

Public Abstract

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Department:Journalism

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Title:PUTTING THE BEST NEWS FORWARD: THE INFLUENCE OF PRESSURE TO BE A COMMUNITY BOOSTER ON COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER GATEKEEPERS

Gatekeeping can be one of the most difficult areas of journalism. For community newspaper editors, who must balance professional standards with relationships in their communities, it can be particularly daunting. Readers and advertisers often hope editors will do their work in a way that makes the community look good, either by playing up positive stories or suppressing negative ones. The current study examines how the pressure to boost the community affects how editors make decisions about the content of the paper. The study found that editors often resist that pressure by staying mindful of journalistic values like truth, objectivity and independence and working to serve those values even when they are at odds with what readers and advertisers say they want.

The study seeks to add a layer to understanding of how gatekeeping is done; that deeper layer not only will expand understanding of how editors work, but will add another dimension to journalism education by making students aware of -- and preparing them for -- often subtle pressures on journalists that can be at odds with traditional criteria for decision-making.