Round PEG in a Square Hole? Defining Community Media for the Digital Age

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Abstract

Round PEG in a Square Hole?

Defining Community Media for the Digital Age

Thomas Hackbarth

The legacy community media institutions known as Public, Educational, & Governmental access (or PEGs for short) are disappearing from the American consciousness. At the same time, social media platforms that allow users to upload and distribute their own creations have captured public attention. At first glance, social media platforms capture the spirit of community media, allowing anyone to be a media producer. Yet, their corporate profit-motive undermines any status as community media and lack the same democratic and education functions of PEGs. At a time, federal regulators are threatening mass deregulation and cuts to funding structures of community media institutions, threatening the future of many PEG institutions. In this thesis, I argue that PEGs are important community media. Drawing on a definition of community media by activist filmmaker Frances J. Berrigan, PEGs are different than corporate media, community-orientated and community managed. I document how these institutions are adapting to the internet and a changing regulatory situation. My analysis demonstrates how emerging practices within PEG provide a model for future community media.

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Chapter One – The End of an Era?

On September 25, 2018 the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) published a Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FNPRM) that proposed a significant change in the funding structure for community media.[1] The notice proposed limiting cities' ability to regulate public rights of way and negotiate franchise fees with cable companies. This threatens core funding for the legacy community media institution, Public, Educational, & Governmental (PEG) access television stations and could lead to mass closures around the country. PEG provides non-commercial and localized services for the general population, run by non-profit organizations, quasi-governmental entities, local governments and private for-profits. They provide localized communities with community-produced programming, production resources, and media education. PEG has been a project of community media for over thirty years now; a history that may be ending.

The notice is part of a policy agenda deregulating the broadcasting and telecommunication sectors. The current FCC administration is led by sitting Chairman Ajit Pai, who is already infamous for his rollback of Network Neutrality with his "Restoring Internet Freedom Order."[2] Having only been in act for two years, Net Neutrality was still in the public conscious, PEG access television, on the other hand, is not. At a glance, it may appear to be slipping into obsolescence.[3] A growing number of homes in the U.S. are unsubscribing—or never subscribe in the first place—in preference to online services, a process commonly referred

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[1]   FCC, Second Notice of Proposed Rulemaking https://ecfsapi.fcc.gov/file/0925046713889/FCC-18-131A1.pdf

[2]   FCC, Restoring Internet Freedom Order https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-releases-restoring-internet-freedom-order

[3]   Pew Research, *Home Broadband 2015* https://www.pewinternet.org/2015/12/21/4-one-in-seven-americans-are-television-cord-cutters/

to as "cord-cutting." Nevertheless, many PEGs persist through the adoption of digital technologies. Some do so for survival, but others seem to do so simply as a continuation of their mission-driven operations. I have witnessed this focusing away from cable access and towards multimedia operations first-hand. Since there is no unified vision for the field, it is difficult to account for this change which could prove influential on public media in the United States.

For these reasons above, the notice did not receive much attention. It was easy to ignore. Community media advocates had to translate the notice, that was steeped in legal jargon. The title alone is long and difficult to decipher, "Implementation of Section 621(a)(1) of the Cable Communications Policy Act of 1984 as Amended by the Cable Television Consumer Protection and Competition Act of 1992." Not only was the title undecipherable for the layperson, there is no apparent argument being made. Unlike the argument of the "Restoring Internet Freedom Order" that rolling back net neutrality would "restore internet freedom," FNPRM does not make an argument even though it threatens to further entrench the U.S. telecom and broadcasting oligopoly by dismantling one of its few alternatives.

The FCC's FNPRM is an existential threat to existing community media. The notice is a continuation of Pai's objective of mass deregulation, with the backing of cable companies. Without the funding provided from franchise fees, many PEGs will not be able to continue operating, potentially freeing up channel space for cable companies to further profit. Companies, like Comcast or Verizon, want to argue that they already sufficiently serve the public and the allocation of their channels for PEG access is superfluous. If there is no common definition of PEG services as primarily educative, and inclusive of social media, then they are able to make this argument based on viewership and revenue.

The FCC's deregulatory approach is bolstered by growing confusion about what counts as community media. Public access television is all but forgotten from the American consciousness. Over the past decade social media sites (SMSs) and video streaming services (VSSs) have dominated the conversation over community media. Recognized for their employment of user-generated-content (UGC), SMSs appear to have democratized the American mediascape by connecting communities all around the world. But in light of recent scandals,[4] the general public has become more critical of SMS structures and practices.[5] SMSs shook up the industry, but ultimately replicated the same structures of power. What then is necessary for promoting a functioning democratic media system?

In this thesis, I will argue that PEG is community media. By calling PEG community media, my thesis studies media as process, rather than product. This focus is necessary for understanding community media like PEG. I apply three principles of community media, defined by Frances J. Berrigan (1981), of access, participation, and self-management, to PEG and SMS. In doing so, I may critique the current regulatory media environment of American media.

Community media is a process of democratizing media systems that results in content, but its real aim is towards community-building (Ali, 2014; Halleck, 2002; Howley, 2005; Rodríguez, 2001; Uzelman, 2011). American community media has always struggled to justify its relevance. Cable companies consider PEG a siphon of revenue and some politicians consider it a partisan platform, regularly leading to lawsuits over censorship.[6] Now, in the past two

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[4]   Channel 4 investigation of Cambridge Analytica, *Data, Democracy and Dirty Tricks* https://www.channel4.com/news/data-democracy-and-dirty-tricks-cambridge-analytica-uncovered-investigation-expose

[5]   Pew Research, *Public Attitudes Toward Technology Companies* http://www.pewinternet.org/2018/06/28/public-attitudes-toward-technology-companies/

[6]   Manhattan Community Access Corporation vs. Halleck https://www.allcommunitymedia.org/ACM/ACM/Public_Policy/National/US_Supreme_Court/Manhattan_Community_Access_Corporation_vs._Halleck.aspx

decades, video sharing sites (VSS), like YouTube, have established a new era of participatory media, making PEG access television appear obsolete. By showing the value of PEG, this thesis confronts the notion that Social Media Sites (SMSs)[7] are sufficiently democratic, participatory platforms. I will look to PEG as an already-existing community media project in order to project what this project will look like in the "digital age."

To consider how PEG operates as community media—curating media made by the community for the needs they identify—I ask three questions with the goal to solidify the role of community media plays within the American media environment, and why its importance is sustained. Each question correlates to the three community media principles of access, participation, and self-management.

(1) How do PEGs identify and engage with their *community*? How do they decide what platforms to include within their access operations? This includes within the physical media center or in partnership with other local organizations, but also through choices in online presence.

(2) Is the PEG addressing digital needs within their community? This then leads to questions on how citizen/members can participate in production and organization.

(3) What are the opportunities provided to PEG members? And how are they able to make decisions within the organization?

By answering these questions, my goal is to explain how PEGs are community media and demonstrate why they should be protected and ultimately cannot be replaced by SMSs.

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[7]   Unless noted otherwise, SMSs include video and audio streaming services

"Community" is a fuzzy concept, often used to refer to vague assemblages of individuals. This obscures more than it describes. Community media is a process. It cannot be measured by output of content. Every definition of community media incorporates the inclusion and self-determination of community members, whether that be geographic or virtual (Downing, 2001; Halleck, 2002; Howley, 2010; Rodríguez, 2001). PEG is a result of early discussions around community communications. It was established during the early deployment of cable television as a public service in return for the installation of private property in public space.

As an institution of American community media, PEG also addresses the issue of localism. The term "community" is often thrown around but rarely clearly defined. It can refer to a geographic area of varying boundaries: neighborhoods, cities, or states. However, communities can form in countless ways within or across these lines. To address community is to address the perception and policies of "the local" (Ali, 2017). Online networks are not fit to address the local as they give major preference to established, corporate media. Some academics have already noted a crisis of local news online (Hindman, 2018). PEG is rarely mentioned in the discussion of local media, largely due to its limited definition. Unfortunately, the federal definition of PEG access doesn't acknowledge PEG's community media practices. The American broadcast and telecommunication regulator, the Federal Communication Commission (FCC), defines the allocation of cable channels and the franchising process. It does not sufficiently define the public service PEG provides beyond public access to those channels. This definition has consequences for shaping policy. It has given room for cable companies and unsympathetic politicians to propose the elimination of franchising agreements. It is my opinion that a reevaluation of PEGs' services is consequential for the future of community media.

Why Study PEG?

The value of PEG services do not end at broadcast. PEGs play an integral role in community development by facilitating communication across racial, political, and class lines. This role, however, is not readily apparent to those who are not consistently engaged with local media. Personally, PEG has shaped my point of view on the power of community media. As a high school student, and aspiring filmmaker, my hometown municipal PEG station provided me the opportunity for production experience. Later, as a college student, less-interested in pursuing a career in the film industry, I took an off-campus course in social justice media. I learned about a lot of different community-based media initiatives, but it wasn't until I witnessed PEG's programming first-hand that I understood the social value of community media. I became more deeply engaged in community media when I worked for a PEG center in Minnesota. SPNN is open to anybody who wants to produce and distribute their content on cable in Saint Paul, regardless of experience or motivation. What made my experience with SPNN significant was their mission to "[build] community through media." This is done through production courses that encourage their members to address issues happening in their communities.

For example, one SPNN member produced a documentary short on the re-integration of ex-convicts into society through a 16-week intensive documentary course and won some local acclaim. Rather than continuing his work in filmmaking, he was inspired to found his own non-profit to aid ex-convicts re-entering the workforce. Through the course, he was able to identify an issue and realize his ability to enact change in his community. This has highly influenced how I think about media-production: rather than a means to an end, it can be a system of empowerment for individuals and their communities. This process is not readily apparent in the content output of PEG. By better addressing PEGs educational services, PEG may be better

positioned to address issues and concerns around equitability in online spaces—something some

PEGs are already undertaking.

My personal experiences with PEG gave me a valuable perspective on the power of

media; a perspective I may have never developed on my own. My perspective comes from

several years of experience with the field and in multiple roles; volunteer, course-participant,

intern, AmeriCorps member. Community media are grassroots movements measured by

qualitative engagement. This cannot be compared to corporate, top-down structured media,

despite the presence of UGC. This perspective is not easily translated, but I find that it is

necessary in order to do so in order best define what is at stake against mounting threats to

legacy community media. My own experiences with PEG inspire a defend these institutions

against symbolic and regulatory attacks.

After a few years with SPNN I noticed a significant drop in content submission. While

members were still visiting the center at a normal rate, they were foregoing cable broadcasting in

favor of their personal YouTube accounts. While the use of SPNN's equipment and facilities did

not reduce, there was less content for SPNN's cable channels. Members, particularly newer

members, ignored the opportunities for cable distribution in favor of YouTube where they felt

they had more control over their audience. This change in public interest represents SMSs

emergence as a mainstream broadcasting platform, despite of—or because of—its claims to

public service. The migration from PEG access to SMSs may represent preference for the

emergent communities of SMSs like YouTube. [8] I am suspicious about any one-to-one

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[8]   YouTube's mission is to "give everyone a voice and show them the world.
https://www.youtube.com/yt/about/

comparison between PEG and SMS based on this migration. SMS growth in user base and UGC does not necessarily imply effectual community media practices.

YouTube has made similar claims of community-building since its beginning. Though they are referring to trans-national communities facilitated by internet culture, this claim relies on the legacy of existing community media like PEG. Launched in 2005[9] and acquired by Google in 2006, YouTube grew rapidly in popularity to become the largest video-sharing platform. Presenting itself from its inception as an alternative to broadcast television that allows users to be producers, or "produsers," (Bruns, 2008) The community defined by YouTube appears to represent this convergence of users and producers; a community of produsers. In the early years of the 21st century, when YouTube and Facebook were still young, Henry Jenkins described the contemporary mediascape as a convergence of old and new media. A large factor in convergence is the involvement of fan cultures. Rather than taking a "passive" role in consuming content, fan cultures take direct roles in the construction of narrative worlds. Social media has since grown exponentially. SMS infrastructure has adjusted to algorithmic customization of content that gives preference to democratized celebrity. Mark Andrejevic, in the context of reality TV, has argued that the democratization of production, more than anything, has resulted in the democratization of celebrity that has "disturbing implications for the democratic potential of the internet's interactive capability" (2002, pp. 251). The convergence of old and new media, users and producers is now commonplace. The results of convergence may not be exactly what was expected, yet we can see much of the same discourse which celebrates the possibilities of online participatory cultures.

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[9]   First video uploaded to YouTube, "Me at the Zoo," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Me_at_the_zoo

The growing popularity of SMSs poses a serious challenge to PEG broadcasters. From my experience, SPNN members were reluctant to submit their content for playback on cable television. Rather, they opted to upload their content to personal YouTube channels or Facebook pages. While it was policy that any member who uses SPNN's equipment or facilities must submit content for playback, it became necessary to regulate member participation in order to have content for the cable channels. The staff by no means wanted to discourage members from utilizing other platforms. The question quickly became, "how do we adapt to new member interests and remain mindful and equitable to long-time members?" Considering the steady disappearance of public access in the area, the question of adaptation has become a serious consideration for the field at large. SPNN staff understood the organizations mission of community development and media education is not limited to one platform.

YouTube and Facebook are now massively influential platforms, and broadcasters in their own right—though the use of UGC has allowed them to evade the "broadcaster" title and the ensuing regulations. In the past fifteen years, YouTube has increasingly taken the form of corporate television (Bennett & Strange, 2011). From its design layout to the PGC and now subscription services, YouTube became more akin to broadcast television than cyberutopian image it projects. Now at a time when a growing percentage of households are unsubscribing from cable, what does this mean for users? How are users becoming producers, and how does this affect political movements? Community media practices within traditional broadcast systems help democratize platforms that are otherwise dominated by private interests. YouTube undermines the appeal of community media by creating an alternative, unregulated broadcasting system. Are SMSs revolutionary democratic media we've been waiting for or is this a techno-deterministic view of what amounts to no more than a new hierarchy? YouTube and Facebook

speak to community development in terms of what they call "global communities." (Zuckerberg, 2017). This concept speaks to the broad possibilities of social networks while flattening geographic, language, class, and ideological boundaries that exist between SMS users.

Thesis Structure

In the following chapters, my thesis will seek to account for the changes in community media in our digital age. Chapter Two will explore the gap in academic literature to account for the growing role of PEG access centers in community organizing and media literacy. PEG is often sidelined, or excluded completely, from discussions of democratic media online. The field is already showing signs of expanding to multimedia access operations. To do so, I return to the early discussions of community media in order to build a strict definition.

In Chapter Three, I account for this trend through an environmental scan of U.S. PEGs. Because this "trend" was experienced first-hand and cannot be corroborated with census data, I first describe the current state of the field. I outline how PEG structures itself to promote public engagement and how it is expanding into online platforms on top of its cable television operations. It is this expansion that makes PEG a model for community media practices online. Ultimately, this is necessary for justifying a new regulation of public media in the U.S. This is not to make any specific regulatory recommendations, rather, to promote a regulatory approach.

Chapter Four takes a deep dive into Saint Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN) as one of the PEGs who are actively working to democratize media for their local community. In doing so, I can better fill in the full picture of how this new democratic process might look like, and the

role localism plays in it. As a case study, SPNN, provides a helpful outline for how PEG

organizations can find creative solutions to funding and regulatory depletions without

compromising their core mission. In analyzing SMS platforms used by SPNN, I look for

intention by the organization to expand its mission to include social media. I conclude with how

my regulatory approach fosters this intention.

In the Conclusion, I reinforce why it is imperative to update not only the definition of

PEG, but also our perspective of media policy. It is important to have a vision for the future, in

order to work towards it. We cannot allow private interests drive our communication system. If

we continue to allow SMS firms to self-regulate, we will only see the divisions grow within our

fraught media environment. PEG is an already-existing project of community media. It continues

to define and fulfil the function of community despite diminishing support. The trend of

multimedia adoption under the mission of community development, can provide us a model of

what a healthy, equitable media environment could look like if we choose to produce it.

Chapter Two – Community Media 2.0: A Literature Review[10]

My approach to community media builds on a definition by filmmaker and activist Frances J. Berrigan. Berrigan was a researcher of broadcasting, an accomplished filmmaker (Australian Broadcasting Commission, British Broadcasting Corporation), and an early advocate for community media. She participated in studies of international communications with United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); editing the original study of community media in North America and Europe, "Access: Some Western Models of Community Media" (1977), and authored "Community Communications: The Role of Community Media in Development" (1981). These studies were commissioned by UNESCO in conversation of a "New World Information and Communication Order" (NWICO), spearhead by the McBride commission.

