

EXPLORING PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENTS
STUDYING COMMUNICATION TOWARD
MEDIA ACCESS AND USE:
A Q METHOD STUDY

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1964, William Stephenson published his ludenic theory of newspaper reading to little fanfare (Glasser, 2000). That same year, Westley and Severin (1964a) bemoaned a lack of research on the credibility of the media channels through which information was being transmitted, and Elmo Roper (1964) released his report comparing the first three years of his polling data related to people's preference for television versus other media channels of information.

The research came on the heels of several volatile years in American history that had underscored the relevance of television as a news medium. For example, Roper's 1963 media survey was conducted between November 15, 1963, and November 30, 1963, with President Kennedy's assassination leading to then-unprecedented media coverage beginning on November 22, 1963. News coverage of the young president's assassination pre-empted network programming for the next four days, resulting in Roper adjusting his data (Roper, 1964). Just four years before, in 1960, television had been credited with massive political power, allegedly helping then-candidate Kennedy to win the presidency via his appearance during the nation's first televised presidential debate (Druckman, 2003).

More than 40 years later, Americans have vastly more media channels through which to receive information. A recent report noted people increasingly are getting their news from the Internet, making it second only to television for news consumption and adding another layer to the

country's increasingly sepia-toned newspaper industry (The Pew Research Center Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2011). Additionally, the report found nearly half of Americans received news, mostly about weather or local information, via a mobile device. The report noted a side effect of the growth of digital news consumption: the software companies that deliver news content electronically via cell phone or electronic notepad sometimes own the demographic information about the news audience, rather than that demographic information belonging to the news industry.

At the same time, Americans spend more time following the news (The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2010). The Pew Center found people report spending an average 70 minutes per day getting news from TV, radio, newspapers or online. Additionally, the report found that online newspaper readership grew to 17 percent in 2009, up from 13 percent the year before. However, the news is not as promising for print newspaper readership, as "only about one-in-four (26 %) Americans say they read a newspaper in print yesterday, down from 30% two years ago and 38% in 2006" (2010, p. 5).

Statement of the Problem

The literature has shown young adults, those generally younger than 25 years of age, have never been lauded for their excessive interest in news, but fewer young people receive any news each day (The Pew Research Center for People and the Press, 2010). However, young people are especially coveted by the newspaper industry because if print news is going to regain readership, it must first entice this set to read the paper (Armstrong & Collins, 2009). This study highlighted various perspectives held by communications students toward credibility related not just to newspapers, but all media outlets. Bird's (2000) research found that journalism students are sometimes disconnected from the news with comments such as "knowledge of current events, history, or social science is unnecessary because 'I want to go into TV news'" (p. 31). While such comments are certainly not representative of all communications students, and Bird (2000) said as much, it does call into question societal views

toward the credibility of various media channels. In other words, if some journalism students have such notions about their supposed future profession, how can news consumers be expected to take news seriously?

Newspaper newsrooms today are an estimated 30 percent smaller than they were in 2000 (Pew Research Center, 2011). News companies, increasingly forced to support multiple media channels with fewer resources, can ill afford to make sound business decisions based on simple demographic data. News industry leaders need to understand how news consumers think, rather than which page they turn to, or click on, first. As Armstrong and Collins (2009) said: "...it is time scholars move beyond measuring newspaper readership, or lack thereof – and begin focusing on attitudes that may explain readership problems" (p. 98).

This study continued that focus by examining the perspectives of future news industry professionals. Before today's news industry leaders can make sound decisions about their audience, it would help, first, to recognize the perspectives toward news use and access held by today's communications students. Additionally, while young adults are often noted for their lack of interest in news (Bird, 2000; Lazarsfeld, 1940; The Pew Research Center for People and the Press, 2010), this study did not exclude nontraditional students who are often older than the average university student because they, too, are preparing for a future in news.

Theoretical Framework

The main theory used in this study was William Stephenson's ludenic, or play, theory. It is supplemented by Dutta-Bergman's theory of media complementarity. A purely quantitative approach is insufficient to determine the significance of a media channel to an audience, the then-director of the Television Information office wrote in a preface to the landmark 1964 Elmo Roper report. Meanwhile, that same year, Stephenson (1964) debuted his ludenic theory of newsreading in an effort to explain the society's appeal of news. The theory never caught on (Glasser, 2000).

Ludenic Theory

Stephenson debuted his ludenic theory, called play theory, in 1964, and expanded on it three years later in his book *The Play Theory of Mass Communication* (1967). The theory lauds that newspaper readership is pleasure-seeking behavior. Stephenson (1964) cautions against confusing play theory with games theory, which requires decision-making behavior. However, neither does he regard play as passive (1967). Rather, he postulates that people read news, including bad news or even information with no new news at all, for enjoyment, in as much as it gives them something to discuss. This theory was relevant to the present study in that the instrument developed to describe perspectives of university communications students toward news includes statements adapted from Stephenson's (1964) *The Ludenic Theory of Newsreading*. Additionally, the statements reflect newsreading attitudes and behaviors, both of which are encompassed in play theory.

Media Complementarity Theory

Dutta-Bergman's (2004) theory of media complementarity proposes people use media channels in balance, rather than displacing one with another. The theory holds that a person is likely to consult a variety of media channels when seeking information on a certain subject. In other words, the media channels complement each other in providing additional information for consumers. Indeed, the theory seems to be confirmed by the Pew Research Center for People and the Press (2010), which found Americans receive their news by integrating new technologies, rather than replacing traditional methods. Postman and Powers (2008) argued viewers are unprepared to watch television news, if they have not first read newspapers and other print media. This theory is relevant to the present study in that the instrument was developed to include a variety of media channels used by today's communications students.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe the perspectives of university communications students about the credibility of media in their lives by employing Q methodology as a means of investigation. Q methodology is designed to explore human subjectivity and is well-suited to study such perspectives (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). This study's purpose allows industry and educators increased understanding as to how university communications students determine which media channels to access and use. That added dimension increases the ability of professionals and educators to navigate a subjective industry with increasingly precious resources.

Research Questions

The two research questions that guided the inquiry for this study were:

1. What are university communications students' perceptions of news credibility as related to media access and use?
2. What do these perspectives say about university communications students' access and use of media channels?

Significance of the Study

This study is a stepping stone toward bridging the gap in the scientific study of perspectives of readership patterns (Armstrong & Collins, 2009) and of media channel credibility (Westley & Severin, 1964a). Detailed perspectives of university communications students toward the credibility of media in their lives may help both news industry professionals and educators tailor their services to the expectations of an up-and-coming audience that has grown up with a smorgasbord of media channel options.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study includes students on a large, comprehensive university campus pursuing undergraduate studies in the Department of Agricultural Education, Communications and Leadership and the School for Media and Strategic Communication during the 2010 – 2011 school year.

Assumptions

This study included the following assumptions:

1. Students who study communication have at least a working knowledge of a variety of media channels, including social networking media.
2. Students honestly and accurately answered demographic questions.
3. Students honestly and accurately identified themselves as enrolled in a communications-related field at Oklahoma State University.

Limitations

The following limitation was identified for this study: the results of this study cannot be generalized to students by major or college.

Definition of Terms

The follow terms were defined operationally for use in this study:

Concourse of statements: A spectrum of statements that is winnowed for potential inclusion in a Q method study (McKeown & Thomas, 1988).

Convergence: The conjoining of two or more communication channels to widen an audience (Brooks, Kennedy, Moen, & Ranly, 2008).

Media channel credibility: The “relative credibility of the media which carry the message” (Westley & Severin, 1964a, p. 325).

P set: The sample population that participates in a Q method study by sorting a Q sample (McKeown & Thomas, 1988).

Q methodology: A scientific method of measurement of subjectivity. It “allows respondents to assemble a model of her or his own subjectivity, preserving its internal and self-referent characteristics during analysis” (Robbins, 2005, p. 210).

Q sample: A collection of statements or other items that are sorted by participants in a Q method study (McKeown & Thomas, 1988).

Q sort: Ranking Q sample statements according to a condition of instruction to determine a person’s point of view (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). In this study, the ranking of Q sample statements is referred to as “sorting.”

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following review of selected literature is relevant to this study's purpose in describing the unique perception of university communications students about the credibility of media in their lives. This review is presented to bolster understanding of the history of media channel credibility, with its roots in the early days of radio broadcast when urban and farm families alike gained some control over how they would receive the news. The review highlights relevant literature regarding certain demographic factors pertaining to news consumers' selection of media channels. Additionally, Stephenson's (1964) play theory is employed to help increase understanding of how news consumers' subjective self-perspectives are linked to the media channels they regard most credible. Media complementarity theory aids in the understanding of how news consumers use media channels, especially in today's environment of converging media. This review also includes a short discussion of the relationship between agricultural journalism and modern media. It begins with an effort to clarify the notion of media credibility.

Media Credibility

Credibility, a subjective notion, is notoriously difficult to determine. Schweiger (2000) said judgments on media credibility are based on particular experiences. For example, more than one respondent to his study on Internet credibility in Germany asked what he meant by

"television." However, the literature provides some benchmarks in determining credibility, a notion important to the news industry because of evidence that people are more likely to consume news they trust (Thorson, Vraga & Ekdale, 2010; Tsfati & Cappella, 2005).

Schweiger's (2000) study described six levels of attributes for media credibility:

1. Presenter, such as the journalist or commentator;
2. Source/Actor, such as a politician or other article source;
3. Editorial Units, such as a news program or article;
4. Media Product, such as a media company or brand;
5. Subsystem of Media Type, such as public television or industry or trade magazines;
and
6. Media Types, such as television or newspapers as a whole. (p. 40)

Meanwhile, Kioussis (2001) found that key criteria to gauge media credibility include factuality; monetary motivations; privacy infringement; consideration for community; and trustworthiness.

Thorson et al. (2010), in a study of the impact of civil and uncivil online commentary on credibility, noted many of the same conditions to gauge media credibility as Kioussis (2001), but added expertise; fairness; bias; incompleteness; accuracy; separation of facts and opinions; and perspectives of balance. However, Armstrong and Collins (2009) condensed many of the above attributes of credibility to surmise that study of credibility involves source, news, and message credibility.

History of Media Comparisons and Credibility

The advantages of news consumption via broadcast or print have hardly changed since Stouffer's (Lazarsfeld, 1940; Stouffer, 1962) pre-World War II study of radio news vs. newspapers.

Newspapers allow readers to skip articles they find uninteresting and catch up on more thorough accounts of the news at their own pace. However, radio broadcasts allow for multi-tasking, a

modern phrase Stouffer did not use but accurately described. For example, he wrote, that the radio should be most appreciated by “housewives, especially those who have no maids and do their own housework” (p. 156). He added that the appliance “maybe considered of value to drivers of automobiles equipped with radios” (p. 156).

Stephenson (1967) built upon the Stouffer study, using his then-relatively new Q methodology. Stouffer had found women preferred radio broadcasts while men were more apt to turn to a newspaper. Stephenson, however, was unsatisfied with Stouffer’s assertion that rural women, especially, turn to the radio for convenience. A deeper reason, he speculated, was rural women were more enamored by the “scientific marvel” (p.23) that was the radio. Perhaps, he suggested, another perspective was rural women considered newspapers “...sinful, promoting sex, waste, violence...” (p. 23).

