

THREE OF A KIND: HOW YOUNG ADULTS ENGAGE WITH PRINT, ONLINE  
AND MOBILE PLATFORMS

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by  
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ABSTRACT

Mobile devices, Internet websites and print newspapers and magazines supply a veritable feast of options for finding and reading editorial content. Like any meal, however, readers can only consume so much in any given day. Through the combined constructs of uses and gratifications theory and the technology acceptance model, this study examined why focus group participants engaged with one platform versus another, the extent to which social gratifications existed for print products and how gratifications obtained from print, online and mobile media compared to the technology acceptance model factors. Findings showed that focus group respondents preferred to read print but actually engaged the most with online content. No manifest social gratifications appeared for print products on a personal level, but people in this study held a sense of social awareness when talking about reading printed products versus mobile products in a public space. Finally, navigation, distraction, media brand reputation and the personal curation of online content sharing connected with technology acceptance model factors. The study concluded that print, online and mobile platforms can be thought of in some senses as exhibiting a three-of-a-kind existence for reader engagement.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Journalism as an industry has struggled to find online business models to adequately replace advertising-subsidized print content. Although newspapers have had mild success in isolated cases, magazines have been much slower not only to adopt online technologies, but also to fully embrace and implement them. Now, mobile presents a burgeoning opportunity and threat to the entire ecosystem. Content available from diverse offerings and through assorted access points has become normal for Americans, 92 percent of whom get news from multiple platforms each day (PEJ, 2010b).

The Internet has transformed print products from the “Daily Us” to the selective, individualized content of the “Daily Me” (de Waal, Schoenbach, & Lauf, 2005, p. 56). Newspapers and magazines once reigned supreme because they could provide large quantities of information simultaneously (de Waal & Schoenbach, 2008). The Internet trumps that ability by a wide margin, and the Internet and Web-first strategies are now seen as the future (Riley, 2006), even though the idea of the “Daily Me” was introduced more than fifteen years ago (Negroponte, 1995). However, print is far from dead. Audiences read with their hands as much as their eyes, resulting in a strong physical connection to print products (Ytre-Arne, 2011). Meanwhile, mobile companies have found a way to sell users a piece of themselves (King, 2011), reflected in their phones, a consequence of a deep emotional connection to cell phones. Online seems to be a lukewarm conglomeration of attributes that make print and mobile successful. The idea that people use different platforms in different ways is obvious. Yet research is an act

entirely devoted to digging beneath ideas that seem conspicuous and ordinary (Barker, 2003).

The goal of this study will be to explore how readers engage with media platforms (print magazines and newspapers, Internet websites and mobile devices such as phones and tablets) by determining if different uses and gratifications for one media platform overlap into other platforms.

Studies relating to mobile devices have explored the mobile revolution's effects on the public sphere (Hampton, Livio, & Goulet, 2010), interaction between people (Rettie, 2009), and private emotional attachment (Vincent, 2006). Research into mobile devices relating to news consumption is less frequent (Westlund, 2008). Similarly, few studies have focused on the direct interaction between print products and their websites (Ingham & Weedon, 2008; Mersey, 2009). Some that do center on management or business aspects (Ellonen, Tarkiainen, & Kuivalainen, 2010; Tarkiainen, Ellonen, & Kuivalainen, 2009).

Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2010) concluded that one glaring limitation of extant research is an assumption of media division: "Thus, rather than assuming that news consumption is divided across media types, research should inquire into when, where, how and under what conditions this happens – and does not happen..." (p. 1094). As industries such as consumer electronics, information technologies, mobile and media converge, platforms become a kind of technological currency (Fabricant, 2011). This study seeks to identify how people interact with all three channels — print, online and mobile.

Theoretically, this study helps build on the uses and gratifications theory through the lens of technology and new media. This study pairs the newer technology acceptance model with the classic communication theory of uses and gratifications to serve as a bridge between a mainstay of mass media theory and newer models that help address journalism's rapid digitalization. At a practical level, this study sheds light on the thoughts and attitudes of readers in regards to the proliferation of media distribution channels. This research can aid industry practitioners in remaining knowledgeable about readers' preferences for how they perceive their media diets to inform decisions about the distribution of content across the growing number of platforms and devices. A newspaper could once be defined as the daily hunk of black ink and tree pulp that landed on a subscriber's doorstep. That definition, like other media channels, now must address websites and mobile content as well.

The literature review begins with the framework for the environment within which media companies operate using literature from fields such psychology, marketing and management. The paper will briefly touch on audience engagement (a topic explained in greater detail in the methods section) and values, then move to content quality, followed by an overview of website usability. A section on mobile characteristics concludes the review of current literature.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Media companies operate within an industry framework**

To understand the end uses of media, one must first grasp the basic environment in which media companies operate. Porter (1991) described five basic industry-level forces that act on an organization within any industry: the threat of potential entrants, the threat of substitutes, the bargaining power of suppliers, the bargaining power of buyers and the rivalry among existing. Using Barney's (1991) attributes is another way of structuring the force framework at a company level, where companies create competitive advantage through resources that are valuable, rare, hard to imitate and non-substitutable. The threat of substitutes is most affected by disruptive technologies such as the Internet and mobile (Ahlers, 2006).

Substitutability for media products is "anchored in aspects of content" (Lacy, Duffy, Riffe, Thorson, & Fleming, 2010, p. 36). Studies have shown conflicting evidence for displacement of one medium versus another, sometimes concluding online content is a substitute (Gentzkow, 2007) and other times finding it to be complementary (de Waal et al., 2005). Some research suggests that as new media provide better gratifications to old needs, older media are not displaced but instead specialize to fill specific, well-defined niches (Dimmick, Chen, & Li, 2004). Readers might reduce print consumption to accommodate online activity, but few directly substitute online content for print material (Ahlers, 2006). Furthermore, Ahlers (2006) defined two types of complementary media usage: (1) multitasking: using two or more media simultaneously (streaming Internet radio while reading *Salon* online) and (2) multi-channel: using different media at

different times of the day (reading *The New York Times* online at work and reading the print copy of *Wired* at home before bed).

