Hyperlocal Journalism: Exploring a commons-based model in physical and virtual environments

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Abstract

This study focuses on an in-depth case of a commons model of online hyperlocal journalism, a movement beginning in 2005 to do reporting at the level of neighborhoods in local communities as traditional newspapers withdrew this coverage. This case is an empirical development of two major concepts: the idea of a communication commons and the local communication ecology. This dissertation examines three phases of the local project in depth, tracing a trajectory from few readers to a sustainable model. Using interviews and participant observation, the study demonstrates how news is tied to a physical community through the lens of a commons resource. My findings suggest that in the first and second phases, the hyperlocal journalism project lacked some key commons principles and faced collective action challenges that may have contributed to the struggles of the commons model of hyperlocal journalism. The final phase studied draws on a conventional newsroom-staffing model but works closely with community members to develop intensely local coverage. The finding is that while a number of key commons principles were realized in the hyperlocal project during this third phase, small numbers of participants still threaten sustainability, suggesting that new principles of outreach and recruitment will be necessary.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Many have suggested the first decade of the 21st century has been among journalism's "darkest times" (Sreenivasan, 2005). More and more news became available online. Conventional news publishers and producers lamented losses in subscriptions and viewership and responded by cutting news staffs around the country (Sutel, 2005; Waldman, 2011). Media consolidation became more prevalent as wealthy news conglomerates gobbled up smaller, less financially stable media outlets and content became more homogenized (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2005). Whether during the nightly news broadcast or morning drive-time, or in the print newspaper, content had less of a local flair and more generic content –such as health stories or oldies music – that could appeal to people from Phoenix to Boston.

In this environment, a small team of scholars from a Midwestern university decided to create a hyperlocal journalism website that would provide a space focused on geographically-based, local news and information that could function much like a town square, or third place. During the last few years, the broad focus of my research has been to consider what inspires everyday people to get involved in the news and information process and whether and how this may help them become more capable and engaged civically. This research project deepens that exploration by considering questions about a commons model of hyperlocal journalism and how and why one may originate, evolve, and survive or die.

This study focuses on one particular case of a commons model of hyperlocal journalism. When the founders of this commons resource, Madison Commons, started developing ideas for the commons model of hyperlocal journalism, they envisioned a space in which people would share information and ideas about their neighborhoods, churches, schools, groups or other organizations. They hoped this space would become visible in the local communication ecology

and that people might discuss community problems raised through the commons resource in virtual and physical space. For people to wholly or partially solve the problems of their communities, they need opportunities to engage in "rich, cross-cutting networks of association and public discussion" (Friedland, 2001). While people develop important civic and political competencies engaging in political talk with friends and family (Cook, Carpini, and Jacobs, 2003, p. 21; Mansbridge, 1980/83 and 1999), people need a "critical mass" of participants in public discussions to be more likely to work through and formulate solutions to problems and govern themselves (Friedland, 2001). Media can offer important outlets for allowing people to engage in these broader public discussions about experiences or ideas that are unique from their own and address challenges in their communities (Carey, 1975; Friedland, 2001; Friedland and Boyte, 2000**;** Mutz, 2006; Mutz and Martin, 2001; Park 1925b & 1938; Stamm, 1985 and 1997). Media historically have offered opportunities for people to develop their civic capacities (Barber, 1984; Briggs, 2008; Friedland, 2001; Fung, 2004; Kretzmann, 1997; Sirianni and Friedland, 2001; Wirth, 1938).

This study examines Madison Commons within the local communication ecology. The communication ecology of a city includes face-to-face communication that takes place among people, along with mediated communication in individuals' personal networks, such as e-mail or social media exchanges. Additionally, the communication ecology includes that information produced by local groups, organizations, or institutions, such as church newsletters, neighborhood newspapers, and university press releases. Ethnic, indie, and niche media also play important roles in a city's communication ecology. Finally, larger media outlets, such as broadcast stations or daily newspapers, contribute to informing people about the events and issues within a community (Ball-Rokeach, S., Kim, Y.-C., and Matei, 2001; Friedland, 2001).

The city of Madison is a mid-size urban community of around 230,000, whose population is nearly 80 percent Caucasian, and around 7 percent each African American, Asian, and Latino (City of Madison, n.d.). City residents have access to many mediated communication outlets to complement their personal networks. Madison has a vibrant neighborhood association network, with around 120 associations registered with the city (City of Madison, n.d.), and a number of these have print and/or online newsletters as well as e-mail listserves. Further, several regional quasi-official neighborhood planning councils exist that help bridge communication among neighborhood organizations within their regions, and two of these produce monthly newspapers that are distributed to residents in the regions via print or online. Many of the scores of nonprofits in Madison communicate regularly with members through electronic or print newsletters, e-mail, and websites. The city also has numerous media outlets, including the following: six television stations with local evening or morning news and online presences; several radio stations that address local news; one print daily newspaper that also has a web presence; a former daily newspaper that now publishes online and in print news-and-opinion-focused and entertainment-and-lifestyle-focused publications; an alternative weekly newspaper; several ethnic and issue-specific newspapers published twice each month or monthly; and several magazines that focus on lifestyles for the general population or specific groups of people (such as women or music lovers).

I argue that Madison Commons has developed a niche within the local communication ecology after several years of struggling to grow its readership. Madison Commons administrators developed strong partnerships with a the web branch of a local media outlet and an umbrella organization for nonprofits. These moves allowed Madison Commons to become more visible because its stories are repurposed on the media partner's website, a partnerships that

has led to greater hits for Commons' stories. Further, individuals affiliated with the nonprofit umbrella organization are developing a sense of the Commons as a media resource to which they can turn to share and gain information about nonprofits and their work in the city. In addition to these partnerships, Madison Commons administrators also chose to hone in on four specific broad issues to cover, areas undercovered by local conventional media. Thanks to these moves, Madison Commons has carved a space in the local communication ecology because some people look to the resource for reliable news about such topics as education, environment, transportation, and city life.

This research draws from in-depth interviews with individuals who have participated in various phases of the project, as well as with community members who have meaningful interests in issues reported on thoroughly by staff members for this community-minded journalism model. It also draws from my observations as a researcher and project manager for two years for Madison Commons. In my capacity as a project manager, I instructed workshop participants in basic journalism skills, engaged in discussions and provided feedback about story topics, and developed friendships with a number of the individuals.

Since the early 2000s, hyperlocal journalism models[1] have been popping up around the Internet at an almost dizzying pace. Many of those people practicing forms of such journalism in the virtual world believe these efforts offer opportunities to begin conversations about local

[1] Community and hyperlocal journalism aim to focus coverage on issues at neighborhood levels and include varieties of sources from everyday citizens to community activists to local officials, for example. Some see the term "hyperlocal journalism" as representing a form of new media because it is associated with virtual media that is especially interested in non-official voices of issues at the local level. Additionally, hyperlocal journalism also implies a type of citizen participation in news production or action resulting from its news stories (Metzgar, Kurpius, and Rawley, 2011). Both aim for an intense community-mindedness in their coverage and to involve diverse voices often are not included by traditional media.

issues, to build community rather than just report on it, to offer coverage in areas and of issues not provided by more traditional news outlets, and to give voice to everyday people rather than simply official sources (Ivancin and Schaffer, 2009; Carpenter, 2010**).** A number of online news and information sites in the United States have thrived through reporting about intensively local issues, including New Hampshire's The Forum and New York's NewCastleNow (Schaffer, 2010).

While some of these virtual, geographically based news sites endure, many also fail (Palser, 2010; Schaffer, 2010). This research explores a case of a particular model of hyperlocal journalism in a bounded, geographical mid-size urban city that is rooted in theories of a commons. The overarching questions explored in this examination of a hyperlocal journalism model found in commons-resource principles are the following.

- R1: What characteristics and rules of a commons resource are present in this hyperlocal journalism model?
- R2: How may these contribute to collective action challenges and the resource's successes or failures, and how might such challenges be unique to a virtual but geographically tied commons?
- R3: Does this model exist as an information commons or contribute to an information commons, and, if so, how?

It is worth investigating a hyperlocal journalism project drawing from a commons model of ownership, production, and distribution for a number of reasons. Conventional journalism models continue to struggle financially in a new media environment in which 29 percent of people say they get their news "yesterday" online, a figure that grew nearly 63 percent in eight years (Sasseen, Olmstead, and Mitchell, 2013). Researchers and industry professionals continue

to search for innovative ways to publish news and survive in a rapidly changing media environment, one in which people have had free access to the bulk of news for more than a decade. Hyperlocal journalism efforts have been attractive because publishers see potential for additional advertising revenue (Snell, 2009; Stepp, 2011). This particular case, Madison Commons, is worth examining because project administrators made a careful decision to bridge a geographically based community with a virtual community. They wanted to create an online, news- and information-based environment whose topics would address issues in a particular mid-size urban city. Building bridges between virtual and face-to-face relationships can play important roles for some groups of people in cultivating practices that may foster democratic processes (Katz, Rice, and Aspden, 2001; Matei and Ball-Rokeach, 2003; Mesch and Levanon, 2003). While people have studied virtual communities as cases of commons, little research examines a hyperlocal journalism website through the lens of a commons model. My research seeks to help fill gaps in this area of the literature.

A commons, at its most basic concept, is a resource collectively governed by citizens in which they can share ideas and engage in democratic processes (Hess and Ostrom, 2006). A commons traditionally has been thought of in environmental terms: a piece of land, for example, where owners may bring their cattle to graze. The land could be state owned, privately owned, or managed by cattle owners who have a stake in seeing the land thrive so their cattle can, too. By the late 1990s, people began to recognize communities that functioned much like commons in the online environment. Whether physical commons or virtual commons, all commons will face collective action challenges. Commons stakeholders may choose to act in their own self-interests, for example, and the commons likely would fail. Even successful commons face

collective action problems: for example, not everyone may agree when and how quickly to embrace change.

The hyperlocal journalism commons model that is the focus of this particular study has undergone several transformations in its eight years of existence. In its earliest phases, Madison Commons was set up along the lines of a town square: citizens were trained to report on their communities, the stories were published in the "town square" space, and those living in the city were "invited" into the space to comment on stories, ask questions of one another about the stories and larger issues, and get to one another better through such interactions. But this town square concept failed to create a thriving, sustainable hyperlocal journalism outlet based on a commons model. People in the community didn't turn to the space to learn and talk about issues, and the trained individuals didn't recognize enough reasons to participate in a sustained manner. In its current phase, the model functions more like an information distributor for the community. Students who are professionals-in-training report on local issues, stories are published to the virtual site, and these stories can be repurposed through other media outlets or passed along through virtual networks as individuals "distribute" news to their friends, family, co-workers, and others. Just as importantly, social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter have blossomed since Madison Commons's early days, and many people now share the resource's stories with countless others through these social media tools. The project now has experienced more success at contributing to community conversations by overhauling its reporting practices, refocusing its coverage, and cultivating strong partnerships with several key community organizations.

Many would consider Madison Commons an example of an associational commons. Such a commons is one in which a particular group of people tend to the resource's daily maintenance.

That group also enacts certain requirements or expectations for membership within the commons community (Levine, 2002 and 2006). Individuals working or studying at the local university launched the project. These people developed a vision and worked with regional neighborhood organizers to discuss goals and find community members to engage with the project. Membership in the early phases was open to community members who completed some form of Madison Commons citizen journalism trainings. This stands in contrast to libertarian commons, which are open to all, managed jointly, and the rules are developed and adapted by the commons community members as needed (Levine, 2002). In its early days, the Internet functioned much as a libertarian commons, for example, as computer programmers wrote and refined hypertext markup language, and individuals built and participated in online discussion groups. While both have value, this study argues that an associational commons is particularly well suited to hyperlocal journalism models inspired by commons principles because such endeavors demand time, stability, an intense knowledge of the local community and of the project's evolution, and a stable governing body with understanding of and access to financing opportunities. Still, whether people establish an associational or libertarian commons will not solely determine its success.

Researchers suggest a host of principles that heavily influence a commons ability to flourish (Agrawal, 2001; Baland & Platteau 1996; Ostrom 1990, 2002). Among these, Elinor Ostrom's work has heavily influenced researchers looking at commons resources and the social dilemmas associated with them. Ostrom's *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (1990) challenged assertions that commons resources would fail because people would not set aside short-term interests to work collaboratively or would capitalize on others' work but not participate in collective work (Hardin, 1968; Olson, 1965/71). She suggested that with effective self-governance and communication, people, in fact, had been

collaborating for hundreds of years to secure natural resources. This research project draws on an analytical framework outlined by Ostrom in her early work. In doing so, it considers the characteristics of the commons resource and its community members and how these interact with each other to influence a commons' stability and success. Ostrom's framework is useful because scholars have used these repeatedly when studying physical commons environments to examine collective action problems surrounding commons successes and failures.

In drawing from these principles, this research does not see these as prescriptive. Instead, it prefers to think of these as design elements or "insightful findings," as Ostrom and Hess (2006) describe them, so as to avoid a rigid set of rules or a model that practitioners must employ or researchers should be examining. The discussions of resource and community characteristics, actors and their actions, the interactions, and the design elements addressed in this research are good starting points for spurring additional and deeper studies into place-based, virtual hyperlocal journalism commons models. They help to shine a light on institutional characteristics, actors, and relationships between the commons resource and its actors, or participants, to influence interactions and outcomes. Other scholars can use design practices raised in this study as starting points for examining virtual communities borne from and tending to geographically bounded communities. The characteristics and elements provide broad areas of examination so that researchers may reflect on the nuances of their research community while still contributing to a body of study that has proven beneficial over time. Practitioners who want to nurture successful commons communities can reflect on these to consider how such features are similar to or different from their needs and expectations.

This research project addresses some of the subtle differences that exist between commons that exist in physical space versus those built around culture or knowledge, along with

commons that try to bridge the physical and virtual. With the former, people must work with the resources that already existed, while in the latter situations, people come together to *produce*, share, manage and distribute knowledge or information.

This study investigates the collective action challenges faced by a particular hyperlocal journalism commons model, considers additional potential challenges, and offers insights about how to address such challenges. It examines how the commons may experience challenges differently because it's a virtual commons based on geographical boundaries. All commons face collective action problems, whether a geographically based commons, a virtual one, a commons that arises because people are trying to address a water shortage or because they want to fill in information gaps not covered by conventional news media. Commons community members, for example, must be motivated to set aside their short-term interests for long-term benefits. A critical mass of people must agree to the terms of commons membership for the collective efforts to see anticipated benefits. Individuals must see enough benefits for sustained participation. The actors involved also must navigate trust issues, as they may have limited or no familiarity with one another before becoming members of the commons community. Commons actors also must decide together what rules to establish, along with when and how they are going to evolve their rules and practices as changes in their environment, community, and/or cultures demand. These are just some of the collective action challenges faced by commons arrangements.

While physical and virtual commons may encounter many collective problems similar in nature, they also likely will experience challenges that are unique because of their "space." Scholars and practitioners long have noted that physical commons face problems associated with free-riding – when one or more individuals benefit from the commons without contributing equitably. Farmers, for example, may allow their cattle to graze on commonly owned property

but not honor rotational practices as determined through collectively arrived at rules. In a virtual news commons such as Madison Commons in which news is directed to citizens, free-riding doesn't take away from the community's "wealth."[2] Information is a public good, and the resource isn't subtractable – one person's use will not take away from another's ability to use the information. In fact, the more people who use an online virtual commons such as Madison Commons, the more valuable that space likely will become (Ostrom and Hess, 2006). Thus, a virtual commons faces the challenge of finding not just a critical mass of individuals who contribute content, they also must find a critical mass of people who "participate" in the site by using it and circulating the information found there.

Project administrators tried several iterations of a hyperlocal journalism commons model before landing on a model that has experienced some sustained success. In phases 1 and 2, the project fell short of implementing or achieving many practices that often lead to successful commons. In its early years, as commons administrators tried to lay a strong foundation, citizen journalists recruited and trained to contribute to the commons felt they didn't have enough information about or ownership over the commons. They also didn't see enough rewards to participate for the long term. Still, the model did experience modest success in training around 100 people how to write about their communities using accurate, fair, and transparent practices. Often they took such skills back to neighborhood newspapers or newsletters, church bulletins, listserves or other information outlets. Such practices, themselves, can be important tools to develop for contributing to democratic discussions (Boyte, 2013; Levine 2006; Friedland, 2003). In its third and current phase, project administrators halted a hyperlocal journalism model that

[2] A virtual commons in which news is created and disseminated to news organizations as a news service could suffer from free-riding if some use the service but don't pay for it.

expected volunteer citizens to contribute the bulk of original content to the site and opted for a more conventional newsroom setup headed by a managing editor and student professionals-in-training journalists.

The commons has experienced the most sustained traffic and community recognition in Phase 3. More often than in Phases 1 and 2, stories contribute to community conversations about local public issues and give a greater voice to those whose stories otherwise may not be told in a public format. They are repurposed through an arrangement with a major local media website that allows Madison Commons reporters to repost stories to the media partner's website, and they are posted by staff to Facebook and Twitter. Audience members share links through social media outlets and neighborhood e-mail listserves. As a stand-alone commons model of hyperlocal journalism, one may question the extent of Madison Commons' influence within the community because visitors to the website will find minimal comments or discussions about stories. If considered as one piece of a local information commons, however, this study argues this commons model of hyperlocal journalism plays an important role in the communication ecology of the city. The resource carries community-minded stories not found through the local conventional media outlets.

In the chapters to come, this research explores more thoroughly the commons resource and community features and participants. Chapter 2 provides a brief discussion of the methods used for this research. This research uses a case-study approach and is informed by in-depth interviews and participant observation. I suggest that a case study is appropriate to this research project because such examinations can help generate initial theories, and little research has viewed hyperlocal journalism through the lens of a commons resource. I dicuss and reflect on at greater length my role as both a researcher and project manager for Madison Commons, noting

how my background as a professional journalist may have resulsted in conflicting messages with regards to Madison Commons' journlaistic principles. Chapter 3 looks specifically at Phases 1 and 2 of Madison Commons, a period during which Commons administrators hoped that individuals trained as citizen journalists would produce most content for the site. They did not. The chapter examines the struggles during these phases and uses data from in-depth interviews and my observations of citizen journalists to analyze why individuals didn't maintain their participation. My research suggests that among the reasons, trained individuals felt Madison Commons was minimally relevant to their lives. Chapter 4 focuses on Phase 3, the current iteration, which relies on a more formal newsroom structure. Students from the local university's journalism and mass communicaiton program have been recruited to conribute as managing editor, editors, and reporters. This more formal structure has led to regularly produced fresh content. Madison Commons administrators also have established key relaitonships with a local medi outlet and umbrella nonprofit organization that has resulted in some greater awareness of the site and its stories. In chapters 3 and 4, this study carefully examines characteristics of both the commons resource and its community, while also looking at actors and the actions they took (or not) and reasons why they did so. These chapters consider elements such as homogeneity or heterogeneity of the community, the motivations for participation, and the information shared between commons members. These chapters use Ostrom's analytical framework as a lens thorugh which to discuss such characteristics and how they interact. Analysis of these ideas yield important insight into how and why a commons may flourish or deteriorate. Chapter 5 considers how community members' communication practices and motivations may offer ideas for achieving richer participation for a commons model of hyperlocal journalism. In the last chapter, this research discusses characteristics and practices that may be needed to boost the likelihood of

survival for a commons model of hyperlocal journalism. Further it offers ideas for future areas of study of place-based, virtual hyperlocal journalism models that are inspired by commons principles. Chapter 6 reflects on the findings and considers if and how these findings indicate a hyperlocal journalism model built on commons principles may be useful in other settings.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter considers the methodological approach for this research project, the reasons for methodological choices, procedures for sampling and data collection, the procedures for analyzing data, the framework for data analysis, and any methodological or ethical concerns associated with this study.

This research focuses on Madison Commons, commons resource model of hyperlocal journalism. The site was founded by a professor and graduate student at the local university, and its aims are to provide intensely local coverage to the community. In its early phases, Phases 1 and 2, resource administrators trained community members to report on their neighborhoods, including the people and issues faced in these places. These individuals contributed original content sparingly. In Phase 3, the current phase, resource administrators turned to a more conventional newsroom model for staffing and recruited students from the university, most of who are studying journalism or strategic communications.

The research questions that guided this study are the following.

1. Does this hyperlocal journalism commons resource exist as an information commons or contribute to the local communication ecology?
2. What resource characteristics, community attributes, and rules of this journalism model are present?
3. How may these contribute to collective action challenges and the resource's successes or failures? How may collective action challenges be unique to a virtual commons that is tied to a geographical place?

A review of the literature suggests that much work already exists on natural resource commons, and a growing body of literature addresses virtual information commons. Much of the latter is theoretical in nature, as research into knowledge as a commons resource in the virtual world has developed rather recently, coinciding with the surge of the public's use of the Internet.

In the following sections, I provide a brief overview of hyperlocal and citizen journalism as Madison Commons has drawn from these practices during its endeavor. I explain why I chose a case study that draws on qualitative research methods for this research. This study draws on in-depth interviews with citizen journalists; individuals affiliated with an umbrella organization that is one of Madison Commons' community partners, staff members for Phase 3 of Madison Commons, and engaged community members. I explain how I selected individuals to participate in this study and analyzed data. I also discuss my role as a participant research observer, having served for two years as project manager during the end of Phase 1 and Phase 2 of Madison Commons.

With the rise of the Internet and the availability of user-friendly, often inexpensive production tools, people have access to produce news or information for the web through hyperlocal journalism and citizen journalism (Allen and Thorson, 2009; Deuze, Bruns, and Neuberger, 2007; Gillmor, 2004). Hyperlocal journalism came about to describe news that often address issues at the neighborhood level and aims at making connections with the community (Calo 2011; Gerson, 2011; Metzgar, Kurpius, and Rowley, 2011). This journalism focuses on stories that are intensely local and often are not covered, or are covered in a limited nature, by conventional media outlets.

A number who explore hyperlocal and citizen journalism conceive of participation in broad terms (Goode, 2009; Metzgar, Kurpius, and Rowley, 2011, Outing, 2005). Goode for

example suggests that our ideas of participation in news practices not be confined to story creation but that it also include such practices as rating, commenting, tagging, and reposting of news stories can be journalistic and participatory: "… we should not dismiss out of hand the new modes of citizen participation afforded by the internet at this level (the 'metajournalism' of social news sites) as somehow unconnected with the 'real' business of journalism or news-making." (2009, p. 1290). I define participation in broad terms so that we can capture the ways in which people "make meaning" (Goode, 2009) through their news consumption. For example, it may take the form of sharing a link to a media story, it may be someone commenting in a public format on an article to add or correct information, it may be contributing nuggets of information to a news story (much like the Wikipedia model of production), it may be contributing a photo or video for a hyperlocal media site, or it may be carrying out some action based on information acquired through a media site.

While many think of hyperlocal journalism as that produced by people without professional training with media outlets, this is not necessarily the case. Virtual journalism projects that could be considered hyperlocal in nature include the Ann Arbor Chronicle, the Twin Cities Daily Planet, Baristanet, West Seattle Blog, and Oakland Local, all of which have, or have had, at their helms individuals with prior professional media experience.

Citizen journalism often is used interchangeably with the term participatory journalism. Citizen journalism suggests journalism created by people formerly considered the audience. They generally are people not trained in professional media outlets or with educational backgrounds in journalism. They often have desires to tell stories they believe local media outlets neglect, and they want to engage in work of building community through the stories they share (Ivancin and Schaffer, 2009). Often citizen journalists use community members as sources

to report on their communities, while conventional media turn more often to public officials (Carpenter, 2010).

Hyperlocal and citizen journalism often fuse because individuals want to tell the stories of the people or challenges in their neighborhoods, churches, nearby businesses, for example that they believe have fallen through the cracks. Both citizen journalism and hyperlocal journalism often strive to share news and information about those things not being covered by conventional media.

Limited research analyzes hyperlocal and citizen journalism initiatives from a commons resource perspective. Work that explores these types of projects propose definitions for what constitutes hyperlocal journalism (Metzgar, Kurpius, and Rowley, 2011) or citizen participation (Goode, 2009), examines how the content and/or sources compares with conventional media (Carpenter, 2010), considers how people use such sources to connect with their communities (Calo, 2011; Gerson, 2009; Zachry, 2011), and explores what motivates people to contribute to these endeavors (Ivancin and Schaffer 2009, Lewis 2010, Schaffer 2010). These studies are important for our understandings of participatory journalism as they help scholars and practitioners understand some distinctions from conventional journalism, as well as people's impetuses for engaging in media these ways. Yet we have limited understandings of the ecological conditions that give rise to virtual community or hyperlocal journalism commons projects and the attributes of the resource or its participating community.

This research aims to help explain conditions that give rise to a virtual hyperlocal journalism effort that is tied to a physical location and what features may influence its success or fragility as a component of the local communication ecology. While some virtual hyperlocal journalism efforts succeed, many also fail (Palser, 2010; Schaffer, 2010). This case study

examines one particular resource and its community of participants in a mid-size urban city to consider how the resource, its rules, and the participants influence one another, the early fragility, and the current modest success of one specific commons endeavor.

