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# The state of ethnic and community media serving New Jersey



Center for Cooperative Media  
School of Communication and Media  
Montclair State University  
By Sarah Stonbely, Ph.D., and Anthony Advincula





## About the Center for Cooperative Media

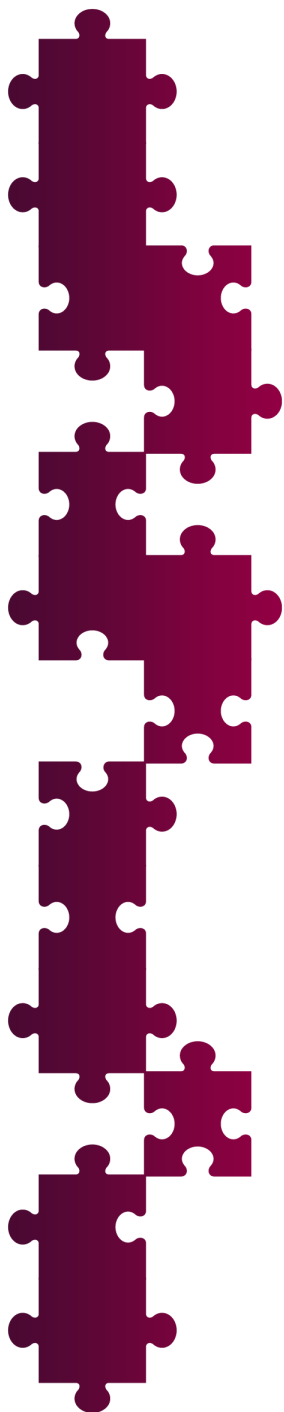
The Center for Cooperative Media is a grant-funded program based at the School of Communication and Media at Montclair State University. Its mission is to grow and strengthen local journalism, which it does through professional development and training, networking, coaching for entrepreneurial and independent news organizations, research, events and by coordinating and advocating for editorial and business collaborations.

The Center for Cooperative Media's flagship program is the NJ News Commons, which is a network of more than 280 publishers and dozens of freelancers in the state of New Jersey, and the NJ College News Commons. The Center's focus within the NJ News Commons is to grow and strengthen New Jersey's local news and information ecosystem for the benefit of residents.

The Center has regular and project-based partnerships with several organizations whose work complements our own, such as the Local Independent Online News Publishers, the Institute for Nonprofit News, the Center for Investigative Reporting, Solutions Journalism Network, Free Press and many others, as well as major platforms including Facebook and Google.

The Center's work is supported by operational funding from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Democracy Fund and the Abrams Foundation.

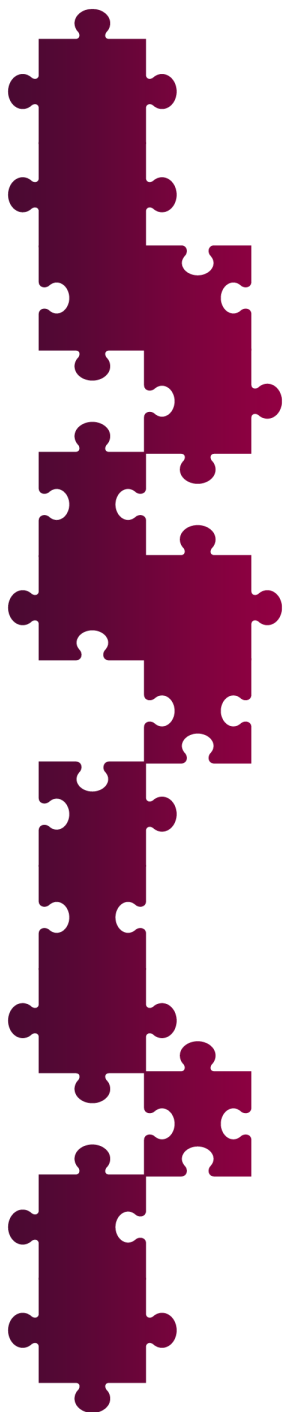
To learn more about the Center and its work, visit [www.centerforcooperativemedia.org](http://www.centerforcooperativemedia.org).



## About the authors

**Sarah Stonbely, Ph.D.** is the research director at the Center for Cooperative Media. Sarah received her doctorate in political communication, media sociology, and journalism studies from NYU in 2015. Recent prior positions include research associate on the News Measures Research Project, as well as postdoc at George Washington University in the School of Media + Public Affairs. Sarah's expertise is in journalism culture and practice, local news ecosystems, and research methodology. The research agenda at the Center supports the Center's mission to grow and strengthen local journalism in New Jersey and beyond, by providing rigorous and timely reports on topics such as local news business models, collaborative journalism, critical information needs, and local news ecosystems.

**Anthony (Oni) Advincula** is a New York City-based journalist and media consultant. He was the national media director and editor for New America Media for 12 years, where he managed and organized journalism projects with ethnic media in 45 states, including Hawaii and Alaska. He is a former correspondent for the Associated Press and *The Jersey Journal*, former editor of *The Filipino Express*, and former communications director and managing editor of the Independent Press Association-New York, where he co-edited *Voices That Must Be Heard* (which is now known as CUNY's *Voices of NY*). He is the recipient of a number of journalism fellowships, including the New York Times Foreign Press Fellowship, National Health Journalism Fellowship, and Metcalf Institute for Marine and Environmental Reporting fellowship. Anthony attended Harvard University, University of the Philippines, and Columbia University, where he was awarded a Charles H. Revson Fellowship and received his master's degrees in public administration and journalism.

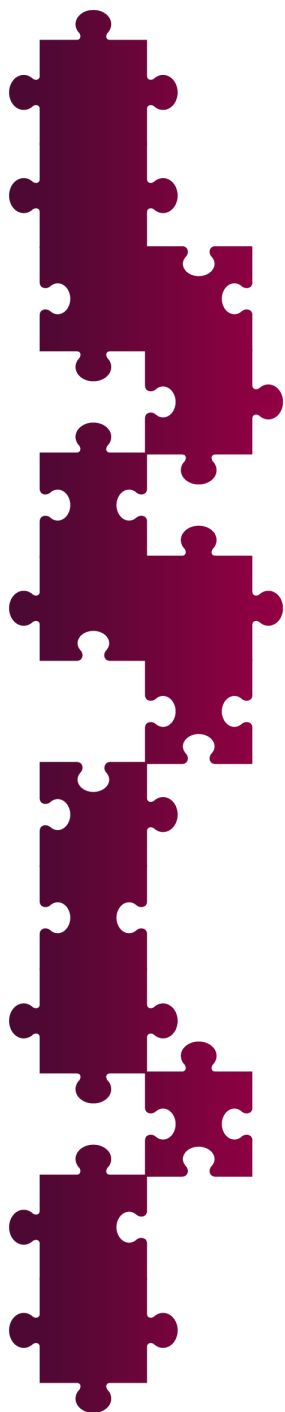


## Executive summary

Ethnic and community media are crucial interlocutors in the many ethnic, religious, and non-English-language communities in New Jersey and beyond. In this report we document a robust and optimistic, yet under-resourced and under-appreciated sector made up of at least 119 outlets serving New Jersey. These media outlets are generally well established with roots in communities dating back decades. They also tend to be close to their audiences, drawing on voices and viewpoints from a wide variety of community members and taking a high degree of input from them as well.