For magazines, content becomes valuable to the audience through the niche market publications fulfill. However, the Internet has increased the bargaining power of readers as buyers, in the sense of consumers, since many magazines have not monetized content. Newspapers also face a tough road. Daily news is a commodity that has not been adequately cordoned off from the free zone of the Internet, and legacy papers face a high threat from news aggregators. Furthermore, content is no longer spatially limited, which could create an increased rivalry between established competitors due to the wider geographic market available for any given brand (Ellonen, Kuivalainen, & Jantunen, 2008). A newspaper or magazine brand must translate regardless of locale, and it must be understandable regardless of distance.

Perhaps the most recognizable way readers have gained power as “buyers” is the sheer load of content available. The availability of content across platforms has fulfilled Herbert Simon’s 1971 prophecy: “What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention...” (p. 40). Readers have enormous power in the success and failure of media products because readers will never consume the entire supply of content (Picard, 2005). How that content is presented directly relates to media companies’ innovation.

### **Innovation is a missing component in the media industry**

Any company’s long-term growth depends on innovation. Common barriers to innovation include the inability to discard old models and reliance on prior successes and

“familiar knowledge” (Assink, 2006, p. 223). The rise of the Internet has changed the power structure of the media and requires media innovation. Nyugen (2010) asserted that today’s media companies operate in a “fear-driven innovation culture” (p. 224).

Magazine and newspaper companies did not create websites to be cutting edge; instead, they created websites out of fear of being left behind in the online world. Nyugen (2008) identified three fear-generated factors that affect online content: obsessing over a new medium’s destructive power, applying old processes and values to new media and hesitating to properly fund new media experiments. In a study of Spanish publications, Domingo (2006) concluded that online-only projects tended to play by the rules of the online world, whereas online endeavors created by traditionally print-based media companies exhibited the structure and routines of their parent medium as a result of the “inertia of traditional journalistic culture” (p. 507).

Picard (2005) maintained that the core competency of media companies is, in reality, not content creation but content selection and packaging. The Internet, then, requires more dynamic solutions. Despite the Internet’s influence, understanding customer needs and packaging content under a recognizable brand are still crucial (Ellonen et al., 2008). Because magazines and newspapers proceeded slowly in adopting the Internet as an outlet for content, they have created the potential for the beginnings of a vicious cycle whereby they constantly linger two steps behind technology.

Organizations can fall into a “competency trap,” where they specialize their techniques and processes in realms of technology that become obsolete (Levitt & March, 1988, p. 322). A possible case here is that magazines and newspapers are finally producing better



websites but might potentially ignore mobile applications. As technologies have continued to evolve at a rapid rate, this problem presents itself as a recurring one.

News organizations are moving faster toward mobile than they did with the Internet, but they are not focused on creating a customized user experience, according to Will Sullivan, a mobile technology fellow with the Reynolds Journalism Institute at the University of Missouri. (personal communication, March, 2, 2011). Instead, most organizations are employing strategies similar to those they used with the Internet: copying print content. In a 2010 report released by the Columbia Journalism Review, the most common source for magazine web content was republication of print material. Churning old material for new platforms qualifies as neither innovative nor engaging.

### **Engagement is a multi-definitional term**

“Engagement” as a concept slices across disciplines. It has been linked to interactivity in art (Edmonds, Muller, & Connell, 2006), user-generated content in civic awareness (Leung, 2009) and media production in education (Kafai & Peppler, 2011). Livingstone (2008) argued that engagement is a fundamental issue in communication studies. Engagement with digital media involves interacting and participating with media (Cover, 2006). Some areas have been separated more specifically. Youth engagement with social networks has been parsed into five categories: information-seeking activity, connectivity, world-creation, utility and participation (Takahashi, 2008). On the other hand, studies of more traditional media, such as newspapers or television, take a cognitive approach on engagement. One television study explicated engagement as simply “the mental activity of focusing attention” (Smith & Gevins, 2004, p. 286).

An academic definition that addresses both digital media and traditional media forms comes from Oh, Bellur and Sundar (2010): user engagement is an experience with both physical and cognitive dimensions that might lead to absorption with media or action-oriented consequences, such as online sharing. The authors instructed that the theory represented a continuum of engagement, physical on the low end and sharing with others capping the highest, most engaged level (Oh et al., 2010). In other words, engagement involves a psychological and behavioral experience as well as aspects of physical interaction and action derived from engagement, such as commenting on content or forwarding a link to an article (Oh et al., 2010).

Other researchers have focused on interactive features and media use as they defined engagement. Das (2010) stated that studies of the engagement should include ideas relating interactivity in the form of content creation. Interactivity is one “peripheral cue” of new media systems that might foster engagement (Oh et al., 2010, p. 20). Calavita (2003) connected engagement with regular use of news media, and though Livingstone (2004) seemed to embrace a receptive model of audience behavior (versus an active model in this study), she acknowledged that analysis of use is integral to studies of the new media environment. According to Smith and Gevins (2004), “[E]ngagement is presumed to be prerequisite to the elaborative encoding necessary to integrate the ... message with the viewer’s long-term knowledge store such that it might influence subsequent perceptions, feelings, thoughts, and actions” (p. 286). Stated differently, engagement with media products can be linked to elements of personality, such as feelings and thoughts; thus, engagement can be tied to values.

## **Readers bring personal values to media interaction**

Magazine, newspaper and mobile media involve audiences. Thus, it follows that those audiences bring personal values to the intersection of their lives and media. Verplanken and Holland (2002) offered a loose definition of values as cognitive constructs that help define a situation and guide action. Values inform our choices and influence our behavior (Thøgersen & Ölander, 2002). However, to truly shape our actions, values must be activated and as such, tend to show up in general habits (Verplanken & Holland, 2002). In the case of media consumption, activation occurs through searching for information, seeking relaxation or other ideas related to the experience of use, expressed in habits of reading the daily paper or checking news online at a certain time.

