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Is There a Future Audience for Small Market Broadcast Television News?

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IS THERE A FUTURE AUDIENCE FOR SMALL MARKET
BROADCAST TELEVISION NEWS?

By

David W. Madsen

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
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IS THERE A FUTURE AUDIENCE FOR SMALL MARKET
BROADCAST TELEVISION NEWS?

David W. Madsen, M.A.

University of Nebraska, 2013

Adviser: Bernard J. McCoy

Local television stations, especially in smaller markets of 100,000 to 200,000 TV homes, are constantly looking for adults between the ages of 25- 54 to watch their TV newscasts. TV stations must nurture younger audiences (of adults 18-34) to grow into older, desired audiences of loyal TV news viewers. Because of technological innovations such as the Internet, Facebook and Twitter, younger audiences are spending less time watching local TV news.

Existing research on younger audiences has largely focused on news consumption in general (TV, radio, newspaper, Internet), used more of a national news focus, and was often conducted in large U.S. markets. This thesis asked 354 people, aged 18-34, about local TV news consumption in smaller, Midwest television markets. The survey also asked respondents what might encourage them to watch more local TV news.

Results indicate the younger audience for local TV news is shrinking, but there are positive signs for local TV stations hoping to increase the size of those young audiences for the future.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In February of 2012, Nielsen, the TV ratings company, released its *U.S. Digital Consumer Report*, in which the company introduced what it called “Generation C” -- Americans 18-34 years old. According to a Nielsen blog entry about that report:

Americans 18-34 are redefining media consumption with their unique embrace of all things digital. Their ownership and use of connected devices makes them incredibly unique consumers, representing both a challenge and opportunity for marketers and content providers alike (Nielsen).

Those content providers, such as local broadcast television stations, are finding many more challenges from this group of “incredibly unique consumers.” The Nielsen Cross-Platform Report from 2012 says this age group watches the least amount of television of all adult demographic groups studied, yet watches the most hours of video content on the Internet of all age groups reported (Nielsen, Cross-Platform Report).

Table 1: Weekly Time Spent in Minutes with variety of media

Weekly Time Spent in Hours: Minutes	– By Age Demographic for Entire US Population							
	K	T	A		A	A	A	P
	2-11	12-17	18-24	25-34	35-49	50-64	65+	2+
On Traditional TV°	24:09	22:14	25:34	29:55	34:16	42:16	47:13	33:43
Watching Timeshifted TV°	1:57	1:31	1:40	3:18	3:19	3:06	1:53	2:34
Using the Internet on a Computer*	0:32	1:25	3:53	5:57	6:10	5:16	2:36	4:03
Watching Video on Internet*	0:08	0:23	0:51	0:54	0:40	0:25	0:12	0:30
Mobile Subscribers Watching Video on a Mobile Phone^	NA	0:14	0:14	0:15	0:07	0:02	<0:01	0:08

Source: Nielsen Cross Platform Report 2012

Referring to that same Nielsen data, Brian Stelter of The New York Times wrote about the significant challenge it posed to traditional television viewing: “If the trends hold, the long-term implications for the media industry are huge, possibly causing billions of dollars in annual advertising spending to shift away from old-fashioned TV (Stelter).” In a 2012 interview with Jeffrey Brown on *PBS Newshour*, Tom Rosenstiel, the director of the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism, said “the growing role of YouTube and other video-sharing platforms poses yet another challenge for a media industry trying to find its footing in the digital era (Brown).”

This group of young adults, aged 18-34, and their consumption of television news are the focus of this thesis. More specifically, **is there a future audience for small market broadcast television news?** A 2012 Gallup poll reports the confidence of adult Americans in television news is at an all-time low, with only 21% saying they have “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in TV news. For a younger subset of 18-29 year olds, the results are only slightly better at 28% (Morales). Even so, recent surveys indicate local television remains today, as it has been for many years, America’s primary source for local news and information, with almost half of Americans saying they watch regularly (Pew Research Center) (Television Bureau of Advertising). As local TV stations have tried to appeal to a wider audience, they have expanded their offerings in online, mobile and social media, but “most have not yet generated a substantial audience (Potter, Matsa and Mitchell, 2012)” so its main business remains over-the-air, and that business is losing customers (Potter, Matsa and Mitchell, 2013).” This inability to attract an online audience is even more of a concern when research shows that as of February 2012, half of all mobile phones in the United States are smartphones and 63% of

Americans are using their smartphones or tablets to keep up with the news, but not necessarily going to traditional TV station websites (Nielsen, Cross-Platform Report) (Fidler). Brian Stelter of the New York Times:

I think what we're seeing is news organizations that used to have bigger audiences, seeing their audiences go in dozens of directions because of the Internet. It's the splintering effect of the Internet. And they're trying to reassemble those audiences, as best they can in different ways (Brown)

The Pew Research Center's annual report, *State of the News Media 2013*, has some especially dismal words for the future of local television news as it concerns the need to build audience for the traditional "core business" of the evening and late night news. The 2012 version of the *State of the News Media* report said that while 2011 had seen some small overall increases in audience for television news, most of that was attributed to specific news-worthy events such as unrest in Egypt and Syria. "The longer-term outlook is troubling," the authors state, "and these newscasts are battling a trend over which they have no control. If fewer people are watching broadcast TV of any sort at evening and late news times, local stations can't expect to see their audience grow ever larger (Potter, Matsa and Mitchell, 2012)."

The 2013 report, released in March of 2013, explained a reversal in the small gains from 2012 by saying local TV news lost audience in every key time slot, including those that gained the year before (Potter, Matsa and Mitchell, 2013). And it's even harder if you are expecting to grow an audience of younger viewers (18-24 years old) to be the new audience for television news, because they aren't usually watching television news (Meijer). The 2013 Pew survey says while all age groups saw a decline in the number of

people who are regular local television news viewers, the number of younger adults (under age 30) has dropped “precipitously,” from 42% in 2006 to just 28% in 2012 (see Table 2).

Table 2: Adults Who Regularly Watch Local News

Pew Research Center-State of the News Media 2013					
Percentage of Respondents Who Regularly Watch Local News					
	2006	2008	2010	2012	2006-2012 Change
Total	54	52	50	48	-6
By Age Group:					
18-29	42	36	31	28	-14
30-49	51	51	48	46	-5
50-64	60	60	61	57	-3
65+	65	63	64	63	-2

Source: Pew Research Center News Consumption Survey

Because similar declines in viewership are evident in all of broadcast TV, the Pew authors state “with fewer people watching broadcast TV in general, local stations have little hope of reversing the long term decline in audience for news in key time slots (Potter, Matsa and Mitchell, 2013).” Amy Mitchell, one of the authors of the Pew report summarized all of these challenges in a webcast describing the report:

2012 was a year of intensifying challenges for local news media, because people have more opportunities to access media in a variety of ways. Local TV is newly vulnerable, and the content people want from TV is transitory and replaceable—weather, traffic and sports—which they can now get on their mobile devices (Mitchell).

This paper will use the term small market television, defined by the author as those markets listed by Nielsen as having between 100,000-200,000 TV homes. Especially in those smaller markets, it is imperative that TV stations consider how they're going to attract the next generation of television news viewers. Many of the younger potential news consumers are not currently regular television news viewers (Mindich), and when they get news from other sources, it is not usually from local TV station websites, but rather from Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other such online sources. What can small market TV stations do to bring a new audience to the core business of the 6pm and 10pm newscast, or get them to other station news offerings such as websites or social media, while monetizing those online offerings to keep them in the business model? Simply put, **is there a future audience for small market broadcast television news?**

Chapter 2--Literature Review

The fact that young people aren't traditional news viewers is nothing new. In her 1985 study of the use of news media by college students, Dr. Lucy L. Henke was clear that an important step in becoming a news viewer was what she called "socialization to news media," that is, as students grow into their adult roles in society, especially during the college years, media consumption changes. But even 27 years ago in her study, well before the advent of the Internet or social media such as Facebook, she wrote "New, nontraditional news media abound. Therefore, as the younger generation of news consumers matures, they may not embrace traditional patterns of news media use. Anticipatory shifts in news consumption that correspond to life cycle changes might be expected to occur (Henke)." Henke's research question is as applicable today as it was then: "Do young adults who turn to the nontraditional news sources available to them differ from others in their perceptions of news sources, or in their levels of using other news sources (Henke)?"

Vincent and Basil reported in 1997 on a survey they conducted in 1990-1991 looking at college students' use of news media during and immediately after the Persian Gulf conflict. They, too, concluded that college students have a sort of socialization process that occurs as they grow older, making them want to access more news media. At the time, they reported college students watched a local newscast about 1.8 times per week, which was comparable to a previous study in 1973 that showed 1.9 times per week (Vincent and Basil).

A clear decline in the share of young adults who regularly watch television news was mentioned in a Barnhurst and Wartella study in 1998. Referring to previous studies,

the authors wrote that “the percentage of young citizens who view news regularly has shrunk by half since the 1960s (Barnhurst and Wartella).” That being said, they reported that a majority of their 129 college student respondents (60.5%) watched television news at least 4 to 5 days a week, and that a “commitment to watch regularly seems to come easy (Barnhurst and Wartella 290).” It should be noted that the Barnhurst-Wartella study is now 14 years old, and a more recent (2011) survey of young adults reported that 27% of respondents never or seldom watched TV news in a typical week (Zerba, Chan-Olmsted and Rim). A side issue presented by Barnhurst and Wartella was that for young people to be drawn into television news, news should become more entertaining. In fact, several respondents mentioned that they looked at television news more as a form of entertainment, which the authors conclude is one reason many young people are rejecting television news (Barnhurst and Wartella).