This study draws on research by Elinor Ostrom (1990, 2002) as a starting point for discussing the characteristics that may influence a commons' success or fragility. Ostrom examines commons resources to consider elements that influence their success or fragility, exploring such design features as governance structures, communication channels, actors and their actions, and how to evaluate outcomes. She has argued that with effective governance structures that engage the commons community and sets and enforces appropriate rules, commons can overcome such collective action challenges as free-riding and self-interests (1990, 2002). While her work originally focused on natural resources, she also now examines commons resources in the virtual environment. Her body of research has proven influential for others investigating commons resources in both physical and virtual worlds. Through her work, Ostrom developed a broad framework for examining commons resources that examines the resource, its community, the actors, actions, interactions, and outcomes. As this research project indicates, as have numerous others, the relationships between these areas often are interconnected.

From this broad framework, Ostrom and colleagues were able to identify eight design principles present in thriving commons resources. Scholars and practitioners examining commons resources have repeatedly used these design principles as they examine commons successes and failures. Like the framework, the principles are broad enough in nature that they don't prescribe a specific path for success. Further, scholars have pointed to some different resource and community characteristics that they believe are closely intertwined with the design principles and a commons resource's likelihood for success.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I focus especially on the resource and community attributes, along with actors and actions to consider what features may influence Madison Commons, a commons resource model of hyperlocal journalism that aims to contribute to the local communication ecology. This research does not see Ostrom's research as prescriptive. Rather, it depends on a careful, grounded analysis of interviews conducted with individuals affiliated with the project or with interests in the Madison Commons' goals to give voice and explain the features that have influenced the resource's fragility in its early years and its modest success in later years. It turns to individuals affiliated with the project to shed light on the collective challenges that Madison Commons has faced and explain these using researchers' insights into commons resources as a foundation. Through in-depth interviews with individuals with ties to the project as well as interviews with engaged community members not affiliated with the project, this research seeks to offer insights into how Madison Commons may continue to build on its modest success by exploring what people want from a hyperlocal journalism endeavor, along with if and how they conceive of their own participation in such work.

This research also is guided by my role as a participant observer in the project. I joined Madison Commons my first year as a graduate student as the project manager for the site. One of the site co-founders has been my graduate program advisor and dissertation advisor. I developed my own line of inquiry with regards to Madison Commons and was encouraged to analyze the resource critically. Among my responsibilities as project manager, I recruited and trained individuals in citizen journalism practices, edited content during trainings and for those few who continued to participate after trainings, occasionally wrote original content for the site, developed new partnerships with neighborhood newsletter editors in regions of the city that the Commons

had spent minimal time working with, and offered a workshop at the city's annual conference for neighborhood leaders.

From these interviews, the research considers how commons community experiences may reflect some of the "insightful findings" noted by Ostrom and others who study commons. Scholars suggest that Ostrom's framework is designed to be flexible in nature (Bollier, 2004 and 2006; Cox, Arnold, Villamayor Tomás 2011; Ostrom, 2010), which could make it valuable for studying commons that are physical or virtual, or that rely on pre-existing resources (such as water or land) or cultural ones (knowledge). This research, however, does not see these "findings" as models within which this study must "fit."

Why a case study?

Case studies that explore commons resource permeate the literature (Epstein, Vogt, Cox, Shimek, 2014). Case studies can be useful for helping generate initial theories that future researchers can assess and build on and modify as they examine case studies as part of similar situations. This approach is valuable with regards to commons resources for researchers and practitioners because they can focus on particulars of a commons resource as they try to understand relationships between the resource, its actors, its governance systems, and its outcomes.

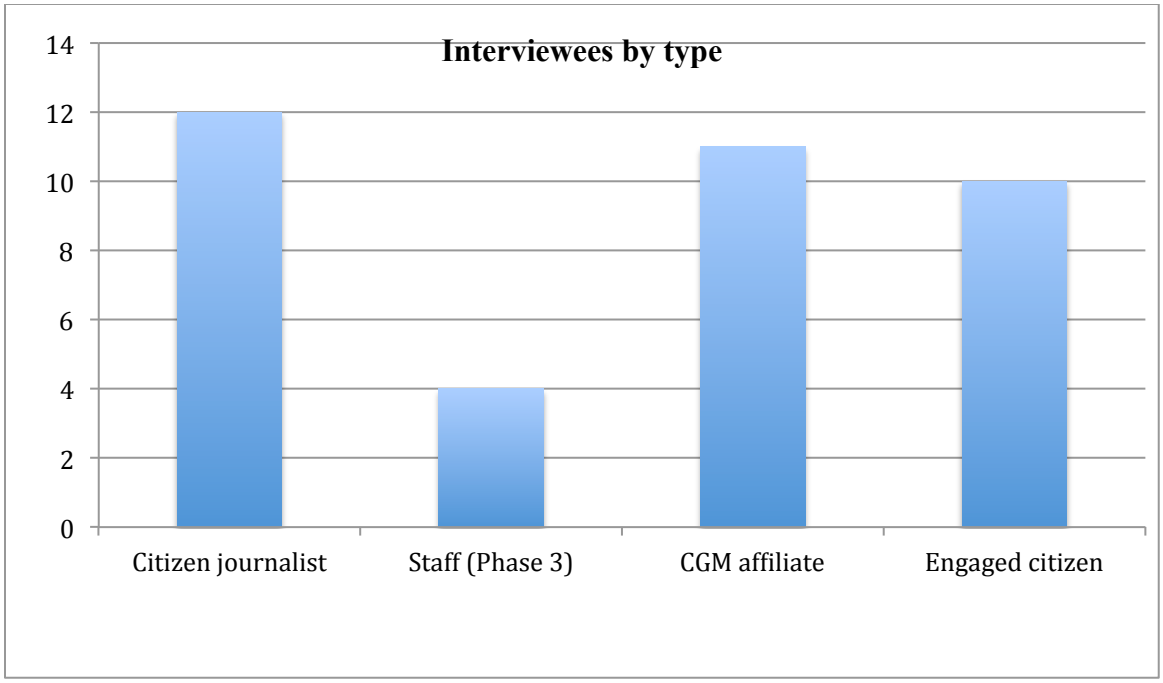
Both qualitative and quantitative approaches have been used to examine cases (Bahr and Caplow, 1991; Orum, Feagin, and Sjoberg, 1991; Sjoberg, Williams, Vaughan, and Sjoberg, 1991). This case study employs a qualitative methods approach. Quantitative methods allow scholars to carryout large-scale surveys to examine relationships. Qualitative methods generally are conducted with smaller populations. Both look at particular cases of society, but the former

does so in an "experience-near" setting and the latter in an experience-distant setting (Glaser and Strauss, 1967/2006). Scholars involved in quantitative research often use information gathered to test whether existing theories can be disproved (Orum et al., 1991; Ragin, 2000). Scholars carrying out qualitative research can advance theory through in-depth knowledge of research subjects that allows them to identify subtle commonalities and/or distinctions in relationships that may not be evident through such quantitative methods as surveys (Orum et al., 1991; Bahr and Caplow, 1991; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Vidich and Lyman, 2003). While quantitative research such as surveys or experiments "take people out of their natural settings" and treat people "more as if they live independently (Orum et al., 1991), qualitative researchers often carryout their work in natural settings and may consider a holistic approach to researching relationships between individuals and social communities. Qualitative methods allow researchers to situate their work within the cultural, social, and historical settings present.

Qualitative methods are appropriate for this study because it seeks a deep understanding of the particulars of a hyperlocal journalism commons resource driven by individuals' thorough discussions of their communication practices, attitudes about media, and motivations for participating in some form in a commons resource of hyperlocal journalism. The research format for this study included a semi-structured interview agenda designed to allow interview participants to expand and draw personal connections to the subject at hand. Interview questions focused on such broad areas as media consumption, connections to one's community, civic engagement, and participatory information practices.

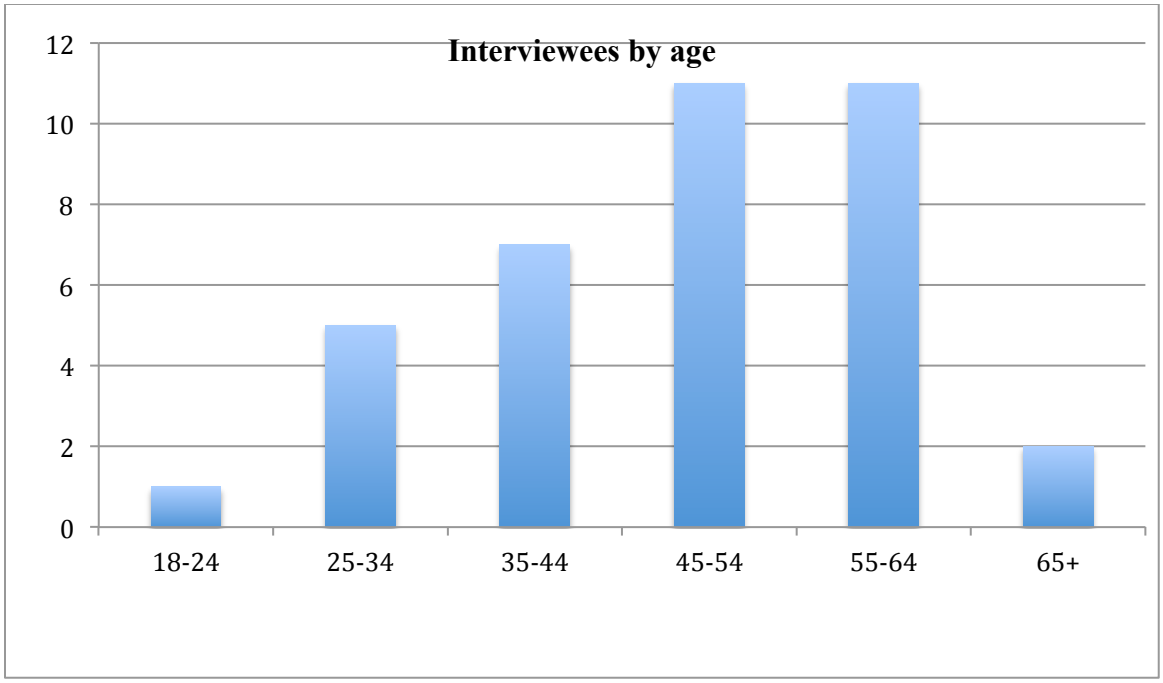
Data collection

This study used both participant observation and semi-structured, in-depth interviews with individuals to carry out its research. Observations occurred through my role as a managing editor in the early years of Madison Commons. Interviews were conducted with the following: people who completed citizen trainings during Phases 1 and 2; staff members during Phase 3; individuals who work with nonprofit organizations affiliated with Community Giving of the Midwest (CGM, a pseudonym for the organization), an umbrella nonprofit organization that partnered with Madison Commons during Phase 3; engaged community members with interests in the topics covered more intensively – education, environment, food, and city life – beginning with Phase 3. The interviews conducted with citizen journalists were done so as part of a distinct research project with Sue Robinson, an associate professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication. Professor Robinson completed half of these citizen journalist interviews, and I completed the other half. The researcher also attempted to conduct interviews with Madison Commons audience members but was not successful doing so.



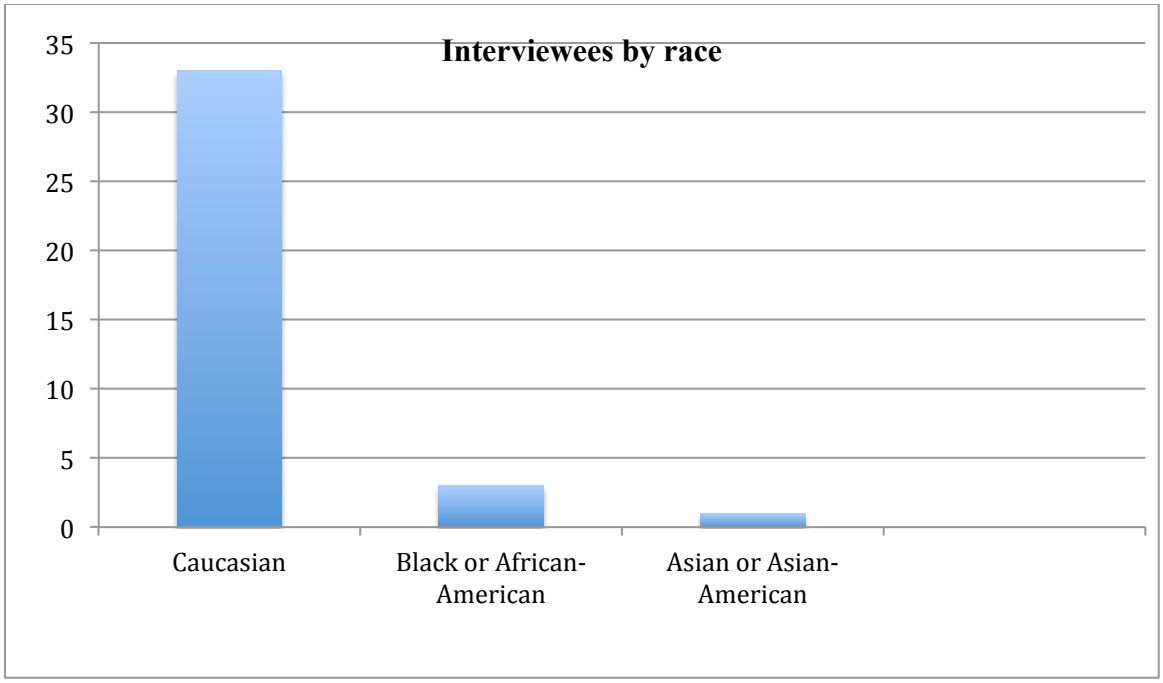
Interview population

Interview participants were found using purposive sampling techniques. During interviews, participants were given wide latitude to address questions as they saw fit. The semi-structured interview questions varied somewhat for the citizen journalists, the Madison Commons staff members, and the CGM partner affiliates and engaged citizens. Interviews generally lasted between 90 and 120 minutes. Most were conducted face-to-face, while some were conducted by phone. Follow-up questions were carried out through e-mail. Individuals trained as citizen journalists were contacted by e-mail or phone.



Twelve people trained as citizen journalists were interviewed for this. See Appendix 1 for the semi-structured, open-ended interview questions. All are women, eight are Caucasian, three are African American, and one is Asian American. Ages ranged between early 30s to late 50s. This group composition is similar to all who completed trainings but differs from city demographics as a whole. The city has close to 51 percent women and about 49 percent men (City of Madison, 2014). According to most recent census data (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013), the median age is 30, about 79 percent of its population is white, a little more than 7 percent is Black or African American, a little more than 7 percent is Asian American, close to 7 percent is Latino, about 3 percent are two or more races, and about .5 percent is American Indian. Staff members who were interviewed were editors or individuals who had reported and moved into editing roles. See Appendix 2 for the semi-structured, open-ended interview questions. All were women, Caucasian, and in their 20s. In reaching out to Community Giving of the Midwest (CGM)

nonprofit affiliates, I chose to contact only individuals at organizations whose work focused on coverage areas that also were focal points for Madison Commons coverage. These coverage areas morphed from education, food, and transportation to education, food, the environment, and city life in Phase 3. These people likely would be those with the most interest in cultivating some form of participatory relationship with Madison Commons. Seven nonprofits were identified as meeting these criteria. Within this group, the researcher contacted the directors of these nonprofits. In several cases, directors referred the researcher to other individuals within the organization for an interview. In total, 10 nonprofit members were interviewed: seven were women and all were Caucasian. See Appendix 3 for the semi-structured, open-ended interview questions. They ranged in age from their early 30s to early 60s. Engaged citizens were selected on the basis of two primary attributes: they needed to have contributed to some form of digital communication in general and that communication needed to have taken place in a topical area that aligned with Madison Commons coverage. In looking for people who had contributed to some form of digital communication, I drew from community listserves, neighborhood websites, or local organizational or group websites. So, for example, an individual could have contributed to a local food e-mail list serve or to a neighborhood association e-mail list serve in which discussions about city life took place. In total, 11 individuals were interviewed, and they represented seven different neighborhood associations or issue groups, such as the environment. See Appendix 4 for the semi-structured, open-ended interview questions. Eight of these were women and all were Caucasian. They ranged in age from early 30s to early 60s.



These choices mean that some types of people could have been left out. Individuals in the city who may be active in their neighborhoods or around such issues as education, environment, or food but were *not* active in digital communication around these issues were excluded. Research indicates that around 40 percent of groups host online discussion or message boards (Rainie, Purcell, and Smith, 2011), which means there could be a sizeable portion of engaged citizens around some of these issues who do not participate in online group listserves or message boards. Further, research indicates that 15 percent of Americans report not having any access to the Internet, and most of these are people who are 55 or older who earn less than $30,000 each year (Zickuhr, 2013). Some of these people also could be actively engaged in such areas but not been given an opportunity to participate in the study. I felt that focusing on digitally active people for this initial research into hyperlocal journalism as a virtual commons resource was an important first step for understanding how a virtual commons resource can find a critical mass of

participation to sustain the resource. By reaching out to directors of nonprofits, I may have excluded individuals at nonprofits who could be more digitally engaged than the directors. In several cases, directors asked the researcher to interview other employees for this exact reason. Five of the seven nonprofit groups were small in size, with 10 or fewer employees, and directors indicated that people often wore several hats within the organization.

Attempts to conduct interviews with audience members were not successful. I was interested in interviewing people who are residents of the city and visit Madison Commons. An invitation to participate in a brief survey was posted to the Madison Commons website. This invitation included a link to the survey. Four people completed the survey. Of these, two responded that they would be willing to participate in a phone or e-mail interview. These two individuals indicated in the survey that the visit to the website during which they completed the survey was their first visit to the site. Based on their survey responses, the researcher determined they were city residents. These individuals were contacted to ask their preference for a phone or e-mail interview, and one responded to this e-mail. This individual asked for an e-mail interview but did not complete and return responses.

Participant observation

In addition to in-depth interviews, I also carried out participant observation through my role as a managing editor of Madison Commons during phase 1 and 2 of the project. Because of my responsibilities as project manager for Madison Commons, I created trainings and worked with around 40 individuals to develop skills as citizen journalists. I recruited several individuals after their trainings to contribute in a more consistent manner to the commons resource, though

the success of this varied. I edited material from writers, and I also established relationships with neighborhood newsletter editors to share content with one another.

All observations took place in a classroom setting in community centers or library meeting spaces within the city. I never observed people outside the classroom environment. Those who participated in the trainings came to know me as a former newspaper editor and reporter who had returned to graduate school to explore participatory journalism and the Commons. During workshop sessions, we talked about stories they were working on and challenges they encountered while gathering information for the stories or trying to write pieces. I shared with them my experiences that seemed particularly relevant to the skills they were learning or challenges they encountered. For example, we talked on several occasions about objectivity and how those journalists with whom I worked and I defined and practiced objectivity. In retrospect, I see now how I may have shared conflicting messages about objectivity and reporting on those with whom one may be familiar. I told the citizens they could report on people with whom they may have worked or to whom they lived next door. At the same time, however, I shared with them definitions of objectivity and practical stories from my own experiences based on professional news standards. While we wanted to emphasize core principles in workshops, such principles as fairness and transparency, we did not intend for the citizen journalists to execute all standards carried out in professional newsrooms. As I discuss later in this research project, the individuals indicated they felt encumbered by professional standards.

Occasionally, participants would share some personal stories, such as their children's school events or farmers' market turnouts. I developed a rapport with many of these people. One woman I drove to her home following the training on several occasions. Another woman I

maintained contact with for a number of years after the trainings and followed her work with local youth and media projects. Several others I have connected with on LinkedIn. Through my experiences training the individuals to report on their communities, I gained insightful knowledge about people's interests in communicating with the public, concerns they had about doing so, and motivations for such endeavors.

This was not a participatory research project, however, in which the community members participated. I did not ask those who completed the citizen journalist trainings to collect data about their own and others' experiences as reporters for their communities. As an organization, Madison Commons' administrators did try to make adjustments based on comments I heard from individuals during trainings. For example, we relaxed policies on writing about people with whom the individuals may have had strong connections. In Phase 1, the people were cautioned against tackling topics that involved professional, community, or personal associates. In Phase 2, we advised people to be transparent in their stories if they had connections with people they had interviewed. Still, the questions that I asked often stemmed from specific practical challenges the people faced. Had I asked the members to participate in collecting data, they may have disclosed information about one another and their experiences during trainings, while reporting, along with their overall attitudes toward Madison Commons that I did not uncover that could have led to greater insights about their lack of participation.

During the interview process, I did not interview those individuals who I had instructed through citizen journalism workshops. Such individuals were interviewed by Sue Robinson, a professor within the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The citizen journalist interviews originally were conducted as a distinct research project. I insisted that I should not interview those people whom I had trained because I

wanted them to feel comfortable to address shortcomings they believed existed with the trainings or Madison Commons, in general. I was concerned they may feel uncomfortable doing so talking with me. Instead, I interviewed only those individuals who been trained by my predecessor to Madison Commons.

Data from the citizen journalist interviews were analyzed through a close, careful reading of research participants' comments. From these careful readings, the researcher identified broad, general categories of interest before examining them in light of the framework developed by Ostrom (1990) and attributes identified by Ostrom and others (Agrawal, 2002; Baland and Platteau, 1996). Rather than use Ostrom's framework as a prescriptive model, this study looks for inspiration to Ostrom's framework and eight design principles of healthy commons, along with characteristics of flourishing commons resources and their community participants identified by Ostrom and others.

Participant observation can be challenging as it opens possibilities for the participant/researcher to exploit the balance in the relationship (Atkinson and Hammersly, 1998; Emerson, 2001). It can disrupt what would occur naturally if individuals involved in the trainings were not also being examined from a research perspective (Atkinson and Hammersly, 1998; Emerson, 2001). Some suggest that this disruption will be enhanced if the researcher remains very much an "objective" outsider during their time in the field (Swantz, 1996). As much as I tried to meet the individuals were they were with regard to personal aims for their involvement, I also was aware that my own background as a journalist influenced suggestions and decisions made during trainings and beyond. While this was not a specific outcome of my role as a "participant" observer, my role as a trainer may have influenced the outcomes or participation, as this study shows.

Some also suggest that participants observers can be too close to the people they study (Lincoln and Guba, 2003; Emerson, 2001) and my role as managing editor meant I developed friendly working relationships with all those individuals involved in the project during this timeframe. Throughout this process, I've worked hard to maintain a constructively thoughtful approach to examining Madison Commons and potential influences on its success and instabilities. As a managing editor, I often found myself trying to assess what could be done differently and implement these ideas while still aspiring to have a citizen-produced media commons. These nagging thoughts while managing editor informed some of the questions I asked of CGM partner affiliates, engaged citizens, and Phase 3 Madison Commons staffers. While the aims of media production shifted in Phase 3, and the commons resource now looks to student journalists-in-training for the bulk of its content, discussions with the project founder suggest that the Commons will seek out community contributions in various formats as Phase 3 advances. Already, community members are sharing stories and opinion pieces.

Notes taken through the participant observation process were done away from trainings and the individuals. Instead, they were done in my home several hours after trainings or after contact or communication with individuals by phone or through e-mail. In addition, I also took notes during meetings with other staffers involved in Phases 1, 2 and 3 of the project. These notes helped inform the research with regards to understanding goals for the project and staff or citizen attitudes about their media work, but in no cases were comments made during these observational settings included in this study. Only comments made during in-depth interviews have been included here. In all cases, participants' names and any organizational affiliations have been changed.

Data analysis

To analyze the data, I used grounded theory in combination with an inductive method of inquiry and broad frameworks that exist in commons literature (Agrawal, 2002; Baland and Platteau, 1996; Ostrom 1990) as a starting point for examining attributes that influence the fragility or success of a commons model of hyperlocal journalism. Analysis began with an inductive method of inquiry (Janesick, 1998). Rather than approach the data with specific parameters in mind, I let the interview participants share their experiences and stories of their relationships with media, their hopes or expectations for a model of journalism that was focused intensively on local community, and any roles they may have in communicating with people beyond close family and friends. Through this close reading, broad themes emerged. For citizen journalists and Phase 3 staff members, themes included motivations, expectations, journalistic practices, and community connections. For CGM affiliates and engaged citizens, these included media expectations and frustrations, news and community information gathering, and news and community information sharing. I reflected on how some of these aligned with design elements of commons resources and resource and community attributes identified by other scholars successful commons. I also noticed some themes emerge that seemed unique to virtual commons and have been less thoroughly addressed by other scholars. As others have noted (Agrawal, 2002; Epstein et al., 2014), a number of variables can influence a commons' success, and these variables can interact with one another in a variety of ways to further influence success or fragility. A key challenge of this research study was reading and re-reading the data closely to understand more fully the relationships that existed within the data.

The study also was informed by participant observation as noted earlier. As with interview participants' comments, the researcher also reflected on notes taken to consider how

broad themes that emerged may have interacted with one another or have been more isolated incidences experienced by people.

