper City Government Coverage."

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the part of these nonprofits to occupy a niche unfilled by commercial media, thus acting symbiotically, rather than competitively, with commercial news organizations.

Barriers to collaboration

Despite the large and growing number of journalistic collaborations, the dynamic governing relationships among journalists and among news organizations is still largely competitive. In Philadelphia, Anderson observed an environment in which news organizations "erected high barriers around a variety of networked, collaborative possibilities." [173] The newspapers he studied – the *Daily News* and the *Inquirer* – were busy merging many of their reporting desks, but competition persisted. Indeed, he observed a variety of journalistically oriented people in Philadelphia – coming from the newspaper industry, independent publishing and blogging – attempting to reorient the way they thought about journalism, trying to move from seeing a sea of individual players to instead focusing on the work they did – alone or together – as "acts of journalism." [174] That attempted reorientation, though, failed as cultural and economic challenges proved too great and participants continued to pursue their own fractured projects. Eventually, the mainstream journalist who had initiated the reorientation attempt concluded that the only way to remake the news industry was to "blow everything up and start over from scratch. But who wants to contemplate that?" [175] Anderson concluded that while competition has always existed between journalists, its speed and transparency have increased now that the internet has enabled everyone to see what everyone else is

[173] Anderson, *Rebuilding the News*, 105.

[174] Ibid., 116.

[175] Quoted in Anderson 2013, 118.

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doing.[176] Indeed, it was the industry's understanding of its own operations and goals that prevented the breaking down of barriers, he concluded. "In particular, local journalism's occupational self-image, its vision of itself as an autonomous workforce conducting original reporting on behalf of a unitary public, blocked the kind of cross-institutional collaboration that might have helped journalism thrive in an era of fractured communication." [177]

In his research he observed four dynamics that pushed the organizations he studied away from networked collaboration:[178]

1. hierarchy and focus on "regularized production of branded news articles;"
2. perceived economics of digital news production that lead to producing copy to meet "arbitrary production metrics";
3. mismatch between routines and standards of news organizations and amateurs; and
4. the fact that those wanting to embrace collaboration were, in Anderson's observations, organizationally precarious and least able to make change.

As we shall see, the organizations studied here overcome these barriers in a variety of ways, not least through the fact that they are not as precarious as some of the amateur organizations Anderson observed. Additionally, they succeed, as we shall see, at being both similar enough and different enough from the news organizations with which they

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[176] Boczkowski, *News at Work*.

[177] Anderson, "How Journalists' Self-Concepts Hindered Their Adaptation to a Digital World."

[178] Anderson, *Rebuilding the News*, 130.

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collaborate. By being not too similar, they are not seen as competitors; by being not too different, they do not run into the kind of mismatched routines Anderson observed.

Ultimately, though, while the internet can be a great enabler of collaboration and deliberation,[179] it has also worked to build more competition and less diversity. If collaboration is successful for the organizations I study, it is because of a careful negotiation of lines between news entities.

The role of universities

Educational institutions are one of the forces pushing collaboration in journalism in the United States. Students have been producing news for and about their broader communities for some time, often collaboratively. Capital News Service at the University of Maryland, for instance, covers news from around the state and distributes stories through a variety of networks and news organizations – and has been doing so for 20 years. The role of these organizations has been evolving following the financial crisis in journalism, with their work in many cases becoming more central to local news ecologies – in terms of both the content produced and the changes it brings to the functioning of journalism.

Going forward, journalism schools could be ideal places to work out how the journalism of the future will or should look because they form a separate strategic action field, that of university-based journalism centers impacted by a different set of pressures and following a different set of strategies, those related to teaching journalism. As a result, they might, for instance, value teaching journalism above making a profit, and could be more likely to experiment, because their educational mission may mean that they can

[179] Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*.

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accept the cost of experimentation without expecting to turn a profit or even break even.[180] (A study of contributors to sustainability of local civic websites found that affiliation with a post-secondary institution was one of few things contributing to sustainability.[181])

Indeed, scholars have come up with one conceptualization of how this university-based journalism center model can work, and whether and how it can feed into commercial journalism. The idea of the "teaching hospital model" of doing journalism was first suggested in 2009 by Nicholas Lemann, then dean of the Columbia University journalism school.[182] The model involves students working with professional journalists, in the context of a university, to produce content for general audiences in partnership with professional media organizations.[183] In this time of trouble in the news industry, journalism schools have the opportunity to become " 'anchor institutions' in the emerging informational ecosystem," some scholars argue.[184] "Journalism programs must be thought of and begin to think of themselves as more than simply just the teachers and trainers of journalists, but rather as the anchor-institutions involved in the production of community-relevant news that will benefit the entire local news ecosystem." [185] In practice the nature

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[180] It's not clear, at this point, whether or not that has been the case.

[181] Kim et al., "Contributors to Sustainability of Emergent, Civic News Sites: A Qualitative Comparative Analysis."

[182] Lemann, "Journalism Schools Can Push Coverage Beyond Breaking News"; Mensing and Ryfe, "Blueprint for Change."

[183] Francisco, Lenhoff, and Schudson, "The Classroom as Newsroom: Leveraging University Resources for Public Affairs Reporting."

[184] Anderson, Glaisyer, and Smith, *Shaping 21st Century Journalism: Leveraging a "Teaching Hospital Model" in Journalism Education*, 1.

[185] Ibid., 29.

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of these relationships has not stabilized, meaning that there are as many types of relationship as there are relationships. Nonprofit news pioneer Charles Lewis – also founder of the Center for Public Integrity – said in 2012 that there were 17 "university-based professional news enclaves," [186] with the oldest likely being the Elaine and Gerald Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism at Brandeis University, which was founded in 2004. This vibrant space comes in part out of the Carnegie-Knight Initiative on the Future of Journalism Education, started in 2005 out of a concern that journalism schools were not providing an answer to the crisis of confidence in journalism, and a desire to "advance the U.S. news business by helping revitalize schools of journalism." [187] Along with studying the problem and reforming the curriculum at a dozen universities to better integrate journalism into the campus, the project also launched News21, an internship program built in the teaching hospital tradition that matches students with professors to create investigative reporting projects that are distributed through existing news media.

There exist plenty of sources of tension in the teaching hospital model, and other models of interaction between news organizations and educational institutions. In a relationship between the University of Alabama and the local newspaper, Eric Newton at the Knight Foundation – a key advocate of the teaching hospital model – argued that students' journalistic experience shouldn't be a factor in deciding whether they can participate in the program – after all, he sees the newspaper as a venue for teaching – but newspaper staff disagreed. Additionally, money is always an issue, and the future of the Alabama

[186] Francisco, Lenhoff, and Schudson, "The Classroom as Newsroom: Leveraging University Resources for Public Affairs Reporting."

[187] "A Report on the Carnegie-Knight Initiative on the Future of Journalism Education," 2.

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relationship is unclear after Knight Foundation's seed money ran out.[188] Another common concern is whether universities are able to consistently produce serious journalism despite their steady turnover and the fact that they generally operate just eight or nine months of the year.

On top of concerns with the functioning of the teaching hospital model, not everyone embraces the metaphor in the first place. Mensing and Ryfe, for instance, argue that the model behaves as if journalism were not in flux, and that existing practices simply need to be engaged in more rigorously. They argue that the teaching hospital idea is a "supply-side" solution, focused on the production of journalism – more, better, more local. To carry out this goal, the teaching hospital model invokes journalism professionals – the very people who left the industry in such ill repair in the first place. "Put simply, (the teaching hospital model) makes it hard for students to think differently." [189] They argue instead that journalism students would be better served with an entrepreneurial model of journalism education, one that pursues change rather than entrenching existing values and practices. The entrepreneurial model would also acknowledge that civic life is changing – that, for instance, there exists a new relationship between journalists and the public in which lines are blurred. And, it would let journalism education get away from serving the broken news industry and focus instead on creating a new institutional identity for journalism. Of course, even advocates of the teaching hospital model agree that

[188] Roush, "Moving the Classroom Into the Newsroom."

[189] Mensing and Ryfe, "Blueprint for Change," 2.

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journalism schools shouldn't be replicating existing models, but should instead be innovating.[190]

Types of sharing

The commercial funding of journalism has led news organizations to fence off the content they produce, using tools such as copyright to keep it from others in order to retain the ability to charge readers for the stories they produce. Since, as I will describe below, nonprofit news organizations are giving their products away, satisfied with being mentioned – even without attribution – by traditional news organizations, then clearly a different mechanism is at play.

One explanation is that the group of nonprofit news organizations relying on foundations and philanthropists concerned about the ability of the news to promote democracy – in my sample, CPI and WCIJ fall in that category – have oriented their business models around a different economic understanding of news, one that capitalizes on the way in which public affairs journalism produces positive externalities. Recall that, as I described in Chapter 2, a positive externality is something produced by the market that benefits someone who didn't pay for it. Public affairs journalism produces positive externalities because when some people become better informed, everyone benefits – even those who did not expend the time or money to collect the information – which, economists argue, will result in an underproduction of public affairs journalism in the marketplace. The commercial business model for journalism depends on walling off content; nonprofits relying on funding from philanthropists and foundations, though, have an explicit mission

[190] Francisco, Lenhoff, and Schudson, "The Classroom as Newsroom: Leveraging University Resources for Public Affairs Reporting."

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to spread information broadly – in other words, to engage in field repair. Thus, in theory at least, these funders would reward organizations for sharing the stories they produce broadly, rather than walling them off.

Most traditional news organizations manage both content production and distribution. Many of the new nonprofit organizations – in particular those without their own publication – have amassed a collection of distribution outlets for getting their stories out. News sharing is the key to being able to do that. Sharing behaviors are often explicitly mentioned in the mission statements of new nonprofit news organizations. For instance:

- Investigative Newsource writes that it is "collaborative, not competitive;" [191]
- FairWarning says it "distribute(s its) stories as widely as possible through social media and by collaborating with news organizations across the country;" [192]
- Open Secrets says that it provides information for other news organizations to use;[193]
- InvestigateWest writes that "We work shoulder-to-shoulder with reporters in public and commercial newsrooms to increase their capacity for watchdog reporting." [194]

What all these behaviors have in common is that they are all techniques the organizations in question use to share the outcomes of their work as broadly as possible, with an eye to improving the quality of journalism through field repair. I observed four types of sharing

[191] "About Us | Inewsource."

[192] "About FairWarning."

[193] "Our Mission."

[194] "About Us."

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behavior, all of which have existed, to varying degrees and often without being acknowledged, in the commercial media. It is also important to note that each behavior was actively cultivated by at least some of the organizations examined in my work.

- Sharing through distribution: occurs when one news organization produces a story and gives it to another or others to publish, often for free.
- Collaboration: occurs when two organizations work together on a story. In some situations, reporters work together from the beginning, conceptualizing the story together, doing interviews together, and writing a single story that is published in each of their outlets. On the other extreme, reporters form a loose collaboration, without committing to producing any joint materials, but merely supporting each other informally, or hoping to increase the leverage of what they produce by publishing different stories on a topic in different publications at the same time.[195]
- Commenting: occurs when journalists are cited or interviewed as experts on their stories by other programs or publications.
- Being mentioned: occurs when the organization in question acts as a source by having its reports mentioned by other news organizations.

Below, I provide more detail about each of these.

Distribution

This behavior involves one organization producing content that it gives away to others to distribute. The original news sharers were newswires, whose content was distributed almost entirely by other news organizations until the commercialization of the internet.

[195] This kind of collaboration is rare. An example is a project in Madison in which 20 news organizations produced and published stories about healthcare simultaneously, but without actually working together on individual stories (Kushner, 2010).

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(Today, of course, many newswires reach readers directly through their websites.) All or almost all nonprofit news organizations have websites that help them reach audiences; the organizations break into two categories, though: those that largely distribute their own content, and those whose primary distribution happens through other news organizations. The nonprofits examined here represent the spectrum. MinnPost's focus is on providing content through its own website, so much so that it does not track pickups of its stories elsewhere while reporting 12.5 million pageviews of its own website in 2012.[196] At CPI, pageviews on the organization's own sites totaled just over 6 million from Oct. 1, 2012 to Sept. 30, 2013, compared to 2.8 million hits on the sites that ran its content.[197] And WCIJ estimates a potential audience through its distribution partners of 30 million[198] between its launch in the summer of 2009 and the fall of 2013, compared to almost 335,000 pageviews and almost 220,000 visits directly to its own site from November, 2012, to October, 2013. As I explain in more detail in Chapter 5, the absolute numbers are not necessarily important or even comparable; instead, what each organization tracks and how points to the priorities of the organization.

Collaboration

The second, and by far more complicated, type of news sharing is one in which reporters from different organizations work together to report the same story – a behavior I call collaboration. In this type of sharing, the organization works with another news organization generally quite early in the process to come up with the story idea, jointly

[196] MinnPost, "MinnPost 2012: A Year of Stability and Growth."

[197] Personal correspondence.

[198] Calculated as 65% of the paid circulation of the newspapers that carried each story – compared to the industry standard of 75% (personal correspondence – email from Lauren, Oct. 31, 2013).

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conduct the reporting on a story, and then release it together. Here, there are plenty of potential complications, not the least of which is that partners may operate in a different medium. This type of sharing can be a one-off event, or can depend on a longer-term relationship between the collaborating organizations. I examine this type of sharing in detail in Chapter 6.

Offering commentary

Like the two sharing behaviors discussed above, this one has existed for some time in commercial media. Reese and Danielian's[199] study of sources on television, for instance, found that about 15% of sources on the three news programs they studied were journalists (the exception was CBS, where only 3% of sources were journalists). Journalists make good sources, they argue, because they are coherent and knowledgeable about the topic at hand, and because they want exposure, making the relationship a symbiotic one. Ben-Porath provides a thorough and important analysis of what he refers to as "dialogical news" – the rise of delivering news through conversation, which includes the practice of bringing journalists from other news organizations onto a television show.[200] This behavior is not new or unique to the nonprofits studied here; at the same time, I observed significant focus, at least at some of the organizations studied, on getting journalists onto television programs as commentators or sources of information on the subjects on which they were reporting. At CPI, for instance, I observed staffers discussing how to reach out to other news organizations with their stories – both to create distribution partnerships, but also to be invited to comment on the stories they were writing. A committee of center

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[199] "The Structure of News Sources on Television: A Network Analysis of 'CBS News,' 'Nightline,' 'MacNeil/Lehrer,' and 'This Week with David Brinkley.'"

[200] Ben-Porath, "Internal Fragmentation of the News."

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staff was working in the spring of 2013 to figure out how to deal with communication needs, after the organization's communications staff members were let go in 2011 when CPI fell into financial trouble. Following discussions with their co-workers, the committee concluded that the biggest needs were crafting a coherent message and getting reporters on television talking about the stories they write. Still, the organization seemed stuck on the question whether it was more important to deal with the daily issues of getting stories widely distributed and reporters on television, or whether the priority should be longer-term issues including crafting an image and a message. They held a consultation session with a communications professional to try to sort that out. One editor described the situation at the time, in the absence of a communications person, as "guerilla booking," involving identifying bookers on news programs, taking them to coffee, and trying to get them to add the center to their contacts.[201] As one employee put it, "We have a lot of power within these walls and it's not leveraged." "We have amazing experts and there's no one who watches Sunday television and doesn't say 'our reporters can do it better,' but they're not the ones who get called," another said. Getting on television, like getting stories published in other venues, was tricky for CPI, because it meant finding the overlap between CPI's values and the values of organizations that might interview CPI reporters. "We're not an advocacy group; we're not cause-related; we're not going to make outlandish statements that talk shows want," executive director Buzenberg told the consultant.

Attempts to comment through mainstream media go all the way to CPI's early days, when the organization produced reports that it distributed to journalists, and made itself

[201] Meeting with Sharon Toomer, Washington, D.C., May 14, 2013.

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available to comment on them. In those days, center staff were seen as experts and, especially because of the organization's name, people would call for comment on all manner of issues related to public integrity, according to founder Charles Lewis, who found himself on the network news dozens of times a year in the early days.[202]

Located in Madison, WCIJ is in a less vibrant media environment but even so, staff there attempted at least occasionally to comment on the news they produced. The center's frac sand mining expert, for instance, joined an online chat organized by Minnesota Public Radio, answering questions about the frac sand mining boom in the Midwest.