David Mindich’s 2005 book *Tuned Out: Why Americans Under 40 Don’t Follow the News*, looks at the issue of young people watching news with the idea that it is the responsibility of young people to be involved in our democracy, and therefore the future of the democracy depends on young people returning to television news:

...despite their disengagement with news, young people are as thoughtful and passionate and self-reflective as they have ever been, ready to interact with news if we just provide the right conditions for them to do so. This is very important to know. After all, there is no democracy without an informed citizenry, and the future of our democracy depends on young people tuning back in (Mindich).

Mindich continues “the evidence for the long-term decline in news interest is overwhelming...I am convinced that our democracy is in big, big trouble (Mindich 19).”

And Mindich says that we shouldn't assume that these young people are necessarily more informed because they say they are going to the Internet for information: "despite the widespread use of the Internet among young people, the current generation of 18-34-year olds appears to be no more informed now than 18-34-year olds were in 1990 (Mindich 19)." Being written in 2005, before the development of Facebook and before the invention and widespread acceptance of video-capable smartphones, Mindich had some prophetic thoughts about the Internet:

Everything you have read in this book up until now is complicated by the introduction of the most powerful new media force since televisions hit the shelves in the late 1940s. The Internet changes everything...it has substitutes for all the traditional news media and it has the full spectrum of information, from hard news to sports to music to child porn... Within a short time...Internet connections may very well become nearly as available as television (Mindich 70).

Most of Mindich's research was done on a national scale, making references to larger markets across the United States, while the research done for this paper was in smaller market in the Midwest. Nevertheless, in continuing his discussion about young people and local news, Mindich paints a bleak picture for local TV news:

...but local TV news, with its 90 percent crime and PR content, is useful only if we value the staccato reports of crimes and press conferences. The practices of local news outlets—the increase in advertorials and violence and the decrease in political reporting—may be some of the reasons why young people are less interested in the local news (Mindich 83).

In a 2006 study, two professors of journalism, Arvind Diddi and Robert LaRose, sought to explain young peoples' consumption of news by saying that "audiences select among many news sources to gratify their needs for information, entertainment, social interaction and escapism (Diddi and LaRose)." Those authors say, however, that with an ever increasing number of new choices, "the consumer lapses into habitual patterns of media consumption in order to conserve mental resources, rather than repeatedly engaging in active selection (Diddi and LaRose 195)." Diddi and LaRose question whether the Internet is displacing traditional media for news consumption, and they reinforce the idea from other researchers that news consumption patterns of a lifetime are formed around the time a student goes off to college, (Diddi and LaRose 196, 197). On the other hand, Irene Meijer reported in 2007 that the assumption that "young people more or less automatically develop a need for news and information once they move into adulthood" is no longer the case (Meijer).

Not surprisingly, changes in technology have certainly affected where young people get their news. The University of Maryland's School of Public Policy researched media use among young people in 2003 and again in 2006. In the earlier report, the conclusion was that young Americans apparently had no one preferred medium when looking for news and information, saying about one fourth of young people aged 15-25 use television, radio, or newspapers on a daily basis to obtain news (25.2%, 22.9% and 21.5%, respectively). That 2003 report said only 9.4% of young people use the Internet for news (Olander). From the 2006 research by the same organization, "while the Internet is an important source and more popular source for news and information, it still has not become the main source of information for any age group (Marcelo)." A 2007 survey of

college students' predictions of their future news media consumption found that they expected in five years to be getting less news and information from social networking sites and more from traditional media (Lewis). As the newest of those three mentioned surveys is now six years old, this current study will show how much things have changed since 2003 and if those 2007 predictions were accurate. A Television Bureau of Advertising 2012 comparison of media usage shows 18-34 year olds spending more time on the Internet than any other age subgroup (Television Bureau of Advertising), so research in this paper will determine if this age group continues to get more of their news and information from online sources, rather than traditional television news.

Chapter 3—Research Questions and Hypotheses

The research for this paper was completed using an online survey of adults between the ages of 18-34, divided into two separate age groups, 18-24 and 25-34. The purpose was to determine current and potential future viewing habits of that age group as they relate to local television news. In addition, an analysis was done of Nielsen TV ratings data in several small markets in an effort to confirm the author's hypothesis that there has been a decline in news viewing habits among young people in recent years.

Starting with the Nielsen TV ratings data analysis, one research question was developed:

(R1): Has there been a decline in local news viewing habits among people aged 18-34 in small television markets in the Midwest?

The results of that analysis would address this hypothesis:

(H1): Viewing of local television news in small television markets in the Midwest among adults aged 18-34 has decreased considerably in recent years.

For the online survey, the following additional seven research questions were used:

(R2): Where do people aged 18-24 or 25-34 go when they want local news (TV, radio, newspaper, Internet)?

(R3): How often do people aged 18-24 or 25-34 watch local news, if at all?

- (R4): Do people aged 18-24 or 25-34 spend more or less time with local news compared to a year ago?
- (R5): How much time would people aged 18-24 or 25-34 predict they might spend with local news in the next two years?
- (R6): If people aged 18-24 or 25-34 access Internet options for local news, what platforms are used (Website, Facebook, Twitter, Mobile App)?
- (R7): What reasons do people aged 18-24 or 25-34 give for why they DO or DO NOT watch local TV news?
- (R8): If people do not watch local TV news, what might encourage them to do so?

With answers to those questions, the author examines the following hypotheses:

- (H2): Young people aged 18-24 are less likely to watch local broadcast television news on a regular basis than the older subcategory of 25-34, either now or in the future.
- (H3): Young people aged 18-24 can offer advice to local television stations as to what stations might do to attract that younger audience.

Chapter 4—Methodology

There are two separate research sections for this study. First, an analysis of Nielsen Television ratings data would determine if there has been a decline in audience ratings for television news among people aged 18-34. As mentioned in the Introduction, national data from the Pew Research Center/Nielsen Research Company shows a definite reduction in audience 2006-2012 (Table 1). In addition, the researcher examined ratings data from three Midwest small market television markets: Sioux City, IA; Sioux Falls, SD; and Rapid City, SD. Data from the May ratings periods in those markets for the years 2005-2012 were reviewed (Appendices A, B, C). Going back to 2005 gives data prior to the launch of Facebook, which the author contends, along with other online services, may have adversely affected TV viewing among younger viewers. Data gathered from the 10pm newscasts in the three television markets looked at the demographic breakout from the Program Averages section of the Nielsen Ratings book for Ratings for Adults aged 18-34, Women aged 18-34 and Men aged 18-34.

A quantitative research study was designed to ascertain the local news habits of people between the ages of 18 and 34. The study was in the form of an online survey, (Appendix D) using the popular Survey Monkey online tool, available to respondents for a two week period in September 2012. Survey participants were asked questions about their current news consumption, why they do or don't watch TV news, what could TV stations do to entice them to be viewers, and how they think they might change their consumption in the future. Basic information such as age, gender and education were also collected from the respondents.

The original proposal was to survey college students from at least three different colleges located in the Midwest, hoping for a final tally of 400 participants. Permission was received to send survey requests to all students from Morningside College, a small, private liberal arts college in Sioux City, Iowa, while two others, Briar Cliff University in Sioux City and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, allowed the researcher somewhat more limited access by granting permission to send requests to students directed through someone already on campus, such as a teacher. Permission was denied from one other institution, Western Iowa Tech Community College, in Sioux City, Iowa.

At Morningside College, an email was sent to all students on the campus (approximately 1300) by the Associate Dean of Students, on behalf of the researcher, asking for student participation in the survey (Appendix E). A week later, a follow-up email was sent to all students reminding them of the availability of the survey if they had not already taken it. At the University of Nebraska, Prof. Bernard McCoy agreed to send the recruitment email to students in his classes. At Briar Cliff University, three professors sent the survey link to students in their classes. To assure enough respondents to the survey, the list of potential respondents was increased by distributing a link to the survey via the researcher's Facebook page, and then utilizing a snowball method of asking respondents to send the survey link to their friends. Because of this snowball distribution, the survey did reach enough respondents to generate a returned sample of 354 people, of which 49% reported completing four or more years of college, 36% had from one to three years of college education, and 15% had only a high school education.

For this study, the following operational definitions are used:

- Local News: news and information from a local geographic area, rather than from national news networks.
- Local Television Newscast: a newscast broadcast by a local TV station at 6pm, 9pm or 10pm.
- Small Market: Geographic areas with 100,000- 200,000 TV homes as determined by the Nielsen company
- Rating: Defined in a percentage as the number of people in a particular demographic watching a particular program at a particular time divided by the total potential audience of people in the demographic.

