

The 1980 Cleveland Newspaper Market Revisited: Analysis Finds Vibrant Agenda Diversity, Robust Marketplace of Ideas

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Abstract:

A reanalysis of the Cleveland newspaper market of 1980, prior to the closure of the Cleveland Press, differs with the conclusions of a previous content analysis of two-daily communities that have become monopoly markets. Unlike the conclusions of the previous study, by McCombs, this replication found a diverse marketplace of ideas and opinion that suggests a lively agenda-setting and ideological diversity that disappeared with the emergence of the monopoly market, to the detriment of the Cleveland community and the democratic process.

Keywords: Monopoly; Agenda-setting; Competition; Marketplace of ideas; Cleveland newspapers

Introduction:

As McCombs aptly commented in his 1987 study of the Cleveland newspaper market before and after the 1982 closure of the Cleveland Press, any individual study “observes only a discrete portion of the phenomenon of interest,” and most studies look at “only a single outcropping of a more general phenomenon.” Thus, McCombs wrote, replication of studies provides a “key check” against the “danger of overgeneralization” [1].

McCombs’ observations came as an introduction to his replication of a 1948 study of Canadian newspapers by Stanley K. Bigman that, according to McCombs, supported “a sociology of news perspective that newspapers competing for the same geographic and demographic market will produce highly similar products due to the similarity of their professional values, beliefs, and practices” [2].

Similarly, in his replication of the Canadian study, conducted in Cleveland using the same method as Bigman to analyze content of the Cleveland Press and Cleveland Plain Dealer before and after the demise of one of the Press, McCombs found the content of the Plain Dealer as a monopoly similar to its content during its competition with the Press. More importantly, for the purposes of this study, McCombs found little beneficial effect of competition, concluding that his research “indicates that the potential advantages of competition and potential disadvantages of the disappearance of competition are largely outweighed by the professionalism of journalism” [3].

Such findings raise the question for the current study of whether newspaper competition brings about discernable differences in content that serve a democratic government. The study presented here is not a replication so much as it is a revisit of the Cleveland market during the same period of study used by McCombs – 1980, two years before the closure of the Press. McCombs also analyzed the Plain Dealer content in 1983, one year after the Press’ demise, to determine what, if any, content changes had occurred under the monopoly ownership.

The current study, however, is not concerned with the content of the Plain Dealer after the closure of its rival; this author does not question McCombs’ finding of little content change because of the evolution of the Cleveland market from competitive daily to monopoly daily newspaper coverage (McCombs found, and his content analysis bears him out, that “the overall editorial strategy and emphasis of the two newspapers on news and entertainment across 11 major categories were similar on most days,” and, following the closure of the Press, “the Plain Dealer remained essentially the same newspaper”) [4].

Rather, the concern here is with the inference that this similarity in content means that the Cleveland newspaper audience did not lose something of democratic value when the Press closed its doors. In his discussion of his findings, McCombs argued in the context of Democratic political theory, which regards monopolies, whether economic, governmental, or journalistic, as threats to the basic rights of human beings.

Traditionally, it has been assumed that competition among news organizations fosters a diversity of ideas. As a corollary, it also was assumed that a community with two newspapers is better served – with a wider diversity of information available to it – than a community with only one newspaper [5].

In this context, McCombs concluded that based on his findings and those of other researchers; “there again is little evidence of the beneficial effects of competition. The increasing professionalization and bureaucratization of daily journalism exerts a centripetal force on news gathering and editing that works against diversity” [6].

This inference is one that other researchers have taken from the McCombs study. For example, Shoemaker and Reese in their landmark 1996 *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influence on Mass Media Content* referenced the McCombs study as one of three they used to conclude that when a community loses one of two competing newspapers, the audience apparently is not “left with poorer coverage of the diverse concerns in the community” [7].

Such observations are based largely on a method of analysis, not only in the McCombs study but in the previous research it replicated, that relied on the counting of articles and on the listing of them according to category of subject matter without looking beyond the

sums and percentages to ascertain more substantive differences on content. Such differences could include how stories are framed to which stories are selected – gate keeping and agenda-setting.

To explore these concepts, this study focuses on the pre-closure, competitive period of McCombs' study to more closely scrutinize what the competing newspapers offered the Cleveland market and thus to analyze what that market lost in terms of diversity of content brought about by head-to-head competition. To this end, the author undertook a more qualitative, analysis of newspaper content that went beyond counting of stories according to geographic or topical focus, analyzing in more detail the subject matter of newspaper stories published during the study period. As suggested by Shoemaker and Reese, such analysis is vital to reach an understanding of the role of media content in society and in democracy.

