THE MEDIA ENVIRONMENT FOR LOCAL POLITICAL NEWS: DIFFERENCES IN MEDIA CONTENT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POLITICAL PARTICIPATION RESEARCH

By

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Introduction

In this project I focus on the content of the local media, the differences in quality of content across outlets and cities, and the implications of those differences for studying the role of the media in shaping political attitudes and behavior. This project contributes to theory building and model specification in the study of the role of mass-mediated political communication and political participation in three important ways.

First, traditional models of the role of media in political participation are not explicit about what kind of information can be found in the media, and especially the local media which are the most common sources of information for average citizens. This lack of empirical evidence of content makes it difficult to theorize and justify the use of the media variables that are utilized, namely rough measures of media use, in participation models. Discussions of how media affect political participation are most often the subject of speculation and directions for future research in concluding chapters or sections of articles. This project addresses this hole in the research by offering evidence of content, and specifically evidence of factors of content that have been theorized or found in other studies to be related to the creation of political meaning and the decision to participate. The findings of this project can stand alone, and be utilized by those specifying participation models in general to justify or challenge the use of widely-used media variables.

Second, exploring the political content of two specific political media environments has value in its own right, providing a new way of looking at the role of mass-mediated political communication in political participation by unpacking the independent variable of political media environment in two specific places, while holding as many other variables in the causal model of political participation constant. This allows for a richer understanding of what people are seeing and hearing and reading when they watch television news or read the local newspaper.

Third, this project allows for exploring two different underlying theories that inform much political communication research, often implicitly, regarding the causal mechanism that is at work when mass-mediated political communication is used as a variable to explain political participation. The conditional models and contextual models make different assumptions about the role of the media in this process, and this study explores empirically whether the content available in each of these two cities is more in keeping with one set of assumptions or the other.

Specifically, I explore the media in two cities, Green Bay, Wisconsin and Duluth, Minnesota, which have higher than average levels of political participation. In comparing the media both within and across the two cities under study, I explore whether significant differences exist from television broadcast to television broadcast, or from newspaper to newspaper. A finding that media outlets vary in content and quality within a single city, or across these two very similar cities, casts serious doubt on measures that fuse all newspaper reading or television news viewing into single variables at the national

level (Lear Center 2003; Wasserman 1999; Just, et al., 1996),[1] and also upon the possibility of developing a single theory of media effects.

The method utilized here is a comparative case study of the two cities under study, as well as nested studies at the individual city level, comparing the performance of media and outlets within each city, with the media outlets serving as the cases.[2] Content analysis of the newspaper and television offerings in these two cities, along with analyses of media ownership patterns and levels of competition are conducted. These analyses are based on data collected in January and February of 2003 in Duluth, Minnesota and in June and July of 2003 in Green Bay, Wisconsin, as well as pilot data collected in Duluth in August 2002 and Green Bay in March 2003.[3]

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[1] Recent reports by the Lear Center Local News Archive (2003) in conjunction with the Wisconsin News Lab have found significant differences in amount and type of coverage of national, state, and local political campaigns. Wasserman. (1999) also found wide variation in quality of coverage of the Super Tuesday elections in 16 newspapers. Just, et al., (1996) found significant variance in the amount and type of Presidential campaign coverage available across four local media markets. To date, studies of quantity and quality of local coverage have been restricted to coverage of political campaigns.

[2] For more information on the comparative case study and nested case study designs, see chapter 3.

[3] These dates were selected because it was possible for the researcher to spend two weeks in each city at these times. Events occurred during each period that may affect news coverage—Valentine's Day, and more importantly the explosion of the space shuttle during the Duluth study, and Independence Day in Green Bay. However, none of these events interrupted daily programming during news hours or led to a change in news format for any of the television broadcasts or newspapers under study. Though it was summer in Green Bay, the state legislature was still in session debating the budget, a topic which was also a primary concern in the Duluth study period. Coding decisions, discussed in the coding appendix, were made to deal with the space shuttle crash. There are many precedents for making such adjustments, as nearly all timeframes include anomalous events. In the recent Lear Study, Lear Center Local News Archive (2003), for example, coding adjustments were made to account for the death of Senator Wellstone during the study period. West (1992) in his study of media effects in the California Senate elections had to take into account the Rodney King incident and its effect on news coverage.

The local media are important.[4] Recent research demonstrates that local news attracts the only regular, large audience that is not event-driven with 61% of Americans following local news regularly, with 57% of Americans watching local television news daily and 41% of Americans reading the newspaper daily. In comparison, approximately one-third of Americans report watching network television news and cable news, and approximately one-quarter of Americans report going online for news daily (Pew Center 2004). More Americans get their news from the local media than from the national, cable, or Internet media. Perhaps more importantly, the local media create a sense of identity that ties people to the places where they live, ties that may lead to the sense of shared fate that promotes civic and political participation (Schudson 1995; Friedland 2001; Kaniss 1992).

The Decision to Participate

There are a number of different theories or sets of assumptions regarding how the independent variable of media use affects the decision to participate. One of the most developed theories suggests that by helping citizens obtain political information, the mass media provide citizens with some of the knowledge and interest that are necessary in order to inspire participation. Media don't tell us what to think; they tell us what to think about (Cohen 1963, 13; Lippman 1922; McCombs and Shaw 1972; Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Zaller 1992; Dearing and Rogers 1994) and how to think about it (Entman 1993, 51; Goffman 1974; Bateson 1972; Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Bennett 2001; Iyengar

[4] Local media includes all media produced within the city under study or focused on the area under study, such as daily and weekly newspapers, television news broadcasts, locally produced and focused radio news broadcasts, and Internet sites focused on the cities in question.

1991; Nelson, Oxley and Clawson 1997).[5] What to think is a complicated process that involves early political socialization, mass-mediated information, interpersonal conversation, group identity and individual characteristics (Schudson 1995, 15; Tuchman 1978; Gans 1979; Gamson 1992; Just, et al., 1996; Walsh 2004, ch.6; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995).[6] The content of the information from these sources and the process by which that information is transformed into political ideas is the subject of a broad range of study across social science disciplines. Here, I outline the role of the media in this process.

Agenda setting is the process by which the news media help citizens decide what issues should be considered as pressing in society and politics (Lippman 1922; Cohen 1963; McCombs and Shaw 1972; Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Zaller 1992; Protess, et al., 1987; Rogers and Dearing 2003, 73).[7] When the media tell us what to think about, or set the agenda, some issues are brought to prominence and others fall into the background. Research has demonstrated that, at the national level, what people think is important in public opinion polls matches up closely with what appears in the media. However,

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[5] The use of the concept of frame is widely attributed to Goffman. (1974). Some give the concept an earlier genesis with Bateson (1972). In his meta-analysis, Entman (1993, 53) defines the concept by suggesting "frames highlight some bits of information about an item that is the subject of a communication, thereby elevating them in salience...An increase in salience enhances the probability that receivers will perceive the information, discern meaning and thus proecess it, and store it in memory."

[6] Schudson (1995, 15) "The mass media carry a great deal of symbolic freight in urban and regional identity, more than they know, certainly more than they consciously engineer. The help to establish in the imagination of a people a psychological entity—a "community"—that can be located nowhere on the ground. News, in this sense, is more the pawn of shared presuppositions than the purveyor of self-conscious messages."

[7] Rogers and Dearing provide a good working definition of agenda setting. They define an agenda as "...a list of issues and events that are viewed at a point in time as ranked in a hierarchy of importance" (Rogers and Dearing 2000, 73).

personal experience or interpersonal conversations, for example, can also set the agenda (Iyengar 1995; Hetherington 1996; Goidel and Langley 1995; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992; Walsh 2004). Elites play a key role in agenda setting by promoting issues to the public via the media (Zaller 1992, ch. 12). The media are powerful agenda setters, especially for issues beyond our immediate experience, but they are not the only force in setting the agenda.

Framing is another key effect of the media on public understanding of political issues. Just bringing an issue onto the agenda does not mean that people will necessarily develop an understanding that is political for that issue, let alone an understanding that supports political participation. Getting the issue of job loss on the agenda, for example, does not automatically make for a political issue. It can be framed as an economic or a social issue, as well as a political issue, and actors such as politicians, candidates, business groups and unions all have an interest in which frame appears in the news. *Framing* involves offering to citizens a broad organizing theme for selecting, emphasizing, and linking the events, people, and ideas involved in an issue (Entman 1993; Iyengar 1991, 163; Gamson 1992).[8] Among all the facts and perspectives available, through framing, some pieces of information are made salient and others are ignored. Framing is a necessary part of the news presentations of issues; no story can give all possible details and perspectives equal weight. However, the more choices of organizing themes a person has, the more likely one will resonate with the reader or viewer.

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[8] Here I am using the sociological, rather than the psychological concept of framing, distinguished by Iyengar (1991, 163), note 19.

Use of sources, or who is cited in a story, has a strong influence on the frames available to citizens through the media. Because of the norm of objective reporting in the United States (Schudson 1995; Bennett 2001), reporters do not often give political interpretations of events; rather, they ask sources to provide information about whether an issue is really a problem, whether that problem is political in nature, whom is responsible for the problem, and possible ways of solving the problem. Political actors engage in strategic communications in attempts to influence the frames in the media.

Ideally, journalists working within the objective model seek out a variety of sources in their quest for objectivity and a political actor or set of actors is unable to monopolize the frames available for a particular issue. However, the search for objectivity most often leads reporters to rely on authoritative sources such as government officials and police, because these are seen as the most credible sources (Tuchman 1978; Gans 1979; Cook 1998; Bennett 2001; Zaller 1992).[9] *Gatekeeping* is a term referring to how journalists decide whose voices and what messages get into the news, and the routines by which these decisions are made (Bennett 2001, 2; Graber 1992).[10] Gatekeeping, again, is a necessary part of the making of news; it is not possible even in a book to record all possible sources of information and perspectives on an issue, but how gatekeeping is done can dramatically affect the content of news. By leaving out

[9] Zaller (1992) found that when there is elite agreement on an issue, reporting of dissenting frames is unlikely; when there is elite disagreement on an issue, competing frames are more likely. Bennett (2001) and others have called this phenomenon indexing, when the media gauge elite disagreement and cover competing frames according the level of elite disagreement.

[10] Bennett (2001) and Graber (1992) have slightly different conceptions of gatekeeping, with Bennett including whose voices and messages get in the media, and Graber defining the term more broadly to include what stories are chosen; because Graber's use of the concept fails to distinguish between agenda-setting and gatekeeping, the more precise concept as used by Bennett is utilized here. Both uses of the concept gatekeeping fail to distinguish well between gatekeeping and framing.

competing agendas and frames, the issues and perspectives of those allowed a voice in the media are made more powerful. Research has demonstrated that due to news routines, time pressures of completing the story and a desire to be objective, reporters rely heavily on official sources who then dominate the news.

This reliance on official sources leads to news that fails to provide frames that include causal explanations of problems that might prove damaging to public officials (Iyengar 1995), news that fails to demonstrate the salience of issues to individuals, and news that fails to provide citizens with the sense of efficacy necessary to mobilize and participate in an issue. Leaving framing to public officials leaves out issue definitions and potential solutions from other sources. When an alternative frame, such as that of a public interest group or social movement does not appear in the media, that frame is also unlikely to occur in interpersonal conversations about an issue (Gamson 1992). When causal connections are not made in the media, citizens are unlikely to make those connections themselves (Iyengar and Kinder 1997).

Without causal connections, citizens cannot act and cannot hold political officials responsible for specific problems. On the other hand, when gatekeeping does allow alternative voices in, and when citizens do see others like themselves acting on political issues, that can give citizens a sense of efficacy on that issue, and the sense can also be transferred into other issue arenas. This allows two possible outcomes, either alternative voices with causal frames and calls for citizen action are allowed into the media, in which case:

> Media-amplified images of successful citizen action on one issue can generalize and transfer to other issues. The repertoire of collective action presented on a broad range of political issues in media discourse- of boycotts, strikes, and demonstrations, for example- can easily be divorced from the particular context in which it is presented and adapted to other issues (Gamson 1992, 2).

Or, the media can be dominated by official sources with their fuzzy attributions of cause and reassurance that the situation is under control and no citizen action is needed or possible, in which case:

> It is no wonder that details of policy debates often escape the public, even when issues receive considerable news coverage. In fact, intense news coverage can undermine understanding of a situation at the same time that people become more concerned and emotionally involved in it. Part of this disorientation is a result of the biases in many news stories that put disproportionate emphasis on what authorities are doing... (Bennett 2001, 19).

Though the media play an important role in political knowledge and understanding, there are a number of other factors at play. Though they are not explored in this project, it is important to situate the media in the overall process. People can get information from other places besides the media. Personal experience, interpersonal conversations, conventional wisdom, and communications from the workplace, interest groups and professional associations, unions, and churches all play important roles (Walsh 2004; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992). In addition, media influence political learning not just through the news media, but also through movies, music, television programs, entertainment magazines, and popular fiction and non-fiction. In processing these sources of information, as well as socialization factors such as social identity, group membership, social location and related demographic factors such as age, level of education, income, partisanship and religiosity all play important roles in which pieces of information and sources are accepted, how they are interpreted, and how they are

integrated into knowledge about a particular issue, and how that knowledge is integrated into overall political beliefs. In this project, I explore the content local news has to add to this process, and assess the degree to which these media are providing content that aids in understandings of political issues that foster political participation.

It is also not universally accepted that citizens often form coherent political ideas. In fact, a large body of political knowledge and public opinion research demonstrates the opposite; that individuals know very little about politics (Neuman 1986; Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McFee 1954; Campbell, et al., 1949), and that they form opinions based on random pieces of information that are unstable over time (Zaller 1992; Converse 1964). Though these studies are very useful in illustrating how little people actually know of what we would like them to know, regular citizens are able to and often do produce political understandings that act as useful guides for their lives.

Local Media in the Decision to Participate

The local media, as the most often watched and most closely situated to the public, play important roles in informing the public. Any exploration of what kinds of content are related to participation must include this oft-used media. For local and often state issues, they are the only sources of information on political issues that most directly affect the lives of citizens. State and local issues also have the potential for more citizen involvement and input than national and international issues—it is easier to march on city hall than on the Capitol, and it is easier to catch the ear of a state representative than a United States Representative.

Even for national issues, the local media play an important role in informing the public by framing issues as to their importance for people locally. For example, the occupation of Iraq is an important political issue that most Americans follow, but stories about local soldiers who have died or returned wounded, or local families struggling to pay bills because a parent has been called up from the military reserves highlights the cost of war in a way that is much more salient than pictures on the national news of people from far away who are suffering. A national story about the failures of the No Child Left Behind Act and the problems created by it may spark an interest in some, but local stories about classes and programs being cut to meet the requirements of the Act are more compelling.[11]

> Local news plays a crucial role in the policy decisions of local officials to implement new initiatives or to eliminate and modify existing programs. It helps determine the allocation of what has become in many cases a dwindling state and local budget pie. Local news can affect private decisions as well. It can send people packing to move out of homes in the city or suburbs and determine whether they send their children to public or private schools or let them play in the nearby park. The information that the local news media provide to their millions of readers, viewers, and listeners colors a multitude of public and private decisions, affecting everything from government decisions and local business investment to the more intangible molding of regional character and local identity (Kaniss 1991, 8-9).

[11] Protess, et al., (1987) found that stories focused on individuals were less likely to lead viewers to attribute responsibility than those focused on the broader social problem. They also found, however, that the investigative stories in their experiments did little to set the agenda for participants. I suggest what local television executives have long said in their own defense, that personalized stories and "local connections" make stories more salient to media users. Perhaps both a systemic explanation AND a personalized connection are necessary to provide both salience and attribution of responsibility, but that is beyond the analysis here. Bennett (2001) also warns against personalized news and its detrimental effects on attributing blame, he also leaves out the possibility that such frames provide salience.

All of the available media in an area make up the media environment. The *media environment* (McLuhan 1964; Bennett 1994; Shamir and Shamir 1997, 229; Friedland 2001; Park 1924; Zorbaugh 1929; Just, et al., 1996, 12)[12] for local politics consists of all the media produced within the local area that contain information about local politics. Media outlets that do not contain information about local politics, or those produced outside the local area, are not included here as they are not part of the environment for local politics. The media environment is a subset of the *information environment* which consists of all resources available to citizens to learn about political issues, such as personal experience, interpersonal conversations, and perspectives provided by groups, churches, unions, workplaces and the like. Citizens' range of available frames and possible meaning creations are limited by what is available in their information environment. If a frame, voice, or perspective is lacking in their information environment, certain interpretations of issues are extremely unlikely. The media are an important element in providing information, and so the *media environment* is a key part of the information environment. Frames that exist but are missing from the media rarely

[12] The media environment concept was first used by McLuhan (1964) *Understanding the Media: The Extension of Man* MIT Press to describe the changing technology of media, and is commonly used in this way. For usages more similar to the concept here, see Bennett (1994) in which he finds that political learning is more difficult in an information poor environment than in an information rich environment in an election context. Shamir and Shamir (1997, 229) find that the media environment is the greatest factor in the phenomenon of pluralistic ignorance, finding that "From the social perspective, pluralistic ignorance is due to error-prone messages from the environment. Inadequate, misleading, or false information cues serve as invalid indicators for public opinion and produce pluralistic ignorance. Freidland (2001) uses a similar concept, media ecology, as a subset of the information ecology; his concept derives from the early sociological studies of Park (1924) and Zorbaugh (1929). Just et al., (1996: 12) also use a similar concept, pointing to the importance of the "political information environment," and finding that what "obtrudes" from the information environment affects candidate evaluations by voters.

make it into conversations about political issues (Gamson 1992, 6).[13] Just the presence of a frame in the media environment does not mean any given person will be exposed to it, yet alone absorb it; however, research demonstrates that passive learning does occur, and that what is learned depends upon what is available (Shamir and Shamir 1997; Zukin and Snyder 1984). Ideally, in a media environment, all media and all outlets would regularly provide a wide range of information to citizens. However, the degree to which media do so likely varies by environment, medium, and by outlet, and it is important to understand to what degree the media meet this ideal, and how much variation exists.

The local media, like the national media, are prone to rely heavily on official sources, highlight sensational stories over important ones, and devote much of their news hole to such non-political stories as sports, weather and entertainment. Local news, and local television news more than newspapers, rely even more uncritically on the press conferences and press releases of local officials than do the national media. In addition, because local news tends to cover new policy proposals when they are first rolled out, often the alternative frames and forces have not even emerged at the time of reporting, as unlike Washington, D.C. where every interest has an office and a spokesperson, local organizations are likely to arise in response to certain events and then dissipate once those events have ended (Kannis 1991, 6-7, 143).

Studies of local news present a dismal picture, with the Center for Media and Public Affairs finding that on average, only 5 minutes and 40 seconds of a half-hour

[13] Walsh's (2004) findings find the opposite, however, in that citizens discuss the issues covered in the media (agenda-setting), but bring to bear their own frames in those discussions, especially utilizing a race frame that is not seen in the media coverage.

newscast are devoted to hard news, with commercials making up a greater portion of the typical newscast than news (Grossman 1998, 33). Other research has demonstrated that local newspapers and television news tilt coverage in favor of business and new development plans to boost the image of the city and draw new readers and advertisers (Molotoch 1976; Banfield and Wilson 1963, 321; Kaniss 1991, 190-195). In a case study of Philadelphia's building of a new convention center, it was found that headlines about the issue were overwhelmingly positive, official cost and benefit estimates were accepted uncritically, single-source or single-perspective articles were common, questions about the proposal were either presented late in long articles or not presented at all, and larger policy issues regarding expenditures of public funds were ignored (Kaniss 1991, 194-196).

Though the local media have a powerful role to fulfill in making and shaping public understandings of issues, they fall prey to the same pitfalls as the national media, and sometimes to a greater degree. On local political issues, if the local media fail there are few alternatives. With the national media, if one newspaper fails to report all aspects of the Iraq war for example, another newspaper may pick up the story, a newsmagazine may present alternative information and frames, or international media sources may bring an important piece of information to light. With the local media, though competition exists, there are fewer chances to "get the story right" in another outlet.

Despite these problems, I suggest the local media can and do contribute to shaping public understanding of issues in ways that are conducive to citizen participation. In the next section, I outline the types of content that are thought to contribute to political

participation, and the ways in which I operationalize and measure these concepts, looking for these aspects of high quality media in Green Bay and Duluth.

The idea here that the local media play an important role in the shaping of public understanding through agenda-setting, framing and gatekeeping is not as widely accepted as the notion that the national media do so. It has long been assumed in political science that the national and prestige media set the agenda, and establish the accepted frames for presenting issues, and local newspapers and television news programs merely replicate, often poorly, these presentations (Lichter, Rothman and Lichter 1986; Gans 1980; Bennett 2001; Gamson 1992, 24). I suggest that while the local media often do reproduce the frames at the national level, they add frames that make issues relevant at the state and local level, and also present issues that are particular to the local media (Just, et al. 1996, ch. 5).

The local media are also uniquely situated to help people negotiate political meanings. While the national media present elite frames, which are received and then processed by individuals and groups, the local media present more of the negotiation of meaning process. For example, national media outlets rarely turn to the "man on the street" for reaction to a presidential policy, but the local media do; and they also get these citizen perspectives on state and local issues. In the local media, too, when the media do turn to alternative sources, those sources are more likely to be "people like me" or even people an individual knows. By citing local interest group members or professors at the local college that may be presenting an alternative frame, it makes knowledge seem more

accessible than when the same types of sources appear in the national news.[14] With the national media, people watch the news, and then discuss what they have seen with others; with the local news, the discussion begins in the newscast or the newspaper. When a variety of sources are used, the gap between the people who make the decisions and the people who live with them can be more easily bridged by the local media than the national media.

High Quality Content

Given that people are capable of forming coherent political conceptions of issues, and that the local media play an important role in this process, what types of content then provide the knowledge and interest that allow for political participation on the part of citizens? In order for a citizen to become involved in an issue, logically she needs to know that 1) the issue is a problem, 2) the issue matters to her or "people like her," 3) that the problem has a cause or set of causes, 4) that the problem can be solved or ameliorated, 5) that she can play a role in addressing the problem, and 6) she has some responsibility to get involved. If all six of these factors are present, a citizen may get involved in an issue.[15]

Breaking these down, first the issue needs to get on the agenda. In the local media, this would mean coverage of the issue that is prominent enough and detailed enough to

[14] In the national news, when interest groups are cited it is more likely to be someone from the headquarters in Washington, D.C. and professors are more likely to be from prestigious universities- sources citizens would likely perceive as elites. However, at the local level, and especially in the small cities under study here, interest group representatives come from within the community and academics are not as distant. It can be argued that such sources would still be seen as distant by individuals, and so use of such sources would provide less of a sense of salience to "people like me" than I attribute. However, even if these sources are perceived as elites, they still serve the function of providing alternative frames that would not be offered up by official sources.

[15] These criteria are adapted from those used by Gamson (1992).

get a citizen's attention. The next step, making the issue salient, involves convincing an individual that the issue is not just on the agenda of the world, but is on the agenda where she lives (Iyengar, Peters and Kinder 1982, 848; Kinder 1981).[16] This involves framing the issue in a way that makes it clear that the issue is locally and personally relevant, and also that there is a common community to which she belongs that shares the issue relevance. This does not necessarily have to be a community on the ground, it could for example be a community of environmentalists all over the world; for local issues, though, this is a community that is at least situated locally. The other members of the community may not live in the same neighborhood, but they will live in the same city or region. The third and fourth steps involve provision of frames that offer cause and effect explanations. Reliance on official sources to the exclusion of others is unlikely to provide this (Protess et al. 1984; Bennett 2001; Hall 1978). Step five is related to creating a sense of efficacy, that there are avenues of action and redress available to the citizen (Gamson 1992). The last step is again related to a sense of being a part of a community that one has a responsibility to take part in, or creating the idea that not only can people like her make a difference, but that she should make a difference.

I suggest that there are four particular factors in media coverage that indicate content that is fulfilling these purposes at the local level. First, the *proportion of political*

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[16] Research demonstrates that news, and especially television news, play an important role in setting peoples' agendas, even for issues with which people have personal experience. Iyengar, Peters and Kinder (1982) found, for example, that "television news programs profoundly affect which problems viewers take to be important." Other research, has however, found to the contrary: Kinder (1981) found that economic issues are always on voters minds, but that the media can "prime" voters to evaluate Presidential candidates based on specific economic issues. Protess, et al., (1984) found that local coverage of local political scandals did not put those issues on the agenda of citizens, but rather attracted the attention of local government officials.

news is an indicator of how devoted the media are to providing political information. More space devoted to political news is an indicator of the range of the agenda. Though it is possible that a newspaper, for example, could devote half of its time to political issues and only cover two issues, it is more likely (and empirically demonstrated in this project) that a range of national, state and local issues will be covered.

Second, *use of a variety of sources* is an indicator that multiple issue frames are being offered and that frames that offer cause and effect explanations, solutions, and opportunities for citizens to get involved make it into the stories. Reliance on official sources is an indicator that these frames are lacking. Certainly official sources, such as government officials, the police, and the fire department offer important and necessary frames for understanding issues. But reliance on official sources is an indicator of reliance on a single or a small subset of frames. The more and the more different kinds of sources are utilized, the more frames are going to be present in media coverage, and the greater the possibility of a frame that will provide interest and salience to more citizens.

Third, provision of *mobilizing information* such as when political meetings occur, how to contact public officials, and where protests will be staged provides citizens with concrete information about how to get involved in an issue, and also makes citizen involvement seem welcome. If an individual has to make five phone calls and wait on hold four two hours to find out when the city council is holding a public meeting on recycling, then she may get the impression that her input is not welcome. If, however, the information appears at the beginning or end of a story on the issue in a news

broadcast, she may feel like she and others like her ought to be present at the meeting; such information can act as an invitation (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1992).

Fourth, providing a *unifying vision of the city* (Kaniss 1991) provides the sense of shared fate and responsibility necessary to motivate people to expend the time and energy necessary to become involved, and also to see that such actions will be welcome and make a local impact. This factor, explained in more detail in chapter two, is a foundation for collective action. The degree to which media content contains these four factors measures, in this study, the degree to which high quality content is being provided.

Investigating Assumptions of Mass Media Research

As assessments of the field over the years have lamented, investigations into the role of the mass media in creating political meaning and shaping political behavior lack a unified theoretical underpinning, fail to investigate the assumptions of the implicit or explicit theories of the process by which media affects citizens, and often work in different traditions of media research undertaken in different academic fields proceed without acknowledging each other's existence (Jacobs and Shapiro 1996; Benson 2004; McLeod 2001; McQuail 1985). Here, I attempt to take a small step toward rectifying this situation by investigating the assumptions two theories, the conditional effects theory and the contextual effects theory, regarding the content of the news across locations. In the next chapter, I outline in detail what these assumptions are, and derive testable propositions that follow from those assumptions. In the end, the detailed analyses of the media in these two similar cities are held up against the assumptions each theory makes

about content. In the end, I find mixed support for each theory, with the strongest evidence favoring the assumptions of the contextual effects model.

Briefly, the conditional effects theory is perhaps the most prominent theory of media effects in political science; the theory assumes that media use operates as a set of independent variables on the individual level affecting the formation of attitudes and opinions or political behavior on the dependent variable side. The measures utilized to measure these effects—primarily survey data about frequency of use of a particular medium such as how many nights per week one reads the newspaper or watches television news—assume that all newspapers and all television news programs have the same effects. These assumptions are justified by pointing to the homogeneity of content across newspapers and television news programs, but rarely test the hypothesis that content is similar across place.

The contextual effects theory assumes that media messages vary from place to place, and that differences in message affect political knowledge at the group level, thus influencing attitudes and opinions. There is less agreement in the contextual effects literature on method, but research tends to rely on survey data and assume differences in media content across place.

Here, I have an opportunity to test the assumptions made by each of these models by comparing the media content in each city to the testable propositions derived from the assumptions of each theory regarding media effects.

The Project

Green Bay, Wisconsin and Duluth, Minnesota are two small Upper Midwestern cities that make excellent case studies for exploring the media for these content factors. Both cities have higher than average levels of political participation, are at the center of their media markets and therefore have the full complement of newspaper and television stations focused on the cities in question, and share many demographic and geographic features such as homogenous populations, cold climates, resource-based industrial economies, and similar political cultures (Elazar 1970).[17] If there are many differences across these two cities in quality of content produced, that bodes ill for generalization across all cities or even types of cities about content. The two cities also have interesting differences which make useful contrasts; Duluth is primarily a Democratic city where Green Bay is primarily a Republican city; Green Bay is the fastest growing city in Wisconsin while Duluth is losing population; Green Bay has a younger than the national average population, while Duluth has an older than average population.