The commission's evaluations resulted in the (1980) report *Many Voices, One World*, which advocated for a more egalitarian international communication system led by the third world. The report was met with much hostility. The United States cited it as one reason for pulling its membership dues to UNESCO (Halleck, 2002). Berrigan argued that representative media, like representative government, is too far removed from the citizens and posits that "[t]he media, when placed in the hands of the community might become the machinery through which participation in the socio-political sphere is achieved" (Berrigan, 1981, pp. 9). Community media is media *of* the people and not just *for* the people.

In returning to these early studies of community media by Berrigan and UNESCO, I seek a model of community media that may be used to reevaluate the contemporary American

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[10] This chapter title was inspired by Christopher Ali's (2014) essay *The Last PEG or Community Media 2.0?: Negotiating Place and Placelessness at PhillyCAM.*

mediascape for a more equitable system. Berrigan's contributions helped the instillation of community media as a development tool. Berrigan defines community media as "adaptations of media for use by the community, for whatever purpose the community decides" (1981, pp. 8). Elsewhere Berrigan explains these adaptations "occur from the level of the national broadcasting networks to the small communication channel. At all levels, and in all formats, they share certain purposes and functions" (Berrigan & Unesco, 1977, pp. 145).

In her study, "Community Communications: The Role of Community Media in Development" (1981), Berrigan traces out three developmental principles of community media: access, participation, and self-management. "Access refers to the use of media for public service" (Berrigan, 1981, pp. 19) It may be characterized by the opportunities available and the means to transmit reactions and demands. Participation is a higher level of public involvement in production processes as well as in management and planning. Participation in decision-making is the most vital element of the third principle, "self-management." This includes involvement in planning and production, but also more fundamental decisions in the selection of materials, management, administration, and financing of the institution. The principle of self-management would make a community media institution responsive to its community, but responsible for it, and vice versa.

In the following sections I outline PEG as a community media using three criteria. I will define the key concepts and objectives of community media based on Berrigan's early criteria and the criteria of contemporary media scholars. First, I explain how PEG change conditions of access and create alternatives to for-profit broadcasting. Second, the necessity of communication in the creation and sustainment of communities, as well as the importance of distributed decision-making. Lastly, I will describe how PEG operates democratically.

Media

Community media is often categorized under the broader label of alternative media. "Alternative," referring in most cases, to hegemonic power. Clemencia Rodriguez (2001) describes power as a binary between the powerful and the powerless, "thus, mass media corporations are conceived as historically located in the camp of the powerful, while indigenous groups, ethnic minorities, Third World peoples, and other groups of ordinary people are deemed to be on the side of the powerless" (Rodríguez, 2001). This scenario of analysis taken by many academics, Rodriguez calls a "David versus Goliath scenario," the level of power becomes an essential trait of the subject's nature. Rodriguez goes further to point out that the David versus Goliath scenario often declares the failure of alternative media based on financial success. This underlines a "crisis of credibility" for alternative media. Rodriguez sites a study by Robert Devine which takes issue with communication academics critique of Access TV; "their critique, writes Devine, is based on the expectation that alternative media should deliver the same democratizing potential as the mass media—in terms of circulating professionally packaged ideas among wide audiences; against this standard, of course, alternative media are always doomed to fail" (Rodríguez, 2001, pp. 12).

Alternative media, therefore, is most often defined by what it is not. It *is not* corporate mass media. Yet the category of alternative media is far more varied than that of the corporate mass media. The heterogeneous qualities of alternative media can hardly be contained by binary categories, leading some to suppose a new goal of alternative media to be the creation of a new hegemony. In order to consolidate the multiple subjectivities, Rodriguez narrows the concept of alternative media to focus on a radical democratic conception of citizenship, coining the term

"citizens' media." Building off of Chantal Mouffe's theory of radical democracy, Rodriguez conceptualizes the citizen as an identification and type of political identity, rather than legal status.

To understand how PEG stands to be a model, we must understand how it is situated as a media project; what role did PEG play in the American mediascape of the past 30 years? It is most commonly referred to as community media, but it is also defined as an alternative to the mainstream corporate media system. The distinction between community and alternative media can help us to characterize PEG. These labels may be appropriate but are too broad to define any specific function. It is necessary then to explore the academic literature on alternative and community media to understand how PEG qualifies and what that entails.

PEGs are institutions which hold the potential to provoke and sustain projects of citizens' media. This also identifies PEG as alternative in structure to mainstream corporate media. However, the categories of citizens' and alternative media extend beyond institutional media. Both Downing and Rodriguez focus their analyses on projects geared towards specialized goals while remaining critical of institutions. Institutions operated by municipalities or corporations generally act as mouthpieces for private interests, rather than public needs. PEG's situation as an institution provides a unique position to better serve local communities.

Community

The opportunity and ability to communicate to and advocate for a community is a public good. Communication shapes communities and manufactures public opinion; so how one receives news and propaganda and how frequently is of high importance. Writing in 1927, John Dewey conceived of the "Great Community," a broad term for a democratic society. He comes

to this conclusion by first understanding that community, simply put, is a social construction defined by participation. In order to create a democratic state, habits and traditions must be taught via language. PEG is a democratic project in that it provides citizens access to a mass media platform, allowing for more voices to be heard than those curated by corporate interests.

Citizens' media are projects of democratization via direct participation. "The radical democratic concept of citizenship 'implies seeing citizenship not as a legal status but as a form of identification, a type of political identity: something to be constructed, not empirically given'" (Rodríguez, 2001). An individual becomes a citizen through their political participation. Radical democracy challenges a modern understanding of politics as expressed strictly through electoral politics. Considering this radical theory of democracy, Rodriguez posits that the term "alternative media" be dropped in favor of "citizens' media." This change implies three things: "first, that a collectivity is *enacting* its citizenship by actively intervening and transforming the established mediascape; second, that these media are contesting social codes, legitimized identities, and institutionalized social relations; and third, that these communication practices are empowering the community involved to the point where these transformations and changes are possible" (Rodríguez, 2001, pp. 20).

Still, there is the necessity of defining what exactly "community" is. For Christopher Ali (2017), this question gets to the kernel of the issue of what he calls localism. How do we define the boundaries of community? Is it defined by geographical boundaries, to what degree? Further, within geographically-defined communities there are multitudes of communities of interest. The fracturing of communities has become increasingly dramatic with the prominence of social media. Communities of interest can now be spread all around the world, with quick and easy access from our portable devices. One can be more familiar with a group of friends all on

different continents than with one's next-door neighbors. If PEGs identify themselves as community media, how do they make these distinctions? Minnesotan PEG, Saint Paul Neighborhood Network's, mission is "building community through media." This is representative of PEG stations identifying and adapting today's fast-changing mediascape. The wording choice of "building community," implies that there may not be an already existing community and that it can be constructed through communication.

Decision-making

Media are always experiments in democracy. As Downing (2001) observes in line with Dewey, models of democracy without communication are also without humans. To remove the discourse, in favor of structures and institutional procedures, from any analysis of democracy is to remove the democratic process. Understanding the structures and functionalities of media necessary for its democratization but doesn't necessarily enact it. This is the role that Radical Media takes up. It is, of course, not fair to say that mainstream media are *un*democratic. Rather, mainstream media, in the US and elsewhere, do not open themselves up to public accountability. Radical media fills the gaps left by the mainstream media representation and discourse.

How media affects politics is not a new subject. From pamphlets to arthouse films, media of all forms have been used to spread (dis)information, influence elections and policy. Many, if not all, commonly-considered political media are considered so after distribution. In other words, the political effects of media are measured by its dissemination. In contrast, PEGs' broadcast signals do not reach far but their effects can be seen through its participatory process. Members of a PEG center are involved in the decision-making process at all levels of production and distribution. Alternative media scholar, John D.H. Downing (2001), defines "Access TV" as a

radical democratic project. Following the democratic theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001) that political action is defined by not by parties of the state but by "a type of action whose objective is the transformation of a social relation which constructs a subject in a relationship of subordination" (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, pp. 153). Central to their argument is that social meaning is made possible through a plurality of possible ways of understanding social organization and activity which are always subject to unending contestation. Radical media projects can therefore be understood as contests to these social meanings. Laclau and Mouffe believe that political change must be preceded by discursive conditions that warn people of oppressive relationships. Downing argues that "access TV," as a radical media project, challenges the media hegemony by both "critiquing and reworking the televisual forum itself, [it] reposition[s] what might otherwise be experienced as transparent meaning into a site of antagonism" and "by challenging the content of the mainstream media and introducing alternative perspectives on social reality." (Downing, 2001).

Berrigan's principles of community media—access, participation, and self-management—are necessary for the development of democratic media. They help us to define PEG as community media. PEG generally operates with these principles baked into its mandate. It promotes democratic processes through media access for localized communities and distributed decision-making. To understand more, we must look more deeply into PEG operations.

Understanding PEG

In a footnote, Rodriguez notes a conversation she had with Downing in which he said that "when communication scholars write about alternative media, all they come up with is the latest

epitaph" (2001, pp. 26). This is indicative of the neglect of the multitude of sites in which communication happens. I believe this includes the lack of reevaluation of existing alternative and community media. PEG access television stations are one of the most robust institutions of community media in the United States. Its relevance does not need to be tied to the decreasingly popular cable television. This considered, it may have an important influence in future community communications. In the following section, I apply my framework of community media above to PEGs.

"PEG" represents three types of participatory media it serves, as the three words in the acronym suggest. While official definitions differ in some states, PEG is generally categorized as follows. The *Public Access* category of PEG is the most well-known, at the least thanks to its unfavorable portrayal in films like *Wayne's World* (1992). This category provides the general public with equipment, resources, and air time for their personally produced content. It is common for PEG centers to refer to the mission of Public Access as a platform for free speech. *Educational Access* generally consists of content geared towards informational purposes. This can include content by participants of PEG center youth or adult programming, or content created in-house by staff, freelancers, or volunteers. The third category of PEG, *Governmental Access*, is the most straight forward. It is the coverage of local political hearings and events. While Governmental Access programming may be produced by staff or volunteers, the content is always fixed to the coverage of local politics.

After failed attempts to require that all cable companies carry public access channels through the 1970s, PEG access was officially sanctioned in the United States as a result of the 1984 Cable Act (Ali, 2017). This didn't guarantee PEG channels, as citizens were required to actively petition cable providers for channels and funding. This act gave authority of cable to

local municipalities, ultimately requiring cable companies to solicit "franchise fees" from each municipality to develop their reach (Ali, 2017, pp. 94). In order for private cable companies to lay down cable in within public space, they are required to pay 5% of their revenue to the municipality and offer a few channels for public, non-commercial use. Once channels and funding are secured, the PEG station operates on a first come, first serve basis for the general public.

At its core, PEG access is a broadcast television movement. Not to be confused with *Public Television* or *Public Service Television*, PEG access is a form of non-commercial Television in which the general public participates in the creation of content broadcast on cable channels. The reach of these channels is often no more than a county or municipality. These channels are managed by Non-Profit organizations or city governments. The services they provide are twofold; to provide local communities with the ability to create and share media, and to provide local viewers the content produced in and for their communities.

Both Berrigan and Halleck allude to PEG as an experiment in community media. For Berrigan (1981), PEG had yet to be established. For Halleck (2002), PEG had been in act for almost 20 years. Despite its growth throughout the US, it had yet to be accepted by the public or by communication theorists as an implementation of a democratic project. Rather than receive praise for its democratic project, PEG is often criticized or condemned for its willingness to broadcast controversial programming. Public Access, of course, does not exclude extremism. This has been used as a point of leverage by the cable industry. PEG has been at odds with the cable since its inception. After heavy lobbying by community TV advocates and cable TV representatives for federal, state, and local governments to award cable companies franchise agreements during cable's formative years, the cable industry quickly discarded any notion of

support towards non-commercial and participatory television (Howley, 2005). PEG was finally established in 1984. As Halleck notes in 2002, "[t]he notion of access as implementation of a democratic project is neither recognized by the public nor acknowledged by most communication theorists" (Halleck, 2002). This was largely due to PEG's use for the dissemination of "kinky" sex programs as well as harmful racist programs. This problematic image was, and is, preferred by the cable companies. Mostly owned by the same media conglomerates, cable companies see the public perception of Access as hurtful or dangerous without curation as a chance to retake to those channels (which they could then profit from).

PEG channels are, at the very least, alternative options for viewers. However, this is an unfair measure for PEG's value. Viewership or profit-based metrics will always favor corporate broadcasters. The content on PEG channels can be problematic, controversial, or just unwatchable. Corporate television, adversely, is consistent in terms of quality and content. But valuations of PEG based solely on its content is misleading. PEG is not just an alternative channel for consumers. It is a tool for community development. It is an alternative avenue for those who are otherwise excluded by barriers of cost, resources, and education. The ideal of PEG as community media created an alternative hierarchy to its top-down corporate counterpart.

Founded in service to local communities as an inherently participatory broadcasting platform, PEG access is facing a serious challenge to its legitimacy. With the establishment of SMS and VSSs—e.g. Netflix and Hulu—media viewership practices have changed significantly. Viewers are cord-cutting in favor of streaming services. The traditional media hierarchies at large are being challenged. But as academics of digital media argue, democracy and community-building of SMSs may be a veil for corporate profit motives (Dror, 2015; Hoffmann et. al, 2018 Proferes, & Zimmer, 2018; Rider & Wood, 2018; van Dijck, 2013). This may prove to be a

critical moment to rethink what community media is in the US and what role PEG access will play in the digital age. This is not to imply that we must return to legacy platforms or institutions if we wish to build a more equitable media ecosystem. Rather I infer that institutions, like PEG access centers, are places in which community members may gather and develop multimedia skills.

PEG as Alternative Media

I want to highlight PEGs unique status as integrated within a localized community. As a fixture within a community, PEG access centers are capable of continued politically engagement—in the least due to Government Access programming—as well as inspiring short-term, goal-oriented projects or movements. In this light, PEG access may also be considered a *Radical Alternative Media* project.

As an institution fixed within a local community, PEG access is not tied to any one specific social movement. PEG's radical project comes from the concept of developmental power, building off notions of counterhegemony and alternative public spheres (Downing, 2001, pp. 44). PEG actively creates alternatives to corporate mainstream media. Downing expands on how radical alternative media act as agents of developmental power, listing: the expansion of available information, responsiveness to community needs, lack of censorship, more democratic infrastructure, and its role in cultural formations (Downing, 2001). We may only go so far as to call PEG a radical alternative media project if it is actively responding to the community it serves. It is not enough for a station to open its doors to the public and expect a democratic structure to form. PEG must actively work as a collective.

PEGS and the Community

My interest in PEG is as a fixture within a given community. As such, PEG centers are capable of continued politically engagement—in the least due to Government Access programming—as well as inspiring short-term, goal-oriented projects or movements. This description perhaps better aligns PEG with public libraries than other broadcast organizations.

As a localized participatory media service, PEG is easily understood as community media. Many centers themselves adopt this title. This is only apt as long as they maintain their public and/or educational access channels. Governmental Access, by itself, only reflects the actions of city government. It also demands the least participation. Much of government access programming is produced by staff or hired workers. Sadly, due to lack in funds, centers can be forced to roll back on Public or Educational Access.

While at their core, PEG centers are TV stations that directly serve their local communities, they may also equip themselves to serve the multitude of communities of interest within their locality and may branch out to include new media platforms. This is of growing importance for PEG access centers, as their relevancy comes further under scrutiny due to low viewership rates and the increasing perception that online streaming platforms have completely democratized media production and viewership. It is my assertion that PEG access is not only relevant in the digital age, but an increasing necessity. This will require a pivot in the definition of PEG access from free speech broadcasters, to a community education center. This is a change that many PEGs have already begun to make.

Perceiving a shift in community media, Christopher Ali conducted an (2014) ethnographic study of one PEG station in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Ali confronts any notion that the internet may be a suitable replacement for PEG access. PhillyCAM (CAM is short for

"Community Access Media") is a young community media station, founded in 2011 after much turmoil from the city. Opposed to other established PEGs founded in the 80s or 90s, PhillyCAM is more dramatically forced to prove its relevance to its community. Under this tension PhillyCAM staffers came to the conclusion that their role is as a community center organized around media. Ali argues that in addition to the common mission to give a 'voice to the voiceless,' community media centers also give 'place to the placeless.' PhillyCAM is demonstrative of the shift of PEG access "[b]y framing itself as a hybrid media center, drawing from the practices of community television, and looking forward to the new practices of digital literacy, PhillyCAM attempts to carve out a niche for itself in Philadelphia's media ecosystem. It models a combination of traditional PEG station and community media center" (Ali, 2014, pp. 82).