Grounded theory

This study uses grounded theory to analyze data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967/2006). It relies on a close reading to examine the data and building on theory from this close reading, rather than using an overarching theory from which to analyze the data. While assessing the data and noticing themes that emerged, the researcher drew on existing theories about commons resources to help develop perceptive findings regarding a commons model of hyperlocal journalism.

Drawing on a broad analytic framework

This research looks to work by Elinor Ostrom and Charlotte Hess for a working framework to inspire research into Madison Commons as a hyperlocal journalism commons resource. Ostrom identified (1990) three broad clusters of commons resources as areas for exploration, and she and Hess (2006) maintain that these clusters also are appropriate for research into virtual commons: (1) the resource characteristics, the community characteristics, and the rules; (2) the actors and their actions; and (3) interactions, outcomes, evaluative criteria. As this research project indicates, the relationships between these areas often are interconnected. For example, the actors and their actions will influence interactions and outcomes.

I drew from these areas to consider how to approach my data when analyzing and assessing the commons resource and the community of actors involved in it. I felt that these areas were broad enough that I would not be missing any information that may provide insights into Madison Commons' struggles and successes (Bollier, 2006; Epstein et al., 2014). Ostrom's

body of research has proven influential for others investigating commons resources in both physical and virtual worlds. After careful readings of commons case studies and others' approaches to analyzing and assessing data, I decided to hone in on understanding more about the cluster that addresses the resource and community characteristics and rules. I hoped this would yield important information about understanding how the values and aims of the community and any subgroups within it may influence the commons resource (Levine, 2006; Ostrom and Hess, 2006; Suber, 2006).

Research into commons resources often considers the eight design principles that Ostrom asserts (1990) are present in successful commons. The specific eight design principles that Ostrom identified as present in successful commons are as follows: Clear boundaries for membership in a commons resource; low costs (money, time) for participating; participants are treated fairly and equitably; a self-governance system that allows participants to contribute to making rules, establishing monitoring system, and imposing sanctions when members break rules; rules used in everyday practice are clear, people generally comply with rules, and clear communication between people exists; those charged with monitoring rules compliance are commons members and can enforce rules that are appropriate to the actions; limited conflict exists; and larger commons resources have nested governance structures. Numerous scholars have used these principles as starting points for research into physical commons, and researchers also have considered their presence in virtual commons. These principles also are broad in scope and identify features that are in place in successful commons regarding resource and community boundaries; rules and community participation in them; community conflict; and community communication.

Many studies don't focus specifically on the eight design principles, but instead focus on specific resource or community attributes that may affect a commons resource's fragility or success. For example, they may examine how organizational affiliation influences a commons' community approach to developing strategies for watershed problems (Bidwell and Ryan, 2006). Through examining characteristics of resources and their communities, scholars seem to agree that commons are more likely to thrive when its community members have prior experiences working collaboratively and that they need to rely on one another and the resource, itself, at least to some extent. They also find that community membership needs to be clearly defined and that there must be some overlap between the residential location of community members and the resource location (Agrawal, 2002). Further, research also suggests that a commons community that has similar expectations with regards to achieving its goals is more likely to endure (Abreu and Camarinha-Matos, 2008; Anthony and Campbell, 2011; Bidwell and Ryan, 2006; Hess, 1995; Hess and Ostrom, 2006; Ostrom 1990).

I found it most useful to examine first resource and community attributes that may have influenced the commons community's challenges and successes. For this commons case, I felt that by looking primarily at the eight design principles and assessing whether or not Madison Commons met such tenets might gloss over or lose features that could yield important information about how to nurture a sustainable, thriving hyperlocal journalism commons resource. Ostrom, herself, suggests that it's important to understand such characteristics in a commons resource's early stages (2002). I would consider Madison Commons still quite new in Phases 1 and 2 as this time period began even before its public launch (some citizens were trained before the launch) and continued through its second full year of being "live." Phase 3 was much like starting over, as commons administrators overhauled one of its main goals in the early

years – to train community members to report on people and issues – and the site appearance also was revamped. Thus, I thought it important to examine carefully the resource and community characteristics before considering Madison Commons and how any design principles may apply.

Methodological concerns with a qualitative case study

Among critiques of qualitative methods is that other researchers can't replicate a scholar's findings because data collection and analysis may be unique to that scholar, thus their findings may not be reliable, valid, or objective. Some also have suggested that qualitative research can't be generalized to other studies and thus can't contribute to scientific research. Proponents of qualitative research have suggested that such critiques may be misguided (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Kirk and Miller, 1986; Lincoln and Guba, 2003; Orum et al., 1991; Sjoberg et al., 1991.).

Triangulation provides a means through which a researcher may test the validity of her findings (Denzin and Lincoln 2003; Orum et al.,1991; Kirk and Miller, 1986). Researchers employing qualitative methods can triangulate data by using several methodological approaches. By combining participant observations with in-depth interviews, a researcher has two checks in place because she can determine how her interpretations of a situation gathered during field observations support or differ from the perceptions that research participants express during interviews. Researchers must find an appropriate balance between ensuring research participants to contribute to the "definition of the situation" and the making claims based on the researcher's interpretation of the situation coupled with background knowledge acquired through scholarly readings of similar situations.

Notions of objectivity in any research must keep in mind that whether scholars engage in qualitative or quantitative research, their personal backgrounds will influence the research questions they are interested in, the lens through which they observe people's actions or responses, and questions they ask participants. Among the benefits of employing qualitative methods in case study work is that it allows researchers to develop a clearer "definition of the situation" as they allow individuals to describe their own ideas about issues that a researcher examines.

Case studies have made important contributions to research into commons resources (Epstein et al., 2014), as well as other fields of study (Flyvberg, 2006; Ruddin, 2006). Proponents of case studies suggest that criticisms of this research approach are misguided. Some assert that case studies may be generalizable depending on the case used and how it is selected. Indeed, some have suggested that the broad framework cultivated by Ostrom and her colleagues through years of research are flexible enough that scholars can assess their data in combination with the framework without feeling hemmed in to specific lines of thinking (Bollier, 2006) or being led "in the wrong direction" (Epstein, 2014). Further, generalizability may be "overrated" as a way toward advancing our understanding of social situations as it is just one of numerous ways to gain knowledge (Ruddin, 2006).

Validity of sampling process

I am aware that the sample size for this research is small and, as a purposive sample, it targets particular people. As I noted earlier, I chose a purposive sample that did not include people who may be engaged in civic matters but did not contribute to electronic or digital media or community conversations. Thus, I could have omitted perspectives not expressed here. An aim

of this research endeavor was to understand better why this *virtual* commons resource experienced fragility in its early years and what has influenced the modest success it's seen in Phase 3 with hopes that we may learn something about how it may continue to grow and thrive. Thus, I felt that it was important to understand how those who already communicate electronically experience Madison Commons as part of their local communication practices.

It also is possible that because I chose to interview people with existing ties, however loose, to Madison Commons or whose interests align with the focal points of coverage for Madison Commons, I could have overlooked people who may be willing and likely to participate in Madison Commons but are not already doing so. I also could have overlooked people who dislike Madison Commons for various reasons.

In the following chapter, Chapter 3, I examine Madison Commons during Phases 1 and 2. I identify resource characteristics, community attributes, and rules in place during these phases as I consider how these may have influenced the community, its interactions, and participation. I find that while the community shared in common a desire to cover more intensively the people and issues in this city, they didn't necessarily share enough of the same ideas about how to produce such media coverage. In Chapter 4, I also consider these three areas – resource characteristics, community attributes, and rules – but do so in light of the significant changes that took place during Phase 3 of the Commons. I also examine the actors, the actions, and the outcomes. With an evolution in aims to have professional-journalists-in-training (students) produce the bulk of content, Madison Commons was able to achieve modest success. I suggest that some part of this can be attributed to the shared beliefs about how to produce hyperlocal journalism. Chapter 5 steps back from assessing the characteristics of a commons resource to consider what the interview participants would like from their community media and whether

and how they imagine themselves as participants in hyperlocal journalism. My aim is to examine how we can mobilize those already doing community work and who have ties to the Commons or interests in its coverage areas. Finally, in Chapter 6, the conclusion chapter, I reflect on Madison Commons as a commons resource of hyperlocal journalism to consider whether it fulfills a role as a commons resource, its challenges and successes, how it may contribute to the local communications ecology, and to propose future areas for examination.

Chapter 3: Madison Commons, Phases 1 and 2

This chapter examines Phases 1 and 2 of Madison Commons to consider how the resource and community characteristics and design principles may have influenced its fragility in its infancy. During Phases 1 and 2, the project struggled to find sustained participation and fresh content for its site. The chapter begins by providing a more detailed overview of the roots of Madison Commons before explaining briefly design principles that Ostrom (1990) identified as influential in the success of a commons resource, along with resource and community attributes that contribute to a commons' success (Agrawal, 2001; Baland and Platteau 1996; Ostrom 1990). This provides context for an examination of the characteristics and elements present in Madison Commons during Phases 1 and 2.

This chapter is based on in-depth interviews with 12 citizen journalists and my experiences as a participant observer. Specifically, this chapter explores the relationship between the resource characteristics, community attributes, rules of the community journalism commons, and the actors and actions taken (or not). It considers how the attributes of two distinct groups, the commons governing body, referred to throughout as advisors, and individuals who trained as citizen journalists were similar to and different from one another, and how these differences influenced participation. Among the key findings of this chapter are that the professional backgrounds brought to the commons by its advisors led to rules that mirrored conventional media practices but that did not align wholeheartedly with the trained citizens' ambitions for their work with the commons. Citizen journalists found limited utility in Madison Commons both as a resource of information and as a way of enhancing their reputations and social capital. While participants expressed frustrations that more people within their social networks didn't seem to know much about Madison Commons, it is likely that the citizen journalists' personal

preferences with regards to news and informtion consumption and comfort level with online communities also played a role in the lack of participation by the trained indivdiuals. Further, the individuals recruited for trainings hailed from neighborhoods often portrayed in the media in unflattering ways, and participants could have shied away from participating in Madison Comomons because they didn't know whether they could trust the outlet and its audience.

Madison Commons: A brief history of Phases 1 and 2

The foundation for the early Madison Commons model drew from theories of the commons, social capital, the public sphere, communicatively integrated communities, and local community as imagined (Robinson, DeShano, Kim and Friedland, 2009). It depended on a strong network of community partners and media outlets and active volunteer citizen engagement. These volunteers were trained as citizen journalists, and administrators' aims were to populate the site primarily with citizen journalist content. In the first two years of the commons, more than 70 people were trained as citizen journalists.[3] During the initial planning phases, staff members of regional neighborhood organizations—quasi-official neighborhood organizations spanning city regions—helped recruit individuals to participate in citizen journalism workshops and identify significant issues at the neighborhood level. These quasi-official organizations were located in three distinct regions of the community. Commons administrators were hopeful that by tapping into existing networks, people would be more apt to join the collective work of Madison Commons. Partnerships were developed with local established media, including two daily newspapers that serve the city's residents; an alternative weekly newspaper; the website arm of a

[3] Madison Commons was rare in its training expectations. A review of other virtual community journalism models around the country that received funding from the same foundation found that no other efforts require citizens to undergo journalistic trainings.

local television station; and a newspaper by and for young people. News organizations agreed to allow their own stories to be republished on Madison Commons, as long as they could publish Madison Commons original content in exchange. In addition, journalism students at the local university were encouraged to report on neighborhood issues as part of their coursework. Graduate students functioned as editors, and I served as project manager for two years during the end of Phase 1 and beginning of Phase 2. Commons administrators offered a workshop during the city's annual neighborhoods conference to familiarize attendees with Madison Commons; offer information about basic journalism practices such as accuracy, fairness, and transparency; and encourage people to participate in the commons resource.

In its third year, Madison Commons reached out to neighborhood newsletter editors to develop partnerships similar to those it had cultivated with traditional news organizations. Madison Commons republished articles that had appeared in neighborhood newsletters to bring broader attention to hyperlocal issues and those newsletter editors were able to republish Madison Commons material with attribution.

The chief challenge for Madison Commons in phases 1 and 2 was that individuals trained to report as citizen journalists simply did not participate beyond the workshops. Only about 10 people contributed once they completed trainings, and less than a handful of these did so with any type of regularity. As a result, the site had to rely on republished content from media partners to populate the site, and site content was not fresh. This chapter examines what characteristics of Madison Commons, community attributes, and rules may have inhibited participation. It also considers the collective action challenges faced during this time. Participants' expectations and practices may have turned them away from the commons community. Further, their own unease with conventional media's portrayals of their

neighborhoods may have influenced their trust in Madison Commons as a media outlet with which they wanted to establish strong working relationships.

Examining a commons in a virtual world

Commons resources long have been studied to examine under what conditions people will set aside their own self-interests to work together toward long-term, common goals. At its core, a commons is a resource that is run by a group of individuals rather than by the state or private interests. This group must collaborate to work through social challenges to develop, maintain, and transform the resource (Hess, 2012). While much of the research around commons up to the 2000s focused on natural resource commons or commons in physical spaces, a growing body of literature exists that examines knowledge commons, especially those in the virtual world. People began to notice that virtual commons exhibited characteristics and collective action challenges that often were similar to natural resource or other commons (Ostrom and Hess, 2006). Participants of both virtual and natural resource commons need to develop trust among one another and show reciprocity, yet such features didn't always progress as needed. Clear communication among commons members also is necessary. Both virtual and natural resource commons need governance systems to thrive. Additionally, virtual commons, like those in the physical world, face such problems as congestion (such as hackers slowing traffic on websites) and pollution (advertising pop-ups when visiting pages is one such example) (Hess and Ostrom, 2006).

Still, virtual commons have characteristics and challenges distinct from those found in the physical world (Hess and Ostrom, 2006). Some have suggested that trust can be more difficult to establish in virtual communities because participants have limited time to build trust

among one another (Tremblay, 2012). While natural resource commons can fail because too many individuals don't participate in its care and maintenance, virtual commons tend to benefit from heavy use even if the people who use the site don't also participate in its production. Consider Wikipedia as one example. Although the site has nearly 22 million registered users (people with editing privileges) just around 31,000 people are considered active editors (Wikipedia, 2014). Despite the low percentage of sustained contributors, the site ranked number 6 in the 500 Most Visited Sites for 2013 (Alexa, 2014). Virtual commons that do not see much traffic (underuse) run risks of failing as participants may not see enough value in maintaining their relationships to the commons. In addition to these differences in how use influences a commons' success, virtual commons also differ because information production often is decentralized: many people may contribute knowledge and to the rules of a virtual commons. Further, administrators who oversee such content may be limited in numbers (Bollier, 2006). People generally can reproduce and distribute virtual information or knowledge cheaply, while the same may not be said for a nutrient-rich piece of land. Because successful commons display practices of clear communication, virtual commons may need to find ways to adapt their communication strategies when working with decentralized ideas and people who may never work together in face-to-face settings.

In her work studying natural resource commons, Ostrom (1990) examined three broad areas of natural resource commons that she found contributed to a commons resource's success or demise. These areas include attributes of the physical resource and its community of people, the actions and actors involved, the outcomes and evaluative measure. Through analyzing these areas, she identified eight design elements that were present in thriving commons but were wholly or partially absent from fragile commons resources. These eight elements are identified

as the following: clear boundaries for membership in commons resources; low costs (e.g. time, money) for participating; fair and equitable treatment of participants; self-governance system that allows participants to contribute to rule-making, establishing a monitoring system, and imposing sanctions when members break the rules; rules that are used daily are clear and people generally comply with them, and clear communication exists among community members; community members are tasked with enforcing compliance of the rules and can enforce rules that are appropriate to the actions; limited conflict exists; larger commons resources have nested governance structures (1990). This list is not intended to be exhaustive. The principles that Ostrom identified are present in successful enduring commons. Conversely, among the noted challenges that faced commons resources that failed were diversity of interests among participants, a lack of tools to address the challenges at hand, a slowness to change on the part of the commons organization, and limited or no attachment and background understanding of the project by participants.

Further, she and others have identified a number of characteristics that influence whether commons resources will form and succeed (Agrawal, 2001; Baland and Platteau, 1996; Ostrom, 1990). Researchers identified such characteristics as the following: reliable flow of the resource (in this particular study, information is the resource); a resource size that is manageable so that those using it have accurate knowledge about its boundaries and the community of participants; participants must rely on the resource for their well-being; those involved must share enough goals and values to offset costs of participating; trust and reciprocity is present; participants have prior experience collaborating on endeavors (Agrawal, 2001; Baland and Platteau, 1996; Ostrom, 2002; Ostrom and Hess, 2006). Group composition, for example, can influence the types of rules established and the actions commons participants choose to engage in. Those groups whose

members are government-centered often establish rules that mirror institutional behaviors (Hardy and Koontz, 2009). Even those commons whose membership is comprised of a mix of government-affiliated individuals and citizens often adopt governance systems that reflect institutional behavior. Commons resources comprised of engaged citizens, on the other hand, generally implement rules that reflect their own values and goals. Ryan and Bidwell (2006) noticed similar patterns with regards to the actions that commons resources engaged in based on group composition.

The design elements and characteristics noted by these researchers were identified with the intention of being flexible in nature (Bollier, 2006; Ostrom and Hess, 2006), and scholars have turned to these as starting points for studying virtual commons (Srbljinovic, Bakic-Tomic, and Božic 2008, Madison, Frischmann, and Strandburt, 2010). Scholars have suggested subtle ways to evolve the design principles for cultural and knowledge commons and to dig deeper into some areas because of distinctions between virtual and natural resource commons (Agrawal, 2002; Anthony, 2011; Macey, 2010; Madison et al 2010). Anthony (2011) encourages people to pay close attention to the role of social capital when examining virtual commons, noting that this is an area underemphasized in Ostrom's early framework. Some critics of virtual commons have suggested there is not enough time to develop trust within such an online community (Diani, 2000; Tremblay, 2012). People who trust one another are more likely to commit to collaborating and they are less likely to be wary that others will act in their own short-term self-interests (Abreu and Camarinha-Matos, 2008; Anthony and Campbell, 2011; Bollier, 2004; Levine, 2006; Ostrom, 1990; Ostrom and Ahn, 2007; Ostrom and Hess, 2006, Putnam, 2001). Some researchers suggest that such commons characteristics as rules and sanctions can build trust and respect among members even if they have never met face to face (Ostrom and Ahn, 2007;

Ostrom and Hess, 2006). Additionally, people's social networks can play important roles in establishing trust in virtual communities: if some people already have working relationships with others within the commons, they may be able to build trust extended social networks (Ostrom and Ahn, 2007).

Some scholars suggest that we need to rethink the types of questions we ask about participation and motivtions for contributing to collective action that takes place virtually. Bimber, Flanigan, and Stohl (2005) argue that although it may have made sense to look at collective action in terms of those who participate or don't in the physical world, participation is not so black and white in the virtual world. They urge people to include in any assessments ideas about degrees of participation and how this influences successful commons. This research takes a broad view of participation, as have other practitioners and scholars examining participatory journalism (Goode, 2009; Metzgar, Kurpius, and Rawley, 2011; Outing, 2005). This study identifies participation as times in which individuals contribute news-style stories, "stubs" of information, comments to stories, and share links to stories with peope in their social networks. When people use the commons in these ways, they are increasing its value because virtual commons become more valuable with use. The more virtual commons are used, the more likely they are to be successful.

Scholars also need to consider whether knowledge that is generated and produced specifically for a virtual commons brings with it challenges that are unique from those of natural resource commons. In natural resource commons, the resource being shared by those in the commons exists already. This is not the case for all virtual commons, including the hyperlocal journalism commons that have been surfacing around the world. In a virtual commons resource such as Madison Commons, individuals must collect information, write stories, and work

through the editing process with others. Commons resource administrators must secure infrastructure and funding to support costs associated with the commons resource, including technology and potential staffing costs.

This brief review of scholarly literature offers ideas that may need to be examined carefully when considering virtual commons, which can bring with them challenges unique to their medium. This particular study of a virtual commons that is tied to an urban, geographical community examines attempts to bridge the virtual and physical worlds. In doing so, it considers not only how virtual commons may experience unique challenges, but also how attempts to marry the virtual with physical may present distinct challenges. In the following sections, this study examines Madison Commons as an institution to consider how the characteristics of this commons resource, the community attributes, and the rules-in-use influenced the struggles and limited successes Madison Commonss experienced. It draws on in-depth interviews with 12 individuals who completed intensive, multi-sessions trainings as citizen journalists by Madison Commons administrators and observations by this study's author as a research participant.

Examining the virtual community journalism commons

While research into the various commons that are found virtually is relatively young when compared with studies into natural resource commons, scholars are advancing theories that seek answers to some of the uniqueness of collective action in virtual places (Hess, 2007 and 2012; Madison, Frischmann, and Strandburt, 2010; Bollier, 2004 and 2006; Ostrom and Ahn, 2007; Ostrom and Hess, 2006; Srbljinovic, Bakic-Tomic, and Božic 2008). Still, few studies have examined an online community/hyperlocal journalism communities from a commons perspective to investigate if, when, and how the community's governing body (advisors) and

participating community marry their goals and values. Drawing from grounded theory and cultural studies approaches, this chapter asks a number of questions. How may individuals' backgrounds influence their approaches to researching and reporting on communities? What happens when these approaches differ? What roles do commons participants think that virtual hyperlocal journalism should play in communities? Does this mirror the roles commons participants expect them to play in their personal communities? How do they conceive of their roles in this process? This chapter sets out to answer these questions. This chapter finds that participants who have deep professional backgrounds working in media settings are more likely to adopt practices and rules that reflect conventional media institutions. Those citizens who have not been immersed in professional media practices are turned off by such practices to the extent it handicaps their participation. Further, this chapter argues that because the trained individuals often came from neighborhoods which had been portrayed in the media as riddled with problems, the citizen journalists felt more comfortable working with neighborhood newspapers than with Madison Commons, a media outlet with which hadn't yet established strong trust.

Madison Commons the resource: characteristics. The landscape of resource characteristics changes with knowledge commons produced virtually. Ostrom identified three areas to be addressed when examining a resource's characteristics: the facilities, artifacts, and ideas. Facilities are the storage of ideas, such as libraries in traditional commons or computer infrastructure in virtual knowledge commons. Artifacts are the representations of ideas, such as articles, books, or stubs/briefs of information (think Wikipedia). Finally, ideas are the thoughts, images, and innovative information contributed to commons. For purposes of this study, this section focuses on characteristics of artifacts and ideas.

Madison Commons original aims were to provide the city with information (the resource) about hyperlocal issues, such as traffic conerns or water-quality issues within particular neighborhoods. One resource characteristic found in successful commons is that the resource flows in a reliable manner (Agrawal, 2002). In other words, people should be able to expect that they'll receive the print edition of their morning newspaper in the morning or that a virtual media outlet will update content every Friday afternoon. Advisors' intent was to have individuals trained as citizen journalists populate the bulk of the site with original reporting. Republished material from conventional media and neighborhood outlets, and to a smaller degree original reporting from Madison Commons advisors, would be used to round out fresh content produced by citizen journalists.

This focus on original content generated specifically for a virtual knowledge commons has been little explored in the research to date. While Ostrom, Hess and others address the collective challenges faced surounding these areas, they generally are challenges that arise when trying to persuade individuals who typically would generate knowledge for specific outlets – such as academic journals – to do so for such commons resources as libraries that can be shared and used by the public. In such situations, one valuable outcome of publishing content within a virtual repository is that such knowledge may otherwise be too costly for the general public to access. Often, the challenges surround communication between the association overseeing the virtual repository (such as university librarians) and professors (Ostrom and Hess, 2006). Among the ways that Ostrom and Hess propose addressing the collective action challenges faced in such situations is through the use of sanctions, enforced by the university.

In this case, the challenges were unique because Madison Commons administrators needed to convince individuals that their time was worth spending on first gathering information,

then reporting on it, and publishing it to the hyperlocal website. People have limited time and are judicious about how they will volunteer it (Wilson, 2010). The costs for contributing are higher for these individuals, all of whom volunteered their time to participate in trainings and write content during Phases 1 and 2. Because they were volunteers, Commons administrators had limited means for establishing and enforcing rules with regards to minimum contributions. Further, while individuals participating in commons often may engage in actions because they feel a commitment to the community to do so (Ostrom, 1990), the individuals had a limited sense of being part of a collective and likely felt no pressure from one another to contribute.

Although content was updated on a regular basis in Phases 1 and 2, this content often was not original in nature; it was repurposed content from other media outlets. The site did experience modest success early in its tenure when one of the trained citizen journalists broke a story about well contamination in the city. This story was picked up by local media outlets, and the issue became part of a broad public discussion. Generally, however, at least 95 percent of stories that appeared when the site was refreshed each week came from conventional media (Robinson, DeShano, Kim, and Friedland, 2009). The commons suffered as a result, as even the individuals with loose commitments to the resource, those trained in citizen journalism, failed to see it as a reliable source of new information. “I felt that I looked at [my neighborhood] section, and the articles were too old. I’d like to see fresh stuff,” said Nan, mid-40s, self-employed, trained as a citizen journalist. Thus, this finding suggests that in a virtual community journalism commons, reliability of the resource also must take into account whether the information is original. By its very definition, journalism is considered “current” information which implies that repurposed content no longer is news but, rather, curated information.

