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Existing for the good the community has been an established claim to legitimacy for the English regional press since the nineteenth century. Expressed varying as a localised version of the fourth estate or 'parish pump patriotism' (Franklin and Murphy 1991: 56), this paper understands this notion as a discursive position which underwrites claims by the local newspaper to act as a watchdog on behalf of those readers it seeks to serve. As such it serves an ideological function and justifies the normative practices of the industry. However, interviews with newspaper workers suggest that while the good of the community remains a key professional value, increasingly they feel compromised in their ability to uphold it due to the economic environment in which they are operating. It concludes with the proposition that the political economy of the local newspaper needs to invest in real terms in the good of the community if its normative function is to be retained.

Key words: provincial press, local newspaper, watchdog, good of the community, journalism, news.

Introduction.

> We're totally embedded in the psyche of [here]. Anything that goes on, they expect to be in the paper, whether it's a court case, whether it's a cheque presentation or a dog show – the tiniest to the biggest thing, they expect to see in the paper. It's easy to forget those things are still as important to people. We do all of those, golden weddings, five generations of the same family, we do all that. (Deputy editor of a weekly newspaper 1IWDE).[i]

The orthodox view of a local newspaper is that of a title which covers the detail of local life, serving up a diet of parochial news and births, marriages and deaths announcements – with the odd grassroots controversy thrown in for good measure. It is the type of journalism immortalised in Richard Stott's (2002) account of his time with the *Bucks Herald* in the 1960s, covering courts and councils and writing obituaries of local luminaries. Fifty years on, and the contemporary quote above from the deputy editor of an established weekly paid-for title continues this conception of the role of the local paper as an essential part of the community it seeks to serve. This notion is, therefore, an established concept for those working in the local and regional newspaper industry; it functions as a normative organising principle for local news practice, dictating routines and content, such as the obligation to cover local government, and is embedded into the traditional shape of training for the industry which emphasises the knowledge necessary to fulfil those functions.

This position is articulated in debates around the function and future of the local newspaper. Lord Justice Leveson paid tribute to the regional newspaper, when ruling on statutory regulation of the press, stating that their 'contribution to local life is truly without parallel….their demise would be a huge setback for communities (where they report on local politics, occurrences in the local courts, local events, local sports and the like) and would be a real loss for our democracy' (House of Commons, 2012: 6-7). More recently, when the British government opened a consultation on tax rebates for local newspaper companies, it reprised this position: 'local newspapers have been a central part of civic life for communities across England for more than 150 years.

They are an important source of information for local communities and a vital part of a healthy democracy' (DCMS, 2015: 4).

The good of the community is understood as a localised version of the fourth estate; those working within the industry understand their role as that of a watchdog that holds elites to account. It has traction with employees and gives social value to their efforts. This value is integral to the identity of those who work in these titles. In the course of interviews carried out for this study, a reporter justified his title but saying it was 'here to serve the community, I very much believe that' (Interviewee 3IDDCR). Similarly, the deputy editor of an independent weekly title said, 'we reflect everything that goes on [here]. We're such a part of life that people expect everything they do to be in the [paper]'(Interviewee 1IWDE). Serving the good of the community functions as a justificatory ideology for local news practice; it is actualised in the work routines and day-to-day experience of those working in local newspapers while externally it brings recognition.

This study understands the good of the community a discursive position, which justifies a range of communicative actions, negotiated between journalist, the public and commercially viable business model (Conboy, 2004). Therefore, just as news practice and work routines in the local newspaper industry are open to change and negotiation, for instance in response to technological innovation or a competitive landscape, so this concept is fluid and is also open to change in response to those shifts. Taking this theoretical perspective enables us to 'see the occupational ideology of journalism at work' (Deuze, 2005: 458) and so leads to a consideration of the impact of that conflict on news workers in the provincial press.

Investigating the good of the community as an ideological instrument.

Hampton (2004) argues that the notion of the press as a fourth estate gains ascendency with a particular form of commercial structure for the news industry in the second half of the 19th century. The regional press refined this position in a

particular way and increasingly shifted away from politicized content, to a content which promotes a 'civic consciousness' (O'Reilly, 2012: 1). Taylor (2006) evidenced the way in which the *Cambridge Evening News* used the interests of a constructed community to inform its news values in the 1890s;[ii] this process was aligned to a period of commercialization for the regional newspaper known as New Journalism.[iii] As they developed into mass-market products, provincial newspapers began to adopt this position, which was embedded as the 20th century progresses. These themes are codified in training – including that of the National Council for the Training of Journalists, which was created to accredit entry into the newspaper industry in 1951. The emphasis remains on the reporting of courts, councils and public bodies (NCTJ.com, 2015). This aligns with the knowledge required of a reporter working on titles which value these sources. In this way the ideology of the journalist as a local watchdog is perpetuated by the work routines of news workers.

