Of Logos, Owners, and Cultural Intermediaries: Defining an Elite Discourse in Re-branding Practices at Three Private Canadian Television Stations

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ABSTRACT This article explores the relationship between local television stations and national networks through a careful study of station re-branding. The relationship is explored through case studies of the three privately owned English-speaking television stations in Winnipeg, Canada. Through in-depth interviews with station and network executives, the author investigates the critical factors that facilitated the re-branding of Canada’s private television networks between 1997 and 2005. This period saw many English-speaking television networks unite their respective affiliate stations under a single logo and brand. Influenced by branding theory and scholarship on Canadian broadcasting, this article examines the shift away from local identification in Canadian broadcasting and the benefits, challenges, and resistances therein.

KEYWORDS Canadian broadcasting; Local television; History of broadcasting; Branding

RESUMÉ Cet article explore le rapport entre les stations de télévision locales et les réseaux nationaux au moyen d'un examen méticuleux des changements de marque des stations. Pour ce faire, l'auteur a mené des études de cas sur les trois stations de télévision privées de langue anglaise à Winnipeg, Manitoba. En se fondant sur des entretiens en profondeur avec des cadres de stations et de réseaux, l'auteur explore les facteurs critiques qui ont permis les changements de marque des réseaux de télévision privés au Canada entre 1997 et 2005. C'est durant cette période que plusieurs réseaux de télévision anglophones ont uni leurs stations affiliées respectives sous la bannière d'un seul sigle et d'une seule marque. Influencé par les théories sur les stratégies de marque et les recherches sur la radiodiffusion canadienne, cet article examine la distanciation prise dans la radiodiffusion canadienne par rapport à l'identification locale, ainsi que les bienfaits, défis et résistances qui découlent de cette distanciation.

MOTS CLÉS Radiodiffusion canadienne; Télévision locale; Histoire de la radiodiffusion; Stratégie de marque

On August 18, 1997, viewers of CKND-TV in the prairie city of Winnipeg turned on their televisions to see the station had been re-branded, seemingly overnight, as Global Winnipeg. As then–CanWest president Jim Sward explained of the decision to re-brand all owned-and-operated stations to Global, “In a world of increasing fragmen-
tation, it has become clear that the evolution to a single brand identity is essential from a strategic marketing standpoint and will result in heightened efficiencies” (“All Stations,” 1997). This meant abandoning the familiar call letters CKND and the host of logos associated with them, and it meant adopting the red crescent that would come to represent the Global Television Network. The re-branding of Global represented the start of what would become a national broadcast phenomenon over the next decade. Between 1997 and 2005, three English-language commercial networks re-branded their local stations to a single, common logo and brand. In Winnipeg, in addition to CKND becoming Global Winnipeg, MTN became A-Channel Manitoba in 1999, and CKY became CTV Winnipeg in 2005.

In an era of intense audience fragmentation, broadcasters have adopted national brands as a way to carve out a niche in an oversaturated media landscape and communicate their network ethos to viewers, advertisers, and employees (Chan-Olmsted & Kim, 2001; Meech, 1996). Despite such an iconographic change, this event went relatively unnoticed by audiences and the popular press, and it piqued the interest of the scholarly community only as an example of corporate consolidation (e.g., McLean, 2005). Notwithstanding this omission, this transition from a local to national brand had an impact on those who implemented the changes, in particular at the level of the local station. Moreover, it changed how local television stations would identify themselves to their communities and employees for the foreseeable future. Normative sentiment suggests that local television stations are “one of the major building blocks of the community” (Cram, 2003) and significant purveyors of local news, information, and reflection (see Napoli, 2000). If the connection between local television and community building is so vital, the questions must be asked: What was the rationale for the re-branding and a move away from local identification? How was the re-branding implemented? And what are the opinions of the stakeholders who implemented this change?

A change in station logo is often perceived as a visual indication of larger structural changes within a broadcasting institution, for instance, a change in ownership (McLean, 2005). Such a perspective, however, blinds us to other phenomena that may be related to consolidation but require further exploration. To be sure, ownership is a critical factor in this analysis, as the re-branding of the stations would have been near impossible without common ownership. It is not enough, however, to say that vertical integration, corporate consolidation, or convergence is the *sine qua non* for the re-branding of the stations. This study aims to nuance this observation and interrogate the embedded power dynamics and corporate rationale of the three re-brandings mentioned above the re-brandings.

A focus on station branding allows us to examine several layers of relationships interacting within a local television station and shifts the conversation from a meta-perspective of networks and policy to a micro context. I address the aforementioned research questions through the lens of case studies of three privately owned, network affiliated, commercial television stations in Winnipeg, Manitoba. CTV Winnipeg (CKY), Global Winnipeg (CKND), and Citytv Winnipeg (A-Channel/MTN). Through these case studies, I seek to understand the rationale and narrative behind these re-brand-
ings; discover how they were perceived by station management and network executives; and seek a better understanding of local television and recent events in Canadian broadcasting.

This article examines a shift away from local identification in Canadian broadcasting and the benefits, challenges, and resistances therein. I frame this analysis through the discussion of three themes: the rationale for the re-branding; the “performative” aspect of the brand (i.e., marketing campaigns) (Lury, 2004); and the organizational qualities of the brand (i.e., staff and management response to the re-branding) (Door-dan, 1995; Lury, 2004). These three themes speak to the changing nature of localism in Canadian broadcasting. This is not a lament, mind you, but the acknowledgment of a change in local television practices. This study attempts to chronicle a moment in the history of Canadian broadcasting that many have not reflected upon—a visual example of what Mosco (2009) calls “the transformation” of media outlets “from modest, often individual or family-owned enterprises, into the large, multidivisional organizations that marked the twentieth century industrial order” (p. 69).

Winnipeg was chosen as the site of inquiry for a number of reasons. First, the city houses a station of each of the commercial broadcasters that experienced this re-branding. Second, Winnipeg has a distinguished, yet unacknowledged, place within the history of Canadian broadcasting. For instance, the city was the launch pad for CanWest Global, Craig Broadcasting, and Moffat Communications, and it was one of the original eight cities to be granted a “second station” licence for a private commercial television station in 1960 (Raboy, 1990).