MinnPost did not engage as much in this kind of behavior during the course of my fieldwork, likely because it sees itself as the main distributor of its own content. Even so, in the spring of 2013, staff members were negotiating a relationship with a commercial radio station focused on sports and music. The station had little news reporting, but was considering having MinnPost staff come on for a couple of minutes at a time to talk about the stories they were working on.

Being mentioned

The final type of collaboration made up the bulk of CPI's operations early on, in the days when the organization would produce a report, print a few hundred copies, hold a press conference and hope its work would get mentioned by traditional news organizations. Examining that moment in time can be very instructive. Charles Lewis, the organization's founder, explained that because he wanted other news organizations to cite the center's reports, center staff could not present themselves as reporters. "We wanted them (other news organizations) to cover it (the center's reports) as a news event and they wouldn't

[202] Charles Lewis, interview, Washington, D.C., May 8, 2013.

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cover something done by journalists."[203] "We had no publication and we had to get it out so it had to be an event."

Today, it has more direct ways of reaching readers, as described above. Still, being mentioned remains an important part of what the organization does. And while CPI prizes having its work attributed to it, for staff the primary goal was getting the information out. In one case, a front-page story in the *New York Times*[204] described how Luxembourg had finally decided to start sharing information about accounts in its banks with foreign authorities. The story linked the decision to pressure resulting from reporting on a cache of leaked documents about offshore tax havens – that is, to an investigation carried out by CPI's international arm, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists – but did not refer to CPI or to ICIJ by name. CPI staff expressed some frustration about this at the editorial meeting the next morning,[205] but ultimately seemed pleased that the news was spreading. "It's a nice backhanded complement, which is the way the media works," one editor said.

Despite all this collaboration, CPI did occasionally exhibit some competitive behavior. When a big story broke, an editor recommended writing something about it to show the center was following the issue, and to point out the issue's broader context. And, center staff kept trying to distance themselves from another organization that shares through distribution of public affairs information: Wikileaks. The comparison was most commonly made in discussions of the center's reporting on a leaked hard drive of data

[203] Charles Lewis, interview, telephone, March 25, 2014.

[204] Higgins, "Europe Pushes to Shed Stigma of Tax Haven With End to Bank Secrecy."

[205] CPI, editorial meeting, Washington, D.C., May 23, 2013.

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about offshore tax havens. The center regularly made clear that unlike Wikileaks, its staff was analyzing the data and choosing for release the portions that were relevant. And, in the spring of 2014, when CPI was awarded a Pulitzer for a project that was partly a collaboration with ABC News, a fight ensued between CPI and ABC over whether ABC deserved a portion of the prize.[206] I discuss this in greater detail in Chapter 6.

Conclusion

This chapter established a typology, which I will use throughout the rest of this dissertation, for thinking about sharing between news organizations. I defined sharing as an umbrella term for news organizations working together, made up of four different behaviors:

- collaboration: news organizations jointly reporting on stories;
- sharing through distribution: news organizations producing content that they share with other news organizations;
- commenting: putting reporters out as experts to comment through other news organizations; and
- being mentioned: putting out information through news stories or documents for other organizations to cite or incorporate into their own reporting.

Those organizations that produce public affairs journalism and give it away to others to publish are essentially focusing on producing the unprofitable elements of journalism in the interests of doing some repair work in the field of journalism. These organizations use

[206] Buzenberg, "The Center for Public Integrity's Response to ABC News"; Tompkins, "ABC News Says Center for Public Integrity Should Share Pulitzer for Investigative Reporting."

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news sharing to achieve that goal of field repair, and the fact they're funded by foundations rather than by the market enables them to engage in news sharing. As long as foundation funding for such journalism continues to exist, it can continue to be produced outside of the marketplace and fed back into market-driven news organizations.

In the next two chapters I examine in more detail the emergent *practices* of sharing through distribution and of collaboration. I define each, provide relevant literature, describe how these practices are manifested in the organizations studied in this dissertation, and ultimately explain how they are forging a new type of news organization that has new impacts on its news ecology.

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Chapter 5: Sharing through distribution

When Bill Buzenberg explained how the Center for Public Integrity worked to visitors in the summer of 2013, there was one image he showed them that made him particularly proud. It was a still of the organization's readership tracker, which displays how many people are reading stories produced by the center, both on its own website and on the websites that republish center stories. On the moment in April, 2013, that is captured in the image (Figure 5.1), 17,794 readers around the world were *simultaneously* reading the center's stories, with the largest external readership coming from Huffington Post, the *Guardian*, *Le Monde*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Le Soir*, as Figure 5.1 illustrates. For a place as tiny as the center, the number is huge. It represents the outcome of intense research and reporting coming out of a leak of data about offshore tax havens, work that was conducted by 86 journalists working at 46 news organizations around the world, and coordinated through CPI's international arm, called the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists. Getting a broad readership for the stories depended on collaborations between journalists at all the organizations, who worked together and released their stories in a coordinated

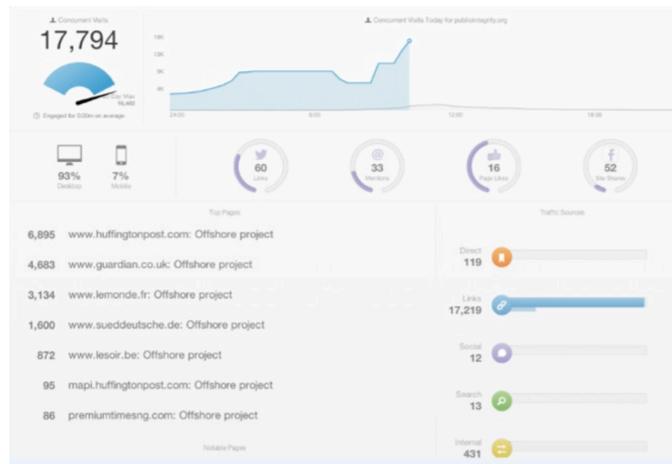

Figure 5.1: A sample screen from the CPI tracker. Note that this screen is not representative; instead, it shows an extremely high-readership day following the release of a high-profile offshore tax haven story by the center's international arm, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists.

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fashion. A significant portion of readers, though, also came from beyond the websites of the organizations that worked on the stories, because the organizations gave away stories to be published by other news organizations. As the stories rolled out, Buzenberg kept updating the number of organizations that had published or referenced the stories – 9,000 by early May of 2013.

The importance of this practice of giving content away to get a broader readership was something staffers at CPI and WCIJ in particular were keenly aware of as they planned their coverage and worked on their stories. When a new reporter asked CPI's executive director about how the center distributes its stories, the editor explained that both collaboration and distributing through other organizations were important because "our biggest audience is not probably our own website; we think where can it go and how can it have impact." [207]

Recall that in Chapter 4, I defined sharing as practices news organizations engage in to help fulfill their goal of achieving a broad readership for their stories. There, I explained how sharing is made up of four different practices, and this chapter explores the sharing activity that occurred most frequently at the organizations I observed: sharing through distributing stories to other news organizations. Each of the news nonprofits I studied engaged in this behavior – at CPI and WCIJ, it was central to their operations; at MinnPost it was, as we shall see, more incidental – and staff at each of the organizations offered plenty of reasons for doing so. It raises the organization's profile. It gives a piece of information a broader reach. It's the only way that an organization that is so small, and

[207] CPI staff meeting, Washington, D.C., May 7, 2013.

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has such a small readership, can justify spending so much money and time on content.[208] They need to do it for funders:[209] no one's going to fund an organization that produces niche stories for niche sites. It improves morale. There's no point building distribution networks when they already exist.[210]

At the same time, this particular type of sharing presented some challenges to the organizations I observed. The nonprofits I studied were founded in opposition to commercial journalism, intended by their founders to achieve something commercial journalism wasn't doing, and perhaps isn't able to do. Distributing stories through sharing, though, means producing stories that mainstream journalists and editors understand as stories that might appear in their newspaper or on their newscast. That raises a particular tension for these nonprofit news organizations: are they able to act as oppositional even though they feed back into the mainstream organizations they oppose? If so, how?

Literature

There is no body of literature explicitly focused on sharing through distribution; instead, works on news sharing are scattered across the literature on newswires, syndicates, citizen journalists, and Indymedia, among others. I will examine some of that literature,

[208] "We're spending enough time doing the work we're doing, shame on us if we're just letting it go into the ether." (Dave Levinthal, interview, Washington, D.C., May 13, 2013)

[209] "Nobody's giving us money for our work if they don't think it's being seen." (John Dunbar, interview, Washington, D.C., May 7, 2014)

[210] "It made far more sense to make our stories available to the very sizeable audience that had been developed by public broadcasting as well as all the other news organizations in Wisconsin. Those organizations have spent many years and millions of dollars developing those audiences, so rather than trying to change the public's media usage and persuade huge numbers of residents come to our website why not instead make our content available to the channels to which residents were already receiving media content." (Andy Hall, interview, Madison, Nov. 4, 2011)

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starting with a discussion of the history and precursors of sharing through distribution, showing how it has evolved as the online environment has changed, not because the internet enabled this kind of sharing necessarily, but because it changed the news environment in such a way that encourages it. I raise questions about whether sharing through distribution can ever lead to a sustainable business model – and whether it is reasonable to expect that it might. Then, I discuss how sharing through distribution manifested itself at the organizations I studied.

History of sharing through distribution

The 20th century was characterized by an "authoritative communication environment" [211] – a linear world in which trained, professional journalists were tied together through their organizational, professional and cultural status, creating a group identity into which some were defined and from which others were left out. Today's news organizations, in contrast, contend with a bustling and chaotic information space. Heinrich,[212] among others, argues that the old one-way flow of communication in which journalists controlled the gates is being replaced by a multidirectional flow in which journalists are one voice of many and contend with information providers from around the globe – bloggers, activists and citizen journalists, among others. These "nonmarket actors" – individuals and groups acting outside of professional journalism, as Benkler describes them[213] – are empowered by the networked information economy to push back against two features of the commercial media: the vast power it wields, and the way in which it can tend to promote disengagement. Futurists in general have been excited about how the

[211] Heinrich, "What Is 'Network Journalism'?"

[212] Ibid.

[213] *The Wealth of Networks*, 220.

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internet enables "produsage" – which Bruns defines as "the collaborative, iterative, and user-led production of content by participants in a hybrid user-producer, or *produser* role." [214] While Benkler, Bruns and others are referring to a kind of citizen journalism, I will argue that another kind of nonmarket actor – nonprofit news organizations – is forcing a re-conceptualizing of where journalism might come from.

Despite the explosion of news on the internet, early studies have shown that we have experienced in fact a concentration, rather than a broadening, of sources online. Paterson, Hindman, and others[215] have found that when it comes to international news especially, the internet has reinforced the strength of traditional news intermediaries and has also created a new type of intermediary, which Sarkar et al. refer to as "cybermediaries." [216]

Of course, news wires operated in this way long before the internet, creating a single story that would be published by a variety of news organizations – in ways that are in some ways similar to, though much vaster than, the operations of the nonprofits studied here. The literature on newswires is sparse; among the few exceptions is a thorough and wide-ranging work by Schwarzlose, who coined the term "newsbroking" to describe "the daily collection and distribution of general news dispatches via communication systems among journalists in several communities, a process controlled by an agent or agency, in other words, a newsbroker." He described newsbroking organizations as a "separate institutional and cultural entity in society," which he measured by the "changing dynamic

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[214] Bruns, "Towards Produsage: Futures for User-Led Content Production," 275.

[215] Paterson, "News Agency Dominance in International News on the Internet"; Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy*.

[216] Sarkar, Butler, and Steinfield, "Intermediaries and Cybermediaries."

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and interactional relationships newsbroking shares with adjacent institutions."[217] His focus is on distribution – he details at length battles over the telegraph lines, for instance. At the organizations studied in this dissertation, producing high quality public affairs journalism and encouraging others to do – that is, engaging in field repair – are the focus, and distribution through sharing is a tactic for getting the stories out broadly. That means that, unlike Schwarzlose's "newsbrokers," these organizations are not just conduits but rather producers and distributors; even so, Schwarzlose's analysis can offer some insights here.

While the telegraph did not *cause* newsbroking, Schwarzlose argues that it contributed new forms and organizing concepts to journalism, enabling previously unfulfilled journalistic needs to be met simply by offering a steady flow of information. The telegraph changed the movement of news between cities from being casual, sporadic and expensive, creating a system of speed, continuity and power.[218] Schwarzlose ended his narrative in 1920 because by then, he argued, the process of newsbroking had matured, and the 70 years leading up to the publishing of his book were characterized largely by a refinement of the technology, he says. His book appeared just as the Center for Public Integrity was developing its early model of sharing – in those days mostly sharing through being mentioned and providing commentary. The popularization of the internet soon after that offered a new set of opportunities to the center and other organizations like it – not *causing* sharing behaviors perhaps, but certainly enabling sharing through distribution, as discussed in this chapter.

[217] Schwarzlose, *The Nation's Newsbrokers, Vol. 2: The Rush to Institution, from 1865 to 1920*, 2:xii.

[218] Ibid., 2:ix.

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Some[219] argue that the importance of newswires has grown since the internet first enabled them to get their content directly to readers, allowing them to bypass other news organizations that could edit or change their copy. Of course, readers still generally access newswire content through a third party such as an internet portal or news site,[220] but today those are today more likely to carry un-edited versions. (Paterson, for one, expresses a concern about this given the systematic bias he finds in newswire content; he cites one research study for instance that found that over a week in 1996, just 6% of sources in Reuters stories were women.) Furthermore, newswires are no longer actively working to minimize their exposure to the public or act as "invisible wholesalers" [221] – a behavior that may have made sense in a pre-internet era in which newspapers were not eager to be open about the fact that they weren't producing all of their content.[222] Today, instead, news organizations that distribute wire content rely on the wire brand to increase their own credibility.[223] In other words, newswires – and nonprofit investigative centers, as we shall see – are today able to be more explicit, because of shifting norms, about their involvement in the flow of information they help produce.

Can sharing through distribution yield revenue?

Traditional news organizations that both produce and distribute their stories create two things: news stories, and eyes on advertisements. Each of these is associated with a revenue source: the first with people willing to pay to read the news, and the second with

[219] Paterson, "News Agency Dominance in International News on the Internet."

[220] Kenny, "News Agencies as Content Providers and Purveyors of News: A Mediahistoriographical Study on the Development and Diversity of Wire Services."

[221] Shrivastava, *News Agencies from Pigeon to Internet*.

[222] Paterson, "News Agency Dominance in International News on the Internet."

[223] Ibid.

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advertisers who want their ads to be seen. Organizations that do not engage in any distribution create just one product: news stories. Newswires and syndicates successfully created a business around this product – until the widespread commercialization of the internet allowed them to reach readers directly, their stories were distributed entirely by other news organizations, which paid for the right to do so. Associated Press – one of the biggest newsgathering organizations in the world – is itself a nonprofit, founded by five news organizations in 1846 to share the cost of transmitting news of the Mexican-American War. Today, AP's revenue comes largely from subscriptions or memberships paid by news organizations.[224] Niche publishers also earn revenue by producing content and selling it to others to distribute. This includes Politico, which focuses on D.C. politics, and Bloomberg, which provides highly specialized financial information.

A news sharer could operate in this way too: by selling content to news organizations, especially if the content filled a particular niche. In its early days, CPI did something similar, signing contracts with ABC And CBS in which the organizations paid the center for early – though not exclusive – access to its reports. This arrangement gave the networks extra time to produce their stories based on CPI's reports, enabling them to release their stories ahead of other news organizations. Today, though, earning money for content or access to content proves largely elusive for the three organizations studied here. The Center for Public Integrity negotiated a modest fee from the Digital First chain of newspapers in 2013-14,[225] and CPI sometimes pays small fees to organizations, such

[224] "2012 Annual Report: Consolidated Financial Statements."

[225] Digital First paid the center $17,500 for the year starting in the summer of 2013 for non-exclusive access to center content. Buzenberg explained (personal correspondence, April 17, 2014) that he did not expect the deal to continue for a second year.

