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Emerging Forms of Hyperlocal Media

The case of Finland

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Abstract

In the Nordic countries, local and regional newspapers have functioned as keystone media. This article examines the emergence of hyperlocal initiatives as part of evolving local media ecosystems in Finland, analysing the extent and characteristics of hyperlocal media, and how they relate to wider changes in the Finnish media ecosystem. The data gathered on hyperlocal initiatives include a semi-structured survey by phone and online. The research conducted shows that the field is diverse. Rather than considering hyperlocal media in the context of typical publication forms, these newcomers can be best described according to a set of dimensions. Furthermore, the results indicate rather a strong desire to engage people in community building. The emergence of hyperlocal publications means adding a new layer to the Finnish media ecosystem. This development also provides the grounds for further study of the possible emergence of a new media era in Finland.

Keywords: hyperlocals, local media, media ecosystem, journalism, Finland

Introduction

Local and regional media play an important role in media ecosystems (Napoli et al., 2015; Nielsen, 2015). In the Global North, local and regional newspapers can be characterised as key or keystone media. According to the World Press Trends 2017 report, three Nordic countries, Norway, Finland and Sweden, are still ranked among the highest in terms of newspaper circulation per 1,000 inhabitants. Norway and Finland stand out regarding the broad range of different local newspapers. The diversity in local and regional newspapers has been important for the scattered populations as it has helped to secure public debate in smaller communities and reinforced local identity and settlement patterns. Newspapers have also helped people feel attached to their local communities, providing a relevant source of information and space for debate and supplementing the

Hujanen, J., Lehtisaari, K., Lindén, C-G. & Grönlund, M. (2019). Emerging forms of hyperlocal media: The case of Finland. *Nordicom Review,* 40 (Special Issue 2): 101–114. doi:10.2478/nor-2019-0029.

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national news arena sustained by the large newspapers, that is, national and regional newspapers (Syvertsen et al., 2014).

In recent decades, profound changes have affected most forms of media. As in many other countries, local and regional media in Finland have lived through a period of intensive change as a part of the structural deformation of the whole media environment. The transformation continues and takes on new forms. On the one hand, the role and presence of the Finnish legacy media has started to diminish locally and regionally and new diversity risks can be seen regarding people's opportunities to access local news (Ala-Fossi et al., 2018). For example, no regional cities or municipalities have more than one daily newspaper (Ala-Fossi et al., 2018). At the same time, new forms of local media are emerging, including social media and hyperlocal media, i.e. initiatives that offer an online news or content service pertaining to a small community such as a town, village or single postcode.

Despite the importance of, and changes in, local media in the Finnish media ecosystem, there has been no systematic research-based knowledge about the above-mentioned changes. In this article, we will examine how local media and media ecosystems are evolving in Finland. In order to get novel, up-to-date and holistic insights into the media ecosystem, we will focus on the emerging hyperlocal media.

With regard to the evolution of media in Finland, four eras during the second half of the twentieth century have been recognised. According to Picard (2003), the media eras are: 1) print and universal public service radio; 2) popular public service radio and the growth of television; 3) media commercialism; and 4) media businesses. The first era, 1950–1957, represented a continuation of the era of print and universal public service radio that began before the middle of the century. Regional newspapers served the primary information and entertainment needs of people. A dominant public service radio channel also played an important role. The second era, 1958–1970, was characterised by the appearance of television. At the same time, the public service broadcasting company YLE widened its radio services, including the introduction of a comprehensive radio news service. Although the oldest existing non-daily local newspapers in Finland were established at the end of the nineteenth century, the number of local non-daily newspapers in Finland rose, especially in the 1950s and 1960s (Björkroth & Grönlund, 2015).

Picard (2003) described the third era, from 1970 to 1984, as the era of media commercialisation. Advertising increased and the profitability of media grew. As media organisations saw increasingly commercial opportunities (and sought to enhance them), they started to act more as businesses than as social and political entities. Picard referred to the fourth phase, 1985–2000, as the era of media businesses. It was characterised by the appearance of media investment funds and offerings of shares in media companies on the stock market. The growth of large media conglomerates also illustrates this period (Picard, 2003).