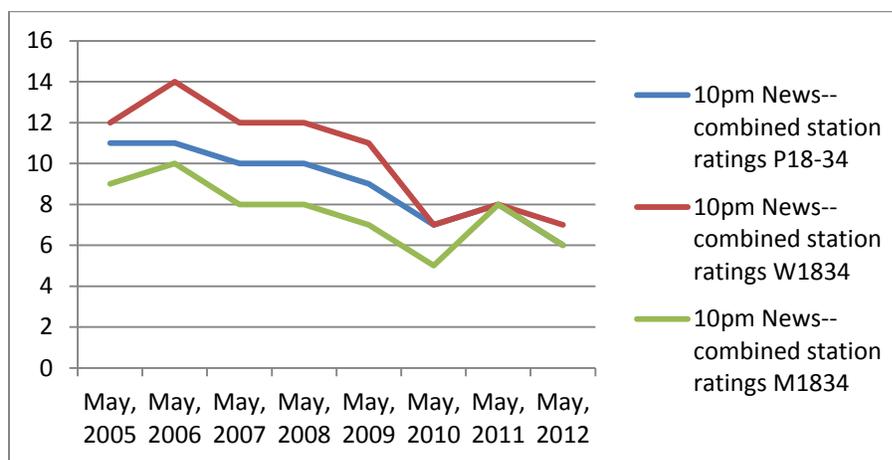
$$\frac{\text{People watching Program}}{\text{Total Potential Audience}} = \text{RATING}$$

Chapter 5—Results

The first question to be answered before proceeding further with this study was **(R1): Has there been a decline in local news viewing habits among people aged 18-34 in small television markets?** If the answer was no, then the rest of the study would be moot. Nielsen ratings for the 10pm time period were reviewed for three Midwest markets: Sioux City, Iowa; Sioux Falls, South Dakota; and Rapid City, South Dakota. Data was reviewed for the May ratings period from 2005-2012 in each of those markets. Tables representing the three markets are shown below, and although not a statistically significant sample, representative of all small market television stations, at least in these three Midwest markets, there has been a marked decrease in audience viewing levels in all three demographics examined: Persons 18-34 (P1834), Women 18-34 (W1834) and Men 18-34 (M1834).

For Sioux City (Table 3), P1834 saw a 45% drop in ratings from 2005 to 2012 in the 10pm time period, with a 42% decrease for W1834 and a loss of a third of the audience (33%) for M1834.

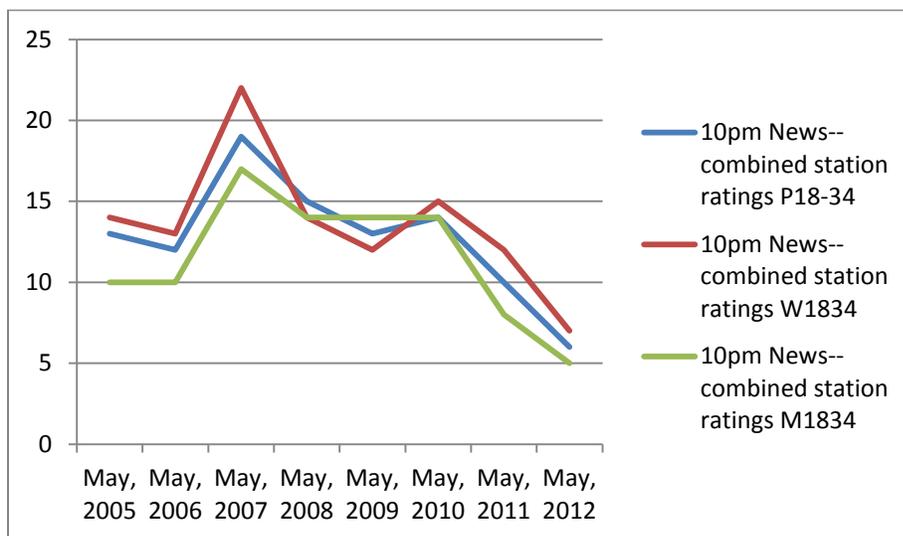
Table 3: 10pm News Ratings, Sioux City, Iowa



Source: Program Averages, Nielsen, May 2005-2012, Sioux City, Iowa

For Sioux Falls (Table 4), it is even a larger drop. P1834 lost 54% of its audience 2005-2012, and half of the W1834 (50%) and half of the M1834 (50%).

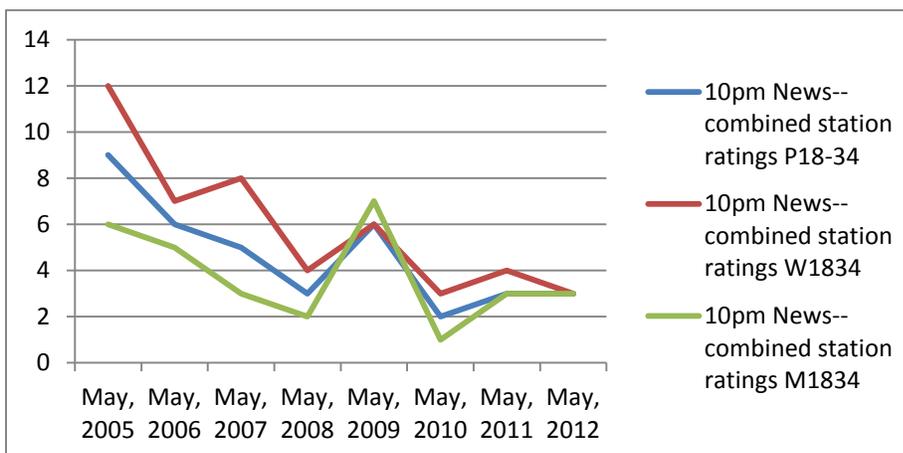
Table 4: 10pm News Ratings, Sioux Falls, South Dakota



Source: Program Averages, Nielsen, May 2005-2012, Sioux Falls, SD

Rapid City (Table 5) showed the most precipitous loss of audience: 67% for P1834, 75% for W1834 and again half (50%) of the audience for M1834.

Table 5: 10pm News Ratings, Rapid City, South Dakota



Source: Program Averages, Nielsen, May 2005-2012, Rapid City, SD

Combining the ratings results from these three markets seems to clearly support the first hypothesis: **(H1)-Viewing of local television news in small television markets among adults aged 18-34 has decreased considerably in recent years.**

Now turning to the quantitative research study, designed to ascertain the local news habits of people between the ages of 18 and 34.

Demographics:

As reported earlier, 354 people returned useable surveys for this report. Of that number, just under two-thirds (61%) were in the 18-24 year old subcategory which will be referred to throughout this paper as “younger adults”, and with 39% reporting in the 25-34 age range, called “older young adults” (Table 6). Self-reported educational levels included almost half (49%) with four or more years of college, slightly more than one-third (36%) were current college students with one-to-three years of college and a much smaller percentage, 15%, with only a high school diploma (Table 7). Respondents were 72% female, 28% male.

Table 6

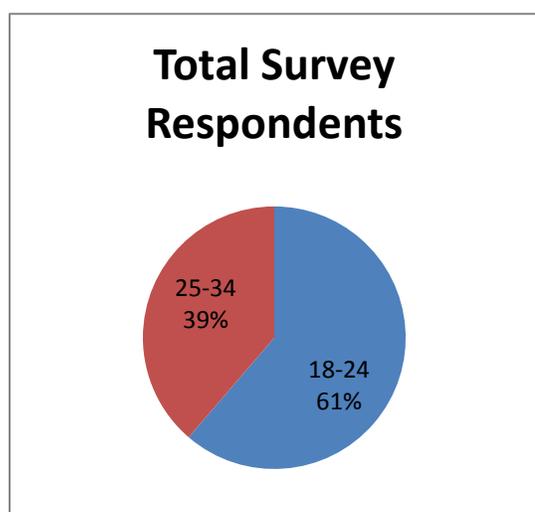
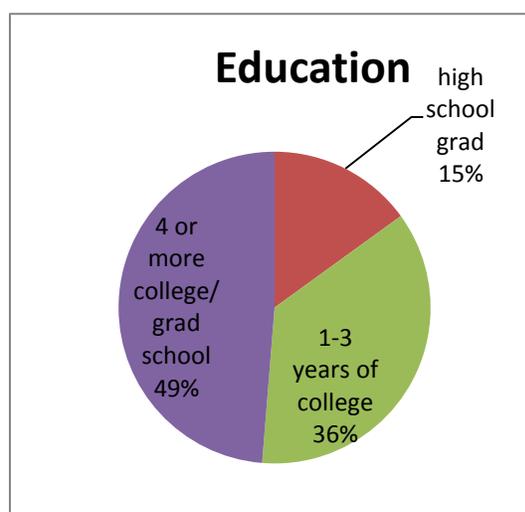


Table 7

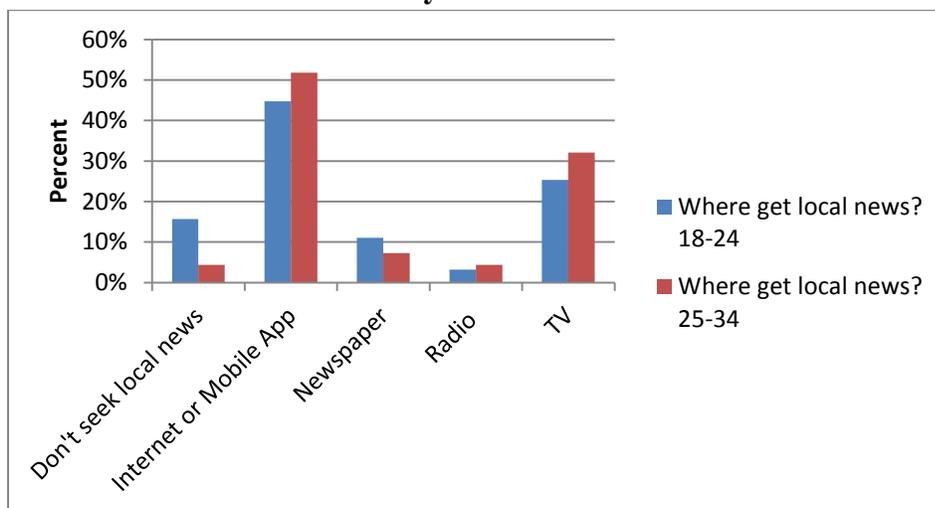


Responses to the other research questions are as follows, with a reminder that responses for each question are shown in two age subcategories, younger adults (18-24) and older young adults (25-34).

