

## **Mapping and Modeling Media Deserts in the US**

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In the last decade itself, more than 120 U.S. newspapers have gone out of business, displacing thousands of journalists and substantially altering the accessibility of residents to consume local news and information. This has inspired the Media Deserts Project (<http://mediadeserts.com>) at Ohio University to raise national awareness about the changing media ecosystem and help communities pinpoint geographies where access to fresh news and information may be lacking. Our research focuses on how geography determines access to news and information and how communication flows may affect community engagement with local decision-making and democratic processes. Our approach is comprehensive and multi-method in that we seek to map access to multiple media types, including daily newspaper circulation, local online news sites and other emerging media to identify under-served communities. The project adopts an explicitly spatial analytical framework for quantitative analysis, with geoinformatics and GIS services playing a central role in our investigation, many aspects of which will be the focus of this presentation. However, for local contextual analysis of media, we use qualitative methods such as surveys and digital ethnography. An important goal for us is to design an interactive map and information access portal, much like the USDA Food Access Locator website, so that residents and community stakeholders can determine local media conditions. Ultimately, we would like to help remediate these media deserts by engaging community stakeholders and higher education institutions using a variety of media innovations and by leveraging existing community assets.