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as WCIJ, with which it collaborates on stories. WCIJ doesn't get revenue from news organizations directly for content – though it has received philanthropic support from some local newspapers and newspaper associations, in the range of $500 to $3,000.[226] In the spring of 2014, the center was in discussions it hoped would lead to a significant increase in this kind of support on the part of news organizations. Additionally, the center works hard to leverage the fact its content is republished by other organizations, tracking it and reporting it to funders and the public – while MinnPost does not even track where its content appears.

Some nonprofit news organizations outside of my sample have been more successful at raising revenue from sharing content. A small group of nonprofits, for instance, have produced pages for their local edition of the *New York Times*. One of these, the Chicago News Co-operative, struck a relationship with the *Times* just as it was opening its doors in the fall of 2009. The co-operative produced four newspaper pages of content for the *Times* every week, for $15,000 a month – less than the cost of production, according to one article.[227] And, although there remains debate around the reasons, when that deal fell apart, the co-operative closed. In other words, even if the arrangement with the *New York Times* did not cover the costs of production, it clearly went a long way toward supporting the organization, given that its dissolution led the organization to shut down.

Generally, though, given the poor financial status of most news organizations and the proliferation of free content online, selling stories to news organizations is a difficult

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[226] These organizations include the *Wisconsin State Journal*, *The Capital Times*, *Isthmus, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, WISC-TV, WKOW, and Wisconsin Public Radio. The associations include the Wisconsin Newspaper Association, the Wisconsin Broadcasters Association, and the Appleton Post-Crescent Community Fund (Funding | WisconsinWatch.org).

[227] Miner, "The High Price of Creating Good Journalism."

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proposition. Even AP has had trouble in recent years, for example with CNN dropping its contract with the wire but continuing to make reference to its stories.[228] In general, few sharing-through-distribution relationships have produced much revenue at all, calling into question the ability of this kind of sharing to produce a sustainable business model that does not rely on philanthropy. The Investigative News Network suggests that the path to sustainability for nonprofit news organizations includes raising, eventually, 30% of revenue through fees charged to news organizations that use content produced by the nonprofit.[229] Nonprofits' tax disclosure forms filed with the IRS, though, show that very few INN members earned anything close to 30% from fees paid for their journalism.[230]

- On average from 2002 through 2010, CPI earned 3% of its revenue directly from its content.
- The Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism earned 6.5% of its revenue from content in 2010, a year after its launch.
- MinnPost, in 2009 (just its second full year of operation), earned 23.9% of its revenue from its content – through advertising. (MinnPost earned little to no money from organizations publishing the content it produced, but the IRS forms do not separate out that kind of revenue.)

Sharing through distribution is a key type of news sharing, which is based on the desire on the part of nonprofit news organizations to distribute their content as widely as possible. The fact these sharing relationships rarely add to the organizations' bottom

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[228] "Curley: Newspapers Now Provide Only 20 Percent of AP Revenue."

[229] Osder and Campwala, *Audience Development and Distribution Strategies: A Primer for Nonprofit News Organizations*.

[230] Konieczna and Robinson, "The New Non-Profits: A Financial Examination."

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lines, though, may suggest the relationships will remain tenuous. Indeed, while MinnPost's Joel Kramer was aggressively pursuing advertising revenue and donations from readers, those organizations that depend on sharing to distribute their content may never be able to wean themselves off foundation funding. On the other hand, though, perhaps it is unreasonable that they would expect to, given that they have set out to produce for commercial news organizations precisely that component of journalism that cannot be adequately produced in the market in the first place.

Findings

Looking back to how the three organizations I studied track their readers points to key differences in how they distribute content.

Table 3.2: Quantifying readership[231]

	Own site	**Other news organizations**
MinnPost	12.5 million pageviews, 2012	Not tracked
WCIJ	330,000 pageviews, 2012-13	30 million*, 2009-2013
CPI	6 million pageviews, 2012-13	2.8 million**, 2012-13

*Calculated by adding 65% of paid circulation at the newspapers that have picked up its content.

**This number for CPI represents only web readership, tracked by asking those who republish CPI stories to embed a bit of code into the website. CPI did try to track pickups in print and on television as well, by adding together the audiences/circulation of news organizations that picked up its content, but gave up that practice, executive director Bill Buzenberg said.[232]

[231] Note that these numbers are gathered by different methods and over different time periods. The WCIJ number, for instance, tallies readership between its founding and 2013. And it does not represent an actual count of readership – instead, it is an estimate beginning with the number of readers who *could have* read the story because it was in their newspaper, and assumes 65% of those would actually read the story. The CPI number, on the other hand, adds together readership on the websites of the center and the organizations that use its stories and agree to embed the tracking code. In other words, it is not advisable to compare the numbers across organizations.

[232] Bill Buzenberg, interview, telephone, April 17, 2014.

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Note that these numbers may not be comparable. What matters here is not the actual figures, but which figures each organization calculates, reports and emphasizes. In the MinnPost newsroom, any talk of readership figures focused on hits to MinnPost's own site. (In fact, when I asked MinnPost CEO Joel Kramer how a sharing arrangement through the Minnesota Newspaper Association was going, he told me that there was no way to track how often MinnPost content was being picked up by other news organizations. This isn't strictly speaking true, since WCIJ does that kind of tracking; rather, it points to the fact that the task of tracking was not worthwhile for the organization.) Kramer wrote that "Every morning, I check Google Analytics to see how many visitors MinnPost received the day before and how many pages they viewed." [233] And, he explained why this matters: "Google Analytics tells us exactly how many times each item we publish gets read. This has a powerful effect. It makes us want to do more of what gets read, and less of what doesn't, while remaining true to our mission." [234]

Andy Hall at WCIJ was never observed mentioning hits to that center's site. Instead, when he talked publicly about the center's readership, he would focus on the number of people who read its stories through other publications, at one public meeting in 2013 explaining that the center's reports had been cited, published and broadcast by other news organizations, reaching a potential audience of 30 million.[235] At WCIJ meetings, staff often discussed the number of publications reprinting the center's stories. During one meeting in 2013, Hall announced, "*The Capital Times* is planning on running [current

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[233] Kramer, "MinnPost's Monthly Page Views Top 1 Million."

[234] Kramer, "Lessons I've Learned after a Year Running MinnPost."

[235] Andy Hall, lecture at Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, September 10, 2013.

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project] as the cover story on Wednesday. Lauren will check to see where it shows up. Ten news organizations requested the password." Staff at the meeting clapped for the reporter whose story was so prized by other news organizations.

Clearly, each of the organizations had a different way of thinking about its audience: MinnPost through pageviews, WCIJ through audience members at other news organizations, and CPI falling somewhere in the middle, adding readership on its own site to readership coming through other organizations.

These different conceptions of audience were reflected in newsroom behaviors as well. The Center for Public Integrity walked a line between distributing its content through other organizations and reaching out to readers directly. Editors were very careful about trying to have something fresh on the site daily so that readers would continue to see it as a destination – so much so that on one particular day, when no story was forthcoming, staff repurposed an old story by adding a new top, and posted that as the main story on the site.[236] The Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism, on the other hand, was never observed worrying about having fresh content on its site; that organization really did see itself as primarily distributing content through other publications. And MinnPost was driven by its model of attracting readers to its own site. Editors there held daily meetings to discuss fresh content for MinnPost.com, and when the newsroom was at a staffing low during a time of state government shutdown, editors worried they weren't producing sufficient coverage of the story[237] – a concern I did not heard in the other two newsrooms.

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[236] CPI story meeting, Washington, D.C., May 9, 2013.

[237] Konieczna, "Do Old Norms Have a Place in New Media: A Case Study of the Nonprofit MinnPost."

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Now that I have examined how each organization conceptualized its audience and hinted at how that affected newsroom decision-making, I will trace the history of the practice of sharing through distribution at nonprofits by detailing the development of sharing at CPI. I revisit some elements from CPI's history, which I described it in Chapter 3, to explain how the organization evolved as its mode of distribution evolved. Then, I describe how distribution through news sharing worked at each of the three organizations during my period of observation, and how differently distribution through sharing might play out in different news ecologies.

CPI's history of sharing through distribution

When the Center for Public Integrity was founded in 1989, its only access to readers was through other news organizations that reported on CPI's projects. As I described in Chapter 3, the center's first publication was a 200-page report about American trade officials. In those days, the organization would print a few hundred or a thousand copies of its reports, hold a press conference, and hope that reporters at other news organizations would write stories about those reports. CPI's only other access to readers was through op-eds staff occasionally wrote for mainstream news organizations synthesizing a recent report.

This early distribution model of writing reports that journalists would cite depended on center staff not calling themselves reporters. "We wanted them to cover it as a news event and they wouldn't cover something done by journalists," said Charles Lewis, the center's founder.[238] "We had no publication and we had to get it out, so it had to be an event." In

[238] Charles Lewis, interview, telephone, March 25, 2014.

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other words, the center's distribution model dictated, in Lewis's mind, the way the center could think about itself.

This orientation is evident in some of the center's early documents. In its application for nonprofit status in 1989, for instance, the organization described its principal activity as "charitable; educate public about ethics in government." [239] Its articles of incorporation[240] similarly state that the organization "will be operated exclusively for the charitable and educational purposes of bringing a higher standard of integrity to the American political process and to government through informing and educating the public about critical issues of integrity." (Some of this could be explained by the fact that the IRS did not have a category for nonprofit news organizations.)

Its first report describes the center as:

> "…a new educational, non-profit organization examining public service and ethics-related issues in Washington, with a unique approach combining the substantive study of government with in-depth reporting. The Center is funded by foundations, corporations, labor unions, individuals and news organizations."[241]

The report goes on to say that: "Some of the material in this Center REPORT (sic) offers new *social science data* (emphasis added) about backgrounds [of American trade officials] – age, education, geography and professional experience. This REPORT also

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[239] "Form 1023: Application for Recognition of Exemption Under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code."

[240] "Articles of Incorporation of the Center for Public Integrity."

[241] America's Frontline Trade Officials, by Chuck Lewis, published by CPI, 1990.

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includes comprehensive data about what senior USTR officials have done upon leaving that agency."[242]

At the center's first press conference, Lewis said that the center was started "by a group of concerned citizens who want to better understand what has happened in public service." At that conference, he added that "we're not really a lobbying organization. We're not like Common Cause or Public Citizen. We're not out on the Hill beating people down for this bill or that bill."

The center commonly referred to itself as using "a unique approach combining the substantive study of government and in-depth journalism" (1991) sometimes adding that it operated "without the normal time or space limitations the media often encounter" (2000). In 2003, it called itself a "research organization," and a "nonprofit, nonpartisan, tax-exempt educational organization created so that important national issues can be investigated and analyzed over a period of months without the normal time or space constraints;" [243] but in the same year its international branch described itself as "extend(ing) globally the Center's style of 'watchdog journalism' in the public interest by marshaling the talents of the world's leading investigative reporters." Finally, in 2010, it seemed to settle on journalism, saying that: "The Center for Public Integrity is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, and independent digital news organization specializing in original investigative journalism and research on significant public policy issues." This change is also evident in the organization's tax returns. In 2002, the center reported to the IRS that its "primary exempt purpose" was that it is "a non-profit, nonpartisan research

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[242] America's Frontline Trade Officials, by Chuck Lewis, published by CPI, 1990, page 9.

[243] Center for Public Integrity, *Harmful Error: Investigating America's Local Prosecutors*.

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organization that concentrates on ethics and public service issues;"[244] by 2012, the organization described its "mission or most significant activities" as "investigative journalism in the public interest."[245] The IRS's attitude toward nonprofit journalism was similar in 2012 as it was in 2002, so it is reasonable to conclude that this change in wording signifies a change in attitude on the part of the center.

Meantime, in search of another distribution venue, the center started publishing the "Public i" newsletter in 1994, allowing it to reach readers directly for the first time – though in practice the newsletter had a small readership largely of political types and center supporters. Even so, access to this broader audience led center staff, for the first time, to produce something that more closely resembled journalism. In 1995, the center published its first book, *Beyond the Hill*, about what members of Congress go on to do after their terms. With the next book, *The Buying of the President* in 1996, the center developed yet another mode of reaching readers, for the first time engaging in sharing through distribution. The publisher serialized the book, the New York Times News Service bought the rights, and the book was published in excerpts over the world, Lewis said. Additionally, the Associated Press, *New York Times* and *Washington Post* syndicated the center's graphics showing donors to each candidate.

As the center's products were moving toward forms more common in traditional journalism, CPI began gaining recognition as a news organization. Lewis had been writing for the *IRE Journal*, a publication of Investigative Reporters and Editors, since the early 1990s – though an article in 1997 about a study of the chemical industry

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[244] "Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax, IRS Form 990," 2002, 18.

[245] "Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax, IRS Form 990," 2012, 1.

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describes the center as publishing "investigative studies that serve as reference material for journalists, academicians, and policy makers alike" and makes no mention of the center engaging in journalism.[246] In the mid 1990s, the center started applying for journalism awards and getting full stories reprinted in newspapers, sometimes for money. In 1996 the center won its first journalism award, the Sigma Delta Chi Award for public service in newsletter journalism from the Society of Professional Journalists, awarded for its story, appearing in the "Public i newsletter," called "Fat Cat Hotel," which described for the first time how the White House was rewarding donors by allowing them to stay in the Lincoln Bedroom. That year, its book, *The Buying of the President*, was a finalist in the IRE books competition.

"It took six or seven years for media to embrace us and start realizing we're reporters," Lewis said. "By the late 1990s and as staff is being upgraded and we're hiring first-rate journalists from around the States and winning awards and policies are starting to change (based on their work), as momentum and public reputation of the center grew so did our money and our wherewithal to hire serious journalists. We were becoming more of an institution and able to attract more accomplished folks." [247]

"Later, young people and mid-career types wouldn't put up with the nonsense of not being called a reporter. They wanted to be reporters, and as they were winning awards, it was hard for me to not acknowledge that we were journalists." By the time Lewis stepped down as executive director in 2004, the organization had won something like 35

[246] Lewis, "Toxic Deception."

[247] Charles Lewis, interview, telephone, March 25, 2014.

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journalism-related honors. “By that point there was no question we were journalists,” he said.

The rise of the internet gave the center another easy and cheap way to reach readers directly. Today, it produces stories regularly, published on its site and re-published by other news organizations. Gone are the 1,000-copy runs of reports and the press conferences at the National Press Club. Two things enabled CPI to change the way it distributes content: the advent of the internet, and the economic crisis in journalism. The internet, like the newsletter, enabled the center to reach readers directly, which led the center to produce shorter stories more reminiscent of traditional journalism. It also created the collaborative environment that helped spur and support distribution through sharing. When Lewis founded CPI, he set the organization up to share through being mentioned because he knew that commercial news organizations would be resistant to publishing things written by others.[248] The internet, however, has enabled a collaborative environment in which organizations such as Wikipedia depend on collaboration, changing that dynamic. The economic crisis in journalism, for its part, has led to a slimmed down press corps, opening editors, perhaps out of necessity, up to republishing stories written by others, enabling CPI to distribute its content by sharing. In essence, the center has evolved from an organization that supports journalism to one that produces it – and this change was shaped by the types of interactions permitted by the internet and the economic reality of news organizations.[249]

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[248] Charles Lewis, interview, Washington, D.C., May, 2013.

[249] One other important chapter in the evolution of the way the center distributes its content was a bold attempt, in 2011, to become a daily destination site, shifting its distribution to largely its own site, in essence aiming to become an online newspaper like MinnPost is, and all but eschewing sharing through

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CPI today

Today, the Center for Public Integrity engages in news sharing through distribution every day. At each morning's editorial meeting, when editors discussed stories nearing completion, the executive editor would ask whether the story had "a partner,"[250] and, if not, he would request a summary from the reporter to send to news organizations that might be interested. Once the story was finished, the editor would send it to the distributing organizations, and would request the partners to embed a bit of web code that would allow the center to monitor readership of the story on the partner's website. The results of this monitoring were displayed on a computer screen in the middle of the center's offices, adding together readers of the story on the center's own site and on partnering sites, as shown in Figure 5.1.

