**Who Gets Vocal about Hyperlocal:
Neighborhood Involvement and Socioeconomics
in the Sharing of Hyperlocal News**

Piotr S. Bobkowski
Liefu Jiang
Laveda J. Peterlin
Nathan J. Rodriguez

Piotr S. Bobkowski, William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications, University of Kansas, Lawrence, USA. Email: bobkowski@ku.edu
http://journalism.ku.edu/peter-bobkowski

Liefu Jiang (corresponding author), William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications, University of Kansas, Lawrence, USA. Email: liefujiang@ku.edu

Laveda J. Peterlin, Department of Digital Communications, University of Saint Mary, Leavenworth, Kan., USA. Email: peterlin651@stmary.edu

Nathan J. Rodriguez, Division of Communication, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, USA. Email: Nathan.Rodriguez@uwsp.edu
https://www.uwsp.edu/comm/Pages/Faculty/Rodriguez.aspx

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This study examined the characteristics of readers who share hyperlocal news in person, over email, and through social media. A reader survey of 10 hyperlocal news websites that operate in a variety of communities in the United States was conducted (n = 2,289). More readers indicated sharing hyperlocal news in person than through email or social media. Higher neighborhood involvement and higher education tended to characterize readers who shared hyperlocal news via each of the three channels. Education moderated the association between neighborhood involvement and sharing news in person and via social media. These results suggested that highly involved readers with little education used social media more than their highly educated neighbors to share news from hyperlocal websites. The study extends the precepts of channel complementarity theory into the domain of online news sharing.

KEYWORDS channel complementarity theory; hyperlocal news websites; neighborhood involvement; news sharing; opinion leadership; quantitative research; reader survey

Individual news readers who share news articles through social media and email make an important contribution to the news distribution process, especially for digital-only news organizations (Mitchell, Jurkowitz, and Olmstead 2014). This includes hyperlocal news websites, which generally are small, independent news outlets that cover local news in specific geographic areas (Hess and Waller 2014; Lauterer 2006; Miller 2016). Despite their importance to news distribution, we know relatively little about the essential characteristics of individuals who share online news. Most of the research on online information sharing has focused on users' motivations to share information (e.g., self-interest), on the information sources that encourage sharing (e.g., friends), and on the content most likely to be shared (e.g., original, useful, newsworthy) (Chiu et al. 2007; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Ho and Dempsey 2010; Hsieh, Hsieh, and Tang 2012; Trilling, Tolochko, and Burscher 2017).

This study examines the attributes of hyperlocal news website readers who share hyperlocal news not only through social media but also via email and through in-person word-of-mouth. Hyperlocal news platforms and the content they publish have been characterized as "backyard-type" news (Miller 2016) and "excessively local news" (Hess and Waller 2014). Although hyperlocal news is delivered via a variety of media platforms (e.g., Ewart, 2014), this study adds to the growing literature on hyperlocal news websites (e.g., Barnett and Townend, 2015; Chadha, 2016). By restricting the source and content of the information being shared, this analysis focuses on the individuals who participate in the news-sharing process. The study draws on channel complementarity theory (Dutta-Bergman 2004), communication infrastructure theory (Ball-Rokeach 2001), and the concept of social capital (Kikuchi & Coleman, 2012), and uses data from surveys of readers at 10 hyperlocal news websites to examine who is most likely to distribute news from these sites.

Literature Review

Hyperlocal News Websites

Research on local news websites has emphasized these sites' potential to promote community affinity and engagement (Hess and Waller 2014; Mersey 2009; Reader 2012), but also has underscored the inherent challenges these websites face (e.g., St. John, Johnson, and

Nah 2014). In many locations, independent hyperlocal news websites address a news void created by the early 21st-century contraction among legacy news organizations that previously generated local coverage (Shapiro 2011; Ewart 2014). Many of the hyperlocal websites, however, are short on human and financial resources. According to a 2015 survey of 80 online local news publishers, 54% of local news websites do not have a full-time staff and 40% of publishers do not take a full-time salary (McLellan 2015). Despite steady revenue, most are not considered profitable (McLellan 2015). Understanding better the characteristics of readers who contribute to the hyperlocal news dissemination process may inform hyperlocal news practitioners' editorial and marketing decisions.

Word-of-Mouth and Online Sharing

The sharing of news in social media is an early 21st-century supplement to the ancient practice of sharing news by word-of-mouth (WOM). Early mass communication research indicated that the sharing of information by word-of-mouth is a key mechanism driving the diffusion of news about politics, consumer products, fashion, and entertainment (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944). This finding subsequently has been replicated across many information domains (Berger 2014; Nyilasy 2005). Since the advent of the Internet, researchers have been documenting the sharing of information in online and mobile spaces, a practice sometimes referred to as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). Research on the sharing of news via email and in social media fits within this research tradition (Bobkowski 2015; Weeks and Holbert 2013; Trilling et al. 2017).