Value types and the activation process are integral because value is not inherent in product attributes, but has been tied to the context of users' experiences (Kujala & Vaananen-Vainio-Mattila, 2009). Sagiv and Schwartz (2000) identified ten types of values, though power, hedonism and self-direction are most closely related to aspects of media consumption in that they respectively describe social appearance, pleasure, and choice or independent thought. The Sagiv and Schwartz model (2000) defines general values that guide everyday life, but users of a product build value through interaction with that product, or "experienced value" (Isomursu, Ervasti, Kinnula, & Isomursu, 2011, p. 198). Thus, a newspaper or magazine with the best content can still fail if users have consistently negative experiences with the product. For example, *The New York Times* is a newspaper with a wide audience, but if it were to make searching online content more difficult than usual or were to narrow its coverage of important issues, these value factors

would impinge on the experience readers have come to expect.

### **Content quality does matter**

Magazines and newspapers have thus far not introduced new types of content to the Internet. A 2008 content analysis from ten online newspapers in the U.S., U.K., France, Germany and Russia found websites avoided new types of content, writing and interaction with readers (Quandt, 2008). At a newspaper disguised as the *Midtown Daily News*, multimedia content did not appear regularly and there was no consistent routine for its creation (Groves, 2009). Perhaps this is why Chyi and Yang (2009) deemed online news an inferior good. In other words, companies have viewed the Internet as a novelty act or a sideshow. Domingo's (2006) study of Spanish newsrooms corroborated this:

In this context where innovation was undermined by lack of support and resources and where the online product should not overshadow the traditional one, journalistic routines were simplified as much as possible. Many online journalists in traditional media companies considered their product as a provisional form of journalism that filled the gaps left by the production rhythm of "real" journalism... (p. 516)

The magazine industry's efforts regarding any online content have been lackadaisical. The Columbia Journalism Review (2010) survey found startling statistics concerning magazine website content. Six in 10 magazines surveyed said their copy editing online was less meticulous than for their print product, and fact checking was reported to be

either non-existent or less rigorous than print for 43 percent of magazine websites (CJR, 2010). These statistics concerning online content come alive in comments from top editors about the reality of a cycle more akin to daily newspapers. Joe Spring, online editor for *Outside* magazine, said, “There’s a less rigorous process of editing, for sure” (personal communication, October 4, 2011). Garrett Graff, editor-in-chief of *The Washingtonian* magazine, was at the publication when it launched its first website in 2005 and compared the attention and money lavished on the print product to a Division-I football program; he compared online to a junior varsity squad at the D-III level (personal communication, July 25, 2011). *New York* Editor-in-Chief Adam Moss said: “The editing process online is zero, pretty much. I’m not that comfortable with that, but that’s practical reality” (Kaplan, 2011a).

Less than half of the newspapers in a study similar to the CJR survey said their online stories were always copy edited and 15 percent of online stories were “not usually” copy edited at all (Russial, 2009). Strikingly, those numbers were not statistically linked to circulation size — it’s happening at all levels (Russial, 2009). Attitudes at some newspapers reflect this. A staffer at the *Midtown Daily News* said of the web, “I don’t see that it’s something that we need to worry that much about” (Groves, 2009, p. 94). That newspaper still published exclusive content in print first, and the website did not have its own story-planning system in the newsroom (Groves, 2009). Little to no value was seen in online content in the Project for Excellence in Journalism study of news media. Answering a survey question about monetizing site usage, 82 percent of respondents said they would find somewhere else for information if their favorite site enacted paywalls (PEJ, 2010a). Seventy percent of web-only *The*

*Washington Post* readers said they would find another source of news if that website was removed (Gentzkow, 2007). As of early 2012, dozens of newspapers had established paywalls or shared plans to do so (PEJ, 2012), and the effects remain to be seen.

### **Website usability is a major factor for readers**

Although print is still the most profitable distribution channel, websites are the primary platform through which readers spend time with a magazine or newspaper brand online. Nearly six in ten Americans regularly obtain news from an Internet or digital source (Pew, 2010). A synthesis of Nielsen's online audience measurements reveals that audiences only spent six minutes per month on magazine web sites; in contrast, readers spent more than ten minutes per month on newspaper websites but newspapers have reported a problem of "drive-by" visits, where users appear to only scan headlines (PEJ, 2010a). The lack of time engaged with online newspaper and magazine journalism might lie in the design and content organization.

Print reading entails a relaxed method, called ludic reading (Nell, 1988). Online readers tend scan in an F pattern, optimized for speed and interaction, meaning they read more and longer at the top of a web page and progressively less as they move down (Nielsen & Pernice, 2009). Major newspaper websites such as the *New York Times*, *L.A. Times*, *Washington Post*, and *USA Today* post important content in that left-to-right, top-to-bottom pattern (Lim, 2010). Still, some readers desire print copies compared to online reading (Ingham & Weedon, 2008). Yet ignoring the fact that people do read online would lose sight of another problem. Research in online reading shows that chunked information with frequent subsection headings creates an important format with plenty of

content entry points, letting a user have “desired exploration” (Nielsen & Pernice, 2009, p. 82). Pew Research Center (2010) found that 57 percent of respondents indicated news-grazing habits, a trend associated with exploring content broadly. This type of exploration can result in a more personal involvement with media; involvement signals attention, emotion and participation (Rubin, 2009).

Users of online journalism appear to thrive on convenience (Chyi & Yang, 2009). Five areas of motivation were identified by Flavian and Gurrea (2009) and included searching for updated news and searching for specific information. Similarly, in Ingham and Weedon’s (2008) case study of *Group Leisure* and its online counterpart, readers’ preferences for online content were most concentrated in areas of search functionality and quick access to information.