Occasionally, when a story was particularly timely and no publishing partner was forthcoming, CPI would publish it on its own, in which case all of the readers of the story would come from its own site. In at least one observed case in the spring of 2013, the organization went back and forth with a potential partner that had trouble committing to a publishing date. When the date had been moved several times, the center gave up, opting to publish the story on its site only.

In the spring of 2013, interim executive editor Gordon Witkin reached out to several organizations regularly – Mother Jones, Huffington Post, Salon, and Digital First, which

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distribution. When that failed to produce the financial results the center expected – indeed when the center lost significant money in the first year of the experiment – it re-focused on attaining broader distribution for its stories through mainstream news organizations. I describe this scenario in more detail later in this chapter.

[250] Note that CPI staff used this word to mean one of two things. In this chapter, it means an organization that publishes the center's stories. In the collaboration chapter, it means an organization with which the center is actively collaborating on a story.

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owns newspapers around the country.[251] All of them got CPI stories for free, with the exception of Digital First, which paid the center $17,500 for non-exclusive access to center content for a year, starting in the summer of 2013. Executive director Buzenberg explained that he did not expect Digital First would want to continue the contract the following year.

The center would also contact other publications with particular stories they might be interested in – for instance the local paper in the place in which a story was set. Witkin described the process as occurring on a "guerilla basis," meaning that it was constantly ad hoc, with even established relationships being renegotiated for every story. And while he identified some benefits of the "guerilla" nature of the negotiations – the flexibility was nice he said; "When (potential partners) ask how this will work, I tell them it's some combination of I have no idea and it works however you and I want it to" [252] – he was adamant that the organization create some standard procedures and consistent relationships with those who publish its content.

The center has been sharing through distribution consistently in this way since 2011, after it attempted a new mode of sharing that failed (described in detail below). Following that experiment, then-executive editor Ellen Weiss began focusing on getting a broader reach for center stories. She built relationships and created a spreadsheet tracking partners,[253] which Witkin took over when she left.

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[251] In 2012, Digital First owned 800 media properties – print papers and news websites – with audiences of 67 million monthly readers in 18 states. Its larger newspapers include the *San Jose Mercury News* and the *St. Paul Pioneer Press.*

[252] Gordon Witkin, interview, Washington, D.C., May 21, 2013

[253] Gordon Witkin, interview, Washington, D.C., May 21, 2013

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Connecting with distributing news organizations was sometimes difficult – both in the case of organizations CPI regularly worked with, and for new potential partners. News organizations were sometimes overwhelmed and would take a lot of time to respond; those that hadn't partnered with CPI before sometimes didn't understand what the center was and either needed to hear an explanation, or didn't respond at all.[254] For instance, in the case of a package of stories comparing state rules on disclosure of campaign spending by outside groups, Witkin reached out to the *Indianapolis Star* because that state was among the worst offenders, and successfully had the story placed there even though the *Star* was not a regular partner. He expressed frustration, though, about the fact that the newspaper he contacted in Montana did not even respond although the main story focused on a race in Montana, and the story was based on data from the National Institute on Money in State Politics, also in Montana.[255] It was sometimes also challenging to negotiate the practices of other organizations: Digital First, for instance, was happy to publish the center's content, as long as it wasn't also made available to McClatchy.[256]

Sharing through distribution at WCIJ

CPI took a long path to arrive at its particular model of sharing content, and its model may yet be evolving. WCIJ and other newer nonprofits had the benefit of looking back at that history. Today, there are dozens of organizations operating like WCIJ, creating content – generally of a type they perceive to be lacking in the mainstream media – and distributing it through existing news networks. WCIJ's model of sharing has evolved little over the time of its existence – a time during which the much older CPI made

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[254] Gordon Witkin, interview, Washington, D.C., May 21, 2013.

[255] Gordon Witkin, interview, Washington, D.C., May 21, 2013

[256] Editorial meeting, Washington, D.C., May 14, 2013

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drastic changes in the way it shares that affected the entire operation. WCIJ founder Andy Hall felt that it did not make sense to create new distribution networks where old ones already existed, so he decided from that start that he would create a center that would produce journalism and distribute it through mainstream media. And unlike CPI, WCIJ always used journalistic language to talk about what it did, describing its goal in its very first tax return as being to "raise the quality and amount of investigative reporting across Wisconsin while training a new generation of investigative reporters," and noting that its content is distributed free to the media of Wisconsin.[257]

WCIJ depends almost entirely on other news organizations to distribute its content. At the time of my fieldwork, those organizations accessed center stories through a special section on its site, which contained all the elements of a story: the main text, any side bars or sub stories, images, maps, interactive graphics, etc. Staff also posted updates as the story evolved. To gain access to this section, news organizations needed to contact the center to request the password. Center staff took pride in these requests, announcing them at meetings – "10 news organizations requested the password," Hall said at one meeting.[258] Hall believed that the passworded section of its site was essential because knowing who downloaded the stories allowed the center to reach those organizations with potential corrections or extra information.[259] In the summer of 2013, the center was working with the Investigative News Network to automate the process so that it wouldn't

[257] Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism, "Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax, Form 990-EZ."

[258] Staff meeting, Madison, Jan. 28, 2013.

[259] Personal observations, Wisconsin Newspaper Association convention, Feb. 28, 2013.

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have to respond to each individual password request, but would still have a way of tracking which news organizations had downloaded stories.

Unlike CPI, which does retain a large readership on its own site despite distributing content through other news organizations, WCIJ's distribution happens almost entirely through other news organizations. Even so, WCIJ goes about that more passively than does CPI, sending emails to its list of around 500 news organizations, notifying them of the upcoming story, and sharing its story budget with Wisconsin Public Radio and Wisconsin Public Television, and also with the 10 Wisconsin papers owned by Gannett Wisconsin Media. WCIJ does occasionally notify particular news organizations earlier in the process, especially regarding stories that might be of particular interest to them, or of stories the center thinks that organization might be interested in collaborating on. And, center staff take the opportunity to network in person with the news organizations that might be interested in their stories. At the Wisconsin Newspaper Association convention in February 2013, for instance, Hall sought out feedback from editors of newspapers that used the center's content. One editor told Hall and another WCIJ employee that his paper had published the center's examination of nursing homes in part because one of the homes that had been the focus of the story was in that newspaper's coverage area. While the newspaper could have written a local story, that would have lacked the statewide context the center offered, he explained. The story was long, but they managed to make room for it – a full page for the turn, in fact. Hall queried the editor about challenges. How did they find the system of downloading stories? Were there any problems? Could it work differently? The editor said it worked well.

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By far the most shared story in the center's existence was the story of an altercation between state Supreme Court justices. The center broke the story and it was published or mentioned by at least 145 news organizations in Wisconsin and, unusually for the center, around the country, including CBS, NBC, Reuters and *USA Today*.

The Wisconsin center has also started sharing across media, sometimes turning the center's print stories into radio stories for public broadcasting or the local community radio station, and discussing whether it would be possible to create video stories for a new investigative news channel on YouTube.[260]

Sharing through distribution at MinnPost

As indicated both by its mission statement and by its focus on pageviews to its own website, MinnPost sees itself as a daily newspaper rather than a self-standing journalistic center that relies on others to publish its stories; that is, it's primarily its own content distributor. This has impacted what MinnPost publishes and when: the organization publishes daily, trying to provide a mix of stories to draw readers on a regular basis, and, during the time of my fieldwork, supplemented its original reporting with several stories a day from Global Post, the *Christian Science Monitor* and blogs from around the state of Minnesota, essentially creating a bundle of content as a way to draw readers to the website. That focus on drawing readers was evidenced in newsroom conversation: staffers were observed discussing the types of things that people at dailies talk about, including pageviews but also time spent on the site, return visits, reader demographics, etc. CEO/editor Joel Kramer would call out pageviews on the organization's own site when they were exceptional, but never mentioned that a story was carried by a particular

[260] Staff meeting, Dec. 10, 2012.

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news organization – compared to WCIJ, where newsroom staffers applauded for an intern whose story was the cover story of the *Capital Times*.

Even so, in May, 2011, MinnPost formed a relationship with the Minnesota Newspaper Association,[261] allowing the association's 25 dailies and more than 300 weeklies to print, for free, MinnPost's coverage of the state capitol and stories written by its Washington correspondent. In the two years after that agreement was signed, about 40 newspapers had used MinnPost's content, Kramer said. It increased MinnPost's visibility and meant no work for the organization – the papers would copy the stories from MinnPost's website. Kramer didn't know how often other organizations used MinnPost content, saying there was no way to track that.[262] (This is, of course, not strictly speaking true: WCIJ staff, for instance, spent significant time tracking where their stories were picked up.) The fact that MinnPost did not track usage and did not have a downloads system for partners is an indicator of the fact that MinnPost was less focused than were the other two organizations on sharing content widely. It is important to ask why MinnPost would be willing to engage in this type of sharing, when its business model is connected to exerting ownership over its content. One explanation could be that the organization sees its competitors as being in the Twin Cities, and does not expect those organizations to reprint its stories in the first place – because they are in competition, after all – and thus sharing through the newspaper association does not interfere with MinnPost's business model. This, though, is a topic ripe for further exploration.

[261] Kramer, "MinnPost Offers Selected Stories to Minnesota Newspapers."

[262] Joel Kramer, interview, Minneapolis, April 2, 2013.

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Over time, MinnPost did forays into more collaborative behavior – discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. And one project in particular was widely shared – at least half of the stories in writer Eric Black's 30-part series on the constitution were re-published by Huffington Post[263] and put out as an e-book,[264] and MinnPost was reaching out to Huffington Post and Salon on a case-by-case basis with content staff thought those organizations might be interested in publishing. While MinnPost's attempts to build a relationship with public radio have paid off – their media commentator, for instance, occasionally appears on MPR – public radio still sees MinnPost as a competitor, the editor said in an interview – in sharp contrast to the relationships WCIJ and CPI had with their local public radio stations. [265] MinnPost has also made other inroads in sharing content, signing an agreement in 2013, for instance, to give away a few stories a week to Twin Cities Business, and take a few stories a week from the publication as well.[266] In a note about that partnership, MinnPost's editor assured readers that "Twin Cities Business, like MinnPost, is committed to high-quality reporting and writing, and they publish a nice mix of in-depth articles and breaking news," and that "MinnPost will continue to rely primarily on original reporting and writing by our own journalists, for and about Minnesota. But partnerships like these enable us to offer our readers a broader range and greater quantity of high-quality journalism" – suggesting that creating a compelling content bundle is one of the goals of the partnership.

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[263] Kramer, "Imperfect Union."

[264] MinnPost staff, "Eric Black's 'Imperfect Union' Now Available as E-Book."

[265] Joel Kramer, interview, Minneapolis, April 2, 2013.

[266] Kramer, "Two New Content Partnerships for MinnPost."

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Notwithstanding the partnerships described above, MinnPost engages in sharing through distribution much less frequently than do the other two organizations, and even when it does, it is clear that kind of sharing is not key to the organization's functioning.

Discussion

Now that I have described how sharing through distribution arose at CPI and how it works at each of the three organizations I studied, I will describe how that form of sharing led WCIJ and CPI in particular to be aware of the needs of the organizations they partnered with. Following that explanation, I will discuss some of the other ways in which sharing through distribution affected the organizations I studied – in particular, the attempt by CPI to move away from that kind of sharing, the awareness at WCIJ that successful sharing depended on trust on the part of the organizations with which it wanted to share, and the way in which journalists from Wisconsin tried to define WCIJ through its mode of distribution, thereby missing out on some of the important features of the organization.

How sharing led to awareness of other news organizations

Because they engage heavily in sharing through distribution, CPI and WCIJ have two audiences – their readers, but also editors at other news organizations who are tasked with deciding whether to publish their stories. And staff at the nonprofits I observed certainly were aware of these two audiences, adding credence to the notion I advanced in Chapter 2 about the overlap between the two strategic action fields. At one editorial meeting, for instance, CPI's executive director pushed a reporter, about to contact PBS News Hour to offer a story, to be aware of News Hour's interests. "News Hour probably

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saw the *(Washington) Post* story today; they may want a wider story," he said.[267] At another meeting, editorial staff planned to shorten a piece because it would make it more appealing to a partner.[268] In a discussion at WCIJ about whether it would make sense to increase the number of shorter stories that were less investigative in nature, one staffer argued that the more in-depth stories were more likely to get picked up.[269] WCIJ also regularly published a longer and a shorter version of its stories, so that news organizations could decide how much space they were willing to allocate. And CPI's editor in charge of partnerships explained that the thing that best determined whether other organizations would be interested in a particular story was how close the story was to "the hard news environment." [270] At WCIJ, editors were aware not just of the interests of editors of other publications, but also of those publications' audiences. At one point, for instance, a local commercial television station expressed a willingness to collaborate because its readers said in a survey that they would like to see more investigative reporting.[271]

In other words, I did observe WCIJ and CPI paying attention to things that might affect the pick-up of their content – minor things such as length and more significant things such as angle and focus. The fact that this did not come up more often, though, could be reflective of the organizations' closeness to mainstream media – those working at the nonprofits likely came to their jobs with an internalized set of news values from their

[267] CPI editorial meeting, Washington, D.C., April 30, 2013.

[268] CPI story meeting, Washington, D.C., May 9, 2013.

[269] WCIJ staff meeting, Madison, Dec. 3, 2012.

[270] Gordon Witkin, interview, Washington, D.C., May 6, 2013.

[271] WCIJ staff meeting, Madison, Dec. 10, 2012.

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time as mainstream journalists, and recognized that they needed to draw on those if they were to engage in sharing through distribution. That is, the strategic action field of nonprofit journalism sits nested within the field of journalism, where it overlaps with commercial journalism, a location from which certain norms and values of that field are obvious and taken for granted within nonprofit journalism.

Contrasting this with a time when CPI did not engage in sharing through distribution is instructive. In those early days, CPI did not produce content that mirrored the form and style of mainstream journalism, because it did not need editors to understand its content as journalism. Indeed, as Lewis offered in explanations I discuss above, the organization was structured around the belief that journalists would not write about its reports if they appeared to be produced by journalists, and so defining the organization as educational rather than journalistic was key. In other words, at that time, CPI had little overlap with the strategic action field of journalism and, as a result, did not need to take into account the norms of traditional commercial journalism.

Two things could be encouraging this awareness of other news organizations' editorial decisions. First of all, like any news organization, CPI and WCIJ judge their success by how broadly their stories are received. For most news organizations, that is measured by readership; for these organizations, a large measure comes from pick-up by other news organizations. As a result, awareness of the interests of those other organizations is key to the successes of CPI and WCIJ. At the same time, though, sharing broadly is also key to CPI and WCIJ's goals of improving the quality of journalism in the space in which they operate – in other words, field repair. Awareness of the editorial decisions made at the organizations they aim to share with is a key element of field repair – perhaps

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paradoxically, as nonprofits try to convince mainstream news organizations to publish the types of stories those organizations have been cutting back on.

Along with an awareness about producing the kind of content mainstream news organizations might be interested in, I also observed an awareness of fitting into the schedules and work flows at other news organizations. Discussions at CPI and WCIJ pointed to a deep understanding of the organizations they partnered with – a knowledge of their work flows and values, and of who at the organizations was familiar with and interested in using content from the nonprofits. CPI staff, for instance, were keenly aware of logistical differences between organizations – the fact, for instance, that some distribution partners sent CPI stories through their own factcheckers and lawyers, even though CPI has already done that and which its staff found frustrating. When staffers at a WCIJ meeting were trying to coordinate the release of their stories, the executive director pointed out that "usually we try to avoid confusing editors by making one story per Sunday, but these both feel like Sunday stories." [272] They also often described themselves as providing a service for news organizations – offering a map or helping other news organizations figure out how to pursue an investigative idea. At the Wisconsin Newspaper Association annual meeting in 2013, for instance, WCIJ staffers offered confidential consultation sessions to help reporters and editors at other news organizations with questions about obtaining records or doing data visualizations.

Evolution of journalistic tone

As CPI has evolved from writing reports to producing journalism, the way the organization talked about the subjects of its research also evolved in telling ways. At

[272] WCIJ staff meeting, Madison, Dec. 10, 2012.