At the same time, interviewees expressed dismay at the under-appreciation of their work by the mainstream and by mainstream journalism; work which could clearly benefit those same mainstream outlets in myriad ways. And they appear to be a mixed bag in terms of the transition to digital, with some fully embracing it and others content to remain in legacy format.

Through a combination of database work, interviews, and surveys, this report provides a conspectus of the ethnic and community media serving New Jersey, transmits thoughts from publishers and established reporters about contemporary struggles and triumphs at these outlets, and documents their outlooks for the year ahead.





# Introduction

This report is a first attempt at a detailed accounting of the ethnic and community media providers serving New Jersey. In addition to a “census” of outlets, it includes both quantitative and qualitative description of their operations, discussion of themes common among them, and recommendations for how we and others might support them as they continue to be crucial news and information providers to their communities.

We offer this assessment in a social, cultural, and political context in which a diversity of voices is both crucial and under assault from the highest levels of government. It is also a moment when journalism and journalistic practice have come under renewed scrutiny, and news organizations would be well-served by expanding the range of voices and viewpoints in their daily coverage. The nonprofit and foundation worlds as well are increasingly broadening their vision with regard to issues of diversity.

This report marks the first time that a comprehensive list of ethnic and community media in New Jersey has been compiled, though we want to be clear at the outset that there are likely outlets that, despite our best efforts, are still not included. It is also the first time that the voices of the publishers and reporters from these organizations have been synthesized in such a report to comment on the evolving sector and their adaptation to the digital age (but see Matsaganis, 2016 for analysis of New York City ethnic media adapting to digital). At a moment when all local news outlets are strapped for resources, we identify and highlight an opportunity for collaboration between these ethnic and community media – many of whom are decades old and have the full trust of their communities – with outlets that cater to a wider audience.

The Center for Cooperative Media’s NJ News Commons – our network of local news providers throughout the state – has long included many ethnic and community media outlets. However until now, we have never had a full inventory of the many ethnic and community media providers serving New Jersey, which is among the top-10 most diverse states in the U.S. (McCann, 18 Sept 2018), and home to the largest U.S. populations of some ethnic groups.

In addition, the most prominent national organization that served and connected ethnic media in the country, New America Media, ceased

operations in November 2017, leaving a large void in this space (the formidable Center for Ethnic and Community Media at the City University of New York's Journalism School has mainly focused on New York).

In a sense, the story of ethnic media is the story of immigration. Historically, the sector was established by and for immigrants, and the sustainability of the sector has largely depended on the immigrants that it serves. Ethnic outlets remain closer to immigrant communities than mainstream outlets both in physical proximity and because those communities serve as the sources of news and the audience. In the same way that local newspapers used to be deeply integrated with the towns they covered, local ethnic media have their fingers on the pulse of communities that were born of diaspora and/or are still welcoming newcomers to this country.



*Dozens of NJ ethnic media reporters and editors attended a media briefing on the impacts of climate change on immigrant and ethnic communities in New Jersey, held at Rutgers University, 2018. (Photo courtesy Anthony Advincula)*

In addition, ethnic media tend to cover immigration differently from mainstream outlets. As we heard in some of our interviews, they often know best how immigration policies and other developments are affecting people directly; we contrast this with the person-in-power focus of most mainstream coverage of immigration. Immigrant-heavy communities, likewise, are more likely to look to ethnic media for news

of immigration, and that news is more likely to feature a diversity of viewpoints than mainstream media (e.g. Pratt, 2017).

Moreover, ethnic media are often a central feature of the built and imagined environments that serve to reinforce the identities of ethnic communities. Georgiou (2001) said of Greek Cypriot television that it “becomes central in the process of [ethnic] identity construction, as it opens access to images of the country of origin that are daily renewed and allows participation in the construction of an ethnic discourse that is globally shaped” (p. 314). Matsaganis, Katz, and Ball-Rokeach (2011), using similar language, describe ethnic media as “a kind of social barometer,” stating further that “they offer an understanding of the current relationship between the ethnic community and the broader society” (p. 16).

In a related way, ethnic media tend to be inherently more engaged with their communities, both in the common sense of the word and in the way that journalism as a field is currently adopting specific programs and techniques to practice “engaged journalism” (e.g. Engaged Journalism Accelerator: <https://engagedjournalism.com/>). As we saw in our interviews, ethnic media are in constant dialogue with their communities, canvassing them for stories by attending events at community centers and churches, speaking with community leaders and elected officials, and taking comments on the content they publish.

## Defining ‘ethnic’ media

Many words have been written attempting to define ethnic media, including the debate over whether it is useful to single out media as “ethnic” at all. The act of defining a media outlet as ethnic is caught between the utility of singling out such outlets for the purposes of better understanding, and the negative symbolic “Otherness” sometimes denoted by application of the term – especially when it implies that the journalism produced is inferior (Gerson & Rodriguez, 2018). With a heightened awareness of the sensitivity to being labeled Other, and a strong renunciation of the negative ramifications of doing so, we opt here for what is gained by looking closely at media outlets that identify as serving some specific ethnic or cultural community in New Jersey (and, in many cases, beyond).

In countries like the U.S. that have heterogeneous populations with a history of immigration and freedom of religion, many different cultures, races, ethnicities and faiths maintain vibrant and sometimes

insular communities. Indeed, since the inception of this country there have been media specifically for these communities (e.g. Grohsgal, 2014).

Johnson (2010), advocating for the use of self-categorized concepts, defines ethnic media as “broadcast, print, and digital communication channels that serve a particular cultural or racial group” (p. 108). Matsaganis, Katz, and Ball-Rokeach (2011) define ethnic media as “media produced *by and for* (a) immigrant, (b) ethnic, racial, and linguistic minorities, as well as (c) indigenous groups living in countries around the world” (*italics original*) (p. 10).



*NJ ethnic media journalists meeting with NJ.com executive editor and reporters, at NJ.com office, in Iselin, NJ, 2017. From left: Raymond Tyler, Rong Xiaqing, Kleibeel Marciano, Walid El Neggar, Lee Keough, Cynthia Salinas. (Photo courtesy Anthony Advincula)*

While most ethnic media do serve a particular cultural or racial group, we append the word “community” to our definition because community connotes a slightly broader range of association with groups that identify by specific cultures, ethnicities, faith traditions, or geographies (e.g. Howley, 2010). In addition, community media are often understood to be closer to those they serve than are commercial or mainstream media – a prominent characteristic of the outlets studied here, as discussed further below.

Therefore we define an ethnic and community media outlet as one that serves a specific cultural, racial, ethnic, religious, geographic, or language community.

In our definition of ethnic and community media we include religious outlets because faith-based communities often have their own media that serve as important conduits of information between the institutions and their publics. However we opted to include only those religious outlets that either include an ethnic or minority community in their audience or provide local New Jersey news (usually about their institution); this means that we left out several radio stations that only play religious music targeted to a mainstream (i.e. white Christian) audience, for example.

In addition, our definition does not rely on the concept of “minority,” which will no longer be an accurate way to describe some ethnic groups in the U.S. in the near future (Frey, 2018). It also does not rely on the (non-English) language in which a publication is transmitted as a criterion, which would not apply to the Black press for example (e.g. Ojo, 2006), or on the geographic location of an ethnic group (i.e. “diaspora media”) (for further discussion of the drawbacks of these terms see Matsaganis, Katz, & Ball-Rokeach, 2011).