Though as many factors are held constant across the two cities as is possible when comparing different places in the real world, the two cities also differ on a few factors that may be expected to affect content. First, at the time of the study, Green Bay was the smallest city in the country with two daily newspapers, where Duluth has just the typical one daily newspaper. Second, the Duluth television market, though it covers a wide geographic area, includes only one population center; Green Bay, on the other hand, also has in its television market the Fox Cities of Wisconsin, with the metropolitan area of

[17] Daniel Elazar (1970) includes both Wisconsin and Minnesota as moralistic political cultures in his typology. Duluth was one of Elazar's case studies.

Appleton-Oshkosh-Neenah which actually has a greater population than the Green Bay metropolitan area.

In this project, I provide as complete a picture as possible of the content available in the media environments of each city by exploring two week's worth of newspaper (including daily and weekly papers) and television news in each city. I also explore the media ownership patterns in each city to ascertain the degree to which the available outlets are actually independent of each other, and to explore possible differences between chain and local ownership of media. I exclude radio because neither city has a radio news program produced in the city that includes more than two stories per day. Both cities have talk radio programs, but the programs focus on issues beyond the local area, and contain mostly opinion rather than news. I exclude the internet, because though both cities have internet websites, using the industry practice of "shoveling," they all replicate the content of the newspaper and television stations to which they are affiliated. Content analysis of newspaper and television, though it does not account for differences in format, does include the content available on the internet.

In Duluth, in the period from February 1 to February 14, 2003, I collected 886 stories, from the daily newspaper and from local television news. In less detail, I analyze three issues of each of Duluth's weekly newspapers. In Green Bay, I collected 1352 news stories in the weeks from June 23 to July 4, with 855 stories coming from the daily newspapers and 497 from the local television news stations. Green Bay has no weekly newspapers.

Each of these stories is coded for whether or not they are political, whether they are about local politics, each instance of a source citation is coded for type of source and each story is coded for whether it contains mobilizing information. There are two sets of observations here; the story and the instances of source use. Coding rules are contained in the Appendix. These observations are used to compare at several levels.

At the highest level of analysis, the degree to which the media environment in each city provides adequate political news to allow for a broad political agenda, uses a variety of sources to permit the presentation of a variety of frames, and provides mobilizing information to give people information about how to get involved is explored. At the next level, the performance of media—television versus newspaper—are examined, both within and across cases in order to ascertain whether in general or within cases one medium does a better job than the other at providing these types of information within the project. Then, individual outlets within each medium are compared, both within and across cases, to explore the degree to which, at least in the project, one can generalize about newspapers and television news. Using qualitative examples, provision of a unifying vision of the city is explored across cases, across media, and across outlets in each city.

In chapter 2, I further outline the theory and prior research that serves as a foundation for this work. In chapter 3, I explicate the methods used here, the case selection, and discuss the comparative advantages and disadvantages of this type of analysis. In chapters 4 and 5, I present individual case studies of Duluth and Green Bay, including background information about each city, a profile of the available media and

the ownership of those media outlets, and the findings for overall quality of media environment and comparisons of media and outlets within each city. In chapter 6, I compare the two cities, exploring just how different the media environments of two cities so similar can be, and what the implications of that are for generalizing about media content. Finally, in chapter 7, I offer conclusions and possible directions for further research.

Importance of the Project

In this project, I explore three important questions. First, what kinds of media content are available in local news about local politics? Second, how does this content match up with content scholars found to be related to political participation? Third, how does this content vary across location and outlet? I examine these questions within the framework of two of the prominent theories of the role of the media in shaping political understanding and political behavior—the conditional and contextual effects models.

I also provide a unique research design for exploring these questions, attempting to combine the benefits of analyzing media content in context, while quantifying it in a way that allows for systematic comparison across outlets, media, and media environments. Finally, this project presents a rare systematic look at what type of media content is available about local politics at the local level.

Chapter 2: Theory
Media Content and Its Role in Political Participation

Introduction

In this project, the media environments of Duluth, Minnesota and Green Bay, Wisconsin are explored with three goals. First, a detailed description of the content available in the two media environments under study is provided, as well as detailed description of the similarities and differences across locations and media outlets within locations. Second, the content available in each of these places is compared, and assessments are made as to whether that content is consistent with the assumptions of either the conditional effects or the contextual effects models of political participation. Finally, this project seeks to relate these findings about media content and the assumptions about media content inherent in political participation models to the overall venture of understanding the role of political communication in political participation.

In particular, the content of the media are analyzed on three variables of quality of content—use of sources, provision of mobilizing information, and providing a unifying vision of the city. In addition to this primary focus, this project also explores in-depth the similarities and differences in media coverage of local political issues across similar places. In the process, a media environment of each city under study is constructed, examining all the media about local politics available in each city, and analyzing in detail the content of the newspaper and television offerings in each city.

Conventional wisdom suggests that the media must affect political behavior; the research has not been quite so clear. Early researchers found that the media matter a

great deal, and that there is a hypodermic effect in which media messages directly influence attitudes and opinions of citizens, causing citizens to act on ideas such as those advocated by fascists and communists at the time (Bernays 1928; Ellul 1968). Subsequent research found that the media matter little, or have minimal effects, and that opinion leaders in communities rather than the media influence attitudes and opinions (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McFee 1952). More recent research, discussed in detail in this chapter, finds that the media matter sometimes in political behavior, with two prominent models of how the media influence political behavior loosely classified as the conditional model and the contextual model.

Though Americans rely on local news for political information, there has been less attention to local, as opposed to national media, in political communication research. Some have assumed that the national media set the agenda for a relatively homogeneous set of local media (Lichter, Rothman and Licther 1979; Gans 1980; Cook 1998). The research that does exist demonstrates variation in the content offered by the local media, and evidence that content has effects on political knowledge and behavior (Wasserman 200; Kaniss 1992; Mondak 1995). Here, I look specifically at the conditional and contextual models and the assumptions those models make about content when exploring the effects of media on behavior. Then, I derive a set of testable propositions about content based on those assumptions, and explore whether the content and differences in content across medium, outlet and place match up with the assumptions of either model.

In doing so, I explore the media outlets of two small cities—Duluth, Minnesota and Green Bay, Wisconsin—and examine how each outlet, medium, and media

environment measures on several indicators of quality of media. These measures are important both in exploring the assumptions of the two theories under investigation, and also as a snapshot of the quality available in these two cities with higher-than-average levels of political participation.

The conditional effects model

The conditional effects model prevails in political communication research within political science today. Research in this tradition examines the conditions under which the media affect political behavior. This line of research involves several assumptions important to this project. First, that media effects happen on the individual level. Media use, working in conjunction with other individual-level independent variables, can have moderate influences on the dependant variable of political behavior. Second, that media use can be measured by finding out how often an individual uses each medium, such as how many nights per week one watches television news or reads the newspaper. Third, that these effects can be studied and measured across place and time, usually in national surveys of political variables. This line of research has yielded a great deal of useful information about the role of media in political behavior. Research that falls under the broad rubric of the conditional effects model takes place in all of the sub-areas of political behavior research.

Much effort in mass communication and political science has gone into the investigation of individual-level media effects, utilizing mostly survey data along with some experimental research. There are three effects identified in most of the literature—agenda-setting, framing, and priming. An additional effect, gatekeeping, has been

identified in some of the literature. While more detailed definitions follow, agenda-setting is the ability of the media to tell us "what to think about" or to choose certain stories to cover and place prominently in newspapers and broadcasts. Framing is the practice of presenting stories in a certain way, particularly in connecting an event or issue (or failing to connect it) to those using the media and attributing responsibility for the issue. Finally, priming involves successful agenda-setting and framing that prompts those using the media to evaluate public officials based on the issues highlighted by the media. Though priming research is important, because this project does not involve voting or the evaluations of public officials, only the agenda-setting and framing literatures will be reviewed here in detail as they relate to the project at hand. Particularly close-attention will be paid to literature that specifically addresses local issues, but research into national agenda setting and framing will be utilized where relevant.

The idea that the media play a role in agenda-setting is nothing new. As Lippmann (1922) noted, journalists point a "flashlight rather than a mirror" on the world, where journalists choose what stories to include, where to place them in the newspaper (in Lippmann's work) and how to present them. As Cohen (1963, 13) so famously put it, the media "...may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about." However, despite the recognition early on that the media are an important player in this process, the empirical study of agenda-setting, and media effects in general, has been rife with methodological difficulty and dispute, which becomes clear in the discussion below.

There are three agendas involved in agenda-setting—the media agenda, the public agenda and the policy agenda, with each labeled according to the dependent variable involved in research—all of these combined play into the agenda-setting process. An agenda can be defined as "...a list of issues and events that are viewed at a point in time as ranked in a hierarchy of importance" (Rogers and Dearing 2000, 73). There is theoretical and methodological dispute in the agenda-setting literature over the role of the public in the agenda-setting process. An influential approach follows the causal logic that elites set the agenda, the media reports it, and the public accepts it for the most part. In cases where elites are in disagreement, as is discussed further in the framing section, the public may be less likely to agree on the details of an issue, but its place on the agenda is virtually guaranteed if the media and policymakers agree that an item belongs on the agenda. The public plays little role in this conception of agenda setting (Zaller 1992). There are exceptions to this rule, with the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal being an example of certain elites and the media placing a high agenda-priority on the scandal, but the public refusing to accept this ranking of the issue. In this case, Zaller argues that the "mainsprings of American politics," or peace, prosperity and moderation played a role in the public's rejection of this agenda-item (Zaller 2001, 76).

While some find that the media and policymakers set the agenda, others disagree on methodological grounds. Most of this research involves examining polls of what issues are most important to the public at the national level, changes in media coverage, followed by changes in the public's reported agenda. It may, however, be the case that the media and policymaker agendas changes in response to public agenda changes, but

that poll measurements do not capture this change at the moment it happens, leading the data to demonstrate that policymaker and media agendas change first, when in fact the problem may be a lag in data reporting. With respect to a discrete event, rather than an evolving issue, it is not possible for measures of the public agenda to demonstrate shifts before changes in the policymakers or media agendas. For example, the public could not have listed suicide hijackings as a major concern before September 11, and media and policymakers would obviously address this event as important before polls would show a shift. This is important, because much of the evidence in this area comes from foreign policy concerns and distant national concerns that people are likely unaware of before a triggering event, or unaware of until a broader pattern is communicated than can be seen from personal experience. It also seems likely that in local issues, because the public directly experiences many of the issues and events, they would play a larger role in the overall agenda setting process.

An alternative finding to the causal chain from elites to media to public is a two-way relationship between the media agenda and the public agenda, where the influence of the media agenda on the public agenda is a gradual, long-term process of the creation of generalized news values, and that the roles of the media and elites in setting the agenda are mediated by interpersonal communication. Other work suggests that

> if our present reasoning is correct, it is inappropriate to expect a one-way causal relationship of the media agenda on the public agenda...More realistically, both the media and the public agenda are probably mutual causes of each other...Since there is a great deal of variance in the agenda items studied, some items probably can be expected to demonstrate linear, rather than circular, causality... (Rogers and Dearing 2000, 79).

Informal communication, then, is an important factor in determining the role of the media and personal experience in personal agenda setting, with those who engage in political conversation demonstrating less of an influence from the media and their own experiences, and those who do not engage in political conversations showing amplified effects from media and personal experiences. The process of interpretation of media content, and integration with knowledge gained through interpersonal communication has been called "social reality testing" (Erbring, Goldenberg and Miller 1980, 41). Walsh (2004, ch. 6) has similar results, finding that the media set the agenda of political discussions, and that citizens do discuss frames present in the news, but that citizens insert their own frames as well.

Rather than the media causing the public agenda, in this line of research, the media activate latent audience concerns by addressing issues the media knows are important to the audience.

> We propose instead a model of "audience effects," which assumes that media coverage interacts with the audience's pre-existing sensitivities to produce changes in issue concerns. Media effects are contingent on issue-specific audience characteristics; or, in other words, issue coverage in the media serves as a trigger stimulus to salience perceptions. Only thus are the audience's latent concerns activated as perceptions of issue salience (Erbring, Goldenberg and Miller 1980, 45).

While there is ample evidence that the public agenda influences the common agenda, especially at the local level, there is evidence that this may not be the case. Protess, et al., find with a quasi-experimental design utilizing telephone surveys before and after investigative reports they knew would air that the public was not concerned with the issues covered by the investigative reports before the stories aired, nor did their

concern increase after the reports aired in most cases. For the most part, the main effect was from the media agenda to the policymaker agenda, with in some cases reporters working out a solution with policymakers before the stories even aired (Protess, et al. 1984). This provides some evidence that reporters and policymakers circumvent the public in setting the agenda, even at the local level. However, it is important to note that investigative reporting and everyday news reporting are different animals.

While there is a great deal of evidence that, especially at the national level, elites and the media play more of a role in setting the agenda than the public, there is some evidence that the relationship between the public agenda and the media agenda is more complicated, especially at the local level. Personal experience, interest in an issue, and interpersonal conversation all play intervening roles in this process.

Additional research, reveals that the media are involved in *priming*, or affecting the standards and criteria that individuals use to evaluate the performance of public officials. This could have an indirect effect on vote choice, as priming individuals to judge candidates based on an issue more favorable to one candidate than the other could be significant. This media effect, though important, is of less relevance for this project because it does not involve the study of elections or vote choice (Iyengar and Kinder 1987).

Framing is a concept that has quite different definitions and operationalizations in different bodies of research, and different types of data are utilized to investigate the phenomenon. In the conditional effects literature in political science looking at the effects of framing, the concept is derived from psychology and economics, but is defined

differently in different studies. Most narrowly, the concept is utilized by Tversky and Kahenman (1974) where experimental data is used to demonstrate that when logically equivalent frames regarding an infectious disease outbreak were presented to experimental groups, people changed their opinion of which policy option should be chosen based on whether the frame stated how many people would live rather than how many would die, even when the options produced the same body counts either way. The definition of a frame utilized here, and explicitly stated by Rabin (1998, 36) is that a framing effect occurs when two "...logically equivalent (but not *transparently* equivalent) statements of a problem lead decision makers to choose different options." This has tremendous implications for democracy because if citizens change their minds based on insignificant (or significant, intentional) rewordings of policy options, then the way media frame issues, and who is allowed to frame issues, may have a significant effect on political behavior.

While this finding is important, it is not often that two logically equivalent ways of understanding a problem are utilized in the media. Entman (1993) suggests a looser understanding of framing, positing that framing involves both selection and salience.

> To frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described. Typically frames diagnose, evaluate, and prescribe..." (Entman 1993, 52).

Methodologically more complicated than the narrower definition, this understanding of framing is richer and more useful in studying real-world situations.

Nelson and Kinder (1996) use this second understanding of frames in conducting experiments on the effect of frames on the prevalence of group-centric evaluations of policies. The authors find that people are more likely to judge a policy based on the groups that benefit when the issue is framed in a group-centric way. Additional research, again using an experimental design, found that framing a Klu Klux Klan rally as a public order issue versus a free speech issue altered the way people evaluated the potential rally, with those viewing the free speech broadcast more likely to see it as a free speech issue, and those viewing the public order story seeing it as a public order issue. This was an interesting study because the authors used actual news broadcasts (Nelson, Clawson and Oxley 1997).

In the interest of the norm of objectivity, one would expect the media to present "both sides" of the issue (Schudson 1995; Tuchman 1978; Cook 1998). However, as many have argued, local news is often of poor quality (Carroll 1985). This presents the possibility that more stories presenting only one frame appear at the local level, increasing the possibility of framing effects. While many other such experiments have been conducted, the important message to take away from this is that in experimental contexts, framing is found to have powerful effects on how important people judge issues to be, on who is to blame or credit, and on how issues should be addressed.

Turning to the political participation literature, and its findings on the role of the media, perhaps one of the best-developed bodies of work in political science is the political engagement literature examining who gets involved in politics. Studies of vote choice and voter turnout have consistently found that the media play a very small role in

voting behavior. The demographic model is an approach to turnout that has been widely accepted and replicated. Education, age, income, residential stability and strength of party identification are key indicators of voting, with people who have more of the former doing more of the latter. Though the mechanisms are untested, the authors suggest this is due to the fact that there are lower costs involved in gathering information for the educated, and because people who are older and have lived in the community longer have a stronger sense of civic duty and a stronger interest in election outcomes. In these studies, media effects play an insignificant role in both vote choice and the decision to vote (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980).

Later research adds newspaper reading to the model, finding that those who read campaign information in the newspaper are significantly more likely to vote than those who do not. This further supports the idea that those who already have the information necessary to make a vote choice are more likely to vote because the costs are lower (Teixeira 1987). However, it could also be argued that civic habits include newspaper reading, because people who participate regularly recognize the need to keep informed as well as the reverse, that people who keep informed realize the importance of participation (Putnam 1993).

Looking at participation more broadly, including civic engagement and civic and political engagement in conjunction, perhaps the best known recent scholar of civic engagement is Robert Putnam (2000), who has suggested that civic engagement and trust are necessary pre-requisites for political engagement, and that those who read newspapers are more likely to be involved in civic and political life, and those who watch large

amounts of television are less likely to be involved these realms. He suggests that newspaper reading is an effort geared toward learning about one's community whereas television, either by taking away time or creating psychological states antithetic to engagement, causes people to be less involved in civic and political life. While his work has come under criticism and been revised, there is general agreement that newspaper-reading is positively related to engagement, but more mixed indications on television-viewing.

Though voting and civic engagement studies such as those mentioned above have found that newspaper reading is positively related to participation where television may be negatively related to participation, controlling for socioeconomic factors, the political knowledge literature has somewhat different findings, with most suggesting that controlling for education and/or cognitive ability, newspapers are not better at providing political knowledge and that, all else being equal, television may actually provide more knowledge. For the most part, the authors suggest those more likely to participate are selecting into the medium of newspapers. This contradicts the theory that those who read newspapers participate more because they have lower information costs, and suggests that the causal arrow may in fact run the other direction.

Using various methods such as survey data, in-depth interviews and experiments, controlling for cognitive ability, Neuman, Just and Crigler (1997) find that TV actually has a stronger effect on political knowledge than newspapers, suggesting that the positive benefits of newspaper reading is a selection effect rather than a media effect. Also, the authors find no clear relationship between either form of media use and participation.

The authors suggest that cognitive ability, not media effects, is responsible for variations in individual participation.

Delli Carpini and Keeter (1989) have similar results, finding with survey data that political knowledge is conditional on education, given the same media exposure, and that political knowledge is a critical variable in participation. The authors suggest that it is normatively undesirable to have a system where the key independent variable affecting participation—political knowledge—is determined in large part by level of education, which is distributed by the market disproportionately to the wealthy. A consideration to keep in mind here is that newspapers are also targeted to a higher socioeconomic class desirable to advertisers, whereas the advertising market of television is less dependant on reaching "quality" consumers and more interested in reaching a large quantity of consumers. This reinforces Delli Carpini and Keeter's suggestion that information is distributed by class.

Other findings suggest that it is not clear if newspaper reading is related to participation, and that TV viewing is negatively related to participation. However, level of education is the key variable in determining participation—with two paths—absolute levels of education increase cognitive ability and are a strong indicator of voting and participation at the individual level. In the second path, as discussed above, relative levels of education sort people into positions of power—in this path, the numbers of "seats close to the stage" are limited and aggregate increases in absolute levels of education cannot increase aggregate levels of participation (Nie, Junn and Stehlik-Barry 1997).

These findings all recognize that people get information from the media, and find somewhat different possible media effects. Most importantly, they find that how much political knowledge is gained from any medium is conditional on cognitive ability and level of interest in politics, which are determined by level of education—either absolute level or relative level, respectively. Previous findings of effects of newspapers versus television are not empirically supported, rather it seems that people select their media based on cognitive ability.

While the above research addresses two media effects generally, an important question for this project is whether and how the various media affect people differently under different situations. Many years of research have found that newspaper reading is highly related to participation, where the political knowledge literature finds that controlling for other factors, people do not actually learn more from newspapers than from television, and in fact, all else being equal (which it rarely is) people learn more from television. Mondak (1993) found that, comparing Cleveland and Pittsburgh during a newspaper strike in the latter, the lack of a newspaper did not have significant effects on knowledge about national candidates, but that it did have an effect on knowledge about House races. Mondak suggests this is because television does not carry detailed information about House races because of the size of the media market and the multiple races going on within it. This suggests that at the local level, relying on television may lead to lesser knowledge about issues, even if this is not necessarily the case for national level candidates and issues.

Not all of the conditional effects research points to the nature of the medium causing effects; some research finds correlations but does not actually test causal mechanisms linking content to effects. Shah finds that television viewing overall does not have individual-level effects on civic engagement and trust, but that some types of television use are associated positively in engagement and trust, and other types are negatively related. Specifically, Shah finds that social drama and news watching are positively related to trust and engagement, where science fiction viewing is negatively related. This suggests that, contrary to Putnam's thesis, it is not something about the medium of television that causes declines in trust and engagement, but rather something about the content being received that causes those differences (Shah 1998).

Wasserman (1999) finds that while newspaper reading may be positively related to knowledge and engagement, that there is wide variation among newspapers. Wassserman notes that most research on the role of newspapers examines national papers, or a few local papers for content, and rarely is the content among local papers compared. Looking at Super Tuesday coverage in 16 newspapers, Wasserman finds wide variation in the content in the papers, and suggests this could have effects on knowledge, vote choice, and participation that are not picked up in national research designs. Wasserman finds that a key variable affecting quantity of candidate coverage in the primaries is the number of reporters devoted to that beat. This is an important finding for this project, because I am expecting that different papers will contain different content on similar issues, and that these differences are related to different levels in participation of users of these media.

Graber (1988), in one of the most interesting works in the uses and gratifications literature, interviewed 21 participants over a year and analyzed the content of the most widely read paper and local TV news of the area, and found a modulator model of media effects, where the effects depend on the relationship of the audience to the issue and where people held opinions on issues and made inferences about issues not directly addressed in the media. Graber found that effects then were a function of both content and audience response.

The contextual effects model

The contextual effects model, though the informing theory of a smaller volume of research than the conditional effects model, has a long history that can be traced back to the Columbia studies in political science, and even further back to the Chicago school sociological studies of 1920s and 1930s (Park 1923; Zorbaugh 1929). The assumptions of the contextual model differ in several important ways from the conditional model. First, the assumption is that the media affect political behavior not at the individual level, but at the group level, either as a set of environmental variables or as contextual variables. Second, researchers assume that it is the content of the news, rather than the medium, that drives media effects; media content is then measured by looking at the information available in the environment, exposure to content, and/or processing of content through interpersonal conversations. Third, that these variables can be compared across time and place, but that the actual effects will vary based on context.

Though conditional effects research relies primarily on survey and experimental research, the range of methods utilized in contextual research is broader, with less

consensus on the appropriate means of studying and measuring contextual effects. Survey research, formal modeling, content analysis, and case studies are all loose categories of methods that have been utilized in this strain of research.

Both Cox (1974) and Orbell (1970) have suggested that the basis for all contextual effects is information flow. Individuals are affected by context as they receive messages from sources within the context; though the information may come from direct observation, social interaction, or the local mass media, the information an individual receives relies in part upon the context in which she is embedded. As these authors suggest, and Prysby and Books 1987, 226) reiterate, "[c]entral to understanding how a contextual effect operates is specifying the variation in informational content which exists across contextual units."

There are at least three kinds of contextual effects. Contexts are typically defined in area terms, such as neighborhood, city, county, or state. Contextual characteristics are usually defined in terms of the measurement procedure used to generate the aggregated data. The most commonly investigated contextual effect is the *compositional effect,* in which the composition of the context is measured in terms of mean or proportion of a characteristic shared by those who live in the context, such as the percentage of people with a college education. There are also *structural effects*, where social organizations affect people. Finally, there are *global effects*, which are attributes such as form of city government, which have no social component themselves, but nevertheless affect the social and political context (Prysby and Books 1987, 225-227). As Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995, 129) suggest, "[c]ontexts are external to the individual, even if the

composition of the context depends on the makeup of individuals contained within it." As such, individuals have little control over contextual factors, unless of course the individual chooses to leave the context. However, contextual effects, such as those described above, may vary from individual to individual. For the purposes of this study, the media environment, or the available media content in an area, qualify as a global effect—it is a non-social, external factor to the individual.

The Columbia studies in political science are an early version of contextual analysis. These studies found little effect of the mass media on vote choice, finding instead that opinion leaders within the community were the main drivers of the rare phenomenon of vote change. The Columbia studies were widely criticized by later research, both in the conditional and contextual effects traditions, as defining effects too narrowly in focusing only on changes in vote choice (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McFee 1954). Perhaps the best-known recent contextual effects studies have been conducted by Huckfeldt and Sprague. In their study of the 1984 election as experienced in South Bend, Indiana, Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995) do not focus on media effects, but do find that the range of information available in a given environment affects the distribution of political preferences.

Researchers have demonstrated that election coverage varies widely from media-market to media-market, city to city, and state to state (Lear Center 2003; Wasserman 1999; Just et al. 1996). Additional research, such as that conducted by Zukin and Snyder (1984, title) found that sometimes "...the media environment is the message," and that the media environment, or the information available about political issues, was a critical

factor in level of knowledge about those issues across all levels of political interest, including the uninterested. Walsh (2004), in a study of the role of informal groups and interpersonal discussions in social identity formation, finds that although members of an informal group bring their own frames and understandings to issues in the news, the news of the day served as the agenda for political discussions in many cases, and many of the frames presented in the media were accepted by those involved in the group.

This study

I am specifically concerned with looking at the content of the media, how that content differs across the two cases and across media outlets within each case, and whether the actual content of the media is more consistent with one or the other of these theories, or neither. It is not the purpose of this study, nor is it possible for any single study, to assess the entirety of either of the theories, processes that make up those theories, and causal implications of those processes. However, a finding that content is more consistent with one of these theories than the other would lend support for one theory, and means of discrediting the usefulness of the other. It is my purpose here to test the assumptions of these theories about content, while at the same time conducting a substantively meaningful study into the nature and quality of content available in the two cities under investigation here. In this study I investigate three key indicators of high quality content, as derived from the literature: use of a variety of sources, provision of mobilizing information, and provision of a unifying vision of the city. Each of these factors, and their foundation in prior research, are discussed below. In addition, I explore two other factors that may affect content, including media ownership patterns in the city

and demographic characteristics of each city. These factors are explored with the expectation that they will provide a richer view of the context in which the content is created.

Use of a variety of sources

The media in general have been found to rely heavily on official sources such as government officials, police and fire. Research has demonstrated that this reliance is due mostly to the routines of journalists—beat reporters tend to go back to the same sources over and over again to define their stories (Tuchman 1978; Gans 1980; Bennett 2001). A reporter on the police beat may go repeatedly to the police chief, a particular assistant district attorney, and a particular street cop, for example, to comment on nearly every crime story. Similarly, on political stories, a reporter on the city hall beat may have a contact in the mayor's office and a contact in the city attorney's office that she turns to time after time to define and explain stories.

Schudson (1993, ch. 5-6) suggests that these tendencies in source use can be traced to journalistic practices that began in the 1800s, when newspapers transitioned from chronological accounts of events, to the narrative form of the inverted-pyramid news story. In this form, a news story contains a summary lead, or first sentence, followed by the relevant facts in most important to least important order. Related to this, Schudson finds that the reliance of reporters on interviews also began in the 1800s, and become more integral to reporting over time. Due to the norm of objectivity, or the idea that reporters should present stories absent their own ideological perspectives, reporters began to turn to sources to frame stories and provide perspective. According to

Schudson, both of these developments increased the power of the reporter, as the reporter chooses who, and therefore which frames, will appear in a story, as well as the order of importance of those sources and frames. Again, due to the norm of objectivity in American reporting, journalists look for objective measures of the importance of sources and perspectives; this has led to a ranking of sources by their level of prestige, or prominence. In this way, in national news stories, the President has become the most important source and therefore is almost always the first source in any national news story on which he has spoken. Over time, the public has come to expect this narrative form, and would likely be suspicious of news stories that varied greatly from it. Tuchman details a similar evolution of the reliance on official sources, and emphasizes the role of professional routines in reinforcing this tendency. At the national level, this reliance has been found to contribute to homogeneity of news content, and the ability of high-level officials, such as the President, to manipulate the media (Tuchman 1978).

