From Newsworthiness to Shareworthiness: Understanding Local News Value Judgements Through an Ethnographic Study of Hyperlocal Media Facebook Page Audiences

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Newsworthiness and Shareworthiness

Hartley ([1982](): 38–39) (focusing on television) identified news as being arranged according to six major topics, being clear that certain potential story types or subject matter is excluded: "The news is, inevitably, what they [the news producers] say it is." (Hartley [1982](): 9). Therefore, events—global, national, or local—must meet criteria in order to 'become' news in the producer's eyes, as in Galtung and Ruge's work ([1965]()) exploring key determining factors, updated twice since by Harcup and O'Neill ([2001](), [2017]()). Such pre-internet approaches to analysing news focus on the producer's agency in setting these values—Lester's ([1980](): 84)

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describes news as "a product of reality-making activities and not simply reality-describing ones […] transformations of the everyday world into published or broadcasted events-as-stories". However, in Harcup and O'Neill's (2017) revisited taxonomy, they recognise an evolution of mainstream news media and its values in the context of participatory online and social media, adding "shareability" (Harcup and O'Neill 2017: 1482) to their list. Here was a sense that, as news media becomes a more participatory affair, with audiences able to source, cite, comment on, endorse and share stories online, shareability is a new area of consideration for the producer, but also a new way of observing and understanding the value of news to audiences, as I explore in this chapter.

A number of scholars have explored this factor, with Trilling et al. (2017: 38) referencing "shareworthiness" in response to the concept of "newsworthiness", and typically involving content analysis of online news, and audience-interactive response on platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. To start with, Trilling et al. (2017) found that many of the traditional criteria of newsworthiness still applied in predicting the shares a story might generate online, and that prior concerns about social media drawing audiences only to human interest stories, rather than political and economic issues, are not borne out. One factor which Kilgo et al. (2018) explored with regards to shareability in the digital age of news media was sensationalism, defined by the degree to which a story "adheres to a style (content and form) that seeks to evoke emotion or emulate tabloid-like structures that trivialize the news" (2018: 1510)—see also discourses of "clickbait" (Bazaco et al. 2019). Most notable here is that sensationalism identified in the online media they studied was no longer limited to crime or entertainment stories but could be applied to a much wider spectrum of subjects. However, as much as they found that sensational stories were shared more on Facebook than non-sensational ones, overall sensationalism wasn't a key driving factor leading to users sharing, as news producers might be hoping. Rather, some studies suggest that audiences are more likely to be sharing practically useful and relatable stories. García-Perdomo et al.'s (2018) content analysis explored what values and topics present in United States, Brazil and Argentina mainstream media led to stories being shared on Twitter and Facebook. Human interest, conflict, controversy and other classic news values still triggered users to share and interact with news articles, as per many of the earlier studies discussed. However, "articles with impact and prominence, useful, and unusual news values" (2018: 1194) prompted more shares on Facebook than on Twitter, and this is

worth noting in the context of hyperlocal media which I present as everyday and functional media, as we will see. In a similar vein to this sense that audiences share stories of everyday significance or 'use', is the extent to which they also respond to politicians or celebrities in the news, but also 'relatable' figures, as demonstrated in Bro and Wallberg's study of digital gatekeeping (2014). Even if the *events* of such stories are preposterous (Bro and Wallberg give headline examples of "Woman Shat in Supermarket" and "Drunken Moose Stuck in Tree"), the hook of such stories making them shareable is that we might just as easily experience the same events in our localised, everyday life. However, as much as such studies draw out shareability as an increasingly important feature of online news, they tend to approach this from the perspective of mainstream journalism and the content being produced; this chapter rather provides insight in engaging with the audiences who share and like such stories, and demonstrates the value of participating in and sharing content when applied in the context of geographically localised social media platforms. In the hyperlocal media discussed here, the audiences are not merely responsive, but involved in the construction and manipulation of the news stories and platform to meet their needs. This therefore becomes the perfect space to observe those news and information values deemed most important by audiences on an everyday level.

Hyperlocal Media

'Hyperlocal' media is a form of online, locally focused community media often framed as citizen journalism, with expectations of filling the gap exposed by receding local newspapers (Metzgar et al. 2011). These constitute blogs, social media accounts or "third places" of communication (Bruns et al. 2008) such as Facebook Pages. What we might think of as the citizen-editors who set up these services, manage a flow of two-way participation from an active audience of "producers" (Bruns 2006). The range of participation can vary enormously from those who read content, others who comment or click 'Like' and finally those who will source or start stories of their own which are then posted into the Page's main flow of posts by the editors. In this respect hyperlocal media is alternative but also clearly relational to mainstream media, in providing a space that at least potentially offers up those untold stories hinted at in Hartley's (1982) dissection of news values.