What then is the utility of naming media as ethnic? Is it possible or desirable to think of the myriad news and information providers studied here as one ethnic media? Certainly a cursory glance at the list of New Jersey-serving ethnic and community media compiled here seems to reveal more differences than similarities. However, we do believe that it is ultimately useful to identify, name, and study these niche-serving outlets together, for the same reason that it is useful to look at hyperlocal digital-natives for their similarities (e.g. Stonbely & George, 2018): because the struggles and triumphs are more similar than different, and it is only by understanding trends from a meso or macro level that we can address structural forces, and provide structural solutions.

## **Ethnic and community media in relation to mainstream media**

When discussing ethnic and community media, it seems inevitable that they are compared to and contrasted with “mainstream media.” On one hand this impulse is easily understood; creating dichotomies aids in definitional work by understanding what something is not. But it is also useful because ethnic and community media producers have

a complex relationship with their peers and audiences at mainstream media that is important and helpful to explore.

Whether an ethnic and community outlet is outside of the mainstream is an issue of vantage: to members of ethnic communities, their ethnic media are mainstream media, as some of our interviewees noted (see also New America Media, 2005). Perhaps a better way to think of the difference between ethnic and mainstream media is between the foci of community versus politics/government media (especially U.S. federal government, which local ethnic media usually do not cover in detail) (e.g. New America Media, 2005). Other terms that have been used for mainstream media are “general-market” media and “English-language” media, though again both of those terms can also be applied to certain ethnic media.

A too-firm distinction between ethnic and mainstream media assumes that there is no crossover of audiences between the two, which we know is not the case. The same New America Media report (2005) found that, for example, a majority of their survey respondents turned to mainstream media for news about government and politics, especially at the federal level, but preferred ethnic media for local news (p. 38).

Finally, perhaps the most important difference between ethnic and mainstream media is the treatment of ethnic communities in their news stories. Many of our interviewees noted that when mainstream media cover their communities, it is negatively, either because of a crime committed by a member of the community, or because something injurious had been done to them (see also Branton & Dunaway, 2008; Chavez, Whiteford, & Hoewe, 2010). Ethnic media, on the other hand, tend to highlight positive stories about their community and usually seek to perpetuate the customs and identity of their heritage (e.g. Newseum, 2014; Pratt, 2017).

# Method and data collection

The data for this report were generated through interviews, a survey, and a census-taking of ethnic and community media outlets in New Jersey.

## Census

Co-author Anthony Advincula has worked with ethnic media in New Jersey and throughout the country for nearly 20 years; he was the national media director of New America Media before it ceased operations in 2017. NAM had a directory of ethnic media outlets that included many in New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania (New America Media, 2009); to supplement it we used the Center for Cooperative Media's proprietary list of local news outlets serving New Jersey as well as the databases Cision and Editor & Publisher, which have become common resources for finding local news outlets (e.g. Napoli et al., 2018). We combined, cleaned, and de-duplicated these four lists, supplementing the master list with outlets learned about in the interviews or through online research related to the known outlets.<sup>1</sup>

The criteria for inclusion in the study were that 1. the outlet serve a specific ethnic, religious, or language-other-than-English audience, and 2. was *either* based in New Jersey *or* provided local New Jersey news (while being based in either New York or Pennsylvania). In other words, there are a handful of ethnic and community media that are based in New Jersey that do not provide local news (e.g. a radio station that plays only music or a magazine that covers lifestyle), or that are based just outside of the state but do provide local New Jersey news – as is the case with several non-ethnic local media outlets as well. As noted above, we have included religious media in our list of ethnic and community media because religious communities are specific cultural communities that often have their own dedicated news and information outlets. The final count of ethnic and community media outlets serving New Jersey was 119.

## Interviews

Once we had our final list of outlets, we selected 30 to interview. We chose the outlets using a combination of random selection (selected 30 outlets using the random function in Excel), but then manually checked and switched out a few to make sure we had good repre-

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<sup>1</sup> Though we sought to be as comprehensive as possible, we expect that additional outlets will surface that are not on our list, and these will be added to the live database (see below).



sentation of the diversity of outlets in our sample. The interviews were conducted mostly over the phone, and a few in person. In every instance the snowball method was employed (for example, at the end of the interview with the publisher/editor of *Gujarat Darpan*, the researcher asked him to list any other South Asian news outlets based in or serving New Jersey. In turn, we learned about an additional South Asian news outlet). The interview questions were about the themes addressed below, and are available upon request.

## Survey

The survey was 26 questions and was administered online via Qualtrics. With our prior knowledge of the sample, we felt comfortable distributing the survey in English, but also offered it in Spanish via a drop-down box on the first question. The people to whom the survey was administered were the contacts for our 119 outlets, and were almost always the publishers or editors, but sometimes were another contact, like a senior reporter who had been with the news outlet for many years. From the initial ask there was a low response rate, and after multiple requests we ultimately offered to everyone who completed the survey participation in a lottery for two Amazon gift cards. The final number of completed surveys was 24.<sup>2</sup> The survey questions are available upon request.

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<sup>2</sup> There was some overlap between the survey respondents and the interviewees, but they were not the same group.



# New Jersey ethnic and community media by the numbers

Number of ethnic and community media outlets serving New Jersey (including based in New York or Pennsylvania): 119

We have created a live database of ethnic and community outlets that serve New Jersey, at <http://bit.ly/njethnicmediadatabase>.<sup>3</sup> The database includes outlet names as well as information such as community served, whether the outlet provides local news, and language of publication. Our intention with making this information public is to facilitate collaboration between ethnic and community outlets and mainstream outlets; to make it easier for community members to find local news outlets; and to help funders and other interested practitioners understand the ethnic and community landscape in New Jersey. A list of the 119 outlets we catalogued is also included in the appendix.

Table 1 shows the different communities being served, from most outlets per community to least. Nearly a quarter of the ethnic and community outlets serving New Jersey serve the Hispanic community, followed by roughly 10% of outlets each serving African American, Christian/Catholic, Indian, and Filipino communities.<sup>4</sup> In total there are at least 25 different ethnic or faith communities being served by dedicated media in and around New Jersey (the number may be greater because some categories are broad and likely include more specific and diverse categories within them).

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<sup>3</sup> Any ethnic and community outlet not included in our database may be suggested for inclusion at: <http://bit.ly/njethnicoutletsuggest>.

<sup>4</sup> New Jersey has the seventh-largest Hispanic population in the country (<http://www.pewhispanic.org/fact-sheet/latinos-in-the-2016-election-new-jersey/>), and people identifying as Hispanic or Latino make up the second-largest group in New Jersey, after Whites, with 18%. African Americans are the third-largest group with 13%, and Asians the fourth-largest with 8% (<https://www.state.nj.us/health/chs/hnj2020/documents/demog.pdf>).

Table 1: Communities served

	Frequency	Percent
Hispanic	27	22.7
African American	14	11.7
Christian/Catholic	10	8.4
Indian	10	8.4
Filipino	9	7.6
Jewish	8	6.7
Chinese	8	6.7
Italian	4	3.4
Korean	4	3.4
Polish	4	3.4
Brazilian	3	2.5
Portuguese	2	1.7
Arabic	2	1.7
Irish	2	1.7
Ukranian	2	1.7
South Asian (broadly)	2	1.7
Multi-ethnic	2	1.7
Continental African	1	.8
Hungarian	1	.8
Bangladeshi	1	.8
Pakistani	1	.8
French-speaking	1	.8
Turkish	1	.8
Total	119	100.0

In addition to the community served by each outlet, we noted the language in which the outlet communicates, as shown in Table 2. English is the most prominent, followed by Spanish, with smaller percentages for languages of India and China, among others.