As we see it, recent changes in legacy media and the development of new types of hyperlocal media are part of a larger transformation regarding the Finnish media, media businesses and media ecosystems. Following this, we will conclude our analysis by continuing the discussion about Picard's eras, as our focus is on the 2000s.

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What are hyperlocal media?

Previously, researchers have defined hyperlocal media from several viewpoints. Some scholars associate hyperlocal with voluntarism and participatory journalism (Borger et al., 2016; Waldman, 2011). Others refer to the role hyperlocal plays in building a sense of belonging and connection (Hess & Waller, 2016). When it comes to hyperlocal news's "ability to foster citizenship, democracy and local community cohesion" the evidence gives a mixed picture (Williams et al., 2015: 699). Radcliffe (2012: 9) defines hyperlocal media as "online news or content services pertaining to a town, village, single postcode or other small, geographically defined community". Yet, a hyperlocal is admittedly characterised by more than a distinct location.

Several researchers agree that the plurality of the hyperlocal scene requires a more complex definition (Lowrey & Kim, 2016; Ofcom, 2009; Radcliffe, 2012). Metzgar and colleagues (2011) encapsulated the aforementioned elements and presented a multidimensional definition that combines them into a coherent reference frame. This model aims to recognise the heterogeneity of the hyperlocal scene by defining key elements present in hyperlocal media. The "Metzgar model" encompasses: 1) the obvious geographic elements, where hyperlocal publications are bound to a certain, limited, physical area or a certain niche area of interest; 2) community orientation, as the hyperlocal strives to build a sense of belonging and connectedness within the target group; 3) the search for original news, as the hyperlocal initiatives aspire to create new content; 4) web-orientation, since the hyperlocal has not been established through traditional media outlets; 5) the filling of perceived gaps in the news coverage; 6) civic engagement through interactivity. However, it should be acknowledged that most of these characteristics are relevant also in relation to traditional news media and journalism (Radcliffe, 2012).

Friedland and colleagues (2012) concluded that a hyperlocal is a layer above personal blogging and social media use but below the news coverage of commercial media outlets. Following their perception, we consider the hyperlocal to be a product located between professional, established publications and social media. Though not a definitive definition of the hyperlocal, the "Metzgar model" combined with the observation of the hyperlocal by Friedland and colleagues (2012) contributes with a frame of reference for further analysis.

The motives of hyperlocal initiatives can vary, as can the background of the people participating in their production. Unlike the case with the traditional professional media, the production team can consist simply of amateurs or "enthusiasts", or the publication can be a semi-professional one, where professional journalists and amateurs act together. Studies from the UK (Radcliffe, 2012) and the Netherlands (van Kerkhoven & Bakker, 2014) have pointed to a great diversity in the way local online news sites operate. A study from Sweden showed that the entrepreneurs behind hyperlocal start-ups are often former journalists who have decided to quit their day jobs and pursue new professional paths (Leckner & Nygren, 2016). The common issue for the hyperlocal is the question of survival: there are only a few viable business models.

Based on this background, we consider it important to study emerging forms of hyperlocal publishing in Finland and to discuss what hyperlocal publishing and media actually are and mean to the media ecosystem. A business ecosystem finds its roots in the idea of value networks and can be seen as a group of companies that simultaneously create value by combining their skills and assets. Business ecosystems create value for

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a participant only when the participant is not capable of commercialising a product or service by relying on own competence (Clarysse et al., 2014). According to Naughton (2006), the new media ecosystem will be richer, more diverse and immeasurably more complex than a standard business ecosystem because of the number of content producers, the density of the interactions between them and their products, the speed with which actors in this space can communicate with one another and the pace of development made possible by ubiquitous networking. Further, Deuze (2009) defines the ecosystem of media organisations as consisting of a combination of large and small public service and for-profit companies dealing with the industrial and creative production and circulation of culture. In terms of media work, this culture refers not only to the production of the spoken and written word, audio and still or moving images, but increasingly also to providing platforms for people to produce and exchange their own content. The emergence of hyperlocal publications fits this trend of a diversifying media landscape where people are increasingly media makers, and not only consumers or audience.