Decades of offline word-of-mouth studies suggest that the most civically and socially engaged individuals are most likely to share information with those around them (Keller and Berry 2003). In terms of demographics, these individuals tend to be above-average educated and to earn above-average incomes (Keller and Berry 2003). Some of these individuals' specific characteristics may vary across informational domains. This is because while some people share information in general, across a number of areas, others' sharing is more narrow, limited to the domains in which they take special interest, in which they are especially involved, and on which they are considered experts (Weimann 1994).

In contrast to what we know about offline sharers, we do not know whether any distinct groups of online news readers share more news than other groups via email and in social media. Rather than study individual differences of those who share online, researchers have focused primarily on individuals' sharing motivations, and on the characteristics of content and sources that prompt greater sharing. We know, therefore, that self-interest in the form of self-enhancement, social engagement, personal gain, and reputation enhancement motivate individuals to share online information (Ho and Dempsey 2010; Malik, Dhir, and Nieminen 2016; Munar and Jacobsen 2014; Syn and Oh 2015). We also know that people are likely to share information from close friends, from people they trust, from influential individuals, but also from people who are dissimilar to them (Chiu et al. 2007; Chu and Kim 2011; Boehmer and Tandoc 2015). In terms of content, we know that hedonic, useful, proximate, informative, original, and positively toned information tends to be shared widely (Bobkowski 2015, Chiu et al. 2007; Eckler and Bolls 2011; Hsieh et al. 2012; Taylor, Strutton, and Thompson 2012; Trilling et al. 2017).

In sum, we may expect those who share hyperlocal news through word-of-mouth to reflect the characteristics of socially and civically engaged individuals, but the online sharing literature provides few clues about the demographics of who might share hyperlocal news through email and social media. We draw next on communication theories to predict more

precisely the characteristics of those individuals who drive the sharing of hyperlocal news.
Neighborhood Involvement

Channel complementarity theory, in concert with the "excessively local" nature of hyperlocal news websites, suggest that individuals who share news from these websites—by word-of-mouth, email, or social media—are involved in their neighborhoods. Channel complementarity theory argues that individuals who consume information from a medium about a specific content domain are likely to seek information about that same domain in other media (Dimmick, Kline, and Stafford 2000; Dutta-Bergman 2004; Ruppel and Rains 2012). Specifically, Dutta-Bergman (2004) found that individuals who were involved in their communities sought information about their communities not only from conventional media but also from online sources. This theory thus suggests that individuals who are involved in their neighborhoods use a repertoire of media sources to gather information about their neighborhoods.

Because involvement in a content domain predicts offline word-of-mouth information sharing (Weimann 1994), the individuals who are involved in their neighborhoods also may be likely to share the information they consume about their neighborhoods, including information from hyperlocal websites, where those are available. It seems reasonable also to extend channel complementarity theory into the realm of information sharing and propose that individuals who share information about a specific domain in one mode (i.e., word-of-mouth), also may be likely to share information about this domain in other modes (i.e., email, social media). Research evidence supports this notion, showing that individuals who share specific information offline also share similar information online (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, and Valenzuela 2012; Vitak et al. 2011). Moreover, information domain involvement and interest predict online information sharing (Boehmer and Tandoc 2015; Taylor et al. 2012). Community participation and a sense of belonging in the community, meanwhile, are associated with using local social media services (Kim and Shin 2016). The sum of this evidence leads to the present study's first three hypotheses, which are, that readers who are more involved in their neighborhoods are more likely than those who are less involved to share information from hyperlocal websites by (H1) word-of-mouth, (H2) using email, and (H3) using social media.
Socioeconomics

In general, exposure to news is greater among individuals with higher socioeconomic status (Ksiazek, Malthouse, and Webster 2010). Channel complementarity research shows that the demographic characteristics of print news readers tend to be similar to those who seek local news online (Dutta-Bergman 2004; Paek, Yoon, and Shah 2005). The higher socioeconomic status of hyperlocal news readers is also reinforced by the content in which these websites specialize. Hyperlocal news readers are predominantly computer-literate individuals who are already engaged in their neighborhoods (Amjad 2008; Hampel 2008). They also may have more access to social capital (Kikuchi and Coleman 2012), than those who do not read hyperlocal news. Social capital consists of intangible assets and information that reside in certain relationships and advantage the members of these relationships (Coleman, 1988). Having a greater sense of community in one's neighborhood, and a higher socioeconomic status, are associated with having more social capital (Perkins and Long 2002).

