Local News & Information: Historic West End

2025

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Historic West End

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The UNC Charlotte Urban Institute is our region's applied research and community outreach center. We seek solutions to the complex social, economic, and environmental challenges facing our communities. We engage expertise across a diverse set of disciplines and life experiences to curate data and conduct actionable research and policy analysis that helps equip changemakers with the power of data and research to solve our communities' greatest challenges.

Special Thanks:
Historic West End residents and business owners that participated in the study

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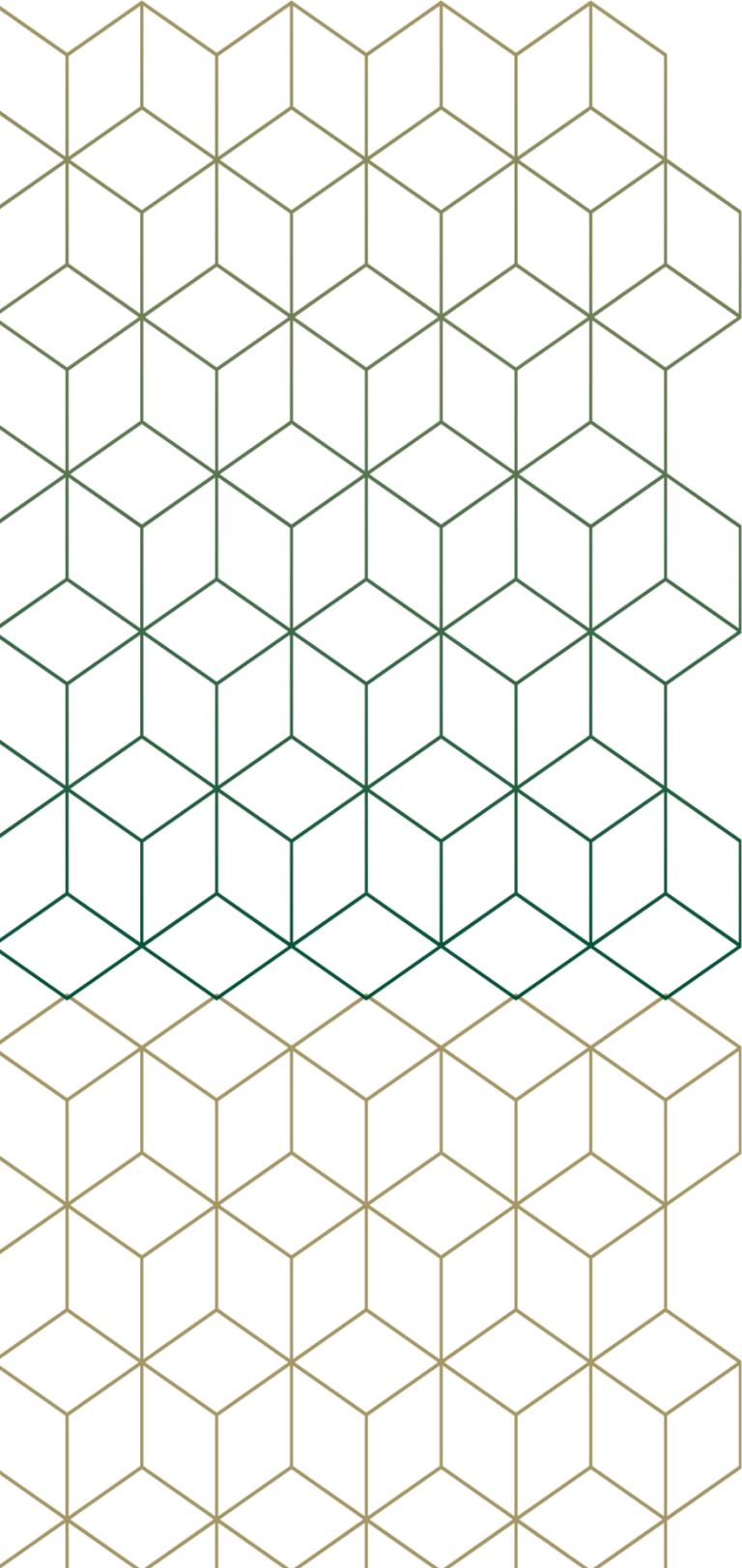
Introduction

News and information providers that focus on defined geographic areas are vital in the dissemination of public information and priorities within communities[1] *and* play a key role in fostering community cohesion and engagement.[2] According to Impact Architects, "communities require accurate, fact based, equitably produced, and accessible local news and information in order to thrive, both at the individual and collective levels."[3]

The preferred news sources of individuals may vary based on their geographic location.[4] The "network of institutions, collaborations and people that local communities rely on for news, information, and engagement" is referred to as a news ecosystem.[5] This ecosystem is not just made up of news outlets, they consist of institutions such as universities, government agencies and libraries; infrastructure such as access to broadband, and training; and networks which could be informal information networks, people, and platforms.[6] Interconnectedness, sustainability, variety, and deep engagement are key characteristics of a healthy local news and information ecosystem.[7]

1. Stroud, N.J. & Van Duyn, E. (2023). Curbing the decline of local news by building relationships with the audience. Journal of Communication, Vol 73, 5, 452–462. https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqad018

2. Park et al. (2023). News Closures, Trust, and Community Attachment among Regional News Audiences: A Case Study of Australia, Journalism Practice. DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2023.2255855; Impact Architects. (n.d.). Knight Communities: Healthy News & Information Ecosystems 2023. https://knightfoundation.org

3. Impact Architects. (2024). News and Information Ecosystem Playbook. https://www.theimpactarchitects.com/ecosystems

4. Pew Research Center. (2012). How people get local news and information in different communities. https://www.pewresearch.org

5. Morgan, F. (n.d.) A Guide to Assessing Your Local News Ecosystem. Ecosystems.democracyfund.org

6. Ibid

7. Ibid

Study Overview

The Knight Foundation partnered with the Charlotte Urban Institute (Institute), an applied research center, to better understand the local news and information landscape in the Historic West End/Beatties Ford Road Corridor. As it pertains to this study, **local news and information are defined** as information about events, issues and topics in the Historic West End/Beatties Ford Road Corridor that involve more than just friends or family.

The Charlotte Urban Institute conducted a mixed methods research study, where quantitative (e.g. survey data) and qualitative data (e.g. interview data) were collected and analyzed. The questions guiding this research study included:

1. What type of local news and information are important to residents and businesses? Are their information needs being met?
2. How do residents and businesses describe their sources for local news and information?
3. What are the facilitators for local news and information engagement?
4. What are recommendations for improving the local news and information ecosystem to better meet the needs of Historic West End residents and businesses?

Methods

In order to answer the research questions and better understand local news and information in the Historic West End/Beatties Ford Road Corridor, the research team conducted the following research activities:

Surveys

To understand the lived experiences of those who live or own a business in the Historic West End/Beatties Ford Rd. Corridor, the research team developed a survey that asked participants to respond to a range of questions regarding their experiences related to local news and information. One-hundred and fifty individuals were included in our survey sample.

Interviews

In addition to surveys, the research team conducted individual stakeholder interviews with residents and business owners (n=8). These individuals participated in the survey and opted in to this component of the study. One focus group interview was also conducted with participants that did not complete a survey (n=4). The research team interviewed a total of 12 individuals. These interviews provided greater context about residents and business owners' local news and information engagement and experiences in the Historic West End/Beatties Ford Corridor. Individual interviews were completed virtually through Zoom communication and the focus group was conducted in person.

Local News & Information Ecosystem Mapping

Local news and information sources identified by survey participants were mapped to describe the local news and information ecosystem in the Historic West End. The surveys were used to provide a snapshot of local news and information sources used by residents and business owners.

Community Advisory Group

A community advisory group made up of Historic West End residents and community leaders informed the research questions, data collection tools, and other components of the study.

Length of Residence (n=122)
- 0-5 years 46%
- 6-10 years 23%
- 11-20 years 12%
- Over 20 years 19%

Race (n=133)
- African American/Black 69%
- White 23%
- Other race 5%
- Prefer not to answer 5%

Gender (n=133)
- Male 43%
- Female 53%
- Prefer not to answer 5%

Age (n=129)
- 18-34, 21%
- 35-44 28%
- 45-54 15%
- 55-61 11%
- 62 or older 26%

Figure 1: Demographic Characteristics of Survey Participants

8. Survey participants were able to select all races they identify with therefore the total percentage may be over 100%

9. American Community Survey, 2023

Participants

The survey included demographic questions to better understand the study sample. Of the residents and business owners that participated in the survey, the majority identified as Black or African American (69%), which is slightly higher than the proportion of people that reside in the West End (64%, ACS 2023). Twenty-three percent of respondents identified as White and 5% of respondents identified with other races.[8] A little over half of respondents were female and over half were 45 and older. Almost a third of survey respondents (31%) have lived in the Historic West End for longer than 10 years and a third (35%, n=127) have households with children.

