Exploring Perspectives of Students Studying Communication Toward Media Access and Use: A Q Methodological Study

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Abstract

This study sought to help communication educators better understand young news consumers who have 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 were asked to complete a Q sort and demographic instrument. Thirty-four participants resulted in 33 usable sorts. The following labels were applied to the three perceptions found in this study: Old-school Media Hounds; Sensational Snippets; and Complimentary Convergers. 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 Convergers 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. Recommendations for educators include suggestions for classroom adaptations in response to three perspectives.

RESEARCH

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KEY WORDS

Media, News, Q methodology, Usage

INTRODUCTION

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" (Zumalt, 2003, p. 27). Additionally, today's agricultural communications students are likely to find work in a variety of organizations, including government agencies, university extension services, news organizations and journals, marketing firms, and commodity or farm groups (2003). Preparing these students for modern communications positions requires melding a diversity of skills.

Traditional journalism and mass communication educational programs "often clearly define news-editorial, broadcasting, public relations and advertising," which tend to be more blended in agricultural communications (Boone, Meisenbach, & Tucker, 2000, p. 64). Indeed, Boone et al. (2000) wrote that some professionals in the agricultural communications industry refer to agricultural reporting as "service" or "advocacy" journalism (p. 111) and insisted there is room in agriculture for both traditional, investigative journalism and service reporting. Either way, agricultural communications students are generally interested in both the media and agriculture, so understanding how these students consume their news is crucial in understanding how to educate them.

According to a recent Pew Research Center study, "In 2016, Americans express a clear preference for getting their news on a screen – though which screen that is varies" (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel, & Shearer, 2016, para. 1). For college-age young adults ages 18-29, the screen is a mobile device and the news source is often a social media platform. For example, Tandoc and Johnson (2016) found that a majority of college students (52%) use Twitter to access breaking news, but from there students turn to newspaper websites, television news websites, and online only news websites for more information regarding the breaking news. However, many of these students were exposed to breaking news because of their use of Twitter, not because they were seeking news, per se. According to Tandoc and Johnson (2016) students "get exposed to news not because they were motivated to access news to begin with, but because they happen to be in that communication space" (p. 161), a concept called incidental exposure.

Although the number of adults who get their news via social media was at 62% in 2016, up from 49% in 2012 (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016), which may seem encouraging, much of this news comes via incidental exposure. In a study for Pew Research Center, Gottfried and Shearer (2016) found that users of Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube get news when they are online for other purposes; however, users of LinkedIn, Twitter, and Reddit are relatively even in using the social media platform for actively or incidentally getting news.

> News stories can now come piecemeal, as links or shares, putting less emphasis on the publisher. And, hyper levels of immediacy and mobility can create an expectation that the news will come to us whether we look for it or not. (Mitchell, et al., 2016, para. 1)

For young adults 18-29, about 50% get their news from online sources and 27% from television (Mitchell et al., 2016). In addition, Instagram is the leading social media platform for 18-29 year olds, followed by Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook. "To be sure, news remains an important part of public life" (Mitchell et al., 2016, para. 3), but has become more complicated as delivery media channels have expanded via the Internet. Since Google News was introduced in 2002, news aggregators have offered news free and easy to access, making this the primary, if not exclusive, model of news delivery most current college students recognize. One study focusing solely on college students' perceptions of paid news content found

> …respondents' perception of news as free and easily available from the Internet may be the biggest barrier to implementing a paid news model. Relatively few respondents considered news to be a commodity, though most respondents thought that news is a kind of public service that inform the public and benefit our society. (Sang, 2014, pp. 23-24).

Court rulings supporting news aggregators have woven more tightly into society the concept of news readily available and free of charge. Writing for the *Journal of Civil Rights & Economic Development*, Reynolds (2011) noted, "Thanks to the Internet, the demand for information, particularly the news, and an increased access to it, has grown. Google News is about reader efficiency and reader choice" (p. 990). This increased access of news leaves open the credibility of content.

Media Credibility

No single method determines how news consumers perceive news itself as credible (Golan & Day, 2010). However, several researchers have developed various criteria to gauge media credibility (Armstrong & Collins, 2009; Kiousis, 2001; Thorson, Vraga & Ekdale, 2010). Additionally, there are some benchmarks in determining media credibility, a notion important to the news industry because of evidence that people are more likely to consume news they trust (Thorson et al., 2010; Tsfati & Cappella, 2005).

The United States' first televised presidential debate of then-candidates Kennedy and Nixon in 1960 added another dimension to the study of media credibility: that 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.