(R2) Primary Source for Local News:

Respondents were asked “What is your primary source for getting local news and information? In other words, what is the FIRST place you would go for local news and information, rather than national news?” An overwhelming majority in both age groups, 45% for 18-24 and 52% for 25-34, reported using the Internet or some type of mobile application to get local news, followed by 25% of younger adults and 32% of older young adults using TV for local news. Those reporting using newspapers as a primary source for local news amounted to 11% of younger adults and 7% for the older 25-34 group, with radio only being used for local news by 3% and 4% for the younger and older groups, respectively. Sixteen percent of the 18-24 group reported they don’t seek out local news, with only 4% of the older group making a similar report.

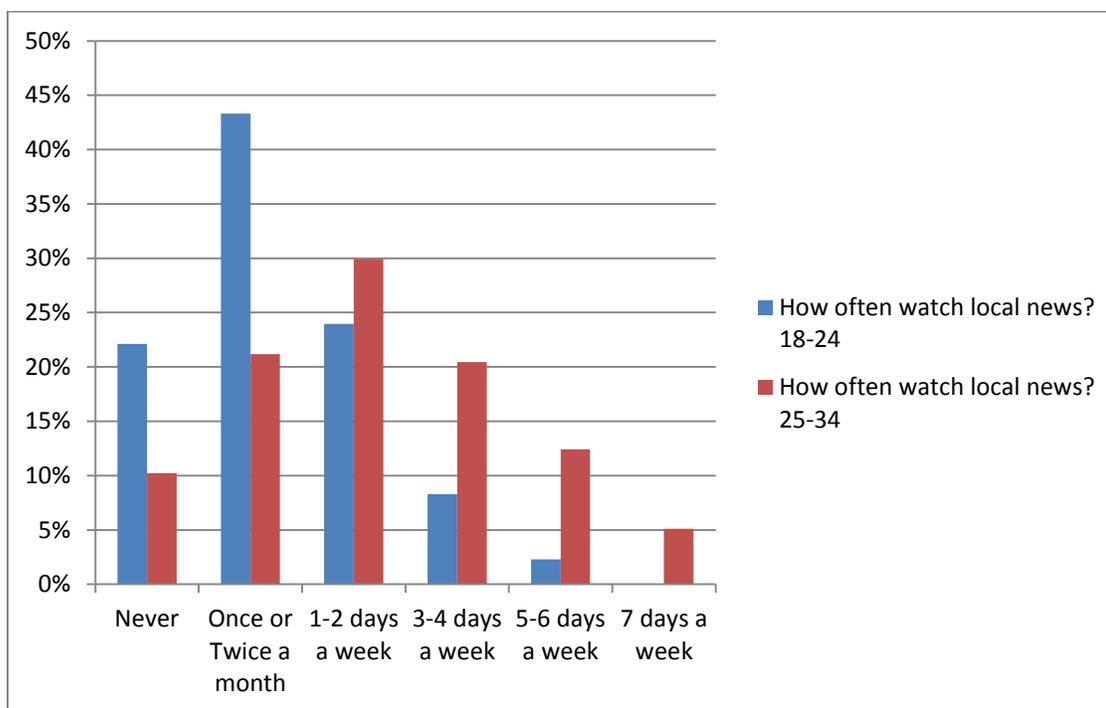
Table 8: Primary Source for Local News



(R3) How often watch local news:

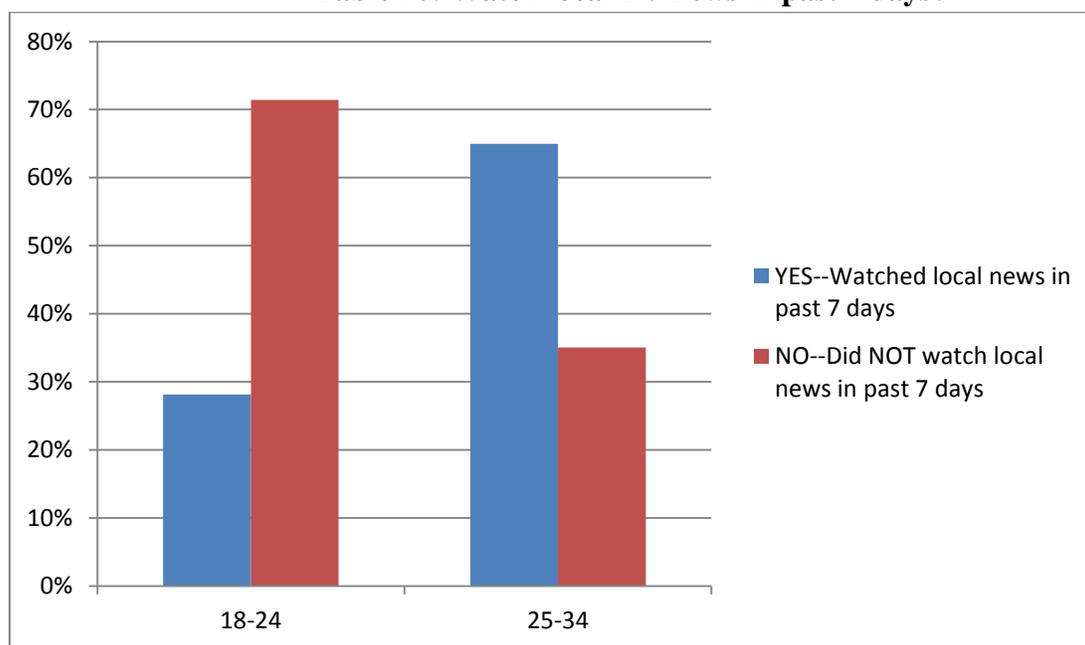
Answering the question of “how often do you watch local news?” the younger adults (18-24) reported the least amount of viewing time, with a largest percentage (43%) only watching once or twice a month, followed by 24% of that group watching one to two days a week and just a slightly smaller percentage (22%) saying they never watch local news. A relatively small 8% of 18-24 year olds reported watching 3-4 days a week, only 2% watching 5-6 days a week and none reporting to be regular viewers, 7 days a week. In the older young adults group, the largest percentage (30%) reported watching local news 1-2 days a week, 21% once or twice a month and 20% 3-4 days a week. In this older subcategory, 12% watch 5-6 days a week, and a small percentage (5%) reported to be loyal 7 days a week viewers. Ten percent of this group never watches local news.

Table 9: How Often Watch Local News

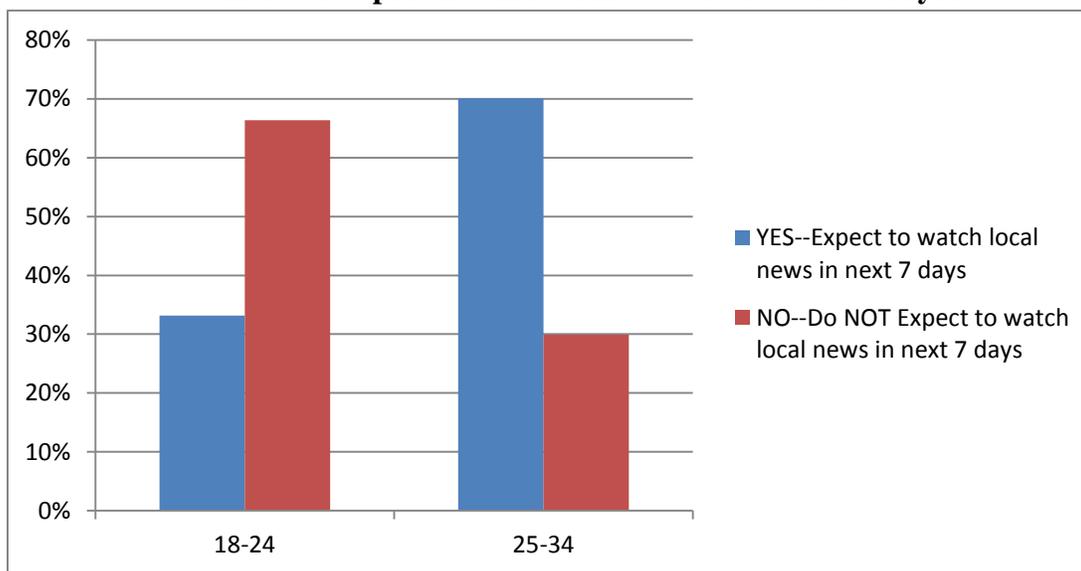


Expanding on the question of how often a respondent watches local TV news, the respondents was asked if they had watched in the past seven days (Table 10) and if they expected to watch in the next seven days (Table 11). These tables show an interesting relationship between the two age groups, with an almost exact reversal of responses depending on the age group. Twenty-eight percent of younger adults (18-24) reported watching local news in the past seven days while 71% of that group reported not having watched news in the past seven days. For the older young adults (25-34), the results are seemingly reversed, with 65% watching news in the past 7 days, and only 35% not watching news in the past 7 days.