As studies of hyperlocal media emerged, around 2010, it was defined according to the practices of certain citizens in running blogs to serve localities, but also expectations that it might help with media plurality concerns regarding mainstream media, or develop local activism and civic engagement (Metzgar et al. 2011). Then, as social media became an increasingly integral and functional part of everyday neighbourhood life, scholars such as Flouch and Harris (2010: 5–7) recognised that as well as what they called placeblogs (defined as "set up by a single person or small group […] to report on local stories at a very local level"), people were increasingly turning to social media to create and participate in 'public social spaces'—social media accounts used "for sharing information about areas and often light-hearted chit-chat". In the UK, hyperlocal media initially presented itself as a grouping of nationally distributed local bloggers, recognised through their affiliation and networking online, or their attendance of Talk About Local's annual 'unconferences'. At the time of writing, hyperlocal media has become messier but no less valuable, including those same hyperlocal bloggers, excluding some who had stopped operating, but also now featuring any social media accounts these producers may have started, often geographically overlapping with multiple accounts set up by other citizens. My own studies presented in this chapter embraced this messiness. I observed the Facebook Pages set up by two hyperlocal media producers and understood people's individual media ecologies in the context of Bourdieu's (2010) recognition that people frequently engage in overlapping social and cultural fields. In the case of hyperlocal media, this might address how people identify and establish their identity by 'joining' or being affiliated to a number of online Facebook Groups or Pages, or other online socialities. Similarly overlapping are the nuances that Facebook Group and Page administrators instil in their pages, whether covering geographical areas or by subject matter—for example, my neighbourhood of Rubery, in 2019, had at least two Groups for everyday issues, another for posting photos and postcards of 'local history', one for local selling, buying and donations, and is also covered by the wider south Birmingham catchment area of the B31 Voices Page.

Ethnographic Research Methods for Studying Hyperlocal Media Audiences

Having established the complexity and inherent 'messiness' of audience practices in hyperlocal media, this suggested the need for a largely qualitative ethnographic approach. This built on the work of scholars such as Heather Horst, Tom Boellstorff, Celia Pearce and, perhaps most significantly given the additional local 'community' dimension of much of their work, Sarah Pink and John Postill (Boellstorff et al. 2012; Pink et al. 2015; Postill 2011). Their methods and approach blur the lines between offline and online, recognising a more holistic 'lived experience' incorporating both. My own method followed in a similar vein and recognised my position in the work as an outsider, being new to the areas I was studying, and also an insider, being resident there. In addition to methods we might think of as typical of such ethnography, of online observation and offline interview, I encouraged audience members to contribute in ways appropriate and meaningful to them, whether through a 'Community Panel' Facebook Group I set up, or through emailed conversations. This approach drew most directly from Postill's work (2011); in his own study of online, local social platforms he sought meaning through deeper, everyday engagement with the key individuals of his Kuala Lumpur field site. This sense of embedding informs our understanding of the communities, their participants, their ideals, media ecologies and ideologies, and the media's role in civic engagement, co-creation and the building of 'third places' (Oldenburg 2001). Ethnographic approaches such as Postill's also reach beyond the testing of theories, allowing the field site to breathe and reveal unexpected insights, rather than making assumptions that romanticised notions of 'community' behaviour will be discovered amongst the participants.

The ethnographic work I draw on in this chapter is my study of the audiences of two local Facebook Pages in the West Midlands, UK (2013–2016). Note my use of the term audiences, because Facebook Pages are distinctly different to Facebook Groups in that the content posted to the Page is always controlled, written or posted by the Page administrators. Even when sources for stories come in from an external source such as the readership, it is the administrator in their writer/editor role that decides what makes it to the Page and is therefore visible to the audience. Groups are hierarchically different—whilst still managed by administrators, the ethos

is rather that anyone can post to them in more of a flat structure which we might be more inclined to refer to as a 'community'.

