Blacks Engage with Local News More than Whites

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WASHINGTON (NNPA) – A growing body of research indicates that Black people pay more attention to local news and digital media than other groups.

The Pew Research Center revisited this trend with its study titled, "Local News in a Digital Age." The research surveys residents of Denver, Macon, Ga., and Sioux City, Iowa to examine news consumption and community involvement habits along racial lines.

"One of the greatest disparities occurs not across metro areas, but within them: that of race and ethnicity," the report finds. "Both Hispanics in Denver and Blacks in Macon closely follow local and neighborhood news at higher rates than their white counterparts."

In Macon, where the researchers compared data between Black and White respondents, 70 percent of Black people followed local news closely, compared to 43 percent of White respondents, and 60 percent of Hispanic respondents in Denver.

People who pay attention to the news are interested in a variety of topics. But Black respondents gave particular attention to news about crime.

"In Macon, about half (51 percent) of residents follow crime news very closely, substantially higher than in the other two cities studied," the report states. "Macon residents also stand out somewhat from the other two cities for their close attention to what is happening in local schools, the local economy, local government and politics, and local jobs and unemployment."

Among respondents who focused on crime, Black peoples were also more likely to discuss crime news with others – 86 percent of Black respondents said they did, compared to 76 percent of White respondents.

The study notes that income and education also influences the interest in crime news; respondents with lower incomes and less education were likelier to be informed about the crime in their neighborhoods.

The Macon metropolitan area is 41 percent Black, which may also help explain another of the report's findings: Black residents are more likely to "feel they can have a big impact on the city" than their White counterparts. This was also true for Hispanics in Denver, in comparison to White respondents there.

This optimism about their own capacity is in stark contrast to their outlook on the city –only 9 percent Macon respondents rated it an "excellent" city, and 43 percent rated it "fair to poor."

Still, people in Macon, Black and otherwise, generally have the highest civic participation rates among the three cities surveyed. It is unclear whether the high news consumption causes people to be more involved in their communities, or whether it is the other way around.

Interestingly, Black people in the study engage with their local media more, and in different ways than do their White neighbors. Social media, for example, is a more important pathway to the news for Black respondents than for their White counterparts.

"For example, blacks in the Macon area who get local news from The Telegraph are more likely than whites to access the site via social media," the report states.

"Among consumers of other print publications beside the major daily, blacks are nearly three times as likely to have gotten there via social media than whites (25 percent vs. 9 percent). And about twice as many blacks (13 percent) who get news on local radio access it through social media than do whites (6 percent)."

Black people in Macon are also more likely than Whites to interact with their local media outlets, as opposed to simply consuming the news. They were more likely to call into a live radio show, comment on a local news or local government blog or website, submit their own content to a news outlet.

Despite all of this interest in news, Macon is sorely lacking in media options geared toward Black people or their interests. The report lists The Georgia Informer, a monthly community paper, as the only Black-centric publication serving Macon. There are 17 outlets in Denver serving people of color.

"Overall interest in local news, meanwhile, is highest in the city with the most limited number of offerings and the lowest level of education and household income," the report says, in reference to Macon.

"These three cities are not meant to be extrapolated to the nation as whole, but they do indicate the degree to which local factors – from digital infrastructure to economics to civic engagement to race, ethnicity and education – contribute to the mix of providers that emerge, the public that supports them and the ways they interact."

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