The largest potential for magazine websites resides in their content frequency (Tarkiainen et al., 2009). Expressed differently, a magazine website can serve as a useful tool in bridging the information and relationship gap with readers between print issues. *TIME* and *New York* magazine have pushed hard in recent years to incorporate a stable of daily blogs to maintain brand appeal and serve as drivers of content between print issues, and the vertical integration has paid off in marked increases in web traffic (Kaplan, 2011a; Kaplan, 2011b). Newspapers already address the frequency issue merely by their existence, as most newspapers have daily circulation. At regular noon data samples, only 16 percent of lead stories for *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, and the *L.A. Times* were identical between the print editions of those papers and their respective websites (Mensing & Greer, 2006). Yet nothing on the market can beat the frequency of a mobile phone.

## **Mobile is the new kid on the block**

Just as magazines and newspapers had their Internet baggage firmly in hand (or at least recollected from the initial scattering), along came mobile promising to reinvent the world yet again. Mobile continues to change business models, user experiences and culture. This revolution is one where mobile offerings can be curated to fit individual user experiences even more so than customized online content (W. Sullivan, personal communication, March 2, 2011). That revolution is growing exponentially. Mobile data traffic doubled in 2011, the fourth year in a row such growth has been achieved, and traffic is projected to increase 20 times the 2010 level in the next five years (Cisco Systems, 2012; Moore, 2011). On top of that, the number of Americans who own a tablet or an e-reader jumped significantly during the 2011 holiday season, from 18 percent in December to 29 percent in January 2012 (Pew, 2012). Ubiquity is important. Mobile devices are valuable because they are familiar, in that they are personalized, spontaneous and entertaining (Anckar & D’Incau, 2002). Gratifications of entertainment and relaxation are the most common aspects of mobile use, especially for trends such as games, mobile applications and texting (Wei, 2008; Ho & Syu, 2010; Leung, 2007). Whether a person uses a mobile device directly for pleasure, such as games or movies, or as alleviation for boredom in an attempt to pass time, the entertainment component of mobile is important (Özcan & Koçak, 2003).

Mobile devices create a continuous stream of private space throughout the day, shrinking the public sphere to a personal level (Groening, 2010; Hampton et al., 2010). That familiarity results in trust, what truly separates user experiences with mobile from print and web. People like mobile devices, particularly cell phones, because they trust



them in a way comparable to no other medium (Best, 2009; Vincent, 2006). Predictability and risk are not sufficient to trust but are related influential factors in a trusting relationship (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Such predictability can be achieved without positive outcomes and not all risk situations involve trust, but a trusting relationship must be based upon an ability to deliver as promised in the best interests of the parties involved. Magazines and newspapers arrive on a predictable schedule, and mobile achieves a predictable status in terms of its ubiquity. The Internet is not predictable. Content changes constantly and the information space is immense.

And though risk is not sufficient for a trusting relationship, studies have found that it is necessary (Schlosser, White, & Lloyd, 2006). Risk for magazines and newspapers lay in the fact that consumers agree to pay money before they see the content; they might or might not be satisfied. Risk for mobile involves the personal nature. Mobile encompasses an intimate world that is shared sparingly with outsiders, and media providers represent outsiders. There is very little risk in online content. Many articles are both free and, via aggregators, disconnected from any larger entity or news brand. The recent explosion of apps has proven nothing if at least to show that consumers will pay for an experience that is properly packaged and priced.

Furthermore, users' digital devices are a reflection of themselves (Vincent, 2006), fulfilling the power value of Sagiv and Schwartz (2000). Some researchers have broken the functionality of cell phones into pragmatic and symbolic uses, where the former addresses the common tasks such as texting, calling or playing games, and the latter considers the role of the phone in maintaining personal and social identities (Wirth, von Pape, & Karnowski, 2008). This symbolic use can, for example, reveal feelings of

inadequacy stemming from being somewhere without the phone, a common sentiment reflected in numerous studies from around the world (Wirth et al., 2008). Mobile devices are ingrained in global cultures from Jamaica (Horst & Miller, 2005) to Mozambique (Archambault, 2011). Fewer than 10 percent of Australians said their lives would proceed as normal without their mobile devices (Wajcman, Bittman, & Brown, 2008). The same effect was observed half a world away in Cameroon (de Bruijn, Nyamnjoh, & Angwafo, 2010). At the most fundamental level, as an everyday attraction and necessity, cell phones have migrated from a want to a need (Wei & Lo, 2006).

Mobile devices are not only part of our hands, but of our clothing, rituals and habits, signaled by the mobile device's proximity to and intimacy with our personal space (Best, 2009). These devices achieve an unprecedented depth of interaction with users, down to a basic emotional level and as a literal extension of the body (Vincent, 2006; Richardson, 2007). In a study of the uses and gratifications of texting, researchers found that kids perceived texting as a way of hanging out with friends without leaving the bedroom or living room (Grant & O'Donohoe, 2007). Mobile devices alter our sense of experiencing the world by acting as augments to our corporeal and intellectual selves (Richardson, 2007), and they serve as constantly updated emotional caches (Vincent, 2006). Grant and O'Donohoe (2007) concluded that mobile devices represent "important emotional dimensions" of everyday life (p. 234). In other words, cell phones, and now tablets, have moved past their original function of serving as a tool for communication with others. People now use these devices to communicate with themselves, to store and later tap in to their emotional reserves.

“Nobody carries a print product that doesn’t leave their side or isn’t within three feet of them,” said RJI Fellow Will Sullivan (personal communication, March 2, 2011). Although this statement does not hold up as a universal truth — ministers with Bibles, voracious readers with novels — most people do not carry a newspaper or magazine like they carry their cell phone. Shin (2007) concluded that people like the feeling of being connected, or available, as much as they like the discrete functions of that availability, such as emailing or downloading movies on the go. That study also found that mobile content should be high-quality, timely and personalized, not unlike content from print and online sources (Shin, 2007). One study found that accessibility was one of the most sought after gratifications for college students using cell phones (Wei & Lo, 2006). Smartphone use is often spread evenly throughout the day because it is a constant physical “situational cue,” with more individual usage sessions but in much shorter interactions compared to laptops (Oulasvirta, Rattenbury, Ma, & Raita, 2011, p. 109).