Research into the provincial press has sought to analyze the significance of the good of the community. Cox and Morgan identify the 'good of the town' (1973:108) as an important but ill-defined – value for titles on Merseyside which 'at best …. involved the attempt to foster community consciousness.' (ibid). Ian Jackson understood the good of the community as aligned with a set of practices by which a local paper could 'project itself as a community conscience, idealist, standard bearer of local pride and recorder' (1971: 273). The increased dominance of single titles over monopolistic circulation which dominated the second half of the 20th century, meant readers saw titles as 'theirs' and 'the establishment', which accorded papers their watchdog mandate (ibid: 274). It also influenced content priorities, including coverage of institutions, crime and court hearings, exposure of disorder, good 'citizenship' and landmarks in the lives of local people.[iv] Franklin and Murphy argued that the embodiment of the community was its institutional representations – so that councils, MPs, court and emergency services were, and still are, prominent sources for newspapers (1991: 93). Until recent years many newspapers also occupied landmark buildings in urban areas which signified their existence as an institution among those others. Even covering bad news – termed 'disorder' news by Jackson (1971: 84) – contributed by promoting the work of police and courts.

More recent research has reframed the debate to consider how the move to local news online has led to a lack of engagement, which in turn, impacts on an informed citizenry (Wadbring and Bergstrom, 2015). However, the notion of this 'civic impact' of journalism has itself been criticised for its imprecision and lack of empirical basis (Simons et al, 2016). In the UK in particular this community role is understood to be increasingly taken up by the 'hyperlocal' community, which is leading a 'grass-roots renaissance' in local reporting (*Pressgazette* 2016a).

This study therefore sets out to investigate the way in which serving the good of the community is operating in the local newspaper industry in the wake of the disruption to the business model by the 2008 recession and digital technology. A series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with employees in local weekly and daily newspapers in England. The sample was shaped according to the pattern of contemporary newspaper ownership in the UK. It includes titles owned by Newsquest and Trinity Mirror and as two independently-owned newspapers, one daily and one weekly. Changes to the organization of, and staffing levels in, newsrooms associated with these major groups have been well-documented and particularly so since the recession has accelerated the process of cost-cutting in the face of revenue decline. In 2008-9 the NUJ reported more than 1,500 jobs losses across the sector and documented a reduction in the number of journalists at the Trinity Mirror Birmingham production centre from 90 to 40 (House of Commons HC43-II, 2009: 152). These cuts were followed by a restructuring of newsrooms along working practices which would accord with 'web first' principles, including Trinity Mirror's 'newsroom 3.1'(Trinity Mirror plc 25.2.14). Newsquest has followed this trajectory and centralised its subediting operations into remote hubs which serve a number of titles, including those included in this study. At the time of the interviews, one of the daily group-owned titles was going through a process to make 16 production staff redundant. Staff had the choice of leaving or relocating to a remote hub with a cut in wages because the use of pre-determined templates had de-skilled their job (Interviewee 6GDWS). These cuts compare with the staffing levels at the independent weekly title included in this study, which have remained the same for the past 30 years.

This period has also seen a restructuring in the audience for these titles. For the largest title included here the print circulation has fallen from just over 113,000 in 2011 to 62,300 in 2016; another has experienced a decline from 19,000 to 11,100 in the same period. The independent weekly had experienced a decline from 34,200 to 26,800, according to audited circulation figures. At the same time though the titles have been building audited web-based audiences with the two daily titles recording 170,000 and 30,200 unique browsers per day respectively in 2016.

The titles are largely focused in the Midlands of England. This design was intended to mitigate against regional variations in practices and also to ease access to newsrooms by capitalizing on the personal contacts built up by the author during the course of her own career in provincial news rooms. This familiarity facilitated a candid engagement with newspaper staff. The independent weekly was the exception this because of the relative scarcity of these types of newspapers. However, one of the hyper-local blogging sites included was drawn from the same area to enable comparisons.