Though reliance on official sources as a consequence of the narrative form of the news story and the reliance on interviews for framing of issues have been less documented in the local media, what evidence exists suggests this general pattern can be found at the local level as well. Research has suggested that local news organizations rely on public officials not only because of their rank, but because they are "knowns" to the public when discussing policy issues that may be otherwise unknown and uninteresting. The personalities and fame or infamy of local officials provide an angle of interest for citizens in local political stories, and local journalists cultivate these personalities in their writings (Kaniss 1992, ch. 6; Lutz 1973). As Kaniss (1992, 222-

223) notes, the ability of local officials to influence the content of media coverage varies widely with their media skills. A mayor, for example, may be elected without being media savvy, and in the same city government, a particular city council member may be a media darling. While in general, local officials may be less capable of manipulating the media, reliance on official sources still means exclusion of alternative sources. There is only so much space in a newspaper or television broadcast, and if the first three sources of a story are government officials, then that leaves little room for interest groups, citizens or other experts to comment on a policy initiative. This can lead to obfuscation of government responsibility for policy problems, and failure to present solutions that may be costly to government or hurt the careers of incumbent politicians and public officials.

Use of a variety of sources, on the other hand, means a variety of perspectives on problems, their causes, and potential solutions are presented. If alternate sources such as academics, non-profit groups, and public interest groups are allowed a voice in the media, then there is competition with the frames presented by public officials. Use of a variety of sources makes it more likely that citizens will see people like themselves, or people who share their views in the media, and therefore contributes to both a sense of salience (the issue matters to people like me) and efficacy (people like me can do something about this).

Especially important is the initial source in a story. The first person cited in a story is often the person who has framed the story for the reporter, and therefore her opinions and ideas are most prominently featured, with other ideas presented afterwards

as either fleshing out that viewpoint, or taking issue with that viewpoint (Bennett 2001; Hall 1978). A hallmark, then, of a high quality media outlet, and a high quality media environment in general, is one in which a variety of sources are cited in stories, and a variety of types of sources are used as initial sources or primary definers for stories.

This factor is one not just posited by social science researchers, but also a criterion journalists themselves use to judge high quality news. In journalistic ethics and reporting practicing classes, one of the most fundamental skills budding journalists are taught is to make sure to corroborate stories with multiple sources and to provide multiple views on a story from different sources (Sloane and Parcell 2002; Gibbs and Warhover 2002, ch. 3 and 8). This goes back to the findings in the research that professional norms and training shape this pattern of source use.

Provision of mobilizing information

Providing mobilizing information, information about when public meetings will occur, how to contact public officials, and how to join or get in touch with groups involved in a political issue, is yet another characteristic of a high quality media outlet, and a high quality media environment as well (Gamson 1992). While many stories, such as a story about a bill just passed by the state legislature, may not offer many opportunities for mobilizing information, stories about political issues that have not yet been decided offer the greatest potential for providing such information. In this study, for example, one political issue being contested was whether street vendors should be allowed to operate on public sidewalks. There were two meetings open to the public where this issue was discussed—two media outlets offered information on when and

where these meeting were so residents could voice their opinions. The other four outlets did not. By providing mobilizing information, the first two outlets helped provide citizens with a sense of efficacy—that their voices could be heard on the issue, while the other four contribute to a sense that such decision are made by distant elected officials, and that regular people have no say.

Granted, whether or not street vendors are available in Green Bay may not be the most serious political issue to cross the city's agenda. It may be one that people care about, and participating in that issue may get people interested in participating in other issues. As Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1993) note, an important input to political participation is learning how to participate. If citizens learn where city hall is, in which room the council meetings are held, and what the procedure is for making an opinion heard, the cost of participating in another issue in the future is greatly lowered.

Mobilizing information educates and empowers citizens to get involved in political life, and the more stories contain mobilizing information, the more likely it is that citizens will come to see that public input is possible and welcome in a community.

Again, this is a criterion also advocated by some in the journalism community, most prominently in the civic journalism strain of journalism, where proponents suggest that in order to provide a higher quality of political information to citizens, news organizations should not only publicize meeting times and places and contact information for public officials, but that news organizations should even hold public meetings for citizens to hear about and discuss political issues of the day (Perry 2003; Kovach and Rosensteil 2001, ch. 7-8).

Provision of a unifying vision of the city

In order to become involved in politics, citizens need to be able to connect their everyday well-being to the health of the community, and be able to identify the government units responsible for the community. In the age of suburbanization, and with the large size of television media markets, and the complications of federalism, it may not be at all clear to citizens that the boundaries of the communities in which they live match up with a political decision-making unit, and in fact they may not. At the same time, as Kaniss notes, in order to retain readers and viewers, media outlets need to have a central focus they can identify as the commonality among their customers in the city, the suburbs, and even outlying communities or other cities within their market (Kaniss 1991; Schudson 1993).

This is particularly challenging for television news where there are a number of cities within the market, such as in Green Bay. The television market centered in Green Bay also includes what are called the Fox Cities, the Census Metropolitan Statistical Area of Appleton-Oshkosh-Neenah in the Fox River Valley south of Green Bay, which actually has a greater population than the city or Metropolitan Statistical Area of Green Bay, with over 350,000 people in the Fox Cities Area, compared to 250,000 in the Green Bay area, and approximately 107,000 in Green Bay itself. The Fox Cities Area actually includes 18 municipalities (Census 2000; Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce 2004; Green Bay Chamber of Commerce 2004). Besides the Fox Cities, the Green Bay television media market also includes rural Door County to the North, and parts of Western

Michigan and the Upper Peninsula. This is in contrast to Duluth, where the concentration of the population in the media market is in the city of Duluth.

Providing a unifying vision of the city is an example of where the political needs of citizens to gather information relevant to participation and the economic needs of a media outlet to unite their audience in a common identity can coincide or conflict, depending on how well the political boundaries of the locale match up with the boundaries of the media market, and whether either of these match the boundaries of how people live and work in their everyday lives (Compaine 1980). In order to effectively participate, citizens need to be able to identify the government units responsible for policy decisions, and in order to maintain an audience, media outlets need to present to citizens a unified sense of community. If the population of the media market is centered in the city, this is fairly straightforward, but if the population is dispersed among many governments, this task becomes more difficult. As Kaniss finds, the typical strategy is still to focus on the central city, which appeals to those who live in the city and suburbanites who identify with the city, and also appeals to those who dislike the city, providing a feeling of "thank goodness we do not live there" (Kaniss 1991, 65-67).

Whom a media outlet is trying to unify depends in part on the target audience of the outlet. As Kaniss (1991) and others have noted, the target audience of newspaper advertisers, and therefore newspapers, is generally higher income, higher educated and more politically active than local television news. Local television news advertisers, like television advertisers in general, are more concerned about a mass audience than a big-spending audience. As has been noted above, television news also has to appeal to a

wider geographic audience. In the Green Bay television market, for example, the Fox Cities have their own daily newspaper, the *Appleton Post-Crescent* (also a Gannett paper), and so the newspapers in Green Bay focus mostly on the city and its surrounding suburbs, while television news must appeal to citizens of numerous municipalities. These differences in demographic audience can make a difference in content, and are explored in the comparisons of newspaper and television in the case study of Green Bay in chapter 5.

Demographics and media ownership

There are several ways to think about the role of demographics in shaping media content. Here, I consider the readers or viewers of a particular media outlet as a community of people receiving similar information on a regular basis, and at the same time influencing the type of information being provided in the outlet's attempt to please that community or demographic audience (Schudson 1995). If a media outlet believes the audience is liberal or conservative, focused in a particular part of the city, of a particular age, income, or education level, all of these factors can affect the type of stories pursued, and the ways in which those issues are reported. Research into alternative weekly newspapers, for example, has found that the generally liberal leanings of such papers are not based on an ideological commitment of the owners so much as a perception that young, hip, and liberal readers are people with a great deal of money to spend, and often do not have a regular local news source. Those readers, though, report feeling like a community of like-minded citizens—not an exploited demographic (Yin 2002). The demographic audience of a media outlet—either actual or perceived—can be very

important in shaping news content. Of course, demographics do not entirely drive media content, which also contributes to this idea of a media community. It is the negotiation among the audience, the people in the particular media outlet, and the local political dynamic that creates the news (Schudson 1995). Through this process, the creation of a media community and the creation of news are inextricably linked.

If it is the interplay of the audience (represented here by demographic information), the political dynamic, and the particular outlet that shapes content then who owns a particular outlet is an important factor in what that outlet would like to produce. Though a great deal of research has been done about ownership patterns and quality of content, the focus here is on how the ownership might affect the content in these particular cases.[1] For example, cross-ownership of a newspaper and a television station may affect content, as may chain versus local ownership, or ownership of an outlet by a person or group with a particular ideological commitment.

Media ownership, and specifically chain ownership, has been the subject of much study and speculation about the effects of the phenomenon on content. Some studies have found that cuts in the newsroom have led to less local political coverage and more wire and entertainment coverage (Candussi and Winter 1988), while other studies have found that chain ownership can improve the quality of coverage offered in sometimes dismal local papers and television news (Demers 1999). Others suggest we should think of the role of competition in a more complex way than whether there are one or two

[1] See, as examples of those finding that ownership affects quality of content, Bagdikian (2004; Pratte and Whiting (1986); Gilens and Hertzman (2000). See, as an example of those finding no effects, Burriss and Williams (1979). The consensus of these studies is that media ownership does affect content under limited circumstances, such as when corporate owners are involved in issues.

papers in town, or which chain owns which media. Persuasively, hailing back to Bigman in 1948, researchers have found that newspapers, and later television, are "rivals in conformity" whomever the owners because in a particular city, each media outlet is looking for the same advertisers and the same audiences. In other words, local news, both television and newspapers, are truly mass media and they succeed by appealing to wide demographic swaths, not to niche audiences. Recent research has demonstrated that perhaps researchers have not cast the net, or rather the umbrella, widely enough when looking for competition. Rosse (1980, 65-71) originated the umbrella model of competition where daily metropolitan papers compete with weekly papers, as well as daily and weekly papers in the region, and with television and other available media. In chapter 6, I compare the content of chain-owned versus locally owned media in Green Bay and Duluth for some insight into this important and timely question, and discuss the result in terms of these other findings and theories. Other parts of this issue are explored in the chapter comparing Duluth and Green Bay.

Key concepts and indicators

In this project, a view of the *media environment* for local politics of each city under investigation here is constructed. The media environment consists of all of the information available about local politics in each city. The focus here is on the media environment for local politics because it is possible to bound the media environment to all of those outlets in the geographic area providing information about politics in the city under study. If one were to explore the media environment for national politics, it would have to include all of the available information about national politics available in the

local media, as well as information available to citizens via national and cable television news, national radio programming, the Internet, and even home delivery of papers from outside the area. For methodological purposes, then, it makes sense to focus on local politics. The concept of the media environment is utilized in a number of studies as a subset of the information environment, which consists of all of the information about politics available to citizens (Zukin and Snyder 1984; Prysby and Books 1987; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995). In some studies, the information environment is seen as a subset of the political environment more generally, which includes such other factors as motivation of those around a person (Kuklinski, et al. 2001); other factors such as electoral cycle, number of days in an election period, voter fatigue, and issues addressed by candidates (Nicholson 2003). The media environment may matter in two ways. First, the media environment limits the information to which a citizen can be exposed. Citizens can and do learn information not provided in the media environment through interpersonal conversations and personal experience (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Walsh 2004). However, lack of information in the media environment is still a strong indicator that the knowledge will not be available in the information environment as a whole (Gamson 1992, Bennett 1991; Hall 1978). Without exposure to information, citizens cannot bring that information to bear in the process of creating the political meanings which inform political behavior.

In this project, media environments are constructed for each city in the study, Duluth and Green Bay, using the indicators provided by gathering and analyzing two weeks' worth of news in each city. As prior research demonstrates, news organizations

can be expected to follow relatively similar patterns in news coverage over time, absent organizational changes, unique financial constraints, or highly atypical events to cover. During the normal news cycle, news programs and newspapers have specific amounts of time and space devoted to certain topics, with such divisions as "local news" sections and allotted time for local news segments. Similarly, news organizations have a fixed number of journalists devoted to different tasks. Finally, journalists develop routines of going to the same sources for comment on stories of a comparable nature (Tuchman 1978; Gans 1980; Bennett 2004). Because neither city had regular local radio programming, and because the news websites in both cities merely replicated the news available through newspapers or television, the analysis is restricted to newspapers and television news, including both daily and weekly newspapers and both evening and late-night news programs. This research yielded 886 stories in Duluth and 1352 in Green Bay. More details on the gathering of the stories can be found in the appendix.

Content is defined as the non-advertising portions of the newspapers and television news broadcasts. *News content* consists of all stories excepting weather, sports, editorials, and opinion columns in the regular newspaper sections and television news program segments. Though definitions of content are uncontroversial, measures of content enjoy no such consensus. In this project, content is measured by coding each story for a variety of factors, including length of the story (short, medium, or long), whether or not the story is political (yes or no), whether the story is about local, state or national politics if it is political, whether the story contains mobilizing information (yes or no), and each source cited in the story is coded into categories. These content factors

are then compared across outlets, media, and locations. More information on the coding process can be found in the Appendix.

Media ownership is defined as the individual or company with a controlling interest in the media outlet in question, as well as any news- or resource-sharing partnerships any outlet has with another outlet. Media ownership was found by looking up FCC licensing documents for the television stations, and by the publishing statements listed in each of the newspapers. Media ownership in the analysis is restricted to who owned the outlet at the time of the study; changes in media ownership since the study are noted in the chapters on each city and in the concluding chapter. *Demographic characteristics* are defined as available measures of the social, economic, and political features of the citizens in each city. These are gleaned from census data, voting and elections data kept by each state, and from statistics gathered by the individual media outlets.

All of these concepts are explored as a way of getting at one variable in the process that leads to, or fails to lead to, political participation by citizens. The causal chain leading to political participation is not tested here. What this study does do is test whether the media content available in these two cities is consistent with the types of content found to be positively correlated with political participation in previous studies and outlined in this chapter. Also tested are whether the similarities and differences in that content across outlet, media and location are consistent with either the contextual or the conditional models of media effects, which both make different assumptions about how media content affects the decision to participate. This study is also an in-depth look

at the media environment in each of these cities, giving a detailed picture of the type of information provided by this very important subset of the information environment.

Research questions

The subject in question here, differences in media environment and media content across contexts, can be boiled down to the following research questions:

Question 1: How does the media environment differ across cities that are similar?

Question 2: How does media content vary across media outlets within a type (one television news program compared to another, for example)?

Both the contextual and conditional effects models provide a framework of assumptions and findings about media content from which testable propositions can be derived based on these questions. Below are the testable propositions explored in this project, as well as the expected outcomes each of the two theories in question suggest.

Testable propositions and expected outcomes

Looking at the first question, as discussed in the sections on each of the two models, the measures used to test media effects in the conditional effects tradition rely on measures that assume news content is similar from one newspaper to the next, and from one television news program to the next, regardless of place within the United States. The contextual effects model posits that content varies across content, and that differences in content may have important effects.

Q1 Proposition A: The news content will not vary in significant ways across media environments. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the conditional effects model).

Q1 Proposition B: News content will vary in significant ways across media environments. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the contextual model).

Turning to the second question, measures used in conditional effects research assume that all newspapers and all television news are relatively equal in their effects, while the contextual model assumes there will be differences in each outlet.

Q2 Proposition A: Media content will not differ in significant ways among outlets of the same medium. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the conditional effects model).

Q2 Proposition B: Media content will differ from outlet to outlet within the same medium. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the contextual model).

These questions and testable propositions offer ways of exploring whether media content in the two cases being studied here is more consistent with the conditional model, the contextual model, or neither. At the same time, all of these questions and propositions offer meaningful ways of exploring the ways in which media differ, and a way to investigate what is actually in the content these theories suggest affects political behavior.

Conclusion

This project explores media content on three levels. At the base, what media content actually looks like from the perspective and level of the citizen and what options are available to citizens. Second, the degree to which there is variation in content across locations and outlets within a location. Finally, whether the nature of the content is consistent with either of the two theories of media effects outlined here, the conditional and the contextual effects models. In the next chapter, I turn to the research design and case selection utilized to explore these questions.

Chapter 3: Methods
Comparing Content with Case Studies

Why Case Studies?

In order to test the theories outlined in chapter 2, and the observable propositions derived from those theories, the multiple, embedded case study method (Yin 1994, 38-51) has been chosen in this project. This project is amenable to this method of inquiry for several reasons. First, case studies provide the best method for detailed description of the subject; in this case, the content of the media environment in the two cities under study. Second, the case study method offers a different type of evidence in support or refutation of the conditional and contextual theories than the bulk of studies; in other words, case study evidence provides a unique, or at least underutilized, way of exploring the theories in question (Miller and Fredricks 1991; King, Keohane and Verba 1994).[1] Third, the observable propositions being explored here regard the differences in content of news across outlets, media, and media environments involve questions regarding "how" news content differs in a contemporary setting with no manipulation by the researcher (Yin 1994, 9). Finally, the case study method has been established as a robust method for exploring a wide range of political and social science phenomena (Yin 1994; George 1979; Collier 1993; King, Keohane and Verba 1994).

In this project, I am isolating one independent variable in the causal chain of the dependent variable of political participation. The aim is to unpack this variable by looking at what kinds of content are available in the media used by most Americans, local

[1] Miller and Fredericks (1991) posit that where well-articulated theories are in place, qualitative evidence is a useful and important form of confirmation or disconfirmation of social science theory. The use of a case study method where different methods have been used primarily is also in keeping with the idea of "triangulation" in political science research, advocated, among others, by Gary King, Robert Keohane and Sidney Verba (1994).

television news and local newspapers, and to find out what this content is like in places that have high levels of the dependent variable, political participation, as Duluth and Green Bay do. In doing so, I am exploring the assumptions about media content inherent in participation models that include media use variables. I also provide detailed description of exactly what the ingredients are that local mass media are offering to people in coming to an understanding of political issues. By understanding what is available to people, I provide and understanding of what type of mass-mediated information citizens have available to them in these highly participatory cities, and whether that information has the characteristics that previous research has found to be related to political participation. Though this project does not test the causal chain of political participation, it offers detailed insight into a key variable, with the aim of providing a better understanding of the processes by which the causal chain operates.

The multiple-case design has been chosen for several reasons. First, and most generally, the evidence from multiple cases is generally considered to be a more compelling, vigorous way of testing theories (Harriott and Firestone 1983, 14-19). Second, within the field of political science, the rationale for and acceptance of multiple or comparative case study is better developed than the methodological basis for single-case studies (Yin 1994; Eckstein 1975; George 1979; King, Keohane and Verba 1994). Third, a multiple-case design allows for more external validity by providing possibilities for congruence testing, or multiple observations of variables across cases (George 1979; Campbell 1988). Finally, and most importantly, the multiple-case design makes it possible to test more observable implications of the theories in question than a single-

case approach would permit; the substantive question here is how content varies across locales, which requires multiple locales.

An embedded design, where multiple cases within each case are also explored and compared is utilized for similar reasons as the multiple case design. Substantively, there are multiple media outlets and multiple media types within a media environment, which allow for logical units of analysis within the primary unit of analysis—the media environment. These "cases within a case" allow for congruence testing, improving the external validity of the design, and also allow for the testing of more observable implications of the theories (George 1979; Van Evera 1997, 61-64; King, Keohane and Verba 1994) .[2]

Though there are strengths to the multiple-case, embedded case study design, such designs have their critics as well. Case studies have been criticized for lacking the rigor and systematic nature of other social science methods, including lacking in such important social science checks as transparency, replicability, generalizablility, and controls for selection and interpretation bias (King, Keohane and Verba 1994; Campbell 1988). Though in practice some case studies may be guilty of these shortcomings, there are no inherent reasons why case studies cannot be rigorous and systematic. Great pains, as described in detail in this chapter, are taken to ensure adherence to social science standards.

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[2] In Van Evera (1997), congruence procedure type 2. King, Keohane, and Verba (1994) also suggest exploring cases within a case in order to increase external validity, though they do not use the terms congruence testing or pattern matching.

The issue of generalizability requires some special attention. A frequent criticism of the case study is that due to the small N or small number of cases being analyzed, the findings of case studies are not generalizable to other cases. Advice is given on how to choose cases in order to make them more generalizable, such as choosing cases with a range of outcomes on the dependent variable (King, Keohane and Verba 1994). These discussions, however, proceed from the erroneous idea that the logic of the case study design relies on the logic of statistical generalization, which requires a random, unbiased sample of cases. The goal of the case study is not to generalize to a population, as in statistical analyses, but rather to generalize to a theory; to provide confirming or contradicting evidence for a theory by yielding or failing to yield observations consistent with the observable propositions derived from theory. It is in fact often desirable to explore a critical case in depth, rather than multiple cases, or more pertinent to this study to choose cases with the same outcome on the dependent variable in order to replicate the findings of the first case. In this sense, the logic of the generalization of a case study is more akin to the logic of the experimental study (Yin 1994, 9-11). The choice of cases requires that cases be selected so that they produce similar results, a literal replication; or so that they produce contrasting results for predictable reasons, a theoretical replication. The key to generalizing in a multiple-case study is to provide a theoretical framework with testable propositions that outline the conditions under which a particular outcome is likely to be found (a literal replication) as well as the conditions under which the outcome is unlikely to be found (a theoretical replication) (Yin 1994, 44-51).

I have chosen two media environments, or two cases at the highest level of comparison, for several reasons. Though it might, perhaps, be desirable to include more cases, these two cases were the closest I could find to a literal replication, as they were similar on the most variables of possible cases I explored. These two cases allow for the benefits of a multiple-case design, without stretching the nature of the similarities in the cases too far as to provide credible comparability. Even in just these two cases, there are differences that provide a theoretical expectation for divergent findings, such as the partisan leanings of the two cities in question, different media offerings within each environment, and perhaps most significantly, the fact that there is one major metropolitan area in the Duluth television media market while there are two in the Green Bay television media market.

A second reason for choosing two cases is that it allows for more in-depth analysis of the cases within the cases, and allows for exploring not just the nature of offerings at the media environment level, but at the medium and outlet levels as well. This in-depth analysis offers insight into the offerings of each individual media outlet and each medium within and across markets provides comparisons that are useful for theory building about why there are some differences in even these markedly similar cities in media content.

A final reason for exploring media content in two places in detail is that it allows for richer description, which can act as a supplement to the wide availability of knowledge we have about media at the national level, and assist in building theory on

why and how the availability of political information in the mass media affects political participation.

Descriptive Inference

The goal of this project is descriptive inference; to describe the media environments in the cases involved, as observed over the study period and to infer to the media environment of those cities in general, based on the observations in the study. Then, these inferred descriptions are compared to the testable propositions derived from the two theories being tested, and conclusions are made about whether the evidence from the study provides support for one, the other, or neither theory. Both theories being tested here have many other observable implications, including causal implications, which are not explored here. The evidence provided here is not sufficient to either prove or disprove either theory; however, the evidence here explores a key set of observable implications for each theory (King, Keohane and Verba 1994; Yin 1994).[3]

Research Design

Accepting that the multiple, embedded case study design is appropriate to this project, I turn to the research design. Though there is no widely accepted format for case study research design, I have attempted to follow well-established design precedents in the field.[4] Yin (1994) suggests that a case study design has five critical components: 1) a study's questions, 2) its propositions, if any, 3) its unit(s) of analysis, 4) the logic linking

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[3] King, Keohane and Verba (1994) and Yin (1994) both suggest that the case study method is appropriate for projects with the goal of descriptive inference.

[4] Yin (1994, 20) suggests that the lack of widely accepted criteria for research designs is one of the reasons case studies are less-accepted than other forms of inquiry, as do King, Keohane and Verba (1994) and Van Evera (1997).

the data to the propositions, and 5) the criteria for interpreting the findings (p.20). Each of these requirements is taken up in turn.

1) The study's questions

The questions of the study were established in chapter 2, but to review, the questions include:

Question 1: How does the media environment differ across cities that are similar?

Question 2: How does media content vary across media outlets within a type (one television news program compared to another, for example)?

2) Observable propositions

Following from the above questions, the two theories outlined in chapter 2 offer testable propositions and expected outcomes for each question. Looking at the first question, there are several testable propositions, with different outcomes expected based on the two theories.

Q1 Proposition A:	The news content will not vary in significant ways across media environments. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the conditional effects model).
Q1 Proposition B:	News content will vary in significant ways across media environments. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the contextual model).
Q2 Proposition A:	Media content will not differ in significant ways among outlets of the same medium. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the conditional effects model).
Q2 Proposition B:	Media content will differ from outlet to outlet within the same medium. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the contextual model).

3) Units of analysis

As this is a multiple case, embedded study, the units of analysis differ across propositions. The concepts of media environment, medium, and outlet are defined in more detail in chapter 2.

Q1 Proposition A: The news content will not vary in significant ways across media environments.
Q1 Proposition B: News content will vary in significant ways across media environments.

The unit of analysis for these two propositions is the media environment as a whole of each location in the study, including all the outlets producing news about local politics in each place, and comparing the combined total news in one location to that of the other. These propositions are also tested using the embedded unit of analysis of medium in one city versus medium in another city; for example, the newspapers in one case are compared to the newspapers in the other case.

Q2 Proposition A: Media content will not differ in significant ways among outlets of the same medium.
Q2 Proposition B: Media content will differ from outlet to outlet within the same medium.

The unit of analysis for these two propositions is the individual media outlet, one television station versus another, for example, both within and across cases.

4) Logic linking data to propositions

The types of data collected here include: 1) media availability in each environment 2) content analysis of newspaper and television coverage of local news in each environment, 3) ownership of media outlets in each environment, 4) demographic characteristics of the cities in which each media environment is located.

Media availability in each environment is operationalized as the number and types of media outlets available, the frequency of news publication, and the quantity of news in each publication. The number and types of media outlets available are measured by finding how many television stations, newspapers, magazines, websites, and radio news programs are available in each environment during the study period. The frequency of publication of each outlet is measured by how many times per day or week an outlet publishes news. The quantity of news in each publication is measured by averaging the number of pages of news in print media, with qualitative allowances for different sizes of paper; and by measuring the time length of news broadcasts for electronic media during the study period in each environment.

Media availability data is important in examining Question 1, Propositions A and B and useful in answering Question 2, Propositions A and B. On Question 1, Propositions A and B, the data provide insight into how similar or different the media offerings are across environments, systematically comparing what is available in one places to another. Regarding Question 2, Propositions A and B, the data allow for comparing the quantity of news available from one outlet to another of the same medium, both within and across cases.

Content analysis of the media coverage of each environment provides the most analytical leverage of all the data in the study. Each news article is coded for measures of quality, as defined in chapter 2. This data allows for the quantitative comparison of media coverage on multiple variables and aids in testing all of the propositions explored here. The propositions derived from all three questions involve comparing content in one

environment, medium, or outlet to content in another or others; as such, the data resulting from content analysis is highly useful in testing these propositions.

The data collected on media ownership do not directly test any of the above propositions, but indirectly provide insight into why content varies across outlets or environments, and also provide the basis for propositions that could be tested in future studies. The data also provide more in-depth background on the media environments and outlets in the study, providing a richer understanding of the similarities and differences found. Media ownership is an independent variable theorized in the literature as being significantly related to media content, though as discussed in the previous chapter, the findings on this point are very mixed. Exploring whether there are ownership patterns that may explain content differences offers a foundation or source of evidence for other studies that may be conducted. Though the study could certainly be completed without this data, it offers the potential for a more holistic understanding not only of how media vary across contexts, but some perspective as to why.

Demographic characteristics also provide data on independent variables that may be related to content differences. The more similar the cities are demographically, the less of a possibility that demographic differences are driving content differences; the more diverse the demographic characteristics across media environments, the more likely this could be an explanatory variable. This data also speaks to how similar these cases are in a set of cases chosen primarily for their similarities. Again, the study could be conducted without this data, but it helps to provide a more complete picture of the context in which the content is produced.

5) Criteria for interpreting the findings

The criteria for interpreting the findings include a strict test of the empirical propositions, erring on the side of an inconclusive, rather than a false-positive finding. This requires multiple pieces of information consistent with a proposition in order to find that proposition supported. Though it is possible to retain a proposition for further study with contradictory evidence, it is not possible to find such a proposition supported by the evidence of the study.

Case Selection, Generally

The two primary cases explored in this analysis are the media environments of Duluth, Minnesota and Green Bay, Wisconsin. Within these analyses, embedded analyses are conducted on the media types of newspapers and television news within each environment, and further embedded analyses are conducted on each newspaper and television outlet in each environment. Media content is an independent variable affecting the dependent variable of political behavior. By holding the dependent variable constant and many of the independent variables related to political behavior, it is possible to isolate the independent variable of media content. Under these conditions, given the conditional effects model, content should be very similar across cases. A finding of significant difference across cases would tend to support the contextual effects model.

The logic selecting non-varying cases is two-fold. The first, and weakest logic for choosing cases that are expected not to vary on either dependent or independent variables is the "most similar cases" logic of John Stuart Mill (1858). Mill posits that comparing cases that are similar provides for a rigorous test of theory because if the

theory is incorrect, then the cases will vary despite the prediction. A finding that cases are similar on both dependent and independent variables is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for demonstrating the usefulness of a theory.