Options Lead to Opinions

Of course, by the time Stephenson (1967) delved further into Stouffer’s work, television news broadcasts had entered the fray, enticing news consumers with additional means of receiving information. Communications researchers already had begun to consider the impact of broadcast on print journalism and, like Stephenson, knew the expanding frontier of communications research was not limited to consumer convenience. For example, Carter and Greenberg (1965) suggested the perceived weaknesses of the print and television media have much to do with their believability. For example, the duo claimed to confirm earlier research by Westley and Severin in suggesting consumers are more apt to believe newspapers over television, when forced to choose the single most believable media channel. Carter and Greenberg explained that consumers are more likely to believe newspapers because that media channel provides more complete report – even if it is a biased account – than television, which they believed was more likely to omit information.

Stephenson's (1967) speculation that some rural women may have considered newspapers distasteful is akin to then-emerging research as to the individual credibility of the various news media channels. Stouffer's (1962) work was first printed in Lazarsfeld's (1940) radio and newspaper comparison textbook, which provides an early look at media preferences. In a section of the book regarding why news consumers prefer radio or print, a single half page is devoted to the idea that people find one of the media channels "more convincing" (p. 143). For example, consider the following anecdote Lazarsfeld provides to illustrate why a pre-World War II news consumer prefers to get news via radio:

On the radio, one thinks if they have chosen that man, he must be good. They would not give time to a quack. Time is too expensive on the radio. They certainly have a responsibility when they select somebody. (p. 143)

Increased Focus in Media Channel Credibility Research

Studies regarding news-seeking behaviors, such as Westley and Barrow's 1959 study, had popped up by the late 1950s. However, the content seemed more focused on news-knowledge and retention, rather than a study of why people prefer to get their news from a particular media channel. For example, Westley and Barrow's study tested sixth-graders' ability to recall news content delivered via television and radio.

Elmo Roper's annual surveys, beginning in 1959, regarding media use and believability brought additional focus to the study of credibility, but they did not offer explanation as to why people seek a particular media channel. Roper's (1964) report comparing his first three media use and believability surveys found television was the most used and believed news source. Newspapers, he found, were the least believable news source. However, Roper's polls quickly spurred additional study and critique. For example, Carter and Greenberg (1965) confirmed the potential

for an anti-newspaper bias in Roper's questioning and found when television and newspapers give conflicting information, newspapers get the benefit of the doubt.

Additionally, the United States' first televised presidential debate, that of then-candidates Kennedy and Nixon in 1960, added another dimension to the study of media credibility. That is, the media channel could confer credibility. The lore surrounding the debate suggests that many people who viewed the debate on television thought Kennedy won; radio listeners, however, thought the winner was Nixon (Druckman, 2003). Druckman, noting a dearth of scientific confirmation of television's role in the 1960 election, recreated the scene in a study that, indeed, lent credibility to this political legend.

Factors Influencing Media Channel Credibility

The literature does not provide one clear winner in the race to determine which media channel is perceived as most credible. Flanagin and Metzger (2000) found that, save for newspapers, news consumers ascribe little difference to credibility based on media channels. However, that is in contrast to Westley and Severin's (1964a) assertion that broadcast media is favored to print. Likewise, no single method determines how news consumers perceive news itself as credible (Golan & Day, 2010). Even so, researchers have seemingly left no stone unturned in the quest to determine what, if anything, drives news consumers' perspectives of news and media channel credibility. Modern researchers have even rustled through news consumers' religious beliefs in an effort to determine whether religion plays a role in credibility perspectives (Golan & Day, 2010; Westley & Severin, 1964a and 1964b). However, mostly age and education have consistently been found to play a role in news consumers' evaluations of credibility (Bucy, 2003).

Age of News Consumer

The idea that young people prefer to obtain news via broadcast, rather than newspapers, is hardly novel. Lazarsfeld (1940) noted a 1937 American Institute of Public Opinion study that noted a

clear preference for radio, as opposed to newspapers, among news consumers younger than 25 years old. The findings held regardless of gender or economic status, save for rural males. Lazarsfeld noted no explanation was available for why young rural men at that time did not seem to prefer to receive news via radio. Additionally, Lazarsfeld noted the data did not explain whether the radio preference was due to the younger generation being less interested in news or more comfortable with the medium. The influence of one media channel compared to another was a then-seemingly important research discussion, so much so that Lazarsfeld postulated that "... radio is the preferred medium of the more suggestible man" (p. 257). Perhaps ahead of his time, Lazarsfeld (1940) did question "...the assumption that the audiences of the two media are substantially similar. But it now appears that people who rely more on print are different from those who rely chiefly on the radio" (p. 257).

More than 20 years later, Westley and Severin (1964b) described the relationship between age and the tendency to read a newspaper as curvilinear. For example, people in their 20s tend to not read the newspaper, but readership increases among those in their 50s. However, the pendulum swings back to non-readership, which peaks among elderly adults. In another 1964 study, Westley and Severin (1964a) noted that "...the oldest medium is least trusted by the oldest people" (p. 330). Interestingly, the duo pointed out their data indicated that subscribing to a newspaper had more to do with social class than news-seeking behavior. More recently, Bird (2000) found people fewer than 30 years old were more skeptical about news credibility; seemed to not possess "a sense of obligation to be informed" (p. 31); and tended to believe it was the media's responsibility to attract their attention.

Prestige and Education

Indeed, in Westley and Severin's (1964a) landmark, comprehensive study of media channel credibility, the authors noted that "...it appears that credibility and prestige are not the same" (p.

326). While the literature has long cited medium preferences for news consumption, less emphasis seems to have been given to medium preferences related to media credibility (Westley & Severin, 1964a). Westley and Severin considered a laundry list of factors, from birthplace to voting tendency, most of which turned up unsurprising results. However, they found that education and “subjective social class” (p. 328) are significant factors in media channel credibility. For example, self-reported middle class respondents ranked newspapers as more credible, while respondents who consider themselves working class reported television as more credible. Likewise, people who viewed themselves as upwardly mobile considered newspapers as the more credible media channel. The findings hold even when social class is considered objectively. So, how people view themselves socially may play a key role in predicting media channel credibility. The study is considered the pioneering research of media credibility across media channels (Kioussis, 2001).

Nearly 20 years after Westley and Severin’s (1964a) study of media channel credibility, Mulder (1981) again tackled the notion. Mulder, using his mathematical analysis, found younger, less educated audiences, especially women, believed television news was the most credible. However, age and education are not the end-all factors in news credibility research. Mulder noted younger people were more likely to have higher education levels, and, in turn, people with more education were more likely to assign greater credibility to newspapers.

In a comparison study of the credibility assigned by young adults to either campus or community newspapers, Armstrong and Collins (2009) found that one was not rated more credible than the other. The authors surmised the findings could be due to a general lack of media credibility, the respondents’ lack of familiarity with local daily newspapers, or that young adults are more likely to ascribe credibility to publications geared toward their demographic.

Armstrong and Collins (2009) also reported a finding that could root a person's perception of media credibility in childhood:

...if parents encourage their children to read newspapers, it appears that these readers will have a higher view of that type of content. ... What this result may mean is that for young adult readers, credibility is not only about what they read and believe but also about what their parents read and believe. (p. 110)

New Media and Familiarity

Interestingly, in Bucy's (2003) study on the synergy effects of television and Internet use on media credibility, adults and college students rated media channels they were less familiar with as more credible. For example, Bucy explained that although college students tend to be more familiar with Internet news sources, they reported TV news as more credible. Additionally, adults, who tend to be more familiar with broadcast, rated Internet news as more credible.

Though it may sound counterintuitive, this inclination has happened before. Nearly 40 years before Bucy's (2003) publication, Westley and Severin (1964a) noted that in their prior research they had found "residents did not necessarily assign greatest credibility to the medium they assigned greatest preference" (p. 326). However, they did note in the study that the more time people spent with media, the more likely they were to favor its credibility. Similarly, Bucy's (2003) study, which involved participants actively using certain media channels, found respondents tended to favor media they had "just used" (p. 258).

Additionally, the Internet's more jumbled presentation of news and opinion articles can affect the perceived credibility of a news item (Thorson et al., 2010). Thorson et al. tested the perception of a news article's credibility in relation to its position to both a civil and uncivil blog post regarding policies discussed in the news item. The researchers found the article was considered more credible when it was embedded within an uncivil blog post, rather than being positioned with a

post of a more civil tone. The perceived credibility of a news article directly influences the credibility of that item's channel of delivery through the "principle of credibility transfer" (Schweiger, 2000, p. 41). Similarly, Kiouisis (2001) touched on the notion of credibility transfer when he said there is more overlap between channel and source credibility than originally considered.

Media Complimentarity Theory

Media convergence may muddle researchers' ability to distinguish between media channels. The Internet simultaneously operates multiple channels (Dutta-Bergman, 2004), including print, broadcast, and personal communication. The convergence of media channels is not only reshaping content but also news consumers' perspectives (Kiouisis, 2001). Flanagin and Metzger (2000) found online information was rated as credible as that included in magazines, radio, and TV. While Flanagin and Metzger offered some conflicting evidence, it is possible, they explained, that the respondents were basing their credibility judgments on a media company, rather than channel of communication. That is to say, the ability of news outlets to converge their print or broadcast editions with an Internet presence may be graying the abilities of researchers and respondents to clearly categorize Internet credibility.

Dutta-Bergman (2004) postulated in the development of media complimentarity theory that subject, rather than communication channel, drives news consumption. For example, Dutta-Bergman found that rather than one communication channel displacing another, news consumers will use various media in a complementary fashion as they search for information on a certain subject. Dutta-Bergman (2004) wrote that the notion, which can be traced to Lazarsfeld's (1940) work, that content drives consumption should be given more attention in media research.

Play Theory

The literature has suggested that media channel credibility is fueled by a certain amount of imagination and comfort. Stephenson's (1964 and 1967) play theory falls in line with this idea, as he proposes that news seeking is a pleasurable, social habit for people, rather than a necessity. In other words, while researchers fret to find the Holy Grail of news-seeking behavior, Stephenson argued the answer is hidden in plain sight. Stephenson essentially gives a name to the notion that the draw of news consumption is that it gives us something to talk about. Nimmo (1976) explained play theory as news gathering, via print or broadcast, for its "own sake rather than to promote the achievement of tangible goals" (p. 40). In a review of Stephenson's book detailing play theory, Mendelsohn (1967) may have provided the clearest explanation of the theory, which is that "...the most important effect to be derived from much of mass communication is simply plain, old-fashioned fun" (p. 407).

As Shepherd et al. (2001) described it, play theory simply refers to the "getting" (p. 151) part of getting the news, which is, itself, the reward. For example, Glasser (2000) explained: "Missing the morning newspaper does not make people unprepared as much as it makes them upset..." (p. 26). Indeed, in the summer of 1945, when newspaper delivery of eight major New York City papers was abruptly stopped due a strike, researchers jumped at the opportunity to study reactions to the dearth of news (Berelson, 1949). Berelson noted respondents believed that claiming to miss the newspaper's "'serious' news value seems to be the accepted if not the automatic thing to say" (p. 39). However, when respondents were asked which serious news stories they missed most, only about a third of them could name such an article. The remainder either could not name a news event or listed some sensational article, such as a murder case. This finding was despite the United States' involvement at the time in World War II.

To be sure, some respondents did claim they felt out-of-the-loop on news; some to the extent that their comments seemed anxiety-laden (Berelson, 1949). For example, respondents reported that not having a paper was "...like being in jail..." (p. 45) or claimed "I could not sleep, I missed it so" (p. 46). There were cases of respondents who seemed soothed by the lack of gruesome tales in the paper, but Berelson also explained that the paper seemed to fulfill a "need for relief from the boredom and dullness of everyday life..." (p. 41).