Both editorial and commercial workers were included where possible, although it was not possible to access all types of staff at all types of newspapers, largely in part to the differential working practices adopted at the centrally-owned newspapers which mean commercial staff are often remote from editorial offices. Only one newspaper (the independent daily) arranged for commercial staff to make a special journey to be interviewed as part of the study. The aim was to collect data which tests the concept of serving the good of the community not only against the idealistic value identified as significant to editorial workers, but also in relation to the way in which other newspaper employees give value to their working lives. In addition, it can shed light on the ways in which the concept has a functional value for the working practices within an organization. By extending beyond editorial departments, this approach offers an addition to the existing research in this area.

The intention was to explore: firstly, if these workers valued on the idea that they serve the good of the community, secondly, their interpretation of that concept, and thirdly, the extent to which they understood their daily work routines as supporting it. The interview was selected as research method because of its ability to yield data which is not available via other sources, such as annual reports or the trade press or

written biographies – which can be highly partisan and, in the case of journalists, often heroise conduct. The use of face-to-face interviews enabled data to be collected from those working on the frontline of the provincial press. Each discussion centered on a schedule of questions which sought to investigate: the perceived role of the titles, the perceived community it sought to service, the impact of resources on the individual's ability to fulfill this role, and the impact of digital developments on each of these concerns. Interviews were recorded and transcribed; the results have been reported anonymously, as per the terms of the interviews agreed with participants. The anonymised schedule which identifies participants against newspaper type is included at appendix 1.

The sample of interviewees was constructed to test the operation of the value of serving the good of the community across newspaper departments in order to elucidate the way in which it influences the organization of titles – for instance via staffing levels and work routines – and therefore its impact on the lived experience of participants and their consequent understanding of their professional context. Interviews were carried out within the workplace and with the relevant permission of each company and staff member. Two hyper-local bloggers were also included in the study in an attempt to see if this ideological value had relevance to those associated with this new form of journalism platform given its increasing relevance to the pattern of local news coverage.

The ideological challenge of existing for the good of the community.

These interviews suggest that workers in the regional news industry attach a great significance to the concept of community and their relationship with it. For editorial staff in particular, the idea of providing a particular form of information to a particular set of people was overwhelming; thus, these workers see their role as unique and vital. It is notable that all of the editorial staff interviewed in the course of this study had undertaken the NCTJ training, which, as explained above, codifies this value. This view was strongly expressed by the deputy chief reporter on an independent

daily paper who had been with the title for just two years.

> Our newspaper is to here to serve the community; I very much believe that - especially with the lack of alternatives in this area. We give people a voice and we scrutinise, the council, the hospital. I think we have a vital role….We tend to have all the important things covered. (Interviewee 3IDDCR)

The managing director of the independent weekly was unequivocal. 'We account to the community in various ways. I am very keen on the concept that we serve the community' (Interviewee 1IWCE). The circulation manager of the independent daily described the role of the paper as being 'to serve the local community, to make sure readers are up to date on local events and issues, campaigns'.

In addition to the formulation of this relationship as a 'watchdog', the role of information provider and a publication of record also resonated with those interviewed. 'It's definitely to communicate what's going on and what the local issues are, what's important to people locally and it may not be what's important to people who don't live in the local area,' was how one weekly reporter put it (Interviewee 6GDWSR). The ability to be at events and provide coverage was considered to be significant. The deputy chief reporter of the independent daily described how often his title was the only one represented council meetings.

One head of content remarked, our role is 'to keep local people informed about what's happening locally and to reflect both events that are happening in their area and also opinions.' (Interviewee 6GDWHC). A subeditor at the same title described it as 'a paper of record' and was proud that high paginations suggested a good service to the reader (Interviewee 6GDWS). The head of circulation for the independent daily said the USP was 'local, local, local' (Interviewee 3IDCM). The deputy editor of the weekly independent title described it as 'the establishment' – which gave meaning to events within the community by recording them.

> One of my great indicators for the paper which I think shows its importance to the community here is our births, marriages and deaths column. It's a massive indicator, I think, that if it's happened, if you've been born, if you've died, if you've married, it's got to be in the [paper]. (Interviewee 1IWE)

Thus we see the way in which the notion of community begins to align with commercial benefit. As the 'establishment' the title attracts a high number of classified adverts announcing landmark events in the lives of their readers, which means a substantial income stream. This alignment underpins the critical stance which positions community benefit as an organisational principle and promotes the success of the newspaper as a business.