Communication infrastructure theory (Ball-Rokeach 2001; Chen et al. 2012; Kim and Ball-Rokeach 2006; Kim, Jung, and Ball-Rokeach 2006) links community storytelling, that is, the information that community members exchange with one another, with the strength of communities. This theoretical perspective emphasizes the resources needed to support

community storytelling and thus increase community participation. It identifies categories of storytelling agents that operate in communities, including meso-level agents like hyperlocal news websites and micro-level agents, namely, community residents. The theory holds that neighborhood participation depends on how well the meso- and micro-level agents tell stories about their communities, and on how connected those agents are with one another (Kim and Ball-Rokeach 2006). Communication infrastructure is likely to benefit a community's social capital. Individuals in communities with access to more communication infrastructure are likely to both benefit from greater social capital, and to invest more in the social capital shared among their neighbors, than those in communities with less communication infrastructure.

In line with communication infrastructure theory and social capital, we expect that a relatively dense human infrastructure is necessary for neighborhood storytelling to take place. Word-of-mouth sharing is likely more common among residents with higher socioeconomic status and higher social capital because these individuals tend to have larger social networks through which they connect with other higher-status residents, thus increasing their exposure to discussions of public affairs and avenues for local involvement (La Due Lake and Huckfield 1998; Shah et al. 2005). This corresponds with research on word-of-mouth sharing, which identifies individuals with higher education, employment status, and income as being more likely to share information with others (Keller and Berry 2003). While there has been little examination of the relationship between socioeconomics and the propensity to share online content, we again extend channel complementarity theory (Dutta-Bergman 2004) to sharing behaviors, and predict that the characteristics of individuals who share hyperlocal news offline will match the characteristics of those who share hyperlocal news online. We thus hypothesize that hyperlocal news readers with higher socioeconomics, marked by (a) higher education and (b) higher income, are more likely than readers with lower socioeconomics to share information from hyperlocal websites (H4) by word-of-mouth, (H5) using email, and (H6) using social media.

Moderations with Socioeconomics

Lastly, we consider whether socioeconomics moderates the relationships between neighborhood involvement and sharing. On the one hand, communication infrastructure theory (Ball-Rokeach 2001) and word-of-mouth research (Keller and Berry 2003), combine to suggest that the sharing of hyperlocal information may be more likely among individuals involved in their neighborhoods who are more educated or who have higher incomes than among those involved in their neighborhoods with less education or income. Despite similar levels of neighborhood engagement, individuals with higher educations and incomes may have more resources—like time and social networks—that can facilitate greater sharing of hyperlocal news when compared to their neighbors with lower incomes. On the other hand, some have argued that new communication technologies disrupt established patterns of engagement, lowering the barriers to entry for those who traditionally have been less likely to participate in their communities and by communicating with those around them. Using the Internet to make digital connections with their neighbors has been shown to increase individuals' social capital and engagement in their communities (Hampton and Wellman 2003; Stern et al. 2011). Perhaps social media provides tools to those who are not socioeconomically advantaged to activate their networks and participate in their neighborhoods by sharing local news. A study of Facebook Group usage for management issues and self-organizing activities in residential communities in the UK, for example, illustrated that social media can have a positive effect on neighborhood engagement by providing residents opportunities to start self-organizing and to learn how to support other members of their communities (Barborska-Narozny, Stirling, and Stevenson 2016).

Because theory and research are limited in suggesting how the relationships between neighborhood involvement and sharing practices may be moderated by socioeconomics, we ask one research question to guide the examination of several possible moderation variants: (RQ1) Does the likelihood of sharing hyperlocal news as related to neighborhood involvement vary at different levels of education and income?

Methods

Sample

The study's hypotheses and research question were addressed with online surveys of 2,289 hyperlocal news website readers. Ten hyperlocal news websites participated in the study. As Table 1 illustrates, there was diversity among these websites with respect to the regions where they are located, how long they have been operating, and their monthly visitor counts. To assemble the respondent sample, the authors first solicited participation from hyperlocal news publishers using Michele's List, a hyperlocal news website directory. The 10 hyperlocal publishers who agreed to participate posted links to the online survey on their websites, encouraging readers to respond as way to inform their website improvements. Each survey was customized, with questions that referred to particular websites displaying the local website name (e.g., "How frequently do you read [News website name]?"). Each survey was open for two weeks.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Measures

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for all variables used in the study. News sharing was measured with a dichotomous variable for each of the three sharing channels (i.e., word-of-mouth, email, social media). There were only weak correlations between these three sharing modes (see Table 3).

[Insert Table 2 about here]
[Insert Table 3 about here]

The neighborhood involvement scale was derived from five items with which respondents rated the sense of community in their neighborhood (1 = "not at all strong" … 5 = "extremely strong"); indicated how often they attend events in the neighborhood (1 = "not at all" … 5 = "often"); estimated how many of their neighbors they know (1 = "none of them" … 5 = "all of them"); and specified how much they agree that community involvement is important to them,e and that they feel part of the community (1 = "strongly disagree" … 5 = "strongly agree").