Quantitative measures, suggest Shoemaker and Reese, can provide important information about amounts of coverage and some insights into priorities, but they cannot tell us what the coverage was like – the qualitative attributes of the content. Two newspapers may run precisely the same number of inches or news about Israel but still provide very different views of what is happening in that country. Knowing how many times a sportscaster refers to black athletes doesn't tell us whether the coverage reflects fairness or prejudice. Measuring the qualitative attributes of media content is difficult, but it is often far more revealing than looking at quantitative data alone [8].

The importance of this research lies in the basic notion of the function of newspapers, or competing media, in maintaining the sort of vigorous debate and different ideas promulgated by an active, vibrant competition of community voices. This theory of the contribution of media, newspapers in particular, to a pluralistic republic is based in the marketplace of ideas concept.

Thomas Jefferson and others have invoked the marketplace metaphor, raised by Milton in 1644 in his *Aeropagitica* in which he envisioned truth arising from a grapple of differing ideas, on behalf of the vital role of public debate and discussion to preserve a democratic form of government. Chaffee and Wilson in 1977 cited the concept on behalf of the media's role in informing the public, arguing that environments promoting diverse opinion "would seem to be functioning more in the manner of the Jeffersonian ideal than those communities where few problems are perceived as important, and where there is little diversity of opinion of change in perspective over time" [9].

The concept also has been endorsed by the political and legal community. One example is passage by Congress and signature by President Richard Nixon in 1970 of the federal Newspaper Preservation Act, intended to promote newspaper competition to preserve diversity of opinion by avoiding newspaper monopolies. The act offered competing, financially distressed newspapers an exemption to anti-trust regulations by enabling them to enter into joint operating agreements (JOAs), in which they shared business and production facilities but maintained separate, independent newsrooms with separate ownership. The federal judge who in 1972 upheld the act invoked the marketplace metaphor in his argument on behalf of preservation of editorial independence [10].

One of the necessary components of a marketplace of ideas is – a marketplace, that is, an environment in which consumers, or readers, have a choice in selection of goods, or ideas and information. Thus, competing news or media organizations provide an opportunity for a variety of differing ideas to thrive, or put differently, for a diversity of

ideas even if they don't necessarily compete with each other. So newspaper, and media, competition is an important component in a discussion of the marketplace of ideas and its role in democracy.

Literature Review

Some media scholars, in studies covering a time frame from the 1940s to the 1990s, have questioned whether competition brings about editorial and voice diversity in a community, while others have argued that competing voices are vital to maintaining a marketplace of ideas. Among the former, besides those already cited above, Drager in a 1999 study of the editorial page content of 105 newspapers, found little diversity among the papers analyzed [11]. In their 1993 book, *Joint Operating Agreements: The Newspaper Preservation Act and its Application*, Busterna and Picard asked whether JOAs can maintain a variety of editorial voices that the authors claimed did not exist in the first place [12]. Other studies have found similar lack of meaningful effect [13-15].

On the benefits-of-competition side of the argument, Glasser argued in 1984 that the First Amendment fosters "divergent points of view" that promote "an informed citizenry," [16] Such discussions invoke not only such Jeffersonian sentiments but also free-market, capitalistic theory, which argues that a free and competitive media market is one operating in classic capitalistic fashion and fostering a range of ideas whose merits are decided by the consumers.

For example, Bagdikian, a former newspaper journalist-turned-academic, offered a free-market-based argument for media competition by citing in his book, *The Media Monopoly*, the reading habits developed by media consumers before the rise of mass advertising. This was an era, he wrote, when "papers succeeded solely because they pleased their readers".

Readers were clustered in terms of their serious political and social ideas – some were conservative, some liberal, some radical – and they had religious or regional loyalties. Each paper tended to focus a great deal of its information on the preferences of its readers. Because papers were physically smaller, lacking mass advertising, they were cheaper to print. . . . The result was a wider spectrum of political and social ideas than the public gets from contemporary newspapers. The frequent excess among adversarial papers of the past is the normal social cost of rigorous debate in a democracy [17].

Other research that has found beneficial political and diversity effects in competitive newspaper markets includes an analysis of data from a 1988 American National Election Study by the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research in which Lasorsa found "significant" opinion diversity [18]. Jan P. Vermeer's in 1995 study found that the presence of more newspapers in a county can bring about tighter governor and U.S. Senate elections [19].

The media theory of agenda-setting, the notion that newspapers and media outlets put forward not so much what readers and audiences should think about a subject but, rather, what subjects are important and ought to be placed before the public, is a major component in a well-functioning marketplace of ideas. Newspapers, and media organizations, can differ not only in framing – the particular emphasis they place on a story through selection of language and description or focus on a particular aspect or angle, or the ordering and organization of information – and in gate keeping – the stories they select for publishing or broadcasting and which stories they leave out. They also differ significantly in where they place the

stories, such as on the front page or at the beginning of a newscast, as opposed to inside the paper or near the end of a broadcast, and in the stories they select as being important enough to devote reporting and editing resources to them.