Table 2: Language of publication

	Frequency	Percent
English	50	42.0
Spanish	27	21.8
Hindi or other language of India	8	6.7
Other	8	6.7
Mandarin or Cantonese	7	5.9
Portuguese	5	4.2
Korean	5	4.2
Italian	4	3.4
Polish	3	2.5
Arabic	2	2.5
Total	119	100.0

The “other” category includes: Hungarian, Creole, Ukrainian, Bengali, Turkish, Tagalog, Pakistani, and multilingual.

Another piece of information we gathered was the primary medium by which the outlets’ content is available. We found that for nearly half the outlets, print and web distribution are equally important. Radio was second while television, print, and websites were essentially tied for third, reflecting the fact that the ethnic and community media serving New Jersey are by and large legacy outlets, though many have embraced the digital transition, as we discuss further below.

Table 3: Primary medium

	Frequency	Percent
Print and web equally important	54	45.4
Radio	22	18.5
Television	15	12.6
Print	14	11.8
Website	14	11.8
Total	119	100.0

Two noteworthy aspects of the ethnic and community media we studied here, mentioned above, are that not all are based in our state, and not all produce local news. However, 84 (71%) of the 119 outlets do produce local New Jersey news, and we wanted to see how those outlets were distributed geographically. Table 4 shows that while most of the outlets that produce local New Jersey news are based in New

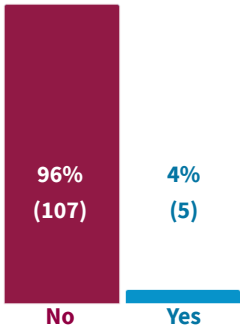
Jersey, 21% are based in New York, while 10% are based in Pennsylvania. An additional 21 outlets sometimes produce local New Jersey news (meaning it is not part of their standard fare), four of which are based outside of the state. This confirms the general blurring of these major markets into New Jersey, a fact that does impact the local news landscape here.

**Table 4: Location of outlets by provision of local news**

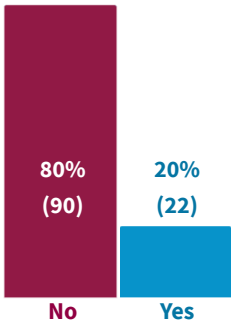
		State in which outlet is located				
		NJ	PA	NY	Other or unknown	Total
Provides local NJ News?	Yes	58	8	18	2	86
		67.4%	9.3%	20.9%	2.3%	100%
	No	11	0	0	0	11
		100%	0%	0%	0%	100%
	Sometimes	18	0	2	2	22
		81.8%	0%	9.1%	9.1%	100%
Total		87	8	20	4	119
		73.1%	6.7%	16.8%	3.4%	100%

Another thing we looked at was whether the outlet’s website had a paywall or asked for voluntary donations. Seven of the 119 ethnic and community media outlets do not have a website, so the numbers below show the totals out of 112 rather than 119. Only 4% of the 112 outlets that are online have a paywall (N=5) (Figure 1), while 20% (N=22) ask for voluntary donations (Figure 2).

**Figure 1:**  
Does the outlet’s website have a paywall?



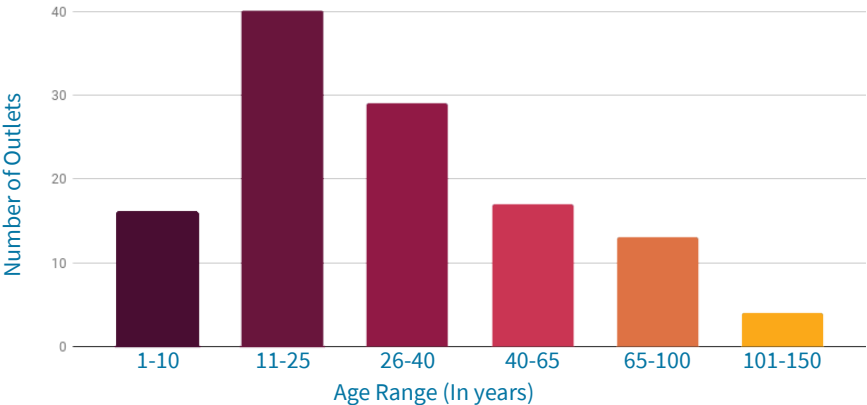
**Figure 2:**  
Does the outlet’s website ask for voluntary donations?



The general lack of a paywall is consistent with broader industry trends against website paywalls for all but the most highly trafficked sites (Stulberg, 2017); one alternative approach that we observed and may see more of is a “soft” paywall, where visitors can still see most content but members can pay for premium content. Asking for voluntary donations has become more common, especially as strategies and organizations to help local news publishers gain donors and members have proliferated (e.g. Edmonds, 2018).

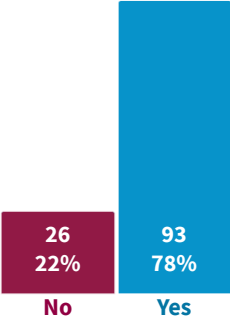
On the whole the ethnic and community media outlets serving New Jersey are well-established; more than 85% are at least 11 years old, and 28% (N=34) are more than 40 years old. This reflects the fact that many of the communities these outlets serve have deep roots in New Jersey and have had their own local media outlets for many years, often passed down through multiple generations within the same family (e.g. Koruth et al., 2018). It also conforms to other surveys of local ethnic media, which have found similar age ranges (e.g. Matsaganis, 2016).

Figure 3: Age of outlet



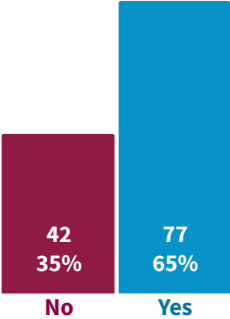
The ethnic and community media outlets serving New Jersey have a robust social media presence; Figure 3 shows that 78% of the outlets are active on Facebook, which we defined as having a dedicated Facebook page and having posted in the last month; fewer, 65%, are active on Twitter (same parameters; see Figure 4.).

Figure 4: Is the outlet active on Facebook?



N=119; outlets that are on Facebook AND have posted in the last month

Figure 5: Is the outlet active on Twitter?



N=119; outlets that are on Twitter AND have posted in the last month.

Being active on social media has affordances like reaching a far-flung or scattered audience and letting that audience communicate with the outlet directly. Social media also lets outlets scan their communities to become aware of issues and events.

One publisher described how they use social media in this way: “What we do is we look for stories on social media that pertain to and target the black demographics. They trigger informational conversation and public opinion in the community, such as black Americans facing police brutality, voting rights or entertainment. ... The great thing [about being present on social media] is that it allows people to submit from everywhere, though we still have to screen them.” We discuss online presence further in the interview section, below.

# Surveys: Advertising still dominates; profitability fluctuates

Twenty-four of the 119 outlets responded to a survey asking for information that was not available through the databases or online searching, such as their primary source of funding, the percentage of their stories that are about local news, and questions about their financial status. Though this 20-percent response rate is just within the acceptable range for publishers and journalists (Carpenter, Nah, & Chung, 2015; Cassidy, 2007), the numbers are too small to make any generalizations. Still, they are suggestive and we think overall accurately reflect the state of ethnic and community media serving New Jersey.