My first study took place in Wednesfield two years after moving to the area, starting in 2013 and lasting ten months. It is worth noting therefore that in this and my second study I benefited from the outsider/insider duality I described earlier. Wednesfield is a small town on the outskirts of Wolverhampton in the UK's West Midlands, having a population of around 22,500 people. The WV11 hyperlocal Facebook Page I studied (named after the local postcode) had a significantly large readership of nearly 10,000. In 2014, I moved with my family to Rubery, on the outskirts of south Birmingham, also in the West Midlands, and then started the second study of the local B31 Voices Facebook Page in March 2015, this time lasting a full twelve months. By comparison, the local catchment population for that area was 100,000, with an impressive 30,000 Facebook followers. It is perhaps also worth noting that (taking WV11 as our example) the ratio of female to male users of such pages was 2:1, with 93% being 25 years old or older—in fact 13–17-year-olds made up only 0.5% of the user base.[1] This age demographic then demonstrates how Facebook might be considered significant in terms of media plurality and its role in public discourse and democratic discussion amongst voters. This also helps with some understanding of the stories requested or sourced by the audience that we will discuss here—for family events, lost pet appeals or neighbourhood complaints.

Both of these hyperlocal organisations also ran a blog, but I chose to focus on the Facebook Pages as these were the most highly participatory spaces, bringing the audience into the mix. These audiences were largely made up of residents from across the locales, as opposed to Twitter, which seemed to attract more organisations, businesses and authorities. The study was carried out in the UK partly because the network of practitioners had been well recognised and celebrated online by advocacy organisations such as Talk About Local, but in addition to this, many studies had focused on the writers' practice or pinned hopes on hyperlocal media without deeply exploring the reception and use by audiences, for example, instead looking at reach (Baines 2012) or, in their own admission, not being highly extensive (Harcup 2015).

[1] Facebook Insight data accurate as of 08/05/2020.

Everyday Media and Keeping on Top of Local Information

My immersion in the field and discussions with people about their everyday lives and media practices were my entry points to understanding what they found most valuable. Whilst my work focused on hyperlocal media, rather than mainstream media, it was not a polar position of people using either one or the other—a messier entanglement of additional local online sources were also involved. These constituted what Dahlgren (2005: 148) calls a multi-faceted "constellation of communicative spaces". People used outputs of: mainstream news organisations, namely local newspapers; the police; local councils; pages representing neighbourhood locations or groups, such as Friends of Cofton Park; local 'buying and selling' groups; history groups; churches; venues such as pubs and social clubs with events; small businesses such as cafes and hairdressers. In the case of those small businesses, they used social media to attract customers and promote events, but there is also a recognised social and wellbeing value to local people in "helping people develop trusting relationships through frequent, serendipitous exposure to each other in a trusted third place" (Farnham et al. 2015: 49). In practical terms then, audiences might be encountering such Pages and their content (1) because they have chosen to click Like and therefore follow the Page, or (2) because content from this secondary Page has been pasted *into* a hyperlocal Page they follow, a very real sense of Bourdieu's overlapping fields I discussed earlier (2010). As of 2013, 28 hyperlocal websites had been counted in Birmingham, "the most for any single local authority area" (Harte 2013: 8), and so it is no surprise that neighbouring Pages and their content also sometimes appeared in the B31 Voices and WV11 Pages.

Many people got their information from offline sources. As Mary, one of the B31 Voices users, put it, "I don't think the Internet is the answer to everything […] I don't agree with over reliance on it." As a regular Twitter user, she took interest in volunteering activities in her community, but still recognised that there were other ways to stay connected. Whilst the internet has clearly affected and broadened many people's individual media ideologies, there is no reason that prior methods should not still be effective; empowered uses of media predate the internet after all (Toffler 1972; Williams 1990; Moores 1993). People from both of my case studies used physical noticeboards, attended local events and chatted to each other during school runs, as well as digital methods such as messaging or using

other online groups or pages. The persistence of these traditional methods was made clear when I visited Wednesfield Community Team, responsible for organising activities on a local housing estate. Whilst the team was plugged into online networks, when it came to advertising a facepainting course, they instead placed two posters in local corner shops. Expecting four to six people to attend, they were somewhat overrun with 34 attendees. So, while we can think of the hyperlocal Page in itself as a field of communication (Bourdieu 2010) or public sphere (Habermas 1991), we should remember that individuals operate within wider numerous socialities, evidenced in the richness of new information and local knowledge people bring into the hyperlocal spaces from 'outside' them—what is 'newsworthy' is expressed here in what most immediately touches, affects or is functionally valuable to local people.