The interviewees also revealed how the idea of community was aligned to the circulation area of the title. The independent weekly claimed the highest penetration (94 per cent) of those titles interviewed. Its staff also articulated the most holistic idea of community, seeing it as inclusive of everyone within their circulation area. They also articulated the significance of the community to their business model and saw the health of both as inextricably linked. Its business structure – which is independent and local – was seen as key to the ability to act in a way which promotes this strategy. As such, it invests both directly and indirectly in the community with projects such as sponsorship or donations; seen as equally significant is the ability to take business decisions which align with the interests of the community. This includes a conscious move to require staff to live locally and, therefore, a conscious effort to maintain staffing levels because to do otherwise would impact directly on that community.

> It's a bit of a win-win situation. The more we invest in the community, the healthier it might become. How you judge that may be up for discussion, but, therefore, the more money we make because we're serving a healthy community. (Interviewee 1IWCE)

For the commercial arm of the organization, acting in a way which sustains the community preserves the 'integrity' of the business (Interviewee 1IWAD). Notably the title has four photographers – at a time when some regional papers are making theirs redundant in a process described as a 'cull' (pressgazette.co.uk: 2015a). Staff are also supported in taking up roles in the community, such as serving on local councils, by being given time off to do so. For staff at other titles though, the comprehension of the business strategy has fractured their notion of community Commercial staff at the independent daily title spoke of multiple communities; they have a clearly identified core community which equates with their target market.

> Our core market is people who were born and bread within their local communities and that tends to be in the more affluent areas rather than the city centres. You've got a lot of ethnic diversity that has no allegiance to the community or town so what's the appeal of the local paper to them? (Interviewee 3IDCM).

The strongest community was therefore identified in the areas of most stable population.

> We've got a lot of communities, because we cover a large patch. We have lots of parochial areas, that is where the local newspaper comes in. Cities care less about what their neighbours are doing. (Interviewee 3IDDE).

At a group-publishing centre, one subeditor articulated the company's 'core area strategy' as one which geared editorial content around certain advertising demographics (Interviewee 5GDWS). He described serving the community as the 'ideal' but said, 'these days the role of the newspaper is to make money' (ibid). Even direct involvement with the community via sponsorship of sport was rationalised in functional terms for its ability to generate content – and readers. 'My community is different from the news community,' said a features sub editor at the same centre. 'It's like a Venn diagram, isn't it?'

At a second centre this attitude has resulted in an articulation of the community as either the 'business community', identified as those which directly contribute to revenue, for instance by advertising, or the 'reader'. There is increased co-operation between commercial and editorial departments and a compromise in the independence of editorial. The deputy head of content admitted that the advertisers would sometimes be given preferential treatment in editorial columns, saying 'a lot of the features stuff that we do sometimes is a little bit more blurred about how commercial it is' (Interviewee 6GDWHC).

This position conflicts with the value placed on independence by news workers – who expressed their need to be able to report bad news, such as criticising a major

employer, as well as good. 'There's a line and I'm the one who has to decide where that line is,' said one editor (Interviewee 5GWGE). Another said, 'exposing wrong doing could have a big commercial impact on your business…but in terms of free speech, which the paper is based on, it's absolutely right that we're…raising those issues' (Interviewee 6GWGE). And it was this position which another editor described as being most compromised by the fall in revenues – which he said had halved at his publishing centre since 2008.

> We don't do as much local government as we used to, we don't do as much of anything as we used to. We do everything we can flat out the best we can….Editorial here comprises 55 per cent of our total budget and we've worked incredibly hard and fought a really quite protracted rear-guard action to protect what we've got. I don't think we've got enough people; we're flat out. (Interviewee 5GDWGE).

Effect of digital on the good of the community

Digital platforms have impacted not only on incomes, but also on the ontology of the local news outlet. Numbers of 'associated websites' (Newspaper Society 2014) now outstrip printed titles for the industry; similarly, the fall in printed circulations is ameliorated by the rise in digital readers which grew by more than 30 per cent year-on-year to the first half of 2015 (Pressgazette.co.uk, 2015b). At the same time, while titles may not be as profitable as they were pre-2008, when a profit margin of 25-30 per cent was typical for the big local newspaper groups (Franklin, 2006: 8), local newspaper groups continue to make money – with digital revenues growing at a higher percentage than print revenues are falling (Themediabriefing.com, 16.4.15).