The Development of Play Theory

Stephenson (1964) noted Berelson's work and built upon it, explaining that the habit of newspaper reading goes beyond ritual or "staid appearances" (p. 371). Three years later, Stephenson (1967) explained that he had coined the ludenic theory of newspaper reading by borrowing from the Latin "ludus," which loosely refers to games and play. He likens a person's absorption in newspaper reading to a child engrossed in play. Newspaper reading, he explained, provides a respite from everyday life, "satisfying in itself and ending there" (1967, p. 150). Readers, he suggested, project themselves into the articles, quickly jumping at-will from one subject to another.

Who indeed has not imagined himself being more effective about a situation than others, who have blundered (making mistakes *we* would not have made)? ... Who has not caught glimpses of his own incomparable good sense, his more accurate appraisal of affairs, as he reads a paper? (pp.150-151)

Play theory may be especially relevant today, as news consumers have the ability to continuously follow the same news story through a variety of media and a wider variety of topics. For example, while Stephenson could not have predicted the variety of media channels available today, he noted (1964; 1967) that sports fans often watch a game, then read on-going coverage of it in the press before watching it again as a re-run. This phenomenon bolsters play theory as

people were not accessing these media channels for new information but were reading “most avidly what they already know about” (p. 149).

Play theory certainly did not generate a stop-the-presses response among media researchers when Stephenson debuted it (Glasser, 2000). In fact, Glasser wrote, the book was “never quite taken seriously and now mostly forgotten” (p. 23). However, he noted that tossing play theory onto the heap of uses and gratification theories, as has been done for more than half a century, neglects the role of media in how people learn about themselves and the world around them. Stephenson (1967), too, thought the role of play was being overlooked in communication research:

“At its best, newsreading is a great skill with which the reader creates his own order, commanding his own grasp of things in the world. ...it is deeply absorbing, almost trancelike. ... Yet the core of it has been overlooked by the theorists.” (p. 158)

Indeed, Ingenthron (1988), in a review of a then-newly reprinted version of Stephenson’s *The Play Theory of Communication*, compared play theory to a “landmark that might have led communications scholars in the right direction 20 years ago” (p. 801).

Agricultural Communications

While early media researchers were beginning to delve into the emerging field of media channel credibility in the 1920s, agricultural broadcasters had long been working on cutting-edge uses for broadcast. For example, The United States Department of Agriculture’s Weather Bureau had been testing wireless communications as early as 1900 and was regularly broadcasting weather forecasts, albeit by crude means (Craig, 2009). By the early 1920s, land-grant institutions were broadcasting educational, agricultural-related programs and daily broadcasts of the most current livestock prices meant farmers were no longer dependent on second-hand or out-of-date information (Craig, 2009).

Farmers, until the proliferation of radio broadcast, turned to agricultural reporting in newspapers and farm journals for accurate information (Zumalt, 2003). What was known in the 1800s as “technical journalism” (Zumalt, 2003, p. 29) became “agricultural journalism” (Zumalt, 2003, p. 29) in the early 1900s. However, by the 1970s, the growth of extension services and other policies led farm publications to become more specialized and farm reporting more sophisticated, which “required improved quality in the work of communications specialists at agricultural colleges and universities” (Boone, Meisenbach & Tucker, 2000, p. 22).

Agricultural journalism became known as “agricultural communications” (Zumalt, 2003, p. 29) in the late 1990s. Society’s shift away from agriculture has resulted in today’s news industry having “more sports reporters than professionals looking out for the safety of our food” (2003, p. 27). However, today’s agricultural communications students are likely to find work at government agencies, including university extension services; news organizations and journals; marketing firms; and commodity or farm groups (2003).

Boone et al. (2000) noted that as traditional journalism and mass communication educational programs “often clearly define news-editorial, broadcasting, public relations and advertising” (p. 64), those roles tend to be more blended in agricultural communications. Indeed, Boone et al., (2000) wrote that some professionals in the agricultural communications industry refer to agricultural reporting as “service” (p. 111) or “advocacy” (p. 111) journalism and insisted there is room in agriculture for both traditional, investigative journalism and service reporting.

Summary

Determining which media channel is most credible is likely a result of both education and childhood exposure. However, it can be inferred from the literature that society has long assigned a certain amount of prestige to newspapers. That phenomenon may have resulted in people with more education or social status, or those who consider themselves as having higher social status,

reporting newspapers as the more credible media channel. The idea is closely related to Stephenson's ludenic, or play, theory.

Self-perception may be key in determining how consumers make judgments on media channel credibility. However, respondents often may have linked prestige and credibility. They may have preferred one media channel, but believed another carries more prestige, and thus reported it as more credible. Additionally, new media conglomerates may cloud attempts to clearly define the Internet's credibility as a media channel, as both newspapers and television have well-developed online counterparts. A variety of media channel options also may lead consumers to tailor their searches by subject, using media channels in a way that complements, rather than displaces, one another. Berelson (1949) and Stephenson (1964 & 1967) both noted the role of mass communication in escapism. However, Stephenson played down the roles of familiarity and appearances in newspaper reading, instead likening the habit to the comfort and self-exploration of child's play. Additionally, this chapter noted the symbiotic relationship between agriculture and the proliferation of media channels, which continues today via agricultural communications and traditional journalism.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to describe the perspectives of university communications students about the credibility of media in their lives with particular interest in access and use of media.

This chapter examines the role of Q methodology as a measurement of subjectivity in this study.

Descriptions of the development of instrumentation, participant recruitment, and procedures are provided. The chapter also provides an introduction to the data analysis completed to obtain results that adequately respond to the research questions.

Rationale

Q methodology, which provides for a measurement of subjectivity, allows for greater depth and context to the survey-based field of media credibility research. Survey-based studies about media credibility have focused mainly on newspapers and television and tend to rely on estimation of previous media use (Bucy, 2003). While survey-based studies may provide beneficial information, they may themselves face credibility problems if respondents self-referently report media use based on prestige, rather than accuracy (Bucy, 2003; Westley & Severin, 1964a). In Q methodology, however, the use of self-reference, or subjectivity, is not a threat to a study, but rather the subject-material itself. Subjectivity refers to “a person’s communication of his or her point of view” (McKeown & Thomas, 1988, p. 12). Q methodology provides a means to examine

a person's beliefs, while preserving their frame of reference (McKeown & Thomas, 1988; Robbins, 2005). Stephenson (1969), the founder of Q methodology, explained subjectivity this way: "Subjectivity is merely what people are talking about, or could talk about, that matters to them self-referently, about this-or-that, whether it be about international affairs, the movies, dog races, or whatever" (p. 74). Therefore, as Stephenson explained his 1964 article applying Q to the measurement of public opinion: "The interest is not in testing hypotheses (often trivial as they are), but in making discoveries" (p. 272).

Indeed, the goal of Q methodology is not to predict "what a person will say, but in getting him to say it in the first place" (Brown, 1980, p. 46) via a Q sort. Essentially, this study is not about how many or whether communications students choose certain media channels, but the perspectives that lead them to those choices. That reasoning is crucial for news professionals, as they work to preserve their future in the industry by turning today's college students into subscribers (Armstrong & Collins, 2009). Additionally, it is beneficial to journalism educators who must grapple with teaching real-world and relevant techniques and ethics of news gathering for an industry with an undefined future.

Instrumentation

Q methodology instrumentation begins with the identification of a concourse, which is, hypothetically, all possible perspectives about the topic of study. The concourse is sampled to result in the instrument used for data collection, called a Q sample. The Q sample was designed in this study to be a set of statements resulting from interaction with students majoring in communications studies and statements found in the literature reviewed for this study.

Several of the statements used in this study were generated from a previous study regarding news media credibility, in which agricultural communications students wrote their thoughts on news media credibility and divergent themes found in the literature. Using the qualitative writings of

the students is considered naturalistic (McKeown & Thomas, 1988), whereas those in the literature bring in theory, making the sampling of the concourse for this study a hybrid combination (McKeown & Thomas, 1988).

A major source of the theoretical statements stemmed from Stouffer's comparison study of radio and print as preferred news media channels (Lazarsfeld 1940; Stouffer 1962). The study was first printed in Lazarsfeld's (1940) *Radio and the Printed Page*. While not a true Q method study, Stouffer's work was similar to Q in that it included statements regarding preferences for broadcast or print (Stouffer, 1962). The work was noted by Stephenson in his 1967 book *The Play Theory of Mass Communication*.

Although the statements listed in the Stouffer (1962) study were dated, they were easily modernized to resonate with today's news consumers by updating references to technological access. For example, one of Stouffer's statements related to the advantages of radio, "Can be heard while one is doing other work" (p. 155), became statement 3: "I prefer to watch or listen to news, because I can multi-task while doing so." Likewise, Paulson's (2009) remarks regarding newspapers being considered cutting-edge were they invented today served as inspiration for statement 4: "I would pay for a service that factually condenses the world's events and just tells me what I need to know."

Once a sufficient number of statements were collected, they were analyzed according to similarity in theme. For example, two distinct categories related to the literature regarding media credibility emerged: media channel credibility and news credibility. The statements were then chosen, or sampled, according to the theories that directed the study. For example, Stephenson's (1967) play theory was the inspiration for statement 25: "I feel smarter after I read a newspaper." Dutta-Bergman's theory of media complementarity (2004) can be linked to several statements, including statement 13: "If I see news on TV, I don't believe it until I see or hear that a

newspaper has printed it.” Additionally, statements were adapted based on likelihood to generate a response. Two statements (10 and 11) include the names of popular pundits from both the liberal and conservative perspectives. These statements were included not only to help define the perspectives as related to news and media channel credibility, but also to ensure the study’s relevance in today’s media industry.

A total of 36 statements, called Q statements, were selected and are shown in Appendix A, along with all quantitative results. Fifteen sets of Q statements were printed on small cards, which were placed in 15 plastic bags. Additionally, a pyramid-shaped form board made of 36 blank squares was printed for distribution with the Q statements. A model of the form board, with columns labeled -4 to 4, which was used in this study, is found in Appendix B. The back of each form board featured a demographic instrument, which included questions related to respondents’ media channel use. The instrument asked respondents for the size of their high school graduating class and the type of community in which they were raised, in an effort to determine whether those issues had any bearing on views pertaining to news or media channel credibility.

It should be noted that in Q methodology notion of validity is not relevant because there is no external verification of a person’s point of view (Brown, 1980). The participant ascribes meaning to the statements, which leaves the researcher to discover that meaning after the sorting process is completed. Reliability, however, does have a place in Q methodology, in that if a participant was asked to re-sort the same Q statements, the two sorts could be correlated (Brown, 1980). Error, in this instance, could be attributed to mood, memory, interpretation of statements, or other causes (Brown, 1980). However, such tests for reliability were not included in this study.

Participants (P set)

The population for this study included Oklahoma State University students majoring in a communications-related field. This population was purposive and chosen because of these

students' familiarity with the news industry and media channels. Participants were students in the following Oklahoma State University Spring 2011 semester courses: Internet Communication, School for Media and Strategic Communication 3623; and Writing for Agricultural Publications, Agricultural Communications 3113. Also, participants included student workers at *The Daily O'Collegian*, Oklahoma State University's student-run newspaper.

In an effort to reach a variety of perspectives, students were invited from both the School for Media and Strategic Communication and the Department of Agricultural Education Communications & Leadership, two of Oklahoma State University's communications-degree-conferring programs. Additionally, for added dimension, this study includes participants from the school's Tulsa and Stillwater campuses, and incorporates both day and evening class times.