The majority of respondents identified as residents of the Historic West End (92%, n=134), and 21% (n=133) of respondents stated they own a business located in the Historic West End/Beatties Ford Corridor. Respondents represented 26 neighborhoods in the Historic West End, with the greatest representation from Biddlesville-Smallwood (26%, n=119) and Lincoln Heights (11%) neighborhoods. Eleven percent of respondents identified "other" if they did not see their neighborhood listed or could not specify their neighborhood.

Almost half of respondents (47%, n=133) had a bachelor's degree or a more advanced degree, 22% had some college, 12% had a high school degree, and 8% had some high school. A little more than half (54%) of respondents reported their household income was less than the median household income in Charlotte ($78,438 in 2023).[9]
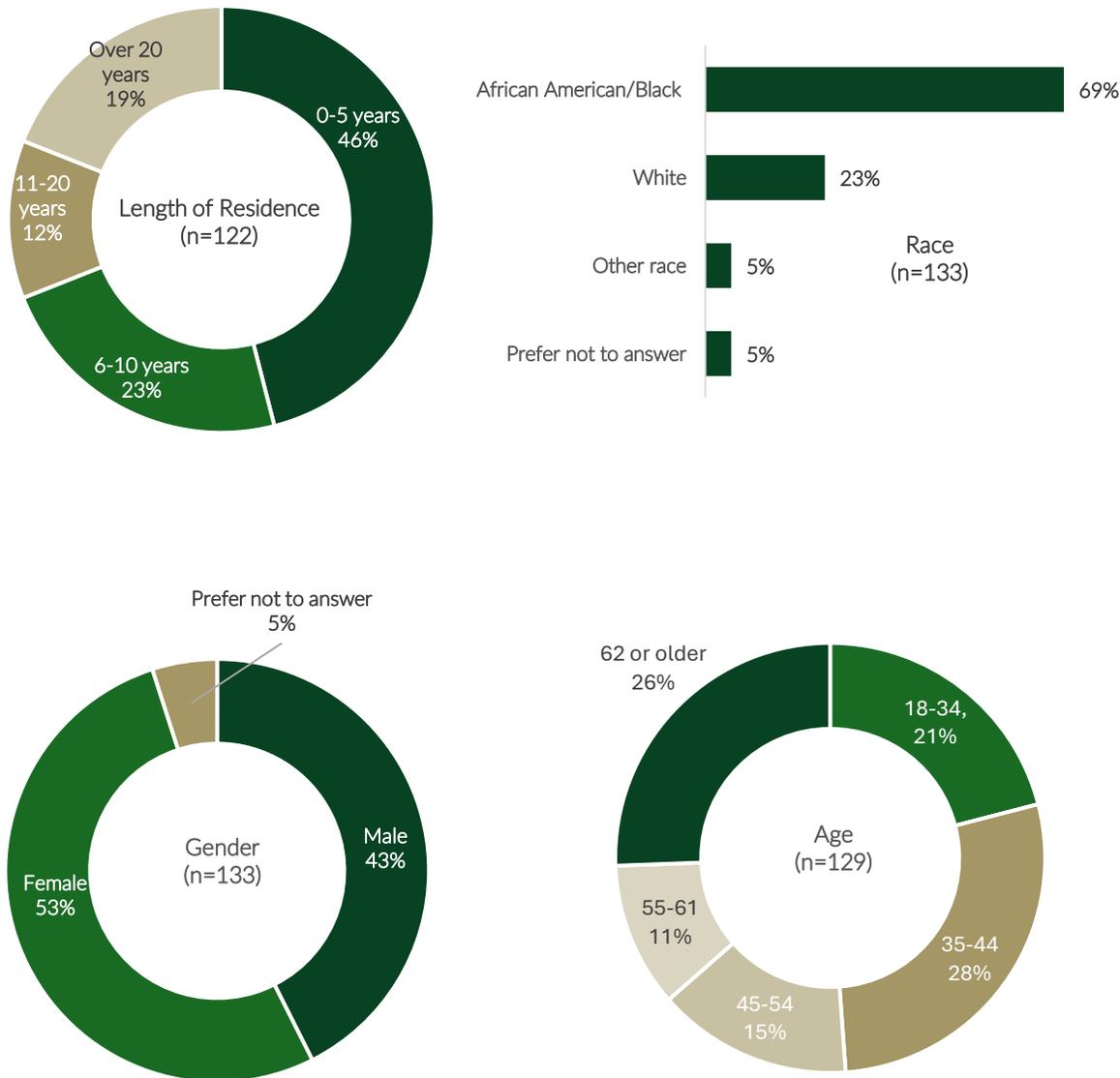
Local News & Information Needs

Study participants were asked about news and information that were important to them. Figure 2 displays survey participants' response to the question, "how important is it for you and your household to know about" various news and information topics. Participants had the ability to choose either "important", "interesting, but not important" or "neither important nor interesting".

Figure 2 displays the **top ten** topics identified as important by survey participants. The types of news and information identified as important will be discussed in more detail in this section of the report.

80%	15%	5%	Local crime (n=149)
78%	19%	3%	New businesses, development, or activities (n=147)
78%	22%		Local breaking news (n=147)
73%	19%	8%	Local schools and education (n=144)
72%	25%	3%	Community or neighborhood events (n=150)
72%	21%	7%	Local taxes and tax issues (n=143)
71%	24%	5%	Local zoning, building and development (n=145)
70%	27%	3%	Local housing & real estate (n=146)
68%	22%	10%	Local politics, campaigns and elections (n=146)
66%	26%	8%	Other local government activity (n=145)

■ Important ■ Interesting, but not important ■ Neither important nor interesting
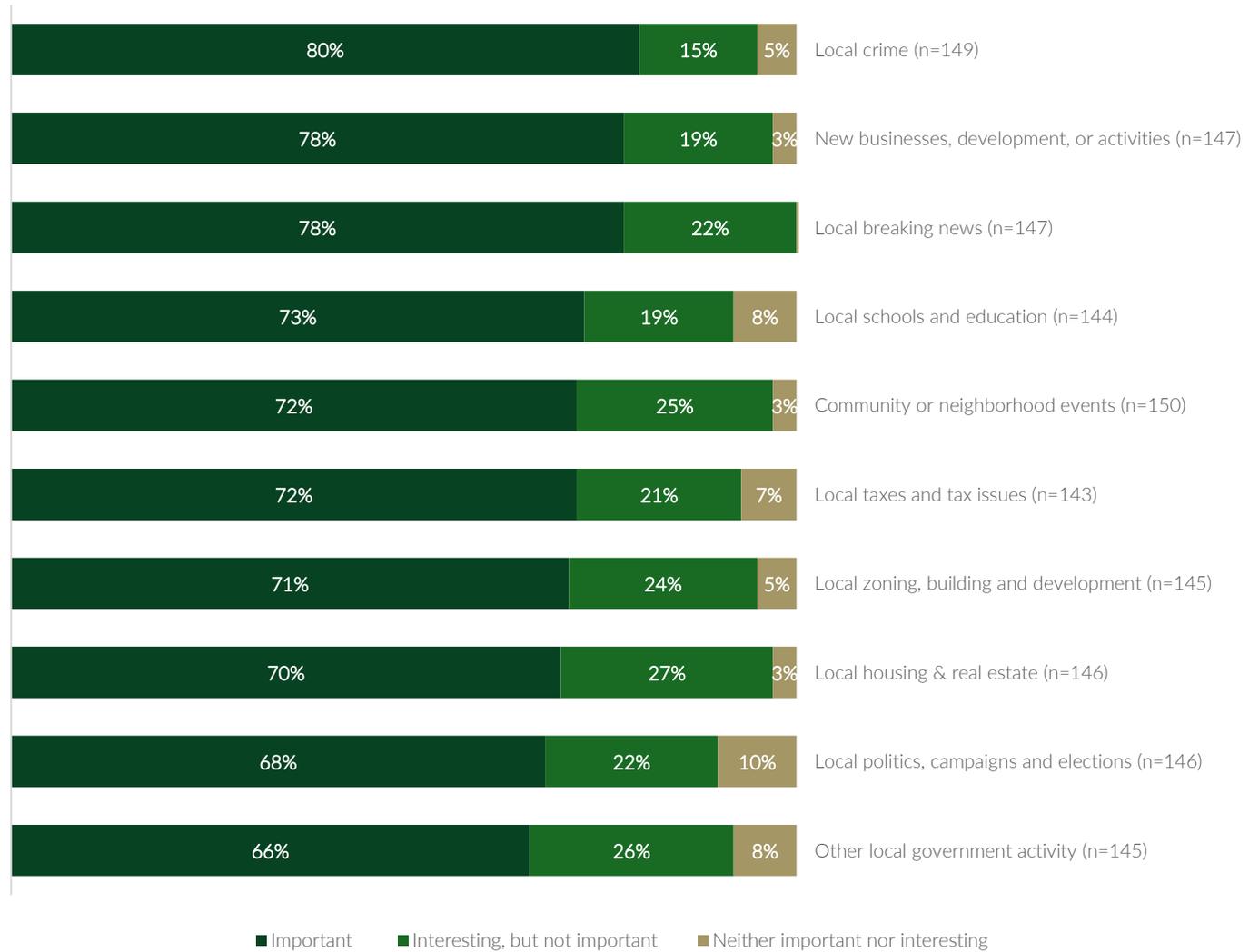
Figure 2: Top Ten Local News & Information Important to Households