The second, and stronger logic behind choosing cases that are expected not to vary on either the dependent or independent variables is the logic of replication, discussed earlier in this chapter. By choosing cases that are similar, and repeating the study in multiple places, the design allows for rigorous congruence testing, also discussed above.

There are weaknesses to this design, and its strengths are in dispute. A major weakness is that when dealing with the real world of social science, no two cases can ever be exactly alike (Yin 1994). Differences in outcomes may be purely the product of intervening variables that cannot be controlled for in a natural setting. Indeed, in the specific discussion that follows of the two cases utilized here, one can see a number of variables on which the two cases vary that may be expected to influence the quality of the media environment. The strength of choosing cases that do not vary is also certainly in dispute and the idea that the logic of small N studies differs from the logic in large N studies is not an accepted consensus.[5] Despite these weaknesses and the lack of consensus on the appropriateness of the method, the strengths and justifications for this method outlined above outweigh these reservations, and comparing similar cases is a

[5] King, Keohane and Verba (1994) and Campbell (1988) both suggest that findings based on similar cases are not a strong basis for inference. As discussed above, others suggest this is based on the erroneous application of the logic of statistical inference to a design based on theoretical inference.

well-established method of analysis in political science specifically, and social science more generally.

Another caveat deserves articulation in this discussion of case selection. As is often the case in case studies, the casual relationships between the dependent variable on the one hand and the independent variables on the other is not clear-cut. The variables are thought to interact in a reciprocal fashion, and the causal relationships are not tested in this design. Therefore, articulating the logic of case selection based on this causal chain is qualified by the fact that the causal chain is not tested, nor even expected to be unidirectional. However, the theory, propositions, and answers provided here do not rely on that causal chain, but only on the presence of a relationship among the variables being explored.

Case Selection, Specifically

Duluth

Duluth has an exceptionally high voter turnout rate and a political culture that encourages civic and political participation, and as such has been examined by scholars and pundits alike in the search for the answers to declines in participation around the country. Elazar theorizes that Duluth has high levels of participation because of its moralistic political culture, imported directly from Europe by the mostly Northern Europeans who settled there (Elazar 1970). Others have disputed this argument, noting that many of German and Eastern European descent also settled in Duluth (in higher numbers than the rest of Minnesota, due to migration on the lakes) (Putnam 2000; Feldman 1996). Putnam made a similar observation to Elazar's, finding that "percent

Scandinavian descent" is a significant variable in explaining the high levels of participation in the Upper Midwest (Putnam 2000). Other explanations include same day registration laws in Minnesota, and a community-building effect of the harsh weather.

The *Christian Science Monitor* visited Duluth in 1996 for a four part series on "Voting not to vote," suggesting several of the factors above in explaining the high levels of participation.

> A simple explanation for the high participation rate is that Duluth is in Minnesota, one of the few states that allow voters to register on election day...But a complete picture of high voter turnout in this mid-size city is far more nuanced...[Duluth] is a city of churchgoers, of union workers, of people who believe that government can do good—all factors that correlate to voting. Duluth, after all, is the birthplace of Bob Dylan, the folksinger-activist whose songs stirred a generation to action for social justice...In addition to its Scandinavian immigrants, northern Minnesota was also settled by Italians, Poles, Jews, Serbs, and Croats. The common denominator was hard work in a punishing climate, where the Arctic chill blows in from Canada and across the iron range. And so it may follow that a place where it feels like winter nearly year-round would also foster community-mindedness. When three feet of snow dump on a town, people pull together (Feldman 2000, 8).

Feldman also notes the higher than average levels of church membership and civic engagement in Duluth as a factor in increased political participation, and as an overall part of Duluth's identity as a community of people who are involved (Feldman 2000).

Table 3.1—Census Statistics on Variables Relevant to Participation

	St. Louis County	MN	USA
Level of education, age 25+			
High school graduates	87.2%	87.9%	84.1%
Bachelors or higher	21.9%	27.4%	25.6%
Home ownership rate	74.7%	74.6%	67.4%
Median Household income	$36,306	$47,111	$43,162
Below poverty (1999)	12.1%	7.9%	11.3%
Living in same house 1995, 2000 (For USA since 1994)	60.8%	57.0%	51.3 %
Persons over 65 years old	16.1%	12.1%	12.8 % (1995)
White	94.9%	89.4%	83 % (1995)

Though Duluthians make less each year, are more likely to live in poverty, and less likely to be college graduates than the rest of Minnesota and the United States, people in Duluth participate more in politics. Looking at voter turnout rates, citizens of Duluth participate at much higher rates than their fellow Minnesotans or Americans, with 69.2% of the voting-aged population voting in St. Louis County, compared to 51.3% of Americans and 67.6% of Minnesotans in the 2000 election.

Table 3.2—VoterTurnout 2000—High Level of Participation[6]

	#VAP	# registered	#voted	% turnout
United States	205,815,000	156,421,311	105,586,274	51.3%
Minnesota	3,632,585	3,265,324	2,457,156	67.6%
St. Louis County	155,699	142,470	107,784	69.2%

While individual-level predictors cannot be extrapolated to the aggregate level, these statistics demonstrate at the environmental level that there is no obvious reason why Duluth has such high levels of participation. Whatever the reasons for the high levels of

[6] Data from U.S. census and Minnesota Legislative Manual 2001-2002. Turnout calculated by dividing VAP by # voted (conservative estimate of turnout).

participation, it is an interesting case for the examination of content that has been found to be positively related to participation because it is such a highly engaged city. As such, I expect that if local media anywhere contain the components that researchers have demonstrated are related to participation, then those characteristics should be present in the Duluth media environment. Here, I do not suggest that high quality media content causes high levels of participation, or vice versa, but that the two are reciprocally related and contribute to a virtuous circle of political participation. The purpose here is not to establish causal links, but to find out what kind of media content is available in a city with high levels of political participation, and if the level of quality of content varies across similar cities.

Green Bay

Like Duluth, Green Bay also can be considered a critical case for participation. Though the levels of participation are not as high as those found in Duluth, they are still significantly higher than those found in the rest of the country on average. In addition, though Green Bay has not been selected by other scholars for study as a critical case, the fact that the city sustained two daily newspapers with separate ownership where many cities with over a million residents cannot suggests a case that is ripe for study. Football fans also appreciate the fact that such a small city is able to sustain a professional football team that is the only publicly owned team in football, and that the stadium is filled to capacity in even the most inclement weather.

Looking at census data, Brown County has a slightly higher percentage of high-school graduates than the nation as a whole, but a slightly lower percentage of the

population over the age of 25 having a bachelor's degree or higher. As the reader will recall from prior work and the previous chapter, level of education is the greatest predictor of political participation at the individual level. Another important socio-economic factor relevant to participation is income, with higher incomes predicting a greater likelihood of participating at the individual level. The median household income in Brown County is higher than the rest of Wisconsin, which in turn is higher than the United States as a whole. With fewer than 7 percent of the population of Brown County living below the poverty level, substantially fewer residents in the Green Bay area live in poverty than in the nation as a whole. Yet an additional set of factors that predict participation at the individual level are measures of residential stability. Both home ownership rates and percentage of the population over age 5 living in the same residence as 5 years prior are census measures that are good indicators of this factor. The home ownership rate in Brown County is slightly lower than in the US overall and the state overall, while the percentage of people living in the same house is slightly higher than in the US as a whole. As was discussed in the previous chapter, age is a very important factor in predicting individual participation, and the older generations are more likely to vote than younger ones. Brown County has a slightly lower percentage of the population over 65 than the US overall or the state of Wisconsin. Finally, homogeneity is correlated with higher levels of participation as was noted in chapter 3 and Brown County is more homogeneous than most of the United States, and slightly more homogeneous than the state of Wisconsin.

Table 3.3 —Census Statistics on Variables Relevant to Participation

	Brown County	WI	USA
Level of education, age 25+			
High school graduates	86.3%	85.1%	84.1%
Bachelors or higher	22.5%	22.4%	25.6%
Home ownership rate	65.4%	68.4%	67.4%
Median Household income	$46,447	$43,791	$43,162
Below poverty (1999)	6.9%	8.7%	11.3%
Living in same house 1995, 2000 (For USA since 1994)	53.3%	56.5%	51.3 %
Persons over 65 years old	10.7%	13.1%	12.8 % (1995)
White	71.1%	88.9%	83 % (1995)

Looking at these indicators, unlike Duluth, Green Bay seems fairly average with comparable levels of education, residential stability, median income, and aged population as the rest of the country. The county is substantially whiter and substantially less poor, using the poverty level as a measure of poor, than the rest of the country. Looking at a rough indicator of political participation, voter turnout in the 2000 election, both the state of Wisconsin and Brown County have substantially higher turnout rates than the rest of the country. An often credited reason for the higher turnout in both Wisconsin and Minnesota is the existence of same-day registration in both states. While this is undoubtedly true, I would also suggest that the existence of same-day registration reflects a commitment to broad participation in these states.

Table 3.4 —VoterTurnout 2000—High Level of Participation[7]

	#VAP	#voted	% turnout
United States	205,815,000	105,586,274	51.3%
Wisconsin	3,994,919	2,598,607	65%
Brown County	167,655	107,684	64.2%

[7] Data from U.S. census and Wisconsin Blue Book 2001-2002. Turnout calculated by dividing VAP by # voted (conservative estimate of turnout).

Both of these cities were chosen for their high levels of participation and reputations for high levels of civic engagement, and for their similar sizes, and status as being at the center of their media markets and therefore having a full complement of media options. The cases have other similarities that make for useful constants, including similar economic bases, ethnic and racial make-ups, and geographic proximity. Given these similarities, the cities have differences that make them useful for contrast, but also may affect their comparability as most similar cases. One city is predominantly Democratic while the other is predominantly Republican, one city has a higher median income and lower percentage of the population living in poverty than the national average and the other is on the opposite side of the national averages on these measures. Green Bay is the fastest growing city by population in Wisconsin, where Duluth has a shrinking population. Finally, one city has a higher level of residential stability than the national average and the other is near or below the national average on measures of residential stability.

Despite these differences, the two cases here present a strong test of the theory that high levels of participation will be accompanied by a high quality media environment—though the cities are politically and socio-economically diverse, they share high levels of participation, and as such should both have similar, high quality media environments if the two variables are related. Of course, more and more diverse cases would offer even stronger support of the theory, but that is beyond the scope of this project.

Data

Duluth

The concepts and indicators for this project are developed in the previous chapter. The data here were collected as measures of these concepts and indicators.

Over the course of two weeks, from February 1, 2003 to February 14, 2003, data were collected on the media of Duluth, Minnesota. All media available to the general population in Duluth, Minnesota regularly carrying local political news about the city of Duluth were investigated. In the table below is a list of the media analyzed in this paper. The criteria for being included as part of the media environment for local news was that each issue or broadcast from an outlet must average at least four stories focused on local issues. This excluded all radio stations, as only one radio station in town covered local politics in two separate shows, those shows included only one to two issues per day, and often the issues were national.[8] Websites are also excluded because the only two websites covering local issues in Duluth are run by the newspapers, the *Duluth News Tribune* and the *Budgeteer*, and both of these sites' content is a result of the industry practice of "shoveling," or duplicating content from the print versions to the Internet. Two of the three weeklies, the *Ripsaw* and the *Reader Weekly* are analyzed in less detail due to the fact that they had too few stories per week for quantitative analysis.

[8] Telephone interviews with each radio company in Duluth yielded the information on number and percentage of political and local political stories. The minimum of four for inclusion in the quantitative analysis was based on having a large enough *N* for even basic quantitative comparisons. The weekly newspapers with a smaller *N* are analyzed in less detail. Radio news, after three days of analysis, only yielded one local political story on one show, and two on the second show. Both consisted mostly of opinion and the opinion was difficult to separate from the news content as each issue was presented by a guest with a particular stance, who then responded to callers' questions and comments.

The *Duluth News Tribune*, published by Knight-Ridder, is the daily newspaper of the city; the *Duluth Budgeteer News*, the *Ripsaw* and the *Reader Weekly* are all weekly papers covering the city of Duluth primarily.[9] The *Budgeteer*, a free shopper, has a standard newspaper format while the *Ripsaw* and the *Reader Weekly* are broadsheet format papers, the customary format for alternative weeklies. The CBS, ABC and NBC affiliates all have daily news broadcasts, with ABC and CBS having 5, 6 and 10pm news shows and NBC having 12, 5, 6, and 10pm news shows. For this project, the noon and 5pm news were not analyzed, and for each channel one week of the 6pm news and one week of the 10pm news was analyzed, in order to account for differences across time slots as well as across media.

Each outlet was examined to find the total size of the news slot, the amount of political news, the amount of local political news, and characteristics of local political news including the presence of mobilizing information and the use of sources. Mobilizing includes all instances where the time and place of public meetings or political rallies were given, instances where contact information for public officials or interest groups were given, and instances where citizens were given information on how to find out more about an issue. Use of sources is explored by coding both initial source and all instances of source use into categories, including such categories as official sources, alternative sources, citizens, and business. Providing a unifying vision of the city is explored in a qualitative example of coverage of political sign displays in Duluth in the

[9] Since the time of the study, the *Ripsaw* has transitioned from a weekly to a monthly magazine, and the *Duluth Budgeteer News*, and its parent company Murphy-McGinniss, has been purchased by Knight-Ridder.

period leading up to the Iraq war, and an analysis of how the coverage reflects several slightly different versions of a shared vision of the community. More detailed information about coding procedures is available in Appendix 1. In addition, some qualitative examples are offered to demonstrate how the quantitative differences found can affect news content.

Green Bay

The data collected for Green Bay is similar in most ways to the Duluth media environment research design, but also differs in several important ways. Just as in the Duluth case, two weeks' worth of media are analyzed, excluding weekends; in this case the period from June 23rd to July 4th 2003 is sampled. In this period, two weeks of each daily newspaper, the *Green Bay Press-Gazette* and the *Green Bay News-Chronicle* are analyzed.[10] In addition, broadcasts of each of the four local news stations are analyzed, with one week each of the 6pm and 10pm broadcasts of the NBC, ABC, and CBS affiliates being analyzed, and one week of the hour long 9pm broadcast of the local FOX affiliate, for a total of five hours of each news station. In the Green Bay design, due to the lack of useful data gathered in the Duluth case, and due to the small percentages of people who rely on them as their primary source of news, the local radio stations are omitted. None of the websites in Green Bay go beyond replicating the information in their print editions, and so local news websites are also excluded. There are no city-wide weeklies in the Green Bay media environment—perhaps because of the existence of two dailies. The *Green Bay News-Chronicle* does distribute a variety of free shopper papers

[10] The *Green Bay News Chronicle* has gone out of business since the study, first selling to Gannett and then publication was stopped in June 2005.

in the different suburbs of Green Bay, but as there is no city-wide weekly, and no weekly for the city of Green Bay proper, these were excluded.

Each outlet was examined to find the total size of the news slot, the amount of political news, the amount of local political news, and characteristics of local political news including the presence of mobilizing information and the use of sources. Mobilizing information was examined as a key variable in providing a sense of efficacy. Use of sources was explored based on the theory that reliance on police and politicians as primary definers alienates people from participating, whereas including non-profit groups, interest groups, and regular citizens as primary definers gives people a sense of salience, that the issues really do matter to people like them, and a sense of efficacy, that people like them can make a difference.

Conclusion

In sum, the methods described here are well-suited to the questions of the project, and carefully conducted to maximize the validity and reliability of the measures representing complicated concepts outlined in the theories under exploration here. Though there are shortcomings and controversies related to this design, as many of these concerns have been addressed as possible.

The design is an effort to maximize both the usefulness of comparative cases in terms of generalization and the benefits of in-depth description for theory building regarding the mechanisms by which people are informed through the mass media at the local level.

The methods here allow for rich description of the media available in each of these cases; data which is largely unavailable in the literature, and important for evaluating the mechanisms by which media content and its subsequent use may factor into political behavior. In addition, the research design allows for a comparison of these two cases, and comparisons within each case, and testing of two prominent theories of the role of media variables in political participation, the conditional and contextual models. Finally, the data here explore the media content used by the largest portion of Americans in their quest for political information, local television news and local newspapers.

Chapter 4: Duluth
Media Quality on the Third Coast

Introduction

This chapter is a single-case study of the media environment of Duluth, Minnesota, chosen for its high level of participation in politics, size of the city, and geographic location, as outlined in chapters 1 and 2. Comparisons between Duluth and Green Bay, Wisconsin are made in chapter 6. Over the course of two weeks, from February 1, 2003 to February 14, 2003, data were collected on the media of Duluth, Minnesota. All media available to the general population in Duluth, Minnesota regularly carrying local political news about the city of Duluth were investigated. In the table below is a list of the media analyzed in this paper. The criteria for being included as part of the media environment for local news was that each issue or broadcast from an outlet must average at least four stories focused on local issues. This excluded all radio stations, as only one radio station in town covered local politics in two separate shows, those shows included only one to two issues per day, and often the issues were national. Websites are also excluded because the only two websites covering local issues in Duluth are run by the newspapers, the *Duluth News Tribune* and the *Budgeteer*, and both of these sites' content is a result of the industry practice of "shoveling," or duplicating content from the print versions to the Internet. Two of the three weeklies, the *Ripsaw* and the *Reader Weekly* are analyzed in less detail due to the fact that they had too few stories per week for quantitative analysis.

Table 4.1—Duluth Media Environment—An Overview of Available Content

	Frequency	**Size**	**Average #News Stories/ Issue**	**Avg # Political Stories/ Issue**	**Avg # Local Political Stories/Issue**
News Tribune	Daily	32 pgs	45.8	20.4	4.6
Budgeteer News	Weekly	24 pgs	23.5	7.5	6
NBC	Daily—3	½ hour	11.7	5.2	3.4
CBS	Daily—2	½ hour	17.7	7.5	3.1
ABC	Daily—2	½ hour	11.7	4.8	2.1
Reader Weekly	Weekly	56 pgs	8	8	3
Ripsaw	Weekly	32 pgs	1	1	1
Radio show 1	Daily	1 hour	1-2	~ 75%	~ 75%
Radio show 2	Daily	1 hour	1-2	~ 75%	~ 75%
duluth.com	Ongoing	n/a	52	18	2
duluthsuperior.com	Ongoing	n/a	18	6	2

The *Duluth News Tribune*, published by Knight-Ridder, is the daily newspaper of the city; the *Duluth Budgeteer News*, the *Ripsaw* and the *Reader Weekly* are all weekly papers covering the city of Duluth primarily.[1] The *Budgeteer*, a free shopper, has a standard newspaper format while the *Ripsaw* and the *Reader Weekly* are broadsheet format papers, the customary format for alternative weeklies. The CBS, ABC and NBC affiliates all have daily news broadcasts, with ABC and CBS affiliates having 5, 6 and 10pm news shows and NBC affiliate having 12, 5, 6, and 10pm news shows. For this project, the noon and 5pm news were not analyzed, and for each channel one week of the

[1] Since the time of the study, the *Ripsaw* has transitioned from a weekly to a monthly magazine, and the *Duluth Budgeteer News*, and its parent company Murphy-McGinniss, has been purchased by Knight-Ridder.

6pm news and one week of the 10pm news was analyzed, in order to account for differences across time slots as well as across media.[2]

Each outlet was examined to find the total size of the news slot, the amount of political news, the amount of local political news, and characteristics of local political news including the presence of mobilizing information and the use of sources. Mobilizing includes all instances where the time and place of public meetings or political rallies were given, instances where contact information for public officials or interest groups were given, and instances where citizens were given information on how to find out more about an issue. Use of sources is explored by coding both initial source and all instances of source use into categories, including such categories as official sources, alternative sources, citizens, and business. Providing a unifying vision of the city is explored in a qualitative example of coverage of political sign displays in Duluth in the period leading up to the Iraq war, and an analysis of how the coverage reflects several slightly different versions of a shared vision of the community. More detailed information about coding procedures is available in Appendix 1. In addition, some qualitative examples are offered to demonstrate how the quantitative differences found can affect news content.

Findings

First, the three factors of content used to measure media quality, as introduced in chapters 1 through 3 are explored here. Those factors are 1) use of a variety of sources, 2) provision of mobilizing information, and 3) provision of a unifying vision of the city.

[2] Significant differences were not found across time slots, and therefore 6pm and 10pm data are pooled.

A systematic view of the media environment of Duluth is presented, including the three factors, as well as demographic and ownership information for the city media. Then, the findings are used to address research question 2 and its testable propositions. To review, those questions and propositions are:

Question 2: How does media content vary across media outlets within a type (one television news program compared to another, for example)?

Q2 Proposition A: Media content will not differ in significant ways among outlets of the same medium. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the conditional effects model).

Q2 Proposition B: Media content will differ from outlet to outlet within the same medium. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the contextual model).

The Duluth media environment

The first factor examined here is use of a variety of sources. As outlined in chapters 1 and 2, use of variety of sources is an indicator that a variety of frames are being presented to the public. A wide variety of frames increases the possibility that an issue will be made salient to more citizens, and also offers the opportunity to receive more information than would be gleaned from narrow use of sources. Media outlets in Duluth do use sources beyond government and official sources in stories about politics in general and local politics in particular. However, the media vary in the extent to which they utilize alternative sources. Here I outline the overall picture for source use in the Duluth media, compare source use among the different media, and discuss ways in which these differences might matter, using examples from the sample period.

First, in examining overall source use in the Duluth media environment, two factors will be examined—primary source use and comprehensive source use. The first

source in a story frames the story, offering to the reader or listener the initial explanation for an event or issue, and subsequent sources support or contest this frame in the narrative structure. Journalistic practices taught in professional journalism schools support this, as budding reporters are taught to use either the "inverted pyramid" form for stories where the most important information comes first, or the "hook, line and sinker" form where an interesting quote or colorful sentence is used for the lead, followed by the inverted pyramid style (Gibbs and Warhover 2002; Schudson 1993). If government officials or law enforcement are allowed to define most stories, then this means that the reporters, and likely then the reader, will see their frames as the defining viewpoints or frames for the story. If this happens consistently over time, consumers of news may come to expect government sources as leading sources, and suspect stories where this does not occur (Schudson, 1993).

Looking at primary source use and all the stories in all the media outlets over the period, in evaluating 886 stories over a two-week period, 244 of those stories, or nearly 28% cited no sources at all. This is an interesting finding in that the reader has no idea who is defining the story. Presumably, the reporter got the information from somewhere, but the reader or viewer must take the reporter's word for it that the information is reliable.

Looking at all stories citing sources, nearly 43% use official sources as first sources, with the second-most-common initial source being citizens at a distant 13%. Citizens include those not affiliated with a particular group, and workers and teachers in non-leadership positions. These are generally "people on the street" type citations. On

the one hand, this is a positive sign that people other than government officials are defining the story and citizens may be able to see others like them in the news, concerned about the issue, and therefore become interested in that issue. On the other hand, "people on the street" may be used for the "hook" function discussed above, where they offer colorful quotes that draw the reader in, but may not illuminate the story. Alternative sources, the combination of sources such as interest groups, labor unions, and academics, are tied with business sources at just over 9% of first citings. Though official sources dominate the media environment as initial sources, they do come in at under a majority, and citizens have a fairly prominent role as initial sources. Business coming in third and tied with alternative sources belies previous findings that local media turn frequently to business due to the economic pressures of chasing advertising dollars (Kaniss 1991; Molotoch 1976).

Table 4.2—First Source Cited in Story—All Duluth Media, All Stories

Type of source	Frequency	Percent
Official	274	42.7
Business	60	9.3
Citizens	86	13.4
Alternative sources	60	9.3
Polls, documents, and other media	49	7.6
Foreign officials	15	2.3
Other experts	47	7.3
Victims and criminals	17	2.6
Celebrities	19	3.0
Total	642	100

Turning to local political stories, of 186 local political stories, 52 of the stories, or 28% cite no sources at all. Again, this is disturbing in that citizens have no idea where the information is coming from. Of the 134 stories citing sources, official sources are

more dominant in local political stories than in the news overall, with 55% of initial sources being official sources. Citizens and alternative sources also fare better, though, in local political stories, with citizens making up 17% of first-citings, and alternative sources constituting 13% of first sources. Business sources are less-often cited in local political stories, falling to just over 5%.

Table 4.3—First Source Cited in Story—All Duluth Media, Local Political Stories

Type of source	Frequency	Percent
Official	74	55.2
Business	7	5.2
Citizens	23	17.1
Alternative sources	18	13.4
Polls, documents, and other media	8	6.0
Other experts	4	3.0
Total	134	100

These are not particularly encouraging findings if one is looking for a balance in primary source use in the Duluth media environment. In political stories overall, nearly half of all stories have official sources as primary definers, and over 2/3 of stories have either no sources or official sources as initial sources. However, the increased use of alternative and citizens sources, and the decreased use of business sources in local political stories is somewhat encouraging. In the locally produced content, though more stories begin with official sources, more also begin with the kinds of sources likely to offer alternative frames to the status quo or official frame. Turning from initial sources to total source use, the reliance on official sources remains heavy. Though the initial source is important for defining and framing the story or issue, the sources that follow can also be an important part of the story. For example, a media outlet may demonstrate

a pattern of beginning stories with official sources, but follow that up with a variety of other viewpoints. This, according to the theories discussed previously, would allow government sources to define the issue, but may draw interest and a feeling of efficacy when people see others like them, or holding similar views, in the news.

Table 4.4—All Sources Cited in Story—All Duluth Media, All Stories

Type of source	Frequency	Percent
Official	640	42.7
Business	139	9.3
Citizens	237	15.8
Alternative sources	154	10.3
Polls, documents, and other media	79	5.3
Foreign officials	56	3.7
Other experts	114	7.6
Victims and criminals	32	2.1
Celebrities	25	1.7
Total	1500	100

Looking at all the stories in the media being explored over a two-week period, and counting up to the first five sources used in every story, in the 1500 instances of source use, nearly 43% of all sources were official sources, followed by nearly 16% of unaffiliated citizens and just over 10% alternative sources. Exploring the local political stories, in the 260 instances of source use, the findings are again very similar. There are more official sources as initial sources, but also more citizens and alternative sources cited, and fewer business sources cited in local political stories, the news generated locally, than in all stories combined, which includes wire service and Knight-Ridder chain produced stories.

Table 4.5—All Sources Cited in Story—Duluth Newspaper, Local Political Stories

Type of source	Frequency	Percent
Official	127	48.8
Business	14	5.4
Citizens	55	21.3
Alternative sources	44	16.9
Polls, documents, and other media	10	3.8
Other experts	8	3.1
Foreign officials	1	.4
Victims and criminals	1	.4
Total	260	100

These findings demonstrate that whether one looks at primary sources or overall source use, the media in Duluth, just as has been found in content studies of the national media, rely heavily on government officials as sources for news. The differences in looking at overall source use versus initial source use do not offer a very different pattern.

While the source use in the overall media environment can be important in that it demonstrates a tone of news coverage for the entire city, people use different media and they may be using media that are doing a better or worse job at providing source diversity. Exploring differences across media—newspaper versus television—and within media comparing different outlets are important ways of determining how different some peoples' news is than others.

Turning first to a comparison of newspaper versus television, the differences in official source use are just significant at the .05 level.[3] The most marked differences are in citation of citizens, with television citing citizens almost twice as often. Television news also cites official sources more often as initial sources, though, and alternative

[3] Independent samples t-test, equal variances not assumed, two-tailed test, t=1.932, sig.=.054. Comparing official source use in newspaper versus television.

sources less often. Newspapers, in contrast, are citing business sources nearly twice as often as television news.

Table 4.6—First Source Cited in Story—Comparing Newspaper and Television, All Stories

	Newspapers (N=380)	**Television** (N=262)
Official	40.8% (155)	45.4% (119)
Alternative Sources	10.3% (39)	8.0% (21)
Citizens	10.0% (38)	19.8% (52)
Business	11.3% (43)	6.5% (17)
Polls, documents, and other media	9.5% (36)	5.0% (13)
Foreign Officials	3.2% (12)	1.1% (3)
Other Experts	7.9% (30)	6.5% (17)
Victims and criminals	2.1% (8)	3.4% (9)
Celebrities	5.0% (19)	--

Turning to local political stories, and comparing newspaper to television, there is less evidence of meaningful differences, though this may be due in part to the smaller number of cases.[4] The biggest difference is in percentage of initial sources that are official sources, with 8.5% more of television stories beginning with an official source than local political newspaper stories.