Ali gets to the core of place and placelessness in his aptly-titled (2017) book, *Media Localism: The Policies of Place*. Ali addresses a gap in scholarship on local media. Media localism is "the belief that broadcasters should be responsive to the local geographic communities to which they are licensed" (Ali, 2017, pp. 7). The term local is often vague, despite its importance in the development of broadcasting policies, in the US and elsewhere. Local can refer to communities of place, geographic area of varying sizes, as well as communities of interest. Communities of interest are communities that form around shared interests and practices. Communities of interest can exist entirely within a geographic area or spread out across many. Therefore, to understand a community, it is incredibly important to identify the various intersections of communities of place and interest. In order to address this, Ali use the analytic framework of *critical regionalism*. This helps in three primary ways:

"(1) it can allow us to better understand the supposed antagonism between communities of place and communities of interest; (2) it can offer a bridge between these two rhetorical positions by recognizing the role that communities of interest can play *within* communities of place; and (3) it can help us to identify moments within the discourse of media regulation where such solutions have already been proposed, but have been pushed to the periphery" (Ali, 2017).

By redefining themselves as community centers, PEGs are directly addressing these concerns of critical regionalism. PEG centers are physical places where members of the local community can gather, a feature that SMSs cannot fully provide. Opening up their operations to new platforms allows for the flexibility to work with a broader population of communities of interest within the area. SMSs and VSSs are not replacements to PEG access, but rather, new tools. PEG educators can help members unfamiliar to online media to navigate the complicated, exploitative, and sometime predatory world of social media.

Was it too soon to write an epitaph for PEG? Is PEG intrinsically tied to cable television, or can it expand out to include other platforms? There is a gap in academic literature addressing a contemporary role of PEG that is not being addressed. Internet scholar, Matthew Hindman (2018) goes so far as to make recommendations for promoting local and independent news online, many which align with PEGs missions, without any mention of PEG or access television. For solutions to contemporary failings of localized media, it is important to look at existing examples for future models. In the following section, I trace themes of community and participation in online cultures.

The Reign of Social Media

For the 2006 annual "Person of the Year" issue, *Time* Magazine opted not for a single public figure, but rather "You."[11] The cover art depicted a computer screen open to a YouTube video. The screen was printed with a reflective surface, putting the face of the holder both within the YouTube video and on the front cover of *Time*. The subheading read "Yes, you. You control the Information Age. Welcome to your world." *Time*, rather than cover the creators or owners of newly popular SMSs, commemorated the explosion of user-generated-content (UGC). Maybe a bit of a gimmick, the magazine nevertheless incapsulates how SMSs have strategically placed users at the center of their operations. Increasingly, SMSs have appropriated the language of "access" and "community." From S-1 registration statements to public manifestos social media companies manufacture a public image of their platforms as public goods, rather than money-making ventures (Dror, 2015; Hoffmann et al., 2018). SMSs as community media organizations is highly questionable due to their private and centralized organizing structures. SMSs rely on the public perception that it is community media. This helps to veil exploitative practices.

Documentary filmmaker and writer, Astra Taylor, argues that the rhetorical placement of SMSs as "open" systems against the "closed" systems of legacy media is a contradicting "concept capacious enough to contain both the communal and capitalistic impulses central to Web 2.0 while being thankfully free of any socialist connotations" (Taylor, pp. 21). SMSs are "open" to all equally, whether you are an individual or a business. This openness gives way to the reconstruction of already existing power structures. Individuals and businesses alike are supposedly empowered by new technologies and SMSs, yet the former can comment and share

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[11]   You, *Time* Person of the Year https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/You_(Time_Person_of_the_Year)

products while the latter boosts its bottom line (Taylor, pp. 22). The internet does not create inequality, it amplifies the already existing inequalities that meet it.

SMS firms have increasingly presented themselves as the ideal of community media. Representatives enlist much of the same language; community, democracy, participation. This presentation has increased despite changes in ownership and infrastructure that conflict these ideals (Hoffmann et al., 2018). As the turn of the Twenty-First Century approached, so did dreams of revolution. This can be compared is comparable to the "small (or alternative) media revolution" of the late 1970s, brought about by portable video and the expansion of the cable system (Berrigan, 1981). Jenkins et. al (2003) note that the perceived "digital revolution" was agreeable across the political spectrum, but left unclear what exactly was to be revolutionized. There was a collective frustration towards the established mass media. Jenkins et. al list common disparages, including UHF and cable television, noting how regulatory and policy decisions "marginalized local access content and granted priority to commercial broadcasters" (Jenkins, Thorburn, & Seawell, 2003, pp. 11). Many wondered if the internet would provide a solution to their grievances. After the dot com bubble burst in the early 2000s, dreams were scaled back. What came after was a peak point of participation in online spaces observed by internet scholar, Henry Jenkins (2006).

In his influential (2006) book *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, Jenkins mapped the emerging online cultures of collaboration on new SMS platforms. These online spaces, he would define by the act of *convergence*, or the "flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences" (Jenkins, 2006, pp. 2). Amateur and aspiring filmmakers could share their films in online forums, citizens could become journalists with their own blogs. A new

appreciation for UGC emerged as a response to opaque and biased media industries (Jenkins, 2006). The emerging online cultures provided hope for a robust community media system, one in which everyone can have a voice. Online cultures were still young, strange, and exciting. The average person now had an outlet to explore and share their interests. Fandom became less idle, and more participatory. Fans no longer needed to wait for the next *Star Wars* movie. They could create and share their own interpretations of the narrative universes, creating intricate "fan fictions." The thirteen years after *Convergence Culture* have seen dramatic changes in online cultures. The initial excitement of SMS has been usurped by corporate powers.

Beyond UGC, YouTube resemble community media in their offering of alternative options and opportunities. These motivations, however, have been more commercial. In 2006, the year of "You," Google purchased YouTube, only one year after its initial launch. A year after that, YouTube launched its YouTube Partners Program. This program was designed as a revenue-sharing program, to make YouTube a viable way for individuals and organizations to make money. Since then, YouTube has expanded its Partners Program to include support for developers, advertisers, and "creators." The expansions included the Creator Academy, a series of online courses. Alongside basics in production, the course catalog includes: "Get Discovered," "Build a Business," "Earn Money with Ads," and "Ways to Make Money Beyond Ads."[12] This is a developmental program for individuals and organizations to build their presence and brand on the platform. The ultimate goal of this, however, is the monetization of their channel and content. These courses teach aspiring "Creators" how to make commercially viable content by gaining viewership. Even the recent "Creators for Change" program[13] measures its success in views. As

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[12]   YouTube Creator Academy Course Catalog https://creatoracademy.youtube.com/page/browse
[13]   YouTube Creators for Change Program https://youtube.com/intl/en/yt/creators-for-change/

an educational and support system, the YouTube Partners Program shapes its "creators" by what has previously proven to be financially successful rather than their individual needs and desires.

Community media must be responsive to the community it serves. It must function like a sort of cooperative. This cannot be said for YouTube, who makes all regulatory decisions from behind closed doors. In this light, YouTube does not appear to be a true alternative to the black box of network television. With 73% of adults on the platform,[14] YouTube is the mainstream. With its establishment as a media giant, came a new hierarchy. This hierarchy, however, relies on its invisibility. Hoffman et. al trace the language of Facebook CEO and spokesperson, Mark Zuckerberg. The language used to describe Facebook has changed dramatically over its 15 years of existence. Zuckerberg has widely defined Facebook as "a place, a tool, a platform, a product, a business, a community, a utility, a service, and an infrastructure" (Hoffmann, Proferes, & Zimmer, 2018, pp. 204). This tracing of language changes is not meant to just highlight discrepancies in Zuckerberg's public narrative, but to bring into light the exploitative practices it obscures. Hoffmann et. al summarize Zuckerberg's changing narrative as an attempt to place Facebook within culture and culture within Facebook (Hoffmann et al., 2018), creating a false sense of responsibility to its users, that Facebook is a public service.

SMS firms strategically brand themselves as public services, driven by mission rather than by profit. This is most clearly articulated in S-1 registration statements and "manifestos" (Dror, 2015; Rider & Wood, 2018). In their analysis of Mark Zuckerberg's (2017) manifesto "Building a Global Community," Karina Rider and David Murakami Wood (2018) argue that Zuckerberg's manifesto is the culmination of all Facebook's public rhetoric, and defines the

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14   Pew Research, "Majority of Americans now use Facebook, YouTube" http://www.pewinternet.org/2018/03/01/social-media-use-in-2018/pi_2018-03-01_social_media_0-01/

platform as both a social infrastructure and a community. Zuckerberg presents Facebook as a

solution to the rise in global authoritarianism (Rider & Wood, 2018). This definition appeals

"user's concerns and critiques of contemporary economic and political institutions by creating a

seductive image of natural human organization and absolves the corporation from legal, social,

moral, or economic responsibilities" (Rider & Wood, 2018, pp. 6). Users are only directly

included in the creation of the site's content. Users are free to vocalize complaints, but the

company is free to ignore and make decisions based on other metrics (Hoffmann et al., 2018).

In addition, what is seen, is highly regulated through intricate sets of algorithms

(Hindman, 2018). Our social media feeds are regulated, promoting certain content while

demoting other. Content is not equally discoverable for all users. "Trending" is an easy example

of this. Trending pages showcase content that is currently accruing a lot of views, or "going

viral." So, content which has already gained a certain level of attention is promoted by the

platform. It is not difficult to see how certain channels gain so much notoriety once they begin to

trend. A study by Ding et al. (2011, pp. 363) found that "4 percent of YouTube's users provide

almost three-quarter of the site's content, and these active uploaders are not quite

demographically representative in terms of gender and age." (van Dijck, 2013, pp). Going

further, YouTube's algorithms are designed to filter in similar content to what we have already

seen and filter out dissimilar content, creating personalized filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011). For

influencers, online celebrities, this system is something to game. Rebecca Lewis found in her

(2018) Data & Society Report "Alternative Influencers Broadcasting the Reactionary Right on

YouTube," gaming SMS algorithms has resulted in the spread of misinformation, hate speech, or

worse. As long as they keep to YouTube's community standards protocol, far-right extremists

are free to build audiences without reproach from YouTube or regulators under the first-

amendment rights. Lewis concludes that "in many ways, YouTube is built to incentivize the behavior of these political influencers" (2018, pp. 43).

SMSs on their own have not proven to be sufficient projects of community media. The idea that SMS, and portable recording devices have made PEG irrelevant is misguided. At the very least, what this ignores is the fact that these SMS platforms are owned and operated by private companies. While PEG channels are public rights of way and operated by non-profit organizations. PEG centers provide alternative services to the public that is not driven by profit. These services may be expanded beyond cable television, including SMSs.

What is PEG today?

The growth of SMS need not be a threat to PEG's project of community media. Community media are responsible to its community, and the community responsible to them. For PEG, to respond to the needs of its community may well include adopting new media. PEG and SMS can exist in cooperation with each other. The pivot towards a multimedia operation does not exclude PEG's core as community-building institution. We can look to progressive PEG centers like PhillyCAM or SPNN for examples of how this pivot may happen. While SMS is proficient at fostering communities of interest, they can never replace IRL community centers. PEG access is a 'place for the placeless,' a physical space in which members of a local community can gather. In general, community members can visit the station center to use facilities, take classes, and find support from staff and other members. This role puts PEG in a critical position to respond to the community's needs.

As noted by both Ali (2017) and Halleck (2002), it is also a strong benefit for community organizations to seek partnerships with other local, community-based organizations. These

strategic partnerships can help a PEG Station find alternative funding revenues to franchise fees, making the station less reliable on the cable company. It also functions as an effective form of targeted outreach. The simple presence of a PEG does not directly result in an egalitarian local media landscape. As a public service, and with little or no outreach on the organization's part, there is the risk of only servicing a limited demographic within the local community and possibly replicating the same hegemonic structure of mainstream media. Through active partnerships, PEGs are able to promote their services throughout their communities and to better adapt their services to those communities.

PEG Stations operated by non-profits have a lot more room for progressive operations than those operated by municipalities (Rodríguez, 2001). Sustaining PEG access then has the same troubles as many non-profit agencies, the Catch 22 of needing publicity and then keeping up increasing demands. "[s]uccessful access centers coordinate outreach publicity with a push for increased budgets from the city councils and state arts funds" (Halleck, 2002). These funding choices keep PEG centers afloat, but also gives them the flexibility to cater to specific community needs. PEG centers operated by municipalities are not much more than mouthpieces for the municipality. An equitable media platform needs the space to cover important yet possibly divisive topics like homelessness, AIDS, the environment and racism (Halleck, 2002).

PEG has always played an interesting role in media literacy. At the baseline, in order to get content to broadcast, PEG centers give the hard skills of how to use the station's equipment and facilities. But PEG centers also, through classes or production experience, help citizen/members develop the soft skills of media literacy, the ability to make critical decisions about what subjects they cover and how they cover them. Left to their own devices many aspiring media-makers often replicate mainstream, corporate media tropes and forms. So, there is

a fine line that the educator must walk. They must teach hard and soft skills without leading the citizen/member, replicating existing power structures. This, however, often results in programming that is of "low-quality" or incoherent. This can obscure the value of PEG to the casual viewer. DeeDee Halleck has written on her experience teaching filmmaking to youth of various backgrounds. One of the biggest challenges was legitimizing the value of youth films, as many adults were quick to discredit them. A reason for this is that "the actual film [is] only a by-product" (Halleck, 2002, pp. 55). This rings true in my personal experience overall working in a PEG center. The role of the PEG staff instructor is to help a citizen/member to convey their message, through decisions of their own. It is not to produce something that appears "professional."

By expanding their mandates to include SMSs and VSSs as well as cable television, PEG can fulfill a role similar to that of public libraries. SMS and online technologies have made easier for more people to create and share media, but they are far from completely democratized. There are still those who are excluded, whether by lack of access or awareness. PEGs are able to center their missions around media literacy and localism, as well as access and participation. This pivot means PEG could help to combat inequalities exacerbated by SMS practices.

SMSs provide opportunity to users but with little accountability to them. The presence of opportunity does not mean that it is used equally by all. Taylor cites research by Eszter Hargittai which finds that even among highly-educated demographics there is a large divide in participation online along race, class, and gender (Taylor, 2014). Left uncriticised, the view of SMS as a project of democratic communication falls into the trap of what Uzelman (2011) calls "determinism of technique." This is the assumption that "democratization can be brought about by broader public access to and engagement with critical information and knowledge" (Uzelman,

2011). Certain strategies of alternative media do not necessarily lead to the desired emancipatory outcomes. This is due to two basic assumptions: first, the widespread access to diverse content will activate politically engaged citizens; and second, "participatory forms of productions and organizations are necessarily articulated to democratic power effects" (Uzelman, 2011, pp. 22).

The question we should all be asking is whether importance should be measured by viewership, or by direct engagement? Is a quantitative measure sufficient for judging our media institutions, or do we need a qualitative approach? PEG's existence is seen to hinge on franchise agreements, as they determine the majority of the organization's funding. But is service to a community enough to keep people paying for cable packages? PEG on founded on making television more accessible and participatory. Cable companies are the enemy of community media and the people. It does not follow that PEG centers, as access television organizations, are obsolete due to an overall public frustration with cable (and OTA) television.

Conclusion

PEG faces a critical turning point. By accepting a larger role as multimedia educators and community centers, PEG could become a leading democratic multimedia institution. This capacity of PEG can be identified by returning to early discussions of community media that influenced the establishment of PEG channels (Berrigan, 1981; Berrigan & Unesco, 1977; Halleck, 2002). It is fair to conclude that SMS ideologies and practices are more comparable to cable companies than they are to public access television. SMSs are service providers with the primary goal of earning profit. PEG centers, as community-focused non-profit entities, are in a position to counteract the rising inequalities on new—as well as old—media platforms. There are already several examples of this pivot in Massachusetts, Minnesota, Philadelphia, and Oregon.

They operate as community media after convergence by: (1) experimenting with new platforms while retaining community center operations, (2) developing curricula that develops overall media literacy, and (3) providing opportunities for public involvement at all levels of operations, from content creation to organizational governance.

Adaptation to the ever-changing media environment is a necessity. PEGs that do little to update their programming may soon disappear. As many in the industry understand, PEG has always fought for legitimacy as well its existence. More than ever, PEGs are pressed to extend their services to multimedia access operations. Creative responses to regulatory failures are more necessary than ever.