Procedures

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board approval was obtained prior to data collection. The IRB letter of approval for this study, application AG1123, is included in Appendix C. After approval was granted from instructors and a group advisor, the researcher visited the classrooms and student newsroom in mid-April 2011. The Agricultural Communications class was held in the morning on the Stillwater campus. The School for Media and Strategic Communication course was held in the evening on the Tulsa campus. The researcher visited the student newspaper on a weekday afternoon, after the group's daily meeting. In each visit, the researcher explained the purpose for her visit and asked for volunteer participants. An Informed Consent Form was obtained to determine participation. Participants were given a bag containing a set of the 36 Q statements. The participants were then asked to sort the Q statements on their provided form board according to the condition of instruction: "Which statements best describe your thoughts about media credibility?" The condition of instruction was selected because it allowed for statements regarding both media channel and news credibility.

Participants were asked to first sort the Q statements into three piles according to which ones were “most like” their views, “most unlike” their views, and those that were neutral. Participants were then asked to choose the two Q statements from the “most-like” pile that were the very most like their views. They were asked to place those Q statements in column 4 on the form board, which was labeled “most like.” Participants were then asked to choose the two Q statements from the “most-unlike” pile that were the very most unlike their views. They were asked to place those Q statements in column -4 on the form board, which was labeled “most unlike.”

Participants were instructed to continue selecting and placing Q statements from the “most-like” pile and then the “most-unlike” pile. Once they had completed selecting and placing Q statements from those piles, they were asked to continue to work in a similar fashion on the neutral pile, filing the remaining spaces on the form board. When all Q statements were in place, participants were asked to look over their form board and make any changes they felt were warranted until they were satisfied with their sort. Participants were then asked to record the sort directly onto the form board, according to each Q statement number.

Participants then were asked to complete a demographic instrument printed on the back of the form board. The instrument included space for written comments under the question: “What else would you like to say about the ideas on the statements you sorted?” The option to provide a name, or code name, and telephone number for a follow-up interview was provided on the demographic instrument. Follow-up interviews and written comments in Q methodology are often useful for clarification in interpreting the statements within potential perspectives (Brown, 1980). Phone calls were made to six participants in an effort to complete follow-up interviews. The six participants were chosen after data analysis based on how strongly they defined a certain perspective, in an effort to gather the purest perspectives. Four participants were reached via phone and agreed to an interview about their perspectives related to media access and use. For clarification, it should be emphasized that the participants were chosen because their sorts most

strongly represented the perspective, or factor, rather than because of the size of the factor itself. As Brown (1980) explained, because subject selection in Q methodology is not based on sampling theory, “factor strength is a statistical artifact of little or no interest” (p. 43).

Data Analysis

Once all data had been collected, each sort was entered into PQ Method 2.11, a software program specifically for Q method data analysis. The program correlated and factor analyzed the sorts to discover perspectives, or “distinct clusters of opinions” (McKeown & Thomas, 1988, p. 15). Solutions including both three and four clusters of opinions, called factors, were considered. However, the three-factor solution was chosen as the final factor solution because it demonstrated the greatest diversity and accommodated the most sorts as significant among perspectives. Follow-up interviews and written responses provided by respondents on their demographic instruments provided additional material for the interpretation of the three factors. A detailed explanation of the results is provided in Chapter 4.

Summary

Q methodology provides a means for the study of subjectivity. This chapter clarified the rationale for using Q methodology in this study. It described the development of the instrumentation, including the Q statements, form board and demographic instrument. It presented the justification for the selection of participants and the procedure in administering this Q study. The chapter concluded with a brief overview of the data analysis.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to describe the unique perspectives of university communications students about the credibility of media in their lives using Q methodology. This chapter will describe the demographics of the participants as an added dimension to understanding the results. This chapter includes a summary of the factor array solution and a description of the study's findings in accordance to the research question. The resultant three perspectives are illustrated through the interpretation of the factor arrays and the interviews with selected respondents.

Participants

The population for this study included Oklahoma State University students majoring in a communications-related field in the Department of Agricultural Education, Communications, and Leadership or the School for Media and Strategic Communications. Thirty-four students sorted the statements for this study, although one sort was disqualified, leaving a total of 33 usable sorts. The disqualified sort was deemed unusable because of multiple duplicate statements recorded. The sample population included 24 women and nine men, ranging in age from 19 to 54. A majority of the participants were fewer than 25 years old (24 of 33). Nineteen of the participants were either juniors or seniors in college, while seven did not provide a classification. Thirteen of the students were from the Department of Agricultural Education, Communications, and

Leadership, while the remaining students (n=20) were from the School for Media and Strategic Communication.

Factor Solution

All usable sorts were entered into PQMethod 2.11, a software program designed for Q methodology. All sorts were correlated to all other sorts, and the resultant correlation matrix was submitted to principle components factor analysis. Initial rotations to discover the best fit of the data resulted in using a three-factor varimax rotation with a significance level of 0.42. The correlations between factor scores of defining sorts ranged from 0.20 to 0.36, meaning that the solution represents three diverse views about media channel credibility. The correlations are represented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Correlations Between Factor Scores

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Factor 1	1.0000		
Factor 2	0.2045	1.0000	
Factor 3	0.3485	0.3558	1.0000

Factor loadings indicate the degree to which each Q sort is like or unlike a composite model Q sort, called a factor array, for a certain perspective (Brown, 1980). Brown (1980) provided the following expression for calculating the standard error for a zero-order factor loading:

$SE = 1/\sqrt{N}$, where N = the number of Q statements. This study used 36 Q statements; therefore, the standard error is $SE = 1/\sqrt{36} = 0.167$. According to Brown (1980), factor loadings exceeding $2.58 (SE) = +/- .33$ are significant at the 0.01 level. Therefore, in this study, a significance level of 0.42 was used to identify the defining sorts for each of the three factor arrays. The 33 sorts resulted in 24 factor loadings used to define three factors, or perspectives. Z-scores were

calculated for each statement within the three factors. In Q methodology, the statement structure within each factor is determined by the arrangement of the statements by z-score calculation of the defining sorts.

Seven sorts were identified as confounds, meaning they achieved significance on more than one factor array. The confounded sorts are not used to define the z-scores for any one factor as they will increase the factor correlations and mask distinct differences between factor arrays. Two sorts were identified as non-significant, or the loading did not achieve significance on any factor. Table 4.2 represents the defining sorts, confounds, and non-significant loadings with selected demographic data. Additionally, several Q statements in each factor were considered “distinguishing,” meaning they were “placed in significantly different locations in the opinion continuum for any two factors” (McKeown & Thomas, 1988, p. 53). These distinguishing statements are crucially important in interpreting the factors.

Table 4.2

Factor Matrix Using X to Indicate a Defining Sort

Q Sort	Major, Classification, Gender and Age Demographics	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
6	Sports Media, Junior, Male, 23	0.66X	0.29	0.33
7	Sports Media, Junior, Male 20	0.80X	0.16	0.12
8	Broadcast, Senior, Female, 25	0.81X	-0.07	0.05
10	Broadcast, Senior, Male, 25	0.86X	0.10	0.02
13	Strategic Comm., Senior, Female, 54	0.74X	0.09	-0.11
22	Public Relations, Senior, Female, 24	0.56X	0.10	0.28
28	Ag. Comm., Junior, Female, 22	0.78X	0.32	0.14

Q Sort	Major, Classification, Gender and Age Demographics	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
31	Ag. Comm., Sophomore, Female, 20	0.57X	-0.15	0.38
33	Broadcast, N/A, Male, 22	0.71X	0.04	0.34
1	Ag. Comm., Sophomore, Female, 20	0.09	0.73X	0.15
2	Ag. Comm., Sophomore, Female, 20	0.09	0.61X	-0.09
3	Ag. Comm. Junior, Female, 19	0.07	0.76X	0.23
11	Strategic Comm., N/A, Female, 35	0.16	0.58X	0.13
17	Strategic Comm., Junior, Female, 23	-0.21	0.75X	-0.08
21	Strategic Comm., N/A, Female, 22	0.20	0.51X	0.18
12	Public Relations, Junior, Female, 41	0.19	0.16	0.59X
14	Public Relations, N/A, Female, 54	0.02	0.39	0.47X
15	Broadcast, Junior, Male, 23	0.12	0.26	0.58X
18	Strategic Comm., Junior, Female, 24	0.11	0.02	0.60X
19	Strategic Comm., N/A, Female, 21	0.29	0.11	0.61X
20	Strategic Comm., N/A, Female, 23	0.07	-0.04	0.51X
25	Ag. Comm., Freshman, Female, 19	-0.05	0.33	0.47X
26	Ag. Comm., Sophomore, Male, 23	0.08	0.40	0.67X
29	Ag. Comm., Senior, Female, 22	0.01	-0.05	0.68X
32	Ag. Comm., Junior, Female, 21	0.23	0.48	0.71 Conf
27	Ag. Comm., Junior, Male, 23	0.19	0.48	0.58 Conf
24	Public Relations, Junior, Male, 26	0.70	0.11	0.48 Conf
5	Ag. Comm., Senior, Female, 21	0.46	-0.00	0.53 Conf

Q Sort	Major, Classification, Gender and Age Demographics	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
30	Ag. Comm., Junior, Female, 20	0.44	0.59	0.11 Conf
4	Ag. Comm., Freshman, Female, 19	0.42	0.47	0.18 Conf
9	Sports Media, Sophomore, Male, 20	0.50	0.44	0.12 Conf
23	Strategic Comm., Junior, Female, 36	0.21	-0.04	0.39 NS
16	Strategic Comm., N/A, Female, 24	0.01	0.16	0.02 NS
Defining Sorts	Total: 24	9	6	9
Explained Variance	Total 50 %	20	14	16

Note. One agricultural communications student is technically an agricultural education major but has taken all core curriculum required of agricultural communications majors. This student was listed as an agricultural communications major in an effort to protect his or her identity.

Interpretation of the Perspectives

The first research question for this study was: What are university communications students' perspectives of news credibility as related to news access and use? This study found three distinct perspectives that give better insight into how communications students regard the credibility of news as related to news access and use.

Perspective 1: Old-school Media Hounds

This perception was named the *Old-school Media Hounds* because of followers' continuing belief in the credibility of newspapers, advocacy of the press as watchdog and wariness of pundits. It was defined by nine sorts. The *Old-school Media Hounds'* most positively and negatively z-scored statements are listed in Table 4.3.

Newspaper credibility belief. Those included in the *Old-school Media Hounds'* perspective clearly believe newspapers are the most credible media channel (statement 15, array position 4, z-

score 1.54) and they find relevancy in newspaper articles (statement 36, array position -3, z-score -1.18). Keeping up with the news is critically important to this group, and they believe newspapers are the most informative way to do so (statement 28, array position 4, z-score 1.95; statement 12, array position 3, z-score 1.20).

Sorter 10, a 25-year-old male senior majoring in journalism and broadcasting, wrote that “Journalists get a bad rap. If readers were honest with themselves, they would realize they still have a lot of faith in newspapers.” In a follow-up interview, this respondent provided the following analogy: “Let’s say, for example, that (Oklahoma State University) President Burns Hargis resigns from OSU, and a friend of theirs tweeted it. I don’t think most people would spread the word until ... they see it in a newspaper.”

Sorter 8, a 25-year-old female journalism and broadcasting senior, said in a follow-up interview: “I feel like people expect more from newspapers... I think a lot of people have the expectation that the television media has to be more sensational in order to get people to watch.”

In demographic questioning, *Old-school Media Hounds* were, on average, most likely to receive news via the Internet (see Table 4.4). However, newspapers were a second choice, on average. That is much higher than the fifth-choice ranking both of the other perspectives gave newspapers.