Lang and Lang in 1959 argued that the media, through agenda-setting, “force attention to certain issues. They build up public images of political figures. They are constantly presenting objects suggesting what individuals in the mass should think about, know about, have feelings about” [20] These same two researchers nearly a quarter of a century later formulated an agenda-setting hypothesis suggesting that media framing, including attention to descriptive language, is an important component of agenda-setting [21].

McCombs and Shaw, in a 1977 study of the 1972 presidential campaign, found support for the notion that newspapers, through agenda-setting, play an active role in setting agendas rather than the public being the causal agent [22]. And McCombs, Danielian and Wanta, argued in a 1995 chapter in a text on the media and public opinion that agenda-setting is a key ingredient in the formation of public opinion, which is a major component of the democratic process. Although agenda-setting is a “secondary and unintentional by-product of the necessity to select a few issues for attention,” they argued, “it is one of the most significant effects of mass communication.” Agenda -setting is part of the process of bringing about public awareness, which, the authors wrote, “is the first step in the formulation of public opinion” [23]

That “formulation” concept is key to agenda-setting, which assumes an activist role by the media in presenting and shaping reality for media audiences as opposed to a passivist role that views media merely as channels of communication. This activist role, through framing, gate-keeping and agenda-setting, is why two newspapers “in the same town may provide radically different views of the day’s events,” noted Shoemaker and Reese. “People who attend a political rally have a much different idea of what happened from that of those who watched it on television. If the media are mere channels for transmitting reality, then all media should provide the same basic view of an event” [24]

The fact that media present different views of events, trends and issues thus is evidence that media, rather than mirroring reality, interpret and shape it for the public. Thus, merely counting stories according to geographic or topic concentration does not present a fully accurate rendering of media content.

Paraphrasing Lippman on the concept of agenda-setting, Severin and Tankard concluded about agenda-setting in their 2001 textbook on communication theory that the phenomenon “is more like a searchlight, and where the searchlight is shining can be affected by groups with special interests in an issue, by pseudo events created to get attention, and by certain habits and rituals of journalists” [25].

It is those habits and rituals, as found in the Cleveland Press and Plain Dealer in 1980, that concern us here.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to discover, through analysis of the content of the Cleveland Press and Plain Dealer before the 1982 closure of the Press, not whether the content of the Plain Dealer changed or remained the virtually the same after the shuttering of its rival. Previous research has answered this question sufficiently. Rather, this study aims to learn, through an analysis of content centered on agenda-setting and framing, whether the newspaper-information

landscape of the Cleveland region had changed following the closure. More succinctly: What did the Cleveland community lose, if anything, in the marketplace of ideas because of the transformation of a competitive daily newspaper market to a monopoly newspaper market?

RQ1: Is any diversity of subject content found in the published local and state news stories of the Cleveland Press and Plain Dealer before the Press shut down?

RQ2: Is any diversity of subject content or geographical focus found in the editorials of the Press and Plain Dealer before the closure of the Press?

RQ3: Is any diversity of ideology or political philosophy, or of framing, found in the editorials of the Press and Plain Dealer before the closure of the Press?

Method

The process here is one of subtraction: to analyze what sort of diversity of ideas and opinion existed in the Cleveland newspaper market before the closure of the Press and thus to infer, after the loss of one of the two dominant competing daily newspapers, what would be missing – as it would be impossible to analyze what actually is missing because there is no content of a second newspaper to analyze for comparison.

This study replicates part of the method of the McCombs and Bigman studies in that the author randomly selected issues of the Cleveland Press and Plain Dealer to create a constructed week during September 1980. As in the McCombs study, because the Press did not publish on Sundays and the Saturday edition was tabloid and thus compromised meaningful comparison, the random selection was of one edition from each of the other five days of the week. This study differs from its predecessor in that the coding did not take in the various categories identified by McCombs that included such news of the day as sports, business, lifestyle/food, entertainment, comics and editorials. Nor did the author analyze, as McCombs did, the content of the newspapers by such specific topics as agriculture, education, crime, accidents or the presidential election. And the author did not count throughout the newspapers, as McCombs did, the number of stories, or percentages, according to geographical focus, such as local, state, Washington, other national or foreign.