[4] Independent samples t-test, equal variances not assumed, two-tailed test, t=.587. sig=.558

Table 4.7—First Source Cited in Story—Comparing Newspaper and Television, Local Political Stories

	Newspapers (N=52)	**Television** (N=82)
Official	50% (26)	58.5% (48)
Alternative Sources	13.5% (7)	13.4% (11)
Citizens	19.3% (10)	11.0% (9)
Business	7.7% (4)	3.7% (3)
Polls, documents, and other media	9.6% (5)	3.7% (3)
Other experts	--	4.9% (4)

Breaking each medium down into its constituent outlets, there are also possibilities of differences between the daily *Duluth News Tribune* and the weekly *Duluth Budgeteer News* in terms of source use, as well as among the television stations. There are differences between the two newspapers, which one would expect given the different formats, but they fail to achieve statistical significance, though they come close.[5]

Comparing the three television stations, there are no statistically significant differences on source use, though with the very small N of local political news stories for each outlet, these findings may not be all that instructive of actual differences.[6]

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[5] Independent samples t-test, equal variances not assumed, two-tailed test, t=1.921, sig=.066, Duluth News Tribune N=359, Duluth Budgeteer News N=21.

[6] Comparing television stations, first source cited in story, all stories, one-way ANOVA test, F=.990, sig=.373; Comparing television stations, first source cited in story, local political stories, one-way ANOVA test, F=.006, sig=.994.

However, looking at the chart below, it is clear that there are differences in what one sees on one television station versus another on the local political stories.

Table 4.8—First Source Cited in Story—Comparing Television Stations, Local Political Stories

	CBS (N=31)	**ABC** (N=23)	**NBC** (N=28)
Official	51.6% (16)	60.9% (14)	64.3% (18)
Alternative Sources	22.6% (7)	8.7% (2)	7.1% (2)
Citizens	21.8% (6)	13% (3)	14.3% (4)
Business	--	8.7% (2)	3.6% (1)
Polls, documents, and other media	--	8.7% (2)	3.6% (1)
Other experts	6.5% (2)	--	7.1% (2)

These findings demonstrate that the degree to which news is initially colored by official sources varies from medium to medium, and depending upon what type of content is being analyzed, but that the statistically significant differences are few. There are significant differences in source use comparing newspapers to television, with television citing more official sources as initial sources, but also citing more citizens, while newspapers cite more alternative sources. There are also near-significant differences in comparing the source use in the *Duluth News Tribune* to that of the *Duluth Budgeteer News.* These findings support the narrow expectation that content varies across types of media, across media organizations, and across types of stories and also supports the broader suggestion that content studies examining "newspaper content" or "local news content" generically are missing out on a very nuanced media environment

where one outlet may vary widely from another and the differences are washed out in aggregation.

Mobilizing information

Mobilizing information is an important characteristic of quality in a media environment because it is the information necessary to actually go and participate—especially in local politics. Information such as when meetings occur, or the address or email address of groups or officials involved in an issue, drastically reduce the information-gathering costs of anyone who wants to have her voice heard on an issue. Mobilizing information is not possible for all political stories. In some cases, there may be no opportunities for citizen input or no organized groups acting on an issue, or the story is about an issue that has already been decided. Sometimes this lack of a possibility of mobilizing information is in the way a story is framed; after all, very few political debates are ever completely settled, and very few decisions are made without some opposition. A person could easily write her member of Congress about a bill that has already been passed, in a desire to change that bill or to get other similar ones passed.

Looking at specific media, there is wide variation in the amount of mobilizing information offered. Focusing in on local political stories, the daily *Duluth News Tribune* offers such information in nearly half of all stories which is remarkable. The *Duluth Budgeteer News* comes in second with 4 of its 12 local political stories containing mobilizing information. The local ABC station fares by far the worst with only 10% of stories containing mobilizing information, or 3 out of 24. These findings are especially potent when considering the local media are for the most part covering the same local

political stories, meaning some are providing mobilizing information and some are not on the very same stories. These differences are statistically significant[7], and demonstrate that from one outlet to the next, citizens would be exposed to very different levels of mobilization information depending on which newspaper or television station one chooses.

Table 4.9—Mobilizing Information By Outlet—Local Political Stories

	Mobilizing Information	**Frequency**
Duluth News Tribune	41.5%	27
Budgeteer News	30.8%	4
CBS	25.6%	10
ABC	10.3%	3
NBC	23.1%	9

The mobilizing findings are important for four reasons. First, exploring how often mobilizing information is offered in the overall media environment may shine light on whether a city is receiving the type of information necessary to get involved in politics. In Duluth, nearly 1/3 of the time, people are receiving that information. Second, the media one uses can play a dramatic role in whether a person receives this mobilizing information. A person who relies on the local ABC affiliate for news will receive very little information on how to get involved in local political issues, but a reader of the *Duluth News Tribune*, if she reads any local political stories at all, is likely to be exposed to this type of news. Finally, again, measures of mobilizing information offered on "television news" versus "newspapers" would not provide useful information here—the variation across news organizations is too great. For example, lumping the ABC, NBC,

[7] One-way ANOVA F=2.913, sig=.023

and CBS affiliates together here would not give an accurate picture of the mobilizing information offered in television news generically—a person who watches the CBS affiliate is going to get a great deal more mobilizing information than a person watching the ABC affiliate. Finally, the overall findings for this city do support the print-superiority hypothesis which finds support in the work of many scholars. All else being equal, a person reading the newspaper—whether the daily paper or to a lesser degree the weekly *Budgeteer News*—is going to know more about getting involved in local politics than a person watching television news.

Providing a Unifying Vision of the City

Media outlets thrive or fail based on their ability to attract and keep a loyal audience. One way media outlets accomplish this is through providing a unifying vision of the city that appeals to a large enough demographic to sustain the media outlet economically. In community-building terms, the byproduct is that each outlet creates a unique yet overlapping vision of the city that resonates with the audience of that outlet, and with the everyday reality experienced by citizens in that city. The high levels of participation in Duluth have certainly not gone un-noticed by citizens of the city, as people living in the area identify and are proud of the reputation as a highly engaged city. It is useful, then, to look at a part of media coverage of high levels of participation, in order to see exactly how this political behavior is being represented. The way in which the media cover this aspect of the collective identity of Duluth then, both reproduces and shapes the image citizens carry of the significance of their own behavior (Gans 1980; Tuchman 1978; Schudson 1995).

A qualitative example of how on the one hand, the Duluth media environment reflects and reproduces the participatory identity of the city, and on the other hand, how different media may carry different messages that present different versions of this identity is illustrated in the coverage of the proliferation of both pro- and anti-war signs in Duluth during the study period. Duluth is a city full of people who like to display their political opinions with yard signs, and as can be seen here, sometimes with very specific messages.

The "Yard-to-yard" combat, as the *Duluth News Tribune* titled its cover story on February 13th, began with UMD[8] Faculty Against War buying signs that read "SAY NO to war with Iraq" and making them available at the local *Green Mercantile* for purchase. The signs quickly sold out and more had to be re-ordered and were visible in all areas of the city. Then signs started disappearing, as war supporters reportedly embarked on a concerted effort to steal them. Anti-war people responded by displaying yet more signs to display their opposition to the war.

A local pro-war citizen, upset by the plethora of anti-war signs, printed up his own "SAY GO to war with Iraq" signs, and offered them for sale on his pro-war website, www.seeyasadaam.com. Another group, with an anonymous benefactor, printed out signs available for free reading "SAY NO TO TERRORISM: SUPPORT OUR MILITARY." Finally, entering into the fray, a local woman ambivalent about the war but concerned about the troops had signs printed up reading "If you don't support our Country's Policy...PLEASE SUPPORT OUR TROOPS."

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[8] University of Minnesota—Duluth

In its February 13th story, the *Duluth News Tribune* offered pictures of all these signs, quoted individuals displaying each of these signs, and asked an academic to explain why use of signs is so important to people. The academic citing the importance of sign display as a form of political participation was the first source in the story, and also noting that Duluth residents seem to have an unusual predilection to display signs, even in the most inclement of weather. In this cover story, and again on the 14th in a story, cleverly titled, "Sign, sign, everywhere a sign...," the newspaper offered mobilizing information on where to get the signs and on how much they cost, and even how to get unique messages printed at local sign shops, in case none of the available signs represented a particular reader's view.

The local NBC television station was on the story sooner, on February 6th airing a long story featuring the man who started www.seeyadadaam.com and distributed the "SAY GO" signs. This story cited the website, the founder of the website, and an anti-war activist. The only mobilizing information offered was on how to get the "SAY GO" signs. On February 10th, the local CBS station also covered the story in a medium length story, but only cited the founder of the pro-war website and offered the mobilizing information that the signs were available via the website.

Looking at this coverage, the story presented by the *Duluth News Tribune* is very different than those presented by the television stations. The *News Tribune* puts the signs in the context of political participation by asking an academic to explain the meaning of signs. The newspaper also notes that by far the largest number of signs sold and seen around town were the anti-war signs. Finally, the newspaper talks to all the different

people and groups producing signs, and offers mobilizing information on where to get each of these signs, as well as information on going to a printer to print up your own personalized message. These are all hallmarks of a high-quality media environment, and a high-quality medium because a variety of different viewpoints and avenues for becoming a part of the sign discussion are made available to citizens, assuring that almost everyone with an opinion on the war walks away from reading the article with information on how to display that viewpoint, the knowledge that they are not alone in their views, with the added bonus of an understanding of the political importance of such displays.

Looking at the television coverage, rather than having a neutral primary definer, both television stations that covered the story in the sample period allowed the founder of the pro-war website to be the primary definer of the story, somewhat oddly given that the prevalence of these signs was third, after the "SAY NO" signs and the free "SAY NO TO TERRORISM" signs.[9] However, the catchy name of his website likely enticed the television stations to go with him has the first source. The NBC station cites an anti-war activist, but does not affiliate him with any group, or offer that there are signs available for this position. The NBC station also fails to note the other two types of signs and groups behind them, the "SAY NO TO TERRORISM" and "If you don't support our Country's Policy..." signs. The CBS station fails to quote anyone besides the "SAY GO" promoter, and fails to offer information about any of these other signs or groups. If

[9] The *Duluth News Tribune* notes that "SAY NO" signs are the most prevalent. Notation that "SAY NO TO TERRORISM signs are second most prevalent is based on personal observation of spending three months in Duluth including the sample frame.

the anti-war side had been more clearly identified in these stories, with information on the groups involved and how to acquire signs, leading with a controversial activist may have been very effective in providing information to a wide variety of people; instead, these stories provide mobilizing information for expressing just one view of the war.

Due to the prevalence of the UMD Faculty Against War signs, visible on nearly every block in every part of Duluth, with heavy concentrations in the neighborhoods around the University and downtown, everyone in Duluth had probably seen the anti-war signs, and likely automatically made the connection between the pro-war website signs as responses to the anti-war group signs, even in stories that did not mention the other signs. However, failure to represent these facts in the media may serve to decrease the salience of the anti-war position and the more ambivalent positions questioning the war and supporting the troops are left unavailable as options, and at the same time increase the salience of the pro-war viewpoint.

One might suggest that the Iraq war was an unusual circumstance, however in August and September of 2003 in the weeks leading up to the mayoral and city council primaries, signs again proliferated. To give an example, on a block that did not seem atypical, of thirteen houses on the block, nine displayed signs for candidates in the upcoming local primary. All but two of those nine displayed multiple signs, with one yard containing five signs for the various mayoral, city council, at-large city council, and school board seats that were open. Yet another example occurred in March through May of 2004 over the hotly contested removal of a Ten Commandments statue from City Hall, with signs displaying the Ten Commandments popping up all over town, followed by

signs displaying the United States Constitution. Having visited Duluth many times over the past three years, it seems there is rarely a time when signs are not being displayed for some local, state, national or international issue, and that "yard to yard combat" is an ongoing affair. Due to the prevalence of this form of political participation, it makes sense that the local media would have set routines for covering the types of signs springing up at a given time. The example here, then, can be seen as evidence of how these outlets approach the form of civic participation, with the *Duluth News Tribune* putting the activity in the context of political expression and participation, while the television stations in this case cover the story as a dramatic, fragmented activity.

Demographics and ownership

Though demographics and ownership are not in themselves indicators of quality of content, the demographic audience and media ownership patterns in a city can shed light on content decisions made by those outlets, and help in presenting a complete picture of the media environment in a city.

Demographic information provided by news organizations to advertisers, known as media kits, can be a useful tool in determining who the audience of a news organization is, and how a news organization contrasts with others. This information is also in many ways difficult to compare, as the polling data used to compile media kits is not available to the academic community. Here, I discuss the demographic information publicly available from two of the media outlets in Duluth, as an example of how audience may affect content. Demographic information was not available for the three local news broadcasts as they do not collect specific information on news program

demographics, being smaller media markets. The other two weekly newspapers likewise do not have available demographic information, the *Reader Weekly* because they do not collect detailed demographics, and the *Budgeteer News* because it is delivered for free to every home in Duluth and so claims a 100% reach of all demographic groups.

Beginning with the largest outlet here, the *Duluth News Tribune* is the local daily newspaper. Using data collected October 12-December 7, 1999, the *Duluth News Tribune* claims a broad audience in Duluth, as well as in the surrounding rural areas of Northern Minnesota, Northern Wisconsin, and the Upper Pennisula of Michigan. The estimated readership of the newspaper is 76,900 on weekdays and 90,500 on Sundays,[10] with only the weekday information being evaluated here. The estimated weekly readership of the *Ripsaw*, which also includes people outside the core Duluth market, is 25,300 each week. Because these circulation differences are wide, and because the *Duluth News Tribune* is published every day as opposed to once each week, it is clear more people get their news from the daily paper. However, as can be seen in the comparisons, the *Ripsaw* serves an important niche in Duluth.

Ripsaw readers are younger, more educated, more single, and more male than readers of the *Duluth News Tribune*. The age differences in the audiences are substantial, with 78% of *Ripsaw* readers under age 34 while only 25% of *Duluth News Tribune* readers are under 34. Figures regarding what percentage of the under 34 audience is reached by the *Ripsaw* are not available, but the two lowest reach age groups of the *News Tribune* are the 18-24 group, of which only 49% read the paper and the 25-34 group, of

[10] I am using the estimated readers rather than the circulation numbers as these are more easily compared to the weekly free papers to which this newspaper is being compared.

which only 52% read the daily paper. These findings are not out-of-line with readership patterns of daily papers around the country, where newspaper readership is lower among younger groups than older groups; however, the percentage of *Ripsaw* readers in this age group suggests that at least some of these younger people are getting news from the alternative weekly. The downside to this from a news perspective is that the *Ripsaw* offers only 1-2 political stories per week, and often these stories are not local stories.

Turning to level of education, 37% of *DNT* readers report their highest level of education achieved as high school, in contrast with only 16% of *Ripsaw* readers. Similar percentages of readers report some college, with 30% of *DNT* readers and 35% of *Ripsaw* readers falling into this category. Looking at those with a college degree or more, 28% of *DNT* readers graduated from college, while 45% of *Ripsaw* readers did so, with 10% of those *Ripsaw* readers holding Masters' degrees or higher. The higher levels of education of *Ripsaw* readers also contrast with the community as a whole, as Duluth's college graduate population makes up approximately 22% of the population.[11]

The differences in marital status are also quite pronounced; 69% of *Ripsaw* readers are single while only 21% of *DNT* readers report being single. The *Ripsaw* readers are also slightly more male, with 54% of *Ripsaw* readers being male, contrasted with 48% of *Duluth News Tribune* readers.

Looking at findings provided in the *Ripsaw* media kit, a substantial number of *Ripsaw* readers exclusively read the *Ripsaw*, and the three weekly papers seem to have distinct audiences. In their poll, the *Ripsaw* found that 36% of their readers read the

[11] 2000 Census data—21.9% of residents of St. Louis County over 25 had a Bachelor's degree or higher.

Ripsaw exclusively, with 25% of readers reporting that they do not read the *Duluth News Tribune,* 70% reporting that they do not read the *Reader Weekly*, and 92% noting that they do not read the *Budgeteer.*

Apart from this demographic information, these papers all have reputations in the community. The *Duluth News Tribune* has a reputation of being a "chamber of commerce paper" with uncritical coverage of local business and government. The *Ripsaw* has a distinct liberal leaning to its content, often printing articles from such sources as *Alternet,* and is the newspaper of the young elite in Duluth, being closely connected with the *Bridge Syndicate*, a local organization for politically and civically active young professionals that play an important role in local issues. The *Reader Weekly* is also a left-leaning paper, but is the paper of the old-guard liberals of Duluth and surrounding areas. Finally, the *Budgeteer* has a clear conservative leaning, and focuses heavily on local civic events.[12]

Ownership has been hypothesized as an important factor in creating newspaper content, with researchers finding that chain ownership of media outlets can lead to homogenization of content across media markets, a decreased commitment to local coverage as outlets rely on content provided by the parent chain, and an increased focus on the audience as product rather than the information as product. All of these changes reflect less of a commitment to the community being served, and more of a commitment to stockholders and corporate concerns. On the other hand, some research has found that

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[12] Personal conversations with Duluthians and personal observations. The three weekly papers are fairly straightforward about their biases and their audiences, while the popular assessment of the *Duluth News Tribune* is more subjective, and one that I find to be somewhat inaccurate.

chain ownership can improve the quality of news offered by a particular outlet, as many small-town newspaper and television stations under private ownership suffered from a lack of management experienced in journalism and news. In this sense, chain ownership contributes to the professionalization of the media industry, especially in smaller markets.

Looking at Duluth, chain ownership has certainly arrived in the media environment. Of the television stations, only KDLH, the local CBS affiliate, is locally owned by the Duluth-based Chelsey Broadcasting Corporation. The local NBC affiliate, KBJR, is owned by the New York City-based Granite Broadcasting Corporation, which owns ten television stations around the country, reaching 7% of the nation's television households (Granite Broadcasting 2003). The local ABC affiliate, WDIO, is owned by Hubbard Broadcasting, Inc, based in St. Paul, MN which owns eight television and three radio stations, with most of their holdings in Minnesota and New York. Until 1999, Hubbard also had controlling interest in DIRECT TV, the national satellite-television service provider (Hubbard Broadcasting 2003). Of the two chain-owned local television stations, using the quality measures from above, the NBC affiliate station had the highest quality content for local participation, while the local ABC station had the worst. Oddly, in looking at the expected pattern from previous research, the station with the lowest percentage of local coverage is the CBS affiliate, which is locally-owned. The quality of content findings in Duluth for broadcast news, then, do not fit neatly in either of the camps discussed above regarding the effects of ownership on content.

Looking at the newspapers, the story is more complicated. The *Duluth News Tribune* is owned by Knight-Ridder, the second largest newspaper chain in the country.

However, the *News Tribune* has been owned the Ridder newspaper company since 1936, and became part of the large media conglomerate when the two companies merged. Looking at the findings for the *Duluth News Tribune*, it does not appear the commitment to local coverage suffers for being part of a large chain, as the *News Tribune* performed the best of all the media outlets in providing local coverage and mobilizing information, and also fared well on using a variety of sources in local stories. The *Duluth Budgeteer News* is owned by Murphy-McGinnis Newspapers, a regional chain owning a number of small papers and weekly shoppers throughout the Northern Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Upper Pennisula of Michigan. Both the *Ripsaw* and the *Reader Weekly* are locally owned alternative weeklies—an increasingly rare occurrence as more and more alternative weeklies are being bought up by chains. The websites offering local content are both run by newspapers, the *Duluth News Tribune* and *The Budgeteer*.

Looking at the radio market, for which content was not analyzed because there were no local news programs of longer than ten minutes per broadcast with more than two stories per broadcast, chain ownership is widespread. According to a web-based organization tracking radio stations with local control over content, of the 28 commercial FM stations broadcasting to Duluth and the 10 commercial AM stations, only two have local control over what they play (Koko's Universe 2003). In addition to these 38 commercial stations, Duluth has six public radio stations broadcasting in the area, with the area being covered by both Minnesota and Wisconsin Public Radio; however, none of these public radio stations have news programs specifically devoted to Duluth. There is some indication that chain owners often cut out news staff as a way to save money, as

many radio stations go to a computerized control system where there are actually no people in the studio for many hours during the day, hence chain ownership may be a factor in why there is no substantial local coverage of news on the radio in Duluth, but further research would be necessary to demonstrate that, perhaps looking to news programming before chain owners came to Duluth.

Returning to the research question and testable propositions of the project, do the findings here lend more support to either the conditional or the contextual effects theories? Looking at question 2 and its testable propositions:

Question 2: How does media content vary across media outlets within a type (one television news program compared to another, for example)?

Q2 Proposition A: Media content will not differ in significant ways among outlets of the same medium. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the conditional effects model).

Q2 Proposition B: Media content will differ from outlet to outlet within the same medium. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the contextual model).

Media content does not differ in significant ways among outlets of the same medium on source use, tending to support the conditional effects model. However, media content does differ among outlets within the same medium on provision of mobilizing information and providing a unifying vision of the city, which would tend to support the contextual model. These findings indicate that, at least in Duluth, source use patterns are similar across media outlets, which research demonstrating that media tend to rely heavily on official sources, and that professional criteria of newsworthiness lead to similar source use across all mainstream media predicts. In regards to source use, then, context may not matter. However, on the other two key variables being explored here,

provision of mobilizing information and providing a unifying vision of the city, significant differences are found, which contradict the expectations of the conditional effects model and suggest that context does, in fact, matter and matter at an even lower level than the media market, at the level of the outlet.

Discussion

Two key ideas can be drawn from these findings. First, the characteristics social scientists have found to influence participation in politics are present in the Duluth media environment, but the degree to which these characteristics are present varies from medium to medium, outlet to outlet, and by type of news. If content matters, and if media outlets vary in the degree to which they offer the content that is conducive to participation, then media choices also matter. In Duluth, it seems, these variations in content are based both on the type of medium (newspaper versus television), and on idiosyncrasies of each outlet. These differences cannot be traced to ownership in any way that previous scholarship predicts, and there is no clear evidence that these differences are based on demographics. These differences also are not consistent within an outlet when moving from national to local news. It will be interesting to compare these findings to Green Bay, to see if any clear patterns emerge regarding which type of media outlets carry the highest levels of content related to political participation.

At this point, the evidence in support of the assumptions about media content made by the contextual and conditional effects models is mixed; evidence on source use tends to support the conditional effects model, while evidence on provision of mobilizing information and providing a unifying vision of the city is mixed but tends to support the

contextual model. More evidence exploring these assumptions will be available in the next chapter, looking at Green Bay, and in chapter 6, comparing the content of the two cities.

What is clear is that each outlet has distinctive patterns of news coverage that may affect the way citizens view local politics. If a person in Duluth reads the daily newspaper, she is likely to see Duluth as a city full of opportunities for local participation in politics, and to have the mobilizing information necessary to do so. If she reads the *Budgeteer*, she is likely to see Duluth as a city full of opportunities for civic engagement, and have the information required to get involved in the community in that way, but less of a commitment to political participation. If she watches the local NBC or CBS affiliate, she will have some sense of the issues in Duluth, and obtain mobilizing information on some political issues, and if she watches the local ABC affiliate, she will likely have an intermittent exposure to political information and lack the mobilizing information necessary to get involved. These differences in media content suggest that the independent variable of media use in the causal chain of political participation may operate differently depending on what exactly it is that people are reading and watching. Unfortunately, the data here do not allow for getting at exposure, but do allow for getting at the potential for exposure. If a person never watches or reads an outlet that contains substantial measures of these factors, then exposure to mobilizing information, a unifying vision of the city that emphasizes political commonalities, or a wide use of sources, then that person is not going to be exposed to these types of information through the mass media.

Though further research is needed, I speculate that there is no clear pattern from city to city in which media outlets provide mobilizing information. Looking at the wide variation in broadcast news, it seems to be an outlet-specific set of news decisions that determines how issues will be covered. As can be seen in the Iraq war signs example, the outlets cover the same issues, but often do so in widely different ways that may have different effects. Using the same example, source use also varies from outlet to outlet, though there is consistently more balanced source use in the daily newspaper, especially regarding local coverage, than in the local television news broadcasts.

Turning to the second key result of this study, it appears that measuring the effects of newspaper reading versus television viewing, or lumping television stations or newspapers together in content measures, may wash out variation in large samples. Taking television stations as the example, at least in Duluth the content varies fundamentally from outlet to outlet, and looking at the content or the effects of these three outlets combined would not provide much useful information about the media environment or political behavior in Duluth. Perhaps it is the aggregation of these genuinely different outlets into groups by medium that leads to findings of little media effect in political participation models, despite the conventional wisdom that the media play a large role in political behavior decisions.

Conclusions

Previous experimental and case study research has found that content plays an important role in political behavior, and that key components such as use of a variety of sources and provision of mobilization information contribute to political participation.

However, studies based on survey research consistently find that media effects on participation are small, at best. This study demonstrates that, at least at the local level, these divergent findings may be the fault of faulty categories in models utilizing survey research. Looking at the content differences among television stations here, for example, it seems that one could not expect these different types of content to have a single effect, and that it is possible that the different effects of different outlets are being washed out in survey measures.

Beyond this methodological point, the substantive implications are the most important here. In unpacking the independent variable of media use, and looking at the content that is being used, the results here clearly demonstrate that an individual reading one newspaper is getting different information about how issues relate to the city as a whole, what the opportunities are for citizen involvement, and to a lesser extent who the important sources and what the important frames are for understanding issues, than a person reading another newspaper or watching a particular television outlet.

In Duluth, anyway, a city know for its high levels of participation, it is possible to get varied source use and mobilizing information from both newspapers and television news, depending on the outlet one chooses, and the type of information for which one is using that outlet. In later chapters, I compare the situation in Duluth to that in Green Bay in order to ascertain whether Duluth is just an anomaly, or whether content varies from outlet to outlet as much in another city with high levels of political participation.

Chapter 5: Green Bay
News from Up North

Introduction

Though perhaps best known for being the smallest city in the country with its own National Football League (NFL) team, the Green Bay Packers. At the time of this study, Green Bay was also the smallest city in the country with two daily newspapers—The Gannett-owned *Green Bay Press-Gazette* and the *Green Bay News-Chronicle* which is published by a locally-based independent regional chain (McCord 1996).[1] On their face, these two phenomena may seem unrelated to each other and to political participation. However, they both provide evidence that as a community, Green Bay has been able to accomplish things that many cities much larger than Green Bay have not. The Green Bay Packers are the only publicly owned football team in the NFL, and the recent renovation of Lambeau Field, and the public funding of the project, was a recent hot button political issue. As a city, the citizens of Green Bay also came together to save their second newspaper in light of a Gannett drive to eliminate the competition in Green Bay from 1987-1991 (McCord 1996). In addition to having higher levels of participation than the national average, Green Bay citizens have come together to sustain ventures that most would say are impossible for a city so small.

In this chapter, I explore the same main questions as in examining the city of Duluth, exploring the degree to which the media outlets in Green Bay provide the three indicators of high-quality media content outlined in chapter 2, and whether the content of

[1] For a detailed account of the ultimately successful battle to retain newspaper competition in Green Bay, see Richard McCord (1996). This success lasted until June of 2005, when a year after selling to Gannett, the newspaper ceased publication permanently.

the Green Bay media environment are more in line with the assumptions of the contextual or the conditional effects models of media effects.

The media analyzed include the two daily newspapers in Green Bay, the larger circulation, Gannett-owned *Green Bay Press Gazette* and the smaller circulation, locally-owned *Green Bay News Chronicle.* Also analyzed include the four local television stations with regularly-scheduled local news programs, including the ABC affiliate WBAY, the CBS affiliate WFRV, the NBC affiliate WGBA and the FOX affiliate WLUK. There are no weekly newspapers in Green Bay, no websites independent of newspaper and television organizations, or regular local news radio programming.

Over the two week period in June and July of 2003, a total of 1352 news stories were collected, 855 of those stories derived from the two newspapers and 497 from local television news. Each of these stories is coded for its medium, outlet, size, location, whether or not the story is political, whether the story contains mobilizing information, placement of story in newspaper or broadcast, and up to five sources are coded for each story. In addition, the local television news is coded for time of broadcast and local stories are coded for whether they are about the Green Bay metropolitan area or other metro areas in the Green Bay market. Demographic information and ownership information are also explored, with this information coming from the outlets themselves, and from research into the ownership of the various outlets.