Watchdog belief. Followers of this view seem to champion the press as watchdog of government while retaining a somewhat sympathetic attitude toward media professionals. For example, the third most-like statement for this perspective regards reporters and editors being unfairly criticized for ignoring positive news (statement 13, array position 3, z-score 1.23). In addition to believing the press should play the role of watchdog of government (statement 30, array position -3, z-score -1.60), they believe that government needs a watchdog. This group does not trust the government to tell the truth about itself (statement 9, array position -4, z-score -1.69).

Additionally, *Old-school Media Hounds* strongly believe that although anyone can publish news

from a computer, America still needs professional reporters (statement 33, array position -3, z-score -1.48).

Written and oral interview responses of respondents included in this perspective tended to continually reference newspapers' increased credibility as compared to other media channels. For example, Sorter 10, the 25-year-old male senior journalism and broadcast double major, said: "The Internet is a great tool, but that's all it is. It's a means to an end, and often we don't get the right end out of it." Among the Internet's problems, he said, are the various sources competing for attention over the Internet. "People will seek the news that they want," he said, "whether or not that site is credible or has a history of providing truthful accurate information." Similarly, Sorter 33, a 22-year-old male broadcast journalism and political science double major wrote that the Internet has had a mixed influence on news. "It's easier to have instant news of remote locations around the world," he wrote. "But the legitimacy of it is difficult to determine."

Wariness of pundits. *Old-school Media Hounds* do not want to be told what to think. Followers of this perspective are the least likely, when compared to the other two perspectives, to be swayed by a politically aligned media channel (statement 21, array position -4, z-score -1.74) regardless of its political leaning. For example, the statement about watching a news-analysis program for ease of understanding, whether conservative or liberal, was among the most-unlike statements for this group (statement 11, array position -3, z-score -1.31). This is likely what drives this group to newspapers.

Consider the perspective of Sorter 10, the 25-year-old male senior majoring in journalism and broadcasting. In a follow-up interview, he explained that when people think about "biased" news, "...honestly, they are thinking of the television or the Internet, because newspapers have never taken that path." Newspapers, he said, have clearly labeled editorial pages. Rather, he said, the 24-hour news cycle has forced broadcast media to have "entertainment shows and bring on

analysts from the left and the right ... it doesn't add any depth to the issue, it just clouds the issue for the consumer.”

Table 4.3

Most Like and Most Unlike Statements for Old-school Media Hounds

No.	Statement	Z-score	Array
Most Like Statements			
28	If I'm not up-to-date on the news, I feel like I'm missing something.	1.95	4
15*	Newspapers are a more credible source of news than other mediums.	1.54	4
13*	News reporters and editors are unfairly accused of ignoring positive news.	1.23	3
12*	Newspapers are more informative than news from other mediums.	1.20	3
2	If a major news event happens, I'll hear about it immediately.	1.45	3
26	I feel smarter after I read a newspaper.	1.14	3
Most Unlike Statements			
36	Newspaper articles are rarely relevant to my life.	-1.18	-3
11	Although I know shows like The Rachel Maddow Show or Glenn Beck are opinion-based, I prefer to get news from them because it's easier to understand.	-1.31	-3
33	America no longer needs professional reporters. People can just post news events online.	-1.48	-3
30	It's no longer important for the press to serve as "watchdog" of government	-1.60	-3
9*	The government should just put out a daily paper telling us what we need to know.	-1.69	-4

No.	Statement	Z-score	Array
Most Unlike Statements			
21*	I often find myself being swayed by Fox News, although I know it has a conservative mission.	-1.74	-4

Note. Distinguishing statements noted by asterisks (*).

Perspective 2: Sensational Snippets

This perspective was named the *Sensational Snippets* because of followers' bits-and-pieces news gathering habits, demand for convenience, and expectation of media exaggeration. This factor was defined by six sorts. *Sensational Snippets'* most positively and negatively z-scored statements are listed in Table 4.5.

Table 4.4

Media Channels Most Often Used to Receive News

	Online	Magazine	Television	Newspaper	Cellphone	Radio
<i>Old-school Media Hounds</i>	1.8	4.8	3.8	2.7	3.6	4.2
<i>Sensational Snippets</i>	2.8	5	2.3	4.3	3.3	3.2
<i>Complimentary Convergents</i>	2.3	4.6	2.4	4.5	3.4	3.9

Note. Media channels most often used as respondents indicated by rank, 1-6. Results depict average rank, per factor array, of each channel.

Bits and pieces. *Sensational Snippets* will not watch or listen to entire news articles (statement 31, array position 4, z-score 1.90). Do not bother asking them to read a newspaper, although reporters and editors should not take the rejection personally. *Sensational Snippets* appreciate newspapers; they are just not going to read one. However, they are sure that if something big happens, they will find out about it immediately (statement 2, array position 3, z-score 1.08). This group's reluctance to read a paper is not influenced by environmental concerns or the projection

of an elitist notion toward print media (statement 8, array position -3, z-score -1.50; statement 34, array position -4, z-score -1.91). *Sensational Snippets* much prefer to receive news via broadcast, because it allows them to multi-task (statement 3, array position 4, z-score 2.37; statement 6, array position 3, z-score 1.16).

Demand for convenience. Convenience is key for the *Sensational Snippets*, and, when they receive news, they likely prefer for it to include updates about their friends. Consider the perspective of Sorter 3, a 19-year-old female agricultural communications junior, who said in a follow-up interview: “My thing is, as a college student, we have no time, of course, to sit down and read a full newspaper, or at least I don’t, because you’re worried about reading for class.” This respondent said that her phone, via news and social media applications, helps her keep track over everything from severe weather to which classes her friends are taking. “Newspapers have more detailed information,” she said. “But I’m definitely more into websites and social media ... they’re more convenient.”

In demographic questioning, *The Sensational Snippets* most often received news, on average, via television (see Table 4.4). That is no surprise as *The Sensational Snippets* seem to view television as the most credible media channel (statement 14, array position -4, z-score -1.67). Interestingly, followers of this perspective seem to have some preference for local television news rather than cable or satellite news programs (statement 4, array position -3, z-score -0.94). This is may be due to a distrust of media companies, which they believe will lie for a ratings boost (statement 20, array position 3, z-score 1.23). Additionally, followers of this perspective tend to have a difficult time determining whether news is biased (statement 22, array position 3, z-score 1.05) and may perceive local stations as the most unbiased.

Sorter 3, the 19-year-old agricultural communications junior, said: “I do believe Fox News is swayed more towards the conservative side, but ... I’m more conservative. It doesn’t bother me.”

She added that she doesn't always agree with the news as presented on Fox and does turn to CNN and local stations for unbiased accounts.

Sorter 1, a 20-year-old female agricultural communications sophomore, wrote on her demographic instrument that she receives her news "from several different sources" in an effort to receive unbiased information. She reported that the Internet sites she most frequently logs onto for news are Foxnews.com and local stations.

Expectation of exaggeration. *Sensational Snippets* have some level of expectance, if not tolerance, of media sensationalism. Additionally, they seem to prefer juicy news. For example, they are not concerned enough about paparazzi practices to seek news from sources that do not purchase photos from ethically questionable origins (statement 19, array position -3, z-score -1.05). Perhaps, *Sensational Snippets* allow convenience to trump credibility. However, that may be because followers of this perspective put an emphasis on the viewers' responsibility, rather than the media companies, to discern the credibility of news.

Consider the perception of Sorter 1, the 19-year-old female agricultural communications junior, who said in a follow-up interview that much of her news comes from the *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* late-night, faux-news, comedy show. "Unfortunately a lot of my news comes from there, because it comes on after *Two-and-a-Half Men*," she said. She added that she often "half" watches the show while doing homework. "A lot of his stuff is fake ... like Photoshopped," she said, describing the program's penchant for presenting snippets of real news stories in an exaggerated, comical format. "As long as people understand that the stuff he's saying is actually going on, but the way he says it is not. ... They have to know it's comedy-based."

Table 4.5

Most Like and Most Unlike Statements for Sensational Snippets

No.	Statement	Z-score	Array
Most like statements			
3*	I prefer to watch or listen to news, because I can multi-task while doing so.	2.37	4
31*	I rarely read, listen to, or watch an entire news article.	1.90	4
6*	I would rather hear the news told to me from television than read a newspaper or online news.	1.16	3
Most like statements			
No.	Statement	Z-score	Array
Most like statements			
20	Media companies will lie to me if it boosts their ratings.	1.23	3
2	If a major news event happens, I'll hear about it immediately.	1.08	3
22	I have trouble determining whether news is biased or truthful.	1.05	3
Most unlike statements			
8	I would buy more newspapers if I knew the paper came from sustainable forests.	-1.50	-3
14	If I see news on TV, I don't believe it until I see or hear that a newspaper has printed it.	-1.67	-4
4*	I prefer cable or satellite news programs to network news.	-0.94	-3
19*	I would seek out news from an agency that refused to purchase pictures from the paparazzi.	-1.05	-3
34*	Newspapers are for busy, educated, professional people.	-1.91	-4

Note. Distinguishing statements noted by asterisks (*).

Perspective 3: The Complimentary Convergents

This factor was defined by nine sorts and was named the *Complimentary Convergents* because of followers' strong beliefs that news should be free, accurate and converged. Table 4.6 shows the most-like and most-unlike statements for the *Complimentary Convergents*. This group is similar to the *Old-school Media Hounds* in that keeping up with the news is important to them (statement 28, array position 4, z-score 2.08) and their belief that the press has a necessary role of government watchdog (statement 30, array position -3, z-score -1.52). However, unlike the *Old-school Media Hounds*, *Complimentary Convergents* assign no greater credibility to newspapers as a media channel.

Read all about it! (If it's free of charge.) Like the *Sensational Snippets*, this group is sure they will hear about it, if something major happens (statement 2, array position 4, z-score 1.93). However, *Complimentary Convergents* do not believe they should have to pay for credible information (statement 7, array position 3, z-score 1.62). Followers of this view did indicate that they "would pay for a service that factually condenses the world's events and just tells me what I need to know" (statement 5, array position 3, z-score 1.19). The keyword in that statement is likely "factually," as that service describes a newspaper.

Wanting, but not expecting, accuracy. While *Complimentary Convergents* seem to have a just-the-facts preference for news, they tend to have an expectation of exaggeration. Like the *Old-school Media Hounds*, this group does not rely on news analysis programs to help them understand issues (statement 11, array position -3, z-score -1.39). They will follow an entire news article (statement 31, array position -3, z-score -1.36). However, *Complimentary Convergents* tend to have a resigned distrust of media (statement 20, array position 3, z-score 1.01).

For example, Sorter 26, a 23-year-old, male, Agricultural Communications sophomore said in a follow-up interview that he knows from his experience working in television that reporters, both

in print and broadcast journalism, “want to make it interesting.” However, he said that although the media channel with the most credibility is the newspaper, that just-the-facts attitude is leading to the print industry’s demise. “I think that’s why they are kind of dying out,” he said. “They aren’t the most interesting read.” He added that while some TV news stations do a good job of presenting the facts, “Newspapers are dying out because they aren’t giving all the gossip. They are just giving the facts.”

This sorter ranked fairly highly Q-Statement 10, which regards editors twisting Sarah Palin’s quotes to affect how people view her. That is likely a reflection of his expectation of media embellishment. For example, he explained in a follow-up interview, “The whole Russia comment, ‘I can see Russia from my house’ ... I think that was kinda said as a joke.” He added that Sarah Palin “is trying to bring a light-heartedness to politics,” but that the media “twists her quotes.” He continued: “I think that one statement was completely blown out of proportion and made the public view her as incompetent, inexperienced and unintelligent.”