Socioeconomic status was measured with two variables: a six-point education scale, and an eight-point income scale. Fourteen variables were used as controls in the statistical models. The first three variables controlled for respondents' demographic characteristics. These were a dichotomous gender variable, a four-point age variable, and a dichotomous employment status variable. The not-full-time-employed category included being employed part time, retired, being a stay-at-home parent, being a student, and being unemployed. Two variables controlled for the respondents' website use patters. These were a five-point website use frequency, and a four-point visit duration variables.

The remaining nine control variables were dummy variables representing individual news websites. These were created because the news websites were not uniform, and average responses to focal questions differed significantly between some website pairs (see Table 1). Dummy variables were created to represent each of the sites; Site 10 was used as the comparison category, and thus excluded from the regression models.

Analysis Plan

Because the dependent variables were dichotomous, logistic regression was used to model associations between the independent variables and each of the sharing variables. The first model, predicting word-of-mouth sharing, addressed H1 and H4. The second model, predicting email sharing, addressed H2 and H5. The third model, predicting social media sharing, addressed H3 and H6. Odds ratios, which are used to interpret logistic regression results, were calculated for the independent variables that were statistically significant. These three models are presented in Table 4.

Graphical techniques were used to investigate the full range of interactive relationships by plotting the marginal effect of neighborhood engagement changes across the observed range of education and income (Huang and Shields 2000; Brambor, Clark, and Golder 2005). Where these graphs showed the confidence interval around the line of marginal effect, through which we determined the conditions under which education and income had a statistically significant effect on neighborhood engagement on people's hyperlocal news sharing (Brambor et al. 2005). Because of space limitations, Figures 1 and 2 present only the interaction effects that were statistically significant.

Results

Model 1 in Table 4 presents the regression model predicting the sharing of news from the hyperlocal website by word-of-mouth. Confirming H1, the model shows that neighborhood involvement was associated positively with the likelihood of word-of-mouth sharing. According to the odds ratio derived from the model, each one-unit increase in the neighborhood involvement score (1 to 5 scale) was related to a 52% increase in the likelihood of sharing the news by word-of-mouth.

This model also supports H4a, which predicted a positive association between education and sharing hyperlocal news by word-of-mouth. Each one-unit increase in education (1 to 6 scale) was related to a 12% increase in the likelihood of word-of-mouth sharing. The model did not lend support to H4b, which predicted an association with income. Thus, only one of the components of socioeconomic status as we measured it here—education—was related to word-of-mouth sharing.

Model 2 in Table 4 presents the regression model predicting the use of email to share news from the hyperlocal website. As with word-of-mouth sharing, email sharing was positively associated with neighborhood involvement and education, supporting H2 and H5a, respectively. Each one-unit increase in neighborhood involvement was related to a 24% increase in the likelihood of sharing hyperlocal news via email. A one-unit increase in education was related to an 11% increase in the likelihood of using email. As with word-of-mouth sharing, there was no association between emailing hyperlocal news and income. H5b, thus, was not supported.

Model 3 in Table 4 presents the regression model predicting the use of social media to share news from the hyperlocal website. As with the previous two models, there was a positive association between neighborhood involvement and sharing hyperlocal news in social media. For every one-unit increase in their neighborhood involvement, readers were 20% more likely to use social media to share hyperlocal news. This supports H3. Neither indicator of socioeconomic status, however, was related directly to sharing hyperlocal news through social media. H6 was not supported.

[Insert Table 4 here]

Addressing RQ1, the two interaction terms that were statistically significant were community involvement × education in predicting word-of-mouth sharing (Figure 1), and

community involvement × education in predicting social media sharing (Figure 2). Figure 1 illustrates that there is a positive association between neighborhood involvement and the likelihood to share hyperlocal news by word-of-mouth among those with little education (i.e., high school diploma or less), and among those with high education (i.e., doctoral degree). The confidence intervals of the two sets of predicted probabilities overlap, that is, are statistically indistinguishable, until the highest levels of neighborhood involvement. At the highest levels of neighborhood involvement, those with high education are more likely to share hyperlocal news by word-of-mouth than those with low education, and this difference is statistically significant.

Figure 2 shows a positive association between neighborhood involvement and sharing hyperlocal news via social media among readers with low education. Readers with high education did not vary considerably, and decreased slightly in their likelihood of sharing news via social media as a function of their neighborhood involvement. The confidence intervals of the two sets of predicted probabilities show that at the highest levels of neighborhood involvement, those with low education are more likely to share hyperlocal news via social media than those with high education, and this difference is statistically significant.

[Insert Figure 1 about here] [Insert Figure 2 about here]

Finally, in addition to the focal variables, two control variables—gender and visit frequency—consistently predicted the sharing of hyperlocal news via word-of-mouth, email, and social media. Women were 61% more likely than men to share news by word-of-mouth, 52% more likely to share by email, and 33% more likely to use social media. Less frequent visitors to the news websites were more likely to share the news. For every one-unit increase in their visit frequency, readers were 34% more likely to share news by word-of-mouth, 33% more likely to share via email, and 30% more likely to use social media.