The Finnish local media ecosystem in the 2000s

The twenty-first century has been a time of major change for the Finnish media ecosystem. Digital distribution channels for content are increasingly popular while traditional distribution methods have lost their positions. Redistribution of media advertising and marketing communications are key forces that change the operating environment of legacy printed news media. Digitalisation has increased the audience's choice and the ability to make individual choices due to increased supply, better targeting and individual consumer choices. These developments together mean that the mass audience has disintegrated, and people's media usage differentiated.

Changing consumer behaviour has forced advertisers to reconsider their investments in advertising and marketing communications as well as targeting them. For example, according to the media advertising statistics of Kantar TNS, since the year 2000, the proportion of online advertising has risen from close to zero to almost a third. At the same time, the proportion of newspaper advertising has drastically declined from slightly over half to a quarter. Small non-daily newspapers have been able to maintain their position in the local media advertising market somewhat better and their proportion of media advertising has declined from a little under five per cent to approximately four per cent. One explanation for this is that advertising in the small local newspapers is different from advertising in regional and national media.

The number of newspaper titles peaked before the economic recession of the early 1990s. Since then, both the number of titles and the total circulation have been in decline. Between 2000 and 2009, there were three newspaper entries and 24 exits (Björkroth & Grönlund, 2015). Since 2010, approximately 20 newspapers have exited, and by 2016, the total number of newspaper titles had declined to slightly under 200 (Björkroth & Grönlund, 2018). Approximately three-quarters of the remaining titles are small local non-dailies.

All these changes have meant that in the complex operational environment, owning a single media product has become problematic (Picard, 2008). As one response to this, Finnish newspaper publishing companies have expanded their operations to other media or new business areas. Enlargement has taken place primarily through mergers

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and acquisitions (Grönlund & Björkroth, 2011). Along with these changes, the majority of small local newspapers have become part of a larger regional media company. Despite concentration and consolidation of the markets, local media markets are still quite vivid and varied. In addition to the local newspapers, there are approximately 130 local free sheets and city newspapers and a vast number of other local publications, such as leaflets, seasonal publications and village bulletins, that serve local media markets.

Picard (2008) rationalises the change in power in communication. In the evolving media environment, the supply market has changed into a demand market. The control and power of the legacy media has increasingly shifted to consumers and audiences. Despite changes in the Finnish media landscape, the significance of social media as the main news source is still low in international comparison. According to the Reuters Digital News Report in 2017, only 8 per cent of the population considered social media to be their main source of news (Newman et al., 2017). However, it varies significantly between age groups: while few above 55 years of age consider social media to be their main source of news, in the youngest age group, growth has been rapid. Over a quarter of people under the age of 25 considered social media to be their main source of news.

The internet and the emergence of free-of-charge online news have also affected people's willingness to pay for journalistic content (Grönlund & Björkroth, 2011). In line with that, the willingness to pay for online news is low. The majority (83 per cent) of Finns do not pay for online news (Newman et al., 2017). The most common reason for not paying for online news is that it is available for free. This was particularly obvious among younger people. This has naturally had an impact on the dynamics of the local media environment.

Data and method

In order to be able to analyse and discuss the extent to which hyperlocal media have entered the Finnish media ecosystem, where the initiatives are located, how the initiatives can be characterised and how they relate to the wider changes in Finnish media, we have focused on hyperlocal initiatives that have emerged since 2000. Despite focusing on the development during the last two decades, we recognise the existence of older and established forms of local media. There are plenty of local newspapers and free sheets that, if established today, would be counted as hyperlocals.