Newspapers, television ... whatever. The channel through which *Complimentary Convergents* receive news seems to have no influence on the credibility of the information for this group (statement 16, array position -4, z-score -1.66). *Complimentary Convergents* have truly accepted media convergence, not on a basis of convenience, but as the future of news. They perceive the news as just as credible, or not, whether it is received through a cell phone or the nightly broadcast. Consider, for example, the perspective of Sorter 29, a 22-year-old, female, agricultural communications major, who wrote: “With blogging, more voices are getting out there, but I’m still concerned about the objectivity of the content.”

Table 4.6

Most Like and Most Unlike Statements for Complimentary Convergents

No.	Statement	Z-score	Array
Most Like Statements			
28	If I'm not up-to-date on the news, I feel like I'm missing something.	2.08	4
2*	If a major news event happens, I'll hear about it immediately.	1.93	4
7*	I should not have to pay to receive credible news information.	1.62	3
26	I feel smarter after I read the newspaper.	1.32	3
5	I would pay for a service that factually condenses the world's events and just tells me what I need to know.	1.19	3
20	Media companies will lie to me if it boosts their ratings.	1.01	3
Most unlike statements			
31	I rarely read, listen to, or watch an entire news article.	-1.36	-3
8	I would buy more newspaper if I knew the paper came from sustainable forests.	-1.37	-3
11	Although I know shows like <i>The Rachel Maddow Show</i> or <i>Glenn Beck</i> are opinion-based, I prefer to get news from them because it's easier to understand.	-1.39	-3
30	It's no longer important for the press to serve as "watchdog" of government.	-1.52	-3
14	If I see news on TV, I don't believe it until I see or hear that a newspaper has printed it.	-1.72	-4
16*	If I see a news item on my phone or Internet, I don't believe it until I see it on TV or in a newspaper.	-1.66	-4

Note. Distinguishing statements noted by asterisks (*).

Consensus Statements

When a statement achieved similar z-scores across all three arrays, it represents shared meaning for participants and is called a consensus statement. The findings identified two consensus statements. These statements represent an area of agreement for all respondents whose sorts defined the factor array. The two consensus statements for this study, with array position and z-score, are shown in Table 4.7. Although a statement with an array position of “-1,” “0,” or “1” represents neutrality, the reasoning may differ according to each perception, or group of participants.

Respondents were neutral about being able to distinguish a pundit or a reporter, as is indicated by the first consensus statement. The fact that this statement was identified as a consensus statement is not surprising. However, its array position, which is that of neutrality, is, on-the-surface, somewhat surprising given that this study’s participants are college students majoring in some form of mass communications. Conceivably, these students envision their future careers to include working in the media profession. Yet, no matter their perspective on media credibility, they do not seem to feel strongly about determining pundits from reporters. However, upon closer reflection, each perspective has its own reasons for this statement’s neutrality ranking, which is explained in-depth in Chapter 5.

The second consensus statement, which is about feeling smarter after reading a newspaper, is related to Stephenson’s (1964; 1967) play theory. Stephenson applies his ludenic theory to newspaper reading, which allows readers to develop a “more accurate appraisal of affairs” (1967, p. 151). Respondents in this study seemed to agree that reading a newspaper does make them feel smarter. Those respondents included in the second factor array were slightly more likely to agree that they feel smarter after reading a newspaper. However, although all perspectives agree that they feel smarter after reading a paper, that is no indication that they will read a newspaper.

Table 4.7

Consensus Statements

No.	Q Statement	Factor 1		Factor 2		Factor 3	
		Array	Z-Score	Array	Z-Score	Array	Z-Score
23*	Sometimes I can't figure out if a newscaster is a pundit or a reporter.	0	-0.03	0	0.06	1	0.35
26*	I feel smarter after I read a newspaper.	3	1.14	2	0.87	3	1.32

Note. Consensus statements are those that do not distinguish between any pair of factors. All listed statements are non-significant at $P > .01$, and those flagged with an "*" are also non-significant at $P > .05$.

Access and Use of News

The second research question for this study was: What do these perspectives say about university communications students' access and use of media channels? This study found that followers of the three perspectives have very different habits related to access and use of media. In an attempt to determine approximate information regarding news access and use, the demographic questions provided added dimension to the three perspectives found in this study. For example, Table 4.6 shows the media channels respondents most often use to receive news, and was compiled by averaging respondents' rankings, 1 through 6. News is most often accessed via online for both the *Old-school Media Hounds* and the *Complimentary Convergents*. News access online is second only to television for the *Sensational Snippets*.

Respondents were also asked to list the Internet sites they most frequently log onto for news.

Table 4.8 reports this data. *Old-school Media Hounds* provided 21 listings of 13 individual news sites. Two of the listings were for sports sites. *Sensational Snippets* provided 11 separate listings

of six sites, including one social media site. *Complimentary Convergents* provided 17 separate listings of 16 sites, including several news round-up sites.

Table 4.8

Internet Sites Most Logged Onto for News as Reported by Respondents

<i>Old-school Media Hounds</i>	<i>Sensational Snippets</i>	<i>Complimentary Convergents</i>
BBC.com	CNN.com (2)	ABC.com
CNN.com (3)	Facebook.com	AOL.com
ESPN.com (2)	Fox.com (3)	AP.com
LATimes.com	Local news site (3)	Buzzfeed.com
Local news site (2)	MSN.com	CNN.com
NewsOK.com (2)	Yahoo.com	Fitperez.com
NPR.com		Fox.com
NYT.com (2)		Marketwatch.com
MSNBC.com		MSN.com
OColly.com		MSNBC.com
TulsaWorld.com (2)		Newser.com
WashingtonPost.com		NewsOK.com
Yahoo.com		TulsaWorld.com
		Twitter
		USAToday.com
		Yahoo.com (2)

Note. Numerals inside parenthesis indicate the number of times a site was listed by individual respondents.

Table 4.9 shows how often respondents reported reading news online. A majority of the *Old-school Media Hounds* reported reading news online multiple times per day (n=6), as did the *Complimentary Convergents* (n=6). A majority of the *Sensational Snippets* reported reading news online at least three times per week. Table 4.10 shows how often respondents reported reading a noncampus newspaper. The *Old-school Media Hounds* was the only perspective in which any respondent reported reading a noncampus newspaper everyday (n=2) or multiple times per day (n=2).

Table 4.9

How Often Respondents Read News Online (frequency)

	Multiple times a day	Every day	1 to 3 times a week	More than 3 times a week	Twice a month	Once a month or less
<i>Old-school Media Hounds</i>	6	1	1	0	0	0
<i>Sensational Snippets</i>	1	2	0	1	1	1
<i>Complimentary Convergers</i>	1	5	2	0	1	0

More *Old-school Media Hounds* and *Complimentary Convergers* report watching television news at least every day, as compared to *Sentational Snippets*. Table 4.11 shows how often respondents reported watching television news. While television was, on average, ranked the number one media channel through which *Sensational Snippets* receive their news, only one respondent in this factor reported watching television news more than once every day. That is compared to four *Old-School News Hounds* who report watching television news at least every day, despite TV's ranking as the third more often used media channel. Also, five *Complimentary Convergers* reported watching television news at least every day, despite its ranking as the second most often used media channel.

Table 4.12 depicts respondents' size of high school graduating class. More *Complimentary Convergers* (n=5) graduated high school in a class of at least 500 students than either *Sensational Snippets* or *Old-school Media Hounds*. However, three *Complimentary Convergers* and three *Sensational Snippets* graduated in a high school class of fewer than 100 students. That is compared to one *Old-school Media Hounds* who graduated in a high school class of fewer than 100 students. While it may be easy to assume that the cynical views of the *Complimentary Convergers* toward news are due to a more urban upbringing, that may not be the case. Two

thirds of the *Complimentary Convergors* (n=3) and two-thirds of the *Old-school Media Hounds* (n=3) grew up in a suburb or major city. Table 4.13 depicts where respondents grew up.

Table 4.10

How Often Respondents Read a Noncampus Newspaper (frequency)

	Multiple times a day	Every day	1 to 3 times per week	More than 3 times per week	Twice a month	Once a month or fewer
<i>Old-school Media Hounds</i>	2	2	2	1	0	1
<i>Sensational Snippets</i>	0	0	1	0	2	3
<i>Complimentary Convergors</i>	0	0	5	0	2	2

Table 4.11

How Often Respondents Watch Television News (frequency)

	Multiple times a day	Every day	1 to 3 times a week	More than 3 times a week	Twice a month	Once a month or less
<i>Old-school Media Hounds</i>	1	3	3	1	0	1
<i>Sensational Snippets</i>	0	1	2	3	0	0
<i>Complimentary Convergors</i>	1	4	2	1	1	0

Table 4.12

Size of High School Graduating Class (frequency)

	Fewer than 100	100 to 299	300 to 499	500 to 799	800 to 1,000	More than 1,000
<i>Old-school Media Hounds</i>	1	4	2	1	0	1
<i>Sensational Snippets</i>	3	1	1	0	1	0
<i>Complimentary Convergers</i>	3	1	0	2	2	1

Table 4.13

Where Respondents Grew Up (frequency)

	Farm/ranch	Rural, not farm/ranch	Suburb	Mid-sized city	Major city
<i>Old-school Media Hounds</i>	2	0	3	0	3
<i>Sensational Snippets</i>	3	0	1	0	2
<i>Complimentary Convergers</i>	2	1	3	0	3

Summary

This chapter presented data obtained through participants' sorts organized into a final three-factor solution. The first Research Question was answered by presenting the three distinct perspectives held by respondents as *Old-school Media Hounds*, *Sensational Snippets* and *Complimentary Convergers*. The second Research Question was answered via presentation of demographic data for each perspective. Additionally, this chapter explained the rationale for, and identified two consensus statements found in this study.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents a summary of the study, conclusions based on the results, implications, and recommendations for further research. The purpose of the study was to describe the unique perspectives of university communications students about the credibility of media in their lives using Q methodology.

Summary of the Study

The early 1960s were seminal years for studies of media channel credibility (Roper 1964; Stephenson 1964 and 1967; Westley and Severin, 1964a and 1964b). Whilst researchers had touched on how likely news consumers were to believe a certain media channel in relation to another (Lazarsfeld, 1940; Stouffer, 1962), little outright comparison of the credibility had been conducted (Westley & Severin, 1964a). In 1964, Stephenson debuted his *Ludenic Theory of Newsreading* to little acclaim (Glasser, 2000). Play theory, as Stephenson's theory is known, holds that people seek news as a reprieve from everyday life and become absorbed, much like a child engrossed in play. Additionally, Dutta-Bergman's (2004) media complementarity theory holds that news consumers' use of various media channels is Complimentary, rather than displacing one with another. Several factors influence a person's perception of media channel credibility. Age is often linked to a preference for new media channels and a greater tendency to

trust news information (Bird, 2000; Lazarsfeld, 1940; Westley & Severin, 1964a and 1964b).

Additionally, education and the perceived prestige of a media channel may influence preference (Mulder, 1981; Westley & Severin, 1964a and 1964b). Finally, familiarity with a news source and exposure to news in childhood also seemingly play a role in perspectives of credibility (Armstrong & Collins, 2009; Bucy, 2003; Thorson et al., 2010; Westley & Severin, 1964a).