Before squarely approaching hyperlocal media in itself, it is also necessary to understand some of the people I spoke to and their comparably often negative attitudes to local mainstream media, and their desire to treat them as performing different roles in their lives. Marie in Birmingham perceived that mainstream news was constructed for various reasons, with biases and agendas that she didn't recognise in the hyperlocal service but that we can identify in Hartley's and Harcup's work discussed earlier:

> News reports [talking about mainstream media] are slanted—everything that's reported on the telly now, they're after a particular reaction and I think that reaction is generally negative, whereas things like B31 Voices are actually reporting the facts and after a positive response. (Marie)

In her narrative was a sense that hyperlocal media from native reporters goes further than just informing, to facilitate feelings of connection, place and relatability. It is worth noting that even on a 'news' level, Marie perceived that the editors were doing a better job of "reporting the facts". Another audience member of B31 Voices commented on a repost of a police press release about anti-terrorist operations: "When you watch the news, you watch for the non-stories an [sic] wonder what we are not being told. I would rather the media just stopped spreading propaganda […]", demonstrating an understanding of mainstream news' sense of agency and control. There were of course occasions that the stories or people's discussions on the Pages were equally 'depressing or negative', but this was more easily overlooked by the audience given the comparative benefits or the sense they were delivered on a peer-to-peer basis with the local native

editors' understanding and appreciation of the neighbourhood, for example crime incidents being functionally posted as a warning to others.

In addition to the agenda of mainstream news, format was also important—local newspapers were considered by many to be less accessible than online formats. Emma, for example, didn't use the train where the free Metro newspaper is distributed and so she said it was unavailable for her. There were other options such as buying newspapers from local shops, but such narratives generally suggested that the physical attributes and issues of accessibility meant that newspapers didn't feature heavily in people's media ideologies, even if they liked the content, as evidenced by response to online versions of the same print articles. Such accounts situate hyperlocal media as one of the ways that "local journalism is changing today because of the larger changes underway in our media environments" (Nielsen 2015: 17)—when technologies but also offline methods can keep us informed in our neighbourhoods, it is perhaps unsurprising that print newspapers suffer. In fairness, it is also worth noting that the local newspapers were not limited to print. Nielsen suggests that increasingly newspapers are not "mainstream", because they don't provide the direct source of daily information for people, but through other dissemination and engagement activity through their websites and social media, they might rather be considered "keystone media", with "'ecological' consequences that reach well beyond their own audience." (Nielsen 2015: 51). In both my cases these organisations (what I will continue to refer as 'mainstream local media') made some attempts to at least disseminate their content online (sometimes picked up by hyperlocal Pages), even if they didn't then *engage* audiences in dialogue, as hyperlocal media editors do.

How Does Hyperlocal Media Work as a Participatory Format?

If we look at the context of hyperlocal Facebook Pages then, they are typically started by a neighbourhood resident who may or may not have any recognised journalism training. In both of my cases, each two-person team had web and social media skills but no formal journalism background, in fact sometimes eschewing the moniker of 'journalist' in the light of what they saw as unfavourable local newspaper or wider media practices. However, whilst Johnson and St John's work (2015) identified journalists sometimes recognising the value of journalistic standards even if they

don't apply them, perhaps the inverse is true of hyperlocal media audiences, not always aiming for mainstream media standards, but sometimes achieving them anyway, in the respect that their stories would often involve participation which could provide multiple first-hand sources and viewpoints in the comments from involved parties. However, the Facebook Pages of my case studies (more so than their blogs) are clearly 'other' than mainstream media, whether I judge this by: the differing story types and subjects I identify below; the communicative and messy flow of participation; or the audience's motivations, which are just as likely to be based in a desire to share a story or to be heard or connect, than to contribute to balanced reporting.

A good illustration of this 'otherness' of hyperlocal media can be found in an incidental content analysis I came to perform during the ethnography work. The Wolverhampton Chronicle was a free, weekly newspaper (in the typical style of an 'advertiser' newspaper relying heavily on local adverts for local restaurants, businesses and estate agents) delivered to residents of the city, including those in the smaller Wednesfield area of my first case study. Wednesfield residents I spoke to said it usually ended up being unread or going straight into recycling, but on realising I had developed a stack of several weeks' worth of issues, I used my own collection to compare content with that delivered by the WV11 Facebook Page over the same time period. Given that the Wednesfield area covers a much smaller area than the Chronicle's wider remit, I didn't expect much of an overlap but was still nonetheless surprised to find that only two stories appeared on both the WV11 hyperlocal Facebook Page and in the newspaper in that time. This was one of the first indicators for me that mainstream print media and the stories they considered to be newsworthy were at odds with the shaping of hyperlocal by the audience, according to their desires and needs. We can of course frame this in terms of the everyday value to residents in terms of media plurality, but we should also remember that Facebook Pages prove themselves to be more obviously "small scale production" that concern themselves with cultural and social rather than economic capital (Atton and Hamilton 2008: 131). The WV11 Page shared stories immediately, rather than having to wait for the weekly print run, and newsworthiness was not weighed against print costs. Banal, everyday stories and upcoming events were featured on WV11, while the Chronicle tended to document *after* events had occurred, as much as before. In this sense, as well as offering more focus on a smaller

hyperlocality, these media spaces do not replace but perform a different role to the news journalism of local newspapers.