The emotional attachment, the need to feel constantly connected to ourselves and others, imparts to cell phones the quality of containment and thus, inseparability (Richardson, 2007). Mobile networks impart a fluid quality to information and allow content to “flow freely and to be appropriated simultaneously in multiple and undetermined ways” (Jackson, 2007, p. 409). As discussed earlier in the paper, the user experience makes mobile revolutionary. Plastic and electronics are irrelevant opposed to what the device represents in addition to its functionality as a communications gadget (Kujala & Vaananen-Vainio-Mattila, 2009). Mobile is a hybrid medium (Wei, 2008). It encompasses every mass medium that has come before it (Fling, 2009) and allows users to view themselves as both creators and consumers of content (Campbell & Ling, 2009;

Kafai & Pepler, 2011). Mobile exists apart from a printed magazine, a printed newspaper or the online versions of either. As such, mobile devices present an imminent opportunity for media organizations to connect with readers, effectively bypassing the scores of mistakes committed with regard to online content. Already, mobile offerings are adding measurable numbers to the overall non-print audience numbers for major newspapers: 11.2 percent for the *L.A. Times*, 9.1 percent for *The Washington Post* and 7.6 percent for *The New York Times* (comScore, 2011).

### **Summary of the literature**

Fear and a general disregard for the power of new media factor into magazine and newspaper companies' current struggles. Value, hinging upon user experiences, has been reduced by website inaccessibility and poor quality, and these blunders threaten to dilute magazines and newspapers in an era of disconnected, free Internet content. Meanwhile, an unprecedented level of interaction between users and their cell phones has been documented, resulting in the idea of a basic emotional connection to these devices that is realized in their constant proximity.

### CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The intersection of digital, print and mobile is a busy junction. As such, several theories could be used to support a line of inquiry into user engagement with these various media types. The theory of disruptive innovation holds that new business innovations are “financially unattractive for the leading incumbent to pursue,” with print as the media incumbent (Christensen, 2006, p. 49). Reading and interacting with media products falls under Stephenson’s (1988) definition of play, or any self-sufficient interlude from work that results in no material gain. Play theory states that mass media represent “convergent selectivity,” or voluntary choice in self-behavior (Stephenson, 1988, p. 194). Play theory relates to reader interaction with mobile devices, websites and print products, connected by Sagiv and Schwartz’s (2000) hedonism and self-direction values. The diffusion of innovation theory could help explain mobile especially. That theory has four steps: An individual gains knowledge of some new technology, evaluates it, decides to try it and finally, confirms the decision to continue use or reevaluates and stops use (Williams, Strover, & Grant, 1994). Additionally, Eliot Freidson’s (1953) theory of the “social situation of contact” holds that content alone fails to address the effects of the social settings in which people interact with any medium (p. 237).

Although the aforementioned theories are useful, the most compelling approach for the aspirations of this research study is a combination of the classic uses and gratifications theory with the newer technology acceptance model. This section will first look at uses and gratifications theory and the technology acceptance model, then explain

why the combination of these theories works well. Finally, examples of this theoretical combination will conclude this section.

### **Uses and gratifications asks “What do people do with media?”**

Studying audience engagement with various media channels requires the acknowledgement of a theoretical foundation grounded in active, audience-centered approaches. The classic communication theory of uses and gratifications underpins this study. This theory has roots in the 1940s with studies by Paul Lazarsfeld and Herta Herzog (Rubin, 1994). Elihu Katz advanced the theory in the post-war research period, and his contributions in the 1970s with Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch form the basis of the modern theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). Principal elements of the theory include people’s needs and motives to communicate; the social, psychological, and environmental factors that influence how people deal with media; and how alternatives to media use alter the consumption of media (Rubin, 1994). The audience is considered active, but the activity component is not assumed to remain at universal level (Rubin, 1994). For example, checking the same newspaper website everyday out of habit (ritualized) is less active than seeking information on a topic at a variety of websites (instrumental) (Rubin, 1994).

Distilled, uses and gratifications approaches communication research by asking, “What do people do with media?” (Katz, 1959, p. 2). That general question can be broken into two further considerations: “Why do people interact with a specific medium?” and “What gratifications do those people attain from that interaction?” (Ruggiero, 2000). Early uses and gratifications research was criticized for reliance on self-reporting, and

thus the focus group has become integral for measures of research sophistication (Katz, 1987). Other problems stem from the potential for uses and gratifications research to produce a simple list of reasons why people interact with media without providing sufficient explanations (O'Donohoe, 1994).

This theory has also been criticized for being too individualistic and ungeneralizable, but comparison and scalable results are possible indirectly through “consistent findings across samples, media, and cultures.” (Rubin, 1994, p. 423). Still, the theory does not lend itself to predictive qualities. Scholars of this theory still debate concrete definitions of uses and gratifications concepts such as needs and motives (or perhaps, engagement), but it is recognized that uses and gratifications has a prime position to inform studies of new communication channels (Ruggiero, 2000). Uses and gratifications is an excellent means to study new media attributes of interactivity and mass customization, fitting this study’s goal of researching Internet and mobile channels (Ruggiero, 2000; Rubin, 2009). In that vein, Wirth, von Pape and Karnowski (2008) surmised that new uses and gratifications studies should incorporate the social and contextual circumstances vital to new media use. Consequently, recent research has suggested that online and mobile media use, in the spectrum of uses and gratifications, “cannot be analogously conceptualized as media exposure ... [W]e suggest that media *use* can be understood as a form of social action...” (Petric, Petrovcic, & Vehovar, 2011, p. 119). Thus it is important to recognize that the social situations created by the Internet and mobile devices might be different from the traditional acts of media exposure, such as reading a print newspaper (Petric et al., 2011).