Q methodology, which provides for the measurement of subjectivity, is particularly suited to this study's focus on the perspectives of university students about the credibility of media in their lives. Survey-based studies about media credibility have focused on newspapers and television and rely on estimations of use that is subject to inaccurate reporting (Bucy, 2003, Westley & Severin, 1964a).

The instrumentation for this Q method study includes a quasi-naturalistic Q sample derived from recurring themes found in the literature and a previous study in which agricultural communications students were asked to write their thoughts about news media credibility. Fifteen sets of the statements were printed on small cards and were packaged for distribution to participants. Additionally, a form board used to record the statements once they were sorted featured a demographic instrument on the back. The population sample for this study, called a P set, was purposive. It included Oklahoma State University students majoring in a communications-related field in either the School for Media and Strategic Communication or the Agricultural Education, Communications, and Leadership Department. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained for this study, and its procedures followed those required in Q methodology.

Thirty-three usable sorts were obtained for this study. All sorts were individually entered into PQMethod 2.11, a software program designed for Q methodology. Principle components factor

analysis and varimax rotation were used to identify the defining sorts for each of three factor arrays.

Summary of the Findings

This study found three distinct perspectives as to how communications students regard the credibility of news as related to news access and use: *Old-school Media Hounds*; *Sensational Snippets*; and *Complimentary Convergents*. Additionally, two consensus statements were found, and analysis of demographic questions provided added depth to the perspectives.

Followers of the *Old-School Media Hounds* perception, which was defined by nine sorts, have a strong belief that newspapers are the most credible media channel. They are wary of pundits and advocate the press' role as government watchdog. Additionally, followers of the *Sensational Snippets* perception, which was defined by six sorts, tend to receive news in snips at their convenience. They respect newspapers, but are not going to read one, and are prone to expect, if not tolerate, media exaggeration. Meanwhile, followers of the *Complimentary Convergents* perception, which was defined by nine sorts, strongly believe that access to news information should be free of charge. They do not assign greater credibility to one media channel over another. Additionally, they expect media accuracy, but have some level of resigned expectation of media exaggeration. Finally, when a statement achieved similar z-scores across all three arrays, it represents shared meaning for participants and is called a consensus statement. Although a statement with an array position of "-1," "0," or "1" represents neutrality, the reasoning may differ according to each perception, or group of participants.

This study identified the following two consensus statements:

1. Sometimes I can't figure out if a newscaster is a pundit or a reporter (statement 23).
2. I feel smarter after I read a newspaper (statement 26).

News Access and Use

Demographic questioning focused on the respondents' access and use of media channels. Results indicated *Old-school Media Hounds* and *Complimentary Convergors* accessed news mostly online. Meanwhile, *Sensational Snippets* used television to obtain most of their news.

Respondents also were asked to list the websites they logged onto most for news. *Old-school Media Hounds* provided the most listings; however, *Complimentary Convergors* provided the most individual sites.

In other questioning, *Old-school Media Hounds* was the only perspective in which any respondent reported reading a noncampus newspaper everyday or multiple times per day.

Additionally, *Old-school Media Hounds* reported watching television news at least every day, even though it was ranked as the third most-often-used media channel for this group. *Sensational Snippets* ranked television, on average, as their primary source for news, although only one respondent in this perspective reported watching television news more than once every day.

Demographic questioning included information about respondents' high school class size and size of town in which they grew up. The results for both questions were not striking, nor did they provide much added information to the perspectives.

Conclusions

The Research Questions for this study were "What are university communications students' perception of news credibility as related to media access and use?" and "What do these perspectives say about university communications students' access and use of media channels?"

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher can answer the first Research Question by attributing the following three main perspectives of news credibility as related to media access to the student respondents in this study: *Old-school Media Hounds*, *Sensational Snippets* and *Complimentary Convergors*. The second Research Question can be answered by the following

discussion, which highlights the very different habits of news access and use attributable to followers of each perspective.

Old-school Media Hounds: Romancing the Newspaper

Followers of this perspective believe in newspapers. However, they may have a romanticized role of newspapers in their lives. Their view of newspapers is probably akin to a campy black-and-white movie, in which editors smoke cigars at their desk and calls of “stop the presses!” are routine. They likely believe that newspapers are patriotic and the foundation for accurate reporting as the Fourth Estate. They firmly believe newspapers are the most credible media channel and are sympathetic toward reporters and editors. At the same time, they do not want to be told what to think and are not going to be swayed by media pundits. In fact, they may be offended when media pundits are presented as anything other than an editorial perspective. This group probably draws a sharp line between the press and the media. However, as much as they love the printed page, all of this may not necessarily translate into action for *Old-school Media Hounds*.

Old-school Media Hounds ranked the Internet, on average, as the media channel through which they were most likely to receive news. Newspapers were actually a second-choice, although that is still a higher ranking than the fifth-place newspapers received for the other two perspectives. Perhaps *Old-school Media Hounds* are more newspaper supporters, rather than readers. A better description for this group may be that they are just generally more interested in the news than others. For example, although followers of this group listed television as the third most-often-used channel for news, almost half of them reported watching television news every day. The notion of an incongruence between a preferred media channel and the channel actually used is not unheard of. Bucy (2003) and Westley and Severin (1964a) both referenced similar findings in their respective studies. Bucy (2003) found that adults and college students rated media channels

with which they were less familiar as more credible. Additionally, Westley and Severin (1964a) reported that “residents did not necessarily assign greatest credibility to the medium they assigned greatest preference” (p. 326).

Sensational Snippets: Just Hit the Highlights

Sensational Snippets like the idea of being news hounds. Interestingly, *Sensational Snippets* report that television, on average, was their primary media channel choice. However, only one respondent in this category reported watching television more than once per day. That is compared to four *Old-school Media Hounds* who report watching television news at least every day, despite TV’s ranking as the third-most-often used media channel. Also, five *Complimentary Convergents* reported watching television news at least every day, despite its ranking as the second most-often-used media channel. Two possible explanations exist for the *Sensational Snippets*’ ranking television as the most often media channel through which they receive news and the lack of frequency with which they watch it. One explanation is that, as Sorter 1 said in a follow-up interview, many of the *Sensational Snippets* receive news via comedy or nontraditional news shows. They are receiving news most often via TV, but they are not watching television news, per se. The other explanation may be that *Sensational Snippets* may fancy the idea of keeping up with the news but do not actually keep up as much as they think they do.

Sensational Snippets are not going to sit through an entire newscast and they sure are not going to read a newspaper. They expect news to be convenient. So, if they could find out about the weather and what their friends are up to on the same screen, that would be great. *Sensational Snippets* expect news to be exaggerated and that media companies will lie to them if it boosts ratings. However, they likely are not thinking about stodgy newspaper companies when they say they expect news to be exaggerated. Followers of this group may get much of their news from faux-news comedy shows, like *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* or *Saturday Night Live’s Weekend Update*.

These shows typically exaggerate news into comedy bits. So, to the *Sensational Snippets*, of course news is exaggerated. It would not be funny otherwise.

Followers of this perspective are much akin to Bird's (2000) perception of the relationship between news and modern young adults. Among her findings, Bird (2000) wrote that people younger than 30 years old tended to believe it was the media's responsibility to attract them. Perhaps it could be added that followers of this perspective also expect, to a certain extent, that it is the media's responsibility to entertain them.

Complimentary Converggers: I love news, but not enough to pay for it.

Complimentary Converggers and *Old-school Media Hounds* have several similarities: a tendency to keep up with the news, and the belief that government plays a necessary role in democracy. They, too, do not want to be told what to think by media pundits. Unlike the *Sensational Snippets*, *Complimentary Converggers* will watch, listen to or read an entire news article. However, *Complimentary Converggers* are not going to pay for news.

Complimentary Converggers may challenge long-standing notions that age or prestige (Lazarsfeld, 1940; Westley & Severin, 1964a and 1964b) are likely to influence media channel preference. *Complimentary Converggers* are truly immersed in media convergence. They have made the transition, and are no more likely to assign greater credibility to one media channel as compared to another. *Complimentary Converggers* receive news most often, on average, via the Internet and television. They receive news via magazines and newspapers least often. That makes sense as those media channels require payment at point of purchase or a subscription, and this group strongly believes they should not have to pay for news. It is true that the Internet, cell phone and satellite television and radio also require subscriptions, but those services also have alternative uses.

Recommendations

The following discussion provides includes recommendations for theory, practice, and further research as related to the three perspectives found in this study.

Practical Implications and Recommendations for Industry

Much of the above discussion could be taken as a swan song to newspapers. After all, the perspective with the most ardent newspaper supporters, *Old-school Media Hounds*, listed the Internet as the first choice for news access. This is not as doom-and-gloom as it may seem. The key for the news industry is recognizing the different needs of each perspective and melding themselves to fit. *Old-school Media Hounds* would likely be frequent users of a newspaper's website and may even cross over to stories linked between the newspaper's hard-copy and electronic versions. Meanwhile, *Sensational Snippets* would probably read through a list of headlines e-mailed or posted to Facebook daily. This group may even appreciate watching a humor columnist talk about the day's headlines. However, this information is going to have to come to them. They are not going to search for it. *Complimentary Convergents*, ironically, are probably the toughest group for the media industry. They are not going to pay for news. They are not going to pay for the newspaper and they are probably not going to pay to access a news site. But, they are really glad the Fourth Estate is there, even if they are a bit cynical about its accuracy. This group may be able to be reached through a free hardcopy version of a newspaper, or perhaps a free broadcast of the day's headlines e-mailed to them.

Practical Implications and Recommendations for Journalism Education

These findings also are relevant for journalism instructors who need to know students' perspectives toward news access and use so they can truly reach students. For example, *Old-school Media Hounds* might benefit best from a traditional pencil-and-paper approach to news reporting. These students want to become journalists. They may be intrigued by investigative

reporting and could be drawn to projects involving computer-assisted reporting to hone investigative reporting skills. Their penchant for following news may make them more likely to speak up in classroom media ethics and current events discussions. While their loyalties clearly lie with newspapers, today's media environment dictates that students be functional across media channels. This group could probably be encouraged to expand their abilities via an introduction to backpack journalism; that is, creating a multi-media package in conjunction with a newspaper.

Current events quizzes may be helpful to *Sensational Snippets*, who may need to be encouraged to keep up with the news more than they already think they do. These students are interested in news, and may recall certain headlines, but are not likely to have followed a news item in-depth. However, because *Sensational Snippets* may tend to receive news via social media, these students may have a better grasp of entertainment news. Therefore, including entertainment news in classroom discussions or current events quizzes may help these students feel more welcome and likely to contribute.

Complimentary Convergents may thrive in a new-media environment, and are likely to benefit most from a hybrid education of broadcast and print. Like the *Old-school Media Hounds*, these students are interested in news and the press' role in democracy. However, Complimentary Convergents' reluctance to pay for news may force them to develop innovative ideas about how the industry is to survive without a paying base. Encouraging these students to develop cutting-edge ideas about the future of the media industry may help them feel included in the classroom. Additionally, if these students are receptive to conceptualizing the future of the industry, they may enjoy learning more about media management. Ironically, the group that is least willing to pay for news, may be the one that is best suited for managing an increasingly converged media environment.

Practical Implications and Recommendations for Theory

The perspectives found in this study seem to validate and challenge Dutta-Bergman's (2004) theory of media complementarity. For example, *Complimentary Convergents*' unwillingness to pay for news may lead them to seek another media channel rather than pay for a newspaper. However, many followers of this perspective still receive news via pay services, such as a cell phone, Internet or cable television. Likewise, *Sensational Snippets*' unwillingness to read a newspaper may lead them away from print. However, this group already tends to not watch, read or listen to an entire article, so there is probably no real displacement effect. Similarly, *Old-school Media Hounds* certainly trust print media more; however, this study found no evidence of displacement of broadcast or Internet media channels by this group. Rather, it found that while *Old-school Media Hounds* assign the most credibility to newspapers, their first choice for news access was online.