It is also worth noting that the Facebook Pages performed a different role to the more formal blogs that the hyperlocal organisations ran, and again some of this focus comes from the audience's participation. Blog posts were likely to be based on more official police or council story sources, whereas Facebook was more useful for the very immediate posts from members of the public, for example, asking people to look out for a missing dog. Most significant here was the sense that the editors had created, and maintained with the audience, a more immediate and participatory space of communication and information. Costera Meijer's (2010) study identified that journalists and journalism scholars' expectations of local journalism matched what people more broadly expected, but that their case of Dutch television also demonstrated *additional* audience concerns, for example regarding representation and the potential to provide inspiration. Given this, it is hardly surprising that when audiences shape a local medium through their own participation and the stories they share there, it tends to look different to mainstream equivalents.

In describing the editor/audience relationship, however, we should remember my distinction earlier, that this is hierarchical, with the editor ultimately controlling what stories are posted and therefore seen. The editors do sometimes choose to share stories including topics in common with mainstream media, especially given that hyperlocal media and other local media may be given the same press releases from official sources. Content comes to the editors from a number of routes—people can directly message the administrator, or post to a section of the Facebook Page called Visitor Posts. The issue there is that Visitor Posts are presented as a 'sidebar' of the Page and not delivered to Page followers in their main stream of content. We can think of this as a holding bay for potential new stories, that the editors may choose to select from and 'repost' into their stream of content with credit to the source. How this all plays out is one of the defining features of hyperlocal media, that it does tend towards fulfilling ideals of participatory media. Yes, there is still a hierarchy involved in deciding what is posted, and inherent power struggles, but audiences have more voice and agency in choosing and responding to the content when compared to mainstream news audiences.

SHARING IS CARING

With the participatory relationship on the Facebook Pages I've just described in mind, we can understand something of what the audience find valuable in how they contribute to and respond to hyperlocal content. Their judgement of valuable content is partly tied up in what they deem to be newsworthy in taking time to consume or read, but also what they consider to be shareworthy—the extra labour of sourcing, sharing or discussing it with others, and the extent to which doing so means they identify with a particular story.

The most immediate way that the audience shared stories was by helping source them in the first place. Sometimes this was due to something they witnessed directly, such as a car accident they knew would result in traffic delays for others. In other cases, the motivation was less altruistic, an appeal asking others to look out for their lost cat or dog (Turner 2015). They sometimes shared from another source, such as another Page, a friend or a newspaper story. They tended to do this according to an observed understanding of what was appropriate in that particular space, what stories would appeal, or were likely to be reposted by the editors. One of my B31 Voices audience interviewees talked about these decisions, reflecting on arguments he had become involved in on Birmingham City FC Facebook Pages, so that he now recognised when "it's not worth it". Here then, we can draw on Bourdieu's (2010) conceptualisation of social spaces that are structured not by steadfast rules but through the participant's observation of the norms and resulting collective practice. This sometimes led to tension and conflict with what the editors saw as being appropriate content—when I interviewed the editors of WV11 they confirmed my suspicion that people seeing numerous lost pet stories was suggestive that the Page was an appropriate space for these, and the audience thus posted more, in a vicious circle. As this wasn't always entirely in keeping with either the broad aims of the Page, or a different immediate story that demanded more attention, the editors would sometimes have to eventually break out of this cycle by actively curating the stories in a different direction, i.e. reposting less of the animal stories, and perhaps more about a political hustings.

It is in looking at Facebook's Insight data about the participation on some of those Pages that we can better understand what the editors were sharing, and what they felt was important according to those civic and political engagement expectations I mentioned earlier. These Insights also

demonstrated what the audience felt about such content. Taking a sample of six consecutive B31 Voices Facebook Page posts from one day, we have the following headlines.

- Are you watching I'm a celebrity get me out of here?
- LIVE NOW: Birmingham leadership hustings Hear from the 5 candidates hoping to be the next Birmingham City […]
- From Andy Val: "A word of warning for bus users-major local changes commenced on Sunday: 29a renumbered […]
- LIVE 7pm Birmingham Leadership husting. Follow live blog from BCU media students on B31 Voices here:[link]
- Bellfield Infant School—Open days for Reception September 2016 | B31 Voices [link]
- Today 7pm. Northfield Ward public Meeting. Longbridge Lane, Northfield baths, West Heath library & more.