**Method**

In-depth interviews were conducted with current and former management at the three aforementioned television stations, along with current and former executives at CTV, Global, and Citytv/Craig Broadcasting. Nine interviews with executives were conducted in total: five from CTV, three from Global, and two from Citytv. Participants were selected based on their position within the organization at the time the station was re-branded. Following Sylvia Chan-Olmsted and Yungwook Kim (2001), who surveyed station general managers to understand branding practices, priority was given to station general managers, promotion managers, and national promotion executives—those who would have been most involved in implementing the re-brandings. Because respondents occupied positions of upper management, these interviews provided an “elite discourse” of the rationale and implementation of the re-brandings. As scholars have reminded us, the methodological practice of “studying up” brings with it both opportunity and challenge for the critical researcher (Dornfeld, 1998; Nadar, 1974; Radway, 1989). While issues such as “over-rapport” (Dornfeld, 1998) and “nonjudgmental relativism” (Radway, 1989) are certainly concerns, Nadar (1974), writing about anthropology, argues that studying up is crucial to understand “powerful institutions and bureaucratic organizations … for such institutions and their network systems affect our lives and also affect the lives of people that anthropologists have traditionally studied all around the world” (p. 293). Similarly, scholars practising a cultural economy approach argue that “cultural intermediaries” such as managers and accountants need to be re-centred within an understanding of cultural production (Negus, 2002, p. 506).
Nevertheless, although I have no reason to doubt my respondents, it is important to contextualize, enrich, or problematize their responses to develop a fuller understanding of the re-branding process. As such, I have attempted to bookmark any methodological concerns (Dornfeld, 1998; Radway, 1989) through additional primary research. Supplementary interviews were conducted with non-managerial staff (two at CTV Winnipeg; one at Global Winnipeg), and I reviewed audience ratings and articles featured in the Winnipeg Free Press, so as to better understand public sentiment and to better contextualize this elite discourse.

**Branding and broadcasting**

A comprehensive definition of branding is difficult to ascertain. Lury (2004), however, provides a point of departure, defining branding as “a set of relations between products or services” (p. 1). Such a definition is nonetheless rather broad and is grounded by Donahue (1995), who suggests branding represents “a totality of the thoughts, feelings, associations and expectations a prospect or customer experiences when exposed to a company’s name, trademark, or to any design representing the company or product” (quoted in Chan-Olmsted & Kim, 2001, p. 77). This definition suggests that a brand is much more than the visual manifestation of a company (logo), but rather also concerns, in Moore’s words, “the design of objects … and spaces … rather than—or in addition to—visual images on billboards and other types of screens” (2007, p. 9).

The vast array of products, services, and competition in the market today leads Conley (2008) to conclude that companies are suffering from “corporate insecurity” and, as such, believe “branding, rebranding and cobranding [to be] the answers” (p. 64). Brand standardization has become essential to corporations, as it allows for, as Lury states, “the co-ordination, organization and integration of the processes of standardization and differentiation of products and services” (2004, p. 46). In addition to these benefits, Lury (2004) and others (Doordan, 1995; Meech, 1996) stress how brands serve to organize not only “the exchange between producers and consumers,” but also “relations within the company itself, between employers and employees” (Lury, 2004, p. 33). Lury comments explicitly on this organizational function of branding when she describes how a brand is a medium (or frame) that is both performative and communicative. The branding of a space or “brandscaping,” for instance, can communicate a certain ethos that a corporation, institution, or city, for that matter, wants to convey (2004, p. 34). By ethos, I mean “what the organization does, stands for, and the way it undertakes its work” (Balmer, 1998, p. 986), which Moore (2007) likens to an organization’s “corporate identity” (p. 80). Brands are thus no longer inherently tied to a product or set of products, but rather emphasize relationships, lifestyles, and associations between products, companies, consumers, and employees (Moore, 2007).

While the practice of branding is relatively straightforward for the manufacturers and retailers of consumer goods, it is complicated in broadcasting because the product is audiences and not the programming or consumer goods advertised (Smythe, 1981). To be successful, a broadcaster’s brand must reflect, in part, its perception of itself, its programming, and its audience (see Alessandri, 2009). As Chan-Olmsted and Kim (2001) observe:
A viewer’s association, perception, and expectation of a television station or network can easily come into play when he or she is making a viewing choice while channel-surfing in an increasingly crowded television environment. (p. 78)

While commercial, over-the-air television networks have always had logos and brands (e.g., the CBS “eye”), in recent years there has been an increased reliance on the building of station and network branding, particularly through logos (Chan-Olmsted & Kim, 2001). Like other commercial enterprises, broadcasters must work toward differentiating themselves in an oversaturated marketplace. This has become increasingly difficult as they no longer retain a monopoly of attention and rather must compete with specialty cable channels, who have “long regarded branding as a key to attract audiences and build loyalty” (Chan-Olmsted & Kim, 2001, p. 79). To remedy this attention deficit, broadcasters have increasingly turned to branding in two primary forms: logo identification and news brands (Chan-Olmsted & Kim, 2001). Traditionally, station logos have had two responsibilities:

They have informed or reminded viewers of the channel they have selected, a straightforward enough function in the days of one, two, three or even four terrestrial channels … [and] … have also sought to express—visually and audibly—aspects of the broadcasting company’s self-perception as an organization in the hope of creating a favourable image and attitude among its audience. (Meech, 1996, p. 69)

With respect to local newscasts, Chan-Olmsted and Kim (2001) found these are perceived as central to brand awareness; most station managers think “news leadership to be a must for building distinctive and positive brand images” (p. 85). Moreover, the local newscast is often the only form of local production still undertaken at stations, and local newscasts remain some of the “the top rated programs in any market” (Cram, 2003). Hence, the branding of a “signature local newscast” has become an integral part of the image a station hopes to create (Chan-Olmsted & Kim, 2001, p. 75).