Chapter Three – An Environmental Scan of PEGs

Where Chapter Two placed PEG in its historico-political context, this chapter seeks to account for current trends across PEGs vast and decentralized field. There is no census data of American PEGs and categorization can differ from state to state. Some states categorize Government and Educational channels separately from Public Access or separately from community media in general.[15] It is difficult to identify trends or the overall state of the field because of this lack in data. While reporting the state of the field is beyond the scope of this thesis, my goal is to account for trends that I have witnessed first-hand. Due to a multitude of factors, PEGs are pivoting their operations from access television stations towards multimedia community centers.

This research follows the principles of community media laid out by Frances J. Berrigan: community, participation, and self-management. In order to apply these principles to multimedia platforms and institutions, my research asks the following questions to identify organizational structure, mandate, the opportunities for participation, as well as changes in distribution across media:

1. How do PEGs identify and engage with their community? This includes within the physical media center or in partnership with other local organizations, but also through choices in online presence.

2. Is the PEG addressing digital needs within their community? This then leads to questions on how citizen/members can be involved in production and organization.

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[15]   Email correspondence: Mike Wassenaar, ACM President & CEO

3. What are the opportunities provided to PEG members? And how are they able to make decisions within the organization? I am seeking whether PEG has a top-down control structure, or whether it is more of a network of cooperation. A community media organization should be just as reliant on its members as the members are reliant on the organization.

To answer these questions, I conduct an environmental scan of the PEG field followed by a subsequent survey to corroborate results. My scan, as discussed below, resulted in 143 PEGs. A supplemental survey yielded 55 responses, of which 50 were used.

Towards new regulatory definition of PEG

PEG poses a challenge for a scan because the industry lacks a more robust regulatory definition. There is no unified image of what any one single PEG is, or what public services they provide. As noted in the previous Chapter, definitions of PEG channels vary in structure, management, regulation, and labels, even from state to state. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in section 611 of the Communications Act defines a PEG as one of three types of channels:

- **"Public** access channels are available for use by the general public. They are usually administered either by the cable operator or by a third party designated by the franchising authority.

- **Educational** access channels are used by educational institutions for educational programming. Time on these channels is typically allocated among local schools, colleges and universities by either the franchising authority or the cable operator.

- **Governmental** access channels are used for programming by local governments. In most jurisdictions, the local governments directly control these channels."[16]

This definition only defines the federal establishment of requirements for PEG; the allocation of cable channels for public use by franchising authorities. A Local Franchise Authority is a local government organization that regulates cable along with the FCC. PEG channels are a product of this regulation; a form of public goods provided by cable companies in order for them to develop their services in a locality. Section 611 of the Communications Act does not define the operations of the organizations operating PEG channels. PEG's public benefits go beyond just the public access of broadcast media. If we are to say that the public good is simply public access to cable channels, then it can be inferred that reduction in PEG engagement or viewership of cable overall speaks to the ineffectiveness of this service. This can give leverage to Cable companies and anti-regulation politicians who may argue against PEG by way of viewership. Therefore, it may be necessary to create a new, more inclusive definition.

I define PEGs[17] as community centers that traditionally operate PEG channels, but whose organizational purposes and goals are geared toward community building and civic engagement through the development of mass media skills. While PEG channels are a foundational element of PEG, PEG's public service goes much further. There is much left to be said about the education process rather than the dissemination of content. Some PEGs are aware of this position and have worked with their communities to develop multimedia programming, while others

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[16]   FCC, "Public, Educational, and Governmental Access Channels ('PEG Channels')
https://www.fcc.gov/media/public-educational-and-governmental-access-channels-peg-channels
[17]   I refer to individual PEG organizations "PEGs" as a short-hand, despite the operation of all three channels. If I am speaking more broadly, I refer to the "field of PEG access."

continue the classic first-come-first-serve cable access operation. There is a disparity in a unified vision of PEG as a field.

Mapping the field of PEG

Given that the definition of a PEG is unclear, I have defined "PEGs" as centers which operate Public, Educational, & Government Access cable channels. However, many PEGs and their member base refer to them as "Public Access Stations," or more commonly now "Community Media Centers;" generally referring to their *access* operations. There doesn't appear to be a common title which encompasses all PEG operations. This may be a symptom of PEG's overall struggle to define itself and its operations. The organizations that run them are incredibly diverse. Illustrating the social networks fostered by media access may give us a better picture of what PEG is and does. If there is an apparent growth in PEG social networks beyond cable television operations, we may need to explore PEGs' organizational missions to reevaluate the driving force of the industry.

The first phase of my research was stakeholder mapping to overcome this lack of industry wide definitions. The use of this method was inspired by Luka & Middleton's analysis of a series of consultations by the Canadian Radio Telecommunication Commission's consultations, "Citizen Involvement During the CRTC's 'Let's Talk TV Consultation'." Stakeholder mapping is a process of identifying all the parties involved as well as the ways they relate and interconnect. Luka & Middleton use this method in order to visualize the large sets of data scraped from the Let's Talk TV (LTTV) consultation hearings and better understand the "breadth of participants involved" (Luka & Middleton, 2017). Since one goal of my thesis is to map American PEG organizations this method seemed apt. Luka & Middleton used stakeholder mapping to identify organizations involved in the CRTC's "Let's Talk TV Consultation" to

identify whether or not LTTV's call for input "generated a significant activist response" and what effect they had in the subsequent policy decisions (2017). By examining CRTC submissions, Luka & Middleton built a map of who participated and the dynamics of policy formation. While Luka & Middleton's stakeholder mapping method generally fits my research goals, it does not exemplify the non-linear, case by case needs of my research subjects. It was necessary to look to other examples of stakeholder mapping.

I began the process of stakeholder mapping by scanning the industry field. Since there is no census or all-inclusive list of PEG stations in the US, I used the organizational membership list of the Alliance for Community Media (ACM)[18], a national advocacy group and foundation for community media. My scan commenced by exploring a selection of PEG organization's websites. Information could be corroborated with available tax documents and a self-made survey. All information gathered is public. I scanned 143 PEG stations, excluding municipal stations and stations without Public Access channels. I visited each organization's website looking for basic organizational information, opportunities for public participation, and platforms used.

I narrowed my considerations to independent non-profit organizations. My definition excluded municipalities. This follows the conclusions of Clemencia Rodriguez (2001) that community—or citizens'—media must have a certain level of independence. I also excluded organizations that did not include *public* and *educational* channels, lacked production courses, and community-involvement limited to "volunteer" positions. They must operate as a third-parties mandated by local franchise authorities, as defined by the FCC.[19] This thesis is concerned

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[18]   The Alliance for Community Media http://www.allcommunitymedia.org/
[19]   FCC, Public, Educational, and Governmental Access Channels ("PEG Channels")
https://www.fcc.gov/media/public-educational-and-governmental-access-channels-peg-channels

with how PEG centers facilitate participation. These exclusions narrow this broad and varied field to home in on PEGs that place public participation at their core. From there, I can better map the broader public service of PEG.

At the very start of the scan, I looked for general data on the organizational structure–e.g. tax status, citizen producer demographics, governing bodies, community/corporate partnerships, funding bodies, and audiences—as well as platforms used. Many websites do not link to all their accounts on other platforms. This required me to check multiple platforms for an organization's account, often leading me to inactive accounts. I included these inactive accounts within my scan, in order to illustrate the experimentation PEGs undergo when choosing platforms to use. Inactive accounts were marked so in the scan. As the scan continued, new factors appeared that need consideration. The scan expanded to include unexpected platforms, platform handles, as well as cable channels. The chart of platform usage grew exponentially to include all the different platforms that PEGs use or experimented with.

After the data was gathered on 143 PEG stations on the ACM's organizational member list, I attempted to fill the gaps by emailing a Google Form survey to the stations. Alongside basic organizational information, I asked about educational programming and platform usage. The survey was successfully sent to 121 organizations of the original 143, then subsequently forwarded to an ACM internal listserv, expanding my reach. The survey was live for one month and yielded 55 responses. The data received from the survey was compared to the initial scan and ended the data gathering process.

The scan identified stakeholders within each PEG center and the opportunities for their involvement. The categories expanded because of the growth of opportunities as PEGs experiment with new media platforms. Identification of stakeholders alone is not sufficient for

understanding how PEG facilitates democratic participation in media production. My goal is to understand how stakeholders interact.

This list included a large number of different community media organizations—not just PEGs—and supporters. I narrowed down my specifications in my scan of the member list for a more manageable sample. I included PEG's which operate Public and/or Educational Access channels and those operated by 501(c)(3) non-profits. This narrowed my sample to 143 PEGs. After all the data was gathered on the criteria listed above, I fortified the sample with a survey sent to all analyzed PEGs. The findings, organized into a series of charts, will be analyzed for connections as a network of stakeholders.

Findings

Results found that the field of PEG access extends well beyond "access television." PEGs, whether they are driven by their mission or by organizational survival, understand their unique positions as locally driven media educators as well as community advocates. Most PEG organizations are structured to promote public engagement, and many are experimenting with multimedia programming following their community driven mission statements. In the following sections I lay out my findings, first with organization structure then funding, followed by mission statements, and concluding with platforms.

Organizational Structure

I looked for organizational structures that foster engagement with the surrounding community. Independent non-profits are better positioned to engage with their community and create opportunities around their needs, rather than simply delivering news. Municipal-run PEGs

were excluded from the scan as they are operated by local government. This is not meant to indicate bias or conflict of interests, but rather organizational commitment to local communities. In my experience, most municipal PEGs are largely focused on governmental access content. In this case, the PEG is a voice-piece for the government.

The large majority of organizations in the scan were 501(c)(3) Non-Profits. Only 5 survey respondents were not 501(c)(3) non-profits, rather: a cooperative, a business, unincorporated, a college department, and a council of governments. 501(c)(3) is a tax-exempt status under the IRS Internal Revenue Code reserved for "charitable organizations."[20] Organizations cannot operate for the benefit of private interests and are restricted in their political and legislative activities.

Public engagement in content creation implies some level of media-education. This is primarily determined by staff resources. Most PEG's hold camera and editing trainings on request. This is the bare minimum required. Other, generally larger, PEG centers hold regular classes for adults and youth. Of the 148 PEGs, 141 hold courses or trainings for adults (18+). Youth courses are often after-school or summer programs. Rather than just educating participants in basic production, they learn long-term communication skills geared toward community-development.[21]

One gatekeeper to PEG's growth is membership fees. Not all PEGs are able to offer their services for free. Most require some fees to cover the cost of operations. The immediate issue with membership rates is the concern that it will exclude certain demographics. PEGs can, and

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[20]   IRS, Exemption Requirements – 501(c)(3) Organizations https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/charitable-organizations/exemption-requirements-section-501c3-organizations
[21]   SPNN Blog, Bus Stop: On a Street Near You https://www.spnn.org/blogs/201605/bus-stop-on-a-street-near-you

do, directly address their communities by how they adjust these rates in an attempt to include more people. The scan identified seven different types of membership for individuals and groups to choose from. The most popular demographics were adult and youth. Two PEGs had a rate for seniors, and only one had rate specifically for low-income adults. There are also membership types aimed at building community partnerships.
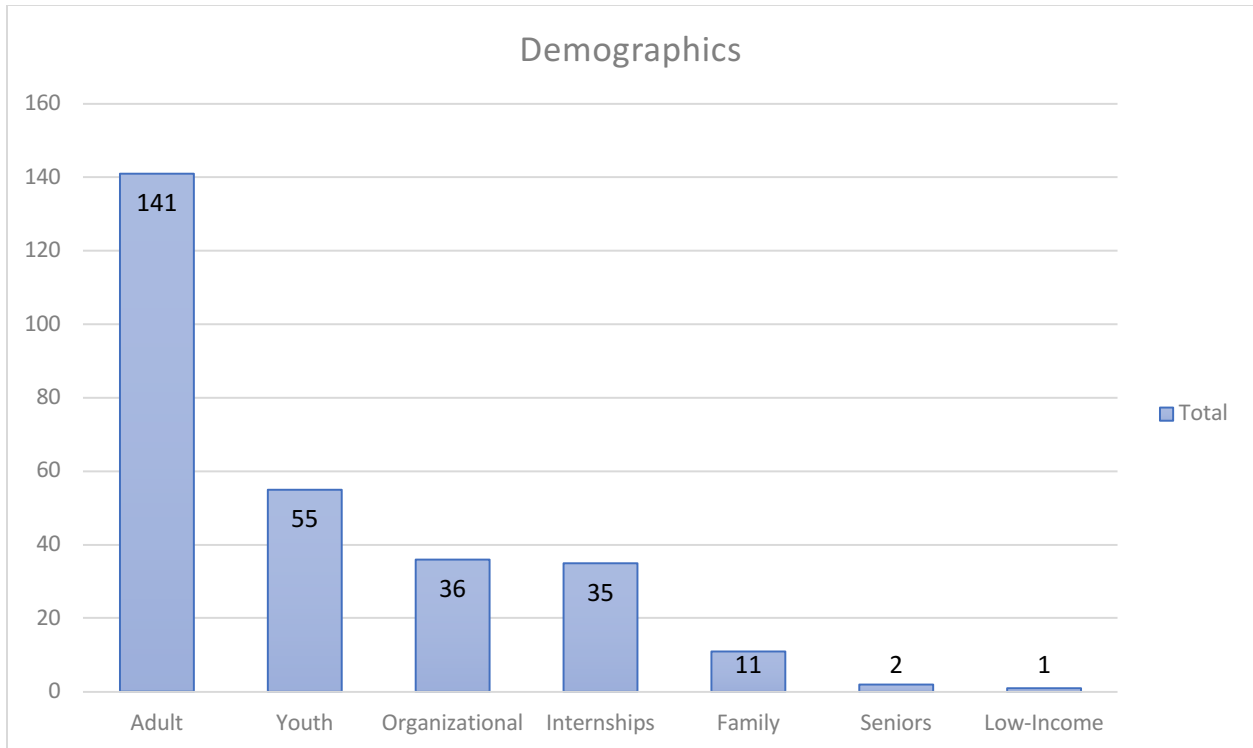
A significant number of PEGs offer group memberships. 36 PEGS included a membership rate for non-profit organizations. This generally meant that multiple individuals from a non-profit organization could join at one discounted rate. This encourages partnerships with other local community groups. 92% of survey respondents partner with local community organizations. A surprisingly popular membership type was *family*. A family of four or five, similar to organizational membership, can join at one discounted rate. While this type is not tremendously popular (11 PEG centers offered this options) it was often listed under organizations that did not hold youth courses. This may be a strategy to include individuals under

18 years of age. So, even if a PEG does not have the resources to work with youth, they are not excluded.

Many PEGs offer work skills development for youth as well. A significant number of PEGs offer college internships—though, it is unclear if any of these internships offer financial compensation. 35 organizations, or 23%, offer regular internship positions. Internships may be a good way to bring more work opportunities to the organization, while also offering experience to aspiring media-makers. Of course, it all depends on the type and length of the internships. Theoretically, PEG internships allow the organization to expand operations while building the intern's skills. Internships also imply some level of familiarity between the PEG organization and Universities. Generally, there needs to be some form of promotion of internship opportunities to Universities, whether that's through direct partnerships or tabling career fairs.

From my own personal experience, receiving an internship at a PEG center is dramatically easier than with corporate television or film studios. PEGs allow students more flexibility in their internships. They can gain experience in production, post-production, broadcasting distribution, instruction, client service, and non-profit administration. What I found to be the most impactful experience from PEG internships was learning about the role of community media within a localized community. Many PEG interns cover community events or work directly with the public at the PEG center. They can directly see the impact that PEG plays in community organizing. This is an important lesson to learn for aspiring content-creators, that there are alternative paths towards a career in media, ones that may be more personally and professionally fulfilling.

Funding

The significant funding sources for PEG are franchise fees, membership dues, public

donations, and grants. The primary source of funding for PEGs come from franchise fees. These

fees are from 5% of the cable carrier's revenue and redistributed by the city government to

public services, i.e. access television. Unfortunately, however, franchise fees are increasingly

unreliable. As more and more households "cut the cord," franchise fees return less and less to

PEGs. The FNPRM could eliminate this source of funding altogether. There are other sources of

funds that can compensate for these losses but are even less reliable and demand that PEGs

remain on their toes.

Membership dues are, usually, small fees for members. This generally covers costs of

operations. Many PEGs offer different rates. This one of the core ways PEGs can address the

needs of the community, through demographics. Only one PEG in my scan offers a discounted

rate for low-income individuals. This is a wonderful strategy for creating opportunity for those

who are often excluded due to financial restrictions. Two PEGs offered a discounted rate for

seniors. More popular are rates for groups. 36 PEGs offer a discounted rate for non-profit

organizations. This usually means one flat rate for 3 to 5 individuals who work for a certified

non-profit organization. This is an interesting option, as it not only brings in more new members,

but builds connections between the PEG and other local non-profits. 11 PEGs also offer a

"family" rate. Similar to the organizational membership, family memberships are one flat rate for

a family of 4 or 5. This rate can often be attributed to PEGs without robust youth programming.