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 (2003) explained, that although college students tend to be more familiar with Internet news sources, they reported TV news as more credible. Flanagin and Metzger (2000) found online information was rated as credible as that included 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.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Two theories that guided this study are Dutta-Bergman's (2004) media complementarity theory and Stephenson's (1964, 1967) play theory. Both theories seek to clarify behaviors toward news consumption. Both theories were essential in the instrument development for this study. Additionally, both theories assisted the researchers in the interpretation of the perspectives identified in this research.

Dutta-Bergman (2004) postulated in the development of media complementarity 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.

The literature has suggested that media channel credibility is fueled by a certain amount of imagination and comfort. Stephenson's (1964, 1967) play theory falls in line with this idea, as he proposed that news seeking is a pleasurable, social habit for people, rather than a necessity. 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). 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).

PURPOSE

This study examined the perspectives of future communications industry professionals. Communications instructors must guide young professionals through a quickly changing media environment that incorporates technologies that did not exist when many of today's professionals were in school. To better understand students' relationship with news credibility, use, and access, the purpose of this study was to identify various perspectives held by communications students. The following research questions guided this study:

> RQ1: What are communications students' perspectives of news credibility as related to media access and use?
> RQ2: What do these perspectives say about communications students' access and use of media channels?

METHODS

We chose Q methodology as the research approach to best explore the subjective perceptions of news media as held by college students with communications majors. There are three ways that Q methodology is known to researchers. As a *technique*, the Q sort is the process of sorting all items into one constellation to represent one thought response of all items sorted in the Q set. As a *method*, statistical procedures of correlation, factor analysis and rotation, and z-score calculation for statements results in the mathematical structure for the relationships between and among the sorts. But, most importantly, as a *methodology*, the process for the interpretation of the resulting factor scores including comparisons across factor scores and other qualitative data provides for the subjectivity of viewpoints (Brown, 1980). Therefore, we applied these principles of Q methodology to determine the prevailing and subjective perceptions of news media among college students studying in a communications-related discipline.

Rather than using a survey in which test items are analyzed independently, we employed the by person analysis of Q methodology. Therefore, this study is in line with the recommendation of Leggette and Redwine (2016) who advocated Q methodology as a strategy to achieve diversity in research methods to acquire the range of knowledge needed to respond to issues in agricultural communications. The Q sort for this study was sampled from a large concourse (Stephenson, 1953; 1973; 1978) of a wide range of statements describing media credibility and usage to which the participants could respond with opinions and beliefs with no expectation of what would be correct.

Q methodology, which provides for a measurement of subjectivity, allows for greater depth and context to the survey-based field of media credibility research. In Q methodology, the use of subjectivity is not a threat to a study but rather the subject-material itself (Brown, 1980; McKeown & Thomas, 2013; Watts & Stenner, 2012). Q methodology instrumentation begins with the identification of a concourse, which is, hypothetically, all possible perspectives about the topic of study. In our case, the concourse was various opinions about media credibility.

Instrument Development

The concourse included over 200 statements reflecting opinions about media usage and credibility as found in the literature and gathered from informal inquiries with agricultural communication students. This collection of statements was sampled to result in the instrument used for data collection. The process for sampling included the "homogeneity" and "heterogeneity principle" (Brown, 1980, p. 189). In other words, the statements are first put together because they are alike in some way followed by choosing the most diverse and varied statements that represent that grouping. Therefore, the Q set was designed to be a sample of statements that represent the informal interactions with students majoring in agricultural communication studies and statements found in the literature.

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*.

All of the sampled statements in the Q set were adapted to represent the vernacular of university students. This adaptation included making each statement an opinion and was especially needed for the statements in the Stouffer (1962) study. Most statements needed to be updated in reference 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."

Furthermore, we were careful to keep the grouping of the statements to maintain the integrity of 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 (2004) theory of media complementary can be linked to several state-

ments, 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 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 were selected for the Q set. Fifteen sets of Q statements were printed on small cards. Additionally, a pyramid- shaped form board made of 36 blank squares organized in nine columns labeled from -4 to +4 was printed for distribution with the Q statements (2, 4, 4, 5, 6, 5, 4, 4, and 2 statements to each column). A demographics sheet, including optional contact information for follow-up interviews and an open-ended question allowing participants to share thoughts related to their sort was included on the back of the form board.

P-Set

The population for this study included students from a large, central land grant university majoring in a communications-related field in the 2011-2012 academic year. This population was purposive and chosen because of these students' familiarity with the news industry and media channels and the necessity to study their perceptions. IRB approval was obtained from the university. One student's sort was unusable, leaving 33 sorts for this research. Six students provided comments during the post-sort interview process.