**Scholarship on Canadian broadcasting**

While a great deal of excellent scholarship has been conducted on Canadian broadcasting, in particular public broadcasting, early history, policies, and the impact of corporate consolidation, little research has concentrated specifically on the recent history or organizational structure of private broadcasting. For instance, much scholarship has been conducted through the lens of convergence and corporate consolidation. Several critics have pontificated on the perils of media concentration and its impact on democracy, cultural homogenization, and journalistic norms and practices (e.g., Shade, 2005; Taras, 1999). Such concern among academics over media concentration is warranted, particularly given Canada’s position as one of the most heavily consolidated media countries in the world (Raboy, 2006). For instance, corporate concentration’s impact on journalistic norms and practices is the guiding theme of McLean’s (2005) ethnography of CKCK Regina (CTV Regina). McLean concluded that a shift from local to distant ownership brought about changes in news gathering, displaced accountability to local audiences, and degraded the quality of local news.
Policy analysis has been another central concern of Canadian scholars. This was the impetus for Raboy's (1990) history of Canadian broadcasting and has been the topic of many excellent recent publications (Barratt, 2008; Killingsworth, 2005; Taylor, 2010). Despite such formidable scholarship, there is a noted paucity of academic accounts of the history of Canadian private television, particularly from the 1960s onwards (Wagman, 2010). Other scholars have also commented on the dearth of critical analyses of Canadian private broadcasting history (Attallah, 2007; Godfrey & Spencer, 2000; Urquhart & Wagman, 2006). Godfrey and Spencer's (2000) history of CFHF-TV and Canadian Marconi is a rare exception to the noted lack of scholarship. The authors argue that Canadian Marconi had a substantial impact on broadcasting and that CFHF was a “pioneering station” in Canadian broadcasting history (p. 451). Importantly, they also comment that beyond a handful of studies, “little else has been written about Canada’s private broadcasters—their innovation, entrepreneurialism, or their contributions to the history of broadcasting in Canada” (p. 437). In concert with this, a second gap has been in chronicling the histories of the local stations—both public and private—that make up Canada’s television networks. While studies by McLean (2005) and Godfrey and Spencer (2000) represent strong exceptions, the fact remains that Canadian scholarship is relatively fixated on the national level. This stands in contrast to American and Australian scholarship, both of which have a strong tradition of analyzing the histories and policies of media localism (Napoli, 2000; O’Regan, 1993).

Broadcasting in Winnipeg

With a population of 684,100, Winnipeg is a “non-metropolitan” market by broadcasting standards (CRTC, 2008a). Despite its market size, however, the city houses three commercial television stations, two public broadcasting stations (French and English), a religious broadcaster, two daily newspapers, and 19 radio stations (CRTC, 2008b). Television arrived in the city in 1954 with the launch of the CBC’s CBWT-TV; its French-language counterpart, CBWFT-TV, began broadcasting in 1960. The first commercial station launched in 1960 as an affiliate of the CTV network, under the call letters CJAY-TV. Owned and operated by Moffat Communications, CJAY changed call letters to CKY-TV in 1973 to correspond with Moffat’s CKY-FM radio station (CCF, 2011a). The station remained in the hands of Moffat until December 2000, when it was sold to CTV Inc. (Cash, 2001). CKY was subsequently rebranded as CTV Winnipeg in 2005 to fall in line with the rest of the CTV Network. 3 CKND-TV was Winnipeg’s third English-language station and second private station. Owned by Winnipeg-based Israel Asper’s CanWest Broadcasting, it launched on September 1, 1975, after Asper purchased KCND-TV in nearby Pembina, North Dakota, and moved the station across the border to Winnipeg (Levine, 1997). CKND, along with the rest of the owned-and-operated stations of CanWest, were re-branded as the Global Television Network in August 1997. 4 CHMI-TV, known to viewers as MTN: The Manitoba Television Network, was the third commercial station licensed in the Winnipeg area. Facing industry backlash toward the licensing of yet another commercial broadcaster in the city, owner Western Manitoba Broadcasters (later Craig Media) offered to locate the station in the small town of Portage la Prairie, about 80 kilometres west of Winnipeg, thus “going in through the back door” to reach the Winnipeg market (Wood, 2000, pp. 73-74). MTN debuted in
1986 and remained in Portage la Prairie until moving to Winnipeg in 1999, when it re-launched as A-Channel Manitoba. In 2004, Craig Media sold its A-Channel network (which included stations in Edmonton and Calgary) to CHUM Ltd., and the station was subsequently rebranded as Citytv Winnipeg in 2005. Citytv was again sold in 2005, to CTWglobemedia, and then to Rogers in 2007 (CCF, 2011b).

**Branding and re-branding**

Since the launch of commercial television in 1960, stations have largely used their call letters as a means to create brands. In the first decade of Canadian private television, English-language examples included CFTO-TV in Toronto, CJOH-TV in Ottawa, CFCF-12 in Montréal, and Winnipeg's CJAY-TV Channel-7 (Nolan, 2001). As the CJAY and CFCF examples suggest, station logos also served a pragmatic function by announcing the station’s position on the analogue dial (Meech, 1996). This dual function of the logo as a communicator of station ethos and dial position was a dominant manifestation of station logos from the earliest years of Canadian private broadcasting until the 1990s, when cable television began to fragment the television viewing audience and channel placement became less uniform. Consequently, many stations dropped references to dial placement in their logo. For instance, CKY dropped the “5” from its CKY5 News logo in 2001. Similarly, MTN deleted the “13” from its logo when it became A-Channel in 1999. CKND abandoned the “9/12” in its ribbon logo (which represented channel 9 off-the-air and channel 12 on cable) in 1985 (Levine, 1997). Centralized branding practices have also been the norm at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, which, with a nationally oriented mandate, has promoted its identity through a nationally recognizable brand. The CBC station in Winnipeg, for instance, has long been branded as “CBC Manitoba.”