The empirical material for this article consists of quantitative data on hyperlocal media in Finland. The data collection started with a semi-structured national phone survey of Finnish municipalities to map hyperlocal publications. The method was developed based on Leckner and Nygren's 2016 study. In 2017, the total number of municipalities in Finland was 311, of which 16 were in the Åland Islands. The phone calls resulted in 241 answers, the response rate being 77.5 per cent. All but 47 calls were recorded. In the phone survey, we asked a representative of the municipality to name the main sources of local news, including traditional and non-traditional sources, the existence of hyperlocal publications and the communication channels used by the municipality.

In addition to publications that were categorised as new forms of hyperlocal publishing, we found a group of publications that shared some functions and/or characteristics of hyperlocal publications and could provide a focus for new research projects. These included local Facebook groups, free announcement sheets and non-continuing hyperlo-

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cal publications. In particular, local Facebook groups are a growing field. According to a recent survey, about a third of adults (aged 18–80) in Finland use Facebook weekly as a source of news. That proportion increases to about a half in the youngest age group, aged 18–24 (Reunanen, 2018). In Sweden, by 2015, Facebook had become the most important source of local news (Nygren, 2018).

The data set was further complemented with an online survey directed at the hyperlocal publications found. In the questionnaire, we asked the publishers to self-categorise their publication. The self-categorisation was based on Schaffer's (2007) classification of hyperlocal websites. Her classification had the following categories: 1) Community cooperatives, 2) Trained citizen journalist sites, 3) Professional journalist non-profit sites, 4) Professional journalist for-profit sites, 5) Blog aggregator sites, 6) Syndicated multi-site models, 7) Legacy media sites, 8) Solo enterprise non-profit sites, and 9) Solo enterprise for-profit sites. The main dimensions Schaffer uses are profit orientation and author type. This classification needed to be amended when confronted with the reality of hyperlocal publishing in Finland. For example, the list lacks solo amateur sites. In some cases, amateurs can be trained to be citizen journalists, but usually, amateurs or volunteers do not have a formal journalistic education. Second, the list is for *hyperlocal websites* while in our typology, we included all publishing forms, including radio, web tv and print. Thus, our classification for *hyperlocal publishing* is based on a wider set of criteria.

The following nine classes, plus the option to create their own classification, were given as answer options for the question "What is the primary type of the publication?": 1) Professional journalist for-profit publication, 2) Professional journalist non-profit publication, 3) Publication made by amateurs, 4) Publication published by a legacy media, 5) Enterprise for-profit publication, 6) Enterprise non-profit publication, 7) Community media, 8) Trained citizen journalist publication, 9) Part of a chain of hyperlocal publications or Other, please describe. Based on the classification into nine types, the hyperlocal publications defined themselves primarily as publications made by amateurs, or as community media.

We sent a web questionnaire to all hyperlocal actors, identified based on the telephone interviews. The questionnaire was sent to 72 people, and we got 33 responses (response rate 45 per cent). Out of these 33 answers, the researchers identified 25 "in-between media". Responses were analysed to ensure that the hyperlocal initiatives that were identified in the first phase of the study equated to our definition of hyperlocal media. The selection criteria used were as follows: publication is published/updated relatively frequently (at least once a month); the content includes stories on local issues on a variety of topics; the publication is targeted at local residents or people with ties to the location. Announcement sheets and established media-like local newspapers, free sheets and local radio stations were left out of this analysis. Further, responses to the survey provided us with tools for identifying inductively key dimensions of the new forms of hyperlocal publishing. The survey thus helped us to achieve the goal of mapping the forms and functions of hyperlocal media in the Finnish media ecosystem.

Analysis of hyperlocal media in Finland

The field of hyperlocal publishing in Finland is evolving at a leisurely pace. In our analysis, we found approximately 30 hyperlocal publications that were active in 2017.