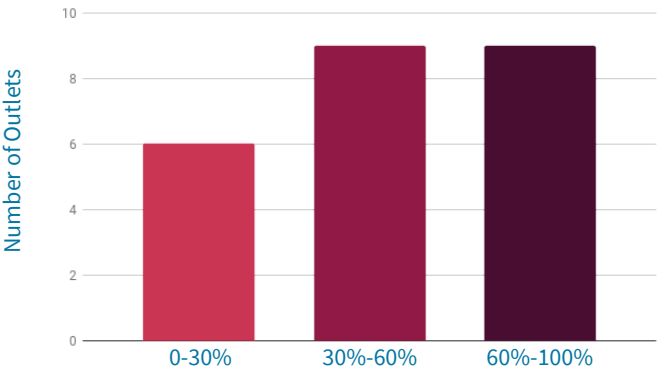
Sixteen of the 24 respondents said their primary source of revenue is from advertising. Despite all the talk of new revenue sources in the digital age, this is consistent not only with our other findings about mainstream local digital outlets (Stonbely & George, 2018), but of ethnic media in other places as well (Matsaganis et al., 2016).

Table 5: Primary source of funding

	Frequency	Percent
Advertising	16	67%
Membership	2	8%
Subscriptions	2	8%
Other	2	8%
Classifieds	1	4.5%
Sponsored content	1	4.5%
Total	24	100%

Though not all of the ethnic and community media outlets that serve New Jersey produce local news, many do, as discussed above. Of the 24 survey respondents, only six said between zero and 30% of their content was local news. Five of these six outlets are aimed at diaspora communities who want to hear the news of their motherland: two carry news from continental Africa, one news from Brazil, and two news from Ukraine; the sixth is a small donation-funded Christian radio station that discusses local news issues in its talk shows but does not cover local news in a systematic way.

Figure 6: Percentage of outlet’s stories that are local



Sustained profitability is an issue for the outlets that responded to the survey; only 30%, or seven of the 23 outlets (one declined to give a number), reported that they had been profitable in every month of the past year. Eight (35%) stated that they had been profitable five months or fewer, while an equal number said that they’d been profitable at least half of the previous year but not all 12 months. It is not clear how representative these numbers are of the field as a whole.

Table 6: Number of months in the last 12 that outlet was profitable

	Frequency	Percent
0-5 months	8	35%
6-11 months	8	35%
12 months	7	30%
Total	23	100%



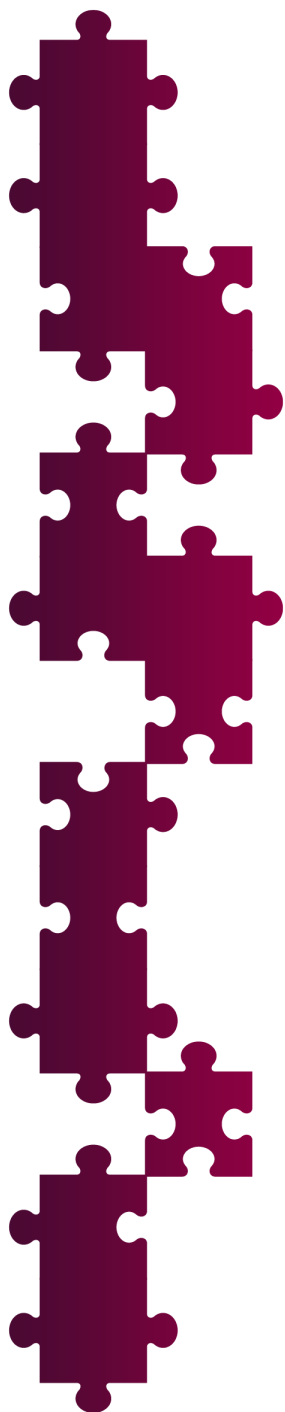
## Closures and declines

A number of ethnic and community media serving New Jersey have experienced circulation reduction and shrinking readership, or have closed altogether. For example *Amerikai Nepszava*, the only Hungarian newspaper in the area, had a weekly circulation of 5,000 a decade ago. Now, of the 1,000 copies he prints, publisher Laszlo Bartus says he would be lucky if 200 were purchased. In November, Bartus plans to move to Naples, Florida, and *Amerikai Nepszava* will then be available only online.

Similarly, *Nowy Dziennik*, a Polish news outlet, used to have a daily circulation of 15,000, with an office building in New York City. A few years ago, the owners sold the building and shifted the publication from daily to weekly. To drum up readership and advertisers, the paper – which is now based in New Jersey – has included online television-style reporting, where reporters act as news anchors. *The Filipino Express*, once the biggest Filipino American newspaper in New Jersey with a weekly circulation of 20,000, stopped printing five years ago; the paper is now available only online, with one part-time staff member. And *The Filipino Reporter* is in a similar situation: after weekly publication for more than 30 years, the paper has shifted from being a weekly to a bimonthly, and is expected eventually to become digital only.

This is not to say that a shift online necessarily means an overall decline. *Reporte Hispano*'s print circulation has gone down, but its online readership has increased. To cover their losses (from the shift to digital advertising from print advertising), they now provide translation services.

In addition to these, at least 19 ethnic and community media outlets that used to serve New Jersey have closed in the last 10 years; these include: *Brazilian News Week*, *Glocally Newark*, *Impacto Latin News*, *La Luz Del Mundo*, *Forum USA*, *Al Manassah Al Arabeyah*, *Radio Pinoy USA*, *Filipino Times and Asian Review*, *Malayee Sangaman*, *Nosotros NJ*, *Nuestra Comunidad*, *Asia Tribune*, *El Amauta*, *Imagenes de Uruguay*, *Su Voz*, *El Latino Expreso*, *Banda Oriental Latinoamerica*, *Continental*, and *South Jersey Journal*.



## **Interviews: Publishers are engaged and optimistic, but deserve recognition and are hungry for more tech**

In addition to the census and the survey, we conducted 30 interviews with owners and publisher/editors of ethnic and community outlets serving New Jersey. The interviews provided supplementary information that could not be gained online or through the survey, filling in detail about the state of ethnic and community media.

### **Who and where is the audience?**

New Jersey is a dense and diverse state that sits between two major metropolises: New York City and Philadelphia. Its mediascape is shaped by this proximity, as noted elsewhere (e.g. Napoli, 2015), and this is reflected in the reach and audience of many of the ethnic and community media outlets interviewed here. Only five of our 30 interviewees said their audience was either wholly or primarily in New Jersey; 24 said that their local coverage area was either New York/New Jersey or New Jersey/Philadelphia, but in some cases also in states or countries beyond; one is based in New Jersey but is strictly a nationwide publication.

The location of New Jersey between two major cities means that the state lines blur when it comes to audience distribution. “We are in New Jersey, so our primary audience is from New Jersey,” one publisher said. “However we also cover New York and Philadelphia, and we have a lot of readers and subscribers from those cities and states, too.” Or, as the executive director of a radio station in South Jersey stated, “Our audience is primarily in southern NJ – the Vineyard and Bridgeton area – as well as some parts of Philadelphia and Delaware.”