As previously noted, local newscasts also factor heavily in station branding decisions and often assume their own brands. Beyond a means to differentiate among competitors in the same market, local news is what differentiates a local station from the plethora of specialty and American channels available to Canadian audiences. As a senior executive at CTV explained:

> What always made them tune to their favourite station was the local news ... they cannot get their news, their local news from those American stations.... If we did not have our local programming, our local news programming, we would just be another channel in a choice of 500. (personal communication, October 11, 2008)

The CBC is an instructive example of the importance of local news for stations despite nationwide branding. In 2000 the network announced that it would eliminate or reduce local news coverage across the country in an effort to reduce expenditures. While CBC Manitoba’s news program 24 Hours was spared, the station experienced drastic reductions in staff and air time (Oswald, 2000). The CBC was subject to public outcry as a result of these local changes (Scoffield, 2000). And although the network later implemented an abridged local news service across the country and restored local news in 2006, the Winnipeg station fell from second to a distant third in ratings until 2009 (“CBC-TV,” 2009; Dixon, 2006; Prokosh, 2002). As this example illustrates, the
importance of a “signature local newscast” cannot be underestimated in a station’s branding practices (Chan-Olmsted & Kim, 2001).

The branding of the newscasts for the private stations followed the same trajectory as the stations themselves, beginning with idiosyncratic names such as CKY5News, CKNDFirstNews, and Prairie Pulse News (MTN). As stations gravitated toward a common national brand, these names were dropped in favour of less “local” brands: CKY5News became first CKY News on CTV in 2001, and then simply CTV News in 2005; CKND-FirstNews became Global News by 2000, and MTN’s Prairie Pulse News became A-Channel News @ 6 by spring of 2000.

Rationale: Consistency and economies of scale
The strategies to achieve a unified look differed among the three stations. CTV Winnipeg, for instance, broadcast both the CKY and CTV logos for years, before phasing out the CKY logo once the station had been purchased by CTVglobemedia. CKND, which never went through an ownership change, went “cold turkey” and switched overnight to Global Winnipeg. MTN always struggled to compete with the larger stations, and to strengthen its market position based its re-brand to A-Channel on having audiences “feel partnership with the brand” through a unique marketing campaign (personal communication, October 15, 2008a). Despite differences in operationalization, interviewees overwhelmingly pointed to efficiency, economies of scale, and national brand consistency as the rationale for re-branding the stations. In brief, a consistent, well manicured, and perhaps most importantly, national brand is more recognizable to a greater number of people than a local one. Explained a former CanWest executive:

It was creating one single network brand across the entire country. So that wherever you went across the country, you could be in Winnipeg or Calgary or Edmonton, and know that you were watching the Global signal, and it was familiar. (personal communication, November 13, 2008a)

Consistency, in its most primal form, was established by having all stations in the network share the same logo. This was done in order to enhance repetition and brand familiarity. In addition to brand familiarity, audience fragmentation is a noted concern, and adopting such synchronized brands and logos across a network allows stations to establish a clear national identity—“to let [viewers] know who you are and what they were watching” (personal communication, October 10, 2008a). This use of a global brand, of course, is also the strategy of the CBC, which competes with the private stations for viewership and advertising revenue.

Of the stations profiled, CTV had arguably the least visually dramatic transition from CKY to CTV Winnipeg. This is due in part to the fact that both the CKY and CTV logos were featured on the channel. With both brands being aired, the strategy was for the CKY logo to be gradually phased out, while the CTV logo would gain in prominence. Additionally, interviewees made a point of noting that programming was unaffected, and that the look and feel of the local newscasts was unaltered. Management at CTV hence decided against a major publicity campaign and intended the transition to be unobtrusive. In keeping with this “silent changeover” (personal communication, November 13, 2008b), executives opted for a station-by-station rollout, rather than a
network-wide transition. Each station gradually transitioned to the CTV brand, with Winnipeg one of the last to change over. Timing remained an important issue, however, and the re-branding of the entire network was scheduled for completion before the start of the 2005 fall season. According to management, this strategy allowed for more dialogue between the network and the individual stations. Although the network had ultimate control over the brand, stations were given some autonomy over its implementation. For instance, CTV Winnipeg's local newscast was not immediately renamed CTV News, but rather became CKY News on CTV, only later transitioning to the national standard. This was done because management agreed the hybrid name informed viewers, “We’re not going to change” (personal communication, October 10, 2008a). The consensus was, so long as key elements (i.e., programming, anchors, reporters, tone and delivery of news) did not change along with the name, then audiences would accept the new name. As was explicated by an interviewee:

Their favourite anchors are still there; their favourite reporters are still there. Their favourite community identification and community involvement will still be there, their programs are still there, the lineup the same. Nothing has changed except the name. And what we stand for has not changed ... It’s a comfort zone to [the audience]. (personal communication, October 11, 2008)

Importantly, audience ratings remained relatively consistent at this point. A review of supper-hour news ratings for 2005 and 2006, as reported in the Winnipeg Free Press, underscores this, as CTV Winnipeg remained firmly atop the ratings chart. Moreover, viewership for the supper-hour newscast actually increased the following year, from 169,800 in 2005 to 179,100 in 2006 (“CKY,” 2005; “CTV,” 2006).6

In contrast to CTV, the re-branding of Global Winnipeg involved two distinct stages. The first occurred in the mid-1990s, when the stations in the CanWest Global system implemented a common promotional package. Previously, each station produced its own promotional material, and common packaging meant the same promotional spot would air across the entire system, with the individual station logo being the only difference. The second phase took place in 1997, when CKND united with its sister stations as part of the Global Television Network. Interestingly, Global Television Network had long been the name used by CanWest’s station in Toronto (CIII-TV), while the rest of the stations used branding that emphasized call letters (e.g., CKND) or created a separate brand altogether (Saskatchewan stations were known as STV).