Discussion

Hyperlocal news websites, along with most other news organizations, rely on their readers to contribute to the news distribution process by sharing these organizations' news stories in social media. About a third of the hyperlocal news website readers who participated in this study said that they use social media to share articles from the news websites. Considerably higher proportions of readers, however, engage in more conventional news sharing. Three-quarters of the readers re-circulate news stories from hyperlocal news websites by discussing them with their friends and family members, and two-fifths use email to forward these stories to others. In an era when much media research focuses on digital communication tools, this study's findings underscore the continuing currency of non-mediated communication in the dissemination of news messages. Non-digital word-of-mouth communication likely remains an important driver of traffic to hyperlocal news websites, and to online news properties in general, despite being less quantifiable through website analytics than email- and social media-generated traffic. Our results may serve as a reminder to media researchers and practitioners to not discount the interpersonal offline context when studying and predicting how people use and are influenced by the news.

The limited use of social media to share hyperlocal news may stem from an insufficient overlap in readers' social networks between the people who are interested in hyperlocal news and the people with whom readers connect through social media. Users use social media to connect with both geographically near and distant friends. Hyperlocal news generally is of greater interest to some of the geographically near connections and may hold little interest to most of the distant friends. If the usefulness of information motivates social media sharing (Bobkowski 2015; Chiu et al. 2007), then hyperlocal news may not be universally interesting or

useful enough to be shared in social media. Future research may address the extent to which hyperlocal readers' social media audiences relate to how much these readers use social media to share hyperlocal news.

We turn next to discussing the individual characteristics of readers who share hyperlocal news. Neighborhood involvement predicts word-of-mouth, email, and social media sharing. This is in line with prior research that found an association between involvement or interest in a content domain and the sharing of information from that domain (e.g., Boehmer and Tandoc 2015; Taylor et al. 2012; Weimann 1994). As is the case with any specialized source of information, the news from hyperlocal news websites is propelled through word-of-mouth sharing by individuals who feel particularly invested in these websites' informational specialization, that is, the neighborhoods in which these individuals live. This finding aligns with and extends channel complementarity theory, which predicts that individuals who are interested in their neighborhoods will search for information about the neighborhoods in conventional and new media news sources (Dutta-Bergman 2004). The finding suggests that channel complementarity theory, which emerged as an information-seeking framework, also may encompass information sharing practices.

Of the markers of socioeconomic status—education and income—investigated here as possible predictors of news sharing, only education is associated with sharing by word-of-mouth and email. Income is not associated with any of the sharing behaviors. From the perspective of communication infrastructure theory (Ball-Rokeach 2001) and social capital (Kikuchi and Coleman 2012), these results underscore the importance of education in strengthening communities. Communication infrastructure theory emphasizes that community participation is strengthened through the storytelling in which community members engage, as they share information with one another about the past, present, and future of the places where they live. Social capital, meanwhile, is built on the trust and reliance that members of communities have for one another, as they share information and norms that sustain these communities (Coleman 1988). More educated neighborhoods have greater human resources to support both storytelling and social capital, thus encouraging participation and strengthening the bonds between their residents.

To an extent, however, this finding also highlights the limits of hyperlocal news websites to serve and encourage community affinity and engagement. This is illustrated perhaps most clearly by the interaction between neighborhood involvement and education, with those who are highly involved in their neighborhoods and highly educated being more likely to share hyperlocal news by word-of-mouth than their equally involved neighbors who are less educated (see Figure 1). Hyperlocal news is most likely to attract the more educated individuals in the areas they serve, and these individuals share the news they glean from these websites with their offline and email networks, which also likely are made up of more educated individuals. This "rich get richer" process reflects the replication of social class structures through the accrual of social capital (Kikuchi and Coleman 2012), and the reinforcement of digital divides that tend to accompany the introduction of new communication technologies. Research shows, for instance, that Google Fiber, which initially aimed to deliver high-speed Internet connections to neighborhoods regardless of socioeconomics, is instead "further networking urban residents who are already networked" (Halegoua 2015, 314). While the sharing of hyperlocal news is more egalitarian than we predicted, in that greater income is not related to word-of-mouth, email, or social media sharing, education likely serves as both a gateway and an obstacle to increased neighborhood storytelling and participation.

The pattern of results for using social media to share hyperlocal news, however, diverges from this straightforward association between education and sharing. As Figure 2 illustrates, less educated individuals who engage in their neighborhoods share hyperlocal news via social media on par with, and more than, their more educated neighbors. This finding runs partially counter to our prediction of a linear relationship between socioeconomic status and news sharing, but reflects the argument that the population segments that practice community engagement via social media may be different from those that engage in the community through more conventional channels. The sharing of news content through social media may entail less effort and can reach a greater audience than news shared via word-of-mouth or email. Even a small number of individuals using social media to address important community issues, whose voices would not have been represented prior to the introduction of these media, may have an outsized effect on the nature of the discourse around these issues. At the same time, the potential for social media as a tool for engaging with hyperlocal news may be tempered by the fact that, as this study shows, more than twice as many readers share hyperlocal news via word-of-mouth than by social media. There is little doubt that social media is an important tool for engaging in hyperlocal news, and that it opens opportunities for individuals who otherwise may not share this news. For the time being, more conventional means of sharing news—word-of-mouth and email—continue to be used by more people than social media.