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CPI's first press conference in 1990, founder Charles Lewis said that the center's first study provided "jarring evidence that America has lost public service as an ideal;" that the "laissez-faire atmosphere in Washington … is eroding trust in government;" and that "Personally, I'm not an expert on the law, but I have to tell you that I'm not tremendously optimistic (a new law) will change things." This kind of critical language is uncommon among professional journalists, and indeed is no longer in evidence in the center's work today. While the organization's *work* remains regularly critical of government, center staff today avoid voicing that critique themselves, instead sticking to the facts and staying away from interpretation or calls for action. The center today publishes a newsletter[273] that highlights key findings in its major stories, but never interprets those findings or calls for action as Lewis did in 1990. For instance, in a note about an investigation into black lung disease, common among coal miners, in 2013, executive director Buzenberg noted outcomes of the center's reporting, but let other voices be the ones calling for change, quoting a newspaper editorial calling the revelations uncovered by the center "shocking and repugnant," and a lawyer saying the reporting shows "a familiar pattern of coal companies screwing the miners." [274]

That isn't entirely out of line with the way the organization behaved in the past – at that first press conference in 1990, when Lewis was asked how he proposed to solve the problem highlighted in the first report, he neglected to provide a response, saying "you're asking a basically quasi-journalistic group to tell you what things we propose." But it does represent a marked change at CPI, as it started to talk more like a traditional news

[273] http://www.publicintegrity.org/inside-publici

[274] Buzenberg, "Remarkable Public Response to 'Breathless and Burdened' as Its Impact Continues."

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organization while evolving away from a research organization and to a news organization.

Now that I have discussed in general how this kind of sharing forced the organizations I observed to be more aware of their partners, I will describe three scenarios in particular that point to the deep imprint of sharing on these organizations:

1. a failed plan by CPI to become a destination site, ie. to change their focus away from sharing;
2. WCIJ's factchecking system; and
3. the relationship between WCIJ and the Wisconsin capitol press corps.

Center for Public Integrity, 2.0

One example of the profound impact of news sharing on the functioning of the organizations I studied can be seen through the bold – and largely failed – project that the Center for Public Integrity embarked on in 2011 to become what the Columbia Journalism Review referred to as "daily destination news site." [275] The center decided to move away from news sharing as its primary mode of distribution, putting the focus instead on becoming an online newspaper, publishing 10 to 20 stories a day on its own site – a mix of daily hits and the center's trademark deep dive investigative pieces, with the goal of drawing a large readership that would donate to the site and enable sales of advertising, as well as earning revenue through content syndication. The change was so dramatic the new business model was called Center 2.0. One of the things that made the project bold was the rapid pace of realignment: in one year, the center anticipated selling

[275] Blake, "Something Fishy?: John Solomon Had Grand Plans for the Digital Future of the Center for Public Integrity. But There Was Always a Catch…."

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public radio-style memberships worth $2.5 million, and anticipated $635,000 in advertising sales by the second year.[276] The plan was vetted by the Bridgespan Group, a consulting company dealing with "mission-driven organizations and philanthropists,"[277] and approved by CPI's board. Although readership did surge, the 10 daily pieces never materialized, and much of the center's content from that period was closer to the traditional daily news story than the investigative pieces on which it had previously prided itself. The center went from running a $1.56 million surplus in 2010 to a loss of $4.7 million in 2011, drawing down the organization's assets from $10.5 million to $6.2 million. The center's 2010 tax filing indicates it published 16 in-depth investigative reports that year, along with "numerous" stories and blogs, and made available 36 online databases. The 2011 tax filing indicates that the center published 17 in-depth investigative reports, more than 1,000 shorter stories and blog items, and made available two databases.

Financially, it is clear the project failed, and staff in 2013 were still discussing how to resolve the problems it caused – including how to explain the blot on the center's financial record to potential investors, and how to deal with the website designed to be a daily destination and which thus no longer fit their needs. One major outcome was that the failure taught managers how fragile the organization is. Staffers had various ways of characterizing what happened: "It was completely off mission, not financially sustainable and a mistake and we learned from that," for instance. More interesting than the implications for the business plan are the implications for news sharing: "We learned that

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[276] Ibid.

[277] http://www.bridgespan.org/About.aspx#.UhE5p1NqthA

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we're not a daily organization; we do in-depth investigative reporting" (John Dunbar); "We file daily but we're not a destination site" (Bill Buzenberg); "We are primarily an investigative news organization and that's not what that plan was about" (John Dunbar).

These insights indicate just how deeply the idea of sharing is tied in with the business model but also the organization's conception of itself. If the center is to fulfill its mission – producing high-quality, in-depth reporting of the type that is lacking in American journalism – it needs to not get distracted by also trying to build its own audience. Although the daily destination project failed, it did change the rhythm of the organization, which now produces a regular stream of stories – as Buzenberg said above, filing daily but not aiming to be solely a destination site.

Factchecking

WCIJ's factchecking process is another illustration of the impact of sharing on the organization. Although modeled on CPI's system, factchecking features much more prominently in newsroom discussions at WCIJ than at CPI. WCIJ developed its system early on, after distributing several stories with factual errors that it had to correct through the news organizations that had picked them up. Realizing that WCIJ's livelihood depended on the trust of organizations that consider printing its stories, Hall developed a complex factchecking process, described in a five-page document that deals with things such as what constitutes a fact, who can check the facts (anyone but the reporter who wrote the story) and what kind of documentation is acceptable to support facts. As each story nears completion, Hall asks whether it has been factchecked and, if not, finds someone willing to do it. The process itself involves the factchecker questioning the reporter, who is expected to produce evidence for each of the facts in the story. WCIJ's

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story downloading system – which requires those organizations that want to use its content to request the password from Hall – is part of the system, because by requiring partnering organizations to request the password, WCIJ staff know who is considering publishing the story, and can contact those organizations with updates or corrections to the story.

This system demonstrates the care that WCIJ needs to take to be able to engage in sharing through distribution. It points to awareness on the part of the organization that what it does has the potential to influence the organizations with which it shares. The influence can go the other way, as well. At one editorial meeting, a CPI editor said he was planning on sending a story about telecommunications policy to Free Press, an organization that advocates for changing media and telecommunication policies. Another editor asked about the ideology of the organization, and the pitching editor explained that it's progressive, but would provide huge traffic.[278] Later, in an interview, the editor in charge of distribution partnerships explained that left-leaning organizations often express interest in the center's coverage, in particular stories from its money in politics series. "We are delighted to have that traffic but at the same time we need to be concerned about being completely and totally nonpartisan," he said.[279] There is no clear distinction between organizations with which CPI would share and those with which it wouldn't, the editor said, but "we don't want to be in publications that are overtly about advocacy; our interest is in partnering with serious journalistic organizations. They may be known for a

[278] Story meeting, Washington, D.C., May 10, 2013.

[279] Gordon Witkin, interview, Washington, D.C., May 21, 2013.

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particular kind of audience, but certainly *Mother Jones* and Huffington Post do serious stuff."

In other words, for those organizations that engage in sharing through distribution, their reputations are intertwined with the reputations of those they share with. "We're in bed together," Hall said.[280]

WCIJ and the capitol press corps

As a content producer without its own distribution network, observers have sometimes struggled with how to understand the center. This was underscored in 2012 when a board of journalists was being created to make recommendations about the process of issuing press credentials in the Wisconsin capitol. "They said the *(Wisconsin) State Journal* used our content and so the *State Journal* was our voice," WCIJ staffer Bill Lueders said in a center staff meeting.[281] An Associated Press reporter instead argued that WCIJ was a wire service – saying it fit the definition in the bylaws of the Wisconsin Capitol Correspondents Association, which referred to wire services as entities that "routinely have material published through news outlets of general interest." [282] (In the end, the board was never created.)

This conversation points to a lack of clarity about the center on the part of traditional news organizations, and shows a reticence to identify that the center has its own issues and thus deserves its own representation. It also points to the perils of defining the center purely by its mode of distribution, a perspective that erases the lines between the center

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[280] Andy Hall, interview, Madison, April 25, 2013.

[281] Staff meeting, Madison, Dec. 10, 2012.

[282] WCCA bylaws.

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and newswires, which distribute in a similar way but have different histories and missions. The traditional journalists who were part of this conversation were trying to fit the center into their traditional conception of a news organization, and failing. To them, the center's mode of distribution was *the* key element of its identity. In some ways this is not surprising, because from the vantage point of traditional news organizations, the center is a content provider. This fails to acknowledge, though, the uniqueness of the center – and other organizations like it – in the local news ecology, and what they stand to contribute as organizations focused on field repair – that is, on providing the kind of journalism that is not viable in the marketplace but that is at the same time essential to democracy.

Conclusion

In the concluding chapter of this dissertation, I examine the broader causes and implications of sharing in general. Here, I discuss the particular implications of sharing through distribution, as compared to the other types of sharing described in this dissertation. As we will see in Chapter 6, the major difference between sharing through distribution and sharing through collaboration is that collaboration, while more intensive, also offers more flexibility by allowing each of the collaborating organizations to direct the process – and, often, to produce their own stories based on the common work they have done. Sharing through distribution, on the other hand, requires the nonprofit to produce content that the partner might publish, without that partner's direct input – often even creating a single story aimed at a number of partners, and relying on the fact that the story will be interesting enough that the partners will be willing to overcome their competitive instincts and publish it. As a result, it requires a constant awareness on the

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part of the sharer of the values and needs of the partner, even though the partner is not there. It is this kind of sharing that most highlights the tension between the nonprofits' aim to be different from commercial journalism by producing the kind of journalism that is in decline, while trying to be similar enough to commercial journalism that those commercial organizations will reprint its content. As I explain above, the fact that this was rarely made explicit in the newsroom points an internalized awareness in the newsroom of the values and needs, and often even the processes, of those organizations the nonprofits partnered with – a further indication of the tight link between nonprofits and the mainstream news organizations with which they share. The alignment between the nonprofits studied here – in particular, CPI and WCIJ – and the organizations that republish their content was enabled by decision-makers at the nonprofit who understood how the mainstream news organization works, an understanding arising from what was often a natural alignment between the values of the nonprofit and its mainstream partner, even as the relationship calls into question those very values. In other types of sharing – by being mentioned or by offering commentary, for instance – organizations have more leeway to produce content that is less similar in form to what comes from traditional news organizations, because the organizations taking the content can re-craft it to fit their genre. In other words, here the overlap between the strategic action field of nonprofit journalism and that of commercial journalism is most intense.

Furthermore, sharing through distribution blurs the lines around where journalism comes from. Benkler,[283] Bruns[284] and others refer to citizen journalism when they discuss

[283] Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*.

[284] Bruns, "Towards Produsage: Futures for User-Led Content Production."

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nonmarket actors that are forcing a reconceptualization of where journalism will come from in the internet age. The nonprofits that are the focus of this dissertation are another form of actor, perhaps better described as extra-market rather than non-market, since their revenue is associated not with tangible products of journalism but rather with the non-tangible action of field repair. Just as the telegraph did not cause newsbroking,[285] the internet also did not cause sharing through distribution – it just made it a lot easier, and, along with the economic crisis in journalism, erased some of the boundaries between organizations that produce journalistic-type work. Schwarzlose's account of newsbroking stops in 1920, but much has changed especially in the last several decades with the growth of quasi-news organizations like CPI that feed into mainstream news organizations. Today, that boundary effacing has allowed CPI, just like newswires, to be more visible.

In sum, those organizations that distribute through sharing are acting as a production site for the particularly unprofitable portion of journalism – public affairs stories – and feeding those stories back into commercial news organizations. Awareness of the editorial decisions made at the organizations they aim to share with is a key element of field repair – perhaps paradoxically, as nonprofits try to convince mainstream news organizations to publish the types of stories those organizations have been cutting back on.

[285] Schwarzlose, *The Nation's Newsbrokers, Vol. 2: The Rush to Institution, from 1865 to 1920*.

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Chapter 6: Collaboration

It could be the biggest collaborative project in journalism's history.[286] Gerard Ryle, director of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, the international arm of the Center for Public Integrity – founded by the center in 1997 to work on stories that cross borders – received a hard drive full of corporate data, personal information and emails, a leak that the organization says is one of the biggest collections of leaked data ever analyzed by investigative journalists. It contained 260 GB of information: 2.5 million files charting the murky world of the offshore banking industry – a trove more than 100 times bigger than the diplomatic cables leaked to Wikileaks in 2010.[287] Since the consortium started publishing stories about the documents in April of 2013, laws have been changed, the French president has called for an eradication of tax havens, the five wealthiest European countries have agreed to share tax information, and the British prime minister has introduced a law making public the owners of British companies. G20 member countries have announced new measures to combat offshore tax evasion, G8 leaders have agreed to share information about ownership of offshore companies with tax authorities, and the EU's top tax official has referred to the stories as "the most significant trigger" for Europe's resolve to transform tax politics.[288]

The thing that made the files so fascinating – the fact they originated from around the world – was precisely what made them so tricky to deal with. It was difficult for the consortium's employees in D.C. to figure out which items in the database were

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[286] Walker Guevara, "How We All Survived Likely the Largest Collaboration in Journalism History."

[287] Campbell, "How ICIJ's Project Team Analyzed the Offshore Files."

[288] Porteous, Hudson, and Chavkin, "Release of Offshore Records Draws Worldwide Response."

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significant in each of the countries for which they had data; thus, consortium staff argued, the project's success depended on the fact that the data from each country was examined by journalists from that country, who had the cultural context to understand which pieces of data were relevant. The initial collaboration was among 86 journalists from 46 countries who were members of the consortium, and who worked together for 15 months before starting to publish the results of their analyses. After the stories began appearing in news media around the world, the consortium began to hear from other journalists – often from countries where the consortium had no partners – who were interested in taking part. The organization prioritized working with investigative journalism centers, for instance making the Romanian Center for Investigative Journalism the hub for Eastern European journalists working on the tax haven data and electing to work with a nonprofit investigative organization in South Korea called News Tapa after turning down mainstream news organizations in that country.[289] The international reporters provided the on-the-ground context for each country, helping identify key players as well as acting as a pair of hands to sort through the data. The News Tapa journalists, for instance, recognized in the South Korean data the names of the son of a former president and a prominent North Korean – relying on their on-the-ground knowledge of South Korea, knowledge that consortium employees were lacking. Plenty of challenges arose of course, but for the consortium, the value of the reporting produced collaboratively was worth the challenge of coordinating such a diverse group. Throughout the project, consortium staffers were adamant about creating true collaborations – rather than handing over the data to a news organization that would do its own analysis and write its own stories. They

[289] Reporters from NBC Korea arrived at the center in May of 2013, hoping to get an interview with consortium staff after the story, written by News Tapa, began to make big waves in Korea.

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talked, for instance, about hiring Chinese-speaking journalists in the U.S. when they could not find a Chinese organization interested in true collaboration.[290] And the consortium refused to partner with a major American newspaper after the staff of that newspaper wanted access to the data to work on themselves, without engaging in the kind of collaboration the consortium was requesting of partners. Consortium staff were insistent on collaboration, arguing that what distinguished them from WikiLeaks was that they weren't simply handing over the data or publishing it raw for readers and others to analyze. In the end, consortium staff partnered with a journalist at the *Washington Post* to produce a front-page, Sunday story for that paper[291] – though Buzenberg expressed dissatisfaction with the risks the *Post* was willing to take, saying that *Post* editors were comfortable making reference only to people who had already been convicted of tax fraud.[292] They also hired a former *New York Times* reporter to write a story that ended up running in the *Times*,[293] and the *Times* also re-published another story the consortium had produced. One presentation that the center gave to investors and others highlighted the *Financial Times*' characterization of the tax haven data as the biggest responsible handling of leaked data, unlike Wikileaks' treatment of, for instance, its leaked diplomatic cables, which that organization posted to the internet, unredacted, for journalists and others to examine.[294] In other words, CPI and its international arm ICIJ are not subverting the journalistic institution like many emergent organizations such as

[290] CPI staff meeting, Washington, D.C., May 7, 2013.