It can, theoretically, compensate for lack of youth participation by involving parents.

Non-profit PEG centers, like other non-profits, require a significant amount of grants and

donations. Grants are a fraught but necessary source of funding for PEGs. They often cover the

cost of new equipment, repairs, and program development. By applying for a grant to fund a specific educational program or initiative, the organization is obliged to execute the proposed plan. Grants can be a vehicle through which PEGs can be more responsive to their communities wants and needs. If a PEG realizes a lack in its service towards a demographic in its community, grants may allow for the capacity to address it.

Mission Statements

The survey also gathered respondents organizational mission statements. A mission statement describes an organization's purpose and goals of operation. Answers to the questions varied. Many answers provided their organization's official statement, some appeared to provide a short hand answer. Responses varied from multiple paragraphs to just two words. While some PEG centers are already expanding to multimedia operations, some may not have made the move yet. Others may not have the funding or capacity to build robust multimedia programming but are open to the possibility given the demand.

I sought to discover whether PEGs are adjusting their missions towards multimedia operations, or if cable is still a primary focus. My method was intended to be a concise,

Rank	Frequency	Word
1	43	community
2	33	media
3	21	access
4	18	public
5	18	television
6	15	provide
7	14	cable
8	14	local
9	14	programming
10	12	free
11	12	providing
12	12	training
13	11	mission
14	11	promote
15	10	expression
16	9	education
17	9	people
18	8	center
19	8	ideas
20	8	speech

Table 1: Top Words

quantitative analysis of themes. If the pivot towards multimedia operations is a conscientious organizational decision, it should be reflected in the mission statements. Future research should definitely expand into a closer reading of these mission statements to identify the differences as well as similarities I find.

All responses were compiled into a single document then entered into the "corpus analysis" software, AntConc.[22] From this I was able to identify trends in word choice and phrasing. Across all 50 responses, the top five most popular words—after sorting by a stop word list—were: community, media, access, public, and television. The frequency of these terms may be their presence in the organizations' names; they are significant, nonetheless.

These results quickly reinforce that PEGs are community-focused organizations. It is also easy to see that PEGs are moving away from a cable television focus. "Media," is the second most popular term, coming before "television," at fifth. "Media" appeared 33 times across 50 responses, while "television" appeared only 18 times. This presents a clear overlap in PEGs as television stations versus media centers.

It is also worth looking into clusters of words. Some words may appear individually at a lower frequency but regularly in combination with other words. "Free speech" was one of the most popular clusters, having appeared seven times across 50 responses. This was followed by "media center" and "public access" at six responses. There is also at least one instance of the phrase "freedom of speech," as well as three instances of "first amendment" and "first amendment rights," respectively. The American First Amendment right of the freedom of speech

[22]   Anthony, L. (2019). AntConc (Version 3.5.8) [Computer Software]. Tokyo, Japan: Waseda University. Available from http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software

Rank	Frequency	Range	N-gram
1	12	1	is to
2	10	1	access to
3	10	1	to provide
4	7	1	for the
5	7	1	free speech
6	6	1	education and
7	6	1	in the
8	6	1	media center
9	6	1	media to
10	6	1	public access
11	6	1	the community
12	5	1	and promote
13	5	1	and training
14	5	1	by providing
15	5	1	cable television
16	5	1	community media
17	5	1	is a
18	5	1	mission is
19	5	1	our community
20	5	1	our mission

Table 2: N-Grams

has been a popular mission of PEG since it was founded. It is inclusive and bipartisan language which speaks to PEG's first-come-first-serve basis. By positioning itself as an *apolitical* organization, PEG seeks support from political support from democratic and republican representatives. This position takes a considerable amount of work to appear as functioning equally. Accusations of unbalanced programming is not rare, and neither are accusations of the suppression of ideas and points of view.[23]

The most common phrases did appear to describe specific functions and specific media. "Public access" is frequently used, appearing six times. As I discuss in the next section, though the phrase in and of itself is neutral, it is primarily used to describe television services. Half of the time this phrase appears as a description of the PEG's cable channels. There is one instance in which the PEG describes its facilities as a "public access center." There is an example of PEG's opening up their phrasing to include multimedia. "Media center" appears six times across all responses. This phrase is used to describe the operation of the PEG's facilities. In more than one instance, "media center" is included in the organization's title. This phrasing is the most neutral in terms of media. While it may be included in a mission alongside the description of the PEG's television services, it hints towards multimedia operations.

In the word choice and phrasing in PEGs mission statements there is a clear pivot away from cable television towards a position as multimedia community centers. These mission statements may look completely different than corporate television stations or even early PEG organizations. Now they may appear more similar to other community centers, like public

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[23]   Manhattan Community Access Corp V. Halleck https://www.scotusblog.com/case-files/cases/manhattan-community-access-corp-v-halleck/

libraries but with a focus on media education and engagement. Now, how does this reflect in PEG's operations?

Public Access Media

My scan analyzed the online presence of PEGs. If PEG is adjusting its focus away from cable television, bow are they changing? How do they present themselves, what platforms are used, and are they including new opportunities for participation via SMSs? Regarding the third research question, how is the expansion into new media platforms creating opportunities for participation and self-management for PEG members.

The scan of platforms used, grew to consider 35 different platforms, actively used, inactive, and prospective. I broke down this broad swath of platforms into four categories; website, social media sites (SMS), video, and audio. The website category included the organization's website, whether it included user accounts for member activity, mailing lists or newsletters, in-site blog or organizational news, and a company app. All platforms under this category are produced in-house. They are also more direct forms of organizational news dissemination. The SMS category is the category of common third-party platforms, e.g. Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. These platforms are generally used by PEGs because of their popularity; meeting the mases where they are. These platforms see the most variance in use. Some PEGs use them for news and event promotion, others use them for simulcasting or archiving content. The last two categories are content specific platforms. Video platforms are used for simulcasting or archiving PEG centers' video content. Audio platforms are used for simulcasting or archiving PEG centers' audio specific content. While Facebook, Twitter, and

YouTube were the most ubiquitous, there appeared to be a large amount of experimentation with platforms by PEGs.

The data on PEG's platform usage show that PEGs, generally prefer to use the most widely popular platforms. PEGs by and far are most active on Facebook and YouTube. According to Alexa Rankings YouTube and Facebook are the second and third most visited sites in the US and the world, respectively—coming behind google.com at #1.[24]
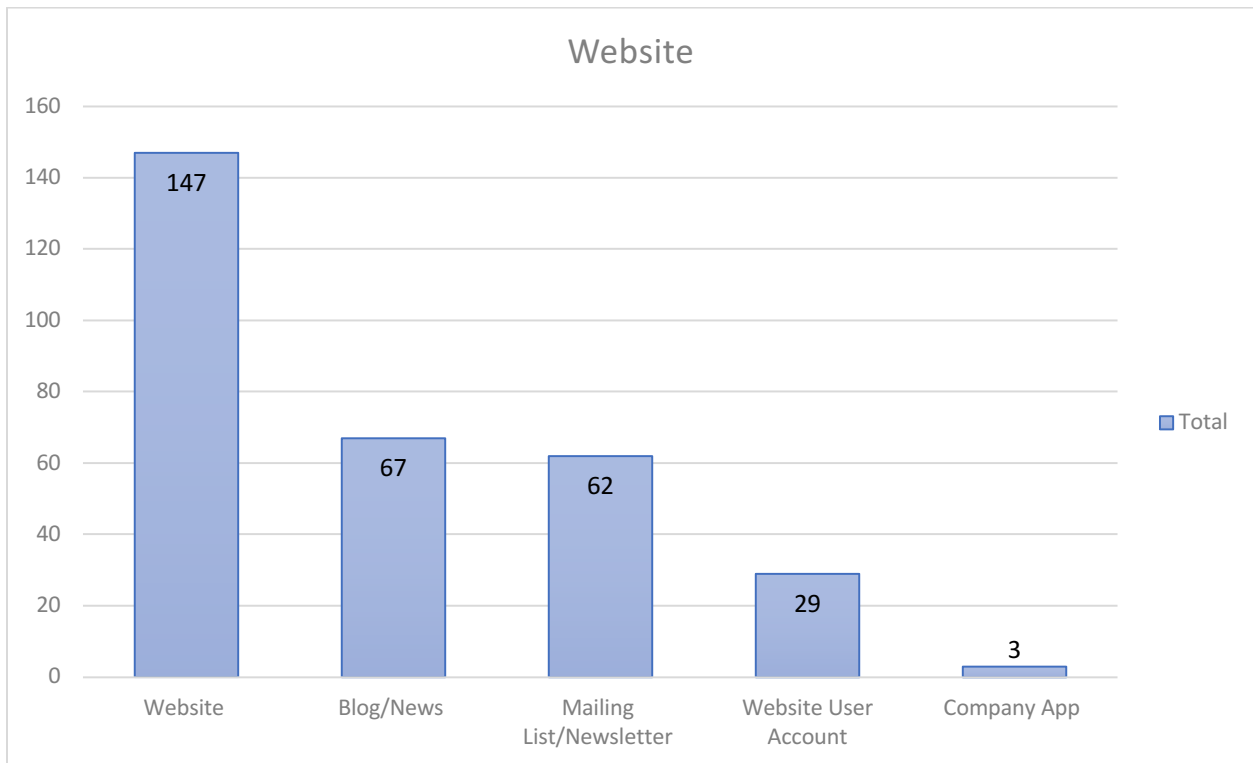

Table 3: Website

While every PEG observed in this research had a website, they varied widely in use. Some were simply informational, preferring community members to come in person to the center. Other PEGs' sites offered more reason to stay on the site. A large number of sites feature embedded video and audio, as well as livestreaming features. This promotes the organization's

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[24]   Alexa Rankings https://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/US

resources and expands its viewership beyond its cable service area. If someone wishes to watch PEG channels but is not a cable subscriber, they can watch the stream live online, given they have consistent internet connection. Though the majority of content on PEG websites are in-house productions, they promote, and inspire, user activity by illustrating what resources they offer the community. A website with little more than contact information does little to inspire a curious citizen with no experience with media. Some PEGs go even further in promoting member activity by inviting activity on the site itself. 29 sites included user accounts. This generally means active members can submit programming remotely. In at least one case, the user accounts allow PEG members to interact with the center and other members on the site.
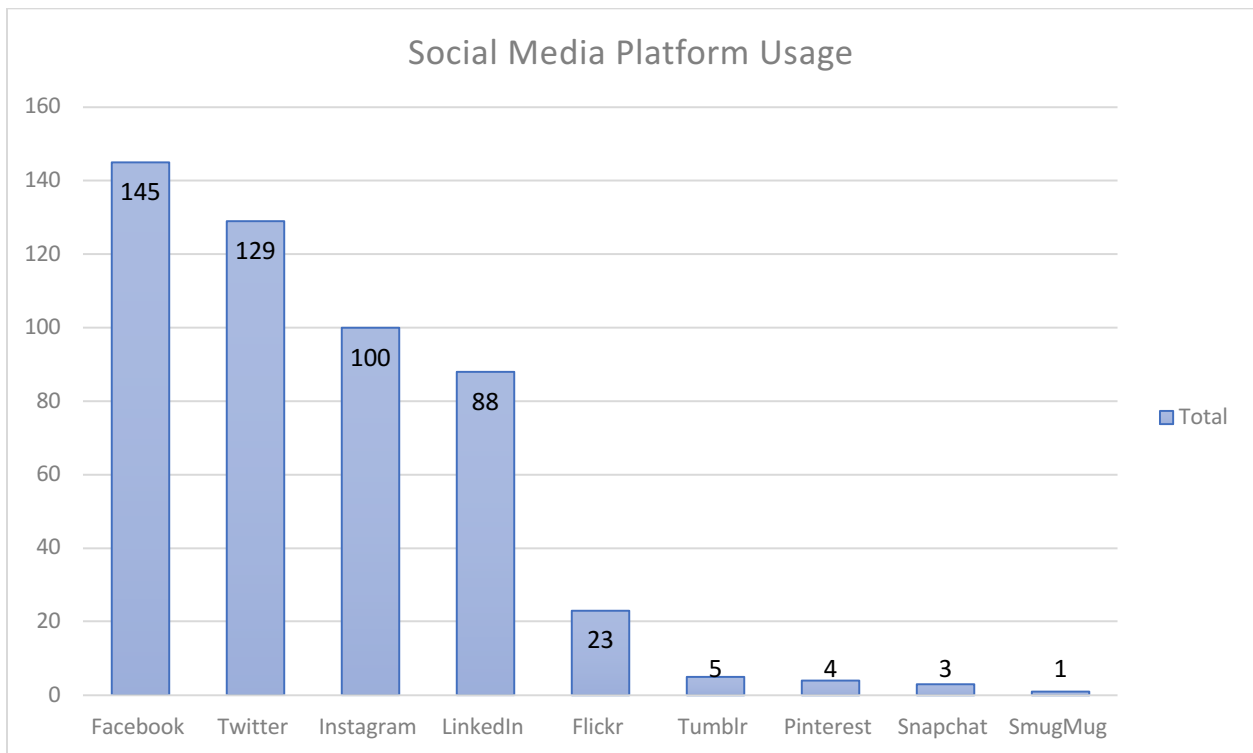
Social Media Platform Usage

Platform	Total
Facebook	145
Twitter	129
Instagram	100
LinkedIn	88
Flickr	23
Tumblr	5
Pinterest	4
Snapchat	3
SmugMug	1

Table 4: SMS Platforms

SMSs are predominately used for news and event dissemination. Nearly all PEGs had an active Facebook page. Because of their widespread use, PEG's Facebook pages act as a secondary—or in some cases, primary—online account. A Facebook account allows PEGs to

have a presence within its community members normal SMS routine. 80% of survey respondents
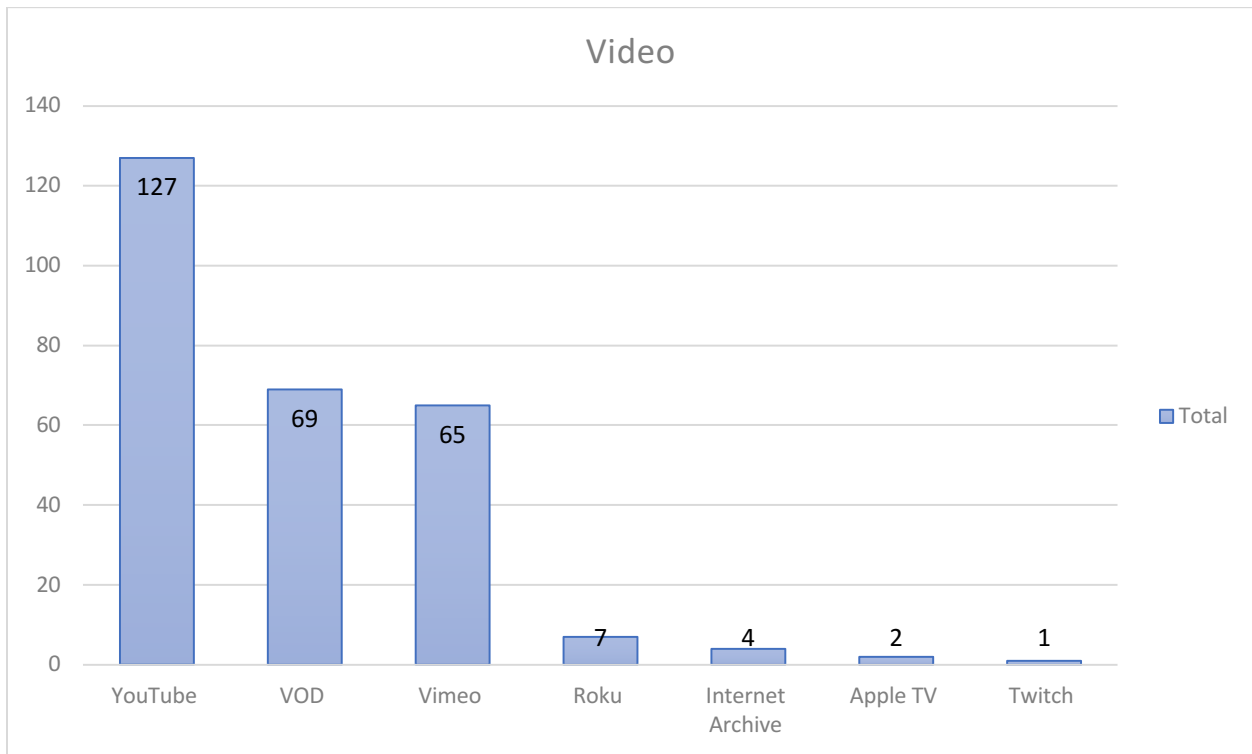have specifically used Facebook video.