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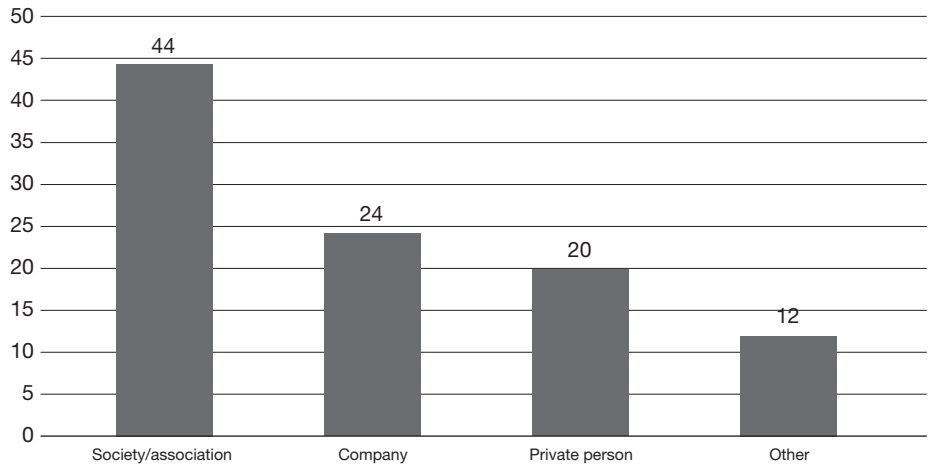
However, the field is changing rapidly – based on our mapping of hyperlocal media, new initiatives and start-ups come and go. Most of the identified publications are located in the more densely populated areas in southern and central parts of the country. What seems to be common to hyperlocals is that their content is typically local and includes stories that would not be regarded as news or as being newsworthy in legacy media. The mapping of hyperlocal media shows that some publications openly promote local business. The publications are small, usually run by one person or a couple of people. According to the estimates presented in our survey, the number of online followers varies from a few hundred to tens of thousands.

Publishers and types of publication

Interestingly, an association or a society publishes almost half of the new Finnish hyperlocal publications (see Figure 1).[1] Often, a municipality or city council is involved. The strong role of societies and associations as well as the involvement of municipalities are not common elsewhere, at least not in the Northern European context. A Swedish study found that municipalities and associations produce only a small amount of the content published in hyperlocal publications (Leckner & Nygren, 2016).

There are also some projects receiving EU funding, for example *Plaani News*, a hyperlocal publication within the Päijänne Leader programme. This publication was established in 2015, with activities on the website ending in 2017 with the closure of the project. The project provided a joint platform for local associations and communities, including activities such as communications training. One out of four hyperlocals is published by a company, and one-fifth by private persons. Despite the amateur or voluntary background of many publications, makers claim they are keen to follow the principles of professional publishers: 87 per cent of respondents to the survey claimed that they follow the guidelines for journalists accepted by the Finnish Council for Mass Media, although they are not formal members of the Council.

Figure 1. *Publishers of hyperlocal publications (per cent)*



Comments: The percentage shares are based on the 25 examined hyperlocals.

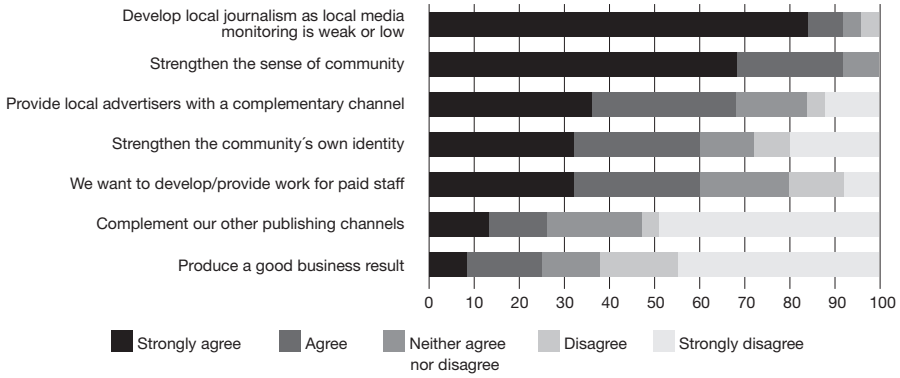
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Guiding values and views on audience

All the respondents saw the local residents as their main audience. In addition, summer residents are an important additional audience for half of the publications. The publication can serve the information needs of people who have moved away from the municipality but want to maintain a connection with it. Due to the long physical distances within Finland, this kind of information does not often reach people through other channels. Tourists are also a notable target audience in some areas.