Table 5.1—Green Bay Media Environment—An Overview of Available Content

	Owner	**Frequency**	**Size**	**Avg # News Stories/ Issue**	**Avg # Political Stories/ Issue**	**Avg # Local Political Stories/Issue**
Green Bay Press-Gazette	Gannett	daily		59.2	26.9	8.6
Green Bay News Chronicle	Brown County Publishing, Denmark, WI	daily	52 pages	28.5	17	5.25
WFRV CBS 6	Paramount/ CBS/Viacom	daily-5	6pm=30 min; 10pm=35 min	12	5.6	2.5
WBAY ABC 2	Young Broadcasting, Green Bay	daily-5	6pm=30 min; 10pm=35 min	14.3	6.3	2.6
WLUK FOX 11	Emmis Communications, Indianapolis	daily-3	9pm=1 hour	23.6	4.4	1.9
WGBA NBC 26	Donald E. Clark Estate Trust, Green Bay	daily-4	6pm=30 min; 10pm=35 min	11.6	3.5	2.7

Findings

The three factors of content used to measure media quality in this project, as introduced in chapters 1 through 3 are explored here. Those factors are 1) use of a variety of sources, 2) provision of mobilizing information, and 3) provision of a unifying vision of the city. A systematic view of the media environment of Green Bay is presented, including the three factors, as well as demographic and ownership information for the city media. Then, the findings are used to address research question 2 and 3 and its testable propositions. To review, the question and propositions are:

Question 2: How does media content vary across media outlets within a type (one television news program compared to another, for example)?

Q2 Proposition A: Media content will not differ in significant ways among outlets of the same medium. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the conditional effects model).

Q2 Proposition B: Media content will differ from outlet to outlet within the same medium. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the contextual model).

The Green Bay media environment

Before turning to the research questions, I first provide some summary data of the content available in the major sources of news in the Green Bay media environment, to provide an overview of the content available to citizens in the city. I then look at the overall media environment, compare newspaper to television content, and content of individual outlets within a media type (i.e. compare television stations to each other).

First, examining source use, Green Bay demonstrates a typical heavy reliance on official sources. Just over 24% of stories cite no sources at all, making it impossible for the reader or viewer to judge in nearly a quarter of cases the reliability of the source, and

also impossible to feel a connection (or revulsion) to the source of the information. Looking first at primary sources, or the first source cited in a story, and exploring the 1026 stories that do cite a source, official sources are the most common sources of information, cited first in over 43% of stories. Following distantly are business sources and citizens with nearly 12% each and alternative sources with nearly 11% of first citations.

Table 5.2—First Source Cited in Story—All Green Bay Media, All Stories

Type of source	Frequency	Percent
Official	444	43.3
Business	121	11.8
Citizens	118	11.5
Alternative sources	112	10.9
Polls, documents, and other media	95	9.3
Foreign officials	57	5.6
Other experts	36	3.5
Victims and criminals	32	3.1
Celebrities	11	1.1
Total	1026	100

It is interesting to note here that business people make up the second-most-cited group, with both citizens and alternative sources coming after. This is in keeping with previous findings that local news is tied to both government and business (Kaniss 1992; Molotoch 1979). Turning to local political stories, the stories that local outlets have the most control over, as other stories come from the wires with sources already set, the story is less encouraging; of the 188 local political stories citing sources, nearly 65% have an official source as a first source, followed distantly again by business with nearly 11% of initial sources. Alternative sources and citizens fare worse in looking only at the local

political stories than in all the stories, a finding unexpected by the researcher. The quality of the purely local political product appears to be lower than the overall product, which includes stories written and produced by other media outlets outside Green Bay. The local political stories did, however, do a better job of citing the source of information, with only 37 stories, just over 16%, failing to cite sources at all.

Table 5.3—First Source Cited in Story—All Green Bay Media, Local Political Stories

Type of source	Frequency	Percent
Official	121	64.4
Business	20	10.6
Citizens	17	9.0
Alternative sources	16	8.5
Polls, documents, and other media	12	6.4
Celebrities	1	.5
Total	188	100

It is also important to look at overall source use; though the initial source in a story is often able to frame and define a story, if that source is followed by other types of sources, there remain opportunities for citizens to get different viewpoints, and to see that a variety of types of people and viewpoints are involved in the decision-making process. Looking at all of the sources cited, including up to the first five sources in each story, official sources are still the most frequently cited, with nearly the same finding as in primary source use above with just over 41%. Unaffiliated citizens are the second most frequently cited type of sources here, which is also very similar to the findings for primary source use where citizens came in a close third. Business sources are still very common, coming in third here. Alternative sources come in fourth, with less than a percent greater proportion of sources cited overall than as initial sources. Looking at

overall source use, then, does not change the picture much from looking exclusively at initial sources in a story in this analysis.

Table 5.4—All Sources Cited in Story—All Green Bay Media, All Stories

Type of source	Frequency	Percent
Official	921	41.4
Business	270	12.1
Citizens	313	14.2
Alternative sources	263	11.8
Polls, documents, and other media	163	7.3
Foreign officials	122	5.5
Other experts	84	3.8
Victims and criminals	67	3
Celebrities	21	.9
Total	2224	100

Focusing on all sources used only in local political stories, including all the media under study here, official sources make up a slightly smaller percentage of overall sources than primary sources—59% versus 64%. Citizens make up a slightly larger proportion of total sources, 14% versus 9% and business sources constitute a slightly lower proportion, 9% versus 10%. Alternative sources, the sources most likely to offer comprehensive alternative frames to problems, occur in slightly higher proportions in all source use versus initial source use, with 11% of citations versus 8.5%.

Table 5.5—All Sources Cited in Story—Green Bay Newspapers, Local Political Stories

Type of source	Frequency	Percent
Official	270	59
Business	42	9.2
Citizens	66	14.4
Alternative sources	51	11.1
Polls, documents, and other media	27	5.9
Celebrities	2	.4
Total	1766	100

The findings, then for use of all sources are not markedly different than the findings for primary source use, suggesting that sources patterns for initial source use tend to set the stage for source use throughout the story.

In the news offered in Green Bay, official sources prevail, both in primary source use and overall source use. In the local political stories, the most important stories for the study at hand, official sources dominate as primary sources and in overall source use, meaning reporters turn to officials to define stories, and then turn to other officials to offer additional viewpoints, rather than turning to such people as academics, interest groups, or even regular citizens.

Thus far, looking at source use, the Green Bay media appear to be producing lower quality content than that offered by the wire stories in their own newspapers and broadcasts, as measured on the factor of source use. Though looking at the overall media environment is important, it is key to look at the performance of individual outlets, and of medium versus medium. It is entirely possible that one outlet is pulling down the averages or at the very least that there are significant differences in coverage across outlets, or that one medium does a better job than the other at presenting the news.

First looking at medium versus medium, newspaper versus television, previous research suggests I should expect to find that newspapers provide a higher quality of content than television. Exploring source use in all stories, looking first at newspapers, the *Green Bay Press-Gazette* and the *Green Bay News Chronicle* combined have 855 stories, 686 of which cite at least one source. Nearly 20% or 169 stories in the newspapers cite no sources. Looking at television, as one might expect with the space

and time demands of a television broadcast, fewer television news stories cite sources. Of the 497 television news stories over the period, only 340 cite sources, leaving over 30% with no sources cited. Exploring the quality content measures being studied here, looking at the table below newspapers do fare better than television news in their content offerings. However, the source use patterns comparing newspapers to television do not achieve statistical significance here when comparing use of official sources.[2]

Table 5.6—First Source Cited in Story—Comparing Newspaper and Television, All Stories

	Newspapers (N=686)	**Television** (N=340)
Official	41.7% (286)	46.5% (158)
Alternative Sources	12% (82)	8.2% (28)
Citizens	9.8% (67)	15% (51)
Business	11.8% (81)	11.8% (40)
Polls, documents, and other media	12% (82)	3.8% (13)
Foreign Officials	6.3% (43)	4.1% (14)
Victims and criminals	2.2% (15)	5% (17)
Celebrities	1.3% (9)	.6% (2)

Overall, it appears of the stories citing sources, there is more variety in the local newspaper than in the local television news, though in some ways the two media are just differing on the focus of citing non-official sources, with newspapers turning more to alternative sources, and television turning more to ordinary citizens.

[2] Independent samples t-test, equal variances not assumed, t=.786, two-tailed sig=.432.

It is also important to remember that this is an analysis of stories citing sources—the television news has a substantially higher proportion of stories with no sources cited at all. Previous research finding print superiority, and the sheer quantity of space available to newspapers versus television, would tell us that newspapers are likely to do better than television news at providing high quality content, which does not seem to be the case here.

Looking at use of all sources is a place where newspapers can perhaps be expected to have the biggest leg-up on television news—all that additional space provides opportunities to for newspapers to ask more follow-up sources to flesh out stories than the time of broadcast news might allow. Looking at the table below, however, this potential for greater variety of source use does not pan out.

Table 5.7—All Sources Cited—Comparing Newspaper and Television, All Stories

	Newspapers (N=1593)	**Television** (N=631)
Official	42.1% (671)	39.6% (250)
Alternative Sources	13.2% (210)	8.4% (53)
Citizens	11.1% (177)	21.2% (134)
Business	12.5% (199)	11.3% (71)
Polls, documents, and other media	8.7% (138)	4% (25)
Foreign Officials	6.5% (103)	3% (19)
Victims and criminals	1.7% (27)	6.3% (40)
Celebrities	1.1% (17)	.6% (4)

Looking at all sources cited in each medium, newspapers actually rely more heavily on official sources as a proportion of all sources than television. Newspapers do manage to cite a higher proportion of alternative sources than television news, though the percentages of alternative sources for overall source use versus primary source use are virtually identical to the percentages for primary source use—newspapers do a better job of citing alternative sources than television news does, but newspapers do not cite more alternative sources further down in the story than they do as initial sources. Newspapers cite substantially fewer citizens than television news, and the difference is more substantial when moving from initial sources to all source use. For the most part, source patterns are the same looking at all sources as opposed to focusing on primary sources.

Turning to just the local political stories, the stories of most concern in this project, and comparing medium to medium, the difference between newspaper and television in citing official sources as first sources is not significant.[3] For local political news, the same proportion of stories will cite an official source first in both newspaper and television. A possible problem here is the small N involved when breaking down the categories this far.

[3] Independent samples t-test, equal variances not assumed, t=.026, two-tailed sig.=.979, comparing official source use.

Table 5.8—First Source Cited in Story—Comparing Newspaper and Television, Local Political Stories

	Newspapers (N=106)	**Television** (N=82)
Official	63.2% (67)	65.9% (54)
Alternative Sources	9.4% (10)	7.3% (6)
Citizens	5.6% (7)	13.4% (11)
Business	13.2% (14)	7.3% (6)
Polls, documents, and other media	7.5% (8)	4.9% (4)

Only the categories with results from both media are included. This analysis includes 106 local political stories with at least one source cited from the local newspapers, and 82 local political stories with at least one source cited from the local television stations. Despite the larger N in stories overall, when it comes to local political news, the local television stations combined have nearly as many stories as the newspapers combined.

Turning to overall source use, newspaper versus television, again newspapers fail to provide an advantage. For local political stories, almost two thirds of all sources cited by the newspapers are official sources, versus just over half for television news. The two cite alternative sources in almost the exact same proportions, and television news turns to ordinary citizens almost twice as often as local newspapers as a proportion of total sources cited.

Table 5.9—All Sources Cited—Comparing Newspaper and Television, Local Political Stories

	Newspapers (N=280)	**Television** (N=178)
Official	63.6% (178)	51.7% (92)
Alternative Sources	11.1% (31)	11.2% (20)
Citizens	9.3% (26)	22.5% (40)
Business	10.7% (30)	6.7% (12)
Polls, documents, and other media	5.4% (15)	6.7% (12)
Celebrities	0% (0)	1.1% (2)

In the Green Bay media environment, on the quality measure of variety of source use, there are no significant differences comparing the medium of television to the medium of newspapers. One will be exposed to similar source use patterns whether reading the newspapers or watching television news, and that pattern will be heavily reliant on official sources, even more so in local political news than in the news overall. However, it is also possible that there are significant differences between the two newspapers, and between the four television stations.

Comparing the two newspapers, there are no statistically significant differences in the source use patterns in stories that cite sources.[4] However, there are more than twice as many political stories citing sources in the *Green Bay Press-Gazette* than in the *Green Bay New-Chronicle.*

[4] Independent samples t-test, equal variances not assumed, t=.673, two-tailed sig=.502.

Table 5.10—First Source Cited in Story—Comparing Newspapers, Political Stories

	GBPG (N=245)	***GBNC*** (N=117)
Official	53.9% (132)	56.4% (66)
Alternative Sources	11% (27)	7.7% (9)
Citizens	6.5% (16)	2.6% (3)
Business	5.7% (14)	5.1% (6)
Polls, documents, and other media	12.2% (30)	8.5% (10)

Turning to local political stories in the two newspapers, there are not enough stories citing sources to achieve statistical significance, and there are few differences in any case. Clearly, the *Green Bay Pres- Gazette* has more local political stories citing sources, with 74 compared to 32 in the *Green Bay News-Chronicle*. The only obvious difference between the two, looking at the percentages, is that the *Green Bay News Chronicle* does not cite any citizens.

Table 5.11—First Source Cited in Story—Comparing Newspapers, Local Political Stories[5]

	GBPG (N=74)	***GBNC*** (N=32)
Official	62.2% (46)	65.6% (21)
Alternative Sources	9.5% (7)	9.4% (3)
Citizens	8.1% (6)	--
Business	12.2% (9)	15.6% (5)
Polls, documents, and other media	7% (6)	6.3% (2)

[5] Independent samples t-test, equal variances not assumed, t=-.451, two-tailed sig.=.653.

The television news programs demonstrate greater diversity, but these differences do not achieve statistical significance.[6] First, looking at the number of stories citing sources in the timeframe analyzed, the four outlets vary with the NBC affiliate having a low of 67 to the FOX affiliate including a high of 90. On source use, there is also variation, with NBC including fewer stories beginning with official sources, and more stories beginning with alternative sources than any other television station, and also including a higher proportion of stories with citizens as initial sources than any but the ABC affiliate. From a different angle, part of the explanation for fewer official sources relative to the other outlets is a substantially higher proportion of stories with a first source of business sources.

Table 5.12—First Source Cited in Story—Comparing Television Stations, All Stories

	FOX (N=90)	**CBS** (N=78)	**ABC** (N=105)	**NBC** (N=67)
Official	51.1% (46)	41% (32)	52.4% (55)	37.3% (25)
Alternative Sources	5.6% (5)	5.1% (4)	9.5% (10)	13.4% (9)
Citizens	12.2% (11)	10.3% (8)	14.3% (15)	13.4% (9)
Business	5.6% (5)	20.5% (16)	9.5% (10)	25.4% (17)
Polls, documents, and other media	3.3% (3)	7.7% (6)	1.9% (2)	3% (2)
Victims and Criminals	7.8% (7)	6.4% (5)	2.9% (3)	3% (2)

[6] One-way ANOVA, F=1.750, sig=.157.

Exploring just the local political stories, the number of stories is very small, but a person watching a week of the local FOX affiliate would only encounter 16 local political stories citing sources, with 14 of those stories beginning with an official source, 1 a citizen, and 1 a celebrity. On the other hand, one watching the CBS station for an hour each night would encounter in a week a wider variety of source use, including alternative sources, business, citizens, and citation of polls, documents, and other media. Over the course of time, if a person regularly watched the local FOX affiliate, she would have a very different picture of the world than if she watched the local CBS affiliate. Similarly, one watching the local ABC affiliate would see a similar number of local political stories as one watching CBS, but would see official sources defining stories nearly three-quarters of the time instead of just over half of the time. Over time, this could make a difference in how one views the world.

Table 5.13—First Source Cited in Story—Comparing Television Stations, Local Political Stories[7]

	FOX (N=16)	**CBS** (N=22)	**ABC** (N=23)	**NBC** (N=21)
Official	73.7% (14)	54.5% (12)	73.9% (17)	52.4% (11)
Alternative Sources	--	13.6% (3)	4.3% (1)	9.5% (2)
Citizens	6.3% (1)	4.5% (1)	13% 3	26.6% (6)
Business	--	9.1% (2)	8.7% (2)	9.5% (2)
Polls, documents, and other media	--	18.2% (4)	--	--

[7] N too small for ANOVA analysis

Looking back over the findings for source use on the first question, there are not statistically significant differences in source use either across medium or across outlet. Statistically at least, all television stations and both newspapers are comparable on quality measures on this indicator of quality of content.

The second component of high quality media explored in this project is provision of mobilizing information in local political stories. Mobilizing information can contribute to a sense of efficacy by helping citizens learn the necessary information to submit their input into the political process. This information can include such things as telling people where to vote, where public meetings are held, or how to get in touch with public officials. Of course, mobilizing information is not available for every story—or even probably for a majority of stories. However, it is available for some stories. Looking at the overall percentage of stories in the Green Bay media environment offering mobilizing information is probably the least instructive, because there is nothing to compare it to at this point. Of the 225 local political stories, 51 or nearly 23% of local political stories included mobilizing information.

Breaking it down by medium, one would expect that newspapers with their expanded space would have more mobilizing information than television news, and this is in fact the case. Looking only at local political news, newspapers offered mobilizing information in 39 stories of 128, nearly 30%, while television news offered such information in only 12 stories of 97, just over 12%, a statistically significant difference.[8] Turning to individual outlets, there is a wide, significant variance among outlets in the

[8] Independent samples t-test, equal variances not assumed assumed, t=3.422, two-tailed sig.=.001.

proportion of local news that contains mobilizing information, though perhaps most notable is how little mobilizing information is offered by the television stations.[9]

Table 5.14—Mobilizing Information By Outlet—Local Political Stories

	Mobilizing Information %	**Frequency**
Green Bay Press-Gazette	27.9%	24 (N=86)
Green Bay News Chronicle	35.7%	15 (N=42)
FOX	10.5%	2 (N=19)
CBS	24%	6 (N=25)
ABC	11.5%	3 (N=26)
NBC	3.7%	1 (N=27)

Thus far, the differences in source use patterns have not been significant, while the differences in mobilization information have shown to be significantly different across both medium and outlet, meaning one will get significantly more mobilizing information from newspapers than from television, and from some outlets than others within each medium. Providing a unifying vision of the city is a less-obvious and more difficult to measure indicator of high quality content, but is necessary in order to foster in citizens both salience and efficacy, making it possible to link up political issues with the relevant governing body, and to sense that citizens have input and control over those governing bodies.

All the variety of source use and mobilizing information in the world will fail to give people a sense of efficacy if it is not clear that the fates of all in the city are tied

[9] One-way ANOVA, F=3.000, sig.=.012.

together, and that these fates are decided through the democratic process. Providing a unifying vision of the city is also beneficial for the media outlet, because it creates a focus for the news-gathering enterprise, for example, city and county government. However, this gets complicated, as is discussed above, when there is more than one locus of population in a television market. In this section, I first explore the degree to which the local television stations, all of which have both Green Bay and Fox Cities bureaus, focus on Green Bay. Then, I turn to some qualitative examples of stories that contribute to this unifying vision of the city.

As I discuss above, there are two major metropolitan areas in the Green Bay media market, Green Bay and Appleton-Oshkosh-Neenah, with the second actually having the greater population. Though all of the news stations offer local news, they split their resources among these two areas. In the media market overall, these foci are almost evenly split with 133 stories focused on the Green Bay metropolitan area and 134 on other municipalities in the market. For political stories, the focus is definitely on Green Bay, with 60 stories about political issues in Green Bay, versus 36 stories about political issues in other municipalities in the market. This is in keeping with Kaniss's findings that most outlets tend to choose to focus on the central city. Though the Fox Cities have more of a population than Green Bay, Green Bay is still the largest single city in the region. Looking at the specific choices of each outlet, there is some variation both in looking at all local stories, and to a lesser degree on local political stories, but none of these differences achieves statistical significance.[10]

[10] Political stories, one-way ANOVA, F=.523, sig.=.668.

Table 5.15—Unifying Vision—Local Stories Focusing on Green Bay versus Market

	Green Bay	Market
FOX	58.1% (25)	41.9% (18)
CBS	38.6% (22)	61.4% (35)
ABC	55.6% (40)	44.4% (32)
NBC	48.4% (36)	51.6% (49)

The local FOX affiliate and the local ABC affiliate have the strongest commitment to Green Bay, with over half of all local stories focusing on the city. The NBC affiliate is fairly evenly divided between the two, and the CBS affiliate has over 60% of local stories coming from outside of Green Bay. Of course, a heavier focus on the Fox Cities is beneficial to the citizens living there, and means that they are receiving more information about local politics, but the study here is of the quality of information available about local politics in Green Bay. The need to split the focus means that Green Bay will necessarily lose some coverage to the other municipalities, but also means a larger media market with the greater resources that come from having a bigger advertising base.

Looking at local political stories, all outlets still focus on Green Bay, and oddly, CBS has the second-highest percentage of local political stories focusing on Green Bay, despite the findings above for all local news. Though residents of Green Bay share their television broadcasts with these other cities and municipalities, the political focus remains on Green Bay politics. This is perhaps not surprising, as the population of the other major metropolitan area, though slightly larger, is divided among the cities that

make up the Fox cities, with different governments that all independently contain fewer residents than the city of Green Bay.

Table 5.16—Unifying Vision—Local Political Stories Focusing on Green Bay versus Market [11]

	Green Bay	Market
FOX	73.7% (14)	26.3% (5)
CBS	64% (16)	36% (9)
ABC	56% (14)	44% (11)
NBC	59.3% (16)	40.7% (11)

Given that the local television stations have to divide their focus, where the local newspapers do not, what difference does this make? Here, I discuss four examples of how it can make a difference in coverage. First, during the study period, the Supreme Court decision on the University of Michigan affirmative action programs came down on June 23. Though this is a national story, because all the media in the market looked at the local effects of the decision, it is also a local political story. All four television stations turned to administrators and students at the University of Wisconsin—Oshkosh in the Fox Valley for reaction to the story, and how the story will affect their admissions process. Both newspapers, on the other hand, turned to the smaller University of Wisconsin—Green Bay and to the private St. Norbert's College also in Green Bay. Both of these approaches make what could seem like a distant, national story more proximate, and therefore perhaps more salient, by demonstrating how the decisions could affect universities that they or their children may attend. For residents of Green Bay, though,

[11] N too small for ANOVA analysis

focusing on UW-Green Bay and St. Norbert's also reminds citizens that they have universities in their city, linking them to a wider education system, and to the decision, demonstrating the decision could have implications for everyone in Green Bay by affecting who gets into the universities and moves to the city. For residents of Green Bay watching the television news, getting a reaction from UW-Oshkosh provides no link between the new policy and the welfare of the community because the effects discussed are about who will be moving to Oshkosh, not Green Bay.

In another example, during the study period, both newspapers have long stories on the impending completion of a plan to clean up the portion of the Fox River running through Green Bay, which has been on the Superfund list due to the dumping of toxic waste from the paper mills of Green Bay into the river. In the *Green Bay News-Chronicle*, this story makes the front page lead. None of the television news stations mention the story. It would be possible to use this story to unify both Green Bay and the Fox cities, as the river also runs through their area (hence the name), but the television stations do not choose to do this. Focusing on the Fox River clean-up reminds residents of the Fox River that is a prominent part of Green Bay's downtown and also the tensions between Green Bay's major industry of paper mills versus the health and recreational concerns surrounding the river. It makes an ongoing political issue salient, and reminds people that it is still on the local agenda.

Looking at a third issue, as Kaniss (1991), Vermeer (2002), and others have suggested, one way to create a unifying vision of the city is to focus on downtown revitalization projects, both in news and editorial sections. Both newspapers discuss

downtown revitalization issues, with a medium length story in the *Green Bay News-Chronicle* and a long story and an editorial in the *Green Bay Press-Gazette*. Both newspapers include news stories on an upcoming facelift for city hall, quoting the mayor's discussion at a press conference of the need to more visibly identify the building as city hall, improve the landscaping, and bring the city hall up to the standard of "postcard worthy" to match the standards the city has been setting for private revitalization projects downtown. These articles remind people that downtown is not just a place for trendy new bars and loft apartments, but is also the political center of downtown. Marking the building more clearly makes political participation more accessible, and publicizing the changes make it more likely residents will try to locate the city hall, or go by it after many years of neglect to see the changes. It also reinforces the idea that, despite past problems, downtown is a nice and safe place to visit for pleasure or political participation. People who are accustomed to driving downtown and parking and know where city hall is are people who can see a meeting announced and hop into their cars to go down and participate without additional costs of figuring out where to go and hand-wringing over whether it is safe. The *Green Bay Press-Gazette* adds to this unifying vision by endorsing plans for downtown revitalization, and encouraging people to spend more time downtown.[12]

Finally, on a fourth issue, I wanted to note that there is one way that all the media in the area promote a unifying vision of the city, and not surprisingly, this involves the Green Bay Packers. The renovations of Lambeau Field where the Packers play were

[12] *Green Bay News-Chronicle* , June 30, 2004, p. 6; *Green Bay Press Gazette* July 2, 2004, p. A6.

almost complete at the study period. These renovations were funded (and continue to be funded) by a Brown County sales tax passed by the citizens. By tracking the progress of this project, it reminds all in the region of a tremendous source of civic pride, and indeed of state pride, and for residents of Brown County provides evidence of their taxpayer dollars at work.

Promoting a unifying vision of the city can involve many issues, and they need not be political. Above are just a few examples of how a unifying vision of the city can be provided through political stories, and how focusing on just Green Bay versus the entire television market can make a difference. The better job a media outlet does of providing a unifying vision of the city, the more people will see their fates are tied together. The more this vision is linked to political decisions, the more people will see that they can have an effect on the vision of the city. Proving a unifying vision of the city, then is both a way of projecting a possible community people can live in (for example, the Fox River clean-up) as well as updating the people on how political decisions made in the community are making a difference (for example, Lambeau renovations). All of the outlets do this to some extent, but the local newspapers are better able to do so because of their singular focus.

Media ownership is a hotly contested issue, and also a factor that is often in flux, as can be seen in both of the cities being studied in this project. Prior research has found that chain ownership decreases quality of content, that it increases quality of content, and has no significant effects on content, with no consensus on the effects. Prior research has also had a variety of findings on the role of competition in increasing quality of content,

with some finding that quality of content increases with competition and other studies finding this is not the case. Here, I will examine the ownership of all the media outlets in the study, and then look at the content found in each outlet in this light in the discussion section.

As is documented extensively in the book *The Chain Gang: One Newspaper versus the Gannett Empire* (1996) by Richard McCord, the *Green Bay Press-Gazette* has been owned by Gannett since 1980, and the *Green Bay News-Chronicle*, created in 1972 as a strike paper called the *Green Bay Daily News*, became the *Green Bay News-Chronicle* when purchased by Frank Wood's Brown County Publishing and merged with the weekly *Brown County Chronicle* in 1976. *The Green Bay Press-Gazette* was born in 1915, the product of a merger between the *Green Bay Gazette*, around since 1866, and its competitor of one year, the *Green Bay Press*, begun in 1914. Due to Frank Wood's willingness to sustain losses for years at a time, and to local support for having two daily newspapers, Green Bay remained a two-newspaper town until June 2005, with one chain-owned paper and one locally owned paper. In 2004, Gannett purchased the *Green Bay New-Chronicle* to operate under a joint operations agreement (JOA), but quickly shut down the newspaper in June 2005.

Turning to the local television news stations, two are owned by large media companies, and two are locally-owned. The local CBS affiliate, WFRV has been owned by one of the largest media companies in the world, Paramount group, which is the local station-owning arm of multimedia giant CBS/Viacom/Paramount/Westinghouse, since 1991. Prior to 1992, this was an ABC affiliate, owned briefly by the media company

Midwest Communications in 1991, and prior to that owned by a local employee-owned trust.

The local FOX affiliate, WLUK has been owned by media company Emmis Communications, based in Indianapolis, Indiana, since 1998. Prior to 1998, the station changed hands several times in the 1990s among different local owners, and has been both an NBC and an ABC affiliate in the past, until becoming a FOX outlet in 1995. Emmis is a large media conglomerate, owning 15 television stations, 30 radio stations, 6 magazines, a book publishing division, as well as 29 interactive radio websites.

Both WBAY-ABC and WGBA-NBC are locally owned, with WBAY owned by Young Broadcasting of Green Bay, and previously a CBS affiliate until 1992, and WGBA owned by the estate of Donald E. Clark since his death in 2002. WGBA was a FOX affiliate until 1995 and then had the call letters WLRE.

All of this data is current as of June, 2005, though with the ever-changing landscape of media ownership is certainly ripe for additional change. In the discussion, I examine how these ownership patterns match up with the above content findings.

Turning to the questions and testable propositions of the project, are the findings here more consistent with the conditional effects or the contextual models of media effects? Looking at question 2 of the project and its testable propositions, the evidence is mixed.

Question 2: How does media content vary across media outlets within a type (one television news program compared to another, for example)?

Q2 Proposition A: Media content will not differ in significant ways among outlets of the same medium. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the conditional effects model).

Q2 Proposition B: Media content will differ from outlet to outlet within the same medium. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the contextual model).