Table 5: Video Platforms

     Video platforms were dominated by YouTube. 89% of survey respondents use YouTube.
Again, as a major platform,[25] this allows PEGs to meet the public where they are already. While
many PEGs use YouTube as a distribution and archival tool, others are taking advantage of
newer features like YouTube Live. As mentioned above, Facebook Video is also very popular,
coming in second, just 9% behind YouTube. The third most popular video platform, Vimeo,
came in at 47%. Vimeo was developed to be a community for professional and amateur
filmmakers.[26] It is popular among filmmakers for its ability to accept larger varieties of formats

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[25]   Pew Research Center, Social Media Use in 2018 https://www.pewinternet.org/2018/03/01/social-media-use-in-2018/pi_2018-03-01_social-media_0-01/
[26]   Vimeo, About https://vimeo.com/about

and higher quality video. It has many features similar to YouTube, including live stream capability. Vimeo appeared in the scan as the platform with the most inactive accounts. It seems that many PEGs tried and abandoned Vimeo for YouTube and Facebook. Despite its mission, which overlaps with PEGs mission of self-management, PEG appears to prefer larger platforms.
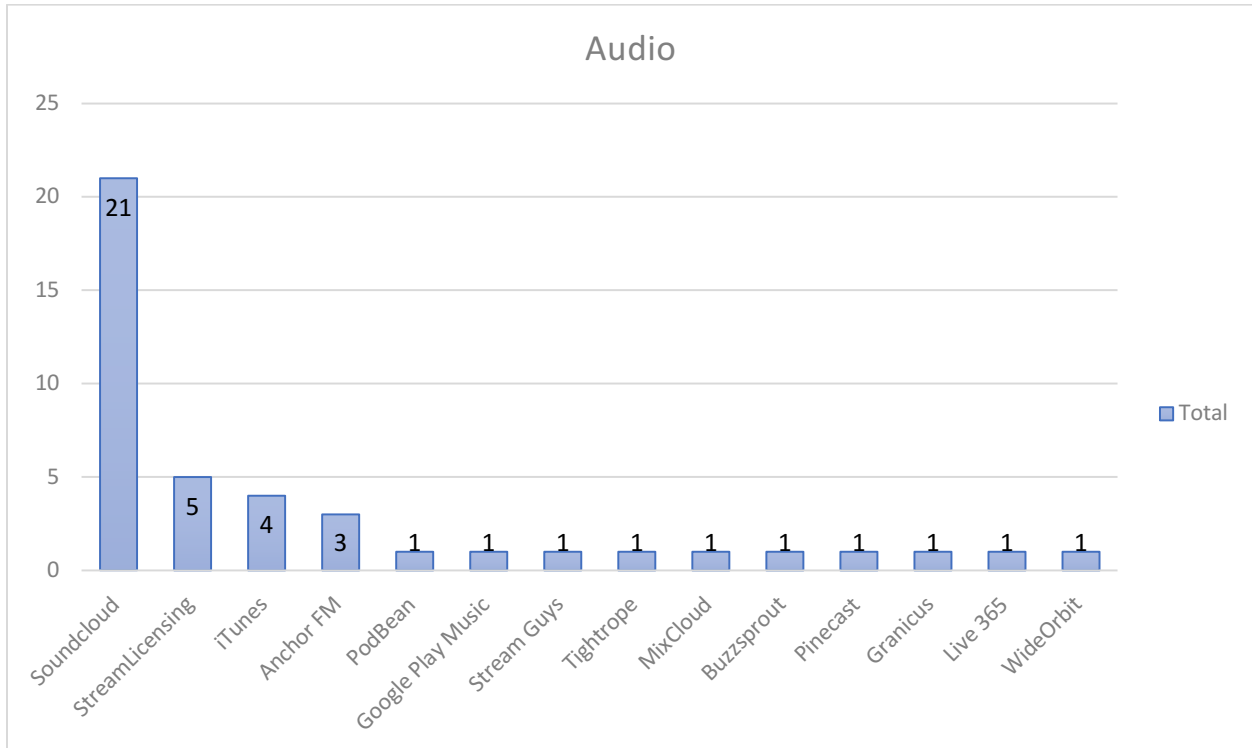

Table 6: Audio Platforms

Interestingly, the largest area of experimentation was in audio platforms. 18% of survey respondents marked that they operate or partner with a radio station—largely low-power FM (LPFM)—and 39% are experimenting with audio platforms. Most have experimented with podcasting on Soundcloud, but there was some significant crossover with online radio platforms like Stream Licensing and Anchor FM. My scan of audio platforms grew to include 14 different platforms. It easy to say that radio, particularly LPFM, is an early starting point for PEG to become a multimedia institution. LPFM is a fairly young medium. The FCC began granting

licenses at the turn of the century. The licensing process sped up after President Barack Obama signed into law the Local Community Radio Act of 2010 (Dunbar-Hester, 2017). This was seen as an expansion of the overall community media movement. Radio may be perceived as familiar territory for PEG stations. A trend may be identified here as television station growing to include, radio, followed by video-streaming-services (VSSs), and then audio-streaming services (ASSs). It may still be too soon to declare this trend. Unlike LPFM, ASSs do not carry a sense of urgency as they do not require a license from FCC.

Conclusion

The name Public, Educational, and Government Access may now be misleading. Now that there are countless options for public participation in mass media, "public access" is not a strong democratizing initiative it once was. However, PEG's democratic experiment today lies in PEG centers daily operations. By this I mean education, skill-development, and community development. It is in these operations that I found answers to my core research questions. First, the operation of a media-based community center can easily include new media platforms. This is simply how they identify and engage with their communities as well as find new ways to offer public access. While a PEG can pinpoint a geographic area it serves, communities can be broken down further. Second, PEGs address the digital needs of their community through curricula for developing media literacy, or through expanding to popular SMS platforms, thereby empowering greater participation in the community and in media making. Lastly, PEGs provide opportunities for involvement beyond UGC. Most PEG organizations operate horizontally, offering opportunities for involvement at every level of the organization enhancing community self-determination.

With threats to PEG's funding by cord-cutting and the FCC,[27] PEG is at serious turning point. The pivot observed by this research is happening from PEG's organizational mission statements and cascades into its growth in multimedia programming. By understanding their missions as hinging on public access and media literacy, PEGs are better able to serve their communities. While cable television still has its place, public attention has moved online to SMSs. When PEG access television was established in the 1980s, there were very little (legal) avenues for individuals to participate in mass media. Now we are inundated with opportunities to participate, but major gatekeepers keep the mediascape far from equitable. Just as PEG stood to democratize broadcast television in the 80s, today it has the potential to democratize our media interactions at large. How this potential can be seized is up in the air. To better understand, it is necessary to look at the specific experiments of PEG organizations.

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[27]   FCC, Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking https://www.fcc.gov/ecfs/search/proceedings?q=name:((05-311))

Chapter Four – Case Study of SPNN

The previous Chapter covered the industry's growing trend of multimedia social networks. This Chapter will explore one PEG as a case for how individual organizations make decisions to conduct this operational pivot. I take a deeper look into how PEG follows their mission towards more progressive and inclusive operations. A prime example of the progression away from a cable access focus and towards operating as media-based community centers is Saint Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN). Some of this redirection is community driven, but others are for survival. As most PEGs are independent organizations, there is no unified vision for these important changes. Through the analysis of individual organizations, we may be able to construct some sort of vision. SPNN is an interesting case study, as it is a PEG that has proven responsive and adaptive since the early days of PEG access. I also have personal experience, as a program participant, intern, and CTEP member which contributes to my understanding of the organization.

In this case study I will analyze the organization following my three core research questions. (1) How do they identify and engage with their community? This includes within the physical media center or in partnership with other local organizations, but also through choices in online presence. (2) Is the PEG addressing digital needs within their community? This then leads to questions on how citizen/members can be involved in production and organization. (3) What are the opportunities provided to PEG members? And how are they able to make decisions within the organization? I look for answers to these questions by examining SPNN's history, infrastructure, and approach to community media.

In finding answers to these questions, I seek how PEGs can be responsive to the digital needs of the communities they serve and how this relates to the trends outlined in the previous

chapters. SPNN is significant case in how they actively address these crucial questions, and at all

levels of the organization. Below I will identify stakeholders at SPNN in order to compare and

contrast it to the other 147 PEGs in the environmental scan. I will then conclude why SPNN is a

fitting example of a PEG for the digital age.

Overview of SPNN

Founded in 1984 as Cable Access Saint Paul (or "CASP") and later rebranded as SPNN

is the Public, Educational, and Government (PEG) access television station for the Minnesota

capital city, Saint Paul.[28] SPNN is dedicated to community development and media and

technology education. This can be seen in the overt language stated in its mission statement:

"SPNN is a 501 (c) 3 non-profit that has since grown to harness its unique media tools, digital

communications expertise, and spirit of innovation to elevate community media arts to a new

level, becoming a national model."[29] SPNN contrasts their founding operations—i.e. cable

access—and the operations it practices today, while noting that this is in response to community

needs. They go on to list four goals specifically towards technology practices:

1. Develop the personal and artistic expression of underrepresented people in media.

2. Foster arts experimentation and collaboration among young people, emerging artists, and
   partners.

3. Create meaningful connections between diverse arts voices and the broader community.

4. Increase 21st century work-readiness skills of underserved youth and adults.[30]

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[28]   SPNN, About https://www.spnn.org/about-spnn
[29]   SPNN, About https://www.spnn.org/about-spnn
[30]   SPNN, About https://www.spnn.org/about-spnn

Within just these statements found on their site's "About" page we can already see two thirds of Frances J. Berrigan's (1981) principles for community communications, access and participation. The third principle, "self-management," is not quite fleshed-out here. It may be hinted at in the description of SPNN's four "core areas," which "help underrepresented populations grow artistically, build confidence, and equip adult and young learners with the 21st century skills they need to be successful in the workforce or the growing makers economy." This mission statement drives SPNN's programming. In further analysis of the organizational structure as well as operations, SPNN shows active experiments in public self-management.

SPNN is explicit about its public access operations. This is be most easily expressed in their tagline, "Building community through media." While their origin is in Cable access television—and that remains a large portion of their operations—they describe themselves more openly.[31] SPNN's early name change from CASP illustrates this same point. CASP centers the organization's operations around "cable access," while SPNN is more open—though this openness can cause confusion.[32]

Besides the administrative department, SPNN has four departments. Each address the organization's core areas of service: Community Production, SPNN Youth, Media Education (AKA "Access"), and the Community Technology Empowerment Project (CTEP AmeriCorps). Master control operates the cable broadcasting and administration oversees the organizational management. The four other departments operate different education and engagement programs. Admin does accept college interns but is normally operated by staff. The public can become

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[31]   In my experience with SPNN, many new members joined SPNN not for access to broadcast over cable, but rather to use SPNN's equipment and facilities. While YouTube and other VSSs have lowered the bar for content distribution considerably, many still want to produce high-quality content in the first place. And while mobile devices more and more come with high quality censors, it still requires a certain level of knowledge to be able to use effectively.

[32]   The SPNN acronym is often mistaken as Saint Paul "News" Network

involved in organizational decision-making primarily through monthly board meetings, which

are open to the public. SPNN shows considerable effort in representing larger demographics

within their board of directors, including youth. The board of directors is made up of elected

community members, Youth Action Committee members, and city appointed directors.
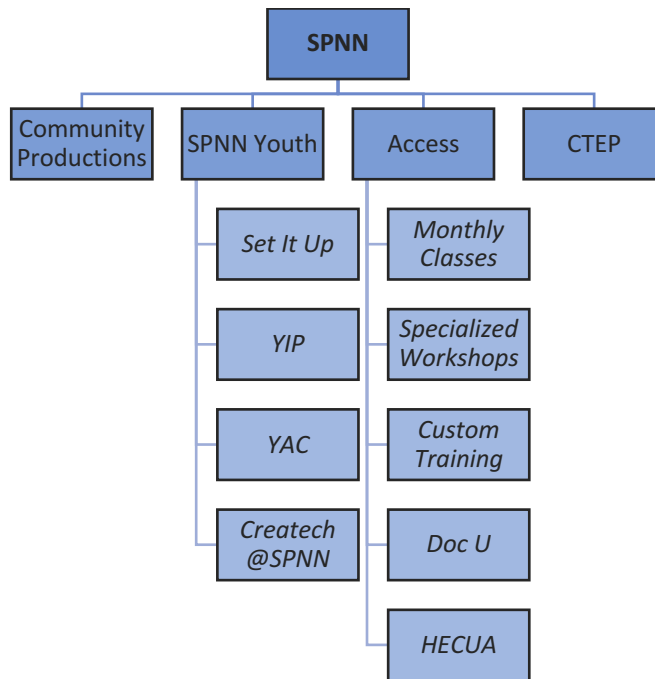

Table 7: Departments of SPNN

First, Community Productions is the production services "arm" of SPNN. The

community production team is responsible for all in-house productions but also partners with

other local groups. Much of this work is led by department staff, but is open for those looking for

valuable experience, whether someone is an amateur or an aspiring professional. These

opportunities are offered through college internships and freelance work. Community

productions lowers the bar of entry to building experience in television production or filmmaking

at large. It also actively connects SPNN, and its members, with other community groups.

The second department, or "Access" department is in charge of adult media education and the daily center operations. This is the most recognizable department across the entire field of PEG access in the U.S. For any adult (18 and older) who wishes to become a member, it is Access that they will interact with. Access offers classes and workshops but also generally operates on duty during hours of operations to check in and out equipment or as production aids.

Access aims to encourage and support community members towards their personal goals for production. The Access department makes involvement with SPNN simple. New SPNN members are required to pay membership fees, which are determined according to age, income, or participation in a specific program. If the new member wishes to use the SPNN equipment available for check out, there are a series of certification courses. Courses do have attendance fees in accordance with membership types. If the new member does not wish to use SPNN equipment, they are not required to take any courses. All members, despite certifications, are able to submit content for broadcast. Certification courses are held monthly and do not need to be attended in any specific order—unless the course has multiple sessions. These courses are introductory level, covering basic operations and theory. The certification is simply an indicator that the member has completed the required course(s) and is responsible for the equipment or facilities they check out. If the member would like more or specific training, the Access department holds regular workshops on advanced or specialty subjects.

The next department is "The Community Technology Empowerment Project" (CTEP), an AmeriCorps program as well as a department of SPNN. This small AmeriCorps program stations 31 AmeriCorps members at non-profits, community centers, and libraries throughout the greater Minneapolis-St. Paul Metro area to teach technology literacy. AmeriCorps is a network of national service programs geared to specific issues, like environmentalism, health care, and

education. AmeriCorps is often referred to as the domestic Peace Corps. It is very significant that SPNN would host CTEP within its organization as its focus is towards digital literacy, at large. CTEP plainly states in its mission that its goals are to "bridge the digital divide" for new immigrants and low-income communities in Minneapolis and St. Paul. This is a dynamic approach to digital education and the role media, and media organizations like PEG, play in it.

CTEP works separately from SPNN but remains a department. CTEP is also funded differently from the other departments. As an AmeriCorps program, CTEP receives grant funding from the Corporation for National and Community Service, AmeriCorps parent company. These federal grants do not spread past CTEP's department. The integration of CTEP into SPNN organization, is a statement of SPNN's commitment to digital literacy.

CTEP positions change regularly, as host sites apply each year to host an AmeriCorps member. Positions can come and go depending on the capacity of the host sites. Currently there are two media-based CTEP positions, one at SPNN in adult education and one at FilmNorth, a filmmaking resource center and fiscal sponsor. Previously—when I was involved with SPNN— there were four positions. Two media positions at PEGs were dissolved after considerable downsizing by sites. CTV North Suburbs and SPNN Youth were forced to downsize their operations after significant loss in funding. CTN North Suburbs ended its Public Access operations. SPNN Youth has shifted "from a focus on creative expression and building video production skills to entrepreneurship and workforce development via Media Active."[33]

The fourth department, SPNN Youth, is a good example of SPNN's dynamic community responsiveness. Aptly named, SPNN Youth is SPNN's youth department, running art-based and workforce readiness programming for teenagers and young adults. Through art and media-

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[33] SPNN Blog, "SPNN Restructures" https://www.spnn.org/node/38649

production SPNN Youth aim to teach youth critical-thinking and community awareness. There are also opportunities to develop practical, hands-on workforce skills. This is the fine line of developing both hard and soft skills to help youth develop personally and professionally while having fun with friends. SPNN Youth has its own space for participants to work, meet, or just hangout. It acts as a "third place," a place away from the structures and dynamics of school or home.