Rather, to discern differences in newspaper content and agenda-setting, four specific categories were selected for analysis: the mix of stories, according to geographical focus, on the newspapers’ front pages, which are a newspaper’s most important page when it comes to agenda-setting; the number and subject matter of local and state stories; the geographic and subject focus of all editorials in both newspapers for an entire month; and how many front-page and local/state stories reported the same subject matter (coded as repeat stories) by both newspapers on the particular days analyzed. The purpose of the last category was to go beyond a counting of stories by subject or geographic focus to discover the variety of coverage, if any, in the context of stories dealing with different or same subject matter – to analyze diversity in terms of story content.

The analysis of local and state stories of inside pages was kept separate from those on the front page. Either paper offered a stand-alone “local” or “regional” section of news as is the norm in many newspapers today; both newspaper spread their local and state stories primarily throughout the inside pages of the A and B sections, and

these are the stories that were identified and analyzed. The analysis of local and state stories was limited to so-called hard news and news-features and did not include sports, business, entertainment or society news.

Because random sampling is likely to omit same-subject stories that might be published on days preceding or following the particular dates selected in a random sampling, and to more carefully analyze the agendas of the competing newspapers along with political or ideological differences that competing daily newspapers traditionally have offered readers, the author also analyzed all editorials during one month of both newspapers. Again, as newspaper editorials reflect the subject content of their respective newspapers and are a primary means of agenda-setting, the purpose was to learn what, if any, differences existed in political ideology, framing and content difference of these newspapers: what sort of marketplace of ideas existed before one of the two competing newspapers departed the market.

Editorials were analyzed according to geographical focus: local, state/regional, national, and international (editorials have no datelines; thus they could not be coded according to national and Washington, D.C. locales). Coding also included subject categories devised by Deutschmann [26]: politics and government; war and defense; crime; accident and disaster; economic activity; popular amusements; general human interest; education and classic arts; public health and welfare; science and invention; public moral problems; and other. Editorials were coded according to whether they were on the same topic as the competing newspaper; and these were analyzed for whether they agreed or disagreed in their opinions. If disagreement was found, the editorials were analyzed for whether the disagreement was largely ideological or a difference in framing.

Ideological, or political, differences were defined as those in which the newspaper editorials simply reached different, or opposing, conclusions. For example, one editorial might support a legislative proposal for a property tax increase backed by Democrats in a state legislature to pay for increased education funding, while a competing newspaper might side with legislative Republicans to argue against the tax increase. Or, removing political parties from the equation, one editorial might support a proposal by a city mayor to repave streets in a residential neighborhood while the other newspaper might oppose the idea because of its expense. This is ideological disagreement.

Framing differences were coded as those in which the competing newspapers focused on different aspects of an issue as its most important agreement. For example, both newspapers might editorialize in support of a president's State of the Union speech; thus both could be perceived as leaning ideologically and politically toward the president's policies. But one newspaper might focus on the president's foreign policy agenda while the other concentrates on the speech's domestic components. Thus, while both newspapers back the president, they disagree in their framing, and thus in their particular agendas, in what they see as the most pressing concern of the nation in the coming year. This sort of difference sometimes can be just as important, in terms of variety and disagreements that can emerge in a vibrant marketplace of ideas, as oppositional stances based on ideological and political disagreements.

Also, the editorials were analyzed according to whether they supported or opposed policies and decisions of President Jimmy Carter. This analysis did not focus on particular policies; rather, it considered presidential and administration policies in general,

analyzing whatever policy matters arose, simply to ascertain whether the newspaper editorial board agreed or disagreed with the Democratic president to ascertain if there was a general political disagreement between the two newspapers – another useful measure of agenda differences, newspaper voice diversity, and ideological variance.

Finally, as a check on McCombs' and Bigman's findings of similar general geographical and topical content by the surviving newspaper, Plain Dealer editorials from January 1983 were analyzed with an eye toward shifts in geographic focus or content after the Press closure.

Editorials from the entire month of January were analyzed. This month was chosen because it is a month more likely to produce same-subject editorials; this is a period when presidents traditionally give their State-of-the Union address, governors their state-of-the-state speeches and mayors their state-of-the-city assessments. Also, this is when legislators are likely to put forth proposals, and when newspapers are most likely to lay out their agendas for the coming year. Thus, it is a time when editorials are likely to offer opportunities to analyze ideological and framing/focus differences on like topics.

Editorials are defined as unsigned opinions, rather than signed columns or letters to the editor, appearing on the newspapers' editorial pages representing the official position of the newspapers and their editorial boards. The method used in this study replicates that of a 2004 study of newspaper competition by the author, which produced intercoder reliability of 96.5 percent [27], and of a 2007 book on newspaper competition by the author [28].

Findings

The two newspapers combined published fifty-three stories on their front pages during the constructed week. Of these, the majority were on local topics: thirty – well more than half. The next most frequent category was national (non-Washington) news, a total of nine. The newspapers published six stories on foreign topics, five with Washington, D.C. datelines, and three on state topics. The Plain Dealer published more front page stories overall, twenty-nine to twenty-four, and more local (seventeen to thirteen), foreign (four to two) and state stories (three to zero). The Press published more national front page stories (six to three) and more Washington stories (three to two).