Robinson has termed the changes wrought by digital as a 'revolution of epic proportions' (2014:114), which has redefined the local news outlet and the relationship between outlet and community. For her, proximity is still a prized value – although increasingly that is not physical proximity, but can be thought of a version of digital connectedness. For Reader and Hatcher, it is increasingly the study of connectedness, which marks out the study of the relationships between journalists and

the communities they serve (2012:5). This study adds to the evidence that news providers are using digital technology in a way which impacts on the day-to-day working routines of those producing local titles. Not least among these is the requirement for editorial staff in particular to produce content across multiple platforms and promote it and the product via social media – and to tackle new tasks like moderating reader comments. For editorial staff the web is seen as having a dramatic effect on working patterns; this is visible in relation to shifts in deadlines related to news.

> If you had an RTA [road traffic accident] in the old days you would expect to open the newspaper and find out about it. Now you would expect to click on the website and find out about it immediately. (Interviewee 1IWDE)

Another worker at one of the group titles described his input as more haphazard than purposeful, echoing documented descriptions of how websites have resulted in additional workloads without identified resources.

> Nobody really gives a monkey's about the weekly websites. I do what I can; on a Tuesday afternoon I might put up features and tinker around. (Interviewee 5GDWS)

For the weekly paper which would not normally run weekend shifts, it means a changed pattern of working: 'I hate moderating comments. Every weekend somebody's got to do it, so it means you never get any time off,' said Interviewee 1IWDE. At the same time, digital sources have resulted in fewer staff at the independent daily; 'The [UGC section] does fill our pages, so we've got less photographers' (Interviewee 3IDDE). Similarly, the group sports editor described how remote working had impacted on his time off.

> Two weeks ago on a Saturday night there was a bit of a rumpus, the [football club] chairman had claimed the manager had resigned that day and later that night released a statement saying he hadn't and the amount of traffic we got that night between half past nine and midnight on a Saturday just smashed all records. I did that from home; I can put stuff on remotely at home. I'd been given a tip off and I was emailed that so we knew it was coming. (Interviewee 5GDWSE)

The editor of the independent weekly described the impact on the skills required of reporters.

> You're constantly having to ask people to work a bit harder, a bit differently. They've taken to tweeting from council meetings, putting stuff on the website if they've done the calls at the weekend, whereas they used to write it down and wait until Monday to write it up. Now they've got to get it on the website and they've learned how to do it themselves. (Interviewee 1IWE)

The pressure of this constant was echoed by the bloggers, who recognised that they had to limit their input into their sites in order to preserve some semblance of work-life balance. This issue of sustainability has resulted in both deliberately curtailing the time spent on news production.

> We don't go out so much now and we feel that we are becoming a bit like regional news is criticised for 'not at things' but it's so engrossing during working hours. (Interviewee 7IBB)

This wish to protect personal time is echoed by the other blogger.

> There's quite a community of web people around [place] who seem willing to give up hours to do stuff; it's very civic-minded and I've always resisted that. I'm not particularly proactive. It probably takes a bit more energy than I've got. (Interviewee 2IBB)

Usher has transformed work place as the 'post-industrial' newsrooms (2014: 4). Physically, these newsrooms are often smaller and out-of-town and institutional landmark buildings may be sold off and demolished. Technologically, titles can be centralised and, therefore, removed from the communities they seek to serve. At the extreme is Newsquest's centralised subbing hub in Newport (holdthefrontpage.co.uk, 5.3.14). The result of this process was described by the advertising director of an independent weekly title who said 'newspapers cull certain things to try to produce something on a much more streamlined basis, but to the point where it's lost its local identity' (Interviewee 1IWCD). Journalists are, therefore, less likely to be locally-based and the 'serious consequence here is the loss of the routine contacts with the local community in which the paper circulates' (Franklin, 2006a: xxi).

This process of centralization and removal contributes to the notion of a fractured community as editorial workers amend their 'justificatory ideologies' (Elliott, 1978: 182) in an attempt to preserve them – and so the value they accord their work. For the subeditor at one of the group titles the claim to local connection – through for instance place of residence, or upbringing – were significant to the ability of the organization to weather the stresses wrought by dislocation (Interviewee 6GDWS). Additionally, both editorial and commercial news workers acknowledged the impact of location on the conception of a 'core' audience. For the independent daily this has heralded a shift from an established policy of promoting personal contact with readers, embodied in their policy of direct delivery, which at its zenith saw more than 80 per cent of sales delivered to the homes of readers. Such was the link between paper and reader that titles would be taken to the favoured regional holiday resorts so that the sale could be maintained (Interviewee 3IDCM). Now though, the same staff see the community as too diverse to target in this way – 'if you try to be all things to all people you lose your focus', the same employee remarked. The distribution manager of another daily paper described how the centralization of her job meant she was increasingly remote from the community (Interviewee 6GDWNS).