The recession that started in 2008 increased the number of lay-offs, including editorial personnel, in the legacy newspaper publishing companies. This development has continued throughout the 2010s. In addition, newspaper publishers have intensified their editorial cooperation. This has also meant, at least to some extent, that the legacy media have withdrawn from some sparsely inhabited areas and reduced their local news coverage and reporting. These developments may have created conditions that enhance the emergence of new hyperlocal media initiatives. The strong will to show local presence is seen in responses regarding values and ideals. Most respondents want to contribute to developing local reporting since they see that the local media scene is weak or low in quality (Figure 2).

Figure 2. *Values and ideals guiding the work of the hyperlocals (per cent)*



Comments: Twenty-five hyperlocals were examined. Using a Likert scale, the respondents were asked to respond to seven claims, all starting with "*We want to…*"

Dimensions for new forms of hyperlocal publications

According to the survey, the new hyperlocal publishing formats are diverse. It is not easy to classify publications into a set of clearly defined groups since their goals, authorship, practices and content vary a lot. Thus, instead of placing one publication in only one category, we decided to use a net of dimensions that help to analyse and characterise new hyperlocal initiatives. These dimensions include 1) authorship, 2) business goals, 3) content and 4) community engagement.

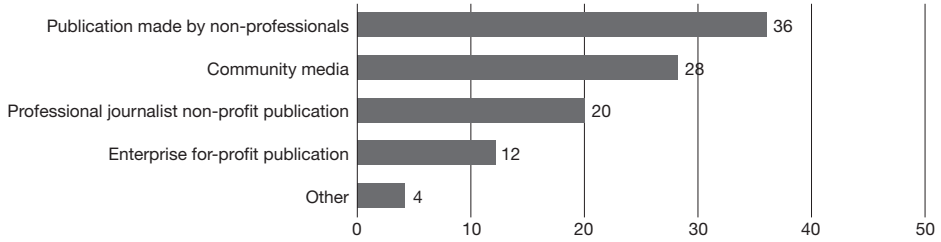
Authorship

By authorship, we mean those who are involved in carrying out the hyperlocal initiative and whether the persons involved are doing it on a voluntary/hobby basis or as a

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business. Roughly speaking, the new hyperlocal publications are produced either on a professional or on a voluntary basis. Some of the voluntary actors have a background in journalism, whereas some are amateurs. The hyperlocal publishers defined themselves primarily as producers of a publication created by amateurs (36%), or as community media (28%). However, there was a group of people (20%) who defined themselves as professional journalists but their publication as a non-profit enterprise (see Figure 3). Authorship and business goals can go in different directions: a hyperlocal site published by a professional journalist does not automatically seek financial profits and can be uncommercial as well. In addition, vice versa, some of the publications run by amateurs in journalistic terms can be commercial. For example, in *Lemin Kirjava*, volunteers produce the content; the publication is the hobby of a professional journalist who is the main writer for the publication.

Figure 3. *Primary type of publication (per cent)*



Comments: Twenty-five hyperlocals were examined. The respondents were asked to categorise their own publications.

Business goals

This dimension concerns whether the publication is non-profit or for profit, and, in that case, the business model. Four out of five of the hyperlocal media included in our sample did not have any business ambitions. In fact, only one representative said he/she was able to get his/her own subsistence from the publication. However, this does not mean that the hyperlocal publications do not have any economic impact. Even without stated business goals, they have an implicit impact on the local business environment. When they provide local news and information for free, to some degree it decreases the attractiveness and significance of traditional commercial media as a source of information. Hyperlocal media can also provide a new channel for local advertisers, societies and event organisers to advertise and promote themselves. To some extent, this also affects the advertising potential and revenues of the local legacy media companies.