Although our literature review did not focus on gender and age, results indicate that women are more likely than men to share hyperlocal news by word-of-mouth, email, and social media; and that younger people are more likely than older people to share news by word-of-mouth and social media. These findings resonate with prior research showing that women, in general, are more likely than men to self-disclose information (Dindia and Allen 1992). Given that hyperlocal news likely often focuses on local events that bring together members of the community, this finding also reflects women's inclination to share news that emphasize the social nature of events (Swanson et al. 2003). While it is not surprising that age is related negatively with sharing by social media because young people are much more likely to use and share content from social media than older people (Mitchell et al. 2014; Mitchell et al. 2013), the corresponding relationship between age and word-of-mouth sharing is less clear. Perhaps younger people also engage more with online news sources than older generations, and thus are more likely than their elders to talk about the news they read on hyperlocal news websites with the people around them. Clearly, the relationships between these demographic variables and news sharing from hyperlocal websites deserves future research attention.

The associations identified here between neighborhood involvement and news sharing, education and news sharing, and demographics and news sharing, suggest concrete implications for hyperlocal news practitioners. It may be worthwhile for hyperlocal website publishers to reinforce their readership bases by identifying and developing relationships with the highly involved, variably educated, female, and younger residents who are most likely to share the hyperlocal news these websites publish. It may be possible to mobilize these individuals to become ambassadors for the news websites, increasing the websites' reach to the neighbors with whom these readers connect. The highly involved readers also may provide valuable information about how the hyperlocal websites can better serve their neighborhoods and thus increase readership. Offline partnerships on community events or causes also may help websites reach a greater number of highly involved neighbors and convert them into regular readers and sharers of hyperlocal news.

Our study's limitations center on our respondents and on our questions about their

sharing behaviors. Our respondents opted in to participate in the survey, and they only self-reported whether or not they share the news without providing any contextual information about this sharing. While our sample size could be sufficient to accurately represent the characteristics and sharing practices of hyperlocal news readers in general, the nonprobability nature of the sample does not allow us to assert this. Additionally, while we surmise that the readers who responded to our survey may not represent the reader populations of the ten news websites (Baker et al. 2010), we have no way to know whether nonresponse bias skewed the results we obtained in this study because we do not know the parameters of the hyperlocal news reader population. Our findings, therefore, should be interpreted with caution, and future research may build on our work to test our findings with representative hyperlocal reader data.

We also limited our assessment to respondents' dichotomous self-reports about whether they engage in word-of-mouth, email, and social media sharing, without examining this sharing with greater precision or context. Specifically, our study didn't include questions about whether participants simply share the news, or whether they combine the news they share with their own opinions and comments. Previous research indicates that self-expression is an important motivator of online sharing (Taylor et al. 2012). We further did not ask respondents about the specific social media platforms they use to share hyperlocal news (e.g., Facebook vs. Twitter), and whether they share the news electronically via a dedicated page operated by the hyperlocal outlet, or if they cut-and-paste links into their own emails or social media profiles. Future studies, therefore, may probe further the mechanisms that readers use to share the news, and also the distinction between news that is shared with and without comment, identifying the individuals who engage in each practice, the content that elicits each form of sharing, and readers' associated motivations. In addition, we only focused on hyperlocal news sites in this study, but didn't include other hyperlocal news media types such as radio programs (e.g., Ewart 2014). Future studies may expand this study's focus to include these and other types of hyperlocal news media outlets.

In sum, this study improves our understanding of those news readers who share hyperlocal news in person, through email, and via social media. The study thus contributes to the literatures on hyperlocal news, and on word-of-mouth and online news sharing. It also extends the precepts of channel complementarity and communication infrastructure theories into the realm of news sharing. To this point, the vast majority of research regarding online news websites has focused on individuals accessing information online rather than sharing hyperlocal news. Along with other recent research examining online news sharing (e.g., Bobkowski 2015; Weeks and Holbert 2013), this study helps to move the field forward by focusing on the unique environment of hyperlocal news, and by identifying potential differences between the readers and sharers of hyperlocal news, and of online news more broadly.

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Table 1

Characteristics of the 10 hyperlocal news websites in the study sample.