Another characteristic found in enduring commons resources is that they have clear boundaries that are manageable in size so commons community members can have accurate knowledge of the external environment and the internal microenvironments. By its nature, Internet websites have fuzzy boundaries because the information, or resource, can be relayed in ways that don't contain it to the site. People can share the information via word-of-mouth or, during the days of Phases 1 and 2 (before the onslaught of social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter), may send links or copy pieces of information and circulate them through e-mail list serves or chat rooms, for example. Thus tools or indicators that can provide information how a website is being used – how users find the site, who is using the site, for example – become important for filling in at least some of the information where these fuzzy boundaries are concerned (Ostrom, 2002).

While Madison Commons advisors shared indicators about site use with one another, this information was shared less frequently and was too abstract for the individuals trained as citizen journalists. The Commons as a resource wasn't fulfilling their information needs or their personal needs as potential contributors to the site. Their sense was that Madison Commons simply wasn't being used in the community if people weren't talking about it. Bridget, a public relations professional in her late 30s, didn't think Madison Commons was the place people visited if they wanted to know "the buzz on something." This perception that few, if any, people in the city cared about Madison Commons as one piece of the local communication ecology influenced contributions, which in turned influenced the reliability of original content. Citizen journalists who already had working relationships with neighborhood print media or other information outlets, such as church bulletins, preferred to take their ideas for stories to those venues. The outcome of this perception was that the site continued to be underused, even by

these individuals who were part of its community. As noted earlier, the more a virtual commons is used, the more useful it becomes. Commons administrators found that visits to Madison Commons site often averged around in the low hundreds during Phases 1 and 2.

This section suggests that as a resource, Madison Commons was limited in its utility. It didn't often present fresh ideas through citizen-journalist generated articles. Trained citizen journalists found limited value in it and had little sense that it was being used even casually by those who lived in the city.

Community characteristics and actors of Madison Commons in Phases 1 and 2. The Madison Commons community in Phases 1 and 2 comprised several groups: commons advisors, individuals from the community trained as citizen journalists, media partners, and its audience, or unknown users. This section addresses the charcteristics of the individuals from the community, the advisors, the community partners, and discuses how relationships between these may have influenced the fragility of Madison Commons in its first two phases.

Madison Commons was founded by a professor and graduate student at the local university, who had between them several decades experience as professional journalists. Later graduate students to join the project as managing editors or technical editors in Phases 1 and 2 also had professional experience as journalists or in cultivating virtual communities. The project's founders secured funding for the hyperlocal journalism website through a grant foundation that provides funding for journalism and community initiatives around the United States.

Through its first two years, Madison Commons trained 70 individuals who administrators hoped would contribute content regularly to the website. The individuals who completed citizen

journalism trainings had a variety of professional backgrounds, ranging from health care workers to strategic communicators to self-employed sales people. None of them had formal training in conventional media practices. One woman had intensive experience working with the media through her profession as a public relations specialist. Another woman was a technical writer. But most were people who enjoyed writing about events, nonprofit work, or people and businesses in their communities for neighborhood newspapers and newsletters and associations' information venues. Often such contributions took the form of opinion pieces. Rarely, if ever, did their volunteer or professional work require these individuals to tackle investigative or timely news stories.The majority of these participants were women, who outnumbered men in these sessions by more than 2 to 1. About 25 percent of the trainees were ethnic or racial minorities. Individuals for Madison Commons trainings were recruited by working with quasi-official neighborhood organizations to identify potential participants. These organizations often suggested people attend who had contributed to neighborhood newspapers or newsletters, along with organizational newsletters. They also were enlisted through list-serve postings and community fliers.

In the first year of trainings, participants completed an eight-session series, with half the sessions held in person and the remaining held online. This number was reduced to six sessions in the second year. Participants were asked to pay a modest fee for the training series, $35, but this often was waived for people for monetary reasons. Free childcare was provided for those who asked for it. Trainings were held at neighborhood centers in low-income communities, and the two neighborhood centers at which workshops were held were in areas of the city with which Commons administrators worked closely with the quasi-official neighborhood organizations. A series was held at one neighborhood center for the duration; the next series was held at a distinct

neighborhood center. People could access the neighborhood centers by public transportation. Each center had multiple computers that trainees had access to during the workshops. Those leading the sessions addressed basic journalism principles enforced in conventional newsrooms, such as transparency, fairness, accuracy, and objectivity. Workshops included time for instruction, discussion, and writing. Individuals with professional journalism experience occasionally visited as guest lecturers to share experiences and ideas for reporting. Citizen journalists were given broad latitude to select topics for each assignment, although they were urged to write about issues or people within their neighborhoods. Additionally, trainers encouraged them to write two news stories and a feature article. Near the end of Phase 2, the training regimen was reduced to one-time-only sessions that ranged from introductory sessions to specific topics to accommodate individuals' harried schedules. Trainers continued to emphasize basic journalistic responsibilities that citizens must employ to create fair, accurately reported stories that allow for balanced public discussions about local matters. Administrators had no expectations for individuals to complete a story at these trainings.

Commons administrators anticipated these trainings would provide the foundation needed for individuals to feel comfortable tackling journalistic stories within their communities. Those individuals who seemed to feel more comfortable with journalistic processes after the trainings were individuals for whom communicating for the public already was part of their lives in their professions. Trainings helped people "think more like journalists." Some commented that when they were in their neighborhoods talking with others and learned about individuals confronting challenges or doing good deeds, or groups of people tackling community problems, for example, they would think these the types of stories appropriate to share through Madison Commons

(though they seldom did). Unfortunately, this greater understanding of how journalists work also had mixed effects.

> "[The trainings] it feels like anyone can write something, which was a good feeling and a little bit of a scary feeling. I guess I was feeling like, Oh, well, you know how I mentioned, how credible is this … The training also made me concerned about paid reporting and the level of [fact] checking they do. Then I thought at the community level there is probably even less. That is what I am writing. And whatever I am reading I should be more skeptical." –
>
> – *Tina, a health professional and Commons trainee in her late 20s*
>
> –

Trainees hadn't necessarily attended workshops with personal goals that they felt aligned with what the Madison Commons advisors emphasized. Often, people indicated they felt compelled to tell stories about which they felt passion and that would help build a stronger sense of community among those who shared their interests and/or neighborhoods. Further, journalistic practices they encountered while engaging in news production conflicted with their desire to express passion for their communities. Madge, late 50s self-employed neighborhood activist recalled writing a story for Madison Commons that she then repurposed for a neighborhood media outlet. The media outlet was irritated that she hadn't come to them first with the story. "I'm miffed that I did not know that was the deal… If you are a journalist then I guess that is the big thing and I did not know that. That is a made up thing that you have to care about that, and I do not care." Tina was discouraged by a final piece that she produced because she felt in her efforts to be objective about the person she was covering, a peer, she had lost some of his community fervor and uniqueness. "I was thinking more like a person who does not know this [individual]," she said.

People who participated in Madison Commons citizen journalism trainings wanted to be able to write about issues for which they care deeply. These individuals share in common a goal with many practicing citizen journalists around the country: they want to tell the stories of the

people and life of their communities that they believe aren't being told by established media (Schaffer, 2010). It wasn't just that the citizens hoped to write about people and issues that mattered to them. People wanted to write to "inspire others" or to "turn people into people" because they felt conventional media wasn't doing this. "In a lot of cases, [local dailies] say 'You are not important enough to waste our time covering this'," said Terri, a free-lance romance writer in her 30s who had a tenuous relationship with her neighbors and a frustration with conventional media. Some saw the Commons as a space in which people with like interests could join together. "[Madison Commons] could provide a venue for people of like concerns to spin off some action group," said Tessa, a woman in her 50s and an active member of her neighborhood association and Commons trainee. Research suggests that commons resources whose community members share commons values and goals are more likely to endure (Agrawal, 2001; Hardy & Koontz, 2009; Ostrom 2002).

While professional journalists also see their roles as community builders (Robinson and DeShano, 2011; Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007), they see the manner in which they go about doing this differently. They embrace telling accurate, fair, and objective stories about people while maintaining some professional distance from their subjects. In Madison Commons citizen journalism trainings, advisors were cautious about encouraging individuals to report on stories near and dear to their hearts. In the first year of trainings, workshop leaders urged people to steer clear of subject matter with which they had ties. When they did give individuals the go-ahead to report on people or issues with whom the citizens had connections, they emphasized repeatedly transparency about these connections. While transparency is valuable in virtual knowledge communities, these trained citizen journalists felt queasy about their reporting because they felt leaders were prioritizing objectivity over community building. Many were less inclined to take

on pieces they would have enjoyed writing, while others wrote pieces they later regretted. Tina was concerned that one of her pieces published to Madison Commons portrayed the individual about whom she'd written in a way that didn't necessarily accurately represent his personality. She said she had tried so hard to be objective about the person's community activism that she feared she might have gone a little too far in noting his quirky and demanding traits. "One thing that I did was I misled readers by putting a line at the top of the story that was taken out of context… I was kind of like, If that were me, I would feel that way, too, (touchy)," Tina, an Asian American woman in her late 20s. The citizens' desires to be partners with the people they were writing about conflicted with the professionalization they believed was expected of them through the trainings.

It's unsurprising that workshop leaders emphasized the professional practices they did during trainings. As noted earlier, the commons' founders and managing editors had professional backgrounds as journalists. Further, citizen media projects often face critiques that reporting practices are too lax (Metzgar, Kurpius, and Rowley, 2011). By stressing key journalism principles, advisors aimed to reduce some of the errors and shortcomings that critics argued made citizen journalism unreliable.

Still, the citizen journalists perceived this focus as one of a culture of professionalism with which they felt queasy. Their intentions were to share stories that would give people voices and help build community. Most indicated they do not think of citizen journalists as similar to professional journalists. But practicing citizen journalists around the country see their aims as unique from professional journalists (Ivancin and Schaffer, 2009). The gulf that the volunteer citizen journalist perceived between their values and goals and the advisors with respect to professionalism was such that it diminished enthusiasm for contributing to Madison Commons.

Another characteristic of thriving commons resource communities is that its members are motivated to participate in collective efforts because the resource is important to their well being (Baland and Platteau, 1996; Ostrom, 2002). In both virtual and physical commons, people often are motivated to participate because they believe doing so will enhance their reputations or social capital within the respective communities. Madison Commons citizen journalists were no exception. Many talked of wanting to communicate with a broader public to build their reputations. "I wanted to be somebody, and I wanted to be a part of something that was noticed in the community and that people would see," said Madge, who was in her late 50s and self-employed. Those who already had written for neighborhood newspapers liked that they could attend local gatherings and have community leaders recognize them as "reporters" or share news tips with them.

The citizen journalists, however, didn't see personal benefits to their contributions. People in their social networks didn't talk about stories these individuals had written for Madison Commons, nor did they talk about the online media outlet in more general terms. One of the unique challenges of a virtual commons based in physical space is participants' expectation that their *virtual* contributions will enhance reputation and social capital in the *physical* world. For those participating in virtual communities, they expect to enhance their reputations and social capital in the virtual world (Lewis, 2010). Because Madison Commons citizen journalists were not recognized in their physical world as Madison Commons reporters, they did not see the resource as salient enough to their lives.

Certainly the limited original content published to Madison Commons influenced visits to the site by peers and others, and this, in turn, affected the citizen journalists' interests in contributing to the community. Still, two additional features about the citizen journalists also

may have influenced their contributions to the commons resource. The individuals expressed an array of comfort with technology and online media or virtual communities. While five of the 12 indicated they had participated in online communities, each of these five also expressed reservations about committing time to virtual environments. Melissa had spent significant time as a member of various online communities but had decided to back away from such participation in recent months after deciding she was spending too much time "chatting." She said she finally asked herself,

> "Where is your time going, and why are you not present with your kids? What the Commons needs, and is difficult to balance, are people who see value in virtual communication but also place high value on physical communication." – *Melissa, an African American woman in her 30s*

The other seven citizen journalists spent limited time in virtual environments. They saw time online as taking "energy" away from life in their physical environments and indicated they went online for very specific information. Elizabeth said that when she needed hip replacement, she did a bit of "information surfing" in a virtual hip-replacement chat room but didn't engage in discussion with others. Most felt like Nina, a late 40s Caucasian woman who said that "communicating online isn't my first thought." Because Madison Commons produces news and information only in the virtual environment, it's likely that the medium influenced these individuals' long-term relationship with the media outlet. They went online to gather information, but more than half of the citizen journalists favored getting their news and information via word-of-mouth, print and broadcast media, and telephone conversations. Such preferences weren't unusual. A 2006 report indicated that just 30 percent of adults regularly sought information from online media sources (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2006).

With such personal preferences, it seems even less likely that they would choose to write content consistently and long-term for an online-only media outlet when they could write for print publications, a preferred medium. Indeed, a 2006 report, the year in which many of these individuals completed their citizen journalism trainings, indicated that just one-third of adults indicated they created content for the virtual environment. Of this group, nearly half of those who produced online content, such as wiki entries, stories, or photos, were age 30 or younger (Lenhart, 2006). Just one of the Madison Commons-trained citizen journalists was younger than 30, and she was among those who felt that time spent online was energy she didn't have to give. The citizen journalists' long-term contributions likely also hinged on their own preferences for getting news and information.

The citizen journalists also may have had another key motive for sustaining established relationships with neighborhood media outlets – trust. When recruiting individuals to participate in Madison Commons, administrators built relationships with regional neighborhood organizers whose efforts were focused especially on people from lower-income neighborhoods, many of which had minority populations above the city's average (City of Madison, 2013). More than three-quarters of the individuals who participated in trainings came from such regions of the city. Citizen journalists indicated they were frustrated with conventional media outlets, many by beliefs that media focused too heavily on issues such as crime in their neighborhoods.

> "I'm probably more disappointed with mainstream media because they don't do a good job of representing community. They don't represent people of color or voices that might be economically or educationally different. I use it [mainstream media] for things I know will be in there. But then that's why I go to [minority-focused media] to find other information." – *Bridget, an African American woman in her late 30s*

Helen is a late 50s Caucasian woman involved actively with a neighborhood newspaper focused on two low-income neighborhoods with among the city's highest density of minorities (City of Madison, 2013). She insisted that communities need to determine their own identities and find ways to convey these to the public: "They need to define themselves in ways other than what journalists have to say." Nan, a mid-40s Caucasian woman from another low-income, higher-than-average minority population (City of Madison, 2013), asserted that the local conventional media outlets aren't "very trustworthy at all," noting that they don't "try to grasp the complexity of issues." Research suggests that people can develop troubled feelings toward the media when such issues as crime are repeatedly highlighted (Couldry and Markham, 2008).

These people were leery of conventional media outlets, but they expressed deep respect for and trust in neighborhood newspapers and other media outlets that included voices they believed were overlooked in conventional media outlets. Nan described her neighborhood print newspaper as "very authoritative." Madge, from the same region of the city, said the neighborhood's newspaper was effective "at tying people together and forming an identity." The citizen journalists believed local neighborhood and ethnic media had a particular interest in building community that they didn't feel existed among the conventional media. Further, the fact that they saw these media outlets as authoritative also suggests the individuals believed their own stories would be well received within their communities.

They didn't see Madison Commons in the same light as neighborhood or ethnic media. The citizen journalists didn't understand Madison Commons' objectives and they may have seen Madison Commons as an extension of conventional media, which many didn't trust. As I indicated earlier, many didn't understand Madison Commons' goals. Elizabeth wondered if it was supposed to be a training ground for students with citizen stories sprinkled throughout.

Madge said she didn't "know who was going there [Madison Commons] to read it, or what they are going there to find, and what kind of impact it [my writing] will have. If I send something out there to the [neighborhood newspaper], I know who is reading it and where it is going." One implication of this is that she also likely has a sense of how her writings will be perceived because she has a relationship with the newspaper and those in her neighborhood. She and others also may have been concerned that their stories wouldn't have the hoped-for effects if published to the commons resource. Such concerns may have been amplified when trainees visited Madison Commons: they commented they often found the same material in both conventional media online spaces and Madison Commons. Because they were frustrated with local media, they may have seen Madison Commons as too closely resembling outlets they felt hampered community building.

When laying the foundation for Madison Commons, administrators reached out to a number of associations and media outlets to develop partnerships. These partnerships had mixed results as the citizen journalists had varied attitudes toward such community institutions or organizations. As noted earlier, Madison Commons advisors developed partnerships with print and web media outlets, including local dailies, youth-produced publications, and neighborhood newsletters.

Advisors felt these collaborations essential for two reasons. First, by tapping into the resources of neighborhood associations, they anticipated individuals would be more likely to participate in citizen journalism trainings and contribute to the commons. The regional councils could help recruit individuals by reaching out to their networks – neighborhood associations, church groups, interest groups, and others. Research indicates that tapping into existing networks to spur collective work or action is fruitful because doing so builds upon already established

relationships of trust. When people trust others, they are more likely to contribute to collective actions (Ansell 2003; Heckathorn, 1996; Klandermans and Oegema, 1987; Passy, 2003; Wilson, 2000). Additionally, making these media and neighborhood networks visible in virtual space could help sharpen the local communication ecology for individuals so that local community and democracy might thrive (Friedland, 2001).

While commons advisors saw benefit in such working relationships, the actual benefits to the resource were mixed. Neighborhood council personnel recruited ample numbers of people for the first two training sessions, but after this they struggled to find newcomers. Social networks don't always positively influence a person's likelihood to participate in collective work (Wilson, 2000). As referrals from neighborhood regional council partnerships became sparser, advisors relied more on recruiting people through workshop announcements they sent to neighborhood and association listserves. Generally the people recruited through these venues had little or no familiarity with one another before joining the trainings.

The media partnerships also showed mixed outcomes. When the daily outlets republished pieces that appeared first on Madison Commons, the citizen journalists were enthusiastic about having a bigger spotlight on the topic and about seeing their names in print. Yet many commented that when they visited the site, they found stories that had been published first through these conventional media partners, and this made the site feel stale to them. Elizabeth is in her early 50s, and she and her husband together read the local dailies and watch local broadcast news. But she says she's found that "news sources have gotten really homogenized, particularly print media. People aren't developing stories. Almost the same things appear in the [afternoon daily] as appeared in the [morning daily]." Because Madison Commons got little fresh content from their citizen collaborators, the advisors were forced to rely on repurposed content

from their media partners. It's also important to acknowledge that a number of these individuals expressed frustrations with media partners' overall general news focus and especially with its lack of coverage of the people and issues near and dear to their hearts. These frustrations coupled with the fact Madison Commons had to turn to its media partners so heavily for content likely contributed to citizens' desires to take their stories to smaller local news and information outlets – such as regional neighborhood newspapers or local ethnic newspapers – rather than take them first to the commons resource.

Madison Commons rules. Successful commons resources engage those participating in the collaborative effort in establishing rules and seeing that they are carried out. These often are established at three levels: the rules in place for day-to-day operations, such as who can participate in the commons and how they must submit ideas and information; collective-choice rules in which a group of people make policy decisions about the day-to-day rules; and the constitutional rules that formally outline, through a charter, who may participate in the collective-choice body that establishes day-to-day policies.

Madison Commons advisors did not establish a charter that was shared with the commons resource community that outlined its governing body, institutional scope and objectives, or general rules, although it did craft information about such topics for funding sources. Madison Commons administrators, who were responsible to funders for executing its goals, implemented and oversaw day-to-day policy decisions. Although common participants may not have had formally recognized roles in making policy decisions, they did offer feedback that influenced such choices.

Advisors articulated one policy decision from the project's outset: individuals who wished to contribute information and ideas to the commons must participate in skills workshops. The advisors did so to reduce the risk of publishing fact-based stories plagued with such problems as errors and bias. This rule had widespread effects. [4] The rule limited who could participate in the commons resource: only those individuals with the time could afford to attend. Eventually, advisors modified these requirements in part because of individuals' feedback regarding workshops and the time commitment. In the last year of the project's second phase, they offered two-hour, one-session trainings, including a basic skills workshop and a couple of workshops designed for individuals with more advanced knowledge of the journalism process.

Madison Commons advisors also enacted a number of other decisions that influenced the commons resource. They chose to emphasize conventional media storytelling practices: fact-based news stories that had beginnings, middles, and ends. The transaction cost was too high for a number of participants. Melissa had a full-time job, children, and already had spent the previous year cutting back on volunteer commitments so she could spend more time with her family, so she "was limited in terms of what I could do. And so I don't feel as if I am as informed as I once felt." She couldn't simply gather information about a topic with which she already was familiar; she also would have to seek out a subject and sources to provide information for stories. Additionally, through all of Phase 1 and much of Phase 2, advisors restricted publishing privileges to advisors: citizen journalists had to submit articles to the managing editor, who would edit them, consult with the citizen journalists about any major revisions, then publish the stories to the site.

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[4] As noted earlier in this chapter, the decision to mandate skills training also enacted a sense of professional responsibility the citizens felt unsettled with because they weren't certain it advanced personal goals.

As they did with the skills workshops, commons advisors addressed concerns to reduce demands of potential participants. They created a wiki-type publishing option so that individuals with training could contribute pieces of information that would build on one another's ideas. Additionally, they provided publishing privileges to these people so they could post information directly to the site. For example, during the 2008 presidential elections, Madison Commons - trained citizen journalists contributed to a news stub about polling places to report on whether the activities at sites seemed to run smoothly or were faced with delays or troubling developments. Citizens also could upload their own photos to the site, which also appeared in real time.

Advisors developed a site structure that focused especially on neighborhood news. This format confused commons participants. Additionally, they found the neighborhood format difficult to navigate when they wanted to learn of others who shared their passions but maybe not their geographical space. While research suggests that people increasingly have moved away from associations based on neighborhood boundaries (Fischer, 1982), scholars also have found that virtual communities based on geography can enhance face-to-face communication (Katz, Rice, and Aspden, 2001; Matei an Ball-Rokeach, 2003; Mesch and Levanon, 2003). The focus on a community journalism commons resource driven in large part by neighborhood-level issues didn't resonate enough with citizen journalists to motivate them to participate in the resource.

Discussion

During Phases 1 and 2 of Madison Commons, commons advisors/administrators sought to cultivate a resource that could contribute to the local communication ecology by giving voice to people and issues not addressed by local conventional media outlets. Advisors secured funding

from national and local foundations to create a virtual presence and hire graduate students to build and maintain the website and to manage content, recruit and train community members as citizen journalists, and work with partner media and information outlets. But advisors struggled to populate the website with fresh content produced by individuals who were trained as citizen journalists. These individuals felt uncomfortable with the professionalism they believed advisors expected of them. Many felt their goals and values – to be passionate storytellers with connections to their subjects – conflicted with those of the commons advisors. Further, they didn't believe those within their social networks recognized Madison Commons as a resource. These individuals didn't see any personal benefits from participation because they didn't see their standings improving among those who shared their passions. Their lack of participation also likely was influenced by personal preferences for their own news consumption: most favored getting information through print or broadcast and via word-of-mouth. Additionally, many had written for and established trust with neighborhood or niche media outlets, and they likely were wary of how their own stories may be perceived by a Madison Commons audience they knew little or nothing about. A lack of participation meant that commons advisors had to rely on repurposed content from media partners and neighborhood newspapers or newsletters to populate the site. This, in turn, left the individuals trained as citizen journalists even more frustrated. They saw a stale site, and it likely was one that didn't reflect their hoped-for aims: to give voice and bring passion to their lived experiences within the community. Madison Commons struggled with many of the design principles that Ostrom and others found present in thriving commons resources. Citizen journalists were unclear about the community of users (boundaries). The costs for participating were too high. While citizen journalists helped in modifying existing rules through their feedback to advisors, they didn't have a hand in designing original rules. Advisors

had no good ways of sanctioning citizen journalists for minimal or no contributions to the commons resource. While limited conflict existed, citizen journalists were uneasy with the goals and values that they perceived advisors held.

The following chapter examines Phase 3 of Madison Commons. In this phase, commons administrators made the decision to overhaul the commons resource in efforts to provide more reliable original content and contribute more broadly to the local communication ecology.

Chapter 4: Madison Commons, Phase 4

This chapter examines Phase 3 of the Madison Commons to explore the relationships between the substantial changes made to the commons resource and its improved stability. In Phase 3, administrators decided to turn away from a commons resource model that relied wholly on citizen journalists for orignal content – an aim that never took hold – and toward practices that reflected more closely a newsroom with editors and reporters. The chapter begins by discussing the noteworthy changes to take place during this phase before moving into a careful analysis of how these changes influenced the improved stability the site has experienced during recent years.