Looking at source use, significant differences were not present when comparing newspapers to television. However, there were also no significant differences between newspapers or among television stations. This finding is inconsistent with the assumptions of both models. However, it is most in keeping with the conditional effects model which suggests we can lump media together in aggregate measurements, rather than the contextual assumption that each media outlet will vary based on environmental factors.

In looking at mobilizing information, there are not significant differences between the medium of newspapers and the medium of television, but there are significant differences from outlet to outlet, which tends to support the assumptions of the contextual model of media effects. In Green Bay at least, whether one chooses newspapers or television as the medium of choice will not affect the amount of mobilizing information to which one is exposed.

In providing a unifying vision of the city, statistical measures were not used to compare the vision provided by television versus newspapers, but it is clear that while newspapers focus just on the city of Green Bay, television stations with their wider markets must split their attention between Green Bay and the larger metropolitan area of

the Fox cities. This means that citizens reading newspapers are going to be exposed to a much higher proportion of news focused on the city of Green Bay than those watching television news. This strong variation as a function of the medium is precisely the type of difference the conditional effects model assumes exists when moving from outlet to outlet.

On source use, significant differences are not found from outlet to outlet within the same medium, which would tend to support the conditional effects model. On use of mobilizing information, significant differences are found when comparing newspaper to newspaper and television station to television station, tending to support the assumptions of the contextual model. On providing a unifying vision of the city, significant differences are not found when comparing the television stations, the medium which must divide its attention between two metropolitan areas, a finding which supports the assumptions of the conditional model of media effects.

Discussion

Examining this summary of the Green Bay media environment, it is clear both that citizens have many opportunities to obtain news, and that there is variation in how much news, how much political news, and how much local political news one can expect to get depending on the outlet or outlets one chooses. Some outlets seem to focus on quality, others on quantity, and mysteriously others on neither. In thinking about how many stories are offered, it is also important to look at how long these stories are. The trade-off between breadth versus depth is an obvious one. Media outlets must choose in limited space and time to either have many stories in little depth, or a few stories with

more detail. These trade-offs are especially important for television news because of the limited amount of time in a broadcast.

Looking first at the newspapers, the *Green Bay Press-Gazette* is a larger paper, with more stories and more political stories. However, as a proportion of its stories, the *Green Bay News-Chronicle* focuses more on local news, and has a higher proportion of longer,[13] more in-depth stories. Turning to the television stations, only the local FOX affiliate stands out in number of stories and percentage of stories that are long, due to its hour-long format, which is in itself a choice to offer the opportunity for more breadth and depth. However, the local FOX affiliate does not focus on politics, with a smaller average number of local political stories than any other station, and a smaller number of political stories than all but the local NBC affiliate. This FOX affiliate is offering breadth and depth, but not in political news. The other three news stations are offering similar formats, with similar numbers of both political and local political stories, as well as similar percentages of longer stories.

Looking at the Green Bay media environment overall, in local political stories official sources are cited first almost 65% of the time, with the second most common first source being business sources approximately 10% of the time. Turning to all sources cited in the media environment in the study period, official sources still make up the plurality at over 40%, with citizens coming in a distant second at 14%. Alternative sources—academics, public interest groups, and think tanks—the most likely to provide alternative causal explanations or alternative solutions for problems, these types of

[13] All stories are coded for short, medium, and long. See coding appendix for rules.

sources are the first sources only 9% of the time, and constitute only 12% of total citations. In providing mobilizing information, some outlets do so frequently, with the *Green Bay Press-Gazette* coming in best with 24 provisions of mobilizing information in almost 30% of local political stories. On the low end, the local NBC affiliate only offered mobilizing information once in 27 local political stories.

These findings, though perhaps good compared to other places, do not seem to meet the content expectations for a city with high levels of participation. On source use, none of the outlets do very well, and on mobilizing information a citizen may do well to read either newspaper, but will very rarely receive mobilizing information from the local television news. Though it may be very possible to cobble together a variety of perspectives and information about how to participate in particular issues by utilizing a variety of media, no one outlet stands out, and the media environment overall does not provide high levels of any of these types of content.

There are several possible explanations for this set of findings. First, and most obviously, high quality media content at the local level may not be correlated to high levels of political participation. Perhaps previous findings that the media have few effects on the decision to participate are accurate. Especially at the local level, citizens do have other options for learning about politics, including personal experience, interpersonal conversations, and information provided by local groups, churches, or unions. Second, perhaps these constructs of high quality content are wrong. Perhaps the media in Green Bay do have high quality content, but that quality is not being measured accurately by the measures here. Third, and most likely, my expectations for how much

variety of source use and how much provision of mobilizing information are necessary to support a city with high levels of participation may be too high. Providing mobilizing information once in two weeks may not be often, but if everyone utilized mobilizing information once every two weeks, participation in America would skyrocket. The problem of what constitutes a high quality media environment and whether Green Bay has one is discussed in greater detail in the chapter comparing the two cities.

What is found here, and was expected, is that there is variation in quality. In keeping with previous research, newspapers in Green Bay tend to provide a higher quality of content than local television news, with more stories, more local political stories, and more mobilizing information. Newspapers, however, do not seem to take advantage of one of their greatest potential assets compared to television, which is their potential to cite a wider variety of sources because they have more space in their stories, and more time to get their stories together. Because of the differences in their market area, newspapers are also better able to provide a unifying vision of the city, because they are appealing to only one population concentration as opposed to two.

What was also expected is that there are variations among outlets. Between the two newspapers, there are few significant differences in proportion of source use, but there are significant differences on provision of mobilizing information. In addition, there are just plain more stories in the *Green Bay Press-Gazette*. The citizens of Green Bay likely benefit from having newspaper competition, but if they exclusively choose the competing *Green Bay News-Chronicle*, they are going to get less news and less mobilizing information.

The differences among the television stations are more substantial than the lack of statistical significance on source use and unifying vision of the city may suggest. Though the local FOX affiliate, with the potential of more news in its hour-long broadcast and its slogan "More Local More Often," may seem like the right choice for local political news, the average number of local political stories in an hour FOX newscast is 1.9 compared with an average of between 2.5-2.7 in the half-hour broadcasts of each of the other stations. The local FOX affiliate may be providing news that is more local, but it is decidedly less political. On source use, there again is wide variation, with a low of 52% of stories citing a source on the NBC affiliate beginning with an official source to a high of 74% on the ABC affiliate. On providing mobilizing information, the outlets range from one to six times over the period. And finally, on providing a unifying vision of the city, looking at local political stories, the outlets range from the NBC affiliate's low of 59% of stories focusing on Green Bay to the FOX affiliate's high of 74%. Depending on which local newscast a citizen chooses to watch, the type of information she can expect to find will vary widely. Over time, these differences can have a great effect on one's vision of the world—or at least in this context of the city.

This set of findings calls into question findings about media effects based on national survey questions, such as those in the NES, that ask citizens whether they read the newspaper daily, or watch television daily, and look for a relationship between the answers to these questions and their answers about political participation. Just within the city of Green Bay, reading the newspaper could mean something very different for a person reading the *Green Bay Press-Gazette* as opposed to the *Green Bay News-*

Chronicle, or for a citizen watching the local NBC affiliate versus the local FOX affiliate. Each of these outlets could have different effects that would be washed out in aggregating newspapers or television news. One must expect that if these differences exist within a city, even wider variations could occur across cities and regions, a topic which is explored in greater detail in chapter 6.

Third, the evidence is very mixed on ownership. Neither the *Green Bay Press-Gazette* (Gannett) nor the local CBS affiliate (Paramount/CBS/Viacom) appear to suffer from being owned by the largest of corporations, at least in comparing them with the locally-owned media in Green Bay. Neither of these outlets seems to turn away from local news for national news, or to entertainment from hard news. Though the local FOX affiliate, which is owned by the large Emmis Communications, has less local political news, what local political news it does have is focused on Green Bay. Because the time and format of the local FOX news is so different, it makes it difficult to compare in any case. Chain ownership versus independent ownership does not appear to be related to either higher or lower quality content in Green Bay in any consistent way.

I suggest the reason for this finding is obvious—local news keeps local newspapers and television stations in business, because local news is the unique product that distinguishes local media outlets from national and cable outlets (Molotoch 1979). As scholars have suggested since the earliest media studies, there are commercial profit pressures that affect all news outlets. Though large companies have been blamed for cutting local reporters and news gathering resources to increase profits, local and independent owners also want to increase profits. Also, so long as there is variation in

ownership, even if five different chains own media outlets in the same city, they will need to compete for the local reader and viewer. As Kaniss notes, the best way to do this is to provide a unifying vision of the city. So long as covering local political issues draws an audience, local media outlets will continue to do so; without local news, local stations would increase their range of competition from other local outlets to national and international news sources. Of course, in addition to providing local political news, they will also continue to devote a third of the broadcast to weather, and the largest section in the paper will continue to be the sports section, but local political news is unlikely to disappear anytime soon, regardless of ownership.

Conclusions

The media environment in Green Bay does not offer spectacular levels of variety of source use and mobilizing information. The television stations have to split their ability to offer a unifying vision of the city with their need to capture the larger half of the local television market that is outside of Green Bay. Most of the political stories in Green Bay begin with an official source, many of them are defined exclusively by official sources, and few offer mobilizing information about how to get involved. Yet citizens of Green Bay continue to support two daily newspapers, and they continue to participate in politics at a higher rate than the national average. Journalists, scholars, pundits, and citizens often speculate about how the media can be changed to better meet the needs of citizens. The media in Green Bay, whatever their faults, do a better job at meeting the needs of citizens for purposes of participation than in the average city, and for that reason alone the findings here are instructive.

Yet, there are other reasons why this case is important. If there are this many differences between newspapers and among local television news broadcasts in the city of Green Bay, then the logic behind measuring newspaper reading and television news viewing as a national aggregate is severely undermined, and any research based on these variables suspect. Though the findings here are mixed in support of the assumptions of the conditional or the contextual models of media effects, the findings are more damaging to the conditional effects theory. If the assumptions of the contextual theory are violated, that means researchers will not aggregate media use across outlets and places when they could, yielding results that are less generalizable than they otherwise could be. If the assumptions of the conditional effects model are violated, researchers are aggregating media use across outlets and places when they should not be, yielding invalid measures and therefore erroneous findings.

Finally, there are key differences between newspaper and television in their ability to create a unifying vision of the city, because of the lack of similarity between city lines and media market borders for local television news. The more municipalities are contained within a media market, the less possible it is for a television news program to present a community identity that is politically-based, and the less reliant the news organization is on political news for getting and maintaining an audience. As this occurs, there are fewer opportunities presented to citizens to understand their community as a political community, a finding which is discussed further in the next two chapters.

Chapter 6:
Comparing Duluth and Green Bay:
Similar Cities, Different Media Environments

Introduction

Duluth and Green Bay are very similar cities in terms of levels of political participation, geographic location, economic base, ethnic and racial make-up and political culture. A finding of differences in quality and characteristics of media content in these two cities would be a very strong indicator that such differences would exist, and perhaps to greater degrees, in cities more dissimilar than these. The title, of course, gives away the results; there are significant differences in content across these two cities. In this chapter, these differences are detailed and some explanations for their causes are explored.

In the previous two chapters, I have described in detail the available media content in the cities of Duluth and Green Bay, and looked for differences in content within each city on the indicators of content related to political participation being explored here, including use of a variety of sources, provision of mobilizing information, and provision of a unifying vision of the city. In this chapter, I will be looking at differences in content across the two cities in terms of these factors, as well as several other factors, and address for the first time in this project the first question of the project, the degree to which content differs across the two cases, as well as additional exploration of the second question of the project. Thus far, key differences have been found between news offered in newspapers versus on television, and also among different newspapers and television outlets within each city. Outlets have addressed their audiences in

different ways, and presented different visions of how issues affect the broader community in providing a unifying vision of the city. Thinking of these findings in terms of the theories being explored here, the support for the assumptions about media content in the conditional effects and contextual theories of the role of media in political behavior are mixed, with some support for the assumptions of each theory. Findings of significant differences across the two cities would tend to support contextual models, which lead one to expect content to differ from place to place and from outlet to outlet as a function of unique environmental differences; while findings of few or no significant differences would tend to support the assumptions of conditional effects models, which suggest that, due to factors such as professional conventions of newsworthiness and commercial pressures, content should be relatively similar across locations and outlets.

Though the cities are quite similar, no two cities are alike, and Duluth and Green Bay vary in several ways that may be important. First, Duluth is a city with a steady population while Green Bay is one of the fastest growing cities in Wisconsin; as such, Green Bay has a population that is on the average younger than that of Duluth. Duluth is primarily a Democratic-Farm-Labor[1] (DFL) city while Green Bay is consistently a Republican city. The Green Bay television media market includes another population area, the Fox cities, which taken together are actually larger and growing faster than Green Bay, while the Duluth television market contains only the large population center of Duluth, with the much smaller city of Superior, WI nearby. Green Bay is in many ways a more successful city than Duluth, and has avoided the "boom and bust" cycles of

[1] The Democratic party in Minnesota is called the Democrat-Farm-Labor Party in recognition of the fusion of the three parties that came together to form the statewide party.

a natural-resource based economy to a greater degree than Duluth has; perhaps because the natural resource on which the Green Bay economy is based, trees, is renewable whereas the natural resource on which the Duluth economy is based, taconite, is not. While these cities do have important differences, one would be hard-pressed to find cities that are more similar than these, and so comparing these two cities offers the closest possible approximation to a replication as is possible in the real world in which social science must operate.

Questions of the chapter

To review, the questions of the project explored in this chapter and their testable propositions are repeated here.

Question 1: How does the media environment differ across cities that are similar?

Q1 Proposition A: The news content will not vary in significant ways across media environments. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the conditional effects model).
Q1 Proposition B: News content will vary in significant ways across media environments. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the contextual model).

Question 2: How does media content vary across media outlets within a type (one television news program compared to another, for example)?

Q2 Proposition A: Media content will not differ in significant ways among outlets of the same medium. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the conditional effects model).
Q2 Proposition B: Media content will differ from outlet to outlet within the same medium. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the contextual model).

Findings

The questions are taken up in order, starting with the first question: How does the media environment differ across cities that are similar? There are two ways of addressing

this question; by looking at the type and quantity of media available, and by comparing the two cities on the measures of quality of content utilized in this project. First, examining the media available, there are some notable differences across the two media environments. Green Bay has two daily newspapers, while Duluth has just one. Duluth, on the other hand, at the time of the study had three weekly newspapers, while Green Bay has none. Green Bay has four television news programs, while Duluth has only three, with the FOX affiliate in Duluth not carrying news. All in all, there is a higher quantity of news available in Green Bay, but a higher diversity of media-types in Duluth. These differences in some ways make it difficult to measure and compare the overall quality of the media environment using quality measures, because each medium is compared head-to-head. So, for example, it is difficult to compare "newspaper coverage" in Duluth versus Green Bay because comparing daily newspapers leaves out the three weeklies in Duluth at the time of the study, but the formats of the two tabloid-style newspapers are too different for meaningful comparison with a standard daily newspaper. Thus, the conclusion that a higher quantity of news available in Green Bay, but a higher diversity of media-types in Duluth.

The second way of looking at this question is by comparing media across the two cities based on the quality measures utilized in this study: use of sources, provision of mobilizing information, and provision of a unifying vision of the city. In addition, several other factors are explored here, including size or length of stories and geographic focus of the stories. Size of stories provides a way of understanding the differences in number of stories, as well as editorial decisions regarding depth versus breadth.

Measures of geographic location allow for analysis of provision of unifying vision of the city by providing a way of understanding quantitatively the differences between a media environment with one geographic center versus two.

Combining television news stories, daily newspaper stories, and newspaper stories from the standard-format Duluth weekly newspaper,[2] there are significant differences across the two media environments in overall quality of media environment. First, looking at all of the stories appearing in these outlets in each environment, exploring at total of 884 stories from Duluth and 1354 stories from Green Bay, there are significant differences in size of stories. Using a scale of 1 to 3, with 1 being short and 3 being long,[3] the average story in Green Bay is substantially shorter than those in Duluth, with a mean of 1.77 in Green Bay versus a mean of 2.04 in Duluth. Additionally, there is a significant difference in the location of stories, measured on a 1 to 4 scale, with 1 being local, 2 within the state, 3 national and 4 international,[4] with the average story in Green Bay focused substantially further away from the city than in Duluth. Though Green Bay has more outlets, which helps to explain why more stories were found in Green Bay, the fact that stories in Green Bay are also shorter contributes to the finding of more stories. Overall, Green Bay has a media environment with a higher quantity of stories, where Duluth stories are on average longer and more local.

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[2] The other two weeklies do not follow the objective model of reporting and therefore are difficult to compare to the other media here.

[3] See coding appendix for more detail on how length was coded.

[4] See coding appendix for more detail on location of story. All stories are coded for the most local location, meaning, for example, that a story that contains local, state and national aspects would be coded as local.

It is not surprising that the average story in Duluth is closer to the city than the average story in Green Bay. As I discussed earlier in chapter 5, the Green Bay media market includes a second metropolitan area which actually has a higher population than that of Green Bay, meaning local television news in Green Bay is split between the two markets, while each of the two population centers in the Green Bay television market have their own local newspapers, leaving the Green Bay newspapers free to focus on Green Bay exclusively.

Including all stories in each media market, looking at the main indicators of this project, there are no significant differences on the proportion of news that is political, the proportion containing mobilizing information, or the proportion of stories citing a source with a non-official first source.[5] In fact, the proportions on these measures are remarkably similar.

Table 6.1—Comparing Duluth and Green Bay—all stories

	Green Bay	Duluth	sig.
size (mean)	1.77	2.04	.000
political	.45	.44	.799
location (mean)	1.5	1.29	.001
mobilizing	.17	.16	.418
non-official 1st source	.157	.157	.811

Turning to just the stories about the city in each place, there are more significant differences. First, looking at the number of stories, despite the fact that Green Bay overall has more stories, they are very similar on number of stories focused on the city during the study periods, with Duluth actually having more stories focused on the city

[5] Independent samples t-test, two-tailed test, equal variances not assumed. For Green Bay, on factors of size, political, location, mobilizing, N=1352; for non-official first source in stories citing at least one source, N=1026. For Duluth, for size, N=884; on political and location, N=883; on provision of mobilizing information, N=882; for non-official first source use, N=642.

with 149 versus 133 in Green Bay. The average story in Duluth is still significantly longer than in Green Bay. Nearly all of the stories focused on the city in Duluth were political, compared to just under half in Green Bay, and stories in Duluth are also significantly more likely to contain mobilizing information.[6]

Table 6.2—Comparing Duluth and Green Bay— all stories about the city

	Green Bay	Duluth	sig.
size (mean)	1.98	2.29	.003
political	.45	.79	.000
mobilizing	.15	.31	.001
non-official 1st source	1.59	1.47	.096

Again, the fact that Duluth has more stories about the city is not surprising, given the dual geographic focus of the Green Bay media. It does, however, mean that Duluth has more and longer political stories than Green Bay, and offers more mobilizing information in stories about the city. The difference in use of sources still fails to meet the requirements of significance.[7] Though it may make a large difference in the quality and quantity of news available to a person living in the city to have less news focused on the city, it may be the case that the overall news offerings are of similar quality, but that Green Bay has to split its focus.

Turning to all stories about the market in each city, including both metropolitan areas in the Green Bay television market, there are still significant differences that favor

[6] Independent samples t-test, two-tailed test, equal variances not assumed. For Green Bay, on factors of size, political and mobilizing, N=133; on non-official first source use, N=95. For Duluth, on factors of size and political, N=149; for mobilize, N=147; on non-official first source use, N=102.

[7] Sources are coded nominally, with 1=official sources, as defined in the coding appendix. While this measure does not ordinally represent "how official" the sources are, it does demonstrate that with the average source being close to "1" in each case that official sources dominate. For proportions of sources that are official sources, and for a breakdown of all source use and comparisons within each city, see the chapters on each city.

Duluth, and one that favors Green Bay, in terms of quality. Green Bay again has more stories when including all stories about the market, with 267 versus 188 in Duluth. Green Bay also has significantly more stories citing a source beginning with a non-official first source. However, Duluth still has significantly longer stories, more mobilizing information, and more political stories than the combination of Green Bay and the Fox Cities.[8]

Table 6.3—Comparing Duluth and Green Bay—all stories about the market

	Green Bay	Duluth	sig.
size (mean)	1.99	2.28	.000
political	.36	.74	.000
mobilizing	.14	.28	.000
non-official 1st source	1.57	1.45	.024

Returning to the question, how the media environment differs across cities that are similar, it is clear that there are differences across these two markets, which would tend to support the assumptions of the contextual models. Significant differences occur when looking at all stories in the market, stories focused on the cities of Duluth and Green Bay, respectively, and all stories focused on each media market respectively. When looking at all stories in both media markets, there are significant differences in size of stories and locational focus of stories. When analyzing stories focused on each city, there are significant differences in proportion of stories that are political, provision of mobilizing information, and size of stories. Turning to all stories about each of the media markets, there are significant differences is proportion of stories that are political, provision of mobilizing information, use of non-official sources as first sources, and size

[8] Independent samples t-tests, two tailed tests, equal variances not assumed. For Green Bay, on size, political and mobilized, N=267; for non-official first source use, N=195. For Duluth, on size, political and mobilize, N=188; on non-official first source use, N=136.

of stories. In addition to these quantitatively measured differences, there are also differences in the nature and quantity of media available in each city, with Green Bay having more news, and Duluth having a wider variety of types of outlets. In sum, the differences across media environments are many and significant.

Returning to the testable propositions of this question, the news content does, indeed vary in significant ways across media environments, tending to support the assumptions of the contextual model regarding media content.

> Q1 Proposition A: The news content will not vary in significant ways across media environments. This is the expected outcome predicted by the conditional effects model.
>
> Q1 Proposition B: News content will vary in significant ways across media environments. This is the expected outcome predicted by the contextual model.

Turning to the next question, how media content varies across media outlets within a type (one television news program compared to another, for example), the focus here is on differences across the two media environments, as differences across outlets within the same environment were explored in the individual case chapters. To put this question another way, do newspaper reading and television viewing mean different things across outlet and market? Comparing the performance of each medium at a time on quality measures across media environments, there are significant differences, meaning newspaper reading and television viewing on average do mean different things in Duluth than in Green Bay. This is found by aggregating television content across all media outlets in each city, and by aggregating the two daily newspapers in Green Bay.

These differences are not surprising, considering the chapters on each individual city in this study found significant differences across media outlets of the same type (e.g. newspaper or television) within media environments. These findings suggest that not only are there differences across outlets within a city, but that these differences do not wash out when outlets are aggregated for a city. This means that there are actually differences in quality of media environment, in the availability of certain types of news on the menu in each city, and not merely differences among media choices within each environment. If a certain type or quality of content in not available, then it is not possible for citizens to choose those types of content.

Looking at all news stories in the Duluth and Green Bay daily newspapers, there are significant differences again on size of stories, with Duluth having again significantly longer stories, significant differences on mobilizing information, with Green Bay newspapers offering substantially more mobilizing information, and significant differences in prevalence of using non-official sources as first sources, with Duluth performing slightly but significantly better than Green Bay on this measure[9].

Table 6.4—Comparing Duluth and Green Bay Daily Newspapers—all stories

	Green Bay	Duluth	sig.
size (mean)	1.76	2.06	.000
political	.47	.45	.381
location (mean)	2.03	2.12	.191
mobilizing	.22	.14	.000
non-official 1st source	1.58	1.59	.010

[9] Independent samples t-tests, two-tailed tests, equal variances not assumed. In Green Bay, on size, political, mobilizing, location, Green Bay N=855; on non-official first source use, N=686. For Duluth on size and political, N=458; on mobilizing, N=456; on location, N=455; on non-official first source use, N=359.

Turning to all stories about the market, excluding state and national stories that are not related to the media market in each place, there are still significant differences, with stories in Duluth being longer and also more likely to be political than those in Green Bay. Looking only at the market, the differences in mobilizing information disappears, suggesting that both media environments have similar amounts of mobilizing information about local political issues in their newspapers. However, there is the added differences that stories about the market are much more likely to be political in Duluth than in Green Bay.[10]

Table 6.5—Comparing Duluth and Green Bay Newspapers—all stories about the market

	Green Bay	Duluth	sig.
size (mean)	1.80	2.55	.000
political	.37	.89	.000
mobilizing	.40	.38	.693
non-official 1st source	1.59	1.55	.597

Do these differences in quality of media across environments extend to television news as well? The overall measures from the first question in this chapter would suggest that they do. Turning to the results, this expectation is met. Though Green Bay has more news stations, and more news stories, looking at all news stories, those in Duluth are significantly longer, more focused on the city, contain more mobilizing information, and

[10] Independent samples t-tests, two-tailed tests, equal variances not assume. For size, political, mobilizing, location, Green Bay N=350, Duluth N=73. For source use, Green Bay N=240, Duluth N=53.

include more non-official sources as first sources than the television news in Green Bay. What Duluth lacks in quantity is made up for in quality.[11]

Table 6.6—Comparing Duluth and Green Bay Television News—all stories

	Green Bay	Duluth	sig.
size (mean)	1.78	1.98	.000
political	.40	.45	.156
location (mean)	1.46	1.36	.015
mobilizing	.09	.15	.006
non-official 1st source	1.54	1.55	.011

Focusing on just television news stories about the market, all the television news stories about the market in Duluth were political over the period, with just over a third in Green Bay. In this analysis, though, Green Bay edges out Duluth on non-official first source use with a significant difference.[12] The finding that all stories about the market in Duluth over the course of the two weeks were political was quite surprising, but stands up to recoding and intercoder-reliability tests.[13]

Table 6.7—Comparing Duluth and Green Bay Television Stations—all stories about the market

	Green Bay	Duluth	sig.
size (mean)	1.99	2.08	.333
political	.36	1.00	.000
mobilizing	.14	.21	.104
non-official 1st source	1.57	1.41	.014

Returning to the question at hand, it is clear that newspaper reading and television news viewing do, indeed, mean different things across different media environments in

[11] Independent samples t-tests, two-tailed tests, equal variances not assumed. On size, political, location, mobilizing, for Green Bay, N=497 for Duluth N=381. On source use, for Green Bay, N=340, for Duluth N=262.

[12] Independent samples t-tests, two-tailed tests, equal variances not assumed. On size, political, location, mobilizing, for Green Bay, N=268 for Duluth N=196. On source use, for Green Bay, N=340, for Duluth N=83.

[13] For more information on re-coding and inter-coder reliability tests, see appendix.

the similar cases of Duluth and Green Bay, a finding which tends to support the assumptions of the contextual theories of media effects. When comparing all the newspaper stories in Duluth to all the newspaper stories in Green Bay, significant differences are found in mean size of stories, proportion of stories providing mobilizing information, and proportion of stories using a non-official first source. When looking at the stories about each respective media market, significant differences exist when comparing Duluth and Green Bay newspapers on the factors of proportion of stories that are political in nature, and size of stories. Looking at the medium of television, differences also exist. When looking at all stories, differences exist on all factors except proportion of political news. When looking at stories about the market, differences exist on provision of mobilizing information and use of non-official sources as first sources.

Returning to the testable propositions of the question, the support again is in favor of the contextual model of media effects.

Q2 Proposition A: Media content will not differ in significant ways among outlets of the same medium. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the conditional effects model).

Q2 Proposition B: Media content will differ from outlet to outlet within the same medium. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the contextual model).

When comparing newspaper content to newspaper content in the two cities, and television content to television content, significant differences are found, even when as is the case here, all of the content of each medium is aggregated for the city. Looking at the findings in chapters 4 and 5, where significant differences were found across outlets of the same medium within each city, this means that significant differences in content exist

that are not washed away when the outlets are aggregated and compared to another city. These results in tandem lend strong support for the contextual model.

Though it is difficult to generalize from two cities, it is possible to at least determine whether there are enough similarities to attempt to add additional cities and types, or to conclude that despite their remarkable similarities, it is nearly impossible to aggregate cities beyond the context of their own media environments. At this point, it seems that despite their similarities, Duluth and Green Bay have markedly different content in their media environments.

Discussion

Exploring the answers to these questions, and the support for the testable propositions derived from them, it becomes clear that although Duluth and Green Bay share many similarities, the media offerings in each city vary substantially in type of media available, quantity of news, proportions of news stories that are local and political, proportion of stories that offer mobilizing information, and average length of stories. Though it is beyond the scope of this project to test the specific effects of these differences on individual-level political behavior, it can be fairly said that if content matters at all, then content is having different effects in these two cities despite their similarities. This supports the assumptions of the contextual models, and calls into question conditional effects models and their assumptions about media content. This raises the very possible potential that studies based on aggregation of the variables of "newspaper reading" or "television viewing" across cities, or even across outlets, may be washing out substantial variation in effects on political behavior.