Yet it was just as common for an outlet that considers its primary audience to be in NJ/NY/PA to serve readers further afield: “When it comes to our print edition, our audience is based in New York and New Jersey,” one publisher stated. “We primarily cover all the issues for Pakistanis equally in both states. But again, our online edition is being read by Pakistani Americans across the country, from California to Chicago and from Washington to Virginia.” Likewise another stated: “We serve mainly the New Jersey and New York communities. The stories are mostly about and for them. But if you visit our website, we also do stories that are happening in California or Hawaii.”

Or again, “A majority of our East Coast coverage is about the Filipinos in New York and New Jersey, but our audience is U.S.-wide and around the world.” This reflects the affordances of the internet and social media – an outlet may be based in and cover primarily a local area, but serve an audience that is much wider. “We concentrate in New York and New Jersey. But there are many Koreans who don’t live in these two states,” another said. “But they work around here or somehow have strong ties, so they are part of our readers, too.” Therefore though many of these ethnic and community media identify as local, and serve local audiences, they also serve audiences that are scattered across the country and around the world. It is in this way that the term “diaspora” media apply most accurately.

## **On content, the meaning of local, and engagement**

Very much related to the question of audience is the question of content. As noted above, while the content of many of the ethnic and community media we interviewed focuses at least in part on New Jersey and its surrounds, it also often looks outward across the country and around the world. This is one of the oldest features of ethnic media in this country; regarding the German-American local newspapers of the nineteenth century, Grohsgal (2014) writes that “balancing local interest stories with global affairs was a primary issue for newspaper editors.” One owner/editor described this balance: “We look for news that matters in the community. News is news – anything that is happening in the world. But because we serve Bangladeshis and other South Asians, anything that is happening in the community is a priority.”

Whether a story is about local, national, or international affairs, one of the main features of content in ethnic and community outlets is that it is told from the community’s angle or vantage. This was reflected by several of our interviewees; for example: “The stories that we produce are mostly about the Turkish community, so our content is mainly about them. We interview Turkish Americans, find out what is going on. Even in national or local news, we have to find a Turkish angle to inform them to make sure that the story is relevant to them.” Or, similarly: “We cover stories that educate and empower the community. We are an informational publication. What’s good for the community, and what’s beneficial for our readers; our mission is to increase awareness in our community.”

We also found in our interviews a level of engagement by ethnic and community media that is not as common to mainstream outlets.

Ethnic and community outlets are closer to the communities they cover because they rely for their content not on a handful of people in power, but on a wide breadth of actors who engage in community events, issues, and who provide story ideas every day. “We seldom use a news wire service,” one publisher said. “Even photos and videos, we try our best to do it on our own. Our reporters get their stories from government officials, business owners, immigrants, everywhere, as long as they are newsworthy.”

“Most of the time we do on-spot reporting,” said another. “For example, if an event is taking place, we cover it ourselves. In some cases, community members/readers send us reports or press releases. We also monitor social media, which is also one of our main content sources.” The same thing was said by the managing editor of another outlet: “Our sources are very diverse. Because our stories are about community-focused issues, we primarily get our information from social-service organizations or community-based organizations, government agencies, and news tips from our readers.”



*NJ ethnic and community media journalists at the General Assembly chamber of the New Jersey State House, 2016. From right: Orhan Akkurt, Zaman Amerika; Laszlo Bartus, Amerikai Nepszava; Rong Xiaoping, Sing Tao Daily; Angie Abella (deceased), The Filipino Express; Kleibeel Marciano, Reporte Hispano; and Momar Visaya, Asian Journal. (Photo courtesy Anthony Advincula)*

## Medium (to be or not to be digital)

It is only a slight exaggeration to say that the outlets we interviewed seemed to be on one of two ends of the medium spectrum: either they had fully embraced digital content transmission, or they were barely digital at all. Of the 30 interviewees, 20 described their digital presence as robust and necessary, while 10 were either not online or barely online. However it was not uncommon for these latter publishers to lament his or her website while being at the same time a regular participant in social media, probably because of the lower barrier to entry on social media than for a website.

On the fully digital end are outlets such as ABS-CBN International, also known as The Filipino Channel, which hosts the news show *Balitang America*. They can be accessed only by digital means – either through IPTV or online. The owner of another streaming channel stated, “We use Facebook Live every day, and I see 23,000 people watching. This is very encouraging if you have a program because you can invite a minimum of 3,000 people. Anybody in the traditional [print] media right now, the days are over; ultimately, it will be digital.”

These outlets – especially those that aim for a global audience – have recognized the affordances of being digital. As one publisher stated, “We are a dotcom. It is something that we embrace globally. We have seen a great amount of growth in our digital presence. Embracing the digital platforms – especially social media and changes to the website – gains more traffic and allows people to upload stories. These things really help in our readership growth.” Another publisher/editor saw being online as a live-or-die imperative: “The only way to keep this historical ethnic Hungarian newspaper alive is to shift to the online version. The digital presence has the ability to go beyond the ethnic community in America because the internet is borderless.”

On the other end of the spectrum were outlets that do not have or are just establishing their digital presence. One publisher/editor stated: “We are building our website right now. The owners have their personal Facebook and social accounts, but they do not bear the name of the publication.” When asked whether a digital presence was important for reaching his audience, he replied, “It is very important to reach more people, have more interactions with people and become more effective. But we need money to build and sustain it.” Not having the financial resources to build and/or maintain a web presence is a common reason among small publishers who have yet to do so (e.g. Matsaganis et al., 2016; Pew Research Center, 2015).

Another reason outlets are not fully online, related to funding, is that they have a small staff without anyone who has the expertise to build or maintain it. This was the case with one publisher/editor, who said: “Our website needs to be improved. It is very basic right now. It is difficult when you operate on your own and you are not very familiar with technology.” But, he added, “I am not too worried about it. Most of our subscribers get the news from us through print. They still like reading the newspaper. We are a community newspaper, so most of our readers are from the area and they like to know the news in their neighborhoods.” A handful of others we interviewed also stated that they had not felt the need to devote resources to building their web presence because their audience prefers to access them via print; two publishers stated that without a print version, they would not be considered a legitimate news source in the community.

This mixed-bag approach to digital is again reflective of the wider state of small publishers, some of whom have fully embraced digital media, and others who have not, either because of a lack of resources or because their audiences have continued to pay for a print product.



*At a census briefing with ethnic media, 2018: From right, Abu Taher, publisher and editor of Bangla Patrika and president of TIME Television; Gregg Morris, professor and editor of Hunter College's The Word; Don Tagala, senior reporter of The Filipino Channel (Balitang America); and Momar Visaya, editor and reporter of Asian Journal. (Photo courtesy Anthony Advincula)*



## Relationship with the mainstream and mainstream media

As noted above, the relationship between ethnic and community media and mainstream media is complicated and important to understanding this sector. On the one hand, most if not all of the publishers we spoke with felt that their journalism could stand up to the journalism produced by mainstream outlets in terms of quality. At the same time, they overwhelmingly feel under-appreciated and in some cases looked down upon.

Those who emphasized parity with the quality of mainstream journalism tended to also point out that their audiences are integral to the social mainstream; one publisher stated: “Filipinos are very mainstream; it is both fortunate and unfortunate, in terms of covering news. Unlike other communities, they have a unique presence. Filipinos always want to adopt the mainstream behavior. So, we have to strike a balance between local community and mainstream news.” Another said: “My publication is more local, more information about the community and for the community [than the mainstream local outlet]. But there is not much difference with the mainstream, in terms of social issues.”