Although Stephenson (1964; 1967) related his play theory to newsreading, this study found that it translates well to modern media consumption as a whole. Sensational Snippets, especially, emulate play theory in that newsgathering, to them, very likely includes seeking information about their friends as well as traditional news all from one media channel. *Old-school Media Hounds* also illustrate the theory in that they seem to take pride in being newspaper loyalists. Interestingly, while Stephenson (1964; 1967) noted that news readers may think to themselves that they would have handled a situation better than subject of an article, *Old-school Media Hounds* may think of themselves as the reporter. Neither *Old-school Media Hounds* nor *Complimentary Convergents* want to be told what to think by pundits. Indeed, drawing their own conclusions about the news is likely part of "play" for these groups.

Implications for Future Research

Future research should include more about why so many respondents seem to have resigned themselves to an expectation of media exaggeration or outright lies for ratings boosts, and how they foresee this affecting their future in the industry. Also, it is important to know why students believe news information should be free of charge, and how those students envision the future of news. Likewise, it would be interesting to know the variety of perspectives university communications students have toward their enrollment in a communications program. In other words, as so many of them have at least a somewhat cynical view toward the media, why did they choose a major in this field?

Summary

This chapter included a summary of this study, including the literature surrounding this topic, methodology, and findings. It included conclusions about each perspective found in this study and recommendations for industry professionals and educators. It also included implications for theory and recommendations for future research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Q Statements with Z-score and array position per factor

Number	Statement	Factor 1		Factor 2		Factor 3	
		Z-score	Array	Z-score	Array	Z-Score	Array
1	If a major news event happens, I'll hear about it immediately.	0.728	2	0.985	2	-0.118	0
2	I prefer to watch or listen to news, because I can multi-task while doing so.	1.447	3	1.081	3	1.932	4
3	I prefer cable or satellite news programs to network news.	0.903	2	2.370	4	0.811	2
4	I would pay for a service that factually condenses the world's events and just tells me what I need to know.	0.628	1	-0.941	-3	-0.217	-1

Number	Statement	Factor 1		Factor 2		Factor 3	
		Z-score	Array	Z-score	Array	Z-Score	Array
5	I would rather hear the news told to me from television than read a newspaper or online news.	0.832	2	-0.281	-1	1.192	3
6	I should not have to pay to receive credible news information.	-0.295	-1	1.162	3	0.300	1
7	I would buy more newspapers if I knew the paper came from sustainable forests.	0.032	0	-0.072	0	1.616	3
8	The government should just put out a daily paper telling us what we need to know.	0.318	0	-1.500	-3	-1.370	-3
9	Editors twist Sarah Palin's quotes to affect how people view her.	-1.691	-4	-0.457	-1	0.535	1

Number	Statement	Factor 1		Factor 2		Factor 3	
		Z-score	Array	Z-score	Array	Z-Score	Array
10	Although I know shows like <i>The Rachel Maddow Show</i> or <i>Glenn Beck</i> are opinion-based, I prefer to get news from them because it's easier to understand.	-0.453	-1	0.860	2	0.258	1
11	Newspapers are more informative than news from other mediums.	-1.309	-3	0.528	1	-1.386	-3
12	News reporters and editors are unfairly accused of ignoring positive news.	1.202	3	0.386	1	-0.627	-2
13	If I see news on TV, I don't believe it until I see or hear that a newspaper has printed it.	1.225	3	0.200	1	-0.036	0
14	Newspapers are a more credible source of news than other mediums.	0.523	1	-1.668	-4	-1.719	-4

Number	Statement	Factor 1		Factor 2		Factor 3	
		Z-score	Array	Z-score	Array	Z-Score	Array
15	If I see a news item phone or Internet, I don't believe it until I see it on TV or in a newspaper.	1.538	4	0.158	0	-1.073	-2
16	News events are so parodied that sometimes I don't know if something really happened.	-0.415	-1	-0.859	-2	-1.660	-4
17	If news agencies didn't exaggerate the news, no one would watch.	-0.838	-2	-0.593	-1	-0.090	0
18	I would seek out news from an agency that refused to purchase pictures from the paparazzi.	-0.344	-1	0.055	0	0.416	1
19	Media companies will lie to me if it boosts their ratings.	0.730	2	-1.053	-3	0.196	0

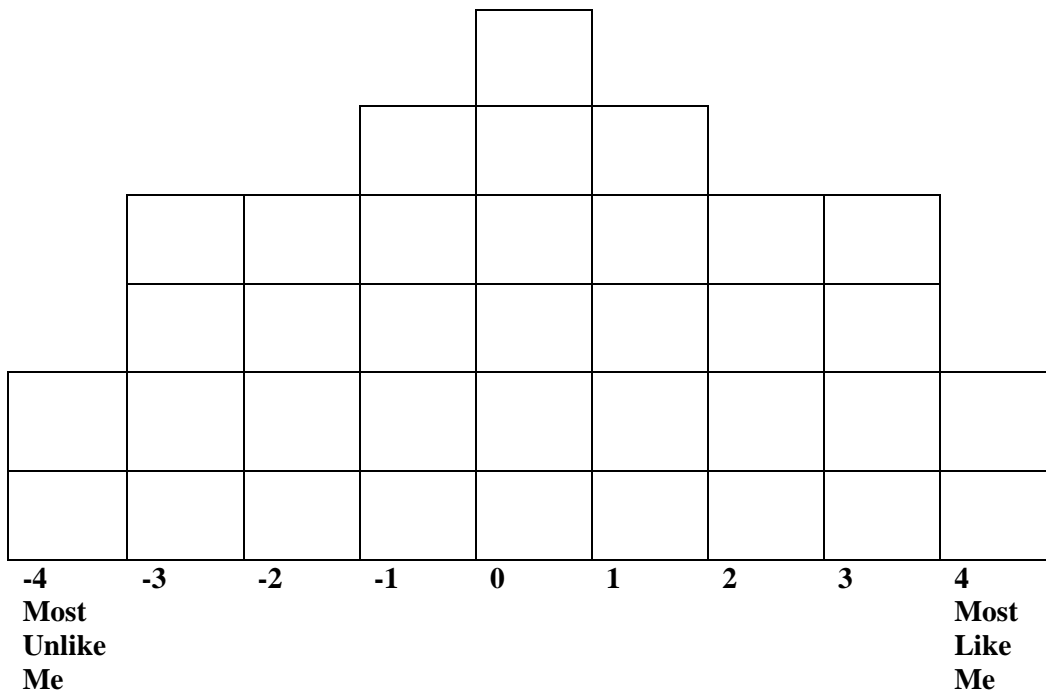
Number	Statement	Factor 1		Factor 2		Factor 3	
		Z-score	Array	Z-score	Array	Z-Score	Array
20	I often find myself being swayed by Fox News, although I know it has a conservative mission.	-0.076	0	1.229	3	1.005	3
21	I have trouble determining whether news is biased or truthful.	-1.737	-4	0.276	1	-0.181	-1
22	Sometimes I can't figure out if a newscaster is a pundit or a reporter.	-0.249	0	1.051	3	0.734	2
23	News reporters and editors are scared to print the truth about industries like agriculture.	-0.030	0	0.062	0	0.355	1
24	Journalists often make up or tweak quotes to fit in story.	-0.549	-1	-0.661	-1	0.701	2
25	I feel smarter after I read a newspaper.	-0.655	-2	-0.254	0	0.572	2

Number	Statement	Factor 1		Factor 2		Factor 3	
		Z-score	Array	Z-score	Array	Z-Score	Array
26	I follow the news more than I lead others to believe.	1.137	3	0.868	2	1.322	3
27	If I'm not up-to-date on the news, I feel like I'm missing something.	0.455	1	0.055	0	-0.237	-1
28	Television and the Internet have been detrimental to news credibility.	1.949	4	0.291	1	2.079	4
29	It's no longer important for the press to serve as "watchdog" of government.	0.716	1	0.897	2	-0.562	-2
30	I rarely read, listen to, or watch an entire news article.	-1.595	-3	-0.892	-2	-1.517	-3
31	Newspapers would be more popular if they were free.	-1.003	-2	1.898	4	-1.362	-3

Number	Statement	Factor 1		Factor 2		Factor 3	
		Z-score	Array	Z-score	Array	Z-Score	Array
32	America no longer needs professional reporters. People can just post news events online.	0.672	1	-0.681	-2	0.220	0
33	Newspapers are for busy, educated, professional people.	-1.484	-3	-1.489	-3	-0.537	-1
34	Only the horoscope/comics, celebrity news or other entertainment sections are important to me.	-0.046	0	-1.905	-4	-0.553	-1
35	Newspaper articles are rarely relevant to my life.	-1.082	-2	-0.346	-1	-1.017	-2
36	If a major news event happens, I'll hear about it immediately.	-1.181	-3	-0.759	-2	0.022	0

Appendix B

Q Methodology Form Board



Appendix C

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Tuesday, March 29, 2011
IRB Application No AG1123
Proposal Title: Media Coverage as Perceived by Communications Students: A Q Method Study
Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 3/28/2012

Principal Investigator(s):

Angel Riggs	Cindy Blackwell
446 Ag Hall	440 Ag Hall
Stillwater, OK 74078	Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,


Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Angel Noel Riggs

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: EXPLORING PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENTS STUDYING
COMMUNICATION TOWARD MEDIA ACCESS AND USE:
A Q METHOD STUDY

Major Field: Agricultural Education

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy/Education in
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Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Journalism at
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Experience:

Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Okla. Graduate teaching associate Graduate research associate	2008 – present
World Publishing Co., Oklahoma City, Okla. Tulsa World newspaper State Capitol Bureau reporter Tulsa World newspaper agriculture/technology reporter	2004 – 2008
E.W. Scripps Co., Wichita Falls, Texas Times Record News newspaper business reporter	2002 – 2004

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Date of Degree: July, 2011

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: EXPLORING PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENTS STUDYING
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Pages in Study: 73

Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major Field: Agricultural Education

Scope and Method of Study: This study sought to help news industry professionals and educators tailor their services to a young audience that has grown up among a plethora of media options. To better reach and educate today's up-and-coming media professionals, those in the industry need a better understanding of modern media students' perspectives of news. This study used Q methodology and relies on Stephenson's Play and Dutta-Bergman's Media Complementarity theories. Students on a large, comprehensive university campus pursuing undergraduate studies via a communications-related major during the 2010-2011 school year were asked to complete a Q sort and demographic instrument. Thirty-four participants resulted in 33 usable sorts. Q statements in this study referenced both how communications students use various media channels and modern media pundits.

Findings and Conclusions: The following labels were applied to the three perceptions found in this study: Old-school Media Hounds; Sensational Snippets; and Complimentary Convergences. Old-school Media Hounds tend to be more traditionally news oriented, with a strong appreciation for newspapers' role as government watchdog. Sensational Snippets tend to seek their news in convenient bits and pieces, often from non-traditional news sources. Complimentary Convergences are similar to Old-school Media Hounds in their views of the press, for example, they appreciate the role of the press as government watchdog. However, they do not prefer one media channel more than another, but expect to obtain credible news information free of charge. This study provided recommendations for news industry professionals and educators regarding the three perspectives.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. Cindy Blackwell