Unlike CTV, whose re-branding was done in-house, CanWest hired U.K.-based brand consulting firm Lambie-Nairn to design its new logo. Lambie-Nairn first examined CanWest’s assets, paying attention to the company’s international holdings as well as the “Global” name that was being used for the Toronto station. The firm suggested adopting the “Global” name for the network, but not the Toronto station’s logo (a stylized “G”). In its place, a red crescent was chosen to symbolize the new Global network. All promotional production would also be standardized out of a central office in Toronto.

A-Channel’s re-branding includes elements from both the CTV and Global experiences. At the time of the re-brand, Craig Broadcasting operated four television stations: A-Channel Edmonton, A-Channel Calgary, CKX-TV Brandon (affiliated with both CBC and CTV and MTN). In 1997, the decision was made to re-brand MTN as
A-Channel Manitoba to fall in line with the Alberta stations. As part of this re-branding, the station adopted the positioning statement “Very Independent” to highlight Craig Broadcasting’s uniqueness in the market. As a station/network executive explained:

We try to differentiate ourselves from the CTVs and Globals of the world and the other players in the market. Because we were just a group of four stations ... we just felt that to be the independent voice in the market made sense from a marketing perspective. And, in terms of our brand and brand strategy, we tried to be different and provide an alternative from what everybody else was doing, because we weren't being governed by a larger network at the time. (personal communication, October 15, 2008b)

This independence and individuality extended to how the station’s journalistic practices changed after the re-branding. More than just a visual and semantic re-brand, converting MTN to A-Channel also meant a change in reporting, since the A-Channels tended to mimic the look and feel of Citytv in Toronto. This meant a “colourful, seemingly chaotic, fast-paced and young-faced approach to news and local programming” (Oswald, 2004, p. A4).

A-Channel's re-branding also involved a change of physical location from Portage la Prairie to Winnipeg, as the station re-launched in 1999 from a new location in Winnipeg’s trendy Forks district. In addition to being consistent in logo and newscast aesthetics with the Alberta stations, A-Channel Manitoba was to be consistent in the look and feel of the station itself. Here, the location of the station served as a communicative function of the brand, emphasizing such qualities as connection to Winnipeg, high energy, and unconventionality (the station is a former steam plant, complete with giant smokestack, and news anchors stood rather than sat at a desk). The station’s site represents an element of what Lury (2004) has called “brandscaping” and is designed to convey a consistent message to the consumer across media, spaces, and places.

Such standardization of brand, logo, journalistic ethos, and place can be considered in several ways. For instance, it may be celebrated as a strategic marketing decision or lamented as the loss of local uniqueness. For the networks, consistent branding allowed for cost-saving, efficiency, and the benefits derived from economies of scale. In simplest terms, economies of scale suggest that with synchronized branding across the country, a network has to produce a promotional spot only once, rather than have each individual station produce its own promotions. This permitted networks to centralize promotional production practices under the supervision of a single group of industry “creatives” and maintain consistency across the network regardless of market size. At CTV, for instance, before the 2005 re-branding, each affiliate produced its own promotional spots for both network (i.e., entertainment or national news) and local (i.e., news) programming. After the re-brand, individual stations no longer handled promotions for network programs or local news, and rather, according to management, could focus their energies on promoting local events and community organizations (personal communication, October 11, 2008). Today, all of CTV’s “look, style, and feel” is handled in-house out of the CTV Creative Agency in Toronto (personal communication, November 13, 2008b). Promotions for Global and Citytv are also directed from Toronto.
Performance: Publicity and marketing

Closely aligned with the way the re-branding was rationalized through consistency and economies of scale is the performativity of the brand. That is to say, when we move beyond the purely visual logo and explicate the larger functions of the brand. Lury (2004) suggests that brands are performative because they act as an *interface*—connecting two “environments”—and possess an element of interactivity in “organizing the two-way exchange of information between the inner and outer environments of the market in time, informing how consumers relate to producers and how producers relate to consumers” (p. 7). This concept was introduced when discussing how “brand-scaping” (Lury, 2004) was part of the larger branding strategy of A-Channel. Performativity manifested differently across the stations and is best exemplified through the publicity campaigns of Global and the “guerilla branding” of A-Channel.

Global chose a different route than CTV’s silent rollout and opted instead for an “aggressive multi-media campaign to trumpet its new identity” (Oswald, 1997b). In Winnipeg, this campaign centred around the positioning statement “CKND goes Global” and included on-air promotions, radio spots, billboards, and merchandise. The rollout for the new Global name and look was fast, aggressive, and immediate. Moreover, like the re-branding of CTV, it coincided with the start of the fall season. Unlike CTV, however, there was never a phase-in process. Rather, on August 17, 1997, viewers watched CKND, and the next day, they watched Global Winnipeg. As was previously noted, Lambie-Nairn designed the new logo and brand for the network, and what they created was not only a new look, but a new philosophy for Global: “They created a world, and then the crescent came—this is a corner of the planet in which [Global] operate[d]. ... So it was that sliver of the world with the word ‘Global’ underneath” (personal communication, November 13, 2008a). The accompanying marketing campaign was also unique to Canadian television. As *Broadcast* (1997) described, “The new look is built around visual puns on the idea of a globe, such as the plum, which expands to create its own world before resolving into a logo” (“New Look,” p. 12). Other examples of on-air vignettes included “multiple fish or multiple flowers, and each of those little vignettes ended being a single entity” (personal communication, November 13, 2008a). These vignettes “represented Global being a group of stations now becoming one” (personal communication, November 13, 2008a). It was also suggested that these vignettes had an ulterior motive to simply promoting the then newly christened network: “In a world where consumers are being fed images every single second of the day, this is a very calming, kind of respite from it” (personal communication, November 13, 2008a).

According to interviewees, response to these new promotions was initially mixed. However, as a former manager explicated, “The packaging that was built for [Global] was just so different than anything else out there, you know, fish swimming by, and stuff like this. And of course, the public was going to react and wonder, ‘What the heck was going on?’ ” (personal communication, October 17, 2008). Naturally, what matters most to commercial broadcasters are ratings, and all three Global interviewees noted that there was no change in ratings after the transition to Global Winnipeg. A review of ratings from 1996 and 1998 upholds such observations. According to the *Free Press,*
CKND had 36,000 viewers tune in for their supper-hour newscast in the fall of 1996 and 50,100 in the spring of 1998 (“CKY,” 1999; Oswald, 1997a).