SPNN's Youth department has been one of the more active in terms of content output and partnership. SPNN Youth operates four central programs: Set It Up, the Youth Intern Project (YIP), the Youth Action Committee (YAC), and Createch SPNN. Set It Up is an after-school program and teen-produced television show. YIP is an intensive summer internship where youth participants produce documentary videos on community issues. Done in partnership with Saint Paul's Right Track program, participants receive stipend pay. YAC is a committee of youth leaders or alumni who meet regularly to ensure a youth demographic is involved in the organizing of SPNN. YAC representatives are also present in the boards of directors. Lastly, Createch SPNN is a drop-in lab for youth—whether or not they are SPNN members—to get support from staff or mentors and is part of St. Paul Public Libraries larger Createch initiative. Some youth members participate in one program and leave. Others come back and take on more leadership positions. This creates a mentoring environment where experienced participants teach the new arrivals.

All four departments carry the same program goals of community communication, civic engagement, skills growth, and workforce readiness. They offer opportunities for the public whether they are looking for work experience, production resources, community organizing tools, or an after-school program. It is also worth noting how the departments complement each

other. It is easy to springboard from one department to another for those looking for more

opportunities. It is not uncommon for Youth participants to join adult programming or CTEP, or

to eventually accept a full-time position at SPNN. These sustained opportunities are fostered by

SPNN's participatory approach to its operations as well as infrastructure. Below I explore how

this was confirmed through my environmental scan.

SPNN's Organizational Structure

Like the majority of PEGs in the environmental scan, SPNN is a 501(c)(3) non-profit.

Therefore, SPNN is a tax-exempt charitable organization. They can accept tax-deductible public

donations. This tax status also restricts operations from the benefit of private interests as well as

political and legislative activities. SPNN must operate as independent, showing no bias towards

politics or demographic representation. SPNN's approach to their inclusive status is very

progressive. Their approach to "Public Access" seems to follow serious questions about

equitability.

An inclusive status does not guarantee diversity. If left alone, a PEG—or any other public

service organization—will only bring in demographics who know about the services, have time

to dedicate, and have the money for membership and classes. That does not represent everyone

within any American community. SPNN is active in their attempts to build a membership-base

that is as diverse as the Twin Cities (Minneapolis-St. Paul Metro). Their approach to self-

advertising, membership fees, as well as services is equitable. Fees are on a sliding scale

according to income. Members who fall under the poverty line are able to pay significantly

reduced rates. SPNN also actively partners with other local community groups. This builds

partnerships for resource-sharing, but it also is a strategy of targeted-outreach. If SPNN notices a

lack of representation of a specific demographic, for example Hmong immigrants,[34] then they may choose to work on a project with a local Hmong organization. The Hmong organization benefits from SPNN's services, but SPNN's services are advertised to those who may not be aware of them. PEG access does not exist internationally, so many immigrants may not understand that this kind of resource exists and further, what they can be used for. Being inclusive implies actively responding to locality in all of its forms.

SPNN was the only PEG in the scan which explicitly offered reduced fees for low-income people. Of course, some PEGs offer free-memberships to local residents. It may be argued that fees help to produce better resources. In the case of SPNN, these fees, which go directly to operational costs, allow for important strategies like targeted-outreach. The sliding-scale may also help individuals to feel that becoming a producer is achievable, that they are not excluded by costs.

Funding

Typical of PEG access, SPNN is funded primarily through a franchise agreement between Comcast, Verizon and the City of St. Paul. Franchise fees account for roughly half of its annual funding. Essentially this means in order for a cable company to develop its cable service, by installing its privately-owned fiber-optic cables in public space, it must return some public goods; vis-à-vis public access channels and 5% annual revenue to public organizations to operate said channels. Due to the effects of cord-cutting and looming federal deregulations, franchise fees are becoming less and less reliable. It is necessary for PEGs to be creative in attaining new

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[34] The Hmong people are an ethnic group indigenous to east and southeast Asia. Minnesota is home to a high number of Hmong immigrants.

funding sources. SPNN accepts public donations and regularly applies for public and private

foundation grants. A list of grant providers can be found on spnn.org under "Corporate and

Foundation Partners." I will touch more on these in a later section.

A unique source of funds I observed for SPNN is space rental. SPNN's facilities include

a hall, kitchen, Youth and Adult classrooms, editing suites, and a studio. These facilities are

primarily for programing or member use. However, for a fee, the hall, studio, and adult

classroom may be reserved for public or private events.[35] This can be paired with Community

production services as well, if an organization would like their event to be recorded.

Cable

SPNN broadcasts its three channels on Comcast and CenturyLink in Saint Paul (Ramsey

County). This means to view SPNN's channels, you must be a Comcast or CenturyLink cable

subscriber within the city of Saint Paul. SPNN observes that during the 2016 fiscal year, "[they]

served nearly 4,200 people directly and through our four cable channels provided 55,000

households with locally-focused TV." Comcast is the largest Cable providers and therefore the

largest carrier of PEG channels. Of the 148 PEGs in the scan 64% operate on Comcast.

Comcast is legally obligated to provide 5% of its annual revenue to the city government

or franchise authority according to franchise agreements. In this way cord-cutting is problematic

for PEG. If cable providers' revenue drops, so does the PEG franchise fees. This may illustrate

why some PEG operators are resistant to SMSs and VSSs. They can easily be pointed to as a

serious existential threat to PEG. However, for PEGs that are more consciously mission driven

see SMSs as within their educational purview. In this light, it could be a saving grace for PEG.

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[35]   SPNN, SPNN Space Rental https://www.spnn.org/node/19243

Platforms

      SPNN use relatively few platforms, only a third of the platforms included in the

environmental scan. Of the 36 platforms, SPNN used 12; 9 of which appeared to be active—not

having been updated in over a year. Nevertheless, SPNN's online presence proves to be a

dynamic experiment in digital community media. They show significant effort to integrate SMS

platforms into their programming. Not just an attempt to grow viewership, SPNN's strategy is to

build engagement. Starting from their website and moving outwards to their SMS accounts, I

examine how SPNN caries the principles of community communication online.

      At the core of any organization's online presence is their website. As a primary way for

people to find information on the organization, stay informed, and become engaged. Looking at

SPNN's website (spnn.org), there is a lot of information. It is clearly geared towards getting

visitors involved, whether in-person or remotely. This is in comparison with many other PEG

sites that I have looked at, which focus on viewership. Many PEG sites rebroadcast their

channels via livestream, or simply offer basic information on channels or the station. SPNN does

not stream its channels online. It keeps a schedule updated and readily available. Spnn.org goes

well beyond attempt to grow viewership or SMS following. The website itself is an experiment

in community communications.

      SPNN's most dynamic use of their website is the implementation of member accounts.

The "member portal" is a service as well as a (prospective) social network between members and

staff. Once someone becomes an SPNN member, they are able to login to the website and create

an account and profile. Similar to other SMSs, members can add a profile picture and write a bio.

They are then able to upload their own content, like and comment on other videos, and follow

other members. There is potential here for a completely locally-based and focused social networking site. The potential is there, but that does not mean it is actualized. It is unlikely that a small non-profit like SPNN has the staff-time or data to foster such a network. Some PEGs appear to be thinking through how they can cater to their growing tech-savvy membership base, going so far as to offer alternatives to SMSs. 29 of 148 (16%) PEGs in the environmental scan host "user accounts." This generally means that active members are able to sign in to the organization's website to access different services. This function appears to mostly be a method for digital content submission for cable broadcast.

There are still benefits to the user accounts. After logging in, members can access the reservations portal, through which they can reserve equipment and facilities. Most notably, they can access the "member resources" page. This page offers video and textual information on how to prepare and share their media with SPNN and tutorials on how they can improve their (pre)production skills. This includes all information on SPNN's policies and procedures members would ever need to know and how to digital submit content for cable broadcast (complete with video tutorials for Mac and PC users). This is a wonderful way to engage members whether or not they are at the PEG center itself. As people are becoming more accustomed to working and communicating remotely, user accounts with engagement goals are a dynamic way to engage people in the same or similar ways to in-center operations. It may also be a way to lighten stress on Access staff. Spending less time explaining organizational policies/procedures or scheduling reservations allows them to expand their work capacities into other projects or missions. The tutorials are mostly created by college interns and volunteers. Yet another way to engage individuals with each other while nurturing their skills and interests.

For those interested in following SPNN's news and events, it is not difficult. They make readily apparent their blog and newsletter. Spnn.org is also a portal to the organization's larger online presence. At the very top of the homepage, across from the SPNN logo, are links to their official Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube accounts.

The platforms used are among the most popular. SPNN regularly updates their Facebook and Twitter with upcoming events and new content. Inactive accounts include Flickr, Instagram, and Tumblr accounts. The Flickr account seems to be used as a public archive of SPNN events. The Instagram account was used similarly to Twitter, in its promotion of upcoming opportunities and events, but is limited to photos, one-minute long videos, and small text boxes.

Inactive accounts speak to two things, platform experimentation and changes in work capacity. Tumblr is an interesting example. Only 5 PEGs in the scan had accounts, but only one was updated within the previous year. No survey respondent listed Tumblr. Tumblr is an interesting experiment for PEGs as it allows for sharing text, photos, videos, and links. It is comparable to Facebook in its micro-blogging structure but allows for anonymity in its users.

SPNN regularly updates its website, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. As noted in the previous chapters, these are some of the most popular SMSs. Behind Google, YouTube and Facebook are the second and third most visited websites in the US. Among PEGs they are the most widely used SMSs to disseminate content and news—Twitter comes in at 8th.

Interestingly SPNN has not expanded into Audio Streaming Services (ASSs), live-streaming its channels, or digital TV—like Roku. SPNN has partnered with and shared members with local Low-Power FM (LPFM) radio stations, e.g. KFAI & Frogtown Radio. Given their proximity to other community media institutions, partnerships become a form of resource-

sharing. Partnering of community media organizations allows for specialization and allows for more capacity towards programming.

Partnerships

SPNN regularly partners with other community groups. They list 11 corporate and foundation partnerships on their website, including Comcast and the City of Saint Paul. This list is not exhaustive. There many more organizations and groups SPNN has built ties with. In response to the survey, SPNN indicated HECUA, City of St. Paul, St. Paul Public Libraries, as well as "a host of nonprofits and cultural organizations." These include other community media organizations like: Frogtown Radio, KFAI, and Twin Cities Daily Planet. These partnerships, as opposed to corporate and foundation partners which participate through grants, range from cross-promotion to shared programming. One such example, and one that furthers SPNN's own mission, is HECUA.

The Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs (HECUA) provides off-campus programming for University students geared towards social justice and community development through activism, environmentalism, art, and media. Courses normally meet twice a week for a university semester and is followed by (or concurrent with courses) a semester-long internship at a relevant organization. Their media-based program *Making Media Making Change* (MMMC) is based at SPNN. One class a week is held at SPNN, the other class period is held throughout the Twin Cities metro visiting other media organizations. Students are able to then intern with SPNN in Access, Youth, Community Productions, Administration, or with another media organization. Students are given the options, along with the continued support by HECUA and SPNN staff. Even after the MMMC course and internships are completed, students still retain their SPNN

memberships (the course tuition covers one year of membership starting at the beginning of the program), promoting continued engagement with the PEG. Many MMMC students do stay with SPNN, extending internships or joining other SPNN programs or CTEP after University graduation.

Like the integration of CTEP into the organization, the partnership with HECUA illustrates SPNN commitment to its mission through, not only its own programming, but through the promotion and aid to others attempting to do the same. Active partnerships, coupled with the operation of a community center, allow PEG to build an awareness of the community and its needs.

A place for the placeless

One role PEG has played over the decades that has not changed is as a gathering space. Ali "argues that there is a disconnect between community television policy and practice that obfuscates the importance of place, bodies, and practice" (Ali, 2014, pp. 72). Community television not only gives "voice to the voiceless," but also a "place to the placeless." In his (2017) book *Media Localism*, he expands on how a relationship to place is a practice of localism. "Our relationship to place does not exist *a priori* to our relationships with one another" (Ali, 2017, pp. 39). It is not sufficient to define the local by geographic area as local communities are also "embedded within transnational flows of capital, people, images, and ideologies" (Ali, 2017, pp. 39). In this light, PEG as community centers can be understood as the practice of community-development. SPNN, as a community media center, operates to address the social and class divisions within the Saint Paul community.

For over thirty years SPNN has been a physical institution in Saint Paul. Formally based in downtown Saint Paul, SPNN moved to a neighborhood more central to the Twin Cities.[36] The "creative enterprise zone"[37] is an arts district of St. Paul, central to the Twin Cities, which houses a large number of non-profits and creative industries. This new home is more accessible for those in Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Proximity to other creative and community-based organizations, foster prospective partnerships.

In public statements, SPNN describes themselves as a "Community Media Center." Understood simply as a community center with a media focus, this status implies a commitment to accessibility and discoverability. SMSs may prove to be the dominant platforms, but they cannot fill the need for physical gathering spaces.

The center offers members of the community a place to meet other like-minded, or disparately-minded, people. For youth SPNN is a "third space," a place separate from the dynamics and constrictions of school or home. The implementation of a third space is a pedagogical approach relative to power, positionality, and subjectivity of all involved (Potter & McDougall, 2017). This is a significant practice for Youth work as it provides them space and control to learn and develop while also having fun with friends.

As a community center, SPNN makes its services more informal and social. They are well-poised to respond to the community's needs because they are constantly interacting with them. Staff regularly meet to discuss recent center events and what workshops or events would be best suited to respond. While introductory classes for adults are held monthly, specialized workshops can change from month to month by demand. SPNN Youth programs are designed to

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[36]   SPNN Blog, *Creating Place—SPNN's New Home* https://www.spnn.org/blogs/201602/creating-place-spnn-s-new-home
[37]   The Creative Enterprise Zone, *About* https://creativeenterprisezone.org/our-story

be open enough for the content to be directed by youth participants. The SPNN Youth space is also open regularly outside program hours for Youth to continue work or just to hang out with friends.

As I concluded in Chapter Two, the notion that SMSs have made PEG obsolete is similar to the notion that cable providers provide the same services as PEG. These notions are measured by revenue or audience size will always favor large corporate entities. This is an inherently unfair metric. PEGs are often non-profit organizations with little resources for professionally-generated-content (PGC), self-promotion, or data-gathering necessary to grow revenue. They were established to counter corporate cable's invasion of public spaces with private property with a public service. In that light, I believe that PEG can play a similar role with SMS. PEG's approach to localism could counteract SMS's failures to the local. While SMSs do have the capacity to build communities across the globe, they have also proven detrimental to local media (Ali, 2017; Hindman, 2018). PEG Centers provide physical spaces for community members to gather and grow digital efficacy. Just as PEG previously provided the public with access to open cable channels, which otherwise would be closed for private commercial use, now PEG provides a space for the placeless.

Recent Restructure

In closing, it is important to note some significant changes undertaken by SPNN at the time of writing. On February 14th, 2019, SPNN announced they will restructure the organization. In a blog post and newsletter by Executive Director, Martin Ludden, sites a significant loss in franchise fee returns.[38] While a reduction was expected, it was more than $3x$ the estimate. This

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[38]   SPNN Blog, *SPNN Restructures* https://www.spnn.org/node/38649

placed SPNN in an awkward position. Many other PEGs in the area—i.e. CTV in Roseville, SWC-TV in Cottage Grove, and SCC in Maplewood—who faced the same dilemma, were forced to eliminate their public access operations. SPNN did not want to cut services they see as central to their mission and opted for other cuts. Ludden wrote that public access is at the "heart of what we do and the service [they] provide."[39] Therefore, the restructuring is a response to the desire to keep public access operating, despite large reduction in funds. This preference to retain operations resulted in some staff layoffs and some cuts to educational programming. Fortunately, SPNN's active partnering with other community groups will pick up some of this new-found slack.