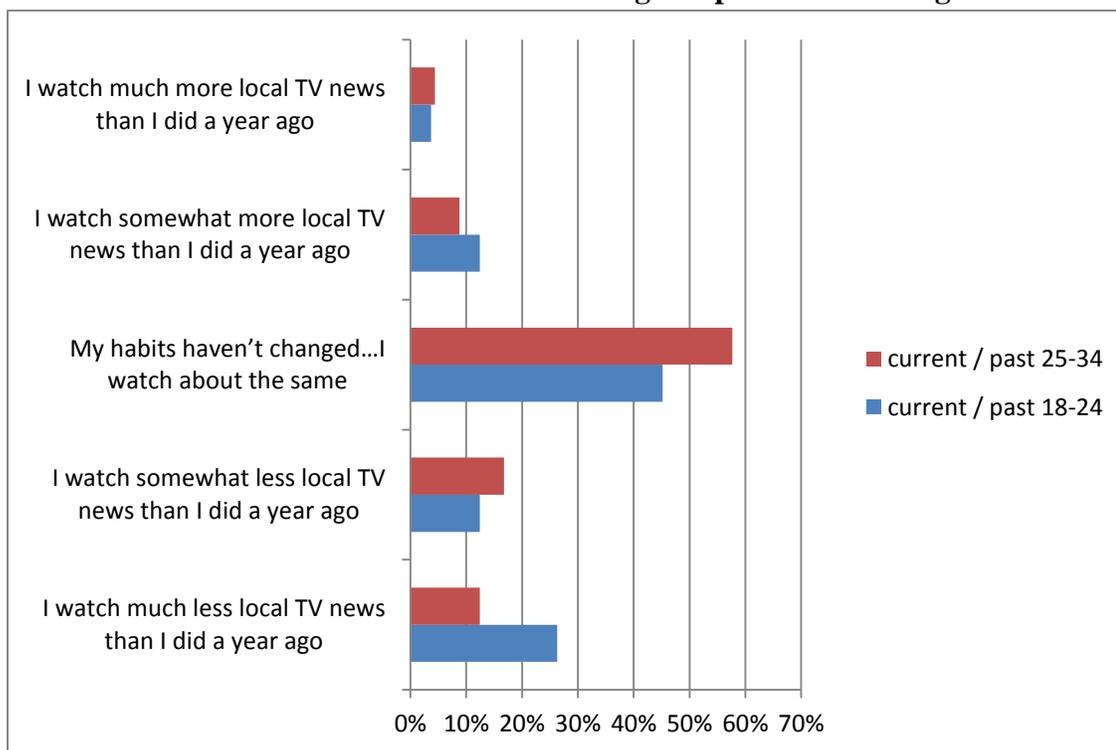
Table 10: Watch local TV news in past 7 days?



With those results in mind, the predictions of “expect to watch in the next 7 days” coincide fairly closely. In the young adult category, while 28% watched in the past 7 days, slightly more (33%) plan to watch in the next 7 days, and among older young adults in which 65% watched in the past 7 days, 70% will be watching in the next 7 days.

Table 11: Expect to watch local TV news in next 7 days?**(R4) Viewing this year compared to last year:**

To get a sense for how the current viewing habits of respondents might compare with a year ago, the next question asked respondents to rate their viewing habits on a scale from “I watch much less local TV news than I did a year ago” to “I watch much more local TV news than I did a year ago.” The largest percentage of respondents in both age groups, 45% for 18-24 and 58% for 25-34, reported no substantial change in their local news viewing habits. Twenty-six percent of the younger group reported watching much less TV than a year ago, with 12% saying they watched somewhat less and 12% watching somewhat more than a year ago. In the older group (25-34), a total of 29% reported watching “somewhat less” or “much less” than a year ago, while a total of 13% of that group watched “somewhat more” or “much more.”

Table 12: Current viewing compared to Year Ago

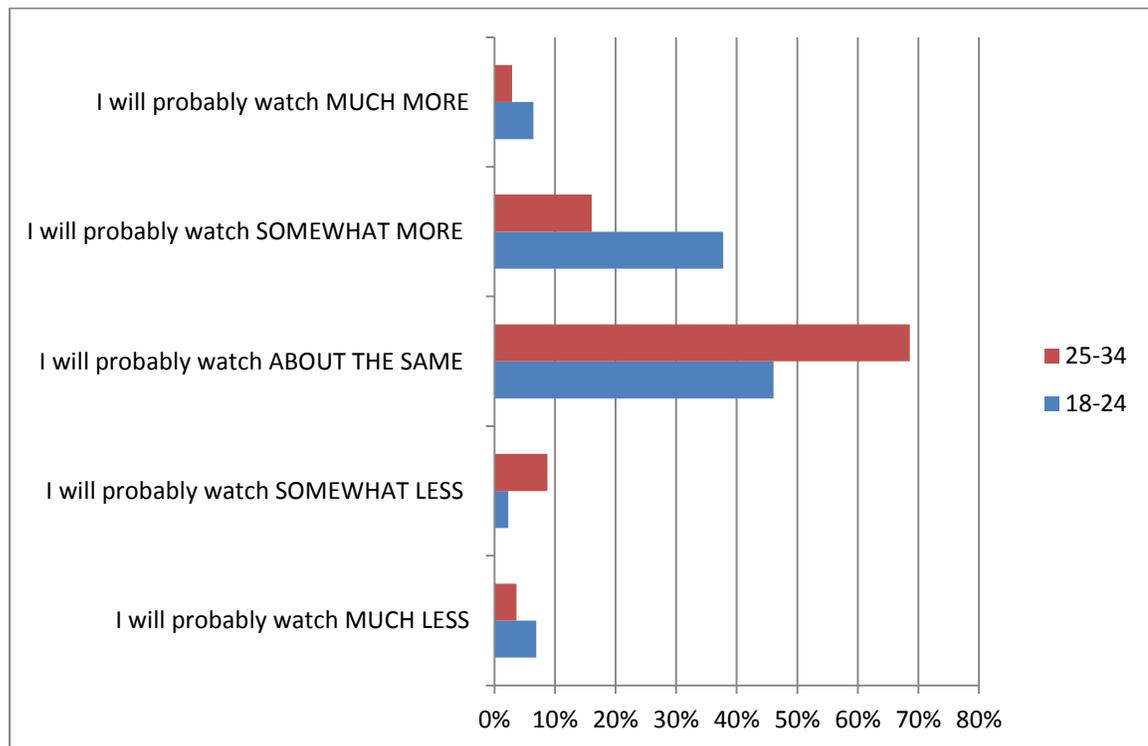
It is worth noting that news consumption from year to year could be driven by major news stories, such as coverage of an election or a souring economy. For example, at the time of this survey (September 2012) it was less than two months before the Obama/Romney Presidential election. However, since this thesis focuses on local TV news, the author contends that “event driven” coverage would be more of a national news concern, not local.

(R5) Prediction of viewing in next two years compared to current habits:

According to the majority of respondents in both age categories, not much is going to change in their viewing habits in the next two years. Forty-six percent of 18-24 year olds and more than two-thirds (69%) of 25-34 year olds expect they will watch

about the same amount of local TV news in the next two years. There is a glimmer of optimism in the results in this category from the younger adult group, in which a combined 47% will probably watch “somewhat more” or “much more” local TV news in the future. More on this in the discussion section later. A much smaller 19% of the older young adult group predicted they would be in the somewhat more or much more category. Responses in the “somewhat less” or “much less” category were relatively small, with only 9% of 18-24 and 13% of 25-34 making one of those predictions.

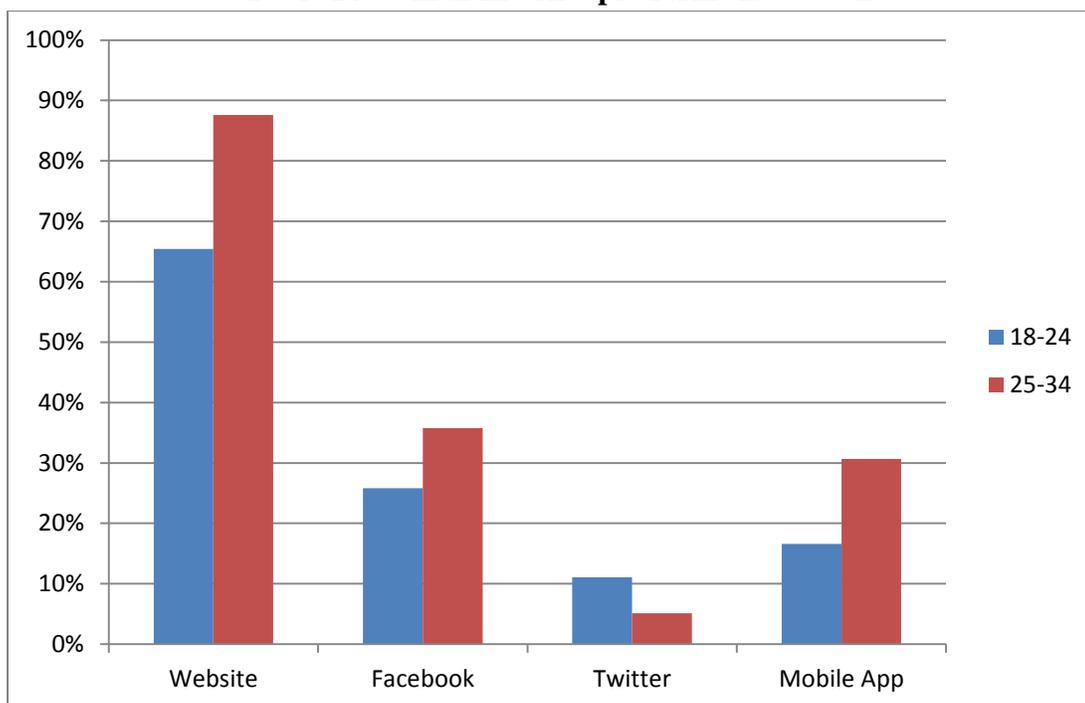
Table 13: Prediction of viewing in next two years