Like Global, there was no “soft sell” for the re-branding of A-Channel Manitoba, and like CTV, very little promotion. While from a corporate perspective it made sense to align the three Craig-owned stations, the execution of MTN’s re-branding had its flaws, according to one interviewee. One hurdle, once the new brand was parachuted in, was that viewers were unsure what “A” meant, or rather, thought it stood for “Alberta” (personal communication, October 15, 2008b). In contrast, “A” was never meant to stand for Alberta, or anything else for that matter. Rather, according to A-Channel’s former general manager, “A” “just meant we were first in the phone book. It was first in the alphabet. You wouldn’t want to have a ‘B’ station. And that’s how we presented it. It had no distinct meaning. It was just A-Channel” (personal communication, October 15, 2008b). Regardless of the significance behind the “A,” the new brand “took a while to gain some traction.”

The problem in Winnipeg was you took an established brand [MTN] and replaced it with a non-established brand [A-Channel] that had no resonance in anyone’s mind in Manitoba. And so ... what was assumed was “Hey, we’ll put this brand in, and it’ll be quickly recognized.” (personal communication, October 15, 2008a)

According to the *Free Press*, moreover, A-Channel’s supper-hour news ratings dropped significantly, from 4,400 in 1999 to 3,500 in 2000 (“CKY,” 2000). A disconnect was experienced between the station’s branding practices and the Winnipeg community. To reconnect the audience with the brand, a unique and innovative marketing strategy was needed. In response, a “guerilla branding” campaign was launched, dubbed “Show us your A.” The campaign was designed specifically for the Winnipeg market, and the premise was to have the viewers quite literally perform the brand. This campaign recruited Winnipeg residents to create A’s across the city. These A’s would then be filmed by A-Channel crews and aired as station promotions. According to the former general manager, as a result, viewers began to “feel partnership with the brand” (personal communication, October 15, 2008a). The “Show us your A” campaign, in addition to A-Channel’s “brandscaping,” allowed viewers to interact with the A-Channel brand and to move beyond the traditional concept of station promos and approach what Lury (2004) calls the “multi-dimensional relations between products or services” (p. 27). The campaign was said to be a success by one interviewee, and a reported jump in ratings by 2002 seems to underscore this observation (Walker, 1999).

**Internal organization: Resistance and adjustments**

Most interesting in this study is the third theme: the organizational abilities of station branding. Specifically, this refers to how branding can be “an effective tool for shaping not only the public image but the internal culture of a corporation” (Doordan, 1995, p. 148, emphasis added). Put another way, organizational abilities capture the way in which branding organizes the workforce and relationships within the station and network. Conventional wisdom suggests that any long-serving brand with positive identification creates both loyalty and equity with consumers, and the same can be said
for the brand of a television station (Chan-Olmsted & Kim, 2001). Moreover, as Doordan (1995) reminds us, station logos can act as “visual anchors” not only for viewers, but to those inside the organization as well (p. 155). A significant finding of this research suggests that the re-branding of these stations was more meaningful to those inside the company than, for instance, the viewers or the press. It is striking, for instance, that a review of articles in the Winnipeg Free Press during these periods found only sparse mention of the re-branding (none for CTV; two for Global; one for A-Channel). As was previously noted, ratings also seemed relatively constant during the re-branding processes. In light of these findings, it is significant that both CTV and Global experienced what managers perceived to be resistance to the re-brandings from both managers and staff. This resistance was a noted issue during the re-branding process according to managers at both stations. The call letters, and logos and brand associated with them, were indeed the “visual anchors” for the employees and managers, and internal communication was needed to ensure that the new brand—CTV’s red circle, blue square, and green triangle, or Global’s red crescent—could “organize the relations within the company itself, between employers and employees” (Lury, 2004, p. 33).

CTV Winnipeg, for instance, is what the network calls a “heritage station”—one of the original eight stations that formed the CTV network in 1960. For such a station, one interviewee suggested that internal resistance to the re-branding was far more significant than any audience reactions because of the station’s longevity.

We’ve still got a couple of staff here who are not “day oners,” but close to it, and they remember those days [with the old logos]. I would say that our staff and managers were trying to hold on to the CKY more than our viewers or advertisers. (personal communication, October 10, 2008b)

This response was not isolated to Winnipeg, for many managers across the country had difficulty adjusting to this change.

Many of them started at the stations or came on very early in the life of the stations and had gone through ownership changes and things like that. But one thing that remained was their call letters, because that’s how we were referred to. (personal communication, October 11, 2008)

According to a senior executive, when the local logos were phased out across the country, “a lot of people internally ... had a hard time with losing what they perceived as their local identity” (personal communication, November 13, 2008b). Moreover, interviewees suggested that some staff members mistakenly saw the re-branding as the loss of local identity rather than market economics—that local stations needed to become part of larger corporations to survive.

There’s a lot of people who started working ... in local stations, and local stations were very strong and had made very good money and had a lot of local control and autonomy. And that’s gone. And it’s gone not because somebody big bought them up and took them over and changed it. It was the way the world was working and, more importantly, the way the television industry was working that that change needed to happen. Because there was no way
that a local station could survive in the way it was in the ’70s. (personal communication, November 13, 2008b)

One instance of disagreement was noted, however, between staff and managers interviewed regarding the sentiment toward the re-branding. While managers noted resistance, one on-air personality tempered this perspective:

In my daily work, it was an adjustment first moving from CKY News to CTV News because people were used to hearing our call letters and we were attached to saying them. However, it was a welcome change as well because even though we had been affiliated with CTV News national for years, we now officially felt like we were part of the “family” and the identity that went with those call letters. The strong name and brand it built up for itself was evident in the market already, so to be unmistakably a part of that brand was a very positive thing. (personal communication, October 25, 2011a)

In the final analysis, perhaps “resistance” is better replaced with the word “adjustment” to reflect these differences in perception. What can be taken away from these comments is that a period of adjustment was necessary, but one whose intensity varied among staff and management. For instance, in addition to acknowledging resistance, several managers noted that a great deal of dialogue took place between CTV and CTV Winnipeg to assure the smooth transition away from CKY (personal communications, October 10, 2008b & October 11, 2008). In the end, however, all agreed that staff and management came to positively identify with the CTV brand.