Content

The hyperlocal publications studied focus on producing their own content or publishing original content produced by other local actors and institutions, not just redistribution. Most of the publications in our data produce all the content by themselves. Another hyperlocal initiative served as an intermediary for content produced by other local publications or individuals. In this sense, hyperlocal publishing in Finland relies on producing and sharing original stories. Publishers are often ambitious in their goal of covering local issues: 40 per cent of respondents' publications are updated daily or several times a week.

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A few of the publications studied were oriented towards news and journalism while the majority of the initiatives also aimed to deliver other kinds of information. Journalism-oriented initiatives focus on news about local issues and claim they adhere to professional journalistic principles. One of the more successful news providers found in the study is *Viisykkönen*, published online in Kirkkonummi, in Southern Finland. A professional journalist who is running the initiative as his own business produces the content. The publication proclaims to follow professional journalistic principles. It aims to produce several original news stories each day, with a view to filling the perceived knowledge gap in the local news landscape.

Lemin kirjava is an example of a publication that relies on a broad range of genres and original local content. The content produced varies from news to, for instance, baking recipes and blog postings on hiking. The publications look like a blog – they are modest and diverse, but there is fresh content and the publication is updated several times a day. *Nopola News* can be characterised as a hyperlocal platform initiative. It produces fresh local content, including web tv. It relies on a shared responsibility in content production, with the motto "The one that knows best writes – not the one who masters the writing best". A wide range of associations and companies produce the content.

Community engagement

By community engagement we mean how publishers see their audience and possibilities for community engagement, and how they invite people to participate in the processes of making hyperlocal media and interacting among themselves and with the makers. In light of the survey conducted, community engagement is a goal for many hyperlocal newcomers. This comes out in the results regarding the use of social media. Forty-eight per cent of the respondents agreed that using social media is a way to engage the readers of their publication. However, somewhat unexpectedly, some of the hyperlocal publications see informing the community as their main task, rather than trying to engage members of the community and audience in content production.

Moreover, in light of the analysis of the selected cases, hyperlocal publications do not necessarily succeed in enhancing a sense of community in a way that is planned. While the community aspect is an important principle for the publishers, engaging with the community is often difficult on a website, which lacks opportunities for interactivity.

Conclusion

The field of hyperlocal publishing in Finland has been evolving at a leisurely pace. In our analysis, we found approximately 30 hyperlocal publications fulfilling our criteria that were active in 2017. The field is changing rapidly; new initiatives and start-ups come and go. As we see it, it is both difficult and unnecessary to count the exact number of hyperlocal publications. Due to the differences in definition, the number of hyperlocal initiatives seems to be smaller in Finland compared with neighbouring Sweden – in Sweden, 99 independent hyperlocal media operations responded to a survey in 2016 (Leckner & Nygren, 2016).

In light of our study, it will be important to continue discussions about the definition of "a hyperlocal". It is difficult to examine hyperlocals without taking the national and

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local media ecosystems into consideration. Because of this, we want to stress the contextuality of hyperlocal initiatives as well as the need for studies of hyperlocal media that position them within media ecosystems. For example, Finland has witnessed the emergence of some printed hyperlocals along with the digital ones, while some definitions consider only online publications. The definitions of "local" and "hyperlocal" also vary. Had we applied the criteria used in the US (News Revenue Hub) to define hyperlocal media, a considerable proportion of the Finnish local media could be seen as hyperlocal (cf. Walter-Brown, 2018).

Why has the emergence of hyperlocal initiatives been rather slow in Finland? This may be for several reasons. In recent years, social media platforms have taken a prominent role in sharing local information. However, the local press is still strong in Finland. Most of the existing 200 titles are local and regional newspapers.