A community's critical information needs are the "information necessary for community members to live safe and healthy lives; have full access to educational, employment and business opportunities; and to fully participate in the civic and democratic lives of their communities."[10] These needs can be divided into eight categories:

- *Emergencies and public safety*
- *Economic development*
- *Education*
- *Civic information*
- *Political life*
- *Environment and planning*
- *Health and welfare*
- *Transportation[11]*

The types of news and information important to Historic West End residents and business owners align with the categories of critical information needs mentioned above. The prominent categories that emerged from the study are further discussed below.

Emergencies & Public Safety

Eighty percent of survey respondents shared that it was important for them and their household to know about local crime (Figure 2). A higher proportion of respondents that have resided in the community for over 20 years (n=23, 91%) identified local crime as important to know about.[12]

Also, 78% felt that local breaking news (i.e. interrupting news about natural disasters, major accidents, other immediate reporting) was important to know about. A higher proportion of respondents that have resided in the community for over 20 years (n=23, 96%) as well as older respondents ages 55 to 61 (n=13, 92%) and 62 and older (n=33, 88%) identified local breaking news as important. Interview participants shared that crime and emergencies were important to follow to know what's going on around them.

Economic Development

The majority of residents and business owners shared it was important for them and their household to know about new businesses, development or activities (78%) as well as other local businesses (62%). A higher proportion of business owners identified new businesses, development or activities (n=26, 100%) and other local businesses (n=26, 81%) as important to know about.

Local housing and real estate were identified by most respondents (70%) as important for their household to know about. A higher proportion of older respondents ages 62 and older (n=31, 84%), business owners (n=26, 85%) and those that have resided in the community for longer than 20 years (n=22, 86%) identified this as important.

Interview participants shared that information related to new businesses, business development, and opportunities related to business ownership were important. Given a changing and bustling landscape, information about businesses that are opening in the area and how they would support neighborhoods were mentioned as important. One interview respondent described residents and business development as going "hand-in-hand", one cannot really thrive without the other.

> " Well, Beatties Ford Road is a bustling place. We have new people that have moved in that are businesses, and it would be nice to hear what the businesses are doing.
> -Interview participant "

10. Morgan, F. (n.d.) A Guide to Assessing Your Local News Ecosystem. Ecosystems.democracyfund.org; Hazeldine, C., et al. (n.d.) Local News for Whom? A News Media Census of North Carolina. https://www.cislm.org/research/nc-news-information-census/

11. Ibid

12. Descriptive crosstab analysis excludes household income and degree attainment due to the small sample sizes of the demographic subcategories. Differences of 10% or higher were mentioned.

Photo: Nancy Pierce

Education

Almost three-quarters (73%) of survey respondents identified information about local schools and education as important information to know about. A higher proportion of female respondents (n=67, 84%), households with children (n=41, 90%), younger respondents 25 to 34 years old (n=24, 92%) and those that have resided in the community for over 20 years (n=23, 87%) identified local schools and education as important to know about.

Interview participants expressed ensuring that children in the community have access to quality education was important.

> " I'm not a parent yet, but I still have a strong penchant for children and making sure that they are growing up healthy and well-educated.
> -Interview participant "

Civic Information

Almost three-quarters of survey respondents identified each of the following civic-related information as important to them and their household: information about community or neighborhood events (72%), local taxes and tax issues (72%) and local zoning, building and development (71%). Two-thirds of respondents identified other local government activities such as council meetings, hearings and local trials (66%) as important. A higher proportion of households with

children identified community or neighborhood events (n=44, 84%) and local taxes and tax issues (n=40, 83%) as important.

Also, a higher proportion of those that have resided in the community for over 20 years identified community or neighborhood events (n=23, 83%), local taxes and tax issues (n=22, 82%), local zoning, building and development (n=22, 86%), and other local government activities (n=22, 82%) as important to know about.

Interview participants further expanded that it is important to know who local officials are, how local officials can be contacted and their preferred communication methods. Participants also mentioned information about zoning changes that affect the health of community members or that affect traffic patterns and safety would be important to know about.

Political life

Local politics, campaigns and elections were identified by 68% of survey respondents as important information for their household to know about.

> " Would be nice to know a little more about what is going on and what might be planned for the future. There is a ton of development happening and lots of new housing, but I feel disconnected to the vision and plans for the area.
> -Survey participant "

Photo: City of Charlotte

Other Information Needs

Over 60% of survey participants also mentioned other critical information needs such as transportation, health & welfare and environment & planning. Sixty-five percent of participants shared that local traffic or transportation (n=148), local social services (n=146) and local weather (n=148) were important information to them and their household.

When asked, "thinking about all of the sources you use to get local news and information, how well do these sources give you the information you need?" 28% shared that these sources give them all of the information that matters to them, 52% shared it gives them some of the information that matters to them, 15% reported not much and 2% reported none of the information that matters (figure 3).

Half of respondents shared that news sources only provide them with some of the information that matters to them (n=135)

All of the information that matters to you	28%
Some of the information that matters to you	52%
Not much of the information that matters to you	15%
None of the information that matters	2%
Don't know	4%
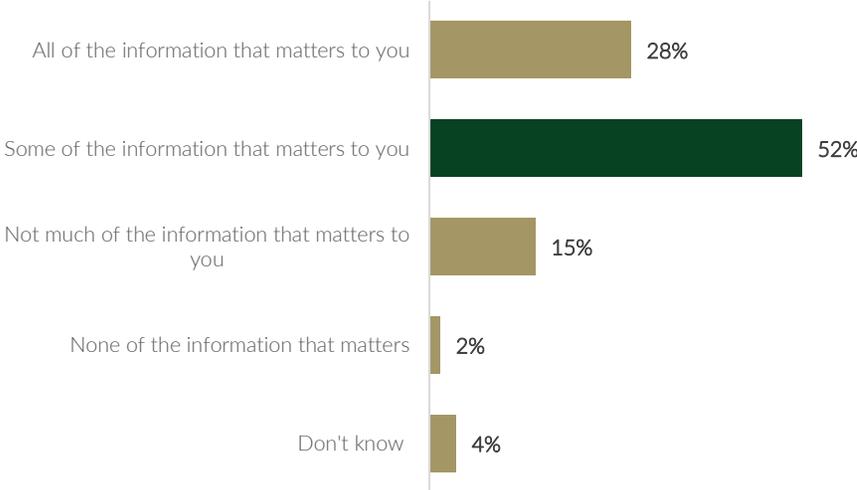
Figure 3: Sources & Information Needs

Local News & Information Sources

TV news stations (such as WCNC, WBTV, WSOC, WCCB, WJZY) (n=139) — **79%**

A news source that publishes online only (such as QCity Metro) (n=139) — **55%**

Radio station (such as WFAE, WBT) (n=135) — **53%**

Other community or specialized newspaper (such as The Charlotte Post) (n=137) — **53%**

Daily newspaper (such as Charlotte Observer) (n=139) — **42%**

Media Institutions

Local church (n=138) — **46%**

Local public library (n=139) — **44%**

Government agencies or officials, such as city or council offices. (n=139) — **42%**

Local University/College (n=139) — **32%**

Other local organizations not included in the previous categories. (n=139) — **28%**