Of the fifty-three stories published on the two newspapers' front pages, just nine, or 17 percent, were on the same subjects. So the majority of their front page stories, forty-four, or 83 percent of all their front page stories, were on topics that the other newspaper did not repeat on the front page. Some front-page stories of one newspaper, though, were repeat topics of inside stories in the other newspaper, most likely due to the professional routine of newspapers avoiding same-page placement of news that breaks first on the time cycle of the competing newspaper.

The newspapers published a total of one-hundred-eighty-eight local stories on the inside pages devoted primarily to hard news and news features – mostly in the A and B sections, with the Plain Dealer placing some of these stories in a back section of its newspaper. Of these, the Press offered a greater story count, one-hundred-three to eighty-five. Overall, the newspapers published a total of two-hundred-forty-one stories in all coded categories during the constructed week. Sixty of these by both newspapers, 25 percent, were on the same topic.

This means that, of the constructed week's published stories, the newspapers traveled separate topical paths 75 percent of the time. A perusal of some of the front page stories that were unique to each newspaper includes the following. For the Press: Former hippie Abbie Hoffman had surrendered on a cocaine charge, the re-election campaign of President Carter was in trouble in Ohio, Carter did not believe that Republican residential opponent Ronald Reagan was a racist, a new highway being constructed in Manhattan would cost an estimated \$6,400 per inch, a nuclear missile silo had exploded in Arkansas, two women had died in two states due to toxic shock syndrome, two local police officers had been filmed sleeping on duty, and the former head of the Cleveland Plaza had died.

For the Plain Dealer

President Carter had become involved in a debate with a university student during a campaign event in Texas, a week-long special investigative series on race relations in the city of Cleveland, a Soviet Union soldier was seeking U.S. asylum in Washington, a Southern Baptist had said in a speech that God does not hear Jews pray, a move to dump a member of the House of Representatives was under way in the state capital, a battered woman had been cleared in the killing of her husband, and local consumer prices had risen.

Stories with topics that both newspapers carried on their front pages included the Iran-Iraq war and the Iran-U.S. hostage crisis, the possibility of a rise in the city income tax, local police had uncovered a plot by Croatian-based terrorists to kill a Cleveland bar owner, and local school desegregation efforts were going smoothly.

Analysis of all of the newspapers' editorials during January 1980 yielded slightly different findings in terms of geographical concentration of subject matter, but similar findings in topic diversity. Whereas the newspapers' front pages were dominated by local stories, their editorial pages during January offered more stories on national topics than local – fifty-eight local compared to seventy-four national stories. So, of their combined total of one-hundred-ninety-three editorials, 30 percent were on local topics, and 38 percent dealt with national subjects (percentages are rounded). The next largest geographical focus by both newspapers was international, a total of forty-two editorials (22 percent). The newspapers showed the least attention to state issues, publishing just eighteen editorials on such topics (9 percent).

However, the newspapers offered telling differences in their individual geographical editorial focus, with the Press giving a far greater percentage of its editorial attention to national and international issues than to local and regional. Of its one-hundred-six total editorials, forty-seven, or 44 percent, dealt with national subjects, and twenty-one (20 percent) with international issues. Its thirty-one local editorials comprised 29 percent of its total, and its seven state editorials 7 percent (percentages are rounded). So, the newspaper spent just 36 percent of its editorial capital on local and regional matters.

The Plain Dealer, though, devoted 44 percent of its eighty-seven editorials to local and regional issues: 31 percent (twenty-seven editorials) to local subjects and 13 percent to state (eleven editorials). National and international topics comprised most of the remaining 56 percent of its editorials: Twenty-seven on national issues (31 percent), and twenty-one on international matters (24 percent). The newspaper published one editorial, dealing with subject matter of a general nature with no geographical focus, in the "other" category (1 percent) Table 1.

| | Press | Plain Dealer |
|---------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Local | (2) 31 (29.3%)* | (1) 27 (31%)* |
| State | (4) 7 (6.6%) | (3) 11 (12.7%) |
| National | (1) 47 (44.3%) | (1) 27 (31%) |
| International | (3) 21 (20%) | (2) 21 (24.1%) |
| Total | 106 (55%)** | 87 (45%)** |

Table 1: Geographic concentration of editorials in the Cleveland Press and Plain Dealer for January 1980

* Percentages are of the total number of that newspaper's editorials only.

** Percentages are of the total number of editorials by both newspapers.

Preceding numbers in parentheses are a ranking of that geographic listing by frequency. Percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth of a percent.