Though there are many reasons why this content may vary so substantially, two in particular stand out as explanations. First, the structure of the media markets varies between these two cities, with the Duluth media market having a single population center in Duluth, while the Green Bay television market contains the population center of Green Bay and the slightly larger population center of the Fox cities. This means that the Green Bay television market serves a larger population, which would tend to mean that the market has more resources and money to provide news, but also that the focus of those resources must be divided between the two population centers. This presents the possibility for differences in covering political stories that may not apply to a high percentage of viewers, differences in providing mobilizing information about political issues outside many viewers' voting jurisdictions, and differences in providing a unifying vision of the city when the television news programs are really trying to unite a wider region than that covered by any particular political unit.

A second possible explanation for these differences, that may be related to the first, is that these two cities have different menus of media options, with the Green Bay media environment offering only the more traditional types of outlets of daily newspapers and television news, but offering one more outlet of each with two daily newspapers and four daily television news stations. Duluth, on the other hand, has the more typical one daily newspaper and has only three daily television news stations, but supplements these (at the time of the study) with three weekly papers offering different perspectives on local news and politics. These different patterns of news coverage and competition could easily lead to different choices on the parts of news producers in individual media outlets.

These two cities may not, by themselves, offer us a picture of what to expect from media in other cities. There are significant differences between the two, but it is also important to keep in mind that there are striking similarities as well. In both cities, the media rely heavily on official sources to define stories, and in both cities a small portion of stories overall offer mobilizing information to citizens.

Conclusion

Just as there are significant differences between newspaper reading and television viewing, and among television and newspaper outlets, within each case, significant differences are found here when comparing across the two cities. This chapter offers the clearest balance of support in favor of the assumptions of one theory over the other, particularly in favor of the contextual models over the conditional effects models. If media content varies from medium to medium, outlet to outlet, and place to place, then we cannot aggregate the effects of a medium such as newspaper or television across media environments. If each city has a different set of media offerings, with some having more daily newspapers, some having more television news stations, some having weekly newspapers while others do not, then we cannot expect the effects of media to be constant across these differences. If media have different distributions of population and different distributions of political jurisdictions to cater to, then we cannot expect the media in one city to offer similar content to the media in another city. These differences exist holding other key factors constant, such as size of the cities, ethnic and racial make-up, political culture, and levels of political participation. Introducing additional variables, it seems, would only increase the differences in media content from place to place. In the last

chapter, the implications of these findings are discussed, and directions for future research are outlined.

Again, the real importance of these methodological differences is their substantive meaning in theorizing about and studying the role of mass-mediated communication in political behavior. People in these two very similar cities have quite different media content available to them; media content that varies in the degree to which it provides information about how to get involved in politics, and that varies in the degree to which it focuses on the city as a relevant and unifying political unit. These differences in media content are significant, though the differences between the two cities that might lead us to expect different content are few. This suggests that when we are looking at media use variables across locations, we are mixing many different things into one measure. It is very possible that newspaper use or television news viewing means very different things from one location to the next, and that given the media environment available, the role of mass-mediated political communication may vary from place to place, depending on other information environment differences. If, as Tip O'Neill so famously said, "all politics is local," then perhaps all media effects are also local, and contingent on the different political communication environments in each location.

Chapter 7
Conclusions:
Local Content in Perspective

Duluth and Green Bay were chosen as cases for their high levels of political participation, and for their many similarities that made it possible to hold a number of variables constant and look specifically at how media content about local politics varies in each place. Though important cases in their own right, with findings that are valuable for understanding what kinds of content related to political participation are found in each of these places, the findings of this project also offer some results that can be generalized to other cases, and that can be instructive for studying the role of the media in political participation more broadly.

Two key questions and their testable propositions have been explored in this project.

Question 1: How does the media environment differ across cities that are similar?

Q1 Proposition A: The news content will not vary in significant ways across media environments. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the conditional effects model).

Q1 Proposition B: News content will vary in significant ways across media environments. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the contextual model).

Question 2: How does media content vary across media outlets within a type (one television news program compared to another, for example)?

Q2 Proposition A: Media content will not differ in significant ways among outlets of the same medium. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the conditional effects model).

Q2 Proposition B: Media content will differ from outlet to outlet within the same medium. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the contextual model).

In looking at media content in these two cities, three key factors of content related to political participation have been explored. First, source use in the media outlets in these two places is examined, using source use as a proxy for the variety of frames that are being offered in each media environment. Second, reporting of mobilizing information in the news is analyzed, with mobilizing information offering citizens information about when, where and how to get involved in the political process. Third, providing a unifying vision of the city is explored, in order to assess the degree to which outlets and media environments overall are providing a picture of the city as a political unit that is common to readers and viewers.

Content analysis of all the news available in each city about local politics has been conducted, in order to construct a picture of the offerings available in the overall media environment in each city, the content available in each medium and outlet, and this content is compared both within and across the two cases under study. The nature of this content is then compared to the assumptions inherent in two important approaches to the role of the media in political participation—the conditional effects approach and the contextual approach. The findings reported in this study produce results that are more consistent with the assumptions of the contextual approach than the conditional approach, but also lend support to the validity of using the conditional approach, even if some of its assumptions about content are violated.

Turning to specific results, as prior research would lead one to expect, similar patterns of source use and reliance on official sources were found in each city. However, there were some significant differences in the degree to which outlets relied upon official

sources, and the degree to which they brought in alternate sources such as citizens, academics and interest groups. Similarly, though low levels of mobilizing information were offered across the two cases, and across outlets, there were significant differences in the levels of mobilizing information offered across medium, outlet and city. Looking to the final key factor in content related to political participation evaluated here, providing a unifying vision of the city, the ways in which outlets did this in the two cases were so dissimilar as to be difficult to compare, and I suggest that this is a result of different media market structures in each city, where Duluth has one major metropolitan area in the television media market, while Green Bay has two; and also the fact that during the study timeframe, Duluth had one daily newspaper while Green Bay had two. In short, while strong similarities in media content exist in these two very similar cities, even in these cases there are significant differences in the media content being offered in each place, and being offered by different outlets and media types within each place.

The differences and similarities in media content among the media outlets in the cities of Duluth and Green Bay, and across the two cities, having been detailed, the findings of the project are held up to the assumptions regarding mass media content in two prominent models of research into the role of the mass media in political behavior—the conditional effects model and the contextual model. Given the findings of this project, the contextual model finds more support; while the conditional effects model finds some support, its assumptions are seriously called into question by the many and significant differences in media content found both within and across the two cities under

study. In this chapter, I want to take the opportunity to put these findings into perspective, and to discuss their implications for further research.

The Duluth and Green Bay Media Environments

Perhaps what this project does best is provide detailed descriptions of the nature of content available in each of these places, measured in a way that retains context while providing for comparability across cases. This project presents a snapshot of what the media environments in these two cities are like, how different outlets compare on the measures of quality explored here, and what differences exist across these two similar media environments. This is a significant contribution, as most mass media research focuses on national-level media and politics, large metropolitan areas, and campaign and election coverage. In this project, smaller cities, local news, and non-election political coverage are explored. While it can credibly be claimed that large metropolitan areas encompass most of the population of the United States, and are therefore most important to explore, that does not exclude the necessity of understanding what kind of content is available in other parts of the country.

The focus of here on local media and non-campaign news coverage is even more significant. While the majority of research focuses on national-level media and campaign news, the majority of Americans rely on local media for their news, and the majority of opportunities to get involved in political decision-making are at the local level. We are also not in the midst of a national election all of the time, though it often seems like national elections are continuous. What content about politics is available in the off-season of elections is also important to study, especially as citizens' positions on

issues, and understanding of their role in the political process, most likely are formed in large part outside of election season. In short, the news between elections and the content available to citizens gives valuable insight into the components that are available to citizens as they formulate political beliefs and positions. The process of deciding whether to participate in politics is an ongoing process that does not begin with the New Hampshire primary and end with the national general election; people have opportunities to participate in a variety of ways, every day, at all levels of the political process.

As a snapshot, just as differences were found across outlets within the same medium in each city, media within each city, media across each city, and the media environment across each city, it can be expected that differences would be found over time in each of these cities. These measures of media content cannot be taken as static in a model looking at the effects of content on political behavior. To revisit Duluth and Green Bay, it is already clear that things have changed in both media environments. The *Ripsaw*, once a weekly in Duluth, has become a monthly magazine, due to cost constraints of publishing a weekly paper, and much to the chagrin of residents who relied on the *Ripsaw*. The local television news ownership situation and content has also changed. Local company Chelsea Broadcasting sold the CBS affiliate KDLH, which at the time of the study was the only independently-owned television station in the market. The station was sold to Malara Broadcasting, and Malara broadcasting then made a strategic agreement with Granite Broadcasting, owner of the local NBC affiliate, to share news content. This takes the original news programming content in Duluth from three television news programs to two. This situation is also in flux, as Granite Broadcasting,

as of October 2005, is in serious economic trouble and facing aggressive action from shareholders.

Perhaps more spectacularly, Green Bay is no longer the smallest city in the country with two daily newspapers. After a long struggle by Brown County Publishing to continue to publish the newspaper, in July of 2004, the *Green Bay News Chronicle* was purchased by newspaper giant Gannett, publisher of the rival *Green Bay Press*-Gazette, and in June of 2005, Gannett ceased publishing of the paper, citing the *News Chronicle's* chronic lack of profits. Gannett continues to produce the other, more profitable, regional weekly papers previously owned by Brown County Publishing. One of the factors in choosing Green Bay as a case, and one of the factors making Green Bay unique, is no longer present. In the ever-changing world of media ownership and technology, media content is continually in flux. Both cities have fewer content options now than they had at the time of the study, and an important future piece of research would be to return to each city and find how the media environments as a whole have changes as a result. Though theses differences mean that the findings here may no longer reflect what is available in each if these cities, documenting the content as it existed when these snapshots were taken is made even more important. The data and findings here provide the possibility for future research exploring how the changing ownership patterns and consequent availability of content affect what is being offered in each place. In the ever-changing world of mass media content, over-time data is very hard to come by, as local television news stations do not archive their broadcasts.

Exploring the Assumptions of Two Models

Aside from offering in-depth analyses of the media offerings available in each city, constituting the media environments, I have also situated these findings into two of the major theories regarding the role of the media in political behavior, by comparing the findings regarding content to the assumptions each model makes about media content, finding that the many and significant differences in content are more in keeping with the assumptions of the contextual model than conditional effects models. To review, the questions of the project, testable propositions, expected outcomes based on each model, and findings on each question and proposition are detailed here.

Question 1: How does the media environment differ across cities that are similar?

Q1 Proposition A: The news content will not vary in significant ways across media environments. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the conditional effects model).

Q1 Proposition B: News content will vary in significant ways across media environments. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the contextual model).

Looking at the first question and its testable propositions, in chapter 6 it is demonstrated that there are indeed significant differences in content across the two media environments under study, Duluth and Green Bay. Clear differences are found in provision of mobilizing information and providing a unifying vision of the city, with more minor but statistically significant differences in source use across the two cities. These findings tend to support the assumptions of the contextual model of the role of the media in political behavior. What this means substantively is that from place to place, what it means to read the newspaper and what it means to watch television news varies, and therefore the role that media use plays in political participation may also vary from place

to place. How and how much the role of media use varies in the decision to participate from place to place cannot be determined here, but these findings suggest that context-specific measures of content, coupled with context-specific measures of other independent variables, may be necessary to explain the independent variable of political participation.

Question 2: How does media content vary across media outlets within a type (one television news program compared to another, for example)?

Q2 Proposition A: Media content will not differ in significant ways among outlets of the same medium. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the conditional effects model).

Q2 Proposition B: Media content will differ from outlet to outlet within the same medium. (This is the expected outcome predicted by the contextual model).

On the second question, the findings in chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate that there are indeed differences in content from outlet to outlet, both within and across media environments, with different content being offered depending upon which television news station one chooses, and which newspaper one chooses to read if more than one is available. These findings tend to support the assumptions of the contextual model regarding the role of the media in political meaning and behavior. Not only do reading the newspaper and watching television news mean different things from city to city, but also from outlet to outlet within a city. This suggests that not only are contextual measures necessary to take into account differences from city to city, but even within a media environment, measures of which outlets citizens choose would be necessary to fully understand the role that media use plays in the individual decision to participate.

Given the empirical findings, the content in these two cities is more consistent with the assumptions of the contextual model than the conditional effects model of the role the media. The findings indicate that current measures of media use and understandings of the role media use plays in political behavior are relying on assumptions about the similarity of media content across outlets and locations that are not present within a media environment or across media environments in cities that are very similar. What, however, does this mean for past and future research, given that the conditional effects model is the predominant model utilized in political communication research?

Local Media Content, Political Participation and Theory Building

Media use has not been found to have a strong effect on political participation. The findings of this study give some reason to believe that the way that media use variables are incorporated into political participation equations may be mis-specified. Though levels of participation are similar in each of these cities, the level of political participation and the quality of media content are both slightly higher in Duluth than in Green Bay, when using the factors of content quality of use of a variety of sources, provision of mobilizing information, and provision of a unifying vision of the city.

In order to develop a complete understanding of the role of political communication in shaping political behavior, however, incorporating measures of the differences in content available in the media environment and from particular outlets within a media environment are just a start. Additional variables that would add nuance to our current understanding may include content exposure and reception measures,

measures of interpersonal political communication, and measures of the opportunities available within the local political structure to get involved.

Implications and Directions for Future Research

It is very important to recognize the contributions of conditional effects models, which have contributed a great deal to our understanding of politics and the media, and also to remember that a model is just that. A model is not meant to exactly replicate the processes that exist in the real world, but rather a reasonable-enough approximation of those processes in order to assist in understanding the processes and explain and predict outcomes. Even if the assumptions of the conditional effects model are violated, it is possible that "assuming all else is equal" and including media content in that "all else" may produce results that are informative. Findings such as those in this study may give researchers pause when failing to reject the null hypothesis, and perhaps suggest the necessity of doing further research in a different way, but do not eliminate the usefulness of such research. It is a well-accepted fact in social science research, and science research more generally, that we sometimes erroneously fail to reject the null hypothesis; that is an inherent bias of scientific research.

In fact, the findings here could be seen as supporting such a conclusion. The two cases here were chosen because the have very little variation on the dependent variable of political participation at the aggregate level; though Duluth has higher level of political participation than Green Bay, both have levels well-above the national average. Other variables also being similar in these two cases, it is possible to conclude that though the content in these two places varies significantly, the results on the dependent variable of

political participation are quite similar. This could be seen as supporting the idea that media content measures are not necessary to understand media use, and that aggregation of media use across locations, though inaccurate, may not affect the ability to explain and predict political participation.

I would suggest that more research is necessary before making such a conclusion. There are enough differences between Duluth and Green Bay on both the dependent variable of political participation, as well as on aggregate measures of other independent variables related to political participation, such as key demographic variables, that a literal replication is not accomplished here, but rather a theoretical replication. Given that cities more similar than these two could not be found for purposes of this project, a literal replication is likely not possible.

One must also not make strong conclusions when moving from the individual level prediction of political participation, standard in the participation literature, and the aggregate measures represented here, as such conclusions would fall prey to the ecological fallacy by inferring individual effects from group-level data. In short, though this is a possible interpretation of the data here, in support of the assumptions the conditional effects models make regarding media content, I would suggest that it is an erroneous interpretation. To address this issue more specifically, the key variable being explored here—media content available in the media environment—actually is an aggregate level variable. The same content is available to all individuals within a media environment. As such, the measures of media content conducted in this study could be

inserted into individual-level equations. However, this study does not address this or test these relationships, and so the usefulness of such variables is still in question.

Conditional effects models, despite their shortcomings in accounting for the role of the media in creating political meaning and affecting political behavior, as demonstrated in this project, have the important advantage of being more generalizable. If social scientists need to understand the role of the media in the United States, rather than in a particular city or media market, then losing some precision for the sake of generalizability is, perhaps, a rational choice to make.

As for contextual models of the role of media in political behavior, this project offers more support for the assumptions of these models regarding media content. That is not the end in determining which model is more useful for research. As previously discussed, conditional effects models have the advantage of wider generalizability that contextual models lack. The conditional effects approach has the advantage of numerous studies and data collections replicated over time that the contextual models do not. This finding of support for the assumptions made in contextual models regarding media content is just one very small step toward the model as a whole perhaps gaining wider acceptance in the political communications field. Scholars utilizing contextual effects models need to agree on concepts and measures, and how to transport those concepts and measures across contexts in order to compare and contrast the effects of media in different contexts. Even given the possibility of advances in contextual research, and more widespread agreement on concepts and how they should be measured, and the ability to develop more nuanced understanding of the role of the media in political

behavior, such research is more limited in its generalizability. Given the uses and limits of each of these models, and the evidence from the findings here about the assumptions of each model about the content of media, it makes sense to temper the widely generalizable results of conditional effects research about the role of the media in political participation with the perhaps more accurate and specific results of contextual research.

To be clear, this project looks at whether the content available in these two cities is more consistent with the assumptions made about media content in these two models, and finds that this content is more consistent with the assumptions of the contextual model than conditional models. This project does not test the relationship between media content and political participation, nor does it test any of the other relationships in either model. Which model is best for research will rise and fall on how well the overall model is specified. So, for example, if the content present in the media is more consistent with the assumptions made by the contextual model, but other and more significant assumptions in the conditional model are more in line with empirical evidence, then the conditional model is going to perform better. This project looks at but one small part of assumptions about how one variable works in two small cities.

In order to really understand the implications of these findings it is important to recognize that these results are just a beginning; a comparison of media content in two small cities that are similar to each other, but unrepresentative to the population of cities in the United States. More such studies are necessary in larger and smaller cities, and over time, in order to truly understand how media content varies, and to develop a set of

independent variables that explain these variations. All that can be concluded from this research, from this standpoint, is that media content as a dependent variable does vary in the strict test of these most similar cases, which calls into question the ways that media content has been used as an independent variable in studies of political behavior.

What is the role of the media in creating a unifying vision of the city, and defining that aggregate identity as one with a political component? This is a question that requires a good deal more evidence than is available in this study. What is answered here is what types of content are available in the two cities of Green Bay, Wisconsin and Duluth, Minnesota; cities that are very similar and where people participate in civic and political life at higher rates than in other parts of the country. Though generalization is difficult from these two cases, the findings here do yield some expectations and directions for future research. One answer, detailed in the three empirical chapters of this project, is that in both cities the media contain fairly substantial offerings of political news, and of political news that is focused on local governmental issues. When a medium must focus on more than one population center, as in the Green Bay case, that medium (in this case television) must split its attention to local politics among governments. This splintering of local coverage within a television media market can be expected to be even more pronounced in places with more governments within the market, and where newspaper markets also contain multiple large population centers.

Another finding is that, as expected, the content of the news in both media environments is dominated by official sources. While use of a variety of sources is desirable, as discussed in the first and second chapters of this project, it does not seem to

be a necessary condition for high levels of political involvement. It would be very interesting to explore the levels of official source use in other media environments, in order to discover how much variation there is on this factor across environments, and whether more evidence of use of a variety of sources is correlated with higher levels of political participation.

There was not a lot of mobilizing information present in either media market, though there was substantial variation across media outlets. Future research could explore media use patterns, and whether the provision of more mobilization information in an outlet utilized by a citizen yields higher levels of political participation. This is a link that has been more inferred in past research than empirically tested.

This project, though illuminating, is more of a start than an ending to the study of media content in the local media environment, and could also inform the beginnings of research into the effects of local content on political participation.

Similarly, the methods of this project offer direction for future research, but could certainly be improved upon. Some aspects of the project that I would change, given more resources and the ability to start over, are included here. First, it would be useful to have a longer timeframe of study in each place. Though two weeks is an extensive enough period of time to offer a snapshot of each city, a longer period would yield a more reliable sample. Such an undertaking would require research assistants and additional funding, but under such circumstances would be quite possible.

Second, it would be useful to code the sources cited not just by type of source, but also by ideological position. This would offer evidence whether or not the use of official

sources is ideologically balanced in each place. As coding source use was the most time consuming aspect of this project, this would again require assistance but would enhance the findings of the project.

Finally, it would be useful to have the studies run concurrently, collecting data in each place at the same time. This again would require more resources and labor, but would make the comparisons more valid. I was fortunate that the available media in each place, and the ownership of those outlets, did not change in between the two studies conducted here; while the two cities were not studied at the same time, the same menu of content was available in each city during the time between the two studies. Despite this looking back wish-list, the methods here are as valid and reliable as possible given the circumstances, and may offer some template for improvement for future research.

Conclusion

This project presents a picture of the media content available in these two cities. In Duluth, television news, and to a greater extent, the daily newspaper, offers news that is highly-focused on local politics, contains mobilizing information in some cases, and news that relates national political issues to the local situation of readers and viewers. The local political content uses a wider variety of sources and contains more mobilizing information than the overall content of the media outlets, meaning that locally-produced content scores higher on these indicators of quality.

In Green Bay, the focus in both newspapers and to a greater degree television news, is less focused on local politics than the news in Duluth. In general, the media in Green Bay offer less mobilizing information, and in some comparisons a narrower range

of sources. The ways in which Duluth and Green Bay provide a unifying vision of the city vary in ways that are difficult to compare, and can be attributed to the different media market structure in Green Bay. In short, the offerings in Green Bay, though greater in quantity, are lower on these measures of quality than in Duluth.

Given these generalizations, there are also differences from outlet to outlet and from medium to medium. A person will be exposed to different content based on which television station she chooses or which newspaper she reads. Despite these differences, both cities are producing political content that is sufficient to support higher levels of political participation than the nation at large.

In sum, as hoped from the outset of this project, the findings here present a modest but significant contribution to the understanding of the availability of political content in the local news media, and how that content varies across media and locale. In addition, this project offers useful evidence in the building of theoretical models for understanding the role of the news media generally, and local news in particular, in the creation of political meaning and political behavior. And finally, I have answered the question in the title, "what's in the news?" for the two cities under study here, Duluth, Minnesota and Green Bay, Wisconsin.

Appendix

Coding Rules

The following coding rules were developed in the Duluth pilot study, and revised after during the analysis of the Duluth case.

SIZE: Stories were coded by short, medium and long in order to compare across media. Newspaper stories were coded as short for 5 column inches or fewer,[1] medium for 10 column inches or fewer, and long for more than 10 column inches. Television stories were coded as short for 30 seconds or less, medium for 1 minute or less, and long for more than 1 minute. These divisions were arrived at empirically by watching and reading several days of news and determining what the cutting points seemed to be between news briefs, regular-sized stories, and feature-type stories.

POLITICAL: Stories were coded 0 for non-political and 1 for political. This was a difficult category to code. Stories about decisions being made or already made at any level of government, programs funded by any level of government where a controversy was discussed, any stories about current government officials, and stories about past government officials that mention political events were coded as political. A key decision was made not to code stories about the Columbia explosion as political unless those stories discussed NASA policy or funding (many of the stories were about local grade school students' reactions, the families of the astronauts, etc) and not to code reports of reservists being called to active duty as political unless the story explicitly discussed military policy or the potential for war with Iraq (most of these stories were human interest stories about parents leaving their children, etc).

LOCATION: Stories were coded for location if they were coded as political. Stories were coded 1 for local, 2 for state, 3 for national and 4 for world. Where a story occurred at more than one level, it was coded for the lowest level. For example, a story about local protests of the potential war on Iraq was coded as 1 for local. Stories about localities outside the city being studied were coded either as state if they were within the state, or as national/international if in another state.

MOBILIZE: All stories were coded with either a 0 for no mobilizing information, or a 1 for having mobilizing information. Mobilizing information includes such information as the time and location of local meetings, addresses and/or phone numbers to contact government officials about upcoming decisions.

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[1] Based on standard 1 ¾" columns. Adjustments were made for other column widths. Did not account for different sized font.

Mobilizing information was also coded for other stories, which mainly included civic stories such as the time and location of benefits. In the paper, analyses as noted either include all stories with mobilizing information, which would include civic stories, or only political or local political stories with mobilizing information.

SOURCES: Sources were coded if information was directly attributed to a person, group or document. If sources were cited as more than one thing (for example, mayor and member of a group) they were coded for the first identity cited. Names mentioned but not attributed any information were not coded as sources. In this paper, only the first five sources in any story were analyzed, due to the very small number of stories that had more than five sources. Below is a list of the codes used for sources.

New Source Codes—Recoded from Originals

The original source codes are listed below. The new source codes were derived by combining categories in the original analysis for ease of presentation and to increase the N in some categories for statistical comparison.

101=official sources: combination of—gov't expert (1), law enforcement/fire(2), judicial/legal (3), military (12)

102=alternative source: combination of—think tank (4), academic (5), interest group/non-profit (7), union (21), lobbyist (22)

103=business: combination of—industry group (6), corporate officials/business owners (17)

104=citizens: citizens(10)

105=educators: educators (24)

106=foreign official: combination of—foreign official (8), international govt body (9)

107=polls, documents, and other media: combination of—polls (14), documents (15), other media (18)

108=other experts: combination of—medical/generic/other (13,16)

109=celebrities: celebrities (11)

110=victims and criminals: combination of victims (23) and criminals (20)

Original Source Codes and their Explanations

1= gov't expert

Any government official, including elected and appointed, including bureaucratic agencies. Not including law enforcement/fire/judges. Including city attorneys, attorneys general, etc.

2=law enforcement/fire

Police, police chief, sheriffs, FBI agents, firefighters

3=judicial/legal

Judges, attorneys or lawyers not identified otherwise (for example, union attorney= union, non-profit attorney= non-profit)

4=think tank

Identified as think tank or citing the name of a think tank as source of information within the story

5=academic

Identified with a University or University research project

6=industry group

Interest group identified as representing an industry

7=interest group/non-profit

Citizens interest groups and non-profit organizations

8=foreign official

Leader of a foreign nation or group of people. Included Bin Ladin here.

9=international government body

International governing bodies such as United Nations, International Criminal Court, World Trade Organization, etc.

10=citizen

Includes students, parents, people not identified with groups. "Man on the street" type references

11=celebrity

Includes actors, musicians, producers

12=military

Includes all officials up to four star generals—four star generals and above identified as government sources. Includes enlisted and officers

13=medical

Medical people not affiliated with a state agency—those affiliated with a state agency included in gov't expert

14=polls

Polls or surveys

15=documents

Any type of document referenced, including laws, criminal complaints, reports. Not including polls, surveys, or other media outlets

16=generic/other experts or officials

Any type of expert or official that does not fit into other categories, including generically cited "experts" and "officials. Includes un-affiliated scientists and engineers, or those whose affiliation is not mentioned

17=corporate officials/business owners

Corporate executives, corporate spokespeople, business owners

18=other media outlets

Any other media outlet cited, including foreign press and websites

19=other

Those not fitting into other categories

20=accused criminal

Cited as accused criminal, convicted criminal, etc

21=union

Union officials, union attorneys, union members being cited as union

22=lobbyist

Lobbyists not affiliated with an interest group

23=victim

Victims of crimes, parents or relatives of victims

24=educator

Teachers, principals and school administrators. School board officials and up are cited as gov't officials

Inter-Coder Reliability

Forty stories—twenty each from newspaper and television—were randomly selected using the random sample function in SPSS and re-coded for by the author for inter-coder reliability five months after the initial coding of the Duluth case. The categories of size, political, mobilize, and the first five sources were all re-coded. The 20 newspaper recodes yielded a total of 123 data points; of these, 106 were coded the same and 17 were different, for an inter-coder reliability rate of .861. Looking at the specific categories, 8 discrepancies were on size, 2 on political, 1 on mobilize, and 6 on source use. The 20 television stories recoded yielded 85 data points, of which 79 were the same and 6 were different, for an inter-coder reliability rate of .932. Looking at the specific categories, 2 discrepancies were on political, 3 on source use, and 1 on mobilize. On size, television stories had the benefit of a VCR counter.

Forty stories—again twenty each from newspaper and television, with 10 each from the two cases of Duluth and Green Bay—were randomly selected by the author using the SPSS random sample function and re-coded by an additional coder, Robert Robinison, for inter-coder reliability in June 2004. Using the coding appendix here, the 20 newspaper stories yielded a total of 136 data points; of these, 113 were coded the same and 23 were coded differently, for an inter-coder reliability rate of .831. Breaking them down by category, 9 discrepancies were on size, 7 on political and 7 on source use. The 20 television news stories yielded 72 data points, of which, 63 were coded the same, for an inter-coder reliability rate of .887. Breaking them down by category, 4 discrepancies were on political and 5 on source use.

These are very high inter-coder reliability rates, but it is also clear that the main coding problem was, somewhat surprisingly, on coding the length of newspaper stories, which accounts for the slightly lower reliability rate on newspapers as opposed to television content. For that reason, length measures were used only when absolutely necessary for comparison purposes in the study.

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