Community Institutions

Local family, friends and neighbors (n=139) — **81%**

A person or organization you follow on a social networking site (n=135) — **50%**

Local school groups (n=139) — **36%**

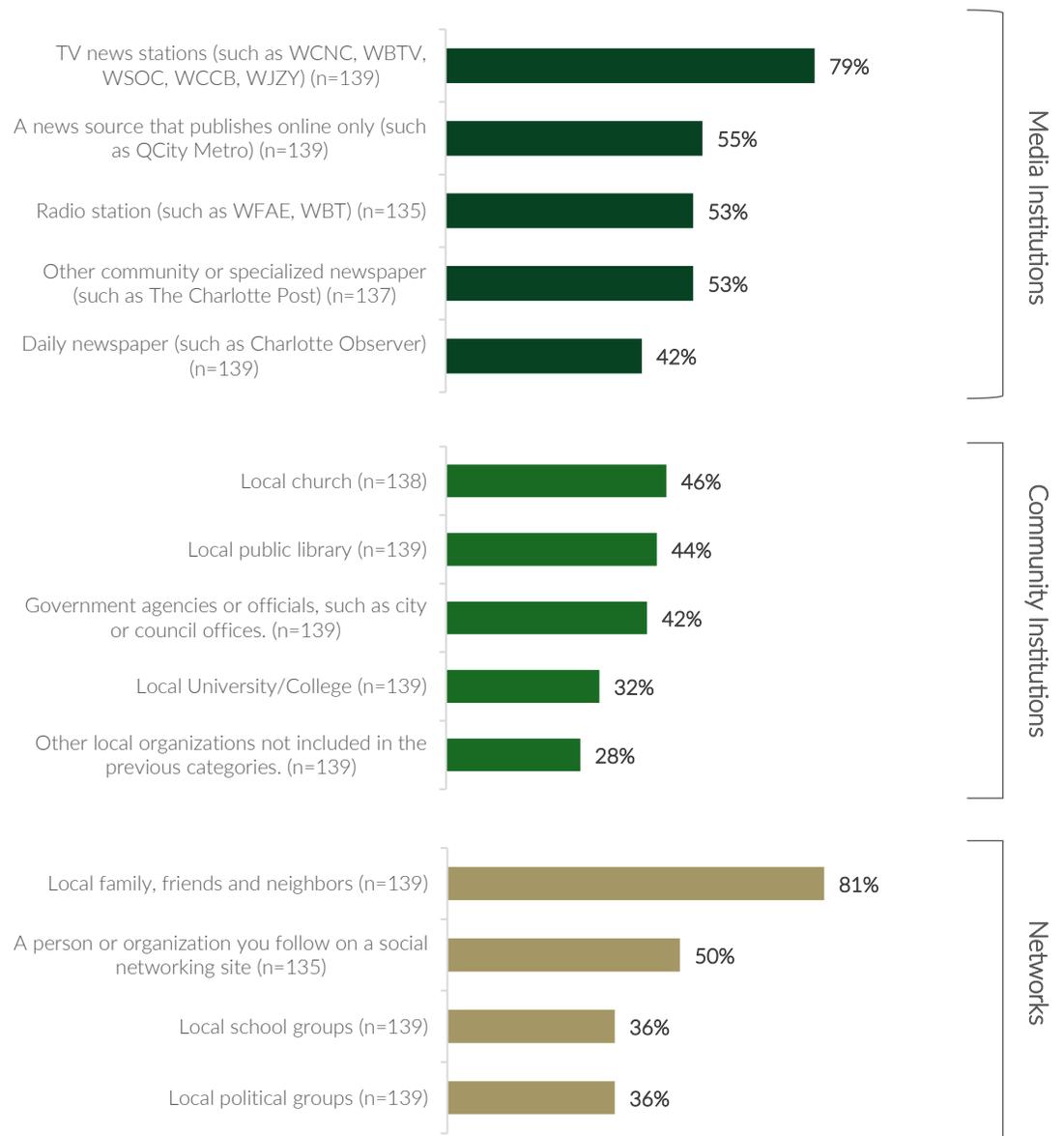Local political groups (n=139) — **36%**

Networks

Figure 4: Local News & Information Sources & Regular Frequency

To better understand the sources for local news and information, study participants were asked how they get local (Historic West End/Beatties Ford Corridor) news and information. The research team grouped these sources into three main categories: media institutions, community institutions, and networks. Information tools were also examined to understand the ways local news and information is shared or disseminated.

Survey participants were asked how often they get local (Historic West End/Beatties Ford Corridor) news and information from various sources. Survey respondents were able to select "daily", "weekly", "monthly", "1 or 2 times a year" or "never" for each of the sources listed. Figure 4 displays survey participants that identified they get their local news and information "regularly" (selected daily, weekly or monthly) from these sources. Participants were also able to write in any other sources important to them for local news or information.

TV news stations were identified by a majority of respondents as a source for local news & information

TV news stations (such as WCNC, WBTV, WSOC, WCCB, WJZY) (n=139)
- Daily: 54%
- Weekly: 18%
- Monthly: 7%

A news source that publishes online only (such as QCity Metro) (n=139)
- Daily: 23%
- Weekly: 21%
- Monthly: 11%

Radio station (such as WFAE, WBT) (n=135)
- Daily: 27%
- Weekly: 19%
- Monthly: 7%

Other community or specialized newspaper (such as The Charlotte Post) (n=137)
- Daily: 15%
- Weekly: 21%
- Monthly: 17%

Daily newspaper (such as Charlotte Observer) (n=139)
- Daily: 13%
- Weekly: 17%
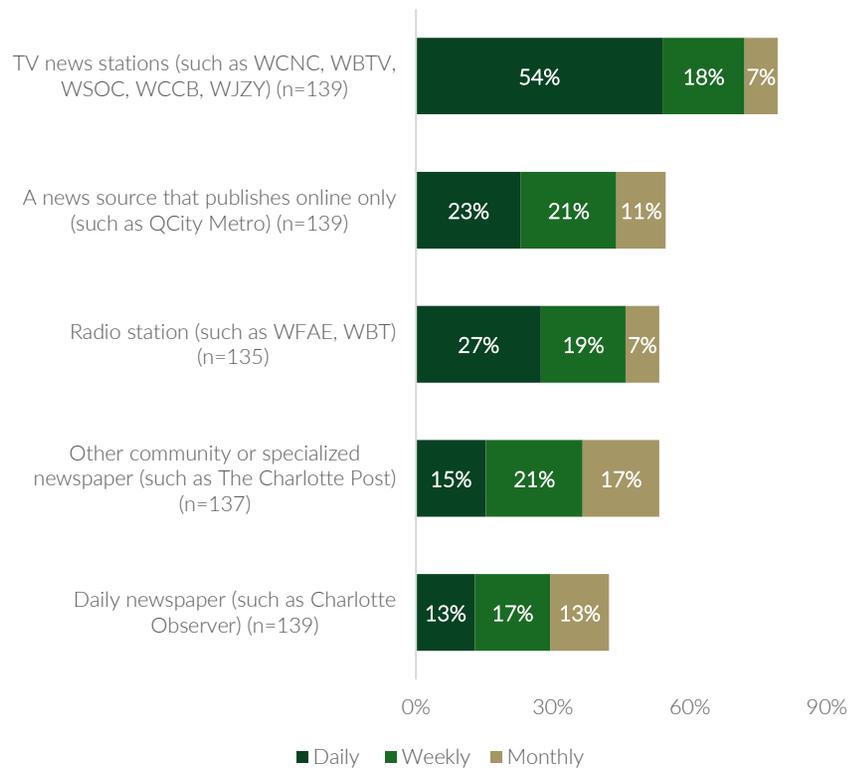- Monthly: 13%

Legend: ■ Daily ■ Weekly ■ Monthly

Figure 5: Media Institutions Sources & Frequency

Media Institutions

Seventy-nine percent of survey participants shared that they get local news and information from TV news stations regularly (daily, weekly or monthly). A higher proportion of respondents 45 to 54 years old (n=19, 90%) and 55 to 61 years old (n=14, 93%), business owners (n=28, 89%), and those that have resided in the community for over 20 years (n=23, 96%) identified TV news stations as a regular (daily, weekly or monthly) source for local news and information.[13] Fifty-four percent of participants shared they get local news and information daily from TV news stations (figure 5). Sixty-seven percent of participants (n=137) also prefer to get news and information from this source.