This chapter is based on in-depth interviews with 15 individuals, including Madison Commons staff members and affiliates of one of the Madison Commons's organizational partners. This chapter explores the relationship between the resource characteristics, community attributes, and rules of the community journalism commons resource; the actions taken (or not) by those affiliated with the resource; and the resource's role in the local communication ecology. Specifically, it considers how features such as a subgroup's values and motivations may influence participation or types of participation. Researchers assert that commons resources whose members have homogeneous values – such as purpose and goals – experience greater success and stability (Cardenas, 2003; Hess and Ostrom, 2006 p. 7)**,** although this may be shifting in large, virtual commons communities (Ostrom and Hess, 2006 p. 49).

Among the key findings of this chapter are that the turn toward reporting and production practices that reflected more conventional newsrooms created a more stable flow of information through the commons resource, which contributed to the greater role that it played in the local communication ecology. Still, the fact that this virtual commons has no clear boundaries means

that it is difficult to track exactly how and to what extent this resource is being used. Staff members in Phase 3, the current phase, share many values with the resource administrators. This is a shift from the individuals who had been trained as citizen journalists in Phases 1 and 2 and who administrators had hoped would contribute the bulk of original content. Community partner affiliates share some values with the staff but also diverge in important ways. Finally, in Phase 3, the administators have imposed some additional rules (although the rules still are minimal in number) to encourage steady participation by staff members. Still, staff express that the resource could benefit from additional rules and ways to sanction those staff members not honoring them.

The Madison Commons: A brief history of Phase 3

The Madison Commons failed to become part of the local communication ecology in Phases 1 and 2 as commons administrators had hoped. As a result, they reassessed some of their original practices and made a number of key decisions that they hoped would lead to the Madison Commons addressing local needs for gaps in coverage and playing a role in the local communication ecology. Among the decisions they made included seeking new ways for securing original content, refocusing coverage, finding new community partners, and offering more current options for content distribution.

After several years of working with a commons resource that struggled to survive, Madison Commons administrators chose to replace this community-based staffing model with one staffed by student-journalists. This is one of several key changes made during Phase 3, the current phase of the commons resource. Administrators recruit students from the local university's journalism program to function as managing editors, editors, and staff writers. Editors receive modest scholarships for their work, and staff writers who meet minimum

contribution requirements also earn nominal scholarships for their work. These scholarships come through a university-based service-learning center. These positions function similarly to those in conventional newsrooms: editors often assign, edit, and occasionally write stories. Staff writers search out and pitch topics to editors, then research and write on approved topics, while meeting deadlines. This move toward a more traditional newsroom staff has meant the Madison Commons is populated with original content year-round, while the amount of original content is reduced in summer months when many of the student journalists are away from the campus and city.

Administrators also chose to refine their coverage. During Phases 1 and 2, administrators focused especially on neighborhood coverage. They asked the would-be citizen journalists to write about people or issues within their neighborhoods, and any new stories were published to the homepage and neighborhood sections. In Phase 3, administrators decided to refocus coverage on issues that seemed to percolate around the city but were getting limited coverage among conventional media outlets. These issues have morphed from education, food (especially sustainable food sources), and transportation in the beginning of Phase 3 to city life, education, environment, and food.

Administrators revamped the website to reflect a new focus in coverage, as well as new ways of community collaboration. They recognized a need to engage with social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter, both of which were in their infancy with regards to public use during Phases 1 and 2 of the Madison Commons. Staff members created a Facebook page and Twitter account and manage these pages routinely.

Along with these changes, administrators also formed new partnerships with community organizations. The partnerships with local media outlets in Phases 1 and 2 had limited success.

Madison Commons administrators chose to focus on nurturing a relationship with the web arm of a local media television station in Phase 3. Such a partnership was one important move in nurturing ways for contributing to the local communication ecology. Further, it helped to make connections between media sources because the partnership has led to Madison Commons being repurposed on the media partner's website. Research suggests that people are more likely to develop connections to their communities when they draw on a variety of information and communication channels, including conventional media outlets whose scope often is broad in covering issues, those that focus on hyperlocal issues, community association information, and personal networks (Matei and Ball-Rokeach, 2001).

When reaching out to community members, administrators cultivated a relationship with an umbrella organization for non-profit groups, Communal Giving of the Midwest (CGM).[5] This partnership reflected, in part, the changed emphases of content. This partnership brought with it two promising developments, including possibilities for connecting with organizations and members around shared interests and opportunities to bring greater visibility to the community work being done by nonprofit organizations. Since the last half of the 20th century, individuals increasingly have chosen to come together because of common interests, rather than because of familial or place-based ties (Fischer, 1982; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook, 2001). The research findings in Chapter 3 demonstrate the would-be citizen journalists made similar choices with respect to reporting: they often chose topics tied to their interests. The nonprofit member groups that are part of CGM are focused around varied issues, such as children and education, the environment, or social justice issues, for example. A number of these member groups focus

[5] Organizations', associations', and individuals' names have been altered to comply with institutional review board requirements.

on issues that Madison Commons hones in on when covering the city. Commons administrators anticipated that by reaching out to CGM, they could tap into the umbrella organization's network, which included numerous non-profit groups that worked in areas of education, environment , food, and such city life issues as poverty and employment.

A partnership with CGM also was hopeful because it would raise visibility of the work these nonprofits do to improve the city in which the commons resource is based. Citizen journalists during Phases 1 and 2 indicated they often consider people who work with nonprofit groups among the "leaders" of the city because they are the ones working in the neighborhoods. Research suggests that media and the communities they cover have tenuous connections with one another, and often community groups express limited significance for local media (Frederickson, 2004 cited in Blom, 2004). If Madison Commons could share accurate, fact-based stories about CGM member groups, the commons resource may be able to cultivate solid relationships with these types of important community workers.

Changes made to launch Phase 3 have led to success for the commons resource. Original stories regularly populate the site. These stories reach wider audiences, in part, through local media and personal networks via the Madison Commons media partner's website, e-mail listserves, and such social media outlets as Facebook. The following sections examine the Madison Commons characteristics, community attributes, rules, actors, and actions of Phase 3 to consider how these features and the relationships between them may have helped lead to a more stable commons resource that figures into the local communication ecology.

Characteristics of the Commons Resource: Phase 3

This phase of the Madison Commons has brought with it more reliable news and information, a feature that was sparse and haphazard in Phases 1 and 2. Because the resource in this commons is news and information, having reliable, regularly updated content is necessary for its survivial. The commons resource includes a community of student editors that assign deadlines and student writers who craft stories. Although the site in Phases 1 and 2 was regularly updated, often the content was repurposed from local media and neighborhood information sources. In Phase 3, the site is updated weekly with original stories, thus the resource users can rely on information from the Madison Commons. Commons resources that thrive in the long-term generally have reliable flows of the resource (Agrawal, 2002; Baland and Platteau, 1996; Ostrom, 2002), information in this case. Commons community members (whether staff members who contribute stories or community residents who may participate by sharing stories via social media) and the audience need to believe they can count on the resource to provide original information on a regular basis if they are going to pursue further participation in the resource. As discussed in Chapter 3, one reason would-be citizen journalists opted out of participation was because they, themselves, didn't see enough original content when visiting the site.

Commons advisors track website usage, and these indicators of usage are shared with both staff editors and staff writers who attend weekly meetings. Visits to the Madison Commons site are consistently higher than they were in Phases 1 and 2, with administrators noting that some stories generate well over a thousand hits, and several genereating close to 10,000 hits. These site visits don't take into account the numbers of people who access the news and information via other means, such as other media outlets who pick up stories, individuals who share stories through their social media channels, or those who share stories via e-mail or word-of-mouth. In virtual commons, the resource benefits from increased use (Hess and Ostrom,

2006), and the stability of original content in an online common resource largely influences its long-term survivial.

As discussed in Chapter 3, a virtual commons resource is unlikely to have clear boundaries because the resource being shared – information – can't be contained to the website on which it is originally published. Madison Commons content that appears on the website also circulates through such social media outlets, e-mail listserves or word-of-mouth. In a 2012 survey, nearly three-quarters of those in the United States said the most common way they learn of news via family and friends is by face-to-face or phone; about 15 percent of people said they get the news from family and friends through social media (Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2013). People now use social media even more than they had during the Madison Commons's early years. In 2012, nearly 20 percent of the total population said they used social media to get news (Sasseen, Olmstead, and Mitchell, 2013). When the Madison Commons launched in early 2006, neither Twitter nor Facebook, the two biggest social media sites (eBiz**,** 2014), was available to the general public. Staff members now are assigned to post links to stories on Facebook and tweet about them. Additionally, staff also can post stories to the Madison Commons's media partner website. These practices have helped boost people's use of the commons resource, with data gathered from Google analytics for a three-month period beginning September 2014 indicating they account for about 25 percent of the site's overall traffic coming from referrals. Twitter, Facebook, and Redditt are the Top 3 referral sources to Madison Commons.

In Phase 3, the commons resource receives the bulk of its funding through one source, a university-based service learning center. This center encourages students and faculty to use skills developed through the educational setting in the local community, as well as around the state and

beyond. Madison Commons receives grant funding through which staff members receive scholarships for editing sections and meeting minimum writing contributions, and to address costs toward infrastructure, technology, and design. Since its inception, project advisors have applied for several grants offered nationally and locally to secure funding for the commons resource. As noted in Chapter 3, in its early phases, the Madison Commons was funded by two large grants from distinct foundations. Research suggests that with regards to funding, commons resources are more likely to thrive when they have heterogeneous funding sources (Agrawal, 2002).

Madison Commons Phase 3: Community Characteristics

In Phase 3, the Madison Commons community comprises five basic subgroups: commons advisors, a core group of staff members, community partners, a university-based service learning center that provides scholarships to staff members, and users, about whom there is very limited information. While all are influential in its success, this section focuses primarily on the community characteristics, actors, and actions of the commons staff members and community partners. Core staff members contribute the bulk of original content to the site and community partnerships were formed to draw on networks for ideas, information, and participation.

The Madison Commons core staff in Phase 3 is a small group. Individuals affiliated with the university act as director and advisors to the group and carry responsibilities of securing funding, recruiting community partners and staff, and offering story ideas to writers. One individual, a graduate student, serves as managing editor, and three to four other people generally are recruited to edit each of the four topic sections. Staff editors turn over when individuals graduate or pursue other endeavors. Since Phase 3 was launched in 2011, four individuals have served as

managing editor. The numbers of staff writers vary throughout the year, with a small core group that contributes regularly. Those studying natural resource commons have asserted that resources that thrive often have smaller numbers of participants because in small groups people may communicate with one another more easily and develop trust and reciprocity among one another (Abreu and Camarinha-Matos 2008, Anthony and Campbell 2011, Ostrom 1990). When trust and reciprocity are present among people, collective efforts are more likely to be successful (Putnam 2001, Prusak and Cohen 2001). Madison Commons staffers note that individuals "have to feel personally connected to the group to stay" and that people in the primary group are able to build relationships with enough staff writers in ways that make them feel committed to the project. "If we don't have that and we don't have a critical mass [of reporters], then we're really going to be in trouble," said Faith, a graduate student and editor.

Despite feeling comfortable with its core group, staff members long for more face-to-face communication. Staff members appreciate that they are able to text and e-mail one another with questions or concerns, but as graduate student and editor Olivia said, they wish they weren't "hampered by the one hour a week meetings" and would like a physical space in which to carry out their duties and share ideas with one another, a place "where we write at the end of the day together." The Madison Commons is in a unique position because it's neither wholly virtual nor wholly physical. Physical commons use face-to-face communication to nurture social capital and foster solidarity among participants. Often, people come into the collaborative effort of a commons resource having prior relationships with at least some participants (Anthony and Campbell 2011). In virtual environments, when at least some individuals already have background information about one another and have prior trust, this can make up for the limited time in which people are online together and for the fluidity of an online environment (Anthony

and Campbell, 2011). Individuals develop alternative ways of establishing trust and a sense of community with one another in virutal environments(Hess, 1995), and they participate in these online spaces with expectations of building reputations and networks in these spaces (Anthony, Smith, and Williamson, 2009). In the case of the Madison Commons, however, staff members indicate they have expectations that although their work is for the virtual environment, they be able to cultivate face-to-face relationships in their place-based setting. This sentiment is similar to that of citizen journalists in Phases 1 and 2, who expected to build on social capital in their physical world through their virtual contributions.

When starting phase 3, the Madison Commons director and advisors reached out to new community partners to launch its efforts. The new partners include the website arm of a locally-owned TV station and CGM, the umbrella organization for local nonprofit groups that work in areas of education, environment, children, fmailies, and urban issues. The media partner has one individual who oversees its community news web pages, and this staff person has changed in the several years of phase 3. The partnership allows Madison Commons staffers to repurpose stories directly to the website of the locally-owned TV station, and data collected from Google analytics shows this relationship accounts for important traffic to the Commons website, as it is among the Top 10 referrals to the site for the six-month period beginning May 1, 2014. Additionally, the site maintains a constant link to Madison Commons on its "downtown" pages so that visitors to these pages can access the commons resource through this means.

Communal Giving of the Midwest has more than 60 member nonprofit groups. Because of the partnership, Madison Commons staffers have provided social media training to nonprofit member affiliates. Additionally, Madison Commons staff members routinely write stories about CGM member accomplishments. Finally, as Phase 3 has progressed, community members whose

interests align with the commons resource coverage areas have contributed occassionally to the Madison Commons. These people sometimes are recruited by editors to write about specific issues that simmer through the city at a specific time, while other individuals contribute stories about their passionate interests on a more regular basis.

Community partners affiliated with Community Giving of the Midwest have deep networks with people, organizations, and institutions who have interests that match their nonprofit group's interests. Half of those interviewed have been with their current nonprofit organization for at least five years. Four of the 11 interviewed lead their nonprofits, and three others lead internal and external communication efforts for their organizations. More than half have extensive backgrounds working for nonprofit organizations. One has worked as a reporter, editor, and free-lance writer throughout his adult life. They work with other nonprofit organizations and also with state agencies such as the Department of Public Instruction, statewide lobbying groups, urban planning departments with cities around the state, and school districts in the region. They do so in such capacities as helping to write curriculum to address obesity prevention or planning for long-term multi-modal transportation needs. Many of the leaders of CGM affiliates know one another, collaborate, and refer individuals in need of assistance to other CGM-affiliated nonprofits when their own organizations can not help. They express admiration and respect for one another. Dave has worked as a manager for eight years for a nonprofit organization that addresses food security issues. He said he came to the job with minimal experience in the food world – "other than gardening myself" – but he now cites an extensive network of connections within the local food world that he's in contact with routinely: "There is a lot of collaboration between like-minded nonprofits. I have more direct contact with people, more contact through listserves." Krista, director of another nonprofit that addresses food

issues. Her organization collaborates with many local groups, including the nonprofit for which Dave works, and she says such collaboration is "one of the things that we're most proud of."

It is important that these past experiences of trust and reciprocity already exist among the CGM affiliates because these can be useful for participation in Madison Commons, as trust and reciprocity are present in members of successful commons**.** Their familiarity with Commons staff members is limited, however, and those who have had interactions with staffers express reservations. One nonprofit director who had been with the organization since its inception noted that a staff member in the current phase had written a story peppered with inaccuraricies. She appreciated that Madison Commons printed corrections, but she was concerned about whether or not stories could be "trusted" as accurate portrayals of people and issues. Her concerns suggest that she needs time to develop trust in Commons staffers, and whether or not she develops this likely will influence if and how extensively she uses the resource.

> "To their (Madison Commons) credit, they made a lot of changes. The difficulty is going to be the professionalism. It's awesome that it can be a kind of training ground for younger journalists, but I think it will be frought with that issue. As a reliable resource, it could be tricky to know if we could start trusting stories." – *Natalie, director of a nonprofit organization*

While nonprofit leaders may trust one another, they may need to cultivate deeper trust of staff members before embracing Madison Commons more fully as a valuable resource. The partnerships that Madison Commons has developed with CGM and its affiliates are valuable because these people bring with them rich connections among nonprofit groups whose interests are similarly focused. Trust already shared among them is valuable for their participation in the resource. Affiliate individuals suggest they can develop trust in Commons staffers as these staff members produce factually sound stories. This will be important for an enduring commons resource of hyperlocal journalism.

Commons staff members and resource administrators share in common understandings about the professional practices of journalism. They value accuracy and fairness in reporting. Affiliates with CGM also value accuracy and fairness in reporting, although they are not concerned with some of the industry standards that commons staff members see as valuable. The open lines of communication among staff members and administrators and with the affiliates are important in both developing trust and contributing to a commons resource that has led to sustained original content.

Similarities, differences in goals and values. In the current phase, those commons participants who contribute most regularly, the staff members, have values that largely are homogeneous with commons administrators. In phases 1 and 2 of the Madison Commons, the two groups of people involved with the commons – commons administrators from the local university and the community members not affiliated with the university – shared some interests, but the community members also perceived some divergence of values. Commons administrators have backgrounds in earlier careers as journalists and strategic communicators.

The graduate and undergraduate students who write and edit for the Madison Commons in its current phase generally are individuals with interests in pursuing jobs in journalism, strategic communication, or other types of communication fields. As students pursuing studies in journalism or strategic communication fields, they learn the professional norms of these industries through the institutional setting of the university in course studies, along with such environments as internships in media or corporate settings. As professionals-in-training, they learn such professional norms as objectivity (Cook, 2005). These students are drawn to the commons resource because they believe this work will provide some concrete newsroom

experience where they can develop skills and acquire more knowledge about journalism. Staff members express that they place high value on the standards they learn through other settings, such as accuracy.

> "I would not publish a story if I weren't confident in its accuracy. The challenge for me as a young writer is that since I'm new I don't know as much, whether that's about writing or about the topic I'm writing on. So the things that I can publish accurately may not be as hard-hitting or as deeply insightful as I'd like them to be. Sometimes I settle for a medium-depth story that is totally accurate." – *Faith, a graduate student and editor*

Commons administrators do not actively educate students about such professional norms as objectivity. Still, these students bring with them the background knowledge and experiences they are cultivating through their formal educations or practical experiences as interns. As future professionals, they also highly respect conventional journalistic practices such as "truth-telling" and being objective in their reporting. They struggle to find a balance between interacting with communities while maintaining some professional distance from their subjects and topics. Olivia, one of the editors, expressed strong support for both professional journalists and community members being able to report on communities, as long as the latter group does so accurately and fairly. "Something I have a very strong belief in is that I think there is too much emphasis on journalists as separate from the rest of the community," she said. Still, she finds it challenging to step away from a "journalistic fraternity" that places a premium on being "above the community." She commented that she recently left a membership organization because she was worried how it may reflect on her professionally. "I think a lot of that is just the old journalistic model of being objective and removed. Even after everything I told you. It's certainly a little bit hypocritical."

Staff members are comfortable with editing processes, and, as will be discussed later in this chapter, express wishes for more training and rules regarding editing and reporting practices.

Through their experiences working with Madison Commons, they also see a need to tell stories left out of the conventional media and endeavor to use sources that are not the official voice.

Because the journalists-in-training hold basic journalistic values such as accuracy, fairness, and transparency that align with those of the commons administrators, the two groups don't need to spend as much energy focusing on these differences in their working relationship. Research indicates that subgroups participating in commons resources that share similar interests and identities are more likely to succeed at working collaboratively in the long-term (Agrawal 2001; Cox, Arnold, and *Tomás*, 2011; Ostrom and Hess 2006a; Hess and Ostrom, 2006b; Ostrom, 1990). Their shared experiences learning the tools of the trade (as professionals or in a classroom setting) help foster a sense of solidarity. Both project administrators and staff members welcome anyone to develop these "tools" they see as valuable to the commons resource, and they suggest working closely with Madison Commons editors during the writing process is one way of doing this. These bonds benefit the commons resource because these groups – the administrators and staff members – are those participating in its routine maintenance. The general agreement about values plays an important role in the regular production of fresh content for the site, and more site visits occur than had in Phases 1 and 2.

As Phase 3 has progressed, Madison Commons staff members have reached out to nonprofit affiliates to contribute to the commons resource through ideas, articles, public comments to the site, and sharing of stories. These individuals often have deep knowledge and ties to the topics. Like the journalists-in-training and administrators, they place high value on filling in news gaps and offering alternatives to official voices. They see conventional media as getting involved in social and political processes only when meetings occur and feel uncomfortable that such practices don't accurately reflect whole stories.

> "Media has basically pulled out of the government. As a result, the government has become much cruder, coarser place… Local coverage tends to be, 'There was a hearing last night'," - *Ted, a nonprofit director of an environmental organization in his late 50s.*

These people see the Madison Commons as a resource designed to address such shortcomings in both amounts and types of coverage. Still, they see other aspects of their roles in journalistic processes as distinctive from the roles staff members envision. Although they value accuracy in reporting, they are unlikely to dedicate time to working closely with editors to hone their "tools" of the trade and/or may be uncomfortable with any "heavy-handed" editing. They see little reason for journalists to distance themselves from their subjects or topics and appreciate journalism that has less fear of "having a relationship with people being reported on as traditional media," said Natalie, a director with one of the CGM community affiliate nonprofit organizations who is in her late 50s. When discussing their roles in producing and distributing information and ideas, they emphasize having their energies as media participants result in action.

Like the staff members, community partners value educating the public through communication vehicles, but they differ in the high value they also place on facilitating actions or spurring change. CGM affiliates describe themselves as "brain trusts" that connect leaders to one another and to rich information. Unlike the staff members, they facilitate the needs of those individuals, organizations, or institutions whose interests align with the nonprofits' missions. If a farmer wants to get her produce into schools, for example, one of these nonprofit groups helps make that happen. Many of these individuals at CGM partner nonprofits routinely meet with policymakers at local and state levels to change systems and institutions and describe themselves as "greedy" about wanting change to come as a result of their communication efforts. All want

journalism that will "foster positive growth in the community," as Diane, a communications director with a nonprofit, explained.

Motivations. In Phase 3, individuals' motivations for participating in a community journalism commons resource vary based on the type of group to which they belong—student journalists-in-training or professionals with nonprofit groups. This section examines the particular motivations based on group membership.

The student staff members who regularly contribute to the Madison Commons see their participation chiefly as a way to cultivate practical skills for their future professions. They made note of the fact that while most media outlets require individuals to have published news stores *before* the outlets will hire them, Madison Commons welcomes those who have yet to build a collection of work. "I wanted to start building my clips. It sounded like a really accessible opportunity but quality journalism at the same time," said Faith, a graduate student and editor.

Although no one had clear understandings of the commons resource and its goals before joining the community journalism project, each said they have grown to appreciate its aims to fill in gaps in coverage by focusing on hyperlocal stories. While the personal benefits attracted them to the project initially, the commons resource goals to give voice to every day people, not just city-level leaders, help keep them motivated.

> "I think this kind of journalism is so important… as long as it's seeking out those stories that maybe they don't want to hear but need to know about. I don't mean to say everything needs to be hard-hitting all the time. [The Madison Commons] does a lot of promoting of events. I think that's very important, too. - *Betsy, undergraduate student and editor*

All of these students moved to the city for schooling and had limited familiarity with city-wide issues before participating in the community journalism commons. Certainly these professionals-

in-training prime motivations for participating throughout has been to gain practical experience and knowledge. This motivation keeps them participating regularly, but feeling stronger connections to the city in which they live and sharing stories that clearly depict its people and challenges also inspires the student staff members to keep contributing.

> "Writing for [the Madison Commons] has definitely changed the way I interact with the city. I feel like I'm more broadly involved. Students, I think, are very tunnel-visioned into the university's life… There were lots of neighborhoods that I'd not even stepped foot in. I know more neighborhoods, or at least one or two people in neighborhoods. I've been reporting for just two semesters. Even in that time, I feel like I have a more colorful view of what life here is like because I've seen events or talked to neighborhood associations or covered little stories that I end up talking to people that I've not read about and probably wouldn't talk to otherwise." - *Faith, graduate student and editor*

CGM-affiliate individuals' are motivated to participate for two reasons: they see the community journalism commons resource as additional opportunities to connect with leaders in their fields and to educate the public about work being done in the community. Their motivations are dependent on their knowledge of the Madison Commons audience. If they are going to participate by writing fact-based or opinion pieces, and a limited number have, they want to know who is reading information on the site. Their participation generally is confined to distributing stories or creating pieces based on opinion since many have limited time in which to craft conventional news articles. Some have added the Madison Commons to their media advisory lists and circulated stories that fit with their organization's mission to staff and board members because they have found news through the resource they don't get elsewhere. "They [Madison Commons] are doing the best work about community gardens that I've seen," said Dave, a manager with one of the nonprofits that focuses on food issues. Many see the Madison Commons as a resource for nonprofit groups to share with a wider audience the work in which

they are engaged. They want to "exchange ideas" rather than focus on "hard-breaking news," said Ted.

Research suggests that people who are motivated to participate in commons resources because they depend highly on it for their own survival or happiness are more likely to participate in the collective efforts of a commons (Ostrom, 2002). The students see this as an important foundation for their professional aspirations. They see reliable and consistent work writing stories that are fair, balanced, and accurate as essential to meeting expectations of potential employers. For them, the commons' success and their own is intertwined. This is not necessarily the case, however, for community partners. Community partners value communication that educates, advocates, connects, and changes. They already have found channels for change by working with local and state policymakers or directly with people or institutions, such as school district or farmers. Through their own communication vehicles, such as member newsletters or e-mail updates, nonprofit leaders are able to educate their own members. But they also are aware that journalism that is factually sound, goes beyond sound-bites, and brings with it a rich understanding of the present and past issues is valuable for helping the public form and change opinions. They do not see the success of their efforts as closely intertwined with media coverage. To the extent that the Madison Commons is an outlet from which community members get information and can learn about how to participate in improving their community, the CGM affiliates see Madison Commons as a media outlet worth participating in.