Similarly, “Our newspaper also covers some of the news that you will see in the mainstream press, particularly as it relates to the Indian-American community, such as stories about high-ranking elected officials of Indian descent, immigration policies, politics, an epidemic, government shutdown and so on.” Another said: “We would like to work with mainstream media, we just don’t know how. Our stories can be mainstream, like what’s going on in the Korean community in Flushing, New York, or Palisades, New Jersey. But mainstream media seldom cover our community unless something bad happens.”

A tendency to cover their community only if something bad happens was just one of the reasons that nearly all of our interviewees expressed disappointment and dismay with mainstream media. Because of the number of such quotes, we will present them as a list below:

*When they cover the Filipino community or any other immigrant community, the mainstream media cover it as if we are outsiders, as if we are foreigners living in a far-away country. We are woven into the fabric of the American society; the mainstream should be responsible in their reporting, their perspectives and their intent.*



*I wish they had the willingness to get to know us, like why our community is facing a housing problem in Trenton, why many Hispanic families live and cramp together in small one-bedroom houses, why our young children need to be protected for their wellbeing, why immigration reform is needed from our own perspective, or why churches are a big influence on us.*

*Quite frankly, I don't really see The Star Ledger or New York Daily News covering and writing anything about the Nigerian or Kenyan communities in the New Jersey and New York areas. These publications cover the black community from what they believe the black community is; that's not what we do. We cover what is actually happening in the community, we feature people from the community, and we write about what our community needs. [The mainstream media] just don't do that.*

*The biggest misconception is the differentiation between the target audience of ethnic media and mainstream media. People say that ethnic media is only for "ethnic" people. There is no such thing – and whoever believes that is wrong. In ethnic media, we cover everything – politics, economy, the environment, etc. – that mainstream media do. The informational needs of our audiences are the same because we all live in the same country. In fact, if there is a huge difference, the mainstream needs us more because they are interested in the ethnic media news as well and they don't know anything how to cover them.*

*Mainstream newspapers don't cover our community.*

*Mainstream covers our community as if we are enemies and we give a lot of troubles to America. They don't relate to our community.*

*Mainstream has a different type of journalism. They don't cover people from our community who are honored for their good work. They don't know much about our community.*

*We cover issues about the Chinese community, about Chinese Americans. It is very different from mainstream reporting. Usually, when they do that, mainstream generalize the whole Asian community.*

**The clear lack of knowledge on the part of mainstream media about ethnic communities is reflected in these various comments. At a time when our country is more diverse than ever, and more politically divided than ever, this is a glaring omission.**

## Sustainability, revenue, outlooks, and challenges

The outlets we interviewed were on the whole optimistic about their position and their futures. Fifteen of the 30 said they had experienced growth in the past year and expected a good year ahead; seven said they had experienced decline. The remaining eight reported a mix of growth and decline – usually a growth in audience but a decline in advertising dollars – but were on the whole still optimistic. When asked about their biggest challenges, most reported resource constraints and the desire to be able to do more with technology.

Those who saw growth reported increases in audience and revenues, and usually attributed these things to strong content and to increased visibility via social media. “Our listeners appreciate our shows when they learn something new,” one publisher said, “when they get educated about policies and their rights. That’s the main reason why our listeners tune in.” Said another, “Within three years, our number of visitors increased from 500 to 6,000 per week. Part of it is getting the word out about our website, meeting people and joining organizations. Social media – Facebook and Twitter – is also very helpful.”

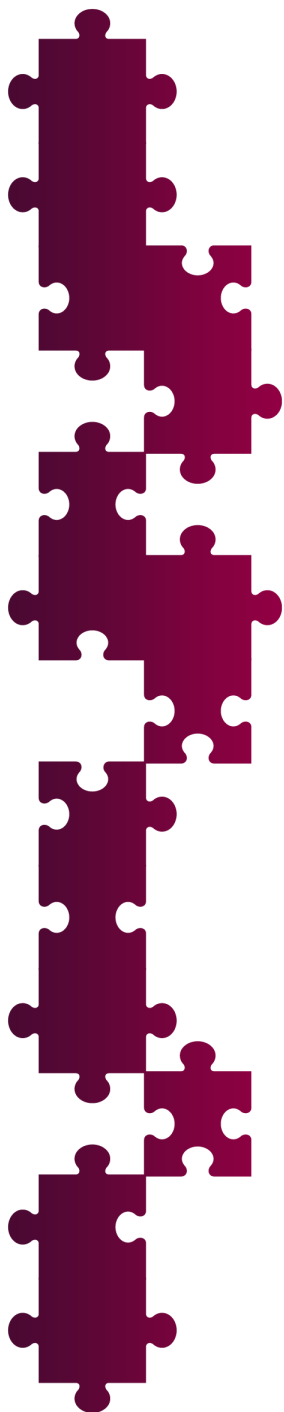


*Momar Visaya, editor and reporter of Asian Journal (left), and Rong Xiaoqing, senior reporter of Sing Tao Daily (right), covering the Asian caucus meeting at the 2016 Democratic National Convention, in Philadelphia, PA. (Photo courtesy Anthony Advincula)*

Those who reported a decline often cited a loss or lack of advertising dollars. Two outlets stated that they were unable to sell advertising to the main organizations in their area, which they attributed to being ethnic – rather than mainstream – media. One said: “Hospitals won’t support our newspaper. There are 15 newspapers around – and all of them get ads dollars from this hospital except us. They have the money, but they won’t give even one dime. White entities won’t support us, so black newspapers struggle to survive, even though we do a better job than anyone in Trenton does.”

“Before, we used to get ads from GNC, AT&T, Verizon, American Airlines, Delta and other mainstream products and services,” the other publisher stated. “It was a lot easier for us to sustain our operations because of them; they truly helped us. Suddenly, they don’t place ads with us anymore. But if you go to our mainstream newspapers in the area, we could see that they still have those ads. I really don’t know what happened. Now, we only rely on ads from small and local businesses in our community. Clearly, it is not enough.” These observations echo findings from the Center for Community and Ethnic Media (2013) that ethnic and community outlets were being overlooked for advertising by New York City’s governmental institutions, despite the significant number of ethnic and community outlets and the size of the ethnic audience.

The mixed increase/decline outlets were also common. “In the print edition, there is a decline in our audience,” a publisher said. “Again, this is because of the shift to digital. People read online and on their phones. Having said that, our online audience has increased dramatically.” And keeping up with the changes to technology was cited as a major challenge: “Keeping with the changes in digital media is the biggest challenge. Digital technology improves faster than anyone could anticipate. You have a new app or program today because we want to have excellent outreach, but tomorrow it would be almost obsolete.”



## Conclusions and recommendations

This report on ethnic and community media serving New Jersey has detailed a robust and optimistic, yet under-resourced and under-appreciated sector. They serve a diverse and thriving patchwork of various ethnic, cultural, and religious communities across the state, a geography that is strongly influenced by its proximity to New York and Philadelphia.

These outlets are the voices to and of their communities, providing crucial news and information and filtering events and issues through the lenses of their audiences. Yet this wealth of knowledge and voice goes underappreciated by mainstream media (and mainstream audiences), many of which share the crisis of the larger journalism field and are in several cases worse off. The sheer longevity of the outlets documented here is impressive, as is their reach – often beyond the borders of the state and the country.