(R6) What Internet platforms are accessed?:

Respondents were asked if they had ever accessed local news and information from a local TV station via the station's website, Facebook feed, Twitter feed or a mobile application on a phone/tablet device. Respondents could mark more than one answer, meaning the total could be more than 100%. Almost two-thirds (65%) of the younger adults had used a station's website for local news, while an even larger number, 88%, of the older young adults had used a local station's website. Coming in a distant second place was a station's Facebook page, with 26% of the 18-24 year olds and 36% of 25-34 year olds reporting using this particular social medium to access local news. Using a mobile app for local news had 17% of the 18-24 group, with a considerably larger 31% of the 25-34 group. Twitter is in last place in both age groups, with only 11% of 18-24's and 5% of the 25-34's.

Table 14: Which Internet platforms have been accessed?



(R7): What reasons do people aged 18-24 or 25-34 give for why they DO or DO NOT watch local TV news?

In an open-ended question, respondents were asked to complete two sentences: “I LIKE to watch local TV news because _____” and “I DON’T LIKE to watch local TV news because_____.” Considering the low response of people on a previous question about whether people even watch TV news, the author didn’t expect to get a large number of responses for these questions. And, while not all respondents answered these two questions, somewhat surprisingly more than 80% of people answered both questions. For the “LIKE to watch”: 179 of the 18-24 group (82% of the total) and 111 of the 25-34 group (81%) answered; while it was 190 (88%) of the 18-24 group and 109 (80%) of the 25-34 group who answered the “DON’T LIKE to watch” question. Even though this was an open-ended question, survey responses could be grouped into only four main areas, as reported in Table 15 below. By far the largest number of people in both the younger and older age groups (83% and 80% respectively) said they like to watch local news using language such as “It interests me,” “It affects me,” or “It keeps me updated.” This seems to conflict somewhat with the numbers of people previously reporting they get local news from sources other than local television stations.

Answers to the “DON’T LIKE” question were more varied among both age groups (Table 16), including 28% of the younger group claiming local news is “boring,” “repetitive” or a “waste of time,” 19% reporting local TV news “doesn’t interest or affect me,” 15% saying the news is too negative or sad, and 15% saying they don’t have time to watch local TV news. In the older young adults group, the highest percentage (22%) gave

a “too negative/sad” response, followed by 16% for whom the local news doesn’t affect or interest them.

Table 15: Why DO you like to watch local TV News?

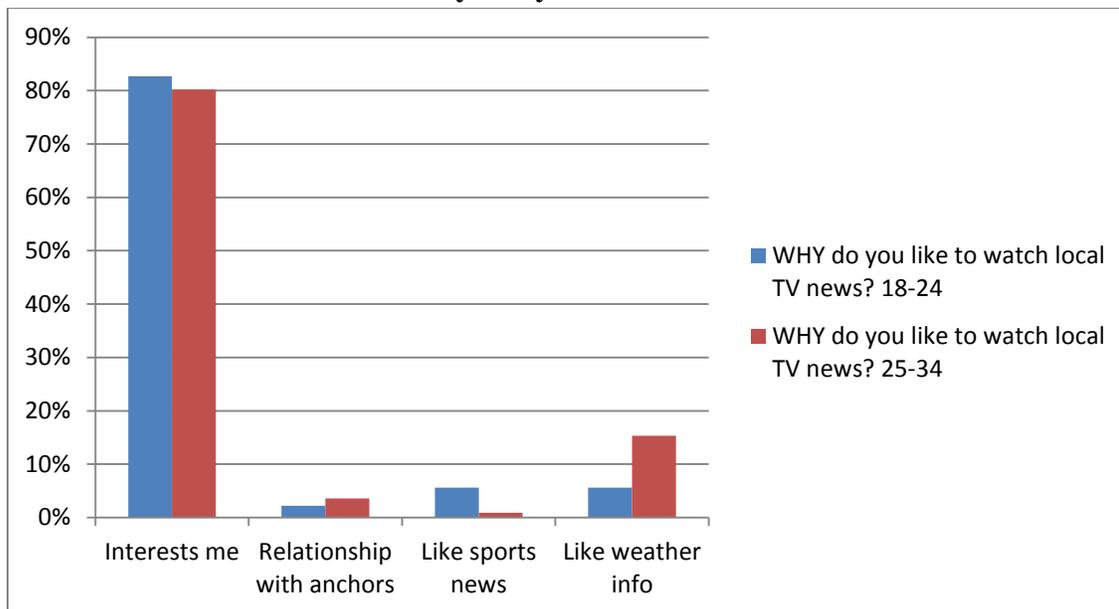
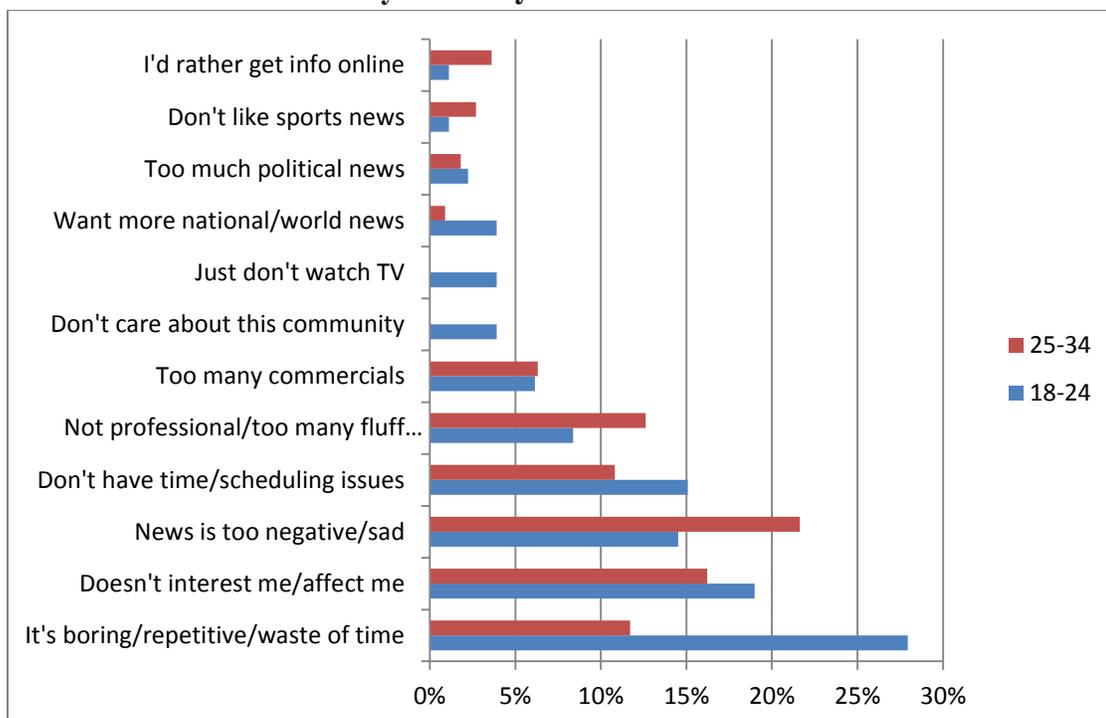


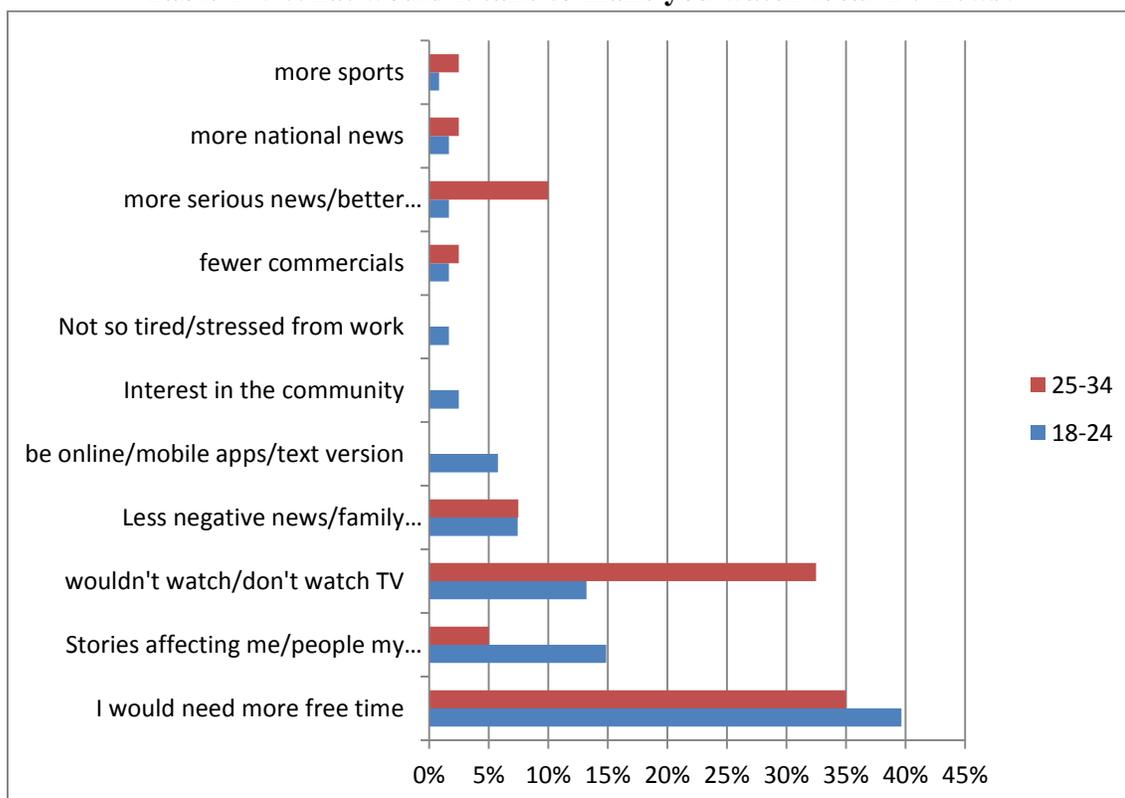
Table 16: Why DON'T you like to watch local TV News?