While CTV management stressed dialogue, CanWest took a different approach. The decision to re-brand the network was made by CanWest executives, designed by Lambie-Nairn in London, and directed out of Global Toronto. The remaining local stations, including CKND, had very little input into the decision-making process. For instance, at the station level, it was noted that more direction was needed from Toronto as far as brand management was concerned. Contrasting with this sentiment however, one interviewee from the network dismissed concerns of the local stations:

There are those [at the local stations] that like their independence and like to be able to do it their own way. And they have a hard time grasping the fact that, you know what? We’re a small cog in this bigger wheel and really it makes much more sense to be a part of this larger network than to be a single, independent entity. They have a hard time grasping that because they like to be mavericks, they like to do things their own way. But there was [sic] so many benefits to being part of a larger whole. And that was always our philosophy, and in everything that we did that was related to the branding and creating a network. (personal communication, November 13, 2008a)

A significant tension is apparent, whereby a manager interviewed from the station noted a lack of communication, while an interviewee from the network intimated they worked with stations to roll out the new brand. This suggests, in a similar fashion to CTV, that internal resistance to the re-branding of CKND was an obstacle to overcome. For CKND/Global Winnipeg, hesitancy toward the re-branding, according to managers, ranged from problems with its Toronto-based management to concerns over whether
centralization would result in the loss of station autonomy and jobs. For instance, there was resistance at CKND to the adoption of the “Global” name itself, as UTV (Vancouver), STV (Saskatchewan), CKND, and MITV (Maritimes) not only had to change logos, but also had to accept the difficult task of changing their respective names to “Global.” Toronto, which had always been known as the Global Television Network, did not have this problem. One former manager reduced this opposition to a Toronto-centric bias within the organization:

If you were in Toronto, and you were the Global Television Network, or Global, it was the big “G” [referring to the Toronto station’s stylized “G” logo]. What would it matter to you if you were changing from the big “G” to the crescent moon? You’re still Global! (personal communication, October 17, 2008)

As at CTV, however, there is disjuncture between the managerial and staff perception of the re-branding. While the above-quoted manager expressed frustration, a staff member acknowledged a loss of local identity but could not recall any negative sentiment:

The community knew us as CKND, that’s what they grew up with…. My personal opinion is that it lost its identity as a local station, because it was now part of a network. And there were so many other things out there that had the word “Global” in it, [like] “Global Refrigeration”… (personal communication, October 25, 2011b)

Importantly, this staff member added that staff perception was hesitant but positive: “I don’t think anybody was negative against it. I think that everyone just kind of waited to see if it was going to stay. It’s always been a positive thing. I think that we all look at Global now as a positive thing” (personal communication, October 25, 2011b). Indeed, at Global Winnipeg, both staff and management acknowledged that, in the end, the re-branding was “definitely for the better good” (personal communication, October 17, 2008). As at CTV, this elite discourse of resistance at Global is tempered by discourses from staff. As such, “resistance” can again be replaced by “adjustment” or “hesitancy” to reflect a more nuanced understanding. The next section outlines five hypotheses for explaining such internal dynamics toward the station re-branding.

Discussion
The findings of this research suggest that the re-branding of CKND, CKY, and MTN to Global Winnipeg, CTV Winnipeg, and A-Channel Manitoba, respectively, was a significant, but neglected aspect in the history of local television in Canada. This is illustrated by the rationale for the re-branding, the publicity and marketing campaigns employed, and the internal adjustments within the stations, all of which forced broadcasters to undertake different strategies both within and without the organization to ensure maximum identification. Interestingly, these three themes can be loosely correlated with the defining characteristics of branding as described by Lury (2004): communicative, performative, and organizational. Branding as communicative suggests consistency across the country, economies of scale, and efficiency. The important aspect of these three re-brandings was to communicate to viewers that no matter where one goes in the country, a network affiliate would look and feel the same. Performativity comes
into play with respect to publicity campaigns and marketing strategies. It should also be recalled that according to respondents (at CTV and Global), and intimated by the notable lack of press, the re-branding of the Winnipeg stations was more meaningful to those within the organization than to viewers or to local media critics in the press. Such an observation suggests that branding has an organizational capacity, one that coordinates the relationships within a company (Lury, 2004).

This organizational capacity was demonstrated both by the adjustment experienced at CTV and Global and by the differences in perception between national management, station management, and staff. Although there was a noted concern among station managers of a loss of local identity and autonomy, staff tempered these responses in expressing that an adjustment was needed, but that it was ultimately for the better good. We can hypothesize several reasons for these differences between management and staff. First, one could speculate that the re-branding resonated most with those who had been with the station for a long period of time (as at CTV). Second, one might guess that it resonated more with middle and station management who feared a loss of local identity and autonomy. Third, we could hypothesize that any staff resistance was a result of concerns over centralization and the loss of employment. Fourth, we might guess that the re-branding process highlighted a possible disconnect between network, management, and staff (e.g., the top-down approach at Global). Fifth, one could assume that, as with any change, a period of adjustment was necessary for management and staff, especially for a change that registered differently for different people.