Madison Commons Rules: Phase 3

The Madison Commons has adopted limited rules in its current phase, and staff members express desires to have more rules and guidance in place. Studies suggest that commons resources' success rely in part on having rules that community members help create and may revise, that compliance with rules is monitored by a group comprised of community members, and that these rules are appropriate for the actions involved (Ostrom, 1990; Ostrom and Hess, 2006). In Phase 3, the same rules that project advisors set in place in the commons' earlier phases also apply: writers are expected to be fair, accurate, and transparent in their reporting. Although project advisors found it difficult to establish minimum contribution requirements or deadlines for the citizen journalists in Phases 1 and 2, they set minimum participation guidelines for staff writers who wish to earn stipends. Not all staffers meet these requirements, and some don't set out to. Deadlines remain difficult to enforce and editing processes advance slowly, even when staff editors exert subtle pressures on staff members to submit stories within a given timeframe. The student staffers expect and appreciate such rules because they believe rules give media outlets more authority within the newsroom and beyond.

> "This is a learning experience. I just want the professionalism edged a little higher here. It's a job, we're paying people. Are you going to do eight to 10 stories? Respond to edits in a timely manner? I expect it, but they don't deliver. You're a reporter. You need to maintain these standards of the industry. I've learned to appreciate the people who do, do those things. I tried to make expectations clearer this semester because last semester I was wishy-washy." -*Paula, a graduate student editor*

Staff members appreciate changes to the rules they believe boosted the professionalism of the commons resource. When fact errors riddled one news story, project advisors and staffers worked together with help of outside professionals to establish new guidelines for fact-checking stories. They want to see additional rules and professional practices established, including an

orientation for all staffers and a stylebook similar to the Associated Press stylebook but with some guidelines specific to the Madison Commons.

> "I think we need some type of guidebook or handbook that lays out our expectations. If you want a scholarship, you have to do these things. We don't give late add-ins our expectations. I think they need to be spelled out clearly and written down." - *Betsy, an undergraduate and editor.*

A couple of inferences can be made from the above comments and the staffers' desires for more professionalism. Staffers see this resource as drawing from conventional media standards of professionalism, which is bound by rules established by governing bodies and by everyday rules of the newsroom. They most likely aim for these standards so they can be seen as part of the community of professional journalists of conventional media. To belong to this community, with practices that have become routinized, also brings with it a sense of authority in the newsroom and beyond (Cook, 2005; Downie and Schudson; 2009).

The CGM affiliates and contributing community members do not have the same needs or desires to be part of the conventional professional journalism community. Editors noted that community members who contribute pieces to Madison Commons are given wide latitude with regards to deadlines and journalistic practices. Individuals from the community write solely on a volunteer basis and aren't expected to meet any minimum-contribution guidelines. Some individuals are recruited to write for the commons resource about a specific issue that has been permeating public discussions. Often, these are one-time-only contributions. While some individuals contribute regularly, they are not required to adhere to specific deadlines. Administrators and editors say they made the decision to publish community contributions with only light editing to correct for such things as grammar or inaccuracies after one nonprofit leader expressed frustration with exacting editing practices. CGM affiliates express interests in

submitting stories that allow them to convey through their own words the work their organizations are involved in.

> "Madison Commons seems to offer more of an intimate relationship between agencies focused on nonprofit organizations in the community and how to help them get their message out. It almost seems like a forum for people who struggle to have their voices raised above the clamor. We'd be able to do it in a more focused way." – *Nancy, a long-time executive director with a nonprofit who focuses on educational issues*

When stories are published, these individuals working with the nonprofit organizations expect the community journalism pieces published through the commons resource to meet the professional standards they perceive as part of the industry.

Discussion

This chapter set out to examine the relationships between resource characteristics, community attributes, and rules of the community journalism commons resource. It also considered the actors, actions taken, and their outcomes. In Phase 3 of Madison Commons, the move to securing student journalists to produce community-minded content meant several key things for the commons resource of hyperlocal journalism. First, by bringing on board students who could be considered professionals-in-training, Madison Commons administrators also found a group of people who shared common goals and values that were similar to administrators. Among these was a desire to produce content that was original, factually accurate, and professional in nature. They saw embracing professional journalistic practices, such as deadlines and accuracy, as beneficial to their long-term lives. As such, they saw their own success as intertwined with that of the commons resource. These students didn't join the project because of shared goals of telling community-minded journalism. As their involvement progressed, however, they developed an appreciation for media coverage that conveyed a more complete

picture of people's lived experiences, such as educational disparities among racial groups in public schools, community garden programs, and urban homesteading. Further, they expressed wishes to work with community members in developing or providing pieces. Such occasions can be valuable for civic life: when communities have opportunities to work with media to identify news agendas, people's participation in civic associations can increase (Nichols, Friedland, Rojas, and Shah, 2006).

Those affiliated with CGM shared a sense of appreciation that the public could read more about community-building efforts. They were enthusiastic about possibilities to engage in dialogue with professional peers through Madison Commons coverage. This enthusiasm was tempered by "wait and see" attitudes toward long-term coverage of the city, its civic life, and people and of the professionalism of Madison Commons news stories. Nurturing this connection between Commons staffers and nonprofit groups may be a significant contribution to the local communication ecology: conventional media too often has forgotten these nonprofits, or "taproots of community," even as it tries to make itself more relevant to communities (Blom, 2004). Yet research suggests these very nonprofit groups are one important component of the local communication ecology because communication from civic associations, families and friends, ethnic media, alternative media, and conventional media all play a part in people's sense of community belonging (Friedland, 2001; Kim and Ball-Rokeach, 2006). While most CGM affiliates may not participate in Madison Commons in the form of traditional news stories, they may add value to the site through sharing information with their networks that originates from the resource.

A staffing model that draws on people with long-term interests in having this commons resource succeed also led to regular, original content. This was an important step toward finding

a critical mass of participants. In Phases 1 and 2, Madison Commons regularly averaged just several hundred visits to the site according to Commons administrators. Site visits increased from an average of roughly 1500 visits each month several months after launching Phase 3 to an average of 2600 during the three-month period from September through November 2014 based on data gathered from Google analytics. This suggests that Madison Commons needed regular contributions of a small group of committed people before others would recognize and use the site as a resource within the community (Oliver, Marwell, and Teixeira, 1985). Data collected from Google analytics indicates roughly 25 percent of site traffic in the three-month period beginning September 2014 comes in the form of referral to the site, especially through social networking sites and local media outlets. Referral traffic has accounted for roughly a third of all traffic at times during Phase 3 (Schwartz, 2013). This may hint that others in the community use the resource because individuals, associations, or institutions are "pointing" people to the commons resource for information about their community. The numbers of overall site visits are small in comparison with the local conventional media sites. According to Alexa.com (2014), the web-arm of the local TV station with whom Madison Commons partnered during Phase 3 ranks 7,263 for most visited sites; the combined site for the web version of local conventional print media ranks 7,200. The site doesn't provide statistics for how Madison Commons ranks among most visited sites within the United States because Alexa.com doesn't keep historical data for those sites that fall beyond a site ranking of 100,000 (2014).

Still, within the city, Madison Commons appears to have some place in the local communication ecology. And yet it's difficult to identify its influence among those not affiliated, however loosely, with the commons resource. As I indicated in Chapter 2, attempts to interview those who visit and read stories on the site were unsuccessful. This may suggest that the

Commons readers aren't invested enough in the site to prompt them to spend their time answering questions about the site. It may simply suggest that the people who visit the site don't feel they have the time to give.

While recruiting students to staff Madison Commons boosted its site traffic, moving the commons resource toward this model also shifted its role as a commons resource so that it became more of a mixed model. In Phases 1 and 2, Madison Commons was an associational commons resource that relied on commons resource administrators for its vision, organization, and funding. Resource administrators looked to individuals trained as citizen journalists to produce original content for the website, although this didn't materialize as hoped. In Phase 3, however, Commons administrators continue to oversee the day-to-day maintenance by securing funding sources and recruiting staff to write original content. Rather than rely on community members for this, however, staff members are students who study journalism and strategic communication, and, through their education, bring with them knowledge of industry standards. Commons administrators and staffers work with community members regularly to identify story topics, and those in the community are free to participate in ways that enhance the resource's value. While the commons resource may not be self-governing in the sense that the community has control over day-to-day decisions, those who tend to its maintenance strive to keep open the channels of communication with community members so they may be part of the news conversation. Such practices are important components to associational commons (Levine, 2002; Levine, 2006).

In the following chapter, I examine people's expectations of community media to explore what they want from a hyperlocal journalism site such as Madison Commons in a participatory age of journalism. I then examine how they may conceive of their roles in this participatory age.

I do so with goals of understanding better how we may mobilize people with loose connections to the Commons or whose interests align with those areas on which the Commons' focuses coverage.

Chapter 5: Community media expectations, potential participation

This chapter examines people's expectations of community media to explore what they want from a hyperlocal journalism site such as Madison Commons in a participatory age of journalism. It also examines how they conceive of their roles in this participatory age. In doing so, I aim toward some better understanding of how we may mobilize those who already do community work to participate in a variety of ways in a commons resource of hyperlocal journalism. Madison Commons depends on the premise that people use the media for a sense of connection to a public community that grapples with public challenges. In other words, individuals will turn toward media, at least sometimes, for its news values so they can learn about others who share common experiences, who face social challenges, and because they believe that people can work together to address social problems. The chapter analyzes people's expectations for the public "work" of media and considers whether and how individuals conceive of themselves as participants in such media work. It focuses specifically on individuals who engage civically: all say they participate in at least one formal organization or semi-formal civic group, such as a neighborhood association, parent-school group, community garden, or bike association.

Why pair these two ideas in this chapter? As commons scholars note, people are more likely to participate when a commons resource is salient to its community's lives. A hyperlocal journalism commons resource that addresses issues in ways in which its affiliate partners and engaged citizens identify as integral to community media's value will have more relevance for

them. When this happens, these people may be more likely to involve themselves with Madison Commons.[6]

This chapter is based on in-depth interviews with 33 individuals, including the following: individuals trained as citizen journalists in Phases 1 and 2 of Madison Commons; affiliates of a Madison Commons organizational partner; and individuals engaged in community issues that are central to Madison Commons' focus in Phase 3.

Madison Commons was formed with the idea that it would bring to light stories about individuals, informal groups, organizations, everyday problems, neighborhood successes, and other community-focused issues that had fallen through the cracks of local media coverage. As media outlets consolidate or reduce staff sizes to meet economic needs, content has become more homogenized and the diversity of voices in coverage has been reduced (Remez, 2012). This poses problems for democracy as media can be an important part of a puzzle for bringing to the public people's differences in lived experiences so that people can begin conversations about finding common interests and goals. One of the reasons for cultivating a commons resource of hyperlocal journalism is the belief that storytelling through the media helps facilitate a sense of shared meaning that people need to live together in community (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, and Matei, 2001; Friedland, 2001). Underlying this idea that media can enrich our connections to community is the thought that people will consume media in a publicly minded manner so they may connect with their communities (Anderson, Dardenne, Killenberg, 1996; Carey, 1975 and

[6] As I've suggested in earlier chapters, I conceive of involvement, or participation, broadly. A contributing factor to a virtual commons' success is that it be used, even if not all users contribute content. Thus, people who participate in Madison Commons by sharing links to stories through their social networks are important to the community. In this sense, virtual communities have membership boundaries that are much more fluid in nature (Ostrom and Hess, 2006).

1997; Cook, 2005; Couldry, Livingstone, and Markham, 2007; Curran, 2005; Dewey, 1927/1954; Friedland 2001 and 2003; Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001; Merritt, 1998; Park, 1923; Thorson, 2005).

This chapter specifically examines what people expect a hyperlocal journalism space to provide. It draws on Couldry, Livingstone, and Markham's work in the mid and late 2000s that explored whether people consume media with personal goals of making connections around public issues with the public. In other words, are they publicly oriented when consuming the media? Further, it draws on research in participatory journalism to consider whether people see themselves engaging civically through media participation in some form.

My findings suggest that people long for hyperlocal journalism that conveys with richness the experiences they have lived and encounter routinely. Often these individuals set their expectations in terms of what the local conventional media does not provide. They believe a site such as Madison Commons should go beyond event or spot news coverage to learn about "details" so they know what "is actually going on" with issues and neighborhoods. They think the local conventional media too often gets only the big picture and cover violence or crime to the extent that the lived experiences of people in neighborhoods are no longer perceptible. Hyperlocal journalism needs to be more "constructive" at connecting people with one another. Interviewees want a commons site to be a catalyst for an exchange of ideas between engaged citizens. Even though they are public minded in their consumption, they do not necessarily aspire to work to address social challenges as contributors to publicly oriented journalism.

Background information: Media consumption and participation

Many media scholars and practitioners long have believed that people's media consumption could strengthen their community ties and enhance their civic abilities and participation. Such beliefs are rooted in the idea that when people consume media, they do so with an "orientation" toward a public world that should raise and discuss issues of common concern (Couldry, Livingstone, and Markham, 2007). Research suggests that, in fact, many people engage with media to learn more about those they share their local and global environments with (Couldry et al. 2007; Livingstone and Markham, 2008; Meijer, 2013). Individuals feel a stronger sense of belonging to their local community when they have access to stories about local people and issues shared by neighbors, friends, and family in combination with those circulated by nonprofit organizations and local media outlets (Ball-Rokeach et al. 2001). Yet some are not publicly minded with regards to their media habits and are content with engaging in online communities to satisfy their lifestyle hobbies or interests (Couldry and Markham, 2008). Among the factors that influence whether individuals are interested in understanding or connecting with the public to address common social concerns, age is the most important indicator of this public orientation (Couldry et al., 2007), with those between the ages 18 and 24 the least likely to be publicly minded in their media consumption. But we may need to expand our notions of how people think about what it means to be publicly minded as individuals' personal ideas about civic or political engagement don't necessarily align with scholarly norms (Thorson, 2012). Even when people do reach for the media to make public connections, they sometimes do so with an uneasiness that leaves them wary and "troubled" over prospects for improving societal conditions as well as conventional media (Couldry and Markham, 2008; Meijer, 2013).

Some people who consume media with hopes for making public connections find that doing so can create anguish, but media researchers, practitioners, and individuals have expressed hope that this could change with more participation from the public in media processes. As in so many areas of public life, citizens appear to feel excluded from the ability to participate in conventional media practices (Haas, 2007; Rosen, 1999). People are saddened by how media portray their neighborhoods, they feel excluded from the images and stories they see, read, and hear, and they think the power to change conventional media is beyond influence from the everyday person. While it may not be a pervasive feeling, it exists. Some suggest that journalists need to "listen more and speak less" (Anderson et al., 1996, p. XV) and engage in a conversation with people. By doing so, media stories could represent more fully a curiosity about people's everyday lives, consider the similarities and differences in people's lived experiences, and explore how to find common ground to connect and live with one another. In this sense, individuals and media could work with one another to nurture public mindedness and connections to society.

The public journalism movement[7] that took hold especially during the 1990s was an effort by some in the field to do just this sort of work – to engage community members and media staffers in conversations about local issues and people (Merritt, 1995). These efforts came about in hopes of improving the public's confidence in the institution of news, to curtail people's "rising anger and cynicism" in public life (Friedland, Rosen, and Austin n.d.), and to search for solutions to social challenges (Nip, 2006). In newsrooms around the country, media outlets worked with citizens to identify local issues to establish news agendas. When community

[7] Many scholars and practitioners use public and civic journalism interchangeably. I use public journalism here.

members and media worked together to set agendas, individuals' civic competencies often increased (Nichols, Friedland, Rojas, Cho, and Shah, 2006).

While some newsrooms and individuals within the profession still are mindful of public journalism practices (Haas, 2007), the industry has moved away from some of the more intensive practices it earlier embraced, such as working with citizens to convene deliberative forums (Friedland, 2003). Technological evolutions during the last decade have ushered in changing opportunities for media and citizens to work together as individuals have growing access to the Internet and inexpensive online publishing options. These opportunities were hoped to offer widespread ways for citizens to connect in publicly minded ways and have greater power over the stories told about their communities (Gillmor, 2004). Individuals could participate in gathering, producing, or distributing information and news, and through this potentially become more informed citizens who would contribute to democratic processes (Boyte, 2011; Levine, 2002 and 2006). Although the participatory possibilities and outcomes may not have been as liberating as some suggested they could be, citizens have participated in media and communication practices to connect with the public about social issues, to raise awareness and ignite conversations, to spark change, to take more control over their lives and stories, and sometimes for a mixture of such reasons. They have grown to know one another in face-to-face settings through their participation in neighborhood e-mail groups or message boards (Katz, Rice, and Aspden, 2001; Mesch and Levanon 2003). Through various types of participation, individuals have expressed more satisfaction with how neighborhoods or peers are portrayed, by the diversity of voices represented, or by the community "building" they believe is being done through media. In some cases, this occurs as engaged and active individuals disseminate news and information through blogs (Bakardjieva, 2012) to augment coverage by conventional media.

Sometimes professional newsmakers work alongside non-trained journalists so that both are engaged in daily conversations about everyday life (Deuze, Bruns, and Neuberger 2007). Sometimes, this takes place when individuals are involved actively in setting news agendas (Meijer, 2013). Still other times these feelings of satisfaction happen when individuals come together to develop news sites or blogs that are produced especially by citizens without professional media training whose goals are to build community and give voice to those people and stories which may seldom be covered by traditional media (Ivancin and Schaffer 2009, Schaffer 2010, Sonwalkar 2009).

This brief background information provides broad strokes to help provide context for anxieties with media processes, media potential for connecting people with their communities, and ways citizens around the world are taking control of information and stories with aspirations of building stronger communities.

Individuals interviewed for this research project express that they wish hyperlocal journalism to engage in news practices that connect them with the public in various ways. My findings suggest these civically engaged people are looking for Madison Commons to tackle six key areas of responsibility: foster understanding, cultivate relationships, engage and respect diverse voices, care for institutional memories, inspire people, and connect individuals with civic life. These findings echo those of Meijer (2010) who interviewed a general population in Amsterdam to examine people's desires for local media coverage. Sometimes, the work these individuals want done they think conventional media can no longer address. Often the hopes they express for a Madison Commons effort is set in the context of what frustrates or worries them about conventional media outlets. They see news and information as integral to connecting with communities and do so through mass and interpersonal communication. A few shared personal

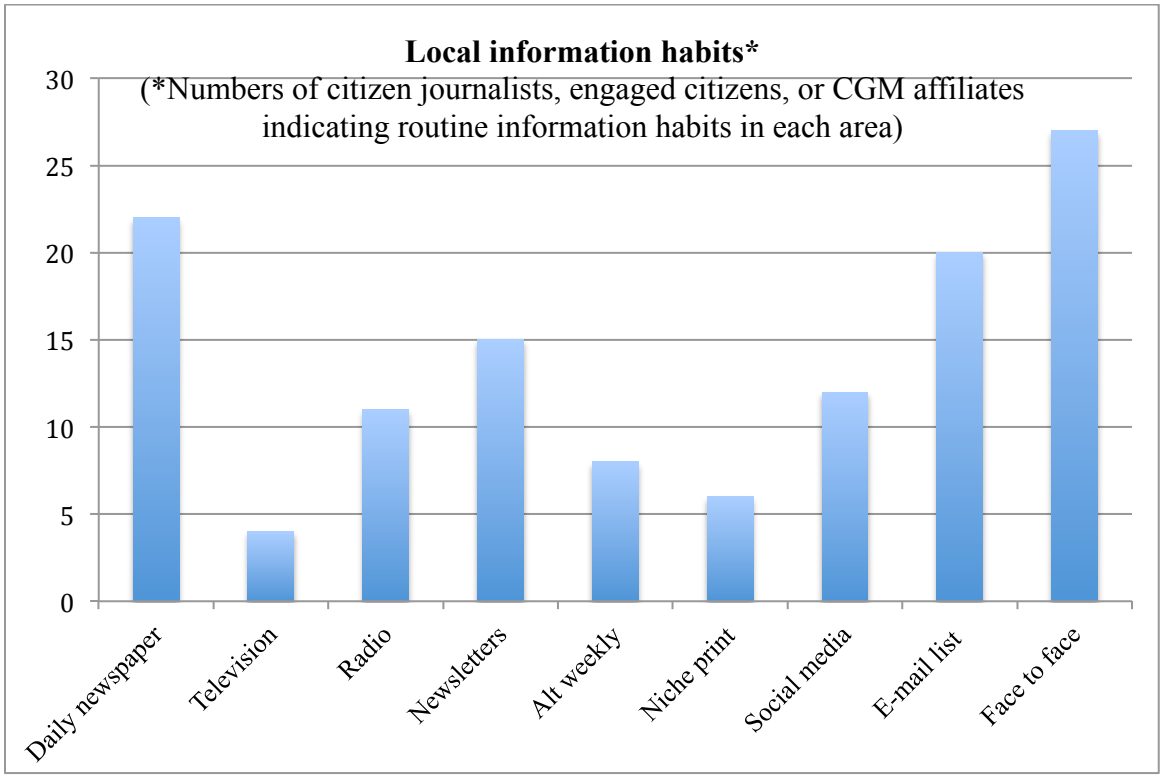
habits that suggest they see their own participation in community-minded journalism contributions (not necessarily for Madison Commons) as central to connecting with the public. For many, there was little sense that such practices are integral to reaching out to the public.

When interviewing these people, most already were familiar with Madison Commons. Four indicated they were not familiar with it before their interview, and I explained the Commons goals during the interview and shared the website with them. In talking with them, I asked the general questions about what they would like from local media, and I also asked them what they may like specifically from Madison Commons, if and how they may participate in such a site, and what suggestions, if any, they may have for Commons administrators and staff members. Most of the CGM affiliates had learned about it through a regular meeting with CGM. Some of these people had participated in social media trainings offered by Madison Commons, and some already had been a piece of news stories produced Commons staffers. As I indicate earlier, people often are imagining how they may participate in Madison Commons but are not necessarily doing so at all or with regularity. The following sections explore these findings in greater detail. First I address briefly the local media or information outlets these individuals consume to set in context some of their hopes and desires for Madison Commons' efforts.

Local media habits

While face-to-face communication is the most important way of learning about local news and information for these people, local media is still very much part of these individuals' lives. Most indicate they read news produced by at least one of the local conventional media sources either in print or online on a "regular" basis. Radio with local news also is important for many of these people. Some also watch local TV news, although the numbers who indicate this is part of their

routine is less so. A number also indicate they address information needs using the following: niche media, such as weekly print newspapers for African-American, Latino, and/or environmentally conscious communities; and monthly print newsletters/newspapers produced by neighborhood organizations. In addition, many also cited neighborhood list serves and/or issue-specific list serves as regular sources for information about public issues. A number said they use such social media outlets as Facebook and Twitter for publicly minded information. A 2012 survey (State of the News Media, 2013) indicates that fewer than 50 percent of people ages 55-64 indicate they read a print or online newspaper "yesterday," followed by about 40 percent for those ages 45-54, around 30 percent for ages 35-44, and around 25 percent for those ages 25-34 and 18-24. The survey indicates that 28 percent, 25 percent, and 12 percent of people consume the local late night, early evening, and morning news.



All of the citizen journalists, engaged citizens, and those affiliated with CGM (33 in total) turn to the media, at least some of the time, with hopes for making connections to others in the communities around public matters, whether that is public schools, crime, living car-free lives, or sustainable agriculture. They value coverage of transportation issues, for example, and worry about impacts of bus terminals being closed. They go to learn more about educational policies. "I go to the paper to find out what's going on with the Spanish-speaking school or what the School Board is working on, or what is going on with the [environmental] charter school," said Kurt, who works in fund-raising for a nonprofit organization that addresses educational issues. As I indicated earlier, these people already are civically engaged by their own definitions. They wouldn't be considered people who "bowl alone" (Putnam, 2001) as each one is involved in at least one type of civic organization. Further, all these individuals also participate in online communities in some format, and people who engage in such ways generally are more civically engaged than the public as a whole (Borgida and Stark 2004; Shah, Cho, Eveland and Kwak 2005).

When it comes to local media sources, many are disappointed by what they believe are the conventional media's failures to describe aptly the lived experiences of people in this city. Daisy is a retired social worker in her mid-60s who was employed in the local public schools. She thinks the media is "much more excited about violence and hurtful things than they are about constructive things." People are concerned the local media doesn't accurately depict the good lives people lead in all neighborhoods, for example, or the nuances of debates surrounding public issues. Some are frustrated that views that are alternative to those held by the majority of public officials or policymakers too often are portrayed in the media as eccentric.