About half of respondents also shared they get local news and information regularly from a news source that publishes online only (55%), a radio station (53%), and other community or specialized newspapers (53%). A higher proportion of business owners stated they regularly get their local news and information from news sources that publishes online only (n=28, 71%), radio stations (n=28, 71%), and other community or specialized newspapers (n=27, 74%).

Furthermore, a higher proportion of Black and African American respondents stated they regularly (daily, weekly, monthly) get their local news and information from radio stations (n=88, 63%). A higher proportion of residents that lived in the community for over 20 years, also stated they regularly get their local news and information from other community or specialized newspapers (n=21, 71%).

Forty-two percent of respondents shared they get local news and information regularly from a daily newspaper.

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13. Crosstab analysis was included for the top 3 responses for each source category.

Media Institutions - Sources for local news and information mentioned by survey participants[14]:

- Axios
- Charlotte Business Journal
- Charlotte Observer
- Newsbreak
- Power 98 (WPEG 97.9 FM)
- Pride Magazine
- QCity Metro
- Queen City Nerve
- Queen City News
- Spectrum News
- The Charlotte Post
- The County News
- WBTV
- WBT
- WCCB
- WCNC
- WFAE/NPR
- WSOC-TV/ABC

[14] This list is not exhaustive. It reflects the responses provided by survey participants.

Community Institutions

A little over 40% of survey participants shared that they get local news and information regularly (daily, weekly or monthly) from a local church (46%), local public library (44%), and/or government agencies or officials such as city or council offices (42%) (figure 6).

A higher proportion of Black and African American respondents stated they regularly get their local news and information from a number of community institutions including a local church (n=91, 62%), local public library (n=92, 59%), and government agencies or officials (n=92, 53%). Similarly, a higher proportion of business owners stated they regularly get their local news and information from the local church (n=28, 57%), local library (n=28, 64%), and government agencies or officials (n= 28, 57%).

A higher proportion of residents that lived in the community for over 20 years (n=22, 59%) and older respondents ages 55 to 61 (n=14, 79%) and 62 years and older (n=32, 56%) stated they regularly get their local news and information from a local church.

Also, almost one-third of survey participants stated they get local news and information from a local university/college (32%) or another local organization (28%).

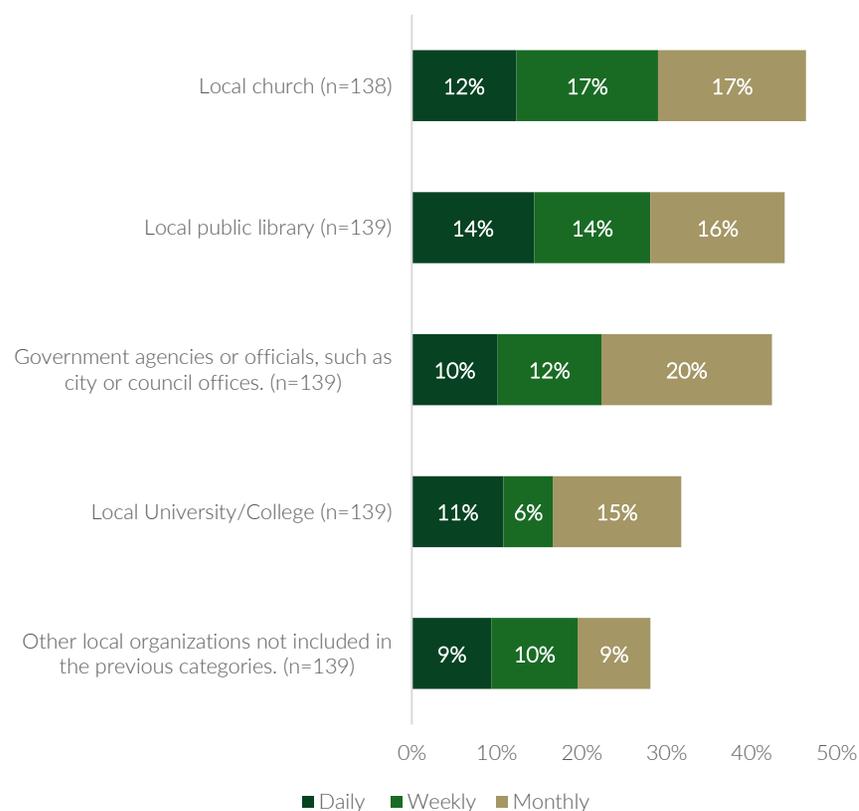**Almost half of respondents share they get local news & information from community Institutions at least monthly**

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly
Local church (n=138)	12%	17%	17%
Local public library (n=139)	14%	14%	16%
Government agencies or officials, such as city or council offices. (n=139)	10%	12%	20%
Local University/College (n=139)	11%	6%	15%
Other local organizations not included in the previous categories. (n=139)	9%	10%	9%

Figure 6: Community Institutions Sources & Frequency

Community Institutions - Sources for local news and information mentioned by survey participants[15]:

- *Allegra Westbrooks Regional Library*
- *Biddlesville-Smallwood Community Organization*
- *Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC)*
- *City of Charlotte*
- *Crisis Assistance Ministry*
- *5PCC*
- *For the Struggle*
- *Historic West End Neighborhood Association (HWENA)*
- *Historic West End Partners (HWEP)*
- *Johnson C Smith University*
- *McCrorey YMCA*
- *Neighborhood or community associations*
- *NW Corridor Council of Elders*
- *Our Lady of Consolation*
- *Sarah Stevenson Tuesday Forum*
- *Urban Ministry Center*
- *UNC Charlotte*
- *United House of Prayer for All People*
- *West Charlotte HS*

[15] *This list is not exhaustive. It reflects the responses provided by survey participants.*

Networks

The vast majority of survey participants (81%) shared that they get local news and information from local family, friends, and neighbors at least monthly (figure 7), with one quarter (26%) sharing that they get news and information from this source daily. A higher proportion of those that have resided in the community for over 20 years (n=23, 91%) stated they get local news and information from this source regularly (daily, weekly or monthly).

Of those who receive news and information from this source, almost half receive their news and information by word of mouth, either in person or on the phone (43%). Almost one-quarter receive news and information by text or email (20%) and through social media (23%).[16] A majority also share local news and information with their network by word of mouth (69%), text, email or social media (60%).[17]

Fifty percent of survey respondents identified a person or an organization they follow on a social networking site as a regular (daily, weekly, monthly) source for local news and information. Also, a little over one third of survey participants shared that they get local news and information regularly from local school groups (36%) and/or local political groups (36%).

A higher proportion of business owners stated that they regularly get local news and information from these networks including those they follow on a social networking site (n=28,71%), local school groups (n=28, 54%) and local political groups (n=28, 50%). Similarly, a higher proportion of Black and African American respondents stated that they get local news and information from a person or organization they follow on a social networking site (n=88, 60%) local school groups (n=92, 47%) and local political groups (n=92, 46%).

A higher proportion of households with children also use their network, specifically a person or organization they follow on a social networking site (n=42, 60%) to get local news and information.

Interview participants shared that their personal networks (neighbors, friends, community groups, other community members, and social media networks) were often sources for news and information. These sources were trusted because they were closest in geographical proximity to the local topic or issue they sought news and information about. Proximity was an important factor to participants.
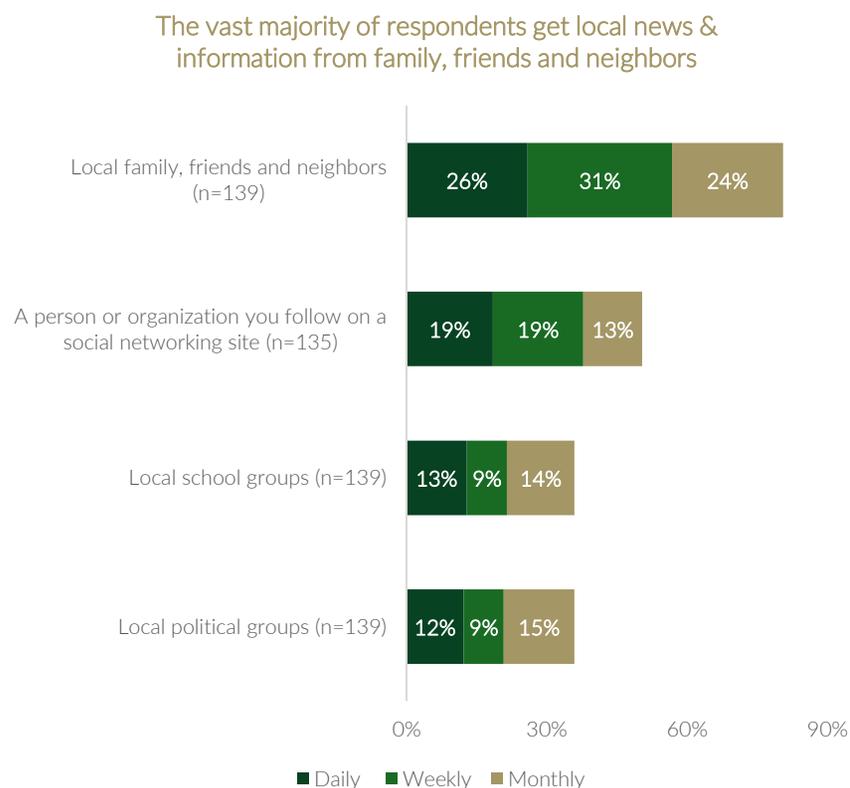

The vast majority of respondents get local news & information from family, friends and neighbors

Figure 7: Network Sources & Frequency

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16. n=116
17. n=134

Information Tools

Information tools are a part of the infrastructure used to support the sharing of information. Survey participants identified that they get their local news and information from various information tools (figure 8). A majority of respondents get local news and information from an internet search using a search engine such as Google (67%); community, neighborhood, or neighborhood association newsletter or listserv (64%); and email (60%) monthly, weekly or daily.