Site	U.S. region	Year launched	Monthly visitors	*n*	Sharing variable means		
					Word-of-mouth	Email	Social media
1	Midwest	2010	25,000-5,0000	346	0.53 a	0.36 a, e	0.25 a, d, e, f, g
2	West	2014	50,000-75,000	444	0.78 b	0.47 b, c, e	0.55 b
3	Midwest	2011	< 25,000	176	0.76 b	0.49 b, c, e, f	0.61 b
4	South	2013	25,000-50,000	377	0.81 b, c, d	0.48 b, c, e, f	0.17 c, e, f, g
5	West	2011	25,000-50,000	235	0.82 b, c, d	0.26 d	0.28 a, d, e, f, g
6	Northeast	2009	< 25,000	110	0.79 b, c, d	0.43 a, b, c, e	0.35 a, d, f
7	Northeast	2014	25,000-50,000	192	0.85 d	0.56 c, e, f	0.23 a, c, e, f
8	Midwest	2014	< 25,000	62	0.74 b, c, d	0.40 a, b, c, e	0.52 b
9	Midwest	2009	< 25,000	109	0.83 b, c, d	0.19 d	0.26 a, c, d, e, f, g
10	East	2003	< 25,000	238	0.76 b, c	0.44 a, b, c, e	0.21 a, c, f, g

Note. In columns of means, a unique subscript between two values indicates a statistically significant difference, based on a two-tailed t-test ($p < .05$).

Table 2

*Descriptive statistics of all study variables (*n = *2,289).*

Variable	Level (numeric code)	*n*	%	α	*M*	*SD*
Word-of-mouth sharing	No (0)	561	24.51	—	.76	.43
	Yes (1)	1,728	75.49			
Email sharing	No (0)	1,322	57.75	—	.42	.49
	Yes (1)	967	42.25			
Social media sharing	No (0)	1,528	66.75	—	.33	.47
	Yes (1)	761	33.25			
Neighborhood involvement	Low involvement (1) – High involvement (5)	—	—	.80	3.08	1.20
Education	High school or less (1)	185	8.08	—	3.98	1.26
	Trade school diploma (2)	121	5.29			
	Associate degree (3)	217	9.48			
	Bachelor degree (4)	941	41.11			
	Master's degree (5)	677	29.58			
	Doctoral degree (6)	148	6.47			
Income	Less than 20,000 (1)	175	7.65	—	4.69	2.05
	20,001-40,000 (2)	249	10.88			
	40,001-60,000 (3)	277	12.10			
	60,001-80,000 (4)	325	14.20			
	80,001-100,000 (5)	331	14.46			
	100,001-150,000 (6)	424	18.52			
	150,001-200,000 (7)	326	14.24			
	More than 200,000 (8)	182	7.95			
Gender	Male (0)	864	37.75	—	.62	.49
	Female (1)	1,425	62.25			
Age	35 and younger (1)	307	13.41	—	2.73	.99
	36-50 (2)	586	25.60			
	51-65 (3)	813	35.25			
	66 and older (4)	583	25.47			
Employment	Not full time (0)	1,121	48.97	—	.51	.50
	Full time (1)	1,168	51.03			
Visit Frequency	Less than once a week (1)	104	4.54	—	3.53	1.01
	Once a week (2)	231	10.09			
	Several times a week (3)	636	27.79			
	Once a day (4)	974	42.55			
	Several times a day (5)	344	15.03			

Visit Duration	1 minute or less (1)	151	6.60			
	2-5 minutes (2)	1,279	55.88	—	2.39	.73
	6-10 minutes (3)	669	29.23			
	More than 10 minutes (4)	190	8.30			

Table 3

*Correlations matrix of the three sharing behavior variables (*n = *2,289).*

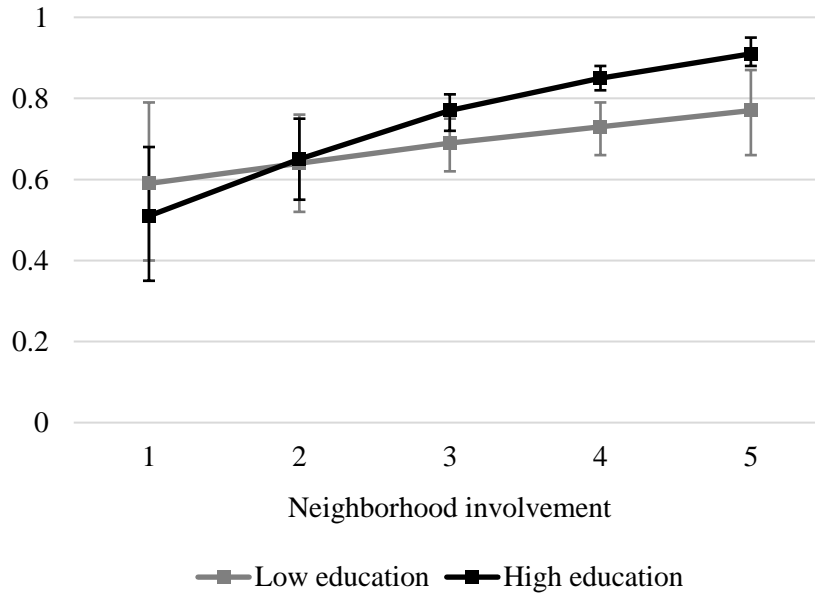|	Word-of mouth	Email
Email	.19 ***	1
Social Media	.09 ***	.19 ***

Note: *** = $p < 0.001$.