In sum, a uses and gratifications framework seeks to understand why and how people engage with media. Due to the new media component of this research study, it is important to pair uses and gratifications with a theory that helps explain technology adoption and use.

### **The technology acceptance model has two major elements**

Although media products are not information technologies in the strictest sense, the technology acceptance model outlines a practical route for thinking about media products as technologies. This shifts the research inquiry from one of dichotomies — such as linear or non-linear and print or digital — to one of “technology,” without sacrificing the attributes of any of the distribution channels. The technology acceptance model originated as a technological interpretation on the theory of reasoned action, from the field of psychology (King & He, 2006). Davis (1989) concluded that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are two variables that influence the current and future usage of information technology. Also, perceived ease of use has a direct impact on perceived usefulness (Davis, 1993). Figure 1 explains how this theory would be applied to a newspaper or magazine website (Huang, 2008).

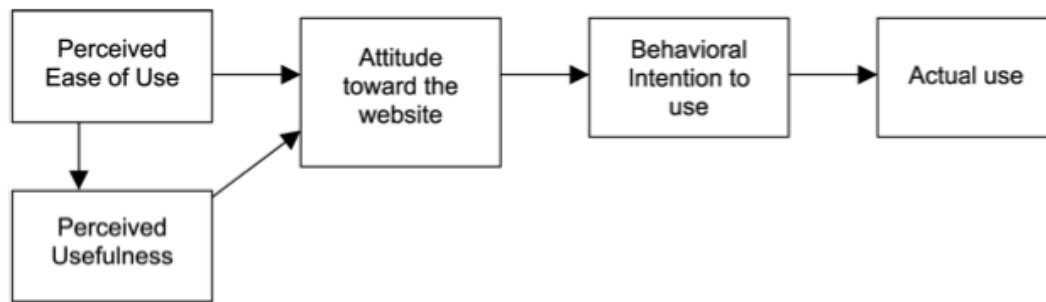
The technology acceptance model is an influential and widely applied to explain user behavior (Huang, 2008). Distilled, this theory posits that perceived usefulness (how beneficial a particular technology is to the user) and perceived ease of use (how easy to use or how intuitive a particular technology is) are drivers that answer why a given technology will continued to be used or not (Davis, 1989). Ease of use finds its opposite in effort of use, viewed in connection with effort expectancy (Davis, 1993; Venkatesh,



Morris, Davis, & Davis, 2003). In general, a user will have a higher threshold of expected effort with a new product or system, such as a tablet, but that standard will decrease with better familiarity (Venkatesh et al., 2003). To summarize, a sudden change in a newspaper's layout will be greeted with more disdain than tablet content design because the familiarity is so high that readers do not expect much effort in navigating the newspaper. Interestingly, quality and availability have also been shown to be influencing factors in mobile Internet users' motivation (Shin, 2007). Researchers have added to the original technology acceptance model factors: perceived availability, "a sense of ... continuity with significant people, things, activities, and social norms," and perceived quality (Shin, 2007, p. 480). Thus, quality is important not only in print and online media, but also mobile content, and the sense of constant availability attends to the issue of cell phones, and now tablets, becoming integral parts of people's lives.

According to the model, an individual's beliefs determine the attitude toward a given system, and in turn, those attitudes affect the actual end usage of the system, be it a website, a smartphone or a tablet application (Shin, 2007). Perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use were found to have strong effects on behavioral intentions on the Internet in a meta-analysis of nearly 100 studies that utilized the technology acceptance model as a theoretical framework (King & He, 2006). Additionally, perceived ease of use has been shown to have a strong impact on trust (Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub, 2003; Koch, Toker, & Brulez, 2011). In other words, this model ties into the literature concerning values and user experiences when interacting with media content online. Combining uses and gratifications with the technology acceptance model provides a stronger theoretical foundation for this study.

Figure 1



### **Combining two theories makes sense**

One important factor in any study involving new technology is the adoption and continued use of that technology (Williams, Strover, & Grant, 1994). The diffusion of innovation is a popular theory that has been applied across disciplines. It has been paired with uses and gratifications to explore Internet-based games (Coursaris, Yun, & Sung, 2010) and social network websites (Chang, Lee, & Kim, 2006). Yet the technology acceptance model is a better fit for this study because it more narrowly focuses on information technologies. “U&G is theoretically similar to the TAM insofar as it explains continued use of something already chosen” (Stafford, Stafford, & Schkade, 2004, p. 265). Expressed differently, this study pairs uses and gratifications with the technology acceptance model in an effort to shift the focus away from media content itself and spotlight how audiences engage with that content.

Uses and gratifications research recognizes two major categories of gratifications. Content gratifications result from the inherent value of the message, and process gratifications have no direct link to the message itself but instead relate to the external benefits of involvement in and interaction with the communication process (Cutler &

Danowski, 1980). Stafford et al. (2004) proposed a third category, social gratifications, that relates to mobile and Internet use. In an analysis of factors influencing the intent to adopt wireless mobile broadband in Korea, Shin (2009) found that of the three types of gratifications, process gratifications (surfing, searching) were the strongest, followed by social (messaging, interacting) and finally, content (knowledge, research).

Katz (2010), an influential researcher in the uses and gratifications tradition, defined four facets of media that serve as jumping points for theorizing: ownership, content, technology and context. This thesis addresses the latter two elements, both of which are not interested in content but rather where and how that message is consumed (Katz, 2010). Process gratifications filter down into areas of technology and context. One can begin to see a framework to understand this study's goals.