The Plain Dealer had one editorial in a general category that fit no specific geographical delineation; therefore the listings in that column should add up to 86 instead of 87; but it was counted in the total sums of editorials.

In the topical analysis, editorials devoted primarily to political and governmental topics dominated both newspapers, comprising one-hundred-two of the newspapers' total one-hundred-ninety-three editorials (53 percent). Economic- and business-focused editorials were the next most frequent, accounting for twenty-seven editorials (14 percent), followed by education/classic arts (nineteen total editorials, 10 percent), and general human interest (eighteen total editorials, 9 percent).

| | Press | Plain Dealer |
|----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Politics & government | (1) 57 (53.8%)* | (1) 45 (51.7%)* |
| War & defense | (7) 2 (1.9%) | (7) 1 (1.1%) |
| Crime | (4) 9 (8.5%) | (5) 3 (3.5%) |
| Accident & disaster | 0 | 0 |
| Economic activity | (2) 11 (10.4%) | (2) 16 (18.4%) |
| Popular amusements | (8) 1 (0.9%) | (6) 2 (2.3%) |
| General human interest | (3) 10 (9.4%) | (4) 8 (9.2%) |
| Education and classic arts | (4) 9 (8.5%) | (3) 10 (11.5%) |
| Public health & welfare | (6) 3 (2.8%) | (7) 1 (1.1%) |
| Science & invention | (5) 4 (3.4%) | (7) 1 (1.1%) |
| Public moral problems | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 106 | 87 |

Table 2: Editorials by topic category in the Cleveland Press and Plain Dealer for January 1980

*Percentages are of the total number of that newspaper's editorials only. Preceding numbers in parentheses are a ranking of that geographic listing by frequency. Percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth of a percent.

Individually, the newspapers offered slightly different frequencies in the top two categories. The Press published 58 percent of its one-hundred-six editorials on political/government topics, compared to the Plain Dealer's 52 percent; and 10 percent of the Press' editorials were on economic matters (eleven editorials) compared to 18 percent (sixteen) for the Plain Dealer Table 2.

As in the findings of the front-page and inside page local/state story mix, though, the most telling difference in the newspaper editorials was found in the rate of same-story topics. Of their one-hundred-ninety-three total editorials, sixty-three of them were on the same issue. That accounts for only one-third (33 percent) of all their editorials. Thus, 66 percent of the combined subjects by the newspapers were of different subject matter. (The Plain Dealer wrote two editorials, compared to one by the Press, on a local subject dealing with the city's bus system; therefore, the actual count of total same-topic editorials by the two newspapers was sixty-three instead of the sixty-two that might have been expected by doubling the total same-topic editorial count of thirty-one to cover both newspapers.)

Of these sixty-three editorials on thirty-one topics, the newspapers agreed in their conclusions on thirteen of the topics; they disagreed in eighteen – a disagreement rate of 58 percent of their same-subject editorials, accounting for 19 percent of all their editorials. Seven of these subjects produced ideological/political disagreement (39 percent of all editorials of disagreement), and eleven varied in their framing (61 percent).

At the local and state level, the newspapers published twenty-three same-subject editorials, on eleven issues. So, nearly 70 percent of their local and state editorials were on subjects entirely different than those of their rival.

Looking at just the local editorials only, some of the subjects editorialized on by the Plain Dealer exclusively included fear of crime among elderly residents in public housing, dismal living conditions in the city's public housing projects, an attempt by city education officials to break through a picket line, the challenges facing the city mayor in bringing together business and local government concerns, the unusual proposal by a public agency (the city library) to seek a lower levy from taxpayers, and reports that the city bus system would be seeking a fare increase.

Local issues taken up by the Press and ignored by the Plain Dealer included the threat posed to the community from a leaking chrome dump, the weekend murder of a deer at the city zoo, the need for a city commission on education, lax enforcement of no-smoking regulations at Cleveland Cavaliers' basketball games, the need for improvements to the lighting system for the interstate highways that pass through the city, the disruptive strike by city school clerks, and public apathy to graffiti.

One other area of content and voice diversity relating to agenda-setting and a marketplace of ideas is ideological, or political, diversity. To measure this component, editorials on the eleven subjects discussed by both newspaper editorial boards were sorted according to whether they agreed or disagreed in their findings. If they disagreed, they were then sorted according to whether the variance was based on ideology or in focus or framing.

The newspapers agreed on seven subjects in conclusions and disagreed on four, for a disagreement rate of 36 percent. Two of these subjects of disagreement, 50 percent, produced ideologically diverse opinions; two differences were for reasons of framing or focus.