So what do these people expect to see from their local media? My findings indicate these individuals are looking for Madison Commons to tackle six key areas of responsibility: foster understanding, invest in relationships, engage and respect diverse voices, tend to institutional memories, embrace and encourage creativity, and connect individuals with community life. As citizens communicate their desires, overlap exists among these descriptions. For example, as they talk about their wishes for people to understand their neighborhoods, it also becomes clear they believe this goes hand-in-hand with engaging and respecting the diverse voices living in the community.

Foster understanding

Community media needs to have as a chief goal cultivating understanding about the people and communities it covers (Hindman, 1998). To do so, many believe these media need to listen to and engage with community members (Lowrey, Brozana, and Mackay,, 2008). Media may work in concert with social experiences to nurture trust and community identity among people with diverse lived experiences (Rothenbuhler, 1991; Stolle, Soroka**,** and Johnston, 2008). Community listening and conversations allow those reporting on neighborhoods or cities to bring to the public differences among people so they can begin public conversations and deliberations that lead to understandings not only of distinctions but also commonalities in the lives they lead. Media can help us understand diversity while planting the seeds for cohesion (Park, 1925).

Interviewees believe Madison Commons can contribute to positive growth in the city by showing "curiosity" and "inventiveness" in the people about which they report. By doing so, Madison Commons can offer deeper pictures of the social dilemmas the city and its residents face. Take Ed, who is in his early 30s, a father of elementary-aged children, a security guard, and

a student in criminal justice. A resident of a neighborhood that often makes news for drugs, shootings, or robberies, Ed says he feels like the neighborhood in which he lives has been beaten "beyond all recognition" by media coverage. "I like the diversity. There are a lot of friendly people there. There are good people in the neighborhood," he says. He knows his neighborhood faces problems that may not be present everywhere in the city, but he also thinks media and public officials don't sufficiently consider the complexity of these problems. They look for a quick-fix solution, for example, by shuffling low-income people around the city. "There's a real blue-blood mentality here," he says. He wants hyperlocal journalism that suggests "we're all in this together" as it examines deeply the diverse challenges people in the city face.

Ed expresses sentiments that were echoed by many: they want Madison Commons to convey with richness what life in this city is like every day to help nurture understanding among citizens. They don't want Madison Commons to shy away from the demanding realities of sensitive subjects, such as race, mental illness, crime, or drugs. They want it to address social disparities, along with environmental threats, for example. But to contribute to an overall understanding about city life, they also believe Madison Commons must convey the rewarding aspects of sharing public lives through repeated coverage of such aspects of community life as neighborhood block parties, work by nonprofits, and social changes that come about through collective efforts of citizens.

Invest in relationships

Individuals believe that local media is "authentic" when it invests in relationships with city residents, informal groups and associations, and neighborhoods to build community. Media scholars and practitioners have suggested that the media's professional pursuit for objectivity

may have led some in the business down a path of detachment from the communities in which they serve (Bagdikian 1997; Merritt, 1995; Rosen, 1999). In so doing, media professionals may have distanced themselves from the grounded experiences of communities' social lives, and the knowledge journalists disperse may not perform the work of nurturing understanding (Compton 2000).

Melissa works as a technical writer, is involved with her children's school, and meets with a local group that focuses on issues of parenting and race. She believes that reporters who cover communities are more genuine when she sees them out, talking with people and at community events. Several noted that current practices by Madison Commons' reporters are promising. "They're not as afraid of having a relationship with the people they're reporting on as traditional media," said Natalie, a nonprofit executive. Many see this as a breath of fresh air. "The mainstream media isn't willing to invest in relationships. The local grassroots try – Lakeshore News, Madison Commons, Lake City Shades[8]. [Coverage] is reflected in that. People are able to say what they want to say and have a different perspective," said Bridget, an early 40s public relations specialist who is actively involved in a number of business and women organizations.

As more people come to participate more frequently in media – whether by adding facts in the comments sections of stories, working as a partner to a reporter to contribute information to a story, blogging, or contributing to citizen-driven news sites – they may increasingly call for trained journalists to invest in relationships with their communities. Research suggests that non-trained individuals participating in hyperlocal journalism websites see building community as among their core responsibilities, and they believe they need to invest in relationships to do so (Ivancin and Schaffer, 2009; Schaffer, 2010). Helen, in her early 60s, has a professional

[8] Lakeshore News and Lake City Shades are pseudonyms for the actual media outlets.

background in social services. She frequently contributes to local media initiatives, including Madison Commons in phases 1 and 2. “I don’t see myself as a journalist because I don’t have that educational part. I feel like I’m a partner with the people I’m writing with and for. Sometimes it comes a lot easier than others,” she said.

Engage and respect diverse voices and ideas

Democracy will thrive under strong participation. A strong democracy depends on people with diverse views being able to come together to resolve conflicts, on cultivating community in which people live with common interests and goals, and individuals having the civic competencies to participate in democratic practices (Barber, 1984). While media, itself, can’t produce strong democratic participation among people, media can employ practices that will help strong democracy grow. To do so, media needs to find ways that help diverse groups foster common goals (Hindman, 1998).

Repeatedly, these individuals indicate they wish for a diversity of voices and ideas in media coverage. As importantly, they want media to respect those diverse voices and ideas when they *are* present in the media coverage. Bridget said mainstream media doesn’t do a good job of representing “people of color or voices that might be economically or educationally different.” She said she uses mainstream media for information she knows she needs to have that will be there, but that she’ll turn to the local “grassroots” media outlets, such as Madison Commons, neighborhood newspapers, and newspapers for the area’s communities of color, to find other information. “It gives me a good feeling that there is this diverse, and I mean that word in many ways, rich tapestry of community that is just below the surface of the official news sources,”

Nina, a policy analyst who is in her late 40s and has school-age children, said of Madison Commons.

What's also worth noting is that it's not simply that these people wish for more diverse voices in community media. It's also that they want diverse voices and diverse viewpoints to be respected. They conceive of diversity broadly. For them, it means diversity with regards to race, ethnicity, education, and economic backgrounds. But it also means diversity with regards to views. These people wish for Madison Commons to include views that don't always align with public officials or the majority public thinking. And they want the Commons to do so considerately. To do this, they believe community media must commit to covering more than public meetings to capture a deep picture of challenges.

> "Local coverage tends to be, There was a hearing last night. That becomes the public interface, but that public hearing is just one tiny part of the process. And if someone comes to the hearing and makes a really outrageous comment, no matter how outrageous, it's the comment that appears in the media. It … gets portrayed as, This is what the counterargument is." – *Ted, an early 50s environmental nonprofit executive*

Ted suggests that although public officials may be able to overcome negative press because they can use money and influence to counter this, everyday citizens face much bigger challenges. "Our only currency is honesty and knowledge. If we're discredited in the media, the public dismisses us," he said.

Tend to institutional memories

People often turn to the media to help them make sense of events and experiences (Schudson, 1993; Zelizer, 2008. Institutional and cultural memories are constructed collectively, and social institutions such as the media can play influential roles in constructing these memories (Edy, 1999; Schudson, 1993, Robinson, 2009, Zelizer, 2008).

The people interviewed for this research are hopeful that Madison Commons can tend to the city's institutional and cultural memories, work they think has become more tenuous for conventional media outlets as they downsize staff and lose individuals with solid historical knowledge of the city, its people, and its issues.

Doris is in her late 50s and is president of her neighborhood's association. She lives in the same neighborhood as Ed and comments at length about her community's efforts to combat drugs, violence, and public noise nuisances by working with police and other public officials. She recalls with sadness a decision made by religious leaders outside of the city to shutter the doors for a vibrant neighborhood gathering spot with religious affiliations that offered educational and training opportunities to people. Local residents wrote letters, a regional neighborhood newspaper wrote stories, and some of the smaller media print outlets were influential in raising public awareness about the neighborhood center's historical importance to the community.

> "We were fortunate that group of … churches said this is what we've envisioned for this space, now we're going to shut it down? Something isn't right with this picture. The [outside church leaders] shut it down in spring and reopened it in the fall. It didn't take long to get it back up and running once people began to understand the importance to people and the need for it." – *Doris*, in her late 50s and neighborhood association president

Many of these individuals are media savvy through their civic work, having interacted on some level directly with media outlets to promote neighborhood festivals, bike events, or transportation changes coming down the pipe from city hall, for example. A number mentioned during interviews that they are concerned that as newsrooms downsize, conventional media loses some historical grounding in social situations and institutional decisions. They are concerned, too, for the practical value of having media that has historical understandings of communities:

when staffs lose members with such knowledge, they also lose important context for unfolding social challenges.

> "They're just spread way too thin. When the bus terminal closed, they didn't know about it. They contacted me to get info about it. In general, they're just spread way too thin, and they can't keep up on everything. You can't blame it on the reporters. They're being turned out of the business or are asked to cover more and more. How on earth can they keep up?" – *Teresa, a mid-50s woman interested in transportation issues and a Madison Commons contributor*

They express hope a hyperlocal journalism outlet such as Madison Commons can step in to fill this gap. Through her interactions with Madison Commons staff as an affiliate of Midwest Giving, Natalie feels confident that the Commons has a sincere and vested interest in "having institutional knowledge of how things are changing over time. Based on relationships between people and between the stories that are out there."

Embrace and encourage creativity

Among the critiques of the ways that conventional media often practices its job, some have asserted too little attention is focused on the good things that happen in life. The saying, 'If it bleeds, it leads,' may evoke a laugh from some, but others have had their fill of violence permeating broadcasts and news pages. Daniel Blom (2004) suggests that newsrooms need to become innovative about how they practice the news so they meet the needs of "community builders," those doing the daily work of improving the quality of lives in communities. These community builders, the types of nonprofits with which Madison Commons has partnered, indicate conventional media has little relevance to their work to communicate with those they serve. "They [community builders] need invention that lets their work shine through the pages of the newspaper so others are inspired to join the ranks of social-capital builders" (Blom 2004).

Kurt is one of those nonprofit workers who thinks the media has little relevance to his organization's efforts. He says the media seems "a lot less regular" in its interest in the work done by the literacy organization for which he works. He talks about the daily e-mails he sends with members and other literacy nonprofit groups to share ideas and information. Each day, he checks the state's larger daily newspapers online and a state political online news site. When he wants to learn about the meat of literacy and education issues, he reads trade journals and connects with other literacy leaders.

> "They [traditional media] don't really get into the issue like a professional would like, What can we really do about this. It's more news, the activities that people are doing as opposed to getting into the issue and why is this happening and that sort of thing. I don't go to the newspaper to learn more about education issues" – *Kurt, an early 60s nonprofit communications worker*

Daisy, the retired public schools social worker, thinks that community media can nurture relationships by showing people the many peaceable and enriching ways in which thousands of residents choose to live. With a background in peace and conflict resolution, she says the violence that plays out in the media doesn't reflect what she knows about people's lives in the city. "I'm very aware that there are people who are doing very good work at local and national levels who don't make the news. I think journalists have a responsibility to do more, to *show people there are other ways of doing things*" (emphasis added).

The upside for hyperlocal media endeavors such as Madison Commons is that the "community builders" of our towns and cities believe they can have a voice in smaller community media outlets because they think such outlets are more welcoming about sharing their efforts (Blom 2004). In doing so, both the community builders and media may help inspire people to act.

Connect individuals with community

Local media can serve important roles informing people about civic life and opportunities for participating in it (Friedland 2003, Lowrey, Brozana, Mackay 2008, Rosen 2000). Even if some individuals choose not to use media in publicly minded ways as Couldry et al. suggest (2008), many look to the media for information about neighborhood festivals, organizational meetings, what is happening with public schools, and so on. Journalism that makes it a point to include in its coverage these community-minded stories can contribute to increased civic action among community members (Friedland 2004, Nichols et al. 2006).

Many of those interviewed for this study see local media as having the potential to help people bond with those and the environment around them. They would encourage anyone who wants to get to know better those they share the city with to pick up copies of the local weekly, press for the area's communities of color, neighborhood newspapers or newsletters, listen to independent community radio stations, and follow local bloggers.

For 50 years, Madge has lived in a particular region of the city, first as a child, then with her own family. She said "there was no identity for this part of town at all." That changed when a quasi-official city organization was formed to work with her region's neighborhood associations. "Then the [organization's) newspaper came out, and it started tying people together and forming an identity. One of the things I like to tell people who are moving here that people should know is how active it is here," said Madge, a late 50s self-employed woman who helps organize neighborhood events.

It's worth noting that Madge suggests her community didn't start to bond until a neighborhoods' organization in concert with its newspaper began reporting on the area's civic life. Now, Madge turns to the newspaper for the region's neighborhoods, neighborhood

listserves, and specific neighborhood newsletters when she wants to publicize information about events she's helped organize as one way of encouraging others to get out, meet their neighbors, and get involved.

A role in hyperlocal journalism?

In its early years, Madison Commons' founders aimed to cultivate a commons resource that published community-minded coverage produced especially by individuals without formal training, or citizen journalists. Yet the Commons struggled to find even minimal participation in its early years. A concern exists that hyperlocal journalism that has very limited participation by community members may result in coverage that is too narrow and doesn't connect community adequately (Metzgar, Kurpius, and Rowley 2011). More recently, the hyperlocal journalism resource has experienced modest success using professional-journalists-in-training to produce the bulk of content. It has drawn on community members to pepper the site with occasional opinion pieces or fact-based stories.

This section examines the potential that Madison Commons partner affiliates, trained-but-not-practicing citizen journalists, or engaged citizens see for themselves to participate in a sustained manner. I explore this idea to consider ways in which a commons resource may expand its participation base in hopes of continuing to nurture a resource that will thrive and endure. I find that individuals are interested in helping to foster understanding, inspire people to action, bring more diverse voices to the Commons, and help people learn how to connect with civic life. Many are interested in doing so by participating casually through partnering with Madison Commons journalists, repurposing content that has been published elsewhere, and sharing hyperlinks among professional peers or interest groups. Those who indicate interest in

contributing more formally through regular submissions of fact-based articles or opinion pieces want to inspire action but feel a need to understand the Madison Commons audience before collaborating in this way. All already have robust civic lives, and any types of contributions they may make to deepening Madison Commons' role in the local communication ecology need to be extensions of their civic involvement.

Casual participation potential. One can't underestimate the role that casual participation plays in the success of online commons resources. Less than .4 percent of Wikipedia's registered users participate regularly (Wikipedia, 2014), yet the site among those visited most online (alexa.com, 2014). Some media professionals will use information shared by citizens who comment on stories to investigate facts or stories more thoroughly (Outing, 2005).

Elizabeth is among those who expressed a desire to work with Madison Commons reporters to provide coverage that helps nurture understanding about those who live in the city. In her late 50s, Elizabeth contributed sparingly to Madison Commons during and for a short time after completing citizen journalism trainings. She's passionate about issues that she describes as "social service," or those that focus on the challenges faced by people at the lower-end of socioeconomic scale. She recalls stories she read in Madison Commons about homelessness and says that she thinks writers could dig deeper into the topic.

> "One thing that struck me: I bet they were written by students, not by people like me. It's like they [homeless people] were a fixture on part of the street. I look at them differently now. There's a mask on a problem that's much deeper. Homelessness is the tip of the iceberg. Submerged beneath is a lot of people struggling to make it." – *Elizabeth, a trained citizen journalist in her late 50s*

Elizabeth said she thinks that students likely will "see" stories differently than the people working and living in the community. Still, she also believes that journalism students may have

training and time to focus on stories that she doesn't, so she imagines a role for herself as a partner to student journalists to provide background knowledge and help them connect with community members relevant to stories around social service issues.

As a community coordinator with a local food organization, Dave is eager to get food to people in need. His organization works with people in the city in a wide capacity, from food pantries to community gardens. He's become used to the seasonal calls from reporters about how full food pantry shelves are, or aren't, during the holiday season, and he says the conventional media gets it "mostly right." He perked up as he talked about Madison Commons coverage of community gardens. "This is a source we need to be going to when we've got news to share," he said he told co-workers at a recent meeting while handing out copies of stories that he'd printed from his computer. Dave says it's common for him to talk about food-related issues in both professional and social settings. "People are genuinely interested in what I do," he said. Though he's comfortable communicating in such ways, his interest in participating in Madison Commons extends primarily to sharing news links to Commons-produced stories and contacting reporters when he thinks his organization has an issue about which the community should know.

A creative writer through formal education, Linda is one of the engaged citizens I interviewed because she is passionately involved in issues about which the Commons focuses. She volunteers significant portions of her time for one nonprofit organization, a group that works with low-income families to address housing and food needs. She writes pieces for and edits its newsletter, organized and produced a cookbook for the organization, and helps organize events. Often, she'll send some of the same pieces to the neighborhood newspaper, and, occasionally, will write fresh pieces for this outlet. She was one of just a few people I interviewed who had little to no familiarity with Madison Commons.

> "I think everyone in a community has a good story to tell. I would like to make a connection with them [Madison Commons] so I could funnel what I'm already doing, but I won't do anything additional. But that's collaboration—it can grow without having to do actual extra work." – *Marge, an early 50s community volunteer*

Participation of this nature could be considered akin to "reviews, features and soft news" (Miel and Farris 2008). Such content as this plays an important role in giving voice to people and issues who often have been under-covered or not covered at all by traditional media (Metzgar et al. 2011). Elizabeth, Dave, and Linda, for example, each work or volunteer time with people they see as being under-represented or inaccurately represented in traditional media. Each shares in common a desire to cultivate understanding and connect people with nonprofit groups or other ways to get involved in the community. They see their roles in doing the community building work they imagine is possible through local media as informal yet relevant.

Formal participation potential. Ben and Sue have in common two characteristics that could fuel formal participation in a hyperlocal journalism commons resource. Both are ardent supporters of multi-modal transportation and both aim to inspire change. Sue does so in a professional capacity, and Ben writes about multi-modal transportation voluntarily to inspire others to cut back their reliance on cars. Both are active on a local listserve that discusses since topic.

Ben organizes city-wide events, some that are calls to action – akin to Bike/Walk to Work Days – and some designed to educate people about car-free living. In a voluntary capacity, he writes event-oriented or educational stories for neighborhood media outlets, institutional communication vehicles, and transportation-related publications. He started a Facebook page to advocate for multi-modal transportation in the city and thought one of his "biggest successes"

was being interviewed for an article that went out to the local university about alternative modes of transportation in the winter. “My Facebook page went from 500 to 600 followers overnight.”

Sue, a late 50s state employee, writes for professional peers by researching information produced by federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, trade journals, and others. On her own time, she also blogs about mutli-modal issues occasionally. “I’ll talk to just about anybody who will listen. That’s me, that’s my personality,” she said.

Both are so passionate about about multi-modal transportation that they devote considerable energy to communicating with various groups and individuals about the topic. Each expressed interest in contributing opinion pieces or fact-based news stories drawing from their own expertise but also from interviews with others. But both also cited a need to understand better who the Madison Commons audience is and what, if any, restrictions would be placed on them before giving some of their time to the commons resource.

> “[Contributing] would depend on who was reading it and also what format. For instance, if they were to say, We want you to write something in 150 words with a photo or, We want you to write something that’s not too controversial, like, about puppies. Then, eh. I’m sure lots of people care about puppies, but I’m not interested. But if they were to say, We’d like to feature your story that’s a page-and-a-half and has data sources about why the transportation system is totally fucked up, then yeah. Especially if it’s being read by a bunch of people up at the Capitol or people who are going to show at a meeting for the city and need information on that.” – *Sue, multi-modal transportation activist*

Ben and Sue were among several individuals who indicated an interest in contributing opinion and analysis or reporting to Madison Commons. Each one of these people who suggested they may be willing to invest time in such pieces said it was important to them that their writings may inspire change. That these people want to see some type of payoff for their effort is to be expected: in a natural commons resource, participants expect for water quality to improve, for example, if people honor the rules created. As the costs of participation increase –

such as repurposing content written for a nonprofit newsletter versus researching and gathering facts for a news article – people are more likely to hope for more results from their contributions.

Findings suggest that most individuals are more likely to participate in the commons resource through informal participation, such as working with student staff members to identify issues for stories and community members to talk with about such stories. They also are likely to distribute news stories through their social networks as they build trust in the commons that these stories are accurately conveyed. Individuals who expressed interest in participating in more ways, such as sharing fact-based stories, want clear information that people are reading Madison Commons stories and an understanding of who is doing so. Further, they want to be able to contribute stories that reflect their voice and personal aims with regards to interests and passions. If they don't have information about the Commons audience or some control over the stories, they likely will take their ideas and stories to other outlets.

Discussion

This chapter set out to examine what people hope for from a hyperlocal journalism site such as Madison Commons and to consider whether and how they may conceive of roles for themselves in this participatory age. These civically engaged people consume media in a publicly minded manner, meaning they hope to connect with their community through news stories. My findings suggest that these people are looking for a hyperlocal journalism site to foster understanding, cultivate relationships, engage and respect diverse voices, tend to institutional memories, inspire people, and connect individuals with civic life. Even though these individuals

are engaged civically at rates higher than U.S. adults[9], it is likely that their hopes for hyperlocal journalism sites are similar to those more generally in the community as my findings are similar to another exploring such an issue (Meijer 2010).

They imagine roles for themselves that may be considered event news or features, opinion and analysis, and more conventional fact-based news articles. While they see possible collaborations as fruitful for community building, they also want to know that the amount of energy put into it will lead to hoped-for results (such as increased understanding, civic participation, or change). To suggest that these people see collaboration with a hyperlocal journalism resource as central to their own sense of community mindedness likely would be misleading. While most see value in participating in the media to engage in conversations with professional peers, to educate the public about nonprofit work and civic life, and to call others to act for change, they all have rich personal networks through which they communicate ideas and exchange community information. Interpersonal communication channels still can carry powerful influence in people's community connections (Stamm, Emig, and Hesse, 1997).

Because these individuals already participate in the civic life of the community, it is important to understand better how we may draw them into participation of varying degrees to a commons resource. Madison Commons, like many hyperlocal journalism endeavors, has as part of its mission contributing to a vibrant civic life by interacting with the community in an intense manner. In choosing to partner with an umbrella organization for nonprofit groups, the Commons recognizes how its efforts line up with these groups' work. Further, the Commons can draw from these groups' existing networks to add to the local communication ecology. A

[9] Forty-eight percent of U.S. adults report taking part in a civic group or activity (Pew Research Center's Intern and American Life Project 2013). Each of the 32 people interviewed report being involved with at least one civic group or activity.

community that has rich, cross-cutting associations is more likely to give rise to the type of community thinking and deliberative discussions necessary for local, strong democracy (Friedland, 2001; Barber, 1984).

Chapter 6: Conclusion

When Madison Commons was founded in the mid 2000s, those behind the endeavor hoped it would fill in gaps in local media coverage of the community by creating a commons resource centered on hyperlocal journalism. Many hours and years later, following modest modifications and then a complete overhaul, the virtual resource for community-minded journalism has forged a niche in the local media scene.

This research set out to examine the following:

- R1: What characteristics and rules of a commons resource are present in this hyperlocal journalism model?
- R2: How may these contribute to collective action challenges and the resource's successes or failures? How might such challenges be unique to a virtual but geographically tied commons?
- R3: Does this model exist as an information commons or contribute to an information commons, and, if so, how?

My findings suggest that a commons resource that draws on the conventional newsroom as a staffing model but works closely with community members to develop intensely local coverage can play an important role in communicating news and information. Madison Commons resource in Phase 3 is a mixed model that implemented professional newsroom practices that use student journalists to create the bulk of original content. Madison Commons has forged a place in the local communication ecology. Said a local media editor who has participated as an advisory board member to Madison Commons,

> "The Madison Commons has reached maturity. Young-ish maturity perhaps, but maturity. Whereas it was for some years a complementary source of hyper-local news coverage for more traditional news providers in Dane County, it is now in many cases the

> *only* source of coverage of issues other news outlets no longer have the resources to cover. A perfect example is recent coverage of the Mayor's Neighborhood Conference. This discussion of issues important to every citizen in Madison was woefully under-covered by local TV, radio and newspapers. The Commons was the only place citizens could go to find coverage. The same has been true of school district public hearings, important transportation and food issues and more. To be sure, its regular Madison Media Digest is a great, smart, well-designed, Huffington Post-style aggregation. But its original reporting has really gotten good. The Madison Commons is fulfilling its mission of being a reliable source of community journalism. It's ready to grow still further. I look forward to its adulthood." – *Oscar, editor of local media outlet*

The issues that it has addressed that are examined to a lesser extent by local conventional media include food sustainability, security and urban homesteading; and work by community nonprofit groups. Coverage also includes regular stories about the city's bus system and includes special series that examine often-under-covered issues, such as recovery and substance abuse efforts underway around the city and surrounding communities.

Among the chief motivators for launching such a site was contributing to the local communication ecology (Friedland, 2001; Robinson, DeShano, Kim, and Friedland, 2010). When individuals have access to a collection of news and information from local media outlets, associations, friends, and family, they feel more connected to their communities (Matei and Ball-Rokeach, 2001). Having connections with one's local community often is an important step toward individuals engaging in the democratic life – civic associations and political participation – of their communities (Putnam, 2000). Local media that is community minded and looks to the people to help set the news agenda by identifying the range of lived experiences and challenges within a geographic space can lead to increased civic engagement (Nichols, Friedland, Rojas, Cho, and Shah, 2006).