In addition to strategies, a discussion of re-branding through this taxonomy allows us to interrogate the relationship between the local station and its community. We can see how the re-brandings resonated more with those inside the station (with employees and managers) for CTV and Global, and more outside the station (with audience members) for A-Channel. Although these disjunctures were rectified using strategies such as internal marketing and guerilla branding, they nonetheless suggest that the re-branding of Canada’s English-language commercial broadcasters brought about a symbolic change at the local level with respect to local identification. This taxonomy speaks to the loss of a symbolic connection to the local community in Canadian broadcasting. Importantly, while stations continue to produce their local newscasts and continue to be involved in community initiatives, an element of local identification has been replaced by a national identity. The question is, is this such a terrible thing? Answering this question is not easy, nor should an approach be taken that romanticizes the local and demonizes the corporate. While any reduction in local employment is both unfortunate and lamented, it is not the intention of this article to condemn the commercial broadcasting industry, but rather to chronicle this transition and interrogate interactions and dynamics.

An inherent and perhaps irresolvable tension exists between centralization and localization. This dichotomy is played out not only at the local and national levels but at a global level as well. From a local perspective, localism could be seen as having been eclipsed by national sentiments and market-based considerations at the expense of community identification and autonomy. If we look beyond the local, however, to the
national and supranational, re-branding could potentially be understood as a mechanism by which Canadian national identity was articulated globally, and we could hypothesize that common ownership and common branding strengthens the Canadian stance against American cultural and economic encroachment. This last point is made evident by the long-term centralized branding strategies of the CBC. Seen through this lens, the re-branding of commercial networks to a single, national brand and logo could be understood as an economic and cultural protectionist approach to unwelcome and overwhelming cultural flows. Nonetheless, we are still left with a loss of locally produced promotions and locally driven jobs, an outcome that may indeed be irresolvable.

Conclusion: Toward the study of Canadian media localism

The past five years have not been kind to Canadian local broadcasters. Lacking regulatory protections to ensure their ability to negotiate with cable operators, lacking protection from the encroachment of distant signals, and, as one critic argues, having networks believing that they were “too big to fail” (not unlike Wall Street) (Tinic, 2010, p. 194), stations have been shuttered and local news severely curtailed (DeMara, 2009). Perhaps, then, the recent takeovers of broadcasters by telecommunication companies (Shaw/CanWest and BCE/CTV) will give local stations more financial stability. However, we must ask, at what cost to local news and information, employment, community initiatives, and even democracy (considering Canada’s three largest English-language commercial networks are now owned by Canada’s three largest telecoms)?

Local television has a tenuous hold on existence in Canada, its fate determined in corporate boardrooms and regulatory hearings. Even the way it presents itself to its community is largely determined from afar. Nevertheless, this research demonstrates how local television stations remain a potent site for inquiry and analysis. This research has been in part a response to the numerous calls within the Canadian academic community to demarcate commercial broadcasting as a critical site of research. In so doing, I have attempted to illustrate how an examination of the branding practices of local television stations can offer a perspective from which to interrogate the history of Canadian private broadcasting and an avenue for comment on commercial broadcasting, without simply dismissing it as the homogenizing bane of the Canadian cultural industries. Although commercial broadcasting is not absent from media research, critical scholarship has tended to treat it in a monolithic fashion—that is to say, as an industry devoid of public interest responsibilities and as the purveyor of Americana to helpless Canadian audiences. Concern is certainly warranted, in particular as Canada sits next to the largest cultural exporter in the Western world and has historically struggled for the ability to determine and control its sovereign mediascape (Raboy, 1990). Nevertheless, such a perspective tends to abstract the histories, development, and contributions of private broadcasting. The victim of this intellectual neglect is the local television station: its history, development, and contributions to Canadian broadcasting going unrecorded. Aside from noted exceptions, few researchers have chronicled the institutional development of Canadian local television (see Tinic, 2005, chapter 1 & 6). Unlike American or Australian research, moreover, there is yet to be a field of inquiry dedicated to defining, describing, and interrogating “Canadian media localism.” Yet these are the institutions informing Canadian communities and, as such, they must
be acknowledged as productive sites of research. The re-branding of Canada’s private English-language television stations represented an opportunity to interrogate the relationships between networks and affiliates. It permitted a moment in which we could interrogate the decision-making process of an otherwise often opaque industry. Most importantly, it represented an opportunity to re-situate the local station as a site of critical inquiry.

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Notes
1. CTVglobemedia (now Bell Media) owns 21 of the 22 stations in the CTV Network; CanWest Global (now Shaw Media) owns all 11 stations of the Global Television Network; and Rogers Media owns all five stations of the Citytv Network (“Local Affiliates,” 2011; “Media Convergence,” 2010).
2. It is beyond the scope of this article to offer a comprehensive literature review on branding. For more, see Lury (2004); Moore (2007).
3. CTVglobemedia has since been purchased by Bell Canada Enterprises (BCE) and now forms part of Bell Media.
4. As Barratt (2008) describes, despite owning stations across the country by the early 1990s, CanWest avoided for a time being called a “network” and rather was labelled a “system,” so as not to be “subject to the increased requirements associated with a network license” (p.117). Moreover, since the writing of this article, CanWest’s broadcast holdings have been sold to Shaw Media, after the debt-riddled CanWest declared bankruptcy in 2010 (Krashinsky & Robertson, 2010).
5. An article in the *Winnipeg Free Press* from 1982 identifies CBWT as “CBC Manitoba,” suggesting the station had been known as such since at the least the early 1980s (MacKinnon, 1982).
6. Ratings reported in newspapers are problematic, and their use in this article should not be taken as suggesting a cause-and-effect relationship between branding and audiences. Rather, they are used to corroborate interviewee statements.
7. Two managers from Global Winnipeg noted that employees were concerned that their jobs would be made redundant; however, this was not confirmed by outside sources. A reduction in staff did occur as a result of centralization in 2007, when CanWest moved all master controls to Calgary (Oswald, 2007). In addition to Global, A-Channel laid off three on-air personalities after re-branding (Kives, 1999).
8. One on-air personality at CTV does recall taking “call[s] from some frustrated viewers, initially when the switch occurred from CKYNews to CTV” (personal communication October 25, 2011a). Similarly, a respondent from Global recalled that it was not until Global re-branded for a second time—adopting the “greater than” logo in 2006—that people began “to realize who Global is” (personal communication, October 25, 2011b).
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