Perhaps because of their age and their closeness to community, many have not yet fully embraced the digital transformation, though there are notable exceptions. In addition, the difficulty of reaching these outlets meant that the survey data in particular may not be generalizable to the larger field. We hope that this is the first of many documentations of this important sector and provide below some recommendations for helping it continue to thrive and grow.

## Recommendations



There is a marked desire among ethnic and community media outlets to collaborate with mainstream outlets,<sup>5</sup> and therefore an opening to facilitate such collaborations (as well as learn from ongoing and previous collaborations).

Gerson and Rodriguez (2017) documented collaborations between ethnic and mainstream media outlets and provide many examples of how these work.



More ethnic and community media should consider nonprofit status.

As with other local publishers, the nonprofit model is an intriguing alternative to for-profit status in these uncertain times (see e.g. <https://inn.org/>).

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<sup>5</sup> This theme was not explored in this report but it came up in several of our interviews.



A study that looks at the demographic and economic fortunes of various ethnic groups as direct causal factors of the success of their ethnic media; this would provide empirical guideposts for funders that could predict tough times for certain ethnic media and thus facilitate support before decreased economic viability started to affect their functioning and products.



Recognition of the quality of the journalism.

As one of our interviewees said, “I wish there is some kind of recognition that community media, which performs an important role in providing information and education, has survived on very little resources. The common misimpression that we are second-rate media is both unfortunate and hurtful.” This sentiment was common, as documented above, and a concerted campaign of recognition would have benefits beyond validating the important work of this sector.



Targeted training in digital production.



Resources to increase online and social media presence.



More consistent outreach for conferences and other relevant events.

This report represents a first iteration of an ongoing project to track and engage with ethnic and community media serving the state of New Jersey. As such it is a living document that will benefit from continued dialogue with ethnic and community media providers and audiences. We look forward to continuing to work with this vibrant and crucial sector.

# Appendix

## List of ethnic and community media outlets serving New Jersey (N=119):

24 Horas	India Abroad
ABS-CBN News (The Filipino Channel; Balitang America show)	Irish Echo, The
African Sun Times, The	Irish Voice, The
AfroPhilly.com	(now Irish Central, online edition)
Ahora News	Italian Tribune
Al Dia	Jewish Community Voice
Amandla	Jewish Exponent, The
America Oggi	Jewish Journal – Ocean County
Americano	Jewish Standard
Amerikai Nepszava	Jewish Voice and Opinion
Anointed News Journal	Korea Daily, The
Arab Astoria	Korea Times, The
Arab Voice	Korean Bergen News
Asian Journal, The	Kurier Plus
Beacon, The	La Tribuna NJ – Decano de la Prensa Hispana
BellaVista Magazine	La Voce di NY
Biz India Online News	La Voz NJ
Black Professionals News, The	Latinos Unidos de Nueva Jersey
Brasilians, The	Luso Americano
Brazilian Press	New Jersey Catholic
Brazilian Voice	New Jersey Jewish News
Catholic Advocate, The	New Tang Dynasty TV
Catholic Spirit, The	NewarkBlackNews.com
Catholic Star Herald	News India Times
China Press, The	Noticiero Colombiano Hispano
Chinese American News	Nowy Dziennik
De Norte a Sur	Nubian News, The
Desi Talk New York	OSM! Magazine
Divya Bhaskar	Philadelphia Tribune, The
El Especial/El Especialito	Philadelphia Weekly
El Hispano	Philippine Daily Mirror, The
Epoch Times, The	Philippine Fiesta
FilAm.net, The	Pinas USA
Filipino Express, The	PLUS – NJ & PA
Filipino Reporter, The	Positive Community, The
Global Chinese Times	Post Eagle, The
Gujarat Darpan	Reporte Hispano
Gujarat Samachar	Sing Tao Daily NY
Gujarat Times	Sino Monthly
ICN Radio	South Asian Times

## Appendix cont.

Svoboda  
TiME Television  
Trenton Monitor, The  
Tri-State Voice  
TV Asia  
Ukrainian Weekly, The  
Urdu News  
WAWZ-FM  
WBGO 88.3 FM  
WBPH TV  
WCNU-LP 102.5 FM – Radio Cata  
WDNJ 88.1 – Radio Poder  
WFFA-CD – UniMas Philadelphia  
WFUT-DT – Unimas New York  
WGTW-TV  
WIBG AM 1020/La Mega FM 101.3  
WIMG 1300 AM  
WJDM 1530 AM – Radio Cantico Nuevo  
WMBC-TV  
WMIZ 1270 AM  
WNDT-CD  
WNJU Telemundo 47  
World Journal NY, The  
WPDI 97.5 FM  
WPSJ-CD  
WRNN-TV  
WTOC 1360 AM – Radio Vision Christiana  
WTTH 96.1 FM  
WUPC 102.3 FM – Radio Alerta Cristocéntrica Mundial  
WUVP-DT – Univision 65  
WWRU 1660 AM – KRadio  
WWRV-AM  
WWSI TV – Telemundo 62 Philadelphia  
WWTR 1170 AM – EBC Radio  
WXMC 1310 AM – Radio Chai  
WXTV 41 Univision  
WYGG 88.1 FM – Radio Bonne Nouvelle  
WYRS-FM  
Yeshiva World News  
Zaman Amerika



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24 Horas

*The African Sun Times*

*AfricaHilly.com*

Ahora News

*Biz India Online News*

Arab Astoria

THE ASIAN JOURNAL

Bella

THE CATHOLIC ADVOCATE  
The Catholic Spirit

The Black Professional  
El Hispano

*De Norte a Sur*

Desi Talk News

THE FILAM.NET

India Abroad

*The Epoch Ti*  
Gujarat

AL DIA

JEWISH JOURNAL - OCEAN COUNTY

*The Filipino Reporter*

The Filipino Express

The Irish Echo

NewarkBlackNews.com

*Latinos Unidos de Nueva Jersey*

*The Korea Da*

La Tribuna NJ - Decano de la Prensa Hispana

*Jewish Community Voice*

LUISO AMERICANO

WWTR 1170 AM - EBC Radio

ICON Radio

Yeshiva World News

SING TAO DAILY NY

WBPH TV

Jewish Stand

*La Voce di NY*

The Nubian News

Gujarat Ti

Italian Ti

New Tang Dynasty TV

*Sino Monthly*

News India

NOWY DZIENNIK

WMBC-TV

*The Ukrainian Weekly*

*The Philippine Daily Mirror*

El Es

*istalito*

Svoboda (Freedom)

New Jersey Jewish Ne

*South African Times*

*Jewis*

*Enig*

*The Philadelphia T*

WCHR-AM

WCNU-LP 102.5 FM - Radio Cata

OSM! Magazine

New Jersey

*WFW-DT - Unimas New York*

Philadelphia Weekly

WIBG

*ABC-CBN News The Filipino Channel: Balitang America*

WJDM 1530 AM - Radio Cantico Nuevo

WPGI 97.5-FM

PHIL

Z

*WWSD TV Telemundo 62 Philadelphia*

Korean Bergen News

GUJARA

WUPC 102.3 FM - Radio Alerta Cristocéntrica Mundial

Karier

TRI=STATE VOICE

The Beacon

The Post Eagle

WWJZ-FM

*WGRS-FM*

PinasUSA

La Voz NJ

WTHH 96.1-FM

The Positive Community

*WXTV 41 Unisat*

*PLUS NJ*

WYGG 88.1-FM RADIO BONNE NOUVELLE

*WFJS 1260 AM*

WWRU 1660 AM - F

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