For a virtual commons model of hyperlocal journalism, I suggest a mixed model that employs a more conventional newsroom staff and embraces associational commons principles is

an appropriate and needed approach to developing and producing community-minded journalism. I assert that my findings in this research project support this. One reason for this is that a hyperlocal journalism resource requires original content that is produced and distributed regularly to build a readership. This requires a time commitment from individuals that may not already be part of their regular routine. As a result, the costs for participating in this type of commons resource may be onerous for citizens whose personal success is not tied to producing fresh news stories. A hyperlocal journalism model inspired by commons principles needs a group of people caring for it that can devote time and energies to learning about the community on which it reports. Such a commons needs a stable group behind it that has deep knowledge about not only how the project has evolved, but also how the city and its people have evolved. A commons model of hyperlocal journalism needs a governing body that can secure funding to keep it operating. An associational commons is one in which a particular group cares for the day-to-day maintenance of a commons resource (Levine, 2002 and 2006).

Madison Commons during Phases 1 and 2 reflected an associational commons. A particular group of people affiliated with the local university gave birth to the idea and secured funding for Madison Commons' infrastructure, web development, and staffing. This group developed community partnerships with conventional media outlets, neighborhood newspaper editors, and neighborhood newsletter editors, all of which allowed the commons resource to republish stories on the Commons website. Administrators trained close to 100 individuals to report on their communities and offered a free workshop during a citywide conference to provide basic skills training in journalism and raise the Commons visibility. In Phases 1 and 2, administrators placed the responsibility for original news production with the individuals who completed citizen journalism trainings.

Unfortunately, the resource never got steam during Phases 1 and 2. Individuals who completed trainings rarely contributed content after completing trainings, and some seldom did so during trainings. With regards to my first research question, R1, my findings indicate that key principles were absent in these early phases that may have contributed to Madison Commons' struggles. The costs for participating were burdensome for the trained-but-not-practicing citizen journalists, most of who had no profession background in communicating with the public. Commons administrators faced challenges establishing any rules or sanctions because the individuals participated solely on a volunteer basis and could not be required to contribute. Although administrators made changes based on individuals' suggestions during and after citizen journalism trainings, these changes didn't prompt sustained participation. One reason may have been that citizen journalists didn't understand the resource's overall goals or its intended audience. Further, none of the individuals had strong personal stakes in the success of Madison Commons. The commons resource during Phases 1 and 2 lacked many of the elements present in successful commons, such as individuals with clear stakes in a successful commons; shared values; low costs for participating; an effective self-governance system with distinct rules in place for day-to-day practices; and clear communication in the many facets of the resource's goals and functions (Ostrom, 1990; Ostrom and Hess, 2006).

This research also set out to examine the collective active challenges faced by a commons resource-influenced hyperlocal journalism model and how such challenges may be unique to a virtual resource based on physical location (R2). My findings show that the commons resource faced several collective challenges during these phases that thwarted the commons' success during these years. Commons resource administrators' and the individuals trained as citizen journalists agreed that the city needed media coverage that was community-minded in its focus.

They wanted such coverage to reflect work being done to improve neighborhoods and people's lived experiences along with stories that would raise issues faced by people around the city as a way to connect publicly with others. Yet the citizens perceived that *how* they wanted to approach community-minded journalism diverged from what they learned during the trainings. This perceived difference in values was one important factor in the fragility of Madison Commons during its early years.

The trainings were influential in inhibiting the Commons in its early days. Rather than coming away from the trainings feeling more prepared to tackle community journalism, these individuals actually felt less so. They felt overwhelmed by the practices discussed during workshops. Even when they gathered facts and conducted thoughtful interviews, they expressed doubts about their abilities and began to question the accuracy of news even among conventional media outlets. Further, the trainings and news practices about which they learned demanded time and energy many felt uncomfortable giving. The startup costs were too high.

These individuals didn't experience benefits quickly enough for their liking. Many wanted their participation to enhance their social networks and reputations within the community. Both are common motivations for citizen journalists in the digital age (Lewis, 2009). Yet while many people who participate in online spaces expect to see their reputations enhanced among others in online spaces, the individuals trained as citizen journalists expected to see their reputations and social networks enhanced within physical spaces, too. This was one result of administrators' efforts to bridge virtual with physical worlds. Because they didn't see personal benefits, individuals turned elsewhere to share information and news. A number of the trained citizen journalists already had contributed to print neighborhood newspapers or newsletters and

knew that people recognized them from their roles as writers for these, and they worked with these outlets first to produce stories that meshed with their personal values and interests.

The Commons administrators evolved several practices to try to address concerns by these individuals. To begin, they modified the content covered in trainings so that individuals could focus more on feature stories, a type of story with which the people indicated they felt more comfortable. They also reduced the amount of time people would spend in trainings so people wouldn't feel the transaction costs for participating were so high. They embraced several Web 2.0 practices, such as Wikipedia-style contributions. This move was designed to allow people to make direct contributions to the website so they could see immediate results of their efforts, reduce the energy expended on participation, and to encourage collaboration in building community-minded stories. These evolutions came about because Commons administrators communicated with this group of individuals and were working to respond to concerns.

Still, the lines of communication may not have been as free as needed for an enduring commons. During interviews, those who completed citizen journalism trainings often commented that they didn't quite understand what Madison Commons was trying to do or who it was trying to reach. They knew the Commons wanted stories that reported on the community, but they didn't understand if it wanted to be its own resource for journalism. Some seemed confused as to just who would do the bulk of reporting, curious about the roles students sometimes played.

In Phases 1 and 2, Madison Commons failed to become a part of the local communications ecology, a third area of inquiry for this research project (R3). Original content was sparse. Fewer than 10 people contributed to the commons resource after they completed citizen journalism trainings. Those who did contribute wrote occasional op-ed pieces, feature

stories, or crafted wiki-stubs, a short contribution modeled after Wikipedia-style entries. Administrators relied on repurposed content or original content crafted by project managers. Conventional media partners didn't have original content to repurpose, so Madison Commons wasn't able to use referrals from such partners to help build an audience. Those within its own community – trained individuals – didn't see the resource as fulfilling their information needs.

Faced with a decision to close shop or overhaul the project, Commons administrators chose a new approach and embarked on Phase 3 of Madison Commons. During this phase, the current phase, Commons administrators have moved toward a mixed-model approach to a commons resource. Rather than rely on community members to produce original content, commons administrators have turned to students recruited as staff members. This turn has led to a more professional newsroom model of production. Still, commons administrators embrace many principles of associational models of commons resources, striving to communicate routinely with community members about individuals' information hopes and needs, and reaching out to community members to create original content about such issues as achievement gaps in education and multimodal transportation.

During Phase 3, a number of key design elements exist (R1) that contribute to its regularly produced original content and contributions to the local communication ecology. Commons administrators secured graduate and undergraduate students from the local university to report for the commons resource. These students bring with them the professional standards they learn through formal coursework. They share in common with the Commons administrators similar values with regards to such journalistic practices as accuracy and transparency. Further, staff members see the success of Madison Commons as directly tied to their own future success. By recruiting these students and offering modest scholarships on a semester-to-semester basis for

staff writers, Commons administrators also were able to introduce rules with regards to minimum requirements for contributions. Because the students already are familiar with such journalism principles as fairness, accuracy, and transparency as a result of their formal education, they feel comfortable with such values and have participated in trainings that address such areas. In Phase 3, administrators, editors, and staff members meet weekly to set discuss potential stories and outline deadlines. Staff members note the lines of communication among administrators and staff is solid. Editors feel generally comfortable about reaching reporters, as well as administrators. Still, this is an area that some would like to see open up even more through such channels as a common work space where story ideas and conversations about the community can flow freely. Overall, the move to this staffing model has led to consistent, original reporting published to the Madison Commons website.

With Phase 3, Commons administrators also developed new community partnerships that have contributed to a blossoming resource: the web arm of a local TV station that repurposes Madison Commons content and an umbrella organization for local nonprofit groups (CGM). Relationships with both, along with its consistently produced, fresh content, allow Madison Commons to play a role in the local communication ecology, a role it didn't play in Phases 1 and 2 because the resource lacked consistent, original content and had little traffic to its site (R3). Stories about such topics as racial disparities in the school system and beekeeping in the city that have been repurposed on the TV station's website have generated comments from readers and drive significant traffic to Madison Commons. Thus the Commons both contributes news and information to the local communication ecology and raises its visibility thanks to traffic driven to the site from this media partner.

Site visits in Phase 3 have increased considerably, with Google analytics data indicating they average around 2600 site visits each month from September through November of 2014. This is an increase of nearly 63 percent during the same time period in 2011, several months after Phase 3 was kicked off on the website. Roughly 25 percent of traffic during this time period came in the form of referrals to the site, which suggests that others in the community value it as a resource because individuals, associations, institutions, and other media outlets are "pointing" people to the commons resource for information about their community. While the numbers of overall visits to the site are small in comparison with local conventional media sites (alexa, 2014), Madison Commons has found an audience for its intensely local media coverage.

Individuals affiliated with CGM appreciate that the Commons is able to get more information out to the public about the work being done in their community. Research suggests that people working at nonprofit groups have indicated local media has little relevance to their work, in part because of limited coverage about their community efforts (Blom, 2004), yet such people seem natural as collaborators in hyperlocal journalism endeavors. CGM affiliates circulate Madison Commons news stories with co-workers and professional peers, thus raising the resource's role in the local communication ecology. These people are enthusiastic about additional possibilities to engage in dialogue with peers through this resource.

Yet two important features may limit CGM affiliates participation in or circulation of Madison Commons news and information. These people already have strong ties with professional peers and others in their physical spaces that they see as essential to their success. I suggest they don't believe journalism is vital to their ability to garner the necessary support for their efforts. Additionally, they express limited time to commit to new endeavors. They may decide Madison Commons doesn't hold enough value for them to participate in ways that will

increase the resource's overall value to the local communication ecology. Further, their enthusiasm for Madison Commons is checked by "wait and see" attitudes toward long-term coverage and hopes that Commons staffers will consistently produce professional quality journalism that meets the nonprofit leaders' expectations for accuracy and community mindedness.

As it continues to mature, Madison Commons likely will need to mobilize more people to participate in the site. Virtual communities are most successful when they have a mix of both seasoned and new participants (Ransbotham and Kane, 2011). To mobilize people, Madison Commons likely would need to target more individuals directly to ask for their participation. My findings suggest that people may be more likely to participate in the commons resource through informal means, such repurposing content written for neighborhood newspapers or community organizations, or working closely with staff members to identify neighborhood issues and community members knowledgeable about such issues. They also may be likely to develop Wiki-style contributions that do not demand significant energy. For more formal contributions, such as opinion pieces and fact-based stories, individuals likely will want to know that people, especially those within their social networks, pay regular attention to Madison Commons as a news source. They also likely will want to maintain control over their "voice" or approach to writing news and opinion pieces.

Mobilizing more individuals could have the benefit of increasing Madison Commons' reach into the community and also contributing to building democratic skills for informal and formal participants. An important value of a commons resource is that participating in such a community often can help people cultivate the democratic skills they will need to join in civic and political life (Boyte, 2011; Levine, 2002 and 2006). A commons resource, at its core, is a

resource that is collectively managed by people (not the state or private businesses). These people collaborate to develop practices and rules to manage the resource. As they see evolutions in the resource and the community around it, they talk through these changes to determine whether and how best to make changes to their own practices and rules to address developments. Those engaged in the work of commons resources face social challenges that arise from collaborative work. For example, they must develop trust in one another that each person will set aside her own, short-term interests to benefit the long-term good of the whole. These are the types of skills and qualities that contribute to a local democracy that is governed by the people (Friedland, 2001).

This type of mixed-model approach has proven effective for Madison Commons. It contributes to the local communication ecology and has possibilities for helping to enhance people's democratic skills. It is a model whose framework is broad enough that it may prove useful in other locations. A group of resource administrators tend to its day-to-day care by securing funding for the resource and recruiting individuals for original content. It relies on a core group of staff members who are offered small scholarships for a minimal numbers of contributions. Further, commons resource administrators work collaboratively with community members to develop news ideas. Community members have opportunities to participate through formal stories or opinion pieces. As it moves forward, this commons resource likely will need to mobilize additional people to continue to thrive and grow.

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Appendix 1: Citizen Journalists

1. Where do you go for your news? What sorts of news stories tend to interest you the most?
2. Where do you go for your community news?
3. What about more informal sources? do you find you talk about community gossip at church?
4. What sorts of community news or issues tend to interest you the most?
5. How often would you say you seek out new news sources?
6. What they think of the local papers WSJ and Cap Times and Isthmus?
7. What do you think about other local sources of news or information about your community?
8. What you think of the state of journalism today?
9. Do you know any reporters? Have you ever had any interaction with journalists, or have you ever been the subject of a news story?
10. When you think of journalists, how do you consider them (as one pack of people trying to get ahead by any means possible? As an institution? As people like you? As a social clique)?
11. When you think of citizens who contribute to blogs and news sites like Madison Commons, how do you consider them? Do you consider them on the same level as journalists?
12. How often do you visit Madison Commons? What do you think of the site?
13. How do you think the administrators could improve Madison Commons? What advice do you have for us?
14. What kind of places do you like to spend with other people? Do you consider time online as time spent with other people? Why?
15. When you spend time with other people, do public or community issues ever come up? What types of issues do you talk about? How much do you contribute to these conversations? When was the last time you came across an opinion different from your own regarding a

local/community issue? In what ways did you differ? Where was this? How would you describe your conversation with this person?

16. What types of problems or issues do you think communities need to address? How do you think they can best do this? Do you see this happening in your own neighborhood or community? What kind of role do you see yourself playing in those discussions, if any? Do you do this?
17. How do you define community? What does the idea mean to you? In what ways do you exercise your particular community? Do you think the concept of community has changed over the years?
18. When you meet people you don't know, where do you tell them you're from? To what area do you feel you belong?
19. How would you describe your neighborhood's sense of identity? What contributes to that? And, what role do you see as having in the neighborhood? If someone who did not know your neighborhood asked you to describe it, what kind of words would you use? What is your neighborhood's relationship to the city at-large?
20. How would you recommend newcomers to the city to get involved in your neighborhood? In the city at large?
21. What are some issues being raised in your community? How do these reflect or differ from those of other neighborhoods? The city at-large?
22. How would you evaluate or rate our public life here in Madison?
23. What role do you think Madison Commons plays in either of your notions of community and public life?
24. Who do you think of as authoritative in your community when it comes to community-

related information? You, your neighbors, community leaders, journalists, elected officials, others?

25. Do you think journalists have more knowledge than you do? What about elected officials?
26. How do you determine whether information you come across or that you yourself relay is credible or not?
27. Who do you turn to get accurate information about topics that are important to you?
28. Do you believe that your voice is heard in your community? How so or why not?
29. In what ways do you feel empowered as a citizen (i.e. voting) and in what areas do you wish you had more power or ability to improve aspects of your life as a citizen?
30. What role do you think media technology like the Internet is playing in community building, democracy and civic life?
31. What role do you think the government, schools or other traditional institutions need to play in community building?
32. Why did you want to be involved with Madison Commons/newsletter/newspaper? Why does Madison Commons, specifically, help you achieve this?
33. How often would you say you have contributed to Madison Commons?
34. How do you decide when and what to contribute to your site/newsletter/news organization?
35. What do you get out of it on a personal/professional/other level?
36. How has it changed the ways in which you think about your neighborhood, or any community of which you consider yourself to be a part, if it does?
37. Did your ways of interaction changed at all after you started the training or contributing to public forms of communication?
38. What other kinds of public/private writing do you do in your personal or professional life?

Do you ever comment on articles online, for example? Or other people's blogs? What are some of these? What sorts of things do you say? Or, what keeps you from doing that?

39. In general, how confident do you feel about the veracity and accuracy of the information you publish? On what topics do you feel particularly authoritative?
40. What keeps you from contributing more? What would make you contribute more, realistically?
41. When you do your writing (either for Madison Commons or the newsletters), how and where do you tend to find your sources? What kinds of sources do you feel like other writers and journalists are missing?
42. When you write do you see yourself as a pseudu-journalist, partner with the journalist, as filling a niche that journalists don't get at?

Appendix 2: Staff

1. Why did you want to be involved with Madison Commons? Why does Madison Commons, specifically, help you achieve this?
2. What do you see as the goals of Madison Commons?
3. How do you decide when and what to contribute Madison Commons?
4. What do you get out of it on a personal/professional/other level?
5. Has it changed the ways in which you think about your neighborhood, or any community of which you consider yourself to be a part, if it does?)
6. Did your ways of interaction change at all after you started writing for Madison Commons?
7. When you write do you see yourself as a journalist, a partner with journalists, or as filling a niche that journalists don't get at?
8. How do you determine who your sources will be? How do you find new sources?
9. Do you use any social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Ning? How often do you use it? How do you use it, for example, do you post your own ideas often? Do you primarily link to others' info, such as Tweets or news stories? How do you determine who you'll link to?
10. When you think of journalists, how do you consider them (as one pack of people trying to get ahead by any means possible? As an institution? As people like you? As a social clique)
11. When you think of citizens who contribute to blogs and news sites like how do you consider them? Do you consider them on the same level as journalists?
12. Who do you talk with routinely about issues that matter to you?
13. What ways do you engage with your communities/groups?
14. What people and media do you rely on for your general news (can include friends, neighborhood newspapers, listserves, Facebook, etc.)? For news about the

communities/groups you're interested in? Why do you turn to these sources?

15. Are there organizations, elected officials or public employees you interact with regularly on issues of interest to you? If so, who? How?
16. What are your favorite hangouts in Madison?
17. Where do you go for your news? (i.e. what newspapers do they get, do they ever watch TV news?) What sorts of news stories tend to interest you the most?
18. Where do you go for your community news? (Follow-up: What do you think of your neighborhood newsletters?)
19. What sorts of community news or issues tend to interest you the most? (Follow-Up: do you see these are being separate from city-wide issues?)
20. How often would you say you seek out new news sources?
21. What do you think about local sources of news or information about your community?
22. Do you have any suggestions for Madison Commons?

Appendix 3: CGM Partner Affiliates

1. Who do you talk with routinely about issues that matter to you?
2. What are the most important issues for you with regards to [food/transportation/education]?
3. Do you find you're in general agreement with the people you talk with on these important issues?
4. When is the last time you had a conversation with someone about this issue with whom you disagreed? Describe for me the conversation.
5. How do you address disagreement on issues?
6. Do you see your involvement in these issues as one of educating, advocating, and/or learning and addressing community needs?
7. What organizations or groups are you part of? What ones do you consider yourself an active member of? Explain your role in these. Why did you join these groups? Do you consider these organizations/groups successful? Why or why not? Has your notion of what is successful changed during the last five years?
8. What ways do you engage with your communities/groups?
9. What people and media do you rely on for your general news (can include friends, neighborhood newspapers, listserves, Facebook, etc.)? For news about the communities/groups you're interested in? Why do you turn to these sources?
10. How have the people you go to for info changed in recent years? Have the media outlets or sources you used changed? Why or why not?
11. How do you communicate your ideas about [food/transportation/education] to others who share your interests in these issues? To the broader public? What media do you think are most effective at addressing these issues and why?

12. If you write about [food/transportation/education], how do you determine who your sources will be? How do you find new sources?
13. Do you use any social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Ning? How often do you use it? How do you use it, for example, do you post your own ideas often? Do you primarily link to others' info, such as Tweets or news stories?
14. Do you blog about your issue(s) of interest? If so, why? If not, why not?
15. If you blog, use social media or have a website, how do you determine who to link to?
16. Are there organizations, elected officials or public employees you interact with regularly on issues of interest to you? If so, who? How?
17. How well do you think the people, sources and/or media outlets you use convey accurate information about the issues of interest to you?
18. What things do they do well when sharing info about these issues? What don't they do well?
19. What do you know about Madison Commons?
20. What have you learned about your issues of interest based on media coverage? What do you think media could learn from you for its coverage on this issue?
21. Have your opinions about this issue changed during the past year? Explain. Do you think the Madison community's position has evolved? Why or why not?
22. If you routinely write about your issue(s) of interest, have your ideas about what you should write about changed during the past year? Explain. Have your ideas about who you should talk with changed? Explain. Have your habits of choosing sources for stories changed? Explain.

Appendix 4: Engaged Citizens

1. What is/has been your role with the neighborhood and how long have you been involved with it and/or lived in this neighborhood?
2. What issues are important to you – both with regards to neighborhood and the city?
3. Who do you talk with routinely about issues that matter to you?
4. What are the most important issues for you with regards to these?
5. Do you see your involvement in these issues as one of educating, advocating, and/or learning and addressing community needs?
6. What organizations or groups are you part of? What ones do you consider yourself an active member of? Explain your role in these. Why did you join these groups? Do you consider these organizations/groups successful? Why or why not? Has your notion of what is successful changed during the last five years?
7. What ways do you engage with your communities/groups?
8. What people and media do you rely on for your general news (can include friends, neighborhood newspapers, listserves, Facebook, etc.)? For news about the communities/groups you're interested in? Why do you turn to these sources?
9. How do you feel about the media coverage of your neighborhood? Other issues that interest you? Do you think coverage is accurate? Is there enough?
10. How could the media improve coverage?
11. How have the people you go to for info changed in recent years? Have the media outlets or sources you used changed? Why or why not?
12. How do you communicate your ideas about [food/transportation/education] to others who share your interests and concerns for these issues? To the broader public?

13. Why do you participate in your neighborhood list serve? What types of information do you usually share there?
14. Do you use any social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Ning? How often do you use it? How do you use it, for example, do you post your own ideas often? Do you primarily link to others' info, such as Tweets or news stories?
15. Do you blog about your issue(s) of interest? If so, why? If not, why not?
16. If you blog, use social media or have a website, how do you determine who to link to?
17. If you routinely write about your issue(s) of interest, have your ideas about what you should write about changed during the past year? Explain. Have your ideas about who you should talk with changed? Explain. Have your habits of choosing sources for stories changed? Explain.
18. Are there organizations, elected officials, public employees or members of the media you interact with regularly on issues of interest to you? If so, who? How?
19. Are you familiar with the online news website Madison commons?
20. What have you learned about your issues of interest based on media coverage? What do you think media could learn from you for its coverage on this issue?
21. Have your opinions about this issue changed during the past year? Explain. Do you think the Madison community's position has evolved? Why or why not?
22. Do you find you're in general agreement with the people you talk with on these important issues?
23. When is the last time you had a conversation with someone about this issue with whom you disagreed? Describe for me the conversation. How do you address disagreement on issues?

Appendix 5: Demographics questions

1. What is your gender?
2. What is your heritage?
3. What is your age?
4. What is the highest level of education you have attained?
5. What is your marital status?
6. Do you have children? How many and how old, if so?
7. What is your profession, including if you are a homemaker?
8. Do you commute to work outside of Madison?
9. How long have you lived in Madison? Why do you live here?
10. Where else have you lived?
11. What is your political affiliation?
12. Did you vote in the primary? Do you generally vote?
13. Are you an active or passive member in a Church or other religious group?
14. Do you volunteer? What civic organizations are you a part of (including PTA)? Which ones would you say that you are active in (meaning, you do something with them at least once a month)?

Appendix 6: Brief descriptions of interview participants*

Ben, mid 30s engaged citizen

Betsy, early 20s staff member

Bonnie, mid-50s citizen journalist

Bridget, late 30s citizen journalist

Daisy, mid 60s engaged citizen

Dave, late 40s CGM nonprofit affiliate

Diane, early 50s CGM nonprofit affiliate

Doris, early 60s engaged citizen

Ed, early 30s engaged citizen

Elizabeth, mid 50s citizen journalist

Faith, late 20s staff member

Fiona, late 20s CGM nonprofit affiliate

Helen, mid 50s citizen journalist

Kevin, late 50s engaged citizen

Krista, mid 40s CGM nonprofit affiliate

Kurt, mid 60s CGM nonprofit affiliate

Linda, mid 50s engaged citizen

Madge, late 50s citizen journalist

Mary, mid 30s engaged citizen

Melissa, late 30s citizen journalist

Mitch, early 60s engaged citizen

Nan, mid-40s citizen journalist

Nancy, late 50s CGM nonprofit affiliate

Natalie, mid 50s CGM nonprofit affiliate

Nell, mid 40s citizen journalist

Nina, late 40s citizen journalist

Olivia, late 20s staff member

Paula, late 20s staff member

Rick, mid 40s CGM nonprofit affiliate

Rose, early 60s engaged citizen

Sue, late 40s engaged citizen

Ted, early 60s CGM nonprofit affiliate

Teresa, late 50s engaged citizen

Terri, late 40s citizen journalist

Tina, early 30s citizen journalist

Tessa, mid 60s citizen journalist

Val, early 50s engaged citizen

*Participants' names have been changed to respect their confidentiality.