

Americans' information needs not being met, study finds

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(Phys.org) -- Americans' lives are still grounded in the communities where they live and require a set of basic information to navigate daily life, despite the proliferation of technology that seems to shrink the world by the hour.

But even though these clear [information](#) needs exist, research suggests that they're not being met, according to a group of researchers led by Lewis Friedland, a professor in the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Journalism and [Mass Communication](#), along with Ernest Wilson, dean of the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for [Communication](#) and Journalism, and Philip Napoli, a professor at Fordham University.

The research was commissioned by the [Federal Communications Commission](#), which was looking to examine existing research to identify the American public's information needs, as well as barriers into participation in the communication industry.

"The information needs of local communities are not at odds with the national or global community," the report concludes. "But they are unique and specific.

That is why we recommend that the FCC conduct serious, rigorous, research into whether and how these needs are being met. We have recommended that modeling community communication ecologies that can investigate whether and how local information needs are met is a

critical first step to understanding how markets, [government policies](#) and individual and group actions can work together to meet the information needs of their communities."

Friedland and his research partners presented their findings to the FCC last month; a Webcast of the presentation is available [here](#). They reviewed more than 500 pieces of literature and research to determine what areas need further study.

When it comes to critical information needs, the study determined there are forms of information that are necessary for people to live safe and healthy lives; have full access to educational, employment and business opportunities; and fully participate in civic life in their communities, the researchers found. To meet those needs, communities need access to information about emergencies and risks; health and welfare; quality of local schools; transportation, including alternatives and schedules; economic opportunities, including job listings and training; the environment, along with air and water quality; and civic and political information.

Although neighborhood news is becoming hyperlocal with greater online news sources, there is the chance that many low-income communities will become "news deserts" without the same access to information, the study found.

Friedland says he expects the report will lead to a national research project to pursue further study on these topics.

Friedland founded and now directs the Center for Communication and Democracy, and his research and teaching focus on civic and citizen journalism, communication and society, and civil society and public life.

Provided by University of Wisconsin-Madison

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