An example of an editorial subject that divided the newspapers ideologically is the proposed reform of the state's lottery commission. The Plain Dealer argued that the director of the commission "should have the authority to hire employees. But the director, in turn, should be hired by the commission, not a governor. Until this element of politics is corrected, the lottery likely will continue to face periodic scandals" [29]

The Press agreed that the director should have more clout, but: "The bill provides that the governor will appoint the lottery director, subject to confirmation by the Senate. . . . the lottery should be given a new chance to succeed under the reform bill" [30].

The newspapers produced framing, or focus, differences in their stances on the end of an eleven-week teachers strike in the city school system. The Plain Dealer discussed the agreement first as a plus for the teachers, who "will have won salary increases of 10% and 14% in two increments through April 1, 1981." These, the newspaper opined, "meet their strict demand for double-digit yearly rates in an era of double-digit inflation. As a result, the new contract is a significant victory for teachers" [31].

The Press, though, framed the strike's end in the light of budgetary concerns. How, the newspaper asked, "will this package affect the school system? . . . In short, a system which has been operating on an extremely tight budget would have to make further severe cuts."

Spending more money on schools "is not a sure guarantee of the better schools that parents want for their children," the editorial concluded. "But without adequate funds, it is certain that the first step back toward quality education here will never be taken" [32].

Analysis of support or opposition to general decisions and policies of the Carter administration found that the two newspapers produced a total of twenty editorials on such subjects, thirteen by the Press and seven by the Plain Dealer. Eleven of these editorials supported Carter policies, nine opposed them. So, overall, the president enjoyed slightly more than less newspaper editorial support from Cleveland newspapers in September of 1980.

However, the newspapers produced a distinct split in their individual support of or opposition to Carter and his policies. The Press published eight editorials of opposition, or 62 percent of all its editorials on presidential policies, while the Plain Dealer supported the president in six of its seven Carter-subject editorials, for a support rate of 86 percent.

In the analysis of the Plain Dealer's 1983 editorials, the newspaper demonstrated a slight decrease in numerical commitment to editorials, publishing seventy-nine, compared with eighty-seven in 1980. Otherwise, the newspaper demonstrated rather similar percentages of geographical focus in its editorials. Compared to 44 percent of its 1980 editorials that dealt with local and regional issues, local and state editorial accounted for 42 percent of its editorials. However, the newspaper showed a marked increase – from 31 percent to 51 percent – in the national category and a decline – from 24 percent to 8 percent – in the international category. The overall total for national and international editorials, though, was not too far off from the 1980 rate: 58 percent in 1983 compared to 56 percent in 1980. So, the newspaper's relative geographical focus when it came to local and

regional versus national and international experienced little change Table 3.

| | |
|---------------|-----------------|
| Local | (2) 17 (21.5%)* |
| State | (3) 16 (20.3%) |
| National | (1) 40 (50.6%) |
| International | (4) 6 (8%) |
| Total | 79 |

Table 3: Geographic concentration of editorials in the Cleveland Plain Dealer for January 1983

* Percentages are of the total number of the newspaper’s editorials only.

Preceding numbers in parentheses are a ranking of that geographic listing by frequency. Percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth of a percent.

As for the topical focus of the editorial page, the 1983 version produced a similarly heavy dose of political/government opinions, 46 percent of all its editorials – slightly lower than its 52 percent in 1980. And issues of crime replaced economic matters as the second-most-popular topic category, 15 percent. However, similar to the 1980 findings, 10 percent of the newspaper’s editorial focused on economic matters, the same percentage as in 1980. And the newspaper published a greater number of editorials on other topics, including some not included in the 1980 editorial menu Table 4. Overall, though, the differences are not great enough to demonstrate statistically that the Plain Dealer editors or publisher made a concerted effort to broaden the newspaper’s editorial palette in response to the closure of the Press.

Discussion

The author answers research question 1 in the affirmative; it can be surmised that the Plain Dealer gave more attention to localism, including state stories, and to foreign stories, while the Press gave more play to national stories, including those based in Washington, D.C. While this random finding would not support a general conclusion that the Plain Dealer might be generally viewed by Cleveland readers as a newspaper friendlier to local coverage, the finding nonetheless demonstrated greater attention to local and regional issues by this newspaper for the study period.

However, the finding that the newspapers published stories on the same subject just 25 percent of the time is a meaningful measure of diversity in content that can be generalized. The newspapers demonstrated remarkable variance in agenda-setting in the selection of local and state stories they published. The fact that they differed in content 75 percent of the time is overwhelming evidence of differing agendas – of deciding, through front-page placement and through space and reporting resource allocation, what issues the Cleveland audience would read about – which subject would be placed into the public-knowledge domain. That two newspapers entered the same-topic realm only 17 percent of the time in the front page, the dominant agenda-setting stage for newspapers, further supports this observation.