(R8): If people do not watch local TV news, what might encourage them to do so?

Under the heading of “what could local TV stations do to attract a younger audience,” this question yielded some interesting responses. The largest percentage of people in both age categories responded that they would “need more free time,” 40% of the 18-24’s and 35% of the 25-34’s. Unfortunately, this is not something stations can do much about. Nor is the response from 13% of the younger group and a third (33%) of the older group who claim they aren’t inclined to watch local TV news, no matter what. Showing a somewhat of a more positive opportunity for stations are the 15% of the younger group who say they would watch local TV news if it had more stories that were interesting to them, affecting people in their age group.

Table 17: What would it take to make you watch local TV news?



Chapter 6: Discussion

Previous research has looked at news consumption by young adults, encompassing all news in general, (TV, newspaper, radio, Internet) not just local news (Poindexter) or focused on national news consumption, such as network television news or national online news sources (Mindich). This survey was specifically designed to determine local TV news consumption in small markets by 18-34 year olds. The 18-34 age group was chosen because it is the youngest adult demographic used by the Nielsen Company in its TV ratings surveys. That broader age group was separated into two age subcategories, young adults (18-24) and older young adults (25-34).

The author found that by examining Nielsen Company data in three small Midwest TV markets, he could prove the first hypothesis of this thesis, *(H1): Viewing of local television news in small television markets in the Midwest among adults aged 18-34 has decreased considerably in recent years* (See Tables 3, 4 and 5). Knowing that fewer adults in this coveted age group watch local television news, the question becomes: **Is there a future audience for small market broadcast television news?**

Several questions in the survey asked variations of “how often” respondents watch local news on the television, hoping to get answers to three research questions: *(R3): How often do people aged 18-24 or 25-34 watch local news, if at all?* *(R4): Do people aged 18-24 or 25-34 spend more or less time with local news compared to a year ago?* and *(R5): How much time would people aged 18-24 or 25-34 predict they might spend with local news in the next two years?* Based on the answers received to those questions, the younger audience may be a tough nut to crack.

The 18- 24-year-old-age group comprises what should be the next generation of local small market television news viewers in the prime 25- 54-year-old age group. Fully 65% of people 18-24 in this survey report they either don't watch local TV news at all (22%) or they watch only once or twice a month (43%). A large percentage of this age group also reported not having watched local TV news in the past seven days (71%) and that they don't plan to watch local TV news in the next seven days (66%). Extending their predictions of viewing into the future, a combined 55% of this age group say they will probably watch about the same amount of local TV news in the next two years (45%), somewhat less (2%) or much less (7%) as they do currently. This could be a major stumbling block for the future of the traditional television station business model which is usually based on getting people to watch broadcast newscasts at 6pm and 10pm. As mentioned earlier, there might be an optimistic piece of news in this young adult age group, because a combined 47% predict they will probably watch "somewhat more" (38%) or "much more" (6%) local TV news in the future.

By examining the answer to *(R2): Where do people aged 18-24 or 25-34 go when they want local news (TV, radio, newspaper, Internet)?* we find that use of the Internet or mobile applications are the primary local news source for both age categories: 45% for 18-24 and 52% for 25-34. There is also a smaller audience using TV to get local news: 25% of the younger adults and 32% of the older young adults. (Table 8).

A comparison of the results from the "young adult" (aged 18-24) category to the same questions from the "older young adults" category (25-34) also seem to prove the second of the author's hypotheses from this survey, *(H2): Young people aged 18-24 are less likely to watch local broadcast television news on a regular basis than the older*

subcategory of 25-34, either now or in the future. Compared to the 65% of people 18-24 who reported they either don't watch local TV news at all or they watch only once or twice a month, the 25-34 year old group has only 31% of the respondents making the same report, with a much larger combined percentage (67%) reporting they watch local TV news from 1-7 days a week. Clearly, the older young adults are more inclined to watch local TV news, either now or in the future.

For help in finding a response to the third hypothesis developed for this survey, *(H3): Young people aged 18-24 can offer advice to local television stations as to what stations might do to attract that younger audience,* we look to the last two research questions of this survey--*(R7): What reasons do people aged 18-24 or 25-34 give for why they DO or DO NOT watch local TV news?* and *(R8): If people do not watch local TV news, what might encourage them to do so?* Even though most (75%) young adults in this survey reported in R2 that they don't look for local news and information (16%), or they go to a source other than local TV stations (59%), a large majority (83%) of the respondents aged 18-24 claimed they like to watch local TV news because it keeps them updated, it interests them, or it affects them. And when asked what might get them to watch more local TV news, 15% reported wanting to see more stories "affecting me and people my age." So these ideas may be part of the solution for local TV stations wanting to build an audience for the future.

Limitations—

There are several limitations to the research done for this thesis.

- The research was only done with young people in one geographic portion of the U.S., the Midwest.
- The vast majority (85%) of respondents to the survey had some college education, while only about 30% of Americans have at least a bachelor's degree, according to the 2010 Census. Those without post-secondary education were severely underrepresented in this survey.
- The research didn't specifically differentiate between respondents who were current college students and those who were of college age but not necessarily college students.
- The research was done using an online survey, rather than a random phone survey, which means respondents could self-select whether or not to participate.
- The research is not representative of the entire population of adults 18-34 years old.

Future Research—

- For this topic, future research could be done using a statistically significant national sample of adults 18-34 years old.
- This research did not specifically ask whether the use of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, had affected the respondents' consumption of traditional local television news

- In January 2012, Nielsen analysis of two television stations in Oregon indicated that stations can use their websites to “notably expand reach of their news content, helping drive cross-platform sales (Goetzl).” Future research would be useful on a much wider scale to compare local television station ratings with any additional audience “reach” that has come from a station’s website.
- It would be useful if future research could replicate the study done in 2008 by Seth Lewis, following up on the young people who at that time predicted how they would be accessing news and information five years in the future.
- While not statistically significant, doing several focus groups of 18-34 year olds across the United States might provide some useful anecdotal data about what that age group is looking for in a local TV newscast. It would be appropriate for this type of research be done on a market by market basis, rather than trying to apply any type of national survey results to individual TV stations across the country.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

This survey supports the idea that local television news stations need to better address the information needs of the 18-34 year old audience if they wish to develop that group into the desirable 25-54 year old audience needed for the success of the station's traditional business model.

The research confirms the hypothesis that the number of young adults watching local television news has declined in recent years. This is the age group the industry must develop if it expects to have a sustainable "next generation" of TV news viewers.

The number one reason given by respondents to this survey as to what they want from local TV news is that it must "affect me and my generation." Bill Hague, Senior Vice President of the Frank N. Magid, Inc. media consulting firm, uses the term "anticipointment" when talking about recruiting younger viewers. He says that sometimes if a station is able to get younger viewers to try the station's newscast, those younger people complain that the news "doesn't speak to them (Hague)." In a story in the *Daily Texan* student newspaper from the University of Texas at Austin (UTA), a student claimed that "the media doesn't cover Millennial issues or Millennial voices," while another student said "the media doesn't write for Millennials. They write for the parents." The author of that article concludes that "the main problem with the news media is the failure to report on topics that directly affect Millennials (Serrano)." Those comments came from students at a 2010 seminar organized by Paula Poindexter, a journalism professor at UTA, who later wrote in her 2012 book that the number one best practice for engaging the Millennial generation is to regularly include Millennial stories in news coverage (Poindexter).

Young adults surveyed for this paper, aged 18-34, overwhelmingly (82%) reported that what they like about local TV news, when they watch, is that it interests them, affects their lives, or keeps them updated. Seeming to contradict that response is that 55% of those who answered the question about what they don't like about local TV news used language such as it is boring, repetitive, a waste of time, too negative, doesn't interest or affect them. These two questions, as well as a list of the "best practices" from Poindexter (122) seem to tell us that by providing news coverage that is of specific interest to this age group, TV stations might attract more of them to the traditional local TV newscast. According to the survey, 47% of respondents say they'll probably watch "somewhat more" or "much more" local TV news in the future. This may be a positive sign.