[291] Higham, Hudson, and Guevara, "Offshore Havens Conceal Dangers."

[292] Bill Buzenberg, interview, phone, April 17, 2014.

[293] Wayne, "Paradise of Untouchable Assets."

[294] This was after a breach of security; initially, Wikileaks did work to redact the information it was publishing.

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Wikileaks are; instead, CPI and other nonprofits like it work *within* the traditional journalistic institution with the aim of improving that institution from inside. As one WCIJ staffer said, they are working to produce "old school journalism driven by old school rules." [295] In other words, while they are of course journalistic reformers, they are conservative ones.

The tax haven project is far from typical, but ICIJ has engaged in similar collaborations on smaller projects in the past. As I describe in the previous chapter, the goal of sharing through distribution is to achieve a broad readership of stories written by the organizations that engage in it – in sharp contrast to commercial news organizations, which tend to operate on the principle of owning their content, since that is linked to their ability to monetize their content. As with sharing through distribution, collaboration also involves letting go of ownership of information, but with the added orientation that working together can lead to better reporting. This is a much more intense form of sharing than is sharing through distribution, and as a result happens much less frequently.

Literature

Competition – both economic and non-economic, as I outline in Chapter 4 – has created a reluctance to collaborate among mainstream journalists. Pressure to get the story first has, for many, led to an intensely competitive climate in which news organizations sacrifice all else, as evidenced, for instance, by errors in CNN and Fox News' initial reporting on the Supreme Court decision on the Affordable Care Act.[296] Even so, collaborations

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[295] Bill Lueders, talk at Wisconsin Academy, Madison, Wisconsin, Sept. 2013.

[296] The two networks, in their rush to break the news, initially incorrectly reported that the centerpiece of the act had been overturned by the court (Fung and Mirkinson, "Supreme Court Health Care Ruling.")

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between commercial news organizations have long existed in American journalism, though they have been the exception rather than the norm. Brant Houston of INN writes that IRE "set the standard for collaboration" [297] in 1976 by bringing together almost 30 news organizations into the Arizona Project, an investigation of the mafia-linked murder of journalist Don Bolles in Phoenix.[298] The first collaboration organized by Robert J. Rosenthal, now executive director of the Center for Investigative Reporting, examined the murder of journalist Chauncey Bailey, and continued to do the work that had apparently led to his murder.[299] An examination of health care access in Madison, Wis., in 2009 involved local nonprofit news organizations – WCIJ, Madison Commons and public broadcasters – but was initiated and led by the commercial journalists in that city. About 20 local news organizations – including radio, television, magazines, commercial newspapers, student newspapers and the local homeless paper – produced more than 40 stories that they published and collected on a group website. Kushner[300] argued that the fact that 30 journalists from 20 news organizations showed up at the first meeting illustrates that the project was enabled by pre-existing relationships between journalists in the city, perhaps making Madison unique or at least unusual. Even so, staff from the metro daily did not take part, with John Smalley, the editor of the *Wisconsin State Journal*, telling Kushner that "I think it's a good and useful model for the community and for the marketplace to be exposed to that sort of full-pronged approach, but I don't know

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[297] Houston, "Collaborations Spread Quickly, Giving Stories a Broader Reach," 18.

[298] WCIJ's Hall started working at the *Arizona Republic* several years later. Though he was not part of the project, he did say that it inspired in him a sense that journalists could work together and thus achieve things they would not be able to achieve alone.

[299] Rosenthal, "The Power of Partnerships: Collaboration in California Gives Investigative Stories Greater Reach and Impact."

[300] Kushner, "Power in Numbers: Reporters Unite in One City to Cover Health Care Access."

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that there's any great gain individually for any individual outlet." [301] One of the initiators of the project, Bill Lueders – then an editor at *Isthmus*; now a reporter at the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism – told Kushner big publications might be worried about being seen as part of an advocacy effort. And some project participants said after the experience that they were concerned about the balance between cooperation and competition.

Another example of collaborations between commercial news organizations started as a distribution relationship of the type discussed in Chapter 5: eight of Ohio's largest newspapers entered into a partnership they called the Ohio News Organization to share content with each through a private website from which each paper could pull stories to publish. [302] An editor at the *Columbus Dispatch* explained[303] that any story in any of the member newspapers could appear in any of the other papers the same day. That sharing intensified into a pooling of resources – sharing costs, for instance, on statewide polling – and, eventually, led to working collaboratively on reporting projects. One of the editors said that it amounts to "a new kind of journalism in our state, one where the newspapers work for the greater good of Ohioans rather than being pre-occupied with each city's parochial interests." [304] A key moment for the partnership came during a series of disagreements between members about stories each of the newspapers was writing about government pension plans. When editors met to discuss disagreements about

[301] Ibid., 25.

[302] Owens, "Ohio Newspapers Share Content, But Don't Give Up Hope for AP."

[303] Marrison, "Former Rivals Share Content in Ohio."

[304] Ibid., 25.

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methodology and orientation, one said "We need to treat this like one big newsroom, not eight smaller ones" [305, 306]

These collaborations among mainstream news organizations are the exception, but are on the rise, often spearheaded by nonprofit news organizations. "In the post-apocalyptic landscape that is American journalism, collaboration among competing news organizations seems a natural development," wrote Stephen Engelberg, then managing editor of ProPublica, one of the most prominent of the new class of online-only, self-standing nonprofit newsrooms, which itself works collaboratively with organizations that would otherwise be competitors.[307] Some collaborations have existed for a while and just make sense – such as metro dailies operating joint state capitol bureaus rather than sending separate reporters. But today, collaboration has come to mean more than that, Engelberg writes. In the last two years, organizations have working with outsiders on investigative projects – including ProPublica's Pulitzer prize-winning story on euthanasia in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, published in partnership with the New York Times magazine. "They now are more the rule than the exception – so much so that more than 20 nonprofit newsrooms have formed the Investigative News Network to help

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[305] Ibid., 26.

[306] Some commentators have been critical of the arrangement, calling it simply a way of getting around paying for access to Associated Press content, since that organization already aggregated and distributed content from, among other things, newspapers around the state of Ohio. But editors involved in the Ohio News Organization told Owens that they found AP did not work with their timelines, did not offer credit to the newspaper that wrote the story, and edited the color out of stories. And, unlike partnership through the AP, the Ohio News Organization facilitates collaboration, not just sharing through distribution (Owens, "Ohio Newspapers Share Content, But Don't Give Up Hope for AP.").

[307] Engelberg, "How to Get Along: Learn Newsroom Culture, Build Trust and Agree on a Detailed Battle Plan."

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nurture the growth of nonprofits and to distribute their work," Houston writes.[308] That organization's founding document says that it will encourage nonprofit newsrooms to collaborate editorially by working on projects together and publishing on the same day with multimedia partners; administratively through "back office" operations; and financially by exchanging information and jointly fundraising, and perhaps working to develop new models to monetize "the shared, combined content of the member organizations, in order to achieve a more sustainable journalism." [309]

Collaboration has become so much a part of journalistic activity that the *IRE Journal* published a special edition focused on the topic in the spring of 2010. In that issue, Houston called February 2010 perhaps the "biggest media mash-up month" ever (to date, of course), enumerating collaborative projects such as a project run by CPI and NPR, along with five regional investigative centers, to produce stories about sexual assaults on university campuses; a piece by Investigative Reporting Workshop and Frontline about working conditions at regional airlines; another by the workshop and the Watchdog Institute that aired on ABC about stimulus money going overseas; a collaboration between CPI and the Center for Investigative Reporting on mismanagement of funds by homeland security; and a project by ProPublica, the *Times-Picayune* and Frontline on policing malpractice after Hurricane Katrina. The internet has made it easier to share and distribute information, Houston argues, and an increased reliance on databases has been helping collaboration by making it easy to create local stories by slicing off local data from large national datasets. Ultimately, pooling resources is an impetus for

[308] Houston, "Collaborations Spread Quickly, Giving Stories a Broader Reach," 18.

[309] "Pocantico Declaration."

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collaboration, but for collaborations to be successful, they must be built around the realization that they result in more varied content. It can be difficult, Houston notes, for traditional investigative journalists to overcome their competitive instincts. Since Rosenthal's first collaborative project – the Chauncey Bailey Project in 2007 – the Center for Investigative Reporting, which Rosenthal joined as executive director in 2007, has adopted collaboration as a key element of its operations. Rosenthal calls it a "difficult, complicated and organization-altering strategy," [310] but wrote in 2010 that its quick rise in the prior two years made him optimistic about the future of journalism. The Chauncey Bailey Project worked, Rosenthal argued, because of the number of people and organizations that wanted to be part of the story, and because of the awareness that no one organization had the resources to do a good job on its own. He brought that same thinking to CIR, which he argues needed to collaborate if it were to grow. Like the organizations studied here, Rosenthal's CIR distributes its stories through commercial news organizations and other nonprofits, splits a salary for a reporter who works on projects for the center and for public radio, partners with ethnic media and works with students at local journalism schools. All this points to a growing willingness and, along with the ongoing economic trouble in journalism, a growing need to work together – one that, as I will show below, has been embraced to varying degrees by the organizations I am studying.

[310] Rosenthal, "The Power of Partnerships: Collaboration in California Gives Investigative Stories Greater Reach and Impact."

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Findings

The nature of collaborative, or co-reported projects – as some reporters and some organizations refer to them – varied among the organizations I studied, and also within them. I observed one-off projects, which generally were based on a one-time grant, projects built into the existing journalistic infrastructure, or projects that created new journalistic infrastructure. Part of this variation is a result of the nature of journalistic work, where some topics warrant ongoing investigation while others are more suited to a single or small number of stories. Part of it, though, results from the ongoing learning process around collaborative projects, as journalists and the organizations they work for experiment with this increasingly popular way of organizing investigations. One thing staff at the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists at CPI reflected on a year after their tax haven series, for instance, was how the project "has successfully presented a viable new model for journalism" [311] – in other words, learning how to collaborate in this way was one of the goals of the project. Ryle, the consortium's director, added: "If we have proved anything, it's that cross-border reporting is possible in a way never seen before – and it is my hope that, one year on from what is probably the biggest collaboration in media history, this is only the beginning." Below I describe examples of each type that I observed during the course of my fieldwork.

One-off projects

One-off projects ranged from large, centrally organized projects to smaller less structured ones. An example of the former is CPI's State Integrity Investigation, a $1.5-million, foundation-funded, nationwide collaboration, a "first-of-its-kind, data-driven assessment

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[311] Ryle, "Happy Birthday Offshore Leaks - What We've Learned, and What the Future Holds."

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of transparency, accountability and anti-corruption mechanisms in all 50 states." [312] The major partners were the Center for Public Integrity, Global Integrity – an organization advocating for good governance – and Public Radio International, a global public radio organization. The investigation went beyond the kind of reporting that was already being done, focusing not on particular scandals, but instead systematically measuring the mechanisms in place to deter corruption. The organizations contacted 100 experts on government integrity to create a corruption report card consisting of 330 different measures, and hired journalists in all the states, many employed at nonprofit news organizations but some in commercial journalism or public broadcasting, to conduct "on-the-ground investigative reporting" [313] in each state. Each journalist collected data to rank his or her state on each of the 330 measures. The reporter's determinations and notes explaining sources and any judgment calls are available on the project website, which continues to exist as its own micropage.[314] CPI continued labeling some of its own stories with the State Integrity logo through 2013, and would re-publish related stories written by partnering organizations, but the collaborative part of the work was limited to the report-card project.

I also observed plenty of smaller projects, perhaps the most intensive of which involved analyzing a year's worth of activities engaged in by the governor of Wisconsin. The data came from the governor's calendars, obtained by WCIJ in 2012 through a freedom of information request, and, separately, by several other news organizations. By the time the WCIJ began its project, the local metro daily, the *Wisconsin State Journal,* had already

[312] Ginley, "Grading the Nation."

[313] Ibid.

[314] www.stateintegrity.org

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written a 900-word story about the governor's schedule, focusing mostly on how little of it he had made public.[315] WCIJ instead engaged in a detailed analysis of the calendars, working with the *La Crosse Tribune*, which regularly ran the center's content and had also received the same data and was wondering how to deal with it.[316] The center also hired journalism students on an hourly basis to help put the information into a database. In the end, the co-reported stories were shared – as is all of the center's content – with news organizations around the state.

Projects taking advantage of existing journalistic infrastructure

Other projects were built into infrastructure already existing within the organizations I was studying. The most prominent examples of this are the collaborations organized by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, such as the tax haven project described earlier in this chapter. For the consortium in particular, collaborations involve high levels of trust between journalists, especially in the case of the most recent project on offshore tax havens, which involved sharing leaked data with journalists around the world and counted on them to wait until the project was complete before publishing. Thus, the prior existence of a journalistic network, built on trust, is key to being able to carry out its projects. It was only once the stories started to come out that the consortium began to let in organizations that it had not worked with before. "Building trust and friendship within the team is the most important part of the process," consortium director Ryle wrote. [317] In his reflection on the project a year later, he added this about trust: "(Y)ou can imagine the pressure and the ego dramas that could have killed Offshore

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[315] Barbour, "Where's Walker? Out-of-State Travel Often Kept Secret."

[316] Golden, "Data Viz Helps Show Governor's Travels."

[317] Ryle, "How Investigative Journalism Produces Results."

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Leaks. The trust level had to be so high. Any one of the dozens of journalists we worked with could have gone with the story on their own. But they didn't. The fairytale ending for ICIJ is that it worked." [318] Consortium staff told a similar story about an earlier project about the human tissue trade. At that time, a consortium staffer wrote that "Even more important than the work itself is building trust and friendship among our team. Having solid relationships helps later in the project, when both time and tempers are short. That helps us be more compassionate and patient when confronting differences in languages, reporting or writing styles." [319]

And, by taking advantage of the trust within its existing infrastructure, the consortium was able to encourage international collaboration. "Our aim is to bring journalists from different countries together in teams – eliminating rivalry and promoting collaboration. Together, we aim to be the world's best cross-border investigative team." [320] Involving many journalists early on gives consortium members the ability to help one another out with their work in their respective countries, and search for and develop the expertise needed to analyze local data, Ryle added.

Long-term projects that create new journalistic infrastructure

Finally, some collaborative projects created new journalistic infrastructure that became the basis of ongoing collaboration. WCIJ had been collaborating with Wisconsin Public Radio since its inception, but the collaboration intensified in 2012, when the two nonprofit organizations hired a joint reporting intern. The intern spent most of her time at WCIJ and was supervised by employees of that organization. For WPR she created radio

[318] Ryle, "Happy Birthday Offshore Leaks - What We've Learned, and What the Future Holds."

[319] Willson, "How We Collaborated to Produce Skin and Bone."

[320] "About the ICIJ."

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versions of text-based stories written by her and other WCIJ reporters. That particular intern's contract with WPR ended in 2013, but by then she had laid the groundwork for an ongoing relationship between the center and WPR, with center staff continuing to work on creating radio versions of their stories. Another form of collaboration that built new journalistic infrastructure was based in joint funding. In April 2013, MinnPost and WCIJ received a joint grant from the Joyce Foundation to report together on political reform in the two states, as well as environmental protection and gun violence issues in Wisconsin.[321] While the grant isn't explicitly based on collaboration, the organizations plan to work together where possible.[322] A third collaboration creating new infrastructure was called Water Watch Wisconsin and involved WCIJ, Wisconsin Public Radio and Wisconsin Public Television. The agreement written up by the organizations states that "Each participating news organization retains journalistic independence but agrees to work cooperatively with other partners when appropriate to maximize the quality, reach and impact of the journalism." [323] The organizations did produce stories under that brand, and the project got an extra boost in 2014 when it won a $35,000 grant from the Online News Association to work with students at the University of Wisconsin as well as public and commercial journalists around the state in what the organizations referred to as an "unprecedented collaboration between journalism students, instructors and industry professionals." Training students in investigative reporting is a key part of the mission of WCIJ and many other journalistic nonprofits. One manifestation of this is the "teaching

[321] Kramer, "Joyce Foundation Makes a Grant to MinnPost and the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism"; Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism, "Joyce Foundation Awards Grant to Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism and MinnPost."