Data Analysis

Once all data were collected, each sort was entered into PQ Method 2.11, a software program for Q method data analysis. 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 of perceptions and accommodated the most sorts as significant and defining of the factor from among all possible sorts. Follow-up interviews and written responses provided by participants on their demographic instruments provided additional material for the interpretation of the three factors.

All sorts were correlated to all other sorts, and the resultant correlation matrix was submitted to principal components factor analysis with a significance level of 0.42. Initial rotations to discover the best fit of the data resulted in using a three-factor varimax rotation. Although the correlations between factor scores of defining sorts for the factors ranged from 0.20 to 0.36, it was determined that the solution represented three diverse views about media channel credibility.

FINDINGS

The 33 sorts resulted in 24 of the sorts achieving a significant factor loading on only one factor. We used these defining sorts for the three factors, or perspectives, with nine participants defining the first perspective, six defining the second, and nine defining the third. In Q methodology, the statement structure within each perspective or factor is determined by the arrangement of z-scores calculated for the defining sorts (Brown, 1980; McKeown & Thomas, 2013; Watts & Stenner, 2012). We used the statement structure, including the most positively and negatively z-scored statements, comparisons across structures, and interview and demographic data to interpret the meaning of the three perspectives (See Appendix for z-scores and array position for all statements by factor array). The perspectives were interpreted to be *Old-school Media Hounds, Sensational Snippets, and Complimentary Convergers.*

Perspective 1: Old-school Media Hounds

This perspective was named the *Old-school Media Hounds* because of several themes that emerged in the data presentation and analysis. Those themes include a 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* highest positively and negatively z-scored statements are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

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

No.	Statement	z-score	AP
	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 "watch-dog" 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
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 (*). AP represents array position.

Students included in this perspective believe in newspapers. However, they may have a romanticized role of newspapers in their lives because they believe newspapers are the most credible source of information (statement 15, array position 4, z-score 1.54). 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). However, as much as they love the printed page, all of this may not necessarily translate into purchasing newspapers as they more likely to receive news online. Of the 13 websites most logged onto for news by Old-school Media Hounds, only five of the online sources listed included a newspaper component (Table 2).

Table 2

Internet Sites Most Logged Onto for News as Reported by Participants

Old-school Media Hounds	Sensational Snippets	Complimentary Convergers
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 participants.

Participant 10, a 25-year-old male senior majoring in journalism and broadcasting, wrote about his sort: "Journalists get a bad rap. If readers were honest with themselves, they would realize they still have a lot of faith in newspapers." Another student, participant eight, a 25-year-old female journalism and broadcasting senior, also referenced public beliefs regarding newspapers 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."

Old-school Media Hounds 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).

Old-school Media Hounds do not want to be told what to think. Students included in 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 political leaning. For example, participant 10 explained in a follow-up interview 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.

Although students included in this perspective found newspapers the most credible source of news, they ranked the Internet, on average, as the media channel through which they were most likely to receive news (Table 5). Newspapers were the second-choice, on average, although that is a higher ranking than the fifth-place ranking newspapers received by the other two perspectives. In light of the second-place ranking, 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 students included in 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 incongruence between a preferred media channel and the channel actually used is not unusual. 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).

Perspective 2: Sensational Snippets

Sensational Snippets have bits-and-pieces news-gathering habits, demand convenience, and expect media exaggeration. This perspective was defined by six sorts. The *Sensational Snippets* most positively and negatively z-scored statements are listed in Table 3.

Table 3

Most Like and Most Unlike Statements for Sensational Snippets

No.	Statement	z-score	AP
	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 of online news.	1.16	3
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 (*). AP represents array position.

Students included in this perspective are not going to sit through an entire newscast (statement 31, array position 4, z-score 1.90). Additionally, *Sensational Snippets* appreciate newspapers, but they are 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). *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). This group may get much of their news from comedy shows that typically incorporate news into comedy bits. So, it's likely no surprise *Sensational Snippets* expect some level of exaggeration in news to boost ratings (statement 20, array position 3, z-score 1.23). Students included in this perspective are akin to Bird's (2000) perception of the relationship between news and modern young adults. Among her findings, Bird (2000) wrote people younger than 30 years old tend to believe it is the media's responsibility to attract them and perhaps entertain them.

Convenience is key for the *Sensational Snippets*. Consider the perspective of Participant 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." News and social media applications on her phone help her track 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."

Sensational Snippets may allow convenience to trump credibility. However, that may be because followers of this perspective put an emphasis on the viewers' responsibility to discern the credibility of news. Consider the perception of Participant 1, a 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!* A late-night 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."