For editorial staff, this distance is understood to have impacted on their ability to serve their communities. One centrally based subeditor is charged with producing a weekly title for a town 12 miles away without any dedicated reporting staff.

> When I came here there would have been seven district reporters who worked for the company ….and two or three more in head office and that has now gone. (Interviewee 5GDWS).

With the loss of specialist staff is the loss of specialist knowledge. 'You get trainees with some degree of local knowledge but not all of them have it,' remarked the same sub. At another title, the reporter uses her local connections as her authority to report on her 'patch' from a distance.

> It's harder not being based there and that's where knowing the area anyway gives you the upper hand. We work probably 15, 20 miles from [her patch] and we get out as often as we can but if you've got to do a round trip then it's a couple of hours in the car. (Interviewee 6GDWSR)

At the same time though her editor defended the title's position as a community champion. He said that 'to be a community newspaper you have to walk the walk' (Interviewee 6GDWGE) – although his newsroom physically removes reporters from their patch. This contrasted strongly with staff at the independent weekly, which places a great value on their physical proximity to their community. The chief executive described how the locally-owned title made decisions about from a local office and the emphasised the significance of that nearness to the 'adhesion of the business in the community' (Interviewee 1IWCE). Equally as important is the visibility of employees in the area.

> The fact that I go to a quiz night at the local pub in aid of some charity – there's 50 people there who say 'the editor of the [paper] came along, the paper cares'. That's really important to me. (Interviewee 1IWE).

This physical proximity enables news outlets to 'provide news and commentary on their audiences' place in a highly connected world (Hess and Waller, 2014: 130). However, in a digital age, the claim to place made by the newspaper masthead can also be redefined as 'geo-social', which simultaneously values the significance of place to reader and news worker, but recognises that it may be the result of interest or nostalgia, as well as physical nearness. In this instance place can define, but need not limit, the product because digital technology enables a non-functionalist link between geography and community. Instead, 'it serves like a magnetic force in digital space where individual are drawn towards certain nodes in information flows that resonate with 'their sense of place' (ibid: 126). This notion of creating communities of interest by using digital technology is evident via the interviews here. In one group publishing centre, social media was used to communicate with sports audiences – in a process described by Seth Lewis as 'reciprocity' which forges connections among community members (2014: 237).

> We have a Twitter account, we have one devoted solely to [football team]. We have Facebook and our website is developing quickly…. Everybody's an expert, everybody knows best, everybody's got an opinion – there's lots of interaction. (Interviewee 5GDWSE)

This fragmentation of the relationship between community and geographical location expressed by employees of the regional press appears to be the space where hyperlocal bloggers intervene in the news landscape (interviewee 7IBB). Despite the ability of their platforms to reach beyond geographically defined areas, both bloggers interviewed for this study articulated the significance of community to their activities, largely because they define themselves as connected with the hyperlocal blogging movement[v] and recognise the significance of community to that practice.

> It was all about raising my own social capital because from the outside it looks like you're giving back to the community, giving them your own time. I don't think I did it because I necessarily cared about [place] than anywhere else but I think doing hyperlocal has that semblance of being community-minded. (Interviewee 2IBB).

They also both express the view that their audience is overwhelmingly those connected to their geographic locale – despite the potential for technology to reach further.

> Our community is [residents] and ex-pats, people who used to live here. We get over 50,000 hits. It's 95 per cent UK traffic; the problem with IP addresses is that you can't really tell beyond that. All we know is that mention the name, people know us. (Interviewee 7IBB)

The bloggers interviewed for this study also see themselves as directly linked with the people within their locale via their web presence. Despite their virtual presence, they expressed a palpable physicality to their experience of producing online news. Blogger 2IBB articulated how stories literally 'appear before him' such as from notices on trees. Both described personal validation from, and interaction with, people in the community, such as Interviewee 21BB who said: 'I didn't realise the butcher knew me until he said "you've got to write a story about me, I've won this award".' The other blogger, though, described how recognition from the community had its downside.

> We get out a lot less than we used to, because when we're out people are always talking to us and it felt like an extension of work. (Interviewee 7IBB)

All those interviewed for this study exploit the interactive elements of their web platforms to build connections with their audience. However, their approach to this process differed in significant ways. Blogger 7IBB put interaction and comments at the core of his online strategy.