At the same time, transformation within traditional newspapers and media businesses may explain and describe the need for new hyperlocal initiatives. The current media landscape in Finland is characterised by clustering and both vertical and horizontal integration, which shape the landscape into a more complex network. This means that alongside a growing concentration of ownership, newspaper publishers have intensified their editorial collaboration and other forms of cooperation (Björkroth & Grönlund, 2014, 2015). This, together with the withdrawal of legacy media from some geographical locations, has supported conditions that enhance the development of new hyperlocal media initiatives. When we looked at geographical areas and locations for new hyperlocal publications, it seemed that closures and consolidation of traditional newspapers have created opportunities for other local information providers, operating on different platforms. In some cases, hyperlocals have been born in places that are not covered by traditional media (e.g. *Nopola News* in Kyyjärvi and *Lemin Kirjava* in Lemi). However, there are areas with denser media coverage, as in Hämeenlinna, which includes a hyperlocal called *Reska.fi*. In Finland, people have traditionally been highly trustful of media and journalism, which can aid newcomers to the field of media.[2]

In this study, we applied self-categorisation and researcher-led dimensions to analyse the new forms of hyperlocal publishing in Finland. The analysis of initiatives shows that it is not easy to make any clear-cut "ideal types" of hyperlocal publications – it is better to classify them according to dimensions. Based on our data and analysis, *authorship, business goals, content* and *community engagement* are dimensions that help to reveal important insights into the nature of new hyperlocal publications. In further analysis, these dimensions may be applied to other forms of local publishing as well, in order to establish a more comprehensive picture of the local media ecosystems.

The analysis of authorship in Finnish hyperlocal initiatives explains that the publications are often established by individual volunteers or associations while fewer have a corporate background. It is worth noting the important role of local associations in the field of hyperlocal publishing in Finland. In our view, this reflects the high number of (local) associations within the country, as well as those associations increasingly using communicative and journalistic tools as part of their local activities.

The motives for the publications and publishers differ, as do the backgrounds of the people participating in their production. Most of the production teams are comprised of amateurs or "enthusiasts", while there are a few semi-professional operations, in which

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professional reporters and amateurs work together. Community engagement is a widely shared goal within Finnish hyperlocal initiatives, while some are more concerned with sharing information than direct engagement.

As regards business ambitions and goals, while the non-profit approach seems to be shared by many of the publications regardless of their background, there are also publications that aim to find new, profit-seeking business models. When it comes to content, the majority of the publications are updated at least weekly and aim to cover local information needs. An important issue regarding the future of hyperlocal publications in Finland is thus financial sustainability. Many of the publications do not have business ambitions and goals but have other motivations like the personal interest of the authors. Although they do not set business goals for themselves, their appearance may affect the local media landscape and advertising market.

Discussion

Are we witnessing the emergence of a new media phase in Finland in an era of disruptive media businesses? This is an interesting question from the viewpoint of hyperlocal media and the media ecosystem. As we see it, based on the latest development in the media landscape and our findings on hyperlocal media, there might be grounds for a positive answer. This period is characterised by several simultaneous trends, which include consolidation of larger media entities, and the rise of media offerings for smaller, targeted audiences. Old business models of legacy media, including newspapers, no longer work as well as they used to. At the same time, the proportion of income from different sources has significantly changed. Along with changing media consumption habits, the rise of streaming services has altered media usage patterns and shown that consumers are willing to pay for other forms of digital content. In addition, they shape consumers' perceptions of the price level of digital content services.

In regard to future research on changes in the local media ecosystems and information flows, we argue for a less normative and thematically broader framework for analysing hyperlocal operations. Such a framework would make it possible to recognise better such emerging forms of communication as hyperlocal, which do aim to produce professional news but which have a similar role in people's everyday lives as the traditional news media have had. An important area for future research would thus be social media platforms, especially Facebook groups.

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Notes

1. Finland has a high number of associations. The number of associations at the Finnish Register of Associations was 105,937 in October 2018, excluding 480 religious communities. https://www.prh.fi/en/yhdistysrekisteri/statistics/numberofassociationsandreligiouscommunities.html
2. According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017, the overall trust in news in Finland is the highest among the countries studied. Sixty-two per cent of Finnish respondents say they trust news most of the time (Newman et al., 2017: 67).

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