Table 4

Logistic regression models predicting the sharing of news by word-of-mouth (Model 1), email (Model 2), and social media (Model 3) (n = 2,289)

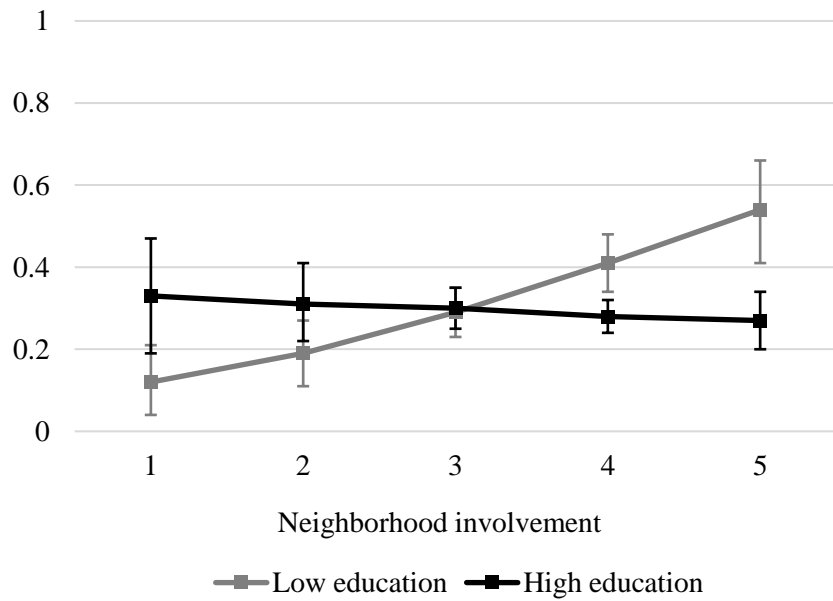|	Model 1 Word-of-mouth sharing			Model 2 Email sharing			Model 3 Social media sharing		
	b (SE)	p	OR	b (SE)	p	OR	b (SE)	p	OR
Neighborhood inv.	.42 (.07)	< .001	1.52	.22 (.06)	< .001	1.24	.18 (.06)	.005	1.20
Education	.12 (.04)	.009	1.12	.11 (.04)	.007	1.11	−.06 (.04)	.170	
Income	.03 (.03)	.251		.04 (.02)	.066		−.02 (.03)	.566	
Gender (female)	.47 (.11)	< .001	1.61	.42 (.10)	< .001	1.52	.28 (.10)	.005	1.33
Age	−.29 (.06)	< .001	.75	.08 (.05)	.111		−.23 (.06)	< .001	.80
Full-time empl.	−.10 (.12)	.402		.35 (.10)	.001	1.41	.23 (.11)	.031	1.26
Visit frequency	.29 (.06)	< .001	1.34	.29 (.05)	< .001	1.33	.26 (.05)	< .001	1.30
Visit duration	.61 (.08)	< .001	1.84	.32 (.05)	< .001	1.38	.07 (.07)	.324	
Site 1	−1.51 (.21)	< .001	.05	−.58 (.19)	.002	.56	−.14 (.22)	.523	
Site 2	−.06 (.21)	.768		.01 (.17)	.936		1.39 (.19)	< .001	4.03
Site 3	−.19 (.25)	.456		.12 (.21)	.588		1.51 (.23)	< .001	4.51
Site 4	.09 (.22)	.701		−.05 (.18)	.787		−.58 (.23)	.010	.55
Site 5	.51 (.26)	.046		−.73 (.22)	.001	.48	.03 (.23)	.908	
Site 6	−.04 (.30)	.890		−.16 (.25)	.508		.37 (.27)	.160	
Site 7	.16 (.28)	.570		.14 (.21)	.517		−.28 (.25)	.260	
Site 8	.10 (.35)	.776		.03 (.30)	.934		1.27 (.31)	< .001	3.54
Site 9	.29 (.32)	.357		−1.43 (.29)	< .001	.24	−.05 (.29)	.837	
Intercept	−.83 (.48)			−2.27 (.41)			−.65 (.45)		
LR χ^2	279.29	< .001		204.47	< .001		315.54	< .001	
Pseudo R^2	.11			.07			.11		

Note. OR: odds ratio.

Figure 1

Line graphs illustrating the likelihood of sharing hyperlocal news via word-of-mouth as a function of neighborhood involvement and education, with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 2

Line graphs illustrating the likelihood of sharing hyperlocal news via social media as a function of neighborhood involvement and education, with 95% confidence intervals.