A higher proportion of Black and African American respondents stated they regularly get their local news and information from an internet search (n=90, 80%). A higher proportion of White respondents (n=30, 87%) and respondents that have households with children get their local news and information from a community, neighborhood or neighborhood association newsletter or listserv (n=44, 77%). A higher proportion of households with children also regularly get their local news and information from email (n=44, 71%).

Over 50% of survey participants also get local news and information from community events/meetings (56%); and/or local online forums or discussion groups, such as community Facebook groups or Nextdoor (53%) monthly, weekly or daily. Also, more than one-third of respondents get news and information at least monthly from other websites dedicated to their local community (46%), letters or fliers mailed home (39%), and community bulletins or kiosks in their neighborhood (37%).

Interview participants emphasized using tools that allow them to receive information or search for news and information about their specific geographic area. They described using alerts for the Historic West End, setting their Google search to a specific geographic region or searching for specific local updates related to businesses and other topics via a search engine.

A majority of respondents get local news & information from an internet search, newsletter or listserv
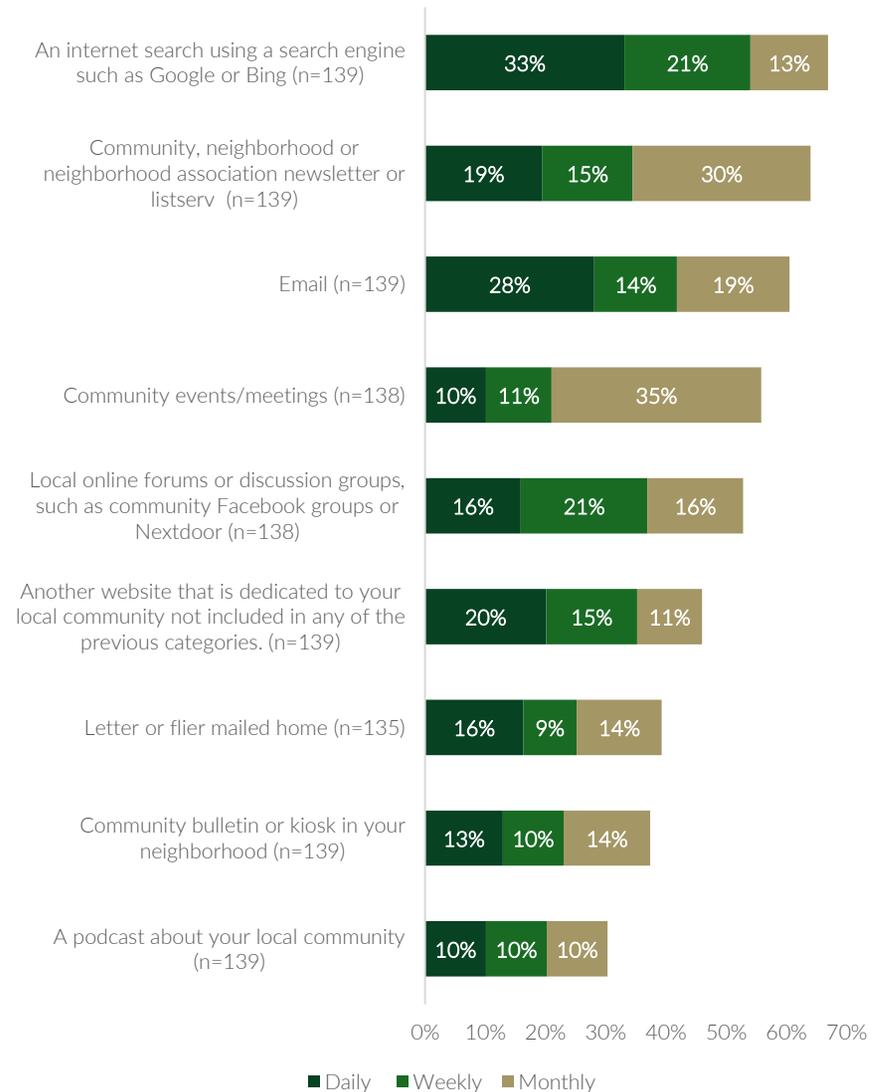

Figure 8: Information Tools & Frequency

Facilitators

To better understand residents and business owners' experience with local news and information, the esearch team also examined the infrastructure and resources that help residents and businesses engage with local news and information.

Digital Access

Survey participants were asked questions related to their digital access. Eighty-seven percent of participants shared they have a smartphone (a phone that connects to the internet).[18] Also, all survey participants shared they use the internet, with 94% using it daily.[19] The majority (82%) of survey participants also shared they had high-speed internet at home,[20] although almost one-third (32%) of those individuals experience problems connecting to the internet.[21]

Interview participants shared challenges with the internet at home and elsewhere in the community. They described having areas in the community where coverage and Wi-Fi was unreliable and having a lack of affordable internet options at home. Some participants shared that they accessed the internet at the library and other locations due to this lack of affordability.

Technology

Survey respondents were also asked how often they use various devices (figure 9) and the frequency in which they engaged with social media and other information platforms. The most used devices were cell phones and televisions, with 91% of respondents stating they use their cell phone daily and 84% stating they use television daily. Interview participants shared that the phone was the device commonly used to access the internet and their preferred device to access local news and information due to its accessibility.

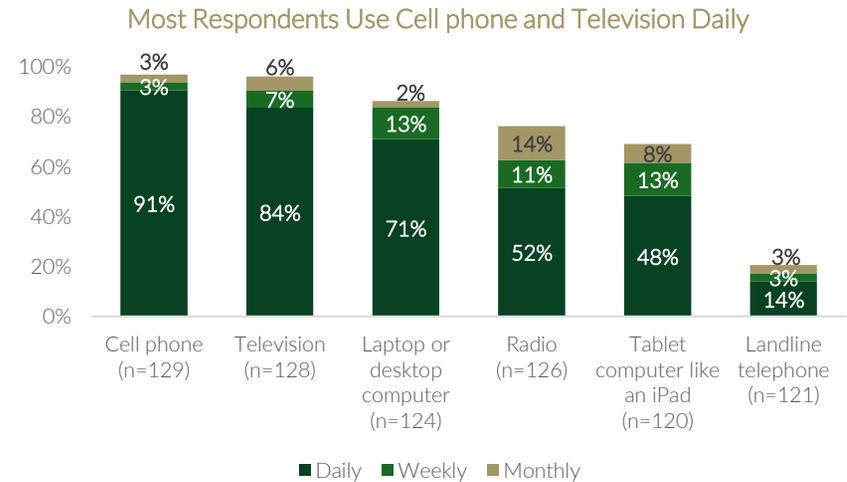**Most Respondents Use Cell phone and Television Daily**

Figure 9: Device Use & Frequency

As it pertains to platforms, the vast majority of respondents (85%) used YouTube at least monthly, with 49% stating they use this platform daily (figure 10). A higher proportion of business owners stated they use YouTube (n=26, 96%) regularly (daily, weekly or monthly).

Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn were also used by a majority of respondents at least monthly, with 76%, 70% and 57% using each platform respectively.

