

Restoring community journalism in the digital age: A business model

ABSTRACT TOPIC: Evolving business models as an outcome of cross-innovation in media industries

Abstract

The traditional business model for community journalism crumbled when news went online, with few community news publications surviving the transition. The local touch that made community journalism so appealing to people in communities – coverage of local news, high school sports, marriages and events – has not been, and cannot be, replaced by the large chain papers that have bought many of the local newspapers and continue publishing them with mostly mass-produced non-local content. The local interaction is particularly valued in rural areas where rural journalism used to represent much of the interaction between neighbors, many of whom live somewhat remotely. Using the same relational appeal that has pulled many people to spend countless hours on social media, the community journalism business model offers a financially sustainable location-specific online social realm that can overlap with, or help form, relationships in person as well as online, to meet the need for community interaction and news.

This paper presents a cross-innovative business model for restoring community journalism as a self-sustaining, community-centered, interactive, advertising-sponsored online center for community life. The appeal of social interaction within the online community reflects the pleasant neighborhood feel of interacting with those around you, but to a level less personal than your friends on social media and more relaxed than on professional networking sites. The advertising portion of the financial sustenance of traditional newspapers can be restored through selling ads to local businesses and individuals, as well as larger advertisers, due to the frequent traffic possible with offering a free place for interaction based around community events and clubs, as well greater possibility for community interaction based around news and informational topics.

At this time when many are feeling isolated from community and longing for interaction with those around them after the COVID-19 seclusion, the community journalism business model is timely as a place where people can interact online with their neighbors, to post, friend and interact based on shared interests and community news events. The community journalism business model implements cross-innovation to redesign the local news website as an interactive place to talk with local friends and meet neighbors, more than just a place to find information.

Keywords: Community journalism, cross-innovation, business model