The Sensational Snippets receive news, on average, via television (See Table 5). 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). Students included in 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.

Although *Sensational Snippets* reported that television, on average, was their primary media channel choice, only one respondent in this perspective reported watching television news more than once per day. In comparison, four *Old-school Media Hounds* reported watching television news at least every day, despite TV's ranking as the third-most-often used media channel.

Perspective 3: The Complimentary Convergers

Complimentary Convergers was defined by nine sorts. The participants whose sort defined this factor believe news should be free, accurate and converged. 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 Convergers* assign no greater credibility to newspapers as a media channel (statement 16, array position -4, z-score -1.66; statement 14, array position -4, z-score -1.72). Unlike the Sensational Snippets, Complimentary Convergers will watch, listen to or read an entire news article (statement 31, array position -3, z-score -1.36). However, Complimentary Convergers are not going to pay for news (statement 7, array position 3, z-score 1.62). The Complimentary Convergers' most positively and negatively z-scored statements are listed in Table 4.

Table 4

Most Like and Most Unlike Statements for Complimentary Convergers

No.	Statement	z-score	AP
	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 *The Rachel Maddow Show* or *Glenn Beck* 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 (*). AP represents array position.

Students included in this perspective may challenge long-standing notions that age or prestige (Lazarsfeld, 1940; Westley & Severin, 1964a and 1964b) is likely to influence media channel preference. *Complimentary Convergers* are truly immersed in media convergence. 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). 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, however, *Complimentary Convergers* tend to have a resigned distrust of media (statement 20, array position 3, z-score 1.01). For example, Participant 26, a 23-year-old, male, agricultural communications sophomore said in a follow-up interview he knew from his experience working in television that reporters, both in print and broadcast journalism, "want to make it interesting." However, he said, 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."

Complimentary Convergers receive news most often, on average, via the Internet and television (Table 5). 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.

Table 5

Media Channels Most Often Used to Receive News

	Online	Magazine	Television	Newspaper	Cellphone	Radio
Old-school Media Hounds	1.8	4.8	3.8	2.7	3.6	4.2
Sensational Snip-pets	2.8	5	2.3	4.3	3.3	3.2
Complimentary Convergers	2.3	4.6	2.4	4.5	3.4	3.9

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

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Although Stephenson (1964, 1967) related his play theory to news reading, this study found the theory translates well to modern media consumption as a whole. *Sensational Snippets*, especially, emulate play theory in that newsgathering 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 Convergers* 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.

To reach students, communications instructors need to understand how students access and perceive news information. Additionally, understanding the relevance of play theory in students' lives may provide for better classroom engagement, especially since many are exposed to news in an incidental manner (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016; Tandoc & Johnson, 2016). For example, *Old-school Media Hounds* might benefit best from a traditional pencil-and-paper approach to news gathering, however, they may be intrigued by investigative reporting and could be drawn to projects involving computer-assisted reporting. 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 since they recognize news as a public service and a need in society (Reynolds, 2011; Sang, 2014). 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 newswriting. They may also be the first to get breaking news via social media, but will back up that information with more traditional media outlets similar to the findings of Tandoc and Johnson (2016).

Current events discussions 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 incidentally via social media (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016; Tandoc & Johnson, 2016) or a late-night humor television program, these students may have a better grasp of entertainment news. Therefore, including entertainment news items in classroom discussions or examples may help these students feel more welcome and likely to contribute.

Complimentary Convergers 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 Convergers'* reluctance to pay for news may entice them to further develop innovative ideas about how the industry is to survive without a paying base beyond news aggregators such as Google News. According to Reynolds (2011) "Google's aggregation of news increases access to information by bringing the world's news to the fingertips of the user" (p. 994). Encouraging these students to develop cutting-edge ideas about the future of media industry management may help them feel included in the classroom.

Suggestions for classroom applications by student perspectives were given here. Yet, research for the connection between these practical suggestions and how teaching to student perspective has yet to be explored. Furthermore, future research should consider how media channel credibility changes as new social media platforms influence how students communicate with each other. Indeed, some of the most prevalent social media platforms today were in their infancy or did not exist when data for this study were collected. Additionally, it would be interesting to gauge the relevance of play theory as media channels increasingly offer interactive engagement.

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APPENDIX

Q Statements with z-score and array position per factor array

Number	Statement	Factor 1		Factor 2		Factor 3	
		z-score	AP	z-score	AP	z-score	AP
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
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
10	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.	-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
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
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
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
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

Note. AP represents array position.

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