[322] Andy Hall, interview, Madison, Oct. 26, 2013.

[323] Water Watch Wisconsin, Project Outline, Feb. 4, 2013.

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hospital model" of doing journalism, supported by foundations and others (and described in Chapter 4).[324] This orientation has at times been written into the missions of nonprofit news organizations. WCIJ's description of its own work, for instance, includes the statement that it "educates and trains University of Wisconsin-Madison students to become investigative journalists;" [325] this commitment forms the basis for the center's connection to the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, which houses the center in a building also shared with Wisconsin Public Television and Wisconsin Public Radio – putting the center in close proximity to its most important collaborative partners – and offers much of the organization's labor in the form of student interns. Not all nonprofit news organizations have a focus on training investigative journalists, though – the Center for Public Integrity, for instance, makes no mention of training or of students in its description of its operations, though the organization does hire student interns.

Although MinnPost's mission does not mention working with students or training, the organization did produce a series of stories on predatory lending, working with an in-depth reporting class from the University of Minnesota's journalism school[326] to produce a dozen stories in collaboration with their professor and a MinnPost reporter.

Not always collaborative

All this isn't to say, though, that these organizations never care about owning their content. That became apparent in the spring of 2014, when the Center for Public Integrity

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[324] Anderson, Glaisyer, and Smith, *Shaping 21st Century Journalism: Leveraging a "Teaching Hospital Model" in Journalism Education*; Francisco, Lenhoff, and Schudson, "The Classroom as Newsroom: Leveraging University Resources for Public Affairs Reporting"; Newton, "An Open Letter to America's University Presidents."

[325] "What We Do | WisconsinWatch.org."

[326] University of Minnesota, "The Lending Trap Project."

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was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in the category of investigative reporting for its series on denials of benefits to coal miners affected by black lung disease. A disagreement erupted between CPI and ABC, with which the center collaborated on at least part of the series. ABC claimed, in a letter to CPI executive director Buzenberg, that the two organizations were equal partners in the project and that the ABC reporter and producer should share in the prize.[327] Buzenberg countered[328] that ABC had joined the investigation partway through, and that its reporting contributed to one part of the three-part series, and was geared to the needs of television, rather than providing original content for the print stories. In his nomination letter to the prize committee, Buzenberg wrote[329] that "Months into the reporting, the Center shared its findings with the ABC News investigative unit, whose broadcasts help reach a wider audience." ABC argued that the partnership began earlier, and that CPI had promised a "true partnership." [330] Buzenberg wrote in his response that the Pulitzer Prize administrator had reviewed the entry, and confirmed that the prize was CPI's alone.

Evidently, the details of the situation are complex. Clearer and more relevant here is the fact that, despite its collaborative spirit and indeed its acceptance of having its work

[327] Tompkins, "ABC News Says Center for Public Integrity Should Share Pulitzer for Investigative Reporting."

[328] Buzenberg, "The Center for Public Integrity's Response to ABC News."

[329] Buzenberg, "Nomination Letter from CPI to Pulitzer Prize Committee."

[330] ABC News president Ben Sherwood's letter to CPI executive director Bill Buzenberg, quoted in Tompkins, "ABC News Says Center for Public Integrity Should Share Pulitzer for Investigative Reporting."

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quoted without reference,[331] CPI does sometimes feel some form of ownership over its content. In other words, the spirit of sharing runs deep, but is not bottomless.

How MinnPost is different

As with sharing through distribution, when it comes to collaboration, WCIJ and CPI operate in similar ways, and MinnPost stands out as different, seldom engaging in the collaborative efforts that have become the mainstay of newsroom processes at WCIJ and CPI, because it acts as an online newspaper, distributing its own content. MinnPost did engage in occasional collaborations, including a series on predatory lending practices co-written with students at the University of Minnesota, and the collaborative grant acquired with WCIJ. Overall, though, with collaboration as with sharing through distribution, MinnPost operated much more like a traditional commercial news organization than like an online-native journalism center, owning its content and making money from that ownership rather than giving it away to achieve the broadest possible readership. This, in part, is due to the news ecology in which it operates. The Kramers started MinnPost out of a concern about the quality of journalism in the Twin Cities when they observed mass layoffs of reporters at the two metro dailies there. Thus, they naturally focused on local news. That local news focus in the mid-sized metro area of the Twin Cities, with its robust but not huge news ecology, meant that few news organizations would likely be willing to pick up and print MinnPost content if its model depended on news sharing. As a result, it made most sense for MinnPost to distribute its own content. That meant attracting readers to the MinnPost site, allowing MinnPost to create name recognition for

[331] In one situation, a newspaper wrote a story coming out of the revelations made by the ICIJ on offshore tax havens, without mentioning the consortium or the center. A CPI editor called it "a nice backhanded complement." I discuss this scenario in more detail in Chapter 4.

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itself, and thus gather revenue from readers and through advertising, reducing the organization's reliance on foundation grants relative to most other nonprofit news organizations.[332] The incentive of owning its content in order to monetize it through donations from readers and philanthropists, and through advertising, means it makes sense for MinnPost to not prize collaboration as highly as WCIJ and CPI do.[333]

Despite these differences, MinnPost does identify with the broader group of nonprofit news organizations. It was a founding member of the Investigative News Network, signing the so-called Pocantico Declaration, which enumerated the ways in which news nonprofits might collaborate. Its executive director also sat on the Nonprofit Media Working Group, which studied and made recommendations about how the IRS could better deal with nonprofit news organizations.

Discussion

Commercial news organizations sometimes engage in collaborative projects – just as they sometimes engage in sharing through distribution. It is much more common, though, among the nonprofits studied – specifically, at WCIJ and CPI, and in general at nonprofit

[332] There are different ways to measure this (Konieczna and Robinson, 2012). One useful metric is the percentage of the organization's revenue that comes directly from doing journalism. For MinnPost, that figure was 24% in 2010, compared to 6.5% for WCIJ and 3% for CPI (for the latter organization that number is the average for 2002 to 2010).

[333] Along with the size of the news ecology, there is one other factor that contributes to the fact that MinnPost is not as focused on sharing as are the other two organizations. MinnPost acts as a "second read," focused largely on providing analysis and commentary. This is illustrated, for instance, by the fact that in my analysis of MinnPost stories about the Minnesota state government shutdown in 2011, I found that 65% of the sources cited in MinnPost stories were other news organizations – as compared to the *Star Tribune*, in which 0.01% of sources were other news organizations (Konieczna, "The Effect of the Nonprofit Business Model on News Content: A Case Study."). It may be that other news organizations are less willing to reprint this kind of content than in-depth investigative journalism. This analysis raises more questions that it answers, but could be an important part of the story and should be investigated further.

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news organizations relying on foundation funding. Organizations such as MinnPost, which primarily distribute their own content and thus have significant revenue streams not associated with foundations – advertising and reader donations, in particular – are less likely to collaborate, just as they are less likely to share through distribution.

There exist several possible explanations for this observation. As described above, organizations that distribute their own content – and thus aim to earn some revenue from advertising and reader donations – are more similar to commercial media than are those organizations whose content is distributed by others, and thus which must rely on foundation funding. Like commercial media, survival for these organizations depends on owning their content and being able to monetize that ownership, that is, on earning money for access to that content or in exchange for advertising attached to that content.[334] Organizations that earn revenue separate from access and advertising – CPI and WCIJ's foundation funding, for instance – can be freer about sharing through collaboration, just as with sharing through distribution.

Another explanation may be related to the organizations' missions. MinnPost staff write that the organization's goal is "to create a *sustainable business model* for this kind of journalism, supported by corporate sponsors, advertisers, and members who make annual donations" (emphasis added),[335] where "this kind of journalism" refers to "high-quality journalism for news-intense people who care about Minnesota." The corresponding

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[334] In practice, earning revenue for access has been elusive. Newspapers charged for the print edition, and have made some attempts to charge for access online, most recently and notably through so-called "porous paywalls" at many newspapers. Few organizations that offer generalized content, though, have figured out how to actually earn revenue online, as evidenced by failed attempts by online magazines Salon and Slate.

[335] "MinnPost: About Us."

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section of CPI's website says that the organization's mission is "To serve democracy by revealing abuses of power, corruption and betrayal of public trust by powerful public and private institutions, using the tools of investigative journalism." [336] And WCIJ's site says that it "seeks to increase the quality and quantity of investigative reporting in Wisconsin, fostering an informed citizenry and strengthening democracy, while training the current and next generations of investigative journalists." [337] MinnPost's goal of creating a sustainable business model for journalism, compared to the other organizations' goals of serving democracy, in particular in the world in which MinnPost operates, in which virtually all news organizations struggle for solvency, forces MinnPost to be inwardly focused on plans that will generate revenue. Sharing through distribution is in direct conflict with this – because it involves giving away the news product for free. Collaboration, while not directly in conflict, also doesn't directly serve the mission of organizations attempting to create a sustainable model for journalism (as voiced by *Wisconsin State Journal* editor John Smalley regarding the healthcare reporting collaboration in Madison, which I describe earlier in this chapter). Thus, with their focus on earning revenue for journalism rather than on producing a new type of journalism that would be better for democracy, organizations that distribute their own content will be less likely to collaborate on production.

Finally, there is a key difference between collaboration and sharing through distribution, which I allude to in Chapter 5. Sharing through distribution involves creating content for other news organizations; collaboration involves creating content *with* other news

[336] "About The Center for Public Integrity."

[337] "What We Do | WisconsinWatch.org."

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organizations. Thus, collaboration offers more leeway for nonprofits, since their partnering organizations create their own version of the collaborated story, putting less pressure on the nonprofit to infer the partners' news values and norms. In these cases, nonprofits and potential partners can work as equals, creating their own stories that satisfy the news norms and values of each organization, rather than having nonprofits produce content and guess at what their potential partners might want.

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Chapter 7: Conclusion

As the crisis in journalism continues to unfold and it remains unclear what new organizations and institutions will arise, public affairs journalism in particular is in trouble. As I described in Chapter 2, public affairs journalism – the kind of journalism that provides the information needed for a democracy to function – produces positive externalities, meaning that it has a positive effect even on those who don't read it or don't pay for it. That means that those who *do* pay won't be willing to pay the full price – since they don't get the full benefit – and thus public affairs journalism will tend to be underproduced in the marketplace. Essentially, this argument, outlined by Hamilton[338] but common in economic analyses of journalism, suggests that those types of journalism that have positive social effects will be underproduced. Throughout the 20th century, this type of journalism was subsidized by other, more profitable elements of the newspaper, or by families who felt they received some benefit from publishing high-quality journalism – often prestige or a perceived impact on politics. As newspaper profits have plunged and as family-owned papers have been bought up by large companies, the willingness to offer such subsidies has been increasingly in trouble.

One response to the problems faced by public affairs journalism is the steady growth, in number and significance, of nonprofit news organizations. Although the first of these organizations pre-date the acute crisis in journalism that started around 2008, there has been a significant swelling of them since then. Additionally, founders of both pre-crisis and post-crisis nonprofit news organizations harken back to what they perceive as a time

[338] Hamilton, *All the News That's Fit to Sell*.

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when journalism was done in a different and better way, and hold that up as their goal, saying, in one instance, that it is their aim to produce "old school journalism driven by old school rules." [339] In other words, they are engaging in a form of what we call "field repair" [340] within the field of traditional journalism, creating quality public affairs journalism to fill the hole left as commercial journalism retreats from that space, while building new systems that they hope will spread the ability of other news organizations to continue to fill that same hole.

This dissertation focuses on the question of whether and how these organizations are able to produce the kind of journalism the market has increasingly struggled to produce – in other words, whether they are able to successfully engage in field repair. Fieldwork at each of the three organizations studied here revealed a particular behavior that distinguished them from the for-profit media from which they arose, and contributed to their work in repairing the field of journalism. That behavior, which I have termed news sharing, is the focus of this dissertation. The organizations studied here all engage in news sharing, though to varying degrees (see Table 3.2). Traditional news organizations produce a package of news and sell access to it; those nonprofits that engage most vigorously in sharing produce stories and give them a way, their focus on field repair in essence translating into providing a service for democracy. And, their revenue comes from that activity – specifically, from entities that believe journalism has an important role to play in democracy, and that are concerned about its continued ability to play that role. These entities are primarily foundations and philanthropists. Those organizations

[339] Bill Lueders, talk at Wisconsin Academy, Madison, Wisconsin, Sept. 2013.

[340] Graves and Konieczna, "Sharing the News: Specialization and Symbiosis in the Emerging Media Ecosystem."

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that produce a news package instead earn their revenue – at least some of it – from offering access to that package, and thus face incentives such as creating an attractive bundle and producing stories that will garner a wide readership. Because revenue for these organizations is connected to access to stories, they cannot share in the same way as field repairing nonprofits can. This explains why MinnPost's goal of earning revenue from its content is incompatible with sharing, and why, therefore, other news organizations, even public broadcasters, see MinnPost as competition.

By way of conclusion, I will start with revisiting some of the data I presented in Chapters 4-6 about sharing, to recap arguments I made about how sharing impacts the organizations doing the sharing, in particular how it separates these organizations from, and ties them to, the organizations with which they share. I will also discuss how the internet enables sharing in the first place. Then, I will look to the future, examining forecasts of sustainability for these organizations and discussing the ongoing growth of sharing as a newsroom practice.

How sharing influences the sharer

In Chapters 4-6, I described the different types of sharing observed at my three case sites. One of the major arguments of my dissertation is that the establishment of news sharing as a newsroom norm influenced how the nonprofits I studied operated. There are two pieces of evidence that make this particularly clear: how the changes in the ways CPI shares content have caused changes in that organization, and the difference between those organizations that depend on sharing and those that don't.

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CPI's mode of sharing and distributing content has evolved significantly over its lifetime, as described in Chapter 3. Founder Charles Lewis decided to adopt an organizational structure reliant on news sharing for a number of factors. He wanted CPI to be able to conduct deep, long-term investigations, the kind he got frustrated were lacking at ABC.[341] But he also wanted to have more autonomy than he believed staff at the Center for Investigative Reporting did. That organization operated as a loose collection of freelancers who, Lewis said, were at the mercy of the editors to whom they pitched stories. At the same time, there was no obvious way for the center to reach a broad audience on its own, so he decided staff would produce reports and hope journalists would cover them. And it worked – as I describe in Chapter 3. "Journalists dined off it," he said. This mode of distribution meant that, in the early 1990s, center staff couldn't consider themselves as journalists. "We wanted (journalists) to cover (center reports) as a news event, and they wouldn't cover something done by journalists," Lewis explained. "We had no publication and we had to get it out so it had to be an event." A constant reminder of this history is the organization's name, which evokes a think tank or other good governance association, and which causes some confusion today, with journalists at the center having to explain to sources that the center is a news organization. In other words, the fact CPI was engaging in this type of sharing affected even whether or not employees would see themselves as journalists. The organization's non-journalistic orientation early on is reflected in things such as its application for nonprofit status in

[341] Charles Lewis, interview, Washington, D.C., May, 2013; telephone, March 25, 2014.

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1989, in which the organization described its principal activity as "charitable; educate public about ethics in government." [342]

As the organization's distribution mode changed, its understanding of itself also evolved. The introduction of the Public i newsletter allowed CPI to publish shorter stories, more reminiscent of journalism, and the ease of sharing content on the internet – coupled with a new openness toward doing so – further pushed the center to write stories that journalists saw as journalism. At some point in that evolution, Lewis said, CPI staff "wouldn't put up with the nonsense of not being called a reporter; they wanted to be reporters. As they were winning awards (for journalism) it was hard for me to not acknowledge that we were journalists." These changes point to how the evolving nature of sharing affected the nature of the organization.

Another indication of how sharing affected the structure of the organizations I studied is the big difference, in terms of funding, between organizations that relied significantly on sharing – CPI and WCIJ – and the one that shared little – MinnPost (see Table 3.2).[343] At WCIJ, distribution happened largely through other news organizations, MinnPost distributed its stories largely through its own site, and CPI was somewhere in the middle. MinnPost's focus on ownership of its content – similar to how a commercial news organization owns its stories – means that readers are most likely to read its stories on its own site. That leads to a dedicated readership that the organization can encourage to donate to the site, and whose attention it can sell to advertisers. At the other extreme,

[342] "Form 1023: Application for Recognition of Exemption Under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code."