Much of this agenda-setting difference can be attributed to such professional routines as the news judgment of their separate Washington and Columbus bureaus and of their home-office editorial staff ranging from editors to reporters, the timing of news events, and

to a commitment to develop enterprise and investigative stories to carry out the newspaper industry’s traditional watchdog role. Yet, some stories, such as the Iran hostage crisis and looming local income tax increases, are so important that they demand front-page treatment despite newspaper staffers’ reluctance to carry same-topic stories on the front page. However, more is in play here than routines. For example, greater emphasis by a newspaper on local topics or national topics indicates a preference for geographical focus.

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Politics & government | (1) 36 (45.6%)* |
| War & defense | (7) 2 (2.5%) |
| Crime | (2) 12 (15.2%) |
| Accident & disaster | (8) 1 (1.3%) |
| Economic activity | (3) 8 (10.1%) |
| Popular amusements | (5) 4 (5.1%) |
| General human interest | (4) 5 (6.3%) |
| Education & classic arts | (6) 3 (4%) |
| Public health & welfare | (4) 5 (6.3%) |
| Science & invention | (7) 2 (2.5%) |
| Public moral problems | (8) 1 (1.3%) |
| Total | |

Table 4: Editorials by topic category in the Cleveland Plain Dealer for January 1983

* Percentages are of the total number of the newspaper’s editorials only. Preceding numbers in parentheses are a ranking of that geographic listing by frequency. Percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth of a percent.

Because this is a randomly selected, constructed week of story samplings, it of course is possible that these newspapers published on other days the stories they had missed on the particular days analyzed. So it becomes necessary to also analyze a universe of content during the month to correct for same-subject stories that might not have been detected during the constructed week. To this end, the author analyzed the content of all editorials published during the entire month of January 1980.

This analysis produced an affirmative response to the second research question: Diversity of content and geographical focus, similar to that found in the randomly sampled constructed week, was found in the editorial analysis. One of these similar variances was the discovery of more attention to localism (community and state issues) by the Plain Dealer than by the Press, which devoted more editorial attention to national and international topics. This mirrors and supports the geographical preference discovered in the random sampling.

Little meaningful findings, other than some slight differences in broad subject category, emerged from the analysis of editorial topics. But as in the findings concerning the constructed week, the key difference in the editorial analysis was the variety of content under editorial discussion. The newspapers entered separate editorial subject realms 66 percent of the time. This evidence of vast subject/content differences supports the finding of the random sampling that these

newspapers demonstrated meaningful variances in agendas – in a realm, the editorial page, devoted primarily to laying out agendas.

A perusal of just the local editorial subjects discussed exclusively by each of the newspapers, such as crime in public housing developments, bus fare increases, leaking chromium dumps, and calls for a city commission on education, reveals a menu of important community issues that these newspapers independently, exclusive of their rivals, identified as important. Considering that half of these issues might go ignored, editorially and/or in general coverage, without one of these newspapers represents a troubling loss of inventory in the marketplace of ideas. Extend the findings of diverse topics in local editorials to those in the state, national and international realm and you can conclude that a broad selection of important issues would elude the public's agenda.

As for editorial diversity in ideology/political leanings and framing, focus, it is telling that the newspapers demonstrated a disagreement rate of 58 percent in their same-subject editorials. Though framing disagreement accounted for more (61 percent to 39 percent for reasons of ideology), this sort of variance is meaningful in its evidence of different agendas if not ideologies. The rate or number of editorials of disagreement at the local and state level was a bit less. Of these four subjects of disagreement, ideology accounted for half.

This finding of ideological and framing diversity, in combination with the findings of significant editorial support for the policies and decisions of President Carter by the Plain Dealer versus meaningful opposition by the Press, suggest a lively ideological debate occurring on the editorial pages of the Cleveland's two newspapers while this newspaper competition thrived.

Finally, the relatively small difference in the Plain Dealer's pre- and post-Press-closure editorial attention to local/state issues compared to national/international, along with evidence of minor change in general editorial topic categories, confirm – unsurprisingly – McCombs' findings of little content and geographical focus change in the Plain Dealer before and after the closure of the Press. But clearly, the loss of one of these two newspapers in this two-newspaper community translated into a severely depleted marketplace of ideas ideologically and in framing but also, perhaps more importantly, in agenda-setting functions found in a robust competing newspaper market. A monopoly newspaper cannot argue with itself ideologically. In the context of the democratic function of newspapers, the loss of one of the competing newspapers in the Cleveland market was much more significant than simply a lower volume of local or national or total business or entertainment stories. The truly troubling measure is one of more specific content that comprises a demonstrable and important marketplace of ideas that is vital to a thriving democracy.

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