A higher proportion of business owners (n=25, 89%), respondents 45 to 54 years old (n=17, 90%), and respondents 55 to 61 years old (n=13, 93%) stated they use Facebook regularly. Also, a higher proportion of respondents 35 to 44 years old (n=30, 83%), respondents 45 to 54 years old (n=15, 83%), and White respondents (n=27, 90%) reported they use Instagram regularly. Furthermore, a higher percentage of business owners (n= 17, 68%), respondents 25 to 34 years old (n=17, 74%),

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18. n=135
19. n=126
20. n=136. High speed internet could include cable, mobile connection, etc.
21. n=111

respondents 35 to 44 years old (n=24, 67%), and White respondents (n=26, 87%) identified that they use LinkedIn regularly.

YouTube is Used by the Majority of Respondents at least Monthly

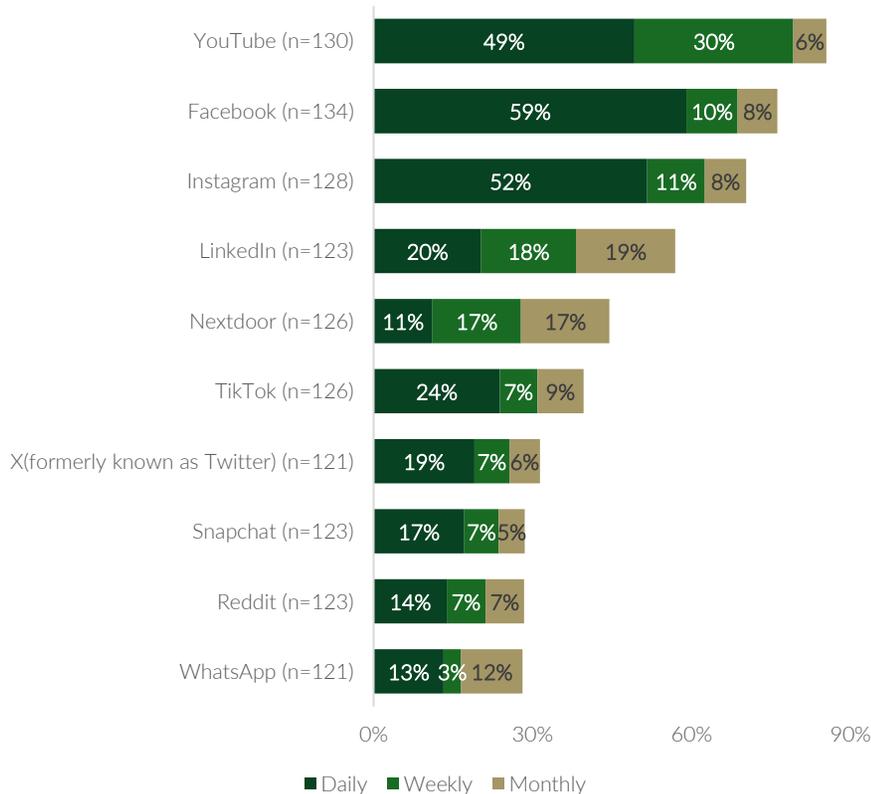|	Daily	Weekly	Monthly
YouTube (n=130)	49%	30%	6%
Facebook (n=134)	59%	10%	8%
Instagram (n=128)	52%	11%	8%
LinkedIn (n=123)	20%	18%	19%
Nextdoor (n=126)	11%	17%	17%
TikTok (n=126)	24%	7%	9%
X(formerly known as Twitter) (n=121)	19%	7%	6%
Snapchat (n=123)	17%	7%	5%
Reddit (n=123)	14%	7%	7%
WhatsApp (n=121)	13%	3%	12%

■ Daily ■ Weekly ■ Monthly

Figure 10: Platform Use & Frequency

Variety

Residents and business owners were asked "in the past, what resources have been helpful to you when obtaining local news and information." A majority of survey respondents stated that information tools such as an easy-to-use website (74%), emails (64%) and a schedule of local events (57%) were helpful to engagement (figure 11).

Survey participants were also asked in an open-ended question what resources they would like to have to obtain local (Historic West End/Beatties Ford Road Corridor) news and information. Half of those respondents (n=61) shared they would like access to information tools such as a newsletter, meetings/gatherings to share, a dedicated social media page, mailers, and a public calendar of events.

Interview participants also emphasized physical information sharing such as flyers, bulletins, and billboards as helpful in obtaining local news and information. Sharing local news and information at the local grocery store, pharmacy, post office, library, at hubs in the community is beneficial, recognizing that not everyone has access to internet or digital sources.

A majority of respondents would like to have information tools and a trusted source (n=132)

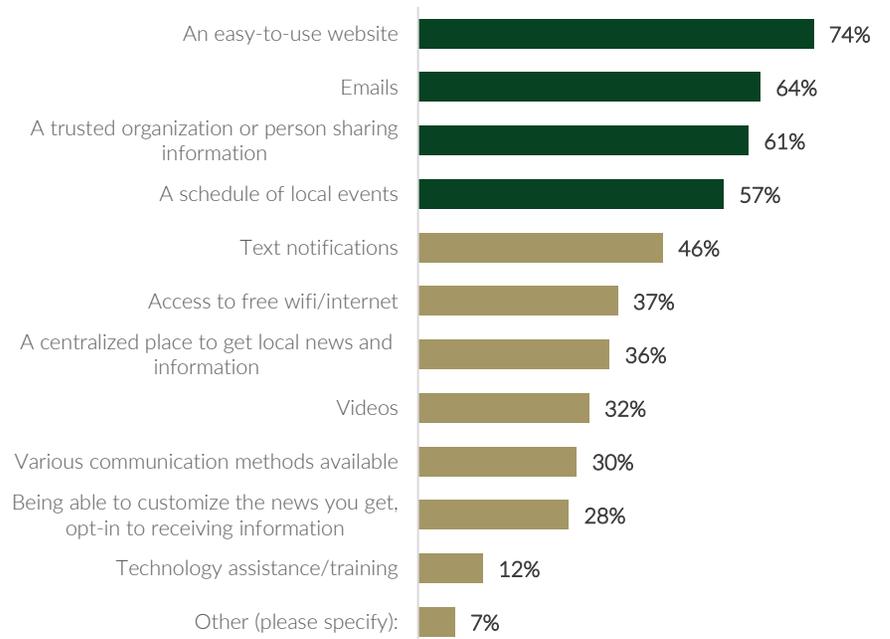|	
An easy-to-use website	74%
Emails	64%
A trusted organization or person sharing information	61%
A schedule of local events	57%
Text notifications	46%
Access to free wifi/internet	37%
A centralized place to get local news and information	36%
Videos	32%
Various communication methods available	30%
Being able to customize the news you get, opt-in to receiving information	28%
Technology assistance/training	12%
Other (please specify):	7%

Figure 11: Helpful Resources

Trust & Community Engagement

Trust was also an important factor for engaging with local news and information as displayed in figure 11. Sixty-one percent of survey respondents shared that a trusted organization or person sharing information has been helpful to them when obtaining local news and information. Establishing a strong and consistent relationship with community members aid in building trust and ensures there is responsiveness to the challenges and unique information needs of the local community.

More than half of survey participants identified challenges in obtaining local news and information. A lack of community representation in stories (61%), information not being easy to find (54%), too much negative local news and information (53%), and inaccurate or lack of thorough (missing news and information) reporting (51%) were identified as a problem, serious problem or very serious problem (figure 12).

Interview participants called for news and information providers to be intentional, transparent, neutral, and to ensure that there are local voices and meaningful stories represented. Interview participants also shared they do not always get the full story from one source, and they must piece several sources together or validate news and information about their community with other community members or neighbors

> " More accurate news and information on the ground from the people experiencing life and disparities here
> -Survey participant "

closest to the topic. Furthermore, participants shared that their community is often painted with a negative light, with negative stories overpowering positive and helpful ones. News and information such as crime gets coverage while community assets, history and resources are often missing from the story.