While SPNN is forced to reduce its staff and reorganize programming, it is compensating loses by sharing resources with partner organizations. The Youth department suffered the largest cuts and will now fall under a singular "programs team." This includes all educational programming, youth and adult.[40] Youth programming will be taken up by a relatively new community partner, Media Active.[41] Media Active is a media arts organization that develops workforce readiness skills in youth. SPNN is Media Active's fiscal sponsor and was slated to host them on-site well before the budget cuts. A Media Active program manager will be posted at SPNN to help run the updated Youth Programs. This will lead to a very different appearing program. Programs will change and a new youth population will enter. SPNN Youth will take on Media Active's focus of entrepreneurship and workforce development in media.[42] Set It Up and

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[39] SPNN Blog, *SPNN Restructures* https://www.spnn.org/node/38649
[40] Email Correspondence with SPNN Executive Director, Martin Ludden.
[41] Media Active Blog, *Media Active @SPNN* https://mediaactiveblog.wordpress.com/2018/01/13/media-activespnn/
[42] SPNN Blog, *SPNN Restructures* https://www.spnn.org/node/38649

the Youth Intern Project (YIP) will not continue in name, but some curricula may carry over.[43] SPNN still plans to maintain the Youth Action Committee, as well as the Youth Board positions.

At a time when franchise agreements may not provide PEG any guaranteed financial security, SPNN's restructure may prove significant indicator for the survival of PEG. Despite some structural changes, the four "core areas" of SPNN will still operate. Far from a simple reorganization, SPNN chose to put their services and programming first. I do not mean to diminish the consequences of staff layoffs; however, this does provide a model of sustained "access" programming despite dwindling funds.

Conclusion

SPNN serves the St. Paul Community. They identify and engage with the community through its core public service of access media as well as partnering with other community groups. As noted above, there are large demographics of any community that may not be aware of PEG services; or if they are aware of the services, unaware of how they may engage with said services. Community partnerships expand public awareness, which allows SPNN to respond to the various sub-communities—virtual or otherwise—within St. Paul.

SPNN's community partnerships allow them to be hyper-aware of the community needs and greater capacity to address them. The core programming of PEG teaches the public video production. Through SPNN's lens of community development, video production can be understood as a tool for community advocacy. After accessing production tools, community members are encouraged to make decisions on the production and distribution. PEG members

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[43]   Email correspondence with SPNN Executive Director, Martin Ludden

are encouraged to focus on identifying issues and how to respond to them, as opposed to a technical approach. This is PEGs fundamental practice of community media as I define it, the process of democratizing media systems with the aim of community-building. Through SPNN's partnerships, e.g. CTEP and HECUA, are able to build strong connections with other community groups who serve underrepresented demographics. These connections allow SPNN to provide more inclusive services to address wider populations of the St. Paul Community.

SPNN offers a wide assortment of courses and workshops for members, whether they are novices or budding-professionals. These programs are well integrated and allow members to find continued support as well as challenges. Part of this support is the tangibility of a physical place for members and the public alike to gather. Like most 501(c)(3) non-profits, board meetings are open to the public. The public as well can be nominated to the board of directors. Uniquely, however, SPNN created a position for a Youth representative to include the youth perspective in its legislation. As an organization, SPNN is far from a black box. It is open and transparent which creates more opportunities for participation and self-management. And this is reflected in the content produced.

Traditionally, PEG offers members the opportunity to contribute to the cable channels. As SPNN extends to SMS and VSS platforms, there are more options for member contribution. Spnn.org is an experiment in building a social network online that is apart from SMS firms. SPNN shows considerable experimentation in SMS applications. The platforms the PEG uses most actively are those that are most popular in the country. This can be most easily understood as "meeting the public where they are." A wonderful way to be reactive to public needs.

SPNN's commitment to civic engagement and public involvement has proven resilient. At every level of the organization we can observe mission-driven operations. Going further,

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SPNN continues to expand its operations in order to better respond to the media and technological needs of the community. While SMS appear on the surface to have democratized the American mediascape, hidden gatekeepers recreate and amplify previously-existing hierarchies. As a legacy participatory media institution, SPNN is well-positioned to counteract these gatekeepers through media-literacy and civic engagement. As a non-profit, services will never be shaped by their bottom line. As a community center, the public may gather together creating a stronger sense of localism. The expanded focus on public access "media" grants this physical community the ability to not just glaze over the existing communities of interests (often curated in online spaces) found within this local community.

Chapter Five – Conclusion

PEG is a long-term project of community media which has proven to be adept for new forms of media and engagement. It is also a good model for emerging community media projects. However, the field is at a critical juncture. Core funding is under threat by the federal government and public knowledge is bleak. The FCC's decision on the FNPRM is forthcoming, and PEGs are braced for serious changes.

SMS platforms have normalized participatory media in mainstream culture and therefore shifted the public conversation away from existing community institutions and projects. SMS firms exert an image and rhetoric familiar of community media in order to promote themselves as democratizing forces. But this image is ultimately undermined by a habit of putting revenue before service to users (Burgess & Green, 2009; Dijck, 2013; Gillespie, 2010; Hindman, 2018; Lewis, 2018; Madden, 2017; Pariser, 2011; Taylor, 2014). The employment of "community" obscures the real, exploitative practices. The "open internet" reflects and amplifies existing power structures. It is necessary to disavow private firms as the proprietors of our public communication systems. Data privacy and regulation of SMSs—and big tech in general—have entered the public conversation. For example, 2020 presidential hopeful, Elizabeth Warren, is running on a platform which in part calls to break up tech companies.[44] Facebook has responded to criticism by announcing a new mission of data privacy and user control (Zuckerberg, 2019). This, however, is the firm setting the terms for the regulation of its platform. It is not my intention to make any recommendations for SMS regulation.

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[44] Elizabeth Warren Campaign Site, *Issues* https://elizabethwarren.com/issues/#latest-announcements

I want to push back from the framing of the problem of SMS to be that of competition. There are past and present experiments in community and participatory media that we may look to for models of how we may nurture a more equitable media environment, one that works across a network of stakeholders. PEG is one of those models. PEGs are a form of legacy community media institution. Founded as a democratic experiment in community communication, my thesis explored whether this experiment is suited to extend beyond cable television and into online space. It was my observation that many PEGs are already experimenting in multimedia operations. Given their community focus and mission driven programming, this transition proves rather natural. With a simple pivot in definition to a media education-focus, PEG stands to be an equitable and truly democratizing force for the American mediascape.

My thesis sought to paint a picture of the current state of PEG access in the U.S. The rise in SMSs, VSSs, and ASSs after the turn of the 21st century brought a tidal wave of user-generated-content (UGC) into the mainstream media. SMS platforms are more proficient at building participation in quantitative terms than PEG could ever be. However, the presence of opportunity is not necessarily followed by equitability. Large SMS firms, like YouTube or Facebook, cloak their exploitative practices in the rhetoric of community and engagement while absolving themselves of accountability to their undefined communities. It is possible that SMSs are suitable tools for media-democratization. However, SMS firms are primarily concerned with the growth of their bottom lines. With no accountability to their users, the U.S. public, SMSs are not likely to make decisions based on user wants or needs—unless, of course, it directly effects their bottom line.[45] My concern is how the principles of community media can be implemented

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[45]   After a series of controversies over the use of user-data, Zuckerberg announced Facebook would implement privacy initiatives and is open to regulation. https://www.facebook.com/notes/mark-zuckerberg/a-privacy-focused-vision-for-social-networking/10156700570096634/

across media in order to create a more equitable mediascape. My experience with Public access television led me to wonder whether PEG centers can have a sustained impact on community-focused, democratically-led media.

Environmental Scan

The field of PEG access is a vast and disparate. The past several years has challenged PEG's relevance. Many have stopped public access operations, or disappeared altogether, as a result of declining funds.[46] Many in the field see SMSs as a direct cause, driving cable subscribers away. While the decline of revenue does pose a serious existential threat to PEG, there is a growing trend in PEG towards multimedia and community center operations. This approach is rooted in community development issues. Some PEGS—like SPNN—identify themselves as centers of media-education, not limited to cable broadcasting. This is an important distinction. SMSs produce dramatically more content than PEG, but content output may be considered a side effect of community media, rather than a goal. Besides access to mass media tools, PEG also provides educational services for the local communities while addressing the embedded "transnational flows of capital, people, images, and ideologies" (Ali, 2017, pp. 39). PEG has never stood to be a replacement to mainstream media. PEG was founded to organize the public alongside corporate cable; to provide the opportunity for the public to participate in mass communication. In the same way, PEG organizes the public alongside SMS firms.

To account for this trend I witnessed first-hand, it was necessary to conduct an extensive environmental scan. Only after there was a sample of data could I begin to identify trends, which

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[46]   SPNN Blog, *SPNN Restructures* https://www.spnn.org/node/38649

are otherwise ignored. Identifying trends through a scan allows us to understand the effects of the everchanging mediascape. My thesis is concerned with how PEG is reacting to the growth of participatory media online. The environmental scan collected data on organizational, programming, and platform data on 148 PEGs.

The scan found examples of experiments undertaken by PEGs to include multimedia platforms. Mission statements showed to be open to the inclusion of new platforms as well as old. I purposefully included PEGs that still operated Public and/or Educational channels, since I was primarily interested in multimedia operations. These operations were surprisingly diverse. Every PEG showed some sign of online presence, with an average of nine platforms used, including the organization's website. This is a number much higher than I expected. While it doesn't account for the various uses for any one platform, it does show signs of experimentation in moving to multimedia operations. At least, this means an attempt to reach a broader viewer audience. Building viewership online nevertheless builds an awareness the community issues as well as PEG resources among non-cable subscribers. At most, it means PEGs are developing multimedia educative programs. Either way, PEGs use of SMS shows the growth of contemporary community media.

SMS firms enlists much of the same rhetoric of community media for their platforms. This naturally raises the question of whether PEG as a community media project is obsolete. Has SMS democratized the American mediascape, fulfilling the mission of community communications of yore? After countless controversies over SMS firms' exploitation of its users' personal data, we can infer the answer is *no*. What might be a solution to this amplification of inequality? PEG is not a solution to SMSs exploitation, but it is a model for regulatory options. PEG was founded as an accountability measure to the expansion of cable television operations.

Cable was suited to be useful to public use, but cable providers were resistant viewing it as a threat to revenue. This is easily comparable to SMS firms of today. They want to be free of any regulations. So, the presentation of their platforms as public goods is necessary to fend of public accountability.

PEG has proven its capacity as radical democratic media project on cable. PEGs' experimentations in multimedia suggest that it may be suited to be a radical democratic project for SMSs as well. It has long organized a mass media platform for communities with those communities. It has done so with cable providers big and small—though mostly big. 64% of PEGs in the scan operate channels on Comcast. Now PEG is continuing these goals online. 97% run Facebook accounts, and 85% run YouTube accounts. PEG, on a much broader scale, could certainly continue their public service of community building and media education through these platforms as well as cable.

A model PEG

Saint Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN) is a prime case of PEG's pivot to mission-driven multimedia community center. An older PEG, SPNN shows consistent development for over three decades. SPNN is, and has been, responsive to its community's communicative needs and is conscious of how this implies digital technology. Their status as "PEG" is only a fraction of their overall mission of media and technology education for community development. SPNN has proven to be committed to public participation and civic engagement at every level of its operations.

PEGs are not perfectly open institutions. Common barriers include membership fees and location. No matter the value, membership fees can exclude those without adequate financial

stability. Location can also exacerbate prices as well. If the center is too far away, travel expenses and inconvenience can be discouraging. To compensate, many PEGs offer varying rates for youth, seniors, organizations, families, and college interns. SPNN was the only PEG center who explicitly listed membership fees for low-income individuals. While standard fees are generally affordable, it can still be restrictive to portions of any community. With no fees, SMSs set a very low bar for entry. However, this assumes that a user has access to a computer or a sufficiently high-speed internet connection. To operate as a community center, convenient location is necessary. SPNN has always been located near major public transit routes. The 2016 move into the Creative Enterprise Zone district, placed SPNN more centrally within the Twin Cities again near public transit. Barriers to PEG like fees and location, cannot be completely erased. While SMSs don't have fees or locations, they do have their own barriers. These barriers are just a lot less tangible.

On paper, SPNN is very similar to most PEGS, a 501(c)(3) non-profit governed by a board of directors. However, SPNN's perspective of its operations is unique in how it actively engages all stakeholders. The Youth leadership positions within the board of directors is an example of this. SPNN youth members are then able to participate in the governing process which effect them. Despite the recent overhaul of the SPNN Youth department, the Youth Action Committee is the only program seated to continue. The youth programs will change due to budget cuts but youth involvement within the organization will persist.

SPNN's experimentations with SMS platforms simply follow the same strategy of inclusion and responsiveness. They did not engage with the most platforms but showed the most measured experimentation. The development of a social network integrated into the official SPNN website was the most dynamic

A new perspective

SMSs paint themselves as public services by offering free services. This is reinforced as more and more people and business join the services and center them in the public discourse. However, the services are not totally free. Users pay with their personal data, which is then sold by SMS firms to advertisers. More and more Americans are becoming aware of this veiled transaction, though this knowledge is starkly divided along lines of race and class (Madden, 2017). A 2017 Data & Society report by Mary Madden found that Americans with lower levels of income and education are only acutely aware of privacy-related threats. These concerns are accompanied by a general mistrust of institutions and companies to be stewards of their data and those who feel the most vulnerable find it difficult to find the tools and strategies to protect themselves. This inequality is a result of current SMS practices. SMS platforms do not offer any sufficient education or resources for these populations. We cannot expect them to produce more equitable practices on their own, especially if they are allowed to set the terms for their own regulation. PEGs are already finding their place as institutions who offer these tools and strategies for underserved populations.

It is detrimental for SMS platforms to continue to masquerade as public services when privacy initiatives come into effect only after it proves profitable. I follow Christopher Ali's recommendations for a "social democratic perspective" of media policy (Ali, 2017). This perspective "is a move away from the myopic neoliberal or 'corporate libertarian' model of media governance and a move toward a system that recognizes multiple stakeholders, including the federal government." It does so in how it "assesses the value of a media system by how it benefits society as a whole, rather than the criteria of individual freedoms, private property

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rights, and profit for a relative few" (Ali, 2017, pp. 189). A social democratic perspective can help us to understand how PEG can coexist alongside SMSs in a larger network of stakeholders that make up the American mediascape. And in an era of declining franchise fees justify new funding for PEG.

Reflection

I would like to end my thesis with a brief reflection. My research spawned from my own observations of PEG operations which could not be corroborated with data. These trends have an impact on the future of community media, whether or not PEG operations continue. More progressive PEGs are already undertaking SMS platforms within their domain, in part for survival, but also as an expansion of their existing missions. In doing so, they are questioning the role media plays in our daily lives and the ways it can be used. This matters for the development of a healthy, diverse media environment and the dissipation of corporate oligopolies.

This thesis made significant distance from the original project proposal. I proposed to analyze multiple different kinds of participatory media organizations to define criteria for online community media. This proved difficult as these organizations varied in structure, operations, platforms, size, and mission. I fell back on PEG as it was the inciting institution and due to the high level of experimentation of new media. PEG thus provided a beneficial case for the development of community media practices. It has a rich history that is too often glazed over. By returning to the early criteria defined by Frances J. Berrigan, I outlined how PEG succeeded as a community media project and how it is positioned to continue as a multimedia project. It is in this transition, from community *television* to community *media*, that we may confront claims by SMS firms of their platform's community services.

The FCC's definition of PEG access is insufficient to the work carried out in centers across the U.S. Public knowledge doesn't fare much better. Individual PEG organizations are forced to adjust operations or find alternate funding sources as government funds deplete. In Twin Cities Metro area alone, the last few years have seen the elimination of public access operations at three PEG centers. A new definition of PEG, through the social democratic perspective, is necessary for the continuation for publicly accountable media institutions. A healthy media environment demands more than a competitive market. We need a broad network of stakeholders, including non-profits, government entities, as well as businesses.

At the time of writing there is still no decision on the FNRPM concerning franchise agreements. While the FCC heavily promotes its 5G implantation initiative,[47] they have made more moves to deregulate broadcast media. The 2018 Quadrennial Regulatory Review proposes to relax, or eliminate the local radio ownership rule, local television rule, and the dual network rule.[48] In a comment for the Free Press, Dana Floberg describes these rules as "the last remaining shreds of the Commission's broadcast ownership limitations" (Floberg, 2019). Any relaxation or elimination would allow for harmful media consolidation at the detriment of the public. There is still a period for advocates and the concerned public to comment on these proposals. Alongside the argument of the detriment of media consolidation, an argument for the public services supported by these regulations. Into the future these arguments must be translated into hard definitions and potentially an update to the 1996 Telecommunications Act. The future of American media is up in the air. It is vital to understand the history of community media to help shape the future of our communication system.

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[47] Federal Communication Commission, *The FCC's 5G FAST Plan* https://www.fcc.gov/5G
[48] Federal Communication Commission, *2018 Quadrennial Regulatory Review*: Docket 18-349
https://www.fcc.gov/ecfs/search/filings?proceedings_name=18-349&sort=date_disseminated,DESC

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