Facebook Insights showed me Reach (the number of people who saw the post), Post Clicks and Reactions in the form of comments and shares for each of these posts. From this sample, the most attractive content by far was the one relating to bus timetabling, touching people on a very immediate and localised level. This reached over 11,000 people, possibly as a result of 136 reactions (many of which would have been people sharing the story on). The value of that story is also clear given that over 1200 people clicked on that post. A generic story about a TV show was also popular, given its populist nature, not requiring specialist interest or expertise in order to answer the question—this reached an audience of 3200. By contrast though, content encouraging civic or political engagement didn't prove to be so popular. The first live hustings post was clicked just once and reached only 766 people; the second time it was posted reached 1900 and was clicked 26 times. At a time (2015, just before the EU referendum) when discourses of politics declared it to be out of touch with reality and people's everyday concerns, it is perhaps unsurprising then that local bus timetabling seemed to be a more pressing and immediate issue.

WHAT GETS SHARED?

As I spent more time immersed in these Facebook Page spaces, it was clear that certain story types and patterns were emerging, so I eventually categorised a sample of 310 Visitor Posts on the WV11 Page into a typology of 'story types' (Fig. 9.1).[2] Visitor Posts, as I mentioned earlier, are indicative of what the audience deem to be stories worthy of sharing to other readers—whilst the Visitor Posts section is less visible, we can understand it as a sourcing platform that the audience know is used by the editors to repost into their main content feed. On the *Creative Citizens* research project I worked on (2012–15), I was part of a team undertaking content analysis of hyperlocal media blog posts—essentially exploring the practice of the editors/writers (Williams et al. 2015). This demonstrated some convergence with mainstream media; in the Visitor Posts I witnessed the audience suggesting and sharing content that was more communicative and functional at an everyday level.
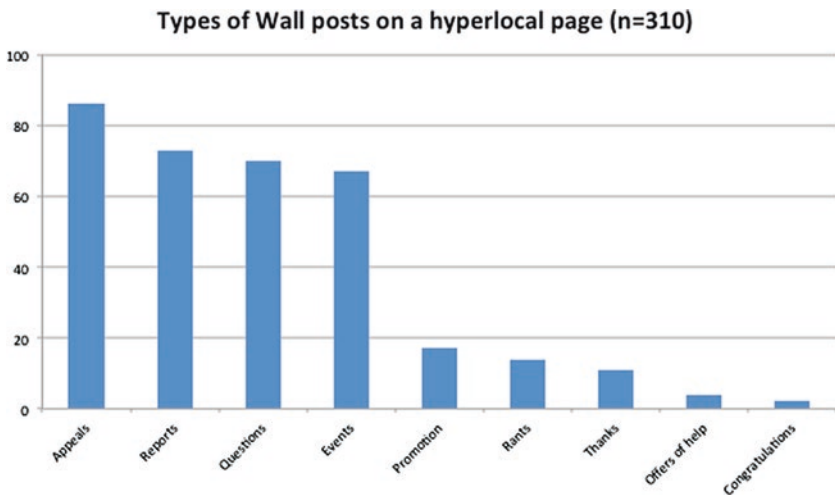
Fig. 9.1   310 Visitor Posts posted by audience members of the Wolverhampton *WV11* Facebook Page, categorised by story type (*n* = 310)

[2] The pattern shown in the graph emerged strongly enough that it was not deemed necessary to consequently carry out the same exercise in the similar B31 Voices Facebook Page.

Appeals describe reader calls to action, maybe for the owner of a lost animal to come forward, or for people to look out for their lost animal, the kind of posts that signpost the blurred edges between the online and offline that Postill recognised (2011). This also covered appeals by police to witnesses of a crime or an appeal to borrow something. These require more effort to respond to than mere *Questions*, as we'll see. *Reports* were also common, something people had witnessed, such as an accident, crime or flooding, often with a sense it might help others practically, but also in a mode of 'general interest' we might expect of mainstream news (Hartley 1982). *Questions* were more passing, e.g. "anyone know about the helicopter hovering over ashmore for??? [sic]", from the WV11 Page. It is in such brief conversations that hyperlocal media demonstrates its unique qualities over mainstream local news; the technology affords immediate interactions. *Events* covers the advertising of any business, charity or community events. Beyond these four main categories is a tail of less significant ones: *Promotions*—other ways people promote their businesses; *Rants*—audience members venting about something but no response was expected other than maybe agreement; *Thanks*—to community members or the editors for some act; *Offers of help*—someone with something spare they can give away, for example; *Congratulations*—to those partaking in charity, or for other success stories. The point to be made here is that the sharp drop off from those first four main categories clarifies how some story types became normative over time, informed by the audience practices and readers observing what is appropriate to post. In this version of the news agenda, the audience clearly has more control than in mainstream media. This isn't to say that these stories would get 'picked up' by the editors and reposted, but it serves as a very useful device for us to explore what the readers *felt* was appropriate to others, and worth sharing with their local community.