Still, context alone cannot account for how media is used, as media have attributes of their own (Freidson, 1953). Eveland (2003) concludes that there is a range of six media attributes provided to a user: interactivity, structure, control, channel, textuality and content. For example, online newspapers and print newspapers are similar in terms of control but offer different structures. Mobile phones are much more interactive than print magazines, but similar in content if a user accesses the magazine mobile brand. Control of media, such as mobile phone and Internet use, represents an important aspect of process gratifications (Stafford & Stafford, 1996). Downplaying content in media research allows for observations across media types (Eveland, 2003).

Online audiences are more active and selective than readers who simply flip the pages of a magazine or newspaper, creating a question as to the level of interaction seen in uses and gratifications research (Waal et al., 2005). The actual interaction involved can

be addressed by combining uses and gratifications with a technology theory, thus confronting one rebuke:

While one could argue over the degree to which a user is active in relation to media such as television or radio, the internet [sic] as a media form negates this criticism as, in order to engage with the any form of content on the internet [sic], the audience must be active. (Dunne, Lawlor, & Rowley, 2010, p. 54)

Involving the Internet and mobile for this study means addressing technologies that require the highest level of active participation by a person. And even though a user must be active to send, receive or select content on the Internet and mobile devices, the literature has demonstrated that “engagement” reaches beyond these physical actions and includes cognitive and emotional components.

Finally, dovetailing a technology theory with uses and gratifications allows for an expansion of applicability for the latter. McLeod and Becker (1981) argue that uses and gratifications theory could move closer to being a broader social theory if it could better relate to overall social systems. Incorporating a technology theory that addresses a much wider social swath helps in this instance. Ruggiero (2000) argued more recently that “[W]e must also be prepared to expand our current theoretical models of U&G to include concepts such as interactivity, demassification, hypertextuality, asynchronicity, and interpersonal aspects of mediated communication” (p. 29). Pairing the technology acceptance model with uses and gratifications theory is not only beneficial, but it has also been done before.

### **Examples of proposed theories in other studies**

Several media studies have utilized a uses and gratifications foundation to investigate the confluence of legacy media and new media (Groves, 2009; Flavian & Gurrea, 2009; Boyajy & Thorson, 2007). Uses and gratifications studies have also focused directly on magazines (Payne, Severn, & Dozier, 1988), mobile applications (Ho & Syu, 2010), texting (Grant & O'Donohoe, 2007), Facebook (Foregger, 2008), MySpace (Ancu & Cozma, 2009) and Twitter (Coursaris et al., 2010). In similar theoretical applications, the technology acceptance model and uses and gratifications have been combined to investigate users' interaction with wireless grid technology (van de Wijngaert & Bouwman, 2009), e-consumers acceptance of websites (Huang, 2008) and the Internet in general (Stafford et al., 2004).

### **Summary of theoretical framework**

To conclude, this thesis seeks to investigate how readers engage with print, online and mobile media platforms by determining if different uses and gratifications for three media platforms overlap into each other. Uses and gratifications asks, What do people do with media? That core question of uses and gratifications is joined with the technology acceptance model to further explain how readers can use different media platforms. These two theories have been combined in several prior studies, and the addition of the technology theory can help broaden the theoretical base this study's main theory. Next, the research questions will precede a section that outlines the methods and key concepts for this study.

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In a research-built house where the relevant literature forms the roof and the theoretical framework provides the walls, the following research questions will serve as the windows through which this study will look for answers.

**RQ1:** Why do users engage with one platform versus another when considering editorial content?

**RQ2:** To what extent do social gratifications, common to online and mobile media, exist for print products?

**RQ3:** How do gratifications attained when accessing print, online or mobile media compare to the technology acceptance model factors?

## CHAPTER 5: METHODS

Research questions for this study were investigated using qualitative methods. Qualitative research examines lived experiences, or the intersection of the individual with the larger culture (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). For this study, the meeting of individual and culture was probed through the lens of media engagement. Qualitative methods allow investigation into how people create social experiences and infuse them with meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). This study used focus groups, an important research method that builds on the idea that language is the “primary medium of interchange between humans and reality” (Jensen, 1991, p. 19). In fact, language is both the tool of data gathering and the data itself in focus groups (Jensen, 1991).

Although qualitative methods produce data and findings that are inherently not exhaustive, focus groups let researchers expand the ways of thinking about a certain studied phenomenon (Roulston, 2010). This choice of qualitative methods also enables the discovery of the complexity of given situations, such as how audience members engage with various forms of media (Creswell, 2009). More precisely, the goal of this study will be to explore how readers engage with print magazines and newspapers, online websites with editorial content and mobile devices such as phones and tablets.

This section will define key concepts such as “engagement” and “media use” and explore the role of focus groups in qualitative research designs. A review of the procedure and participants involved in this study and a brief summary of methodological limitations will conclude this section.

## **Key concepts defined**

Without definition, words are no more insightful than simple numbers (Chaffee, 1991). As such, key concepts for this study's inquiry will be defined. Regarding platforms, print newspapers included the typical daily newspapers as well as those published on a weekly basis. The same is true for magazines; this study included typical monthly magazines as well as those published on a weekly basis. The online websites referred not only to individual articles, but also to the entire web presence of any given media outlet: overall website, multimedia and affiliated blogs. Online content also included blogs, e-magazines and online-only brands such as *Slate* or *Salon*. "Online" referred to content read on the Internet from a laptop or desktop computer. Mobile devices focused on phones due to the literature pertaining to emotional connections with phones, but mobile devices also included tablets (such as the iPad, Galaxy, Fire), netbooks and e-readers (such as the Nook, Kindle).

Communication involves processes, such as thinking, that are difficult or impossible to observe; therefore, operationalizing any single concept in a wholly satisfactory manner proves difficult (Chaffee, 1991). This study defined engagement as: *a process that balances the heuristic properties of interactivity with usage frequency and depth*. The definition is a synthesis of the existing literature, a cul-de-sac of several avenues of study regarding the conceptual idea of engagement.