[343] As we saw in earlier chapters, MinnPost does engage in some sharing, but it certainly is not a focus of the organization, like it is for WCIJ and CPI.

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WCIJ's readers are most likely to see that organization's stories published by other news organizations. When center staff talk about their readership publicly, they frequently mention the number of readers that have accessed its stories through other publications, but never mention the number of hits to the center's own website. This lack of focus on building a following means that WCIJ is unlikely to ever earn significant revenue from advertising or donations from readers, leaving that center more reliant on foundation funding. Another way of understanding this situation, though, is through the lens of field repair. The organizations studied here belong to a class of nonprofit news organizations operating on the internet and founded by people who were concerned about the state of journalism in the news ecology in which they were operating. They started these organizations to deal with those concerns, using field repair to do so through some combination of two activities: creating quality public affairs journalism to fill the hole left as mainstream news organizations retreat from that space, but also building infrastructure to enable other organizations to produce that quality journalism as well. One key example of this orientation is the argument advanced by WCIJ's Andy Hall, who said that it didn't make sense for his center to create its own distribution networks – that is, to distribute its own content – when distribution networks already exist. In other words, his aim from the start was to enrich what travelled in existing distribution networks – that is, to engage in field repair.

How sharing relates nonprofits to commercial journalism

Another major argument illuminated by my observations of the three newsrooms is the way in which sharing at once distinguished them from commercial news organizations, while tying them into those news organizations. While there is a long and largely

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unacknowledged history of news sharing in commercial journalism, the nonprofits I studied have built sharing *explicitly* into their daily operations *from the start*, creating norms around it and relying on it as a way of achieving their goal of field repair. Their desire to share above all else – as evidenced by the fact that CPI was happy to have the *New York Times* mention its work even without attribution[344] – and willingness to give content away for free, even in their precarious financial states, shows how important sharing was to the organizations I studied – particularly to CPI and WCIJ. This draws a sharp distinction between them and the for-profit media from which they arose and for whom content ownership and copyright are key parts of the business model.

At the same time, when these organizations shared through distribution with mainstream news organizations, they needed to create content those mainstream news organizations understand as journalism – as I describe in Chapter 5. Charles Lewis believed when the founded CPI that news organizations would not reprint whole stories, and so he created a quasi-research organization that wrote reports and presented them at press conferences. Now that it is clear that many news organizations are interested in reprinting whole stories produced by nonprofits, those nonprofits need to produce stories that can run alongside the organization's other stories. As a result, journalists at nonprofit news organizations become driven by traditional news norms and values. Indeed, the editor in charge of news sharing at CPI said that whether or not a story is picked up depends on how close it is "to the hard news environment" [345] – an instinct that involves judgment on the part of the nonprofit journalist of how the story relates to traditional newsroom

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[344] Staff meeting, May 23, 2013

[345] Gordon Witkin, interview, Washington, D.C., May 6, 2013.

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norms. In the newsroom, CPI's executive director at one point encouraged a reporter, about to contact PBS News Hour to offer a story, to understand News Hour's perspective. "News Hour probably saw the *(Washington) Post* story today; they may want a wider story," he said.[346] These examples show how CPI's position as a news sharer, specifically one relying on sharing through distribution, meant it needed to stay close to what CPI staffers thought the organizations with which it was sharing would want. In this way, news sharing at once tied the nonprofits I studied into the organizations with which they were sharing, while simultaneously distinguishing them.

How the web enables sharing

In his seminal work on news wires, Schwarzlose[347] describes the ways in which the ability to share content, or engage in what he calls "newsbroking," [348] was enabled by technology – in his case, the telegraph. "Rather than being newsbroking's simple and singular cause, telegraphy contributed new forms and organizing concepts to journalistic practices and enabled previously unfulfilled journalistic needs to be met." [349] This offers a helpful frame for looking at the impact of the internet on news sharing. As with the telegraph and newsbroking, the internet was not the "simple and singular cause" of news sharing (clearly, since the Center for Public Integrity did engage in some forms of news sharing before the commercialization of the internet). As I explained in Chapters 4-6,

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[346] Editorial meeting, Washington, D.C., April 30, 2013.

[347] Schwarzlose, The Nation's Newsbrokers, Vol. 2: The Rush to Institution, from 1865 to 1920.

[348] Schwarzlose defines newsbroking as the "daily collection and distribution of general news dispatches via communication systems among journalists in several communities, a process controlled by an agent or agency, in other words, a newsbroker" (ix).

[349] Schwarzlose, The Nation's Newsbrokers, Vol. 2: The Rush to Institution, from 1865 to 1920, 2:ix.

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though, the internet has created particular opportunities for CPI and other organizations like it that did not exist in 1989 when CPI was founded. In other words, the internet, like the telegraph in Schwarzlose's case, "contributed new forms and organizing concepts to journalistic practices and enabled previously unfulfilled journalistic needs to be met."

The effect of the internet on journalism – the way in which it has "contributed new forms and organizing concepts" – has been widely studied and will not be revisited here. What is of relevance to this project, though, is the way in which the internet has contributed new forms and organizing concepts related to sharing. We know from the history of newswires that the internet is not essential for sharing content. The Associated Press and other newswires developed sharing networks that travelled by telegraph, and the postal system was important to early development of the American news media. Even so, the popularization of the internet in the late 1990s created a robust, easy-to-use infrastructure that enabled free sharing of information. The existence of that infrastructure, though, was not enough. It was not until the financial crisis in journalism became a key element of thinking about the future of journalism that the major forms of sharing described here became the norm for nonprofit news organizations.[350]

Impact measures

This dissertation has largely backgrounded the question of how these organizations measure impact, and in particular the way in which foundations affect that. Of course,

[350] CPI is, of course, an outlier here, having been founded long before the financial crisis in journalism that became acute in 2008. Early on, though, the organization largely shared through commentary and being mentioned; with the growth of the internet CPI began to engage more heavily in sharing through distribution.

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foundation funding of journalism, like funding coming from advertisers and readers,[351] is hardly neutral. There has been a steady increase, since at least the 1990s, in the use of traditional business models and accountability measures by nonprofits.[352] Measuring success, though, has proven complicated and, as recently as the mid-1990s, Sawhill and Williamson found that few nonprofits felt they were doing so well, and some did not try at all.[353] The organizations studied here find themselves in a unique situation within this context. Unlike many other nonprofits, these organizations exist in an area, journalism, which has long employed an established set of metrics, based largely around circulation, and which itself has been going through something of a metrics revolution. While the question of how to measure things such as readership and audience engagement online remains under debate,[354] the idea of audience size and engagement as measures of journalistic success remains entrenched, largely because, for commercial news organizations, these measures are connected to revenue. As I described in Chapter 2, though, the organizations studied here are focused on producing public affairs journalism – those stories that economics tells us cannot be profitable in the marketplace. As a result, they operate, by definition, at a distance from market logics. Thus, there exists the potential for a tension between market logics encouraged by foundations and the extra-market orientation of news nonprofits.

Some market thinking did appear to come up in the newsrooms of the organizations studied here. The Center for Public Integrity, for instance, in a presentation to the funder

[351] See, e.g., Croteau and Hoynes, *The Business of Media: Corporate Media and the Public Interest*.

[352] Poister, Measuring Performance in Public and Nonprofit Organizations.

[353] Sawhill and Williamson, "Mission Impossible?".

[354] See, e.g., Graves and Gluck, Confusion Online: Faulty Metrics and the Future of Digital Journalism.

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of its project on the impact of money on politics, included the number of stories it had produced and the number of people reached as measures of its success – both measures connected to a time when the volume of readership was related to financial success. Similarly, WCIJ staffers talk frequently about the reach of the center's stories, through an estimated number of people who have read its stories in other news organizations; at MinnPost, pageviews were a commonly cited statistic. (Note that, while the goal of news sharing is to achieve a broad readership of content, that is not the *only* goal of these organizations: they are also striving to create a kind of journalism that they believe is underproduced by the market. Thus, simple readership numbers are not a reflection of their success.)

These organizations do also emphasize measures of success consonant with field repair. CPI quoted heavily from an independent assessment, produced by an organization focused on civic education and participation (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University), in its report to the funder. That assessment involved interviews with 13 experts who themselves were reporting on money in politics. The assessment concluded that those experts believed CPI's project offered a "shortcut" for news organizations that did not themselves have the capacity to produce such in-depth work; that it provided in-depth analysis of the influence of money on politics, differentiating it from what the news media had already been producing; and that through the project, CPI enabled news organizations to write about the influence of money in politics. Recall that I defined news sharing in Chapter 2 as the behaviors organizations undertake to spread their journalism as broadly as possible, with the goal of field repair: that is, producing public affairs journalism to fill the hole left as mainstream

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news organizations retreat from that space, and creating new systems and infrastructures that will encourage other news organizations to fill that same hole. The observations above suggest that, at least in the case of the Center for Public Integrity, market logics, while present, are strongly supplemented by the logics of news sharing and field repair.[355] Furthermore, that center's goals for the money in politics project include *content-based,* as well as *readership-based*, outcomes, including revealing more than 100 donors behind 501(c)(4)s; catalyzing more than a dozen reform advocates to action; heightening awareness of "a significant portion" of the general public; etc.

Sustainability

News organizations operating in the same spaces tend to compete in economic ways – for resources and thus for readers and scoops. As I describe in Chapter 4, though, the nonprofits I am studying do not compete with commercial news organizations economically, because the two groups rely on different pools of resources. Still, one would expect them to compete occupationally – both with commercial news organizations and with other nonprofits – though I observed this only very occasionally. (The most significant example was observed in the dispute between CPI and ABC News over a Pulitzer Prize awarded to the center for a project that involved at least some collaboration between the two organizations; see Chapter 6.) This overall lack of occupational competition could be a result, as I argue in Chapter 4, of the fact that these

[355] CPI in particular also puts significant value on the impact of its work, citing, for instance, government investigations and proposed changes in policy resulting from the offshore banking project produced by the center's international arm (Porteous, Hudson & Chavkin, 2014). This kind of orientation toward affecting change raises several key questions; these are not the focus of this dissertation and thus are left to future research.

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nonprofits aim to fill a rapidly emptying niche in commercial media and thus behave symbiotically, rather than competitively, with commercial news organizations.

The sustainability of these organizations, though, is, of course, tied up with priorities of the foundation world. This is especially true for those organizations relying heavily on sharing to produce and distribute those types of journalism that cannot be produced profitably in the marketplace. Indeed, the options for these organizations are sparse. None of the organizations studied earns money for access to content, in the way that traditional news organizations do. In other words, they do not charge readers for content, and do not charge organizations that wish to use their content. In theory that should be a potential source of revenue, but in practice this has proven difficult as traditional news organizations continue to suffer.[356] Apart from that, these organizations have the potential to raise money from audience members who care to donate either because they like the content or think the mission of the organization is important. They can also earn money from philanthropists and foundations and, if they have an audience like MinnPost does, from advertising.

In essence, as public affairs journalism continues to struggle and nonprofit news organizations continue to provide it to ever more stripped-down newspapers, these nonprofits are *subsidizing* the production of public affairs journalism. This model, though, relies on foundations that continue to subsidize the nonprofits. Clearly, foundations are key – both in financial support, and in supporting and encouraging the

[356] The Center for Public Integrity did earn $17,500 from the Digital First chain of newspapers, more of a donation than a payment for content, in 2013-14, but, as I explain in Chapter 4, Buzenberg, the executive director, does not expect that deal to be renewed for another year. The Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism has received donations ranging from $500 to $3,000 from local newspapers and newspaper associations, and is working to strengthen that funding stream.

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field of nonprofit journalism – in financial and non-financial ways. Foundations offer significant support to the Investigative News Network, which it the money to provide training and services to nonprofit news organizations, as well as helping them disseminate their content. Foundations have also funded numerous studies of alternative news organizations and ecologies, contributing to what is known as well as ideas about how best to support and encourage the growth of these alternative sources of news.[357] Data on the effects of foundations on the survivability of news startups, though, is unfortunately sparse. A preliminary study examined the impact of a variety of variables on sustainability of civic community news websites in four American cities[358] – a category that would include the organizations studied here, as well as other, for-profit sites. While foundation funding was not found to have a significant effect, that study did find that a connection to a postsecondary institution and location within a news network were the most significant contributors to sustainability; both of these features are frequently associated with foundation funding. News networks in particular can be spontaneous, but are often seeded or supported, if not actually formed, by foundations. Certainly, these findings – though preliminary – suggest that foundations should consider investing in the creation of structures of support for news startups, instead of only offering financial support.

[357] For example, the Chicago Community Trust and the MacArthur Foundation funded a study of ranking news websites in Chicago (Culbertson, 2012); the New America Foundation conducted a study of the circulation of information in Seattle; many other studies have been conducted or funded by foundations.

[358] Kim et al., “Contributors to Sustainability of Emergent, Civic News Sites: A Qualitative Comparative Analysis.”

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The future

The crisis in journalism is a complicated one, rooted in issues including but not limited to the waning of subsidies for public affairs journalism. The projects described here, and the trend in which they are grounded, offer important reasons to be hopeful about the future. These nonprofits represent one of the institutional responses to the argument that public affairs journalism cannot be sufficiently produced by the marketplace. They have been growing, in breadth, number, and prominence, throughout much of the 21st century. They have drawn the attention of foundations, whose support of such projects has grown dramatically and which have been conducting studies and coming up with plans on how to spur greater innovation. They have drawn readers, who come to their sites, who read their stories through the publications that reproduce them, and who in some cases are deeply supportive, both in money and attention. They have created a network, or an internal governance unit, in the language of Fligstein and McAdam,[359] in the Investigative News Network, which defines them as a group of organizations and acts as a place to host the links between the organizations. And, they have pioneered the new newsroom behaviors described in this dissertation, loosening the reins on the content they produce and setting themselves apart from the commercial journalism from which they arose.

Although no systematic tracking of news sharing exists (the closest is Stearns' now out of date list[360]), it is clear that news sharing is becoming increasingly common. One of the most surprising recent announcements was of a partnership between ProPublica, likely

[359] Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*.

[360] Stearns, "A Growing Inventory of Journalism Collaborations."

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the most prominent and wealthiest of the modern, self-standing investigative centers,[361] and Upworthy, a social media-focused news aggregator. The announcement came with the results of Upworthy's audience survey, which found that its readers were most interested in climate change, human rights and income inequality, and which prompted the organization to partner with a human rights and a climate change advocacy group, as well as ProPublica.[362] ProPublica itself has sharing relationships with more than 100 other news organizations, many of them quite intensive, with ProPublica editors meeting with editors from the other organizations to discuss story ideas from their inception. In this case, the stories will be posted both on ProPublica's and Upworthy's sites – giving ProPublica access to that organization's vast readership.

Of course, many unanswered questions remain. Nobody knows how long foundations will remain interested in the business of supporting journalism. Plenty of social institutions are funded by foundations and philanthropists in perpetuity, particularly in the United States: cultural institutions such as museums and the opera, educational institutions such as libraries and after-school programs, charitable institutions such as shelters, and, not least, some news organizations, such as public broadcasting and some long-standing nonprofits including *Mother Jones* magazine. At the same time, the recent dramatic growth in foundation interest in journalism seems unsustainable. It seems likely that at least many foundations will eventually move on to a new cause, leaving at least

[361] ProPublica's situation is significantly different from that of its cousins in the world of nonprofit centers: the Sandler Foundation pledged to give up to $10 million to the organization per year for each of its first three years. By 2012, the organization raised 62% of its funding from sources that were not the Sandler Foundation; still, those initial funds were key to get the organization on its feet and give it prominence (Nieman Lab).

[362] O'Donovan, "Upworthy Partners with ProPublica and Advocacy Media Groups on Original Content"; "The Most Important Topics Of 2014, According To You."

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some news nonprofits scrambling. At the same time, the growth of news sharing within nonprofits, between nonprofits and mainstream journalism and, increasingly, among traditional news organizations points to a reorganization of journalistic practice that marks a significant contribution on the part of nonprofits.

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