On the B31 Voices Page I instead focused this kind of analysis exercise slightly differently to look at the *subjects* being discussed in the editor's Posts. Most common here were stories about police or crime, lost items, traffic or accident info, small businesses, stolen cars and bikes, and weather, similarly suggesting that the audience is in a position of power in helping to shape these tastes, at odds with those topics enforced in mainstream media (Hartley 1982: 38), for example sport could quite easily have been featured in following the progress of various local teams, but was not a typical subject for hyperlocal stories. In all of these stories, even if Questions or Appeals would seem to be serving the person asking them, it is worth

noting that there are often altruistic outcomes. Asking for a suggestion for a good local plumber might help the person find one, but also served as a 'yellow pages' style listing for various tradesmen or their happy clients to refer them.

WHY DO PEOPLE SHARE?

In the examples I give above, of people adding comments to a story, whether tradesmen recommendations or their witnessed take of a traffic accident, we might question why people participate. In commenting on a story, or clicking the Facebook 'share' button to pass it on to others, can we assume they do so motivated by the potential to be recognised for their effort in a social capital model? Given the local neighbourhood context of the audience, there is surely potential for a 'return' on the investment or the "the advantages of the help, the sympathy, and the fellowship of his neighbours" usually associated with social capital (Hanifan 1916: 130–131). However, Facebook content flows through an individual's stream so fast and fleetingly that it is unlikely most of these acts would have been recognised or remembered over time, amongst the myriad of posts by friends and family members, and advertising. Anyone 'sharing' a story from the hyperlocal Page to their own timeline is unlikely to be recognised as having done so, as it merely adds one onto the number of 'shares' for that story. We might surmise then that the only intention here is to more widely publicise the story, to other Facebook Friends with similar concerns, whether locally or thematically. Therefore I conceptualise this as a capital of 'local knowledge'—an opportunity to share everyday experience as expertise, giving people a sense of their contribution to their local community and perhaps the closest we get to any sense of social capital in these transient, fast-flowing communications of the Facebook Page. Given the banality of many posts, such as merely photographing and commenting on local sunsets, these Pages were clearly also spaces for social connection to the neighbourhood and its participants.

We can also look at motivation in terms of factors that contribute towards people sharing stories. Those stories most typically shared in large numbers were local appeals, sometimes relating to crime, to look out for a lost pet in the area, or to reunite a found one. In my research diary kept during the B31 Voices study, 'lost pet stories' came up 98 times. These were often accompanied by a photo, which I suggest helped them to be shared, supporting Bonsón et al.'s (2015) study demonstrating higher

user engagement in municipality Facebook posts that included images. Examples included: a lost, one-eyed cat which may have generated more shares because of that quirk (184 shares); the initial reporting of a murder in Northfield (471 shares); theft of a lawnmower from a van (160 shares). As calls to action, people shared the stories because they knew others could help or that it might be relevant to them. People were drawn to share those stories where they could define a calculable goal and contribute to that with little effort, e.g. helping to find the lost dog. In other situations, such as news of crime, it was more likely to be situated as gossip, having social value in itself (Foster 2004).

One other practice which I noted on these Pages at the time but have since seen elsewhere is what I called 'mention shares'—the act of typing a friends' name into the comments of a Facebook Post, which then notified that person, thus drawing them to the story. Sometimes this was to organise attending an event together, or just passing the information on. In the context of our discussion regarding the value of this content, such practices serve as a good barometer—the idea that if this strikes a chord with me, so it will with others. This was a common point that came up with my research participants regarding hyperlocal content, but not something they described regarding other more mainstream news sources.