Online also has potential for attracting a younger audience. A majority of respondents reported accessing news information from a television station's website, Facebook, Twitter feed, or a station's mobile application. National survey results from the Pew Research Center show that one-third of adults under 30 now get their news on social networks (Sonderman). The Nielsen analysis mentioned two Oregon TV stations that showed a potential for stations to expand their reach by using their websites in conjunction with the broadcast news product (Goetzl). Indianapolis NBC station WTHR-TV has been successful in using a strong digital media focus to boost the bottom line of its traditional broadcast newscasts (Jessell). All of this suggests the television news industry could see positive results from more concerted efforts to use online resources to drive viewers to newscasts, even younger viewers.

Is there a future audience for small market broadcast television news? The simple answer is yes, but stations need to be specific about how they will attract that audience and plan news coverage that appeals to this young adult audience. This new audience doesn't watch TV the way their parents and grandparents did, by sitting in front of a TV at 6pm or 10pm. They want information at their fingertips, and they want it now. The way TV stations have been doing business for decades won't continue to be successful if this new audience is ignored, and we can't assume the younger audience will just automatically "grow up" into the audience of the future.

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APPENDIX A--NEWS RATINGS--Sioux City, Iowa

(program averages section of Nielsen ratings book)

AVG 5 days, M-F		Rating P18-34	Rating W1834	Rating M1834
May, 2012 10pm	KCAU	1	1	1
	KMEG	-	-	-
	KTIV	5	6	5
	Total	6	7	6
May, 2011 10pm	KCAU	2	1	2
	KMEG	-	-	-
	KTIV	6	7	6
	Total	8	8	8
May, 2010 10pm	KCAU	2	2	2
	KMEG	1	1	-
	KTIV	4	4	3
	Total	7	7	5
May, 2009 10pm	KCAU	2	2	1
	KMEG	-	-	-
	KTIV	7	9	6
	Total	9	11	7
May, 2008 10pm	KCAU	3	4	2
	KMEG	3	4	2
	KTIV	4	4	4
	Total	10	12	8
May, 2007 10pm	KCAU	2	3	2
	KMEG	1	1	1
	KTIV	7	8	5
	Total	10	12	8
May, 2006 10pm	KCAU	4	5	3
	KMEG	1	2	1
	KTIV	6	7	6
	Total	11	14	10
May, 2005 10pm	KCAU	3	3	3
	KMEG	1	1	-
	KTIV	7	8	6
	Total	11	12	9

APPENDIX B--NEWS RATINGS--Sioux Falls, South Dakota

(program averages section of Nielsen ratings book)

AVG 5 days, M-F		Rating P18-34	Rating W1834	Rating M1834
May, 2012 10pm	KELO	4	4	4
	KSFY	1	2	-
	KDLT	1	1	1
	Total	6	7	5
May, 2011 10pm	KELO	9	10	7
	KSFY	1	2	1
	KDLT	-	1	-
	Total	10	13	8
May, 2010 10pm	KELO	11	11	11
	KSFY	2	3	2
	KDLT	1	1	1
	Total	14	15	14
May, 2009 10pm	KELO	6	5	7
	KSFY	3	3	3
	KDLT	4	4	4
	Total	13	12	14
May, 2008 10pm	KELO	11	10	11
	KSFY	3	3	2
	KDLT	1	1	1
	Total	15	14	14
May, 2007 10pm	KELO	15	17	13
	KSFY	2	2	2
	KDLT	2	3	2
	Total	19	22	17
May, 2006 10pm	KELO	8	9	7
	KSFY	2	2	1
	KDLT	2	2	2
	Total	12	13	10
May, 2005 10pm	KELO	10	12	8
	KSFY	1	1	1
	KDLT	2	1	1
	Total	13	14	10

APPENDIX C— NEWS RATINGS--Rapid City, South Dakota

(program averages section of Nielsen ratings book)

AVG 5 days, M-F		Rating P18-34	Rating W1834	Rating M1834
May, 2012 10pm	KOTA	2	2	2
	KNBN	1	1	1
	Total	3	3	3
May, 2011 10pm	KOTA	3	3	3
	KNBN	-	1	-
	Total	3	4	3
May, 2010 10pm	KOTA	1	1	1
	KNBN	1	2	-
	Total	2	3	1
May, 2009 10pm	KOTA	4	4	5
	KNBN	2	2	2
	Total	6	6	7
May, 2008 10pm	KOTA	1	1	1
	KNBN	2	3	1
	Total	3	4	2
May, 2007 10pm	KOTA	3	5	2
	KNBN	2	3	1
	Total	5	8	3
May, 2006 10pm	KOTA	3	3	2
	KNBN	3	4	3
	Total	6	7	5
May, 2005 10pm	KOTA	3	3	2
	KNBN	6	9	4
	Total	9	12	6

APPENDIX D—News Consumption of Local TV News Survey...Sept. 2012***News Consumption of Local TV News***

This is a research project by that focuses on the consumption of local television news by young adults, 18-34 years old. In order to participate you must be at least 18 years old and not older than 34 years old.

Participation in this study will require approximately ten (10) minutes of your time. You will be asked to respond to several questions about your consumption of local TV news.

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

The results of this study will be used to better inform local TV stations about how young adults consume news.

Your responses to this survey will be kept anonymous because the primary researcher will not have access to identifying information such as IP addresses of respondents.

You may ask any questions concerning this research at anytime by contacting Dave Madsen at 712-274-5480 or madsend@morningside.edu . You may also contact secondary investigator Prof. Bernard McCoy at 402-472-3047 or bmccoy2@unl.edu. If you would like to speak to someone else, please call the Research Compliance Services Office at 402-472-6929 or irb@unl.edu.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Morningside College, or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. By clicking on the I Accept button below, your consent to participate is implied. You should print a copy of this page for your records.

 I agree I do not agree

Age 18-24 or 25-34

Male-Female

Highest level of education:

1. Some high school

2. High School graduate
3. Have attended one year of college
4. Have attended two years of college
5. Have attended three years of college
6. Have attended four (or more) years of undergraduate college
7. College Graduate
8. Some Post-graduate college course work
9. Post-graduate college degree

What is your primary source for getting local news and information? In other words, what is the **FIRST** place you would go to find **LOCAL** news and information, rather than national news?

1. Newspaper
2. Radio
3. TV
4. Internet or Mobile App
5. Other (please specify)
6. I don't usually seek out local news

For your answer to the previous question, please tell us more specifically where you get your local news. For example, if you said "newspaper," which specific newspaper(s) might you read?

(comment box)

How often do you watch a **local** TV station evening newscast, meaning a newscast broadcast by a local TV station at 6pm, 9pm or 10pm?

1. Never
2. Once or twice a month
3. 1-2 days a week
4. 3-4 days a week
5. 5-6 days a week
6. 7 days a week

Comparing your current **local** TV newscast viewing habits with your habits a year ago, how have your viewing habits changed in the past year?

1. I watch much less local TV news than I did a year ago
2. I watch somewhat less local TV news than I did a year ago
3. My habits haven't changed...I watch about the same amount of local TV news as I did a year ago
4. I watch somewhat more local TV news than I did a year ago

5. I watch much more local TV news than I did a year ago

If your viewing habits have changed, please tell us WHY your viewing habits have changed in the past year:
(comment box)

Comparing your current **local** TV newscast viewing habits with your **FUTURE** habits, how do you predict your viewing habits might change in the next two years?

1. I will probably watch much less local TV news in the next two years
2. I will probably watch somewhat less local TV news in the next two years
3. I will probably watch about the same amount of local TV news in the next two years
4. I will probably watch somewhat more local TV news in the next two years
5. I will probably watch much more local TV news in the next two years

If you think your **FUTURE** viewing habits might change in the next two years, please tell us WHY your viewing habits may change:
(comment box)

Have you watched a local TV 6pm, 9pm or 10pm newscast in the past 7 days?

- Yes
No

If yes, can you recall which one station(s) you watched?
(comment box)

Please complete this sentence: I like to watch local TV news because _____
(comment box)

Please complete this sentence: I DON'T like to watch local TV news because _____
(comment box)

Do you expect to watch a local TV 6pm, 9pm or 10pm newscast in the next 7 days?
Yes
No

Have you ever accessed local news and information from a local TV station via:
(check all that apply)

- The station's Website
- The station's Facebook feed
- The station's Twitter feed
- A Mobile app on your phone/tablet device
- Other (please specify)

If you **don't** currently watch a local TV station's 6pm, 9pm or 10pm newscast at least 1 or 2 days a week, what would it take to get you to do so?
(comment box)

APPENDIX E--Madsen Survey RECRUITMENT EMAIL...Fall 2012***News Consumption of Local TV News***

Hello, students. This is Dave Madsen, Chair of the Department of Mass Communication here at Morningside College. I am currently working on my Master's Degree in Journalism/Mass Communication through the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. As part of work on my thesis, I am inviting you to participate in an online survey of young adults (age 18-34) to help determine the news consumption habits of your age group, specifically as it applies to local television station news.

Even if you're not from the Sioux City area, I'd like your input on this survey. It should take less than 10 minutes of your time.

If you 'd be willing to take this anonymous survey, please follow this link before Sept. 28, 2012.

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/WC5785J>

Feel free to pass this link along to any of your friends who may be in this age range.

Thanks in advance.

Dave

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