More than half of survey respondents identified challenges when getting local news & information (n=148)
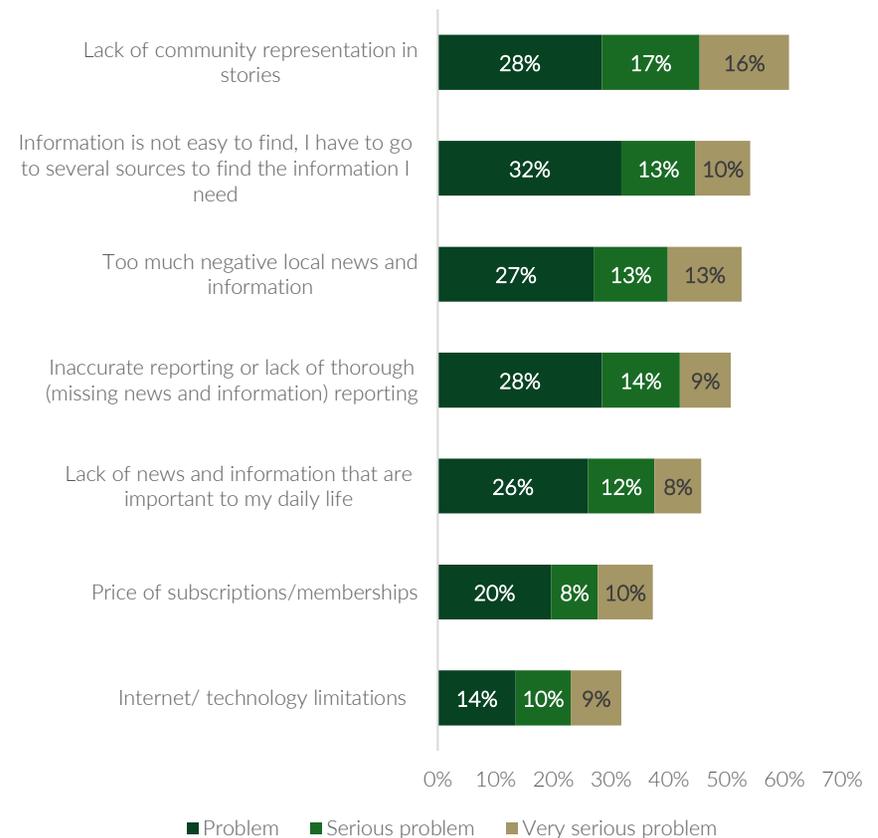
Challenge	Problem	Serious problem	Very serious problem
Lack of community representation in stories	28%	17%	16%
Information is not easy to find, I have to go to several sources to find the information I need	32%	13%	10%
Too much negative local news and information	27%	13%	13%
Inaccurate reporting or lack of thorough (missing news and information) reporting	28%	14%	9%
Lack of news and information that are important to my daily life	26%	12%	8%
Price of subscriptions/memberships	20%	8%	10%
Internet/ technology limitations	14%	10%	9%

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%   60%   70%

■ Problem   ■ Serious problem   ■ Very serious problem

Figure 12: Challenges to Obtaining Local News & Information

Local News & Information Ecosystem Map

Center: **HISTORIC WEST END COMMUNITY**

Quadrants: MEDIA INSTITUTIONS · COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS · INFRASTRUCTURE · NETWORKS

Axes: VARIETY · ENGAGEMENT · INTERCONNECTEDNESS · TRUST

Media Institutions: DAILY NEWSPAPER · OTHER COMMUNITY OR SPECIALIZED NEWSPAPER · RADIO STATION · A NEWS SOURCE THAT PUBLISHES ONLINE ONLY · TV NEWS STATION

Community Institutions: COMMUNITY/NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS OR NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION · LOCAL CHURCH · LOCAL PUBLIC LIBRARY · GOVERNMENT AGENCIES OR OFFICIALS SUCH AS CITY OR COUNTY OFFICES · LOCAL UNIVERSITY OR COLLEGE · OTHER LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

Networks: LOCAL POLITICAL GROUPS · LOCAL SCHOOL GROUPS · A PERSON OR ORGANIZATION YOU FOLLOW ON A SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE · LOCAL FAMILY, FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS

Infrastructure: BROADBAND · TRAINING · TECHNOLOGY · INFORMATION TOOLS

The local news and information ecosystem map reflects the study findings, weaving together the sources & infrastructure that are being used by residents and business owners in the Historic West End. The map also highlights key elements that strengthen engagement with local news and information.

The ecosystem map illustrates the sources of news and information in the Historic West End, which includes media institutions, community institutions and networks. Infrastructure is also an important component of the ecosystem. Access to the internet, training, technology and information tools facilitates engagement with local news and information.

Trust, variety in sources and tools, community engagement, and the interconnectedness of all the components of the ecosystem allows information to flow more easily and allows for the ecosystem to meet the information needs of the Historic West End community.

Recommendations

Recommendations for improving the local news and information ecosystem to better meet the needs of Historic West End residents and businesses are shared.

Deepen engagement & trust

- Encourage deeper engagement between information providers and the community to address challenges to obtaining local news and information and to ensure trust is strengthened over time.

- Ensure local voices, individuals, and organizations are elevated. Information provider's proximity to the issues that are important to residents and businesses matter.

- Tailor local news and information to meet the unique and critical information needs of Historic West End community members with a focus on *emergencies and public safety, economic development, education, civic information,* and *political life*. Study participants recommended more coverage and attention be given to local news and information that are important to the Historic West End and coverage that highlights various aspects of their community, not solely coverage that focuses on the negative stories.

- To ensure Historic West End residents and businesses get information that is important to them, information providers should consider tv/radio advertisements, publishing information online, providing an easy to use website, prioritizing emails, disseminating information through community/neighborhood association newsletters and list serves, providing a dedicated YouTube channel or Facebook page, as well as sharing information at frequented or trusted places in the community (i.e. local supermarket, library, church, etc.).

Continue to strengthen access

- The current local news and information ecosystem is diverse and provides access to a range of sources and information tools to ensure local news and information are available to the community. Study participants spoke to various information tools and sources. Continue to strengthen the variety of sources and tools available, including physical information sharing.

- Focus on trusted networks and institutions in the community and strengthen how local news and information is delivered to these sources.

- Ensure that the Historic West End has access to affordable and reliable technology and internet. This infrastructure facilitates news and information sharing.

Bolster connections

- Strengthen connections between parts of the news and information ecosystem. All components should be working together to meet the information needs of the Historic West community and mitigate challenges. Encourage collaboration in this space.[22] Inviting others in to share and build community strengthens connection and trust.

22. *Morgan, F. (n.d.) A Guide to Assessing Your Local News Ecosystem. Ecosystems.democracyfund.org*

Conclusion

According to the literature, healthy news and information ecosystems are dynamic and must be understood through the lens of people who are located within them.[23] The research team has found that while there are a variety of sources that people use for local news and information in the Historic West End, only 28% of survey participants stated, the sources available to them give them all the information that matters to them. A diverse ecosystem alone does not meet the community's needs.

The ecosystem also requires deep engagement between the information providers and the community so that critical information needs and priorities are understood and can be met. Community engagement also allows for challenges to be understood and mitigated. This deep engagement facilitates trust. Community members often rely on a trusted source for local news and information or verifies news and information that they receive with a trusted network. Trust therefore is an important factor to local news and information engagement.

Lastly, it is important to strengthen connections across the local news and information ecosystem so that the entire ecosystem can be stronger and better able to meet the information needs of the community. "When an ecosystem is healthy the whole is greater than the sum of its parts".[24]

> 66 Maybe it's we need a culmination of all these different entities all working together to build the residents and the business corridor.
> -Interview participant 99

23. Morgan, F. (n.d.) A Guide to Assessing Your Local News Ecosystem. Ecosystems.democracyfund.org
24. Ibid

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Appendix – Methodology

Mixed Methods Approach

A convergent mixed methods design was used, collecting both quantitative (e.g. surveys) and qualitative (e.g. individual interviews and focus groups) data and identifying themes spanning various data sources. Both quantitative and qualitative data were contextualized by the review of the literature, when appropriate.

Surveys were administered using various methods including an online survey, paper surveys, and in-person intercept surveys completed on UNC Charlotte iPads. In-person survey data collection occurred at various locations in the Historic West End including the grocery store, library, and the YMCA. Individuals that completed the survey were able to opt in to individual interviews which were scheduled at a later date. Focus group interviews were conducted with individuals who did not take a survey, allowing those with different sharing preferences to be included in the study.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the survey responses including frequency (counts & percentages of participants providing a response) and crosstab (examining the relation between the responses and various participant groups) analysis. Thematic analysis was conducted for open-ended survey responses, individual interview and focus group responses.

Limitations

As with all research, the study's methodological limitations warrant mention. The study uses a convenience sampling method and includes a sample of residents and business owners in the Historic West End that were made aware of the study through various recruitment methods utilized for this study and that chose to participate. The study aimed to include a representative sample of residents and business owners 18 years of age and older by administering the survey using varying methods (online, paper, and in person). In-person surveys were also administered during various times of the day and varied days in the week. The research team also sought assistance from its community advisory group to help share information about the study. While these efforts were made, the findings may not represent the characteristics and perspectives of all residents and business owners in the Historic West End.