However, I end this point of the discussion with a note of caution, that we should be careful about reading too much into participation on Facebook Pages. An example of this came when the editors at WV11 posted an appeal for volunteers to attend a 'community cleanup' of a local church graveyard. The event was to include a short act of remembrance for casualties of the First World War as well, and helping at the cleanup wasn't compulsory. There followed eight clicks of the Like button for that story, and three readers 'shared' it to their timeline. On the day of the event, only two people turned up, and it was unclear if either of them did so as a result of seeing the Facebook post. The lesson here then is that those people who clicked Like or shared the story may have done so with no intention of attending, in a 'clicktivist' model (White 2010), simple implying 'I like this story, it's good someone is doing this' rather than 'I'm coming to this'. In appeals, clicking 'Like' or sharing content alone may make people feel they have connected or interacted, when the person appealing might have hoped for more.

Closing Discussion

Limitations of this work must be noted, across three key points. First, hyperlocal media organisations and the services they provide vary greatly across the UK (Williams et al. 2014). Being responsive to editorial practices, audience participation similarly varies, so there is no sense that any ethnographic study can describe 'typical' practice. I focus on Facebook, but not all hyperlocal organisations run a Facebook Page, expressing concerns of data use, privacy or being constrained by the platform. Having said this, although ethnography does not explore scale across a large sample as in other methods such as content analysis, it identifies patterns and also anomalies of behaviour longitudinally and in depth, unearthing those rich narratives that help us interpret meaning, and my work here was unique in studies of hyperlocal media in approaching the audiences in this way. Second, whilst I observed practices on a daily basis in the form of a research diary, I was largely limited to online observation, to develop an understanding of how the audience collectively acted. I was unable to physically *be* with those individuals as they engaged in those practices, and in the context of this chapter, unable to directly note what led them to share or discuss content in the ways they did. The ability to spend time with individuals and observe their location, state of mind, time constraints or ease of using the technology might have developed an even stronger sense of the way that such practices are interwoven into everyday life, but was impossible largely due to the 'observer effect' such attention would have produced (LeCompte and Goetz 1982: 46). Thirdly, if we hope to explore the ways that such Pages are impactful in the localities they serve, we must also consider who *didn't* participate in my study. Those residents not using the internet, Facebook or these particular Pages are clearly not featured in my findings. But it is also practically hard to include the unseen 'passive' readership of the Page. I had some initial trouble finding respondents for interview; the Page editors and other parties sometimes helped me advertise and recruit people they felt might be helpful. It was only near the end of my study that I made contact with groups such as a local art project who could have put me in touch with other local participants, and I regretted not having identified such gatekeepers earlier. This was problematic in that many participants were 'friends' of the editors and, as a result of this relationship, they may have felt the need to praise their work. Some of these people, therefore, are not representative of the entire audience, and an additional method such as an anonymous survey might have

served to draw out more representative responses. Nonetheless, the use of multiple research methods and sources, including research diary, elements of content analysis, communication and interviews with participants, and reflection on my own immersive experience of the field allowed me to triangulate my findings into a rich narrative.

In conclusion, I suggest then that the audience's concern in sourcing or sharing stories was not so much whether an event could be deemed as 'news', as whether it was information or sentiment worthy of being shared with others in their community. In other cases, audience members took a solution-oriented approach to their posts, for example in mobilising local people to help find their lost pet. This does not however suggest the findings presented here are irrelevant to the field of mainstream news media—rather, hyperlocal media shows us the information that local audiences find valuable at an everyday level, and this might provide inspiration for journalists seeking to better understand their audiences, even if such news values are at odds with the classic ones. As much as it is the job of journalism to present a challenging plurality of media to engage democratic discourse, to exclude audience voice altogether goes too far. Local information can be valuable in various ways, because of the immediacy of the event, the likelihood that others would be able to relate or provide assistance even if the 'sharer' couldn't, or simply a sense that it was valuable-enough information to pass on. Primarily, that judgement call was made by audience members spending time in the space both online and offline, observing, and eventually making their own contribution, to then judge whether it had been well received, and adjusting the approach if it hadn't, as per Giddens' (1984) conceptualisation of re/productive action. In doing so the audience did sometimes come into conflict or tension with what others might hope was being achieved in the space, but in this they demonstrated a real sense of agency, of this being *their* space. So finally through this window, we understand a clear sense of those issues and everyday concerns that are affective and functionally important for residents of a neighbourhood. Beyond the wider concerns they might have about national or global politics, or the extent to which they felt they were getting too much of that from mainstream media, they still needed to find family activities at the weekend, connect with others by sharing sunset photos or decide on the best neighbourhood takeaway—and hyperlocal media provides that platform. It is in such media that we clearly understand the value of these additional platforms as they emerge through the efforts of citizens, and the enabling, participatory technologies they employ to deliver their services.

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