> Public commenting means you're not just a lone voice. We felt it was important to allow people anonymity because people within an organisation may well provide us with information we wouldn't have otherwise. We have house rules but as long as they're not breaking those house rules they can comment. (Interviewee 7IBB)

This differed starkly with the independent weekly newspaper circulating in the same area, which demanded all commentators be identified and comments moderated 'because they put on all sorts of stuff on there' (Interviewee 1IDWDE).

For both bloggers and formal titles, the audience are seen as content providers. Staff on the independent daily newspaper emphasised the role of the website in generating content for online and printed products; this extended to a user-generated content section of its website, special features in the paper made up of contributed content and using social media to source information from emergency services.

> The [UGC section] does fill our pages. For instance we asked people to send in bird pictures from their garden and you've got a page lead. (Interviewee 3IDDE)

The independent weekly has also started to use comments as source material for the newspaper.

> It seemed like common sense; you do it already via letters to the editor but that's quite archaic now. Six comments within 100 on a web story can easily be lost but if the editor thinks there is some value in them you can pull them out. (Interviewee 1IWE)

For the newspaper groups in particular, the connectedness of their websites was seen as building new and future readerships. Both daily and weekly titles are developing web-based products particularly targeted at younger audiences. But, hyperlocals and

newspaper companies alike dismissed the value of 'expat' web traffic because it did not lead to advertising revenue; instead the web-based products were seen as reaching different parts of the community within the defined geographical locale, who may be separated from those for the printed product. This was particularly true of special interest groups, such as followers of sport.

> You've got two chances now; buying the paper is still very much a generational thing. I think if you went out and asked a lot of [football team] supporters under 30 how often they've physically been out and bought the paper you would find very few said yes. However, if you asked whether they follow you on Facebook and Twitter they would say yes. (Interviewee 5GDWSE)

The independent weekly is also using digital platforms to grow its younger audience, a section of the community it 'struggles' to reach (Interviewee 1IWCE). Therefore, for the newspaper companies there is a strong perception that the web-based products serve a different purpose to the printed product; this is aligned to different editorial strategies for each. The content which makes it on the website or social media is that which is 'already out there' (Interviewee 1IWRW) or content which appeals to a different demographic from that which is seen as engaging with the printed product, or a teaser for the printed version.

> I make a point of tweeting something when I've spoken to someone interesting, or they've said something or there's an announcement which has come in. Obviously Twitter has to link back to the website, it's all about generating hits. (Interviewee 5GDWF)

This separation is the justification for harvesting content from one source for the other, such as using online comments in the printed product.

> People don't necessarily look at the website and also there's some proof that say you had a big fire for example, even if it's been covered on the website, it wouldn't stop people buying the paper the next day. People may want both and we may cover the content as well. (Interviewee 6GDWHC)

Conclusion: when work routines betray the good of the community.

This study has demonstrated that the ideological value of serving the good of the community can be at odds with the day-to-day working practices of those in the local news industry. Significantly, commercial pressures have resulted in the fracturing of the community identified by employees so that only certain populations are targeted. The community is recognized as those that advertise or 'the reader' of the product – rather than as all those living within a certain area. Practically this means the operation of the organization can be streamlined around a core area strategy as fewer staff deliver a product to fewer people. Production of these titles can then be centralized in bureaucratically organized newsrooms, as the commercial context reduces the good the community to a functionalist notion, employed by news teams organised to pursue profit.

> The market, in the form of the circulation area of the newspaper, is also identified with the community so that even if they are not definitionally identical, the two are at least in a mutually supportive relationship. And the role of the journalist is formulated precisely in functionalist terms; to provide a record of the community, to make people publicly accountable who should be; to participate in the system of social control; and to do this in the context of a set of relationships, with 'contacts' chosen by their roles in the institutions which they themselves and the newspaper identify as the defining structure of the community. (Franklin and Murphy, 1991: 59)

This impact of these shifts are demonstrated by the testimony of editorial staff. While the notion of existing for the good of the community is valued by all of those interviewed, the way in which it is understood and enacted differs in relation to the context in which they are working. In particular, the adherence of staff to this concept was strongest at the independent weekly title, –which had incorporated this value into its business model and, consequently, invested in it, for instance, by maintaining staff levels. This enables staff to maintain their perceived position as 'independent, which is seen as vital to their 'integrity' and ability to serve the community. The business model of this title has also embedded physical proximity so that title and community are simultaneously located in one space. They are also an active part of the community – living within and contributing to the community through forms of civic

service and social involvement. Staff at the independent weekly title experience their relationship with the community as absolute to the extent that they are 'embedded into the psyche' (Interviewee 1IWDE) of that community. However, even here the 'good of the community' is aligned with commercial benefit; the mutually-supportive benefit is 'virtuous' (Interviewee 1IWCE) because it sustains the business model of the title.

In other titles, where the dominant corporatized business model has resulted in an established model of cost cutting,[vi] staff have responded to the daily pressures of their working lives by redefining or stratifying their notion of the community they serve. Therefore, in one instance the community was clearly aligned with those who invested financially in the title by buying it; in another a key community was the business community which advertised. Editorial staff there faced the challenge of courting the latter without alienating the former.

This means that the ability of journalists to work in a way which accords with the value of the serving the good of the community can be at odds with the commercial context in which they work. At its least, this creates a tension between the way news workers in particular see themselves as journalists and their allegiance to their employers, who may be asking them to work in ways which contradict that self-conception; at its worst, this conflict undermines the status of those employees by reducing their news work to a set of practices which are divorced from their ideological justification. As noted, covering councils is seen as a 'fairly odd thing to do' (Interviewee 5GDWS), courts go uncovered because there is no one to do it (Interviewee 6GDWSR). The position of editorial independence is challenged by the need to secure a revenue stream so that advertisers are favoured in editorial columns and the line between advertising and editorial becomes 'blurred' (Interviewee 6GDWHC). Integrity, seen as key to building the relationship with the community (Interviewee 1IWC), is lost, and so, for those news workers, serving that community becomes an empty aspiration.

The evidence drawn from this research process, therefore, suggests that increasingly the extent to which a highly-commercialised local press, faced with the challenge of digital media, is able to fulfil the role of serving the good of the community is called

into question. This does not stop this concept forming, for local journalism, 'an essential part of its public legitimacy' (Conboy, 2004: 127), particularly in relation to the significance those interviewed here have accorded to the concept in terms of how they give value to their work. However, it does question the extent to which the industry as a whole can continue to call on it as a 'justificatory ideology' for a business model which appears to promote working practices which undermine the value.

Appendix 1. Anonymised interview key.

Title Number	Ownership Type	Frequency of publication	Interviewee Role	Code
1	Independent (I)	Weekly (W)	Editor	1IWE
			Deputy Editor	1IWDE
			Advertising director	1IWCD
			Reporter Web editor	1IWRW
			Circulation	1IWC
			Chief Executive	1IWCE
2	Independent	Blog (B)	Blogger	2IBB
3	Independent	Daily	Deputy Editor	3IDDE
			Circulation Manager	3IDCM
			Advertisement Manager	3IDAM
			Deputy Chief Reporter	3IDDCR
5	Group	Daily/Weekly	Group Editor	5GDWGE
			Sports Editor	5GDWSE
			Subeditor	5GDWS
			Feature Writer	5GDWF
6	Group	Daily/Weekly	Group Editor	6GDWGE

			Head of Content	6GDWHC
			Senior Reporter	6GDWSR
			Newspaper Sales	6GDWNS
			Subeditor	6GDWS
7	I	Blog	Blogger	7IBB

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Biography.

Dr Rachel Matthews is a Principal Lecturer in Journalism in the School of Media and Performing Arts at Coventry University. Her research focusses on the relationship between provincial journalism and the community. Her historic analysis of the political economy of the provincial press has charted the way in which the good of the community has become embodied as an ideological value which informs the working lives of those within the local and regional newspaper industry.

Endnotes.

[i] For interview key, see appendix 1

[ii] Working from Anderson's notion of community as 'imagined' (1991: 6-7), local papers construct their community in way which serves their business – for instance by defining it as being geographically concomitant with their circulation area.

[iii] For a detailed exploration of this process see Matthews, R (2014) The Emergence of the News Paradigm in the English Provincial Press, *Journal of Historical Pragmatics*, 15.2

[iv] Both Jackson and Cox and Morgan were researching against the backdrop of anxiety about increased concentration of ownership of newspapers by conglomerates. This dominant monopolistic business model curtails the ideological dominance of news in a newspaper and instead organises newsrooms along bureaucratic principles. The emphasis on reporting institutions is because the coverage of councils and courts is reliable content. However, financial pressures mean fewer staff, so that comprehensive coverage of these events is compromised, as is the ability of the title to function as a 'watchdog.

[v] Interviewee 7IBB classes himself as a 'small news organisation' rather than a one-man hyperlocal blogger