The use of media represents a second key concept. For this paper's definition of engagement, depth referred to the amount of time spent with a particular medium. There is a reason that the Pew Center's annual report on the state of American media always includes statistics concerning how much time people spend with a given medium.



Exposure time is a critical factor to consider in defining media use (McLeod & Becker, 1981). This study sought to identify and speak with individuals who were also regular users (frequency) of media. “Regular” was defined as reading editorial content on each platform at least weekly.

### **Focus groups tap into shared experiences**

#### *Background*

In qualitative studies, the researcher can be seen as a quilter who pieces together connected scraps of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Asking participants to clarify their responses is important, and only by digging deeper can a researcher find the nuances of experience often glossed over on first reference by ordinary language (Anderson & Jack, 1998). Direct observation of engagement would be difficult on a large scale, but it can be studied by deferred measures such as after-the-fact recall and personal reports (Smith & Gevins, 2004). Specifically, focus groups for this study were executed in the Gubrium and Holstein (1997) model, which placed favor on understanding experiences. The focus group method lends itself to exploring thoughts, attitudes and processes (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996). This study employed focus groups to ask how readers engage with various media platforms, an endeavor that touched on abstract concepts like emotional connections, values and individual experiences. Other abstract concepts, such as independence (Gutsche, Jr. & Salkin, 2011) and identity (Gu, 2011) have also been examined using focus groups to elicit responses.

Focus group studies can be categorized as habits and usage studies, as well as attitudes studies, as defined by Greenbaum (1993). A focus group facilitates effective and

efficient insight into the motivations and reactions of readers by allowing a researcher to concentrate on a chosen topic (Fallon & Brown, 2002). Furthermore, a focus group setting enables participants to distill their variety of experiences to those that are most pertinent through a moderator-directed discussion (Anderson & Jack, 1998). Focus groups tap into the interactive aspect of language, so responses can elicit recalled experiences in other participants (Jensen, 1991). Put another way, focus group discussions can jog the memories of participants to enlist more complete responses. In fact, a focus group provides three distinct levels of data: individual, group and group interaction (Duggleby, 2005). Purposive sampling methods allowed for a diverse but homogenous respondent group. Homogeneity in focus group studies gives rise to a comfort level among participants, allowing shared experiences to bubble up (Fallon & Brown, 2002). This tactic does require a conscientious choice of the parameters for a given population (Silverman, 2010). Also, a researcher needs to carefully listen, not simply listen to see how an interviewee's response fits with what the researcher already knows (Anderson & Jack, 1998).

### *Participants*

Participants were differentiated from the general public by their regular consumption of editorial content (1) in print magazines and newspapers, (2) online and (3) on mobile devices such as smartphones, tablets and e-readers. The overall aim was to gather individuals who read print and online products frequently enough to cogently comment on their personal preferences, experiences and attitudes toward their interaction with those media. Online viewership of exact web equivalents to print media was not a

restrictive criterion, though potential participants were expected to access and read some kind of editorial content online at least once per week.

People meeting the qualifications of readership and phone ownership were invited from the community to participate in focus groups lasting approximately 90 minutes. Participants were recruited via the graduate school email list and an advertisement posted on Craigslist. Participants were also enlisted with flyers in downtown coffee shops, including sites such as Kaldi's Coffee and Panera Bread Company. Participants received a \$15 cash incentive. Sizes of the three focus group ranged from three to six people, with a total of 14 participants. A smaller-sized focus group allows for a more intimate and less intimidating data collection situation (Morgan & Scannell, 1998; Toner, 2009). Plus, this number of people is easily manageable for a moderator. Participant's ages ranged from 20 to 37 years old, with an average age of 23.6 among the four females and 10 males.

### *Procedure*

The sessions were held the Reynolds Journalism Institute building, in the basement of the Journalism Library, and light snacks and refreshments were provided. This conference room provided a quiet space that was available during evening hours when most participants were free from work or school commitments. Two groups were held on weeknights and one was held on a Sunday in the late afternoon. Focus group sessions were audio and video recorded to aid in subsequent data analysis. A moderator's guide was created, but the moderator had leeway to explore related topics brought up by participants. A base set of questions covered the first focus group, and the questions were modified slightly and expanded to include topics and clarity of word choices brought up

in previous sessions. Specific operationalized questions and the moderator guide are attached in Appendix 1. Operationalized questions reflect the set used in the third and final focus group to encompass the range of questions discussed throughout the three groups. After the warm-up questions, each group participated in a discussion where they were encouraged to shout out words or phrases they associated first positively, then negatively, with print, online and mobile platforms, in that order. The researcher kept track of responses on the whiteboard in the room.

### **Limitations to the proposed methods**

By definition, choosing one method excludes others. Focus groups have limitations, the most obvious of which is that they take place in a contrived setting (Creswell, 2009). As with any qualitative study, focus group data gathered through speaking with a select group of people is not generalizable and cannot be extrapolated to represent the larger population of magazine readers, newspaper readers, the American public, etc. Focus groups allow a more streamlined collection of more data but offer fewer chances to clarify a respondent's answer compared to a one-on-one interview. Because the focus group method relies on structured questions, responses might be limited to what the researcher can imagine and thereby close avenues of thought otherwise unknown to the researcher (Silverman, 2010). To guard against this, the moderator was directed to explore related topics brought up by participants.

A strong moderator is important for the focus groups because though the method taps into the interactive potential of language (Jensen, 1991), it also raises the concern of group-think and the possibility that a small contingent might dominate the discussion

(Fontana & Frey, 1994). Another crucial limitation with using human subjects in research is that people can never describe any experience fully because human experiences can never be replicated and recalled with pure accuracy (Robinson & Clore, 2002). Basically, there is a loss of information between any experience and recalling it. In addition, audience research typically deals with activities a normal person would think to be trivial and unimportant, and thus, it remains a challenge to discern what people think or feel as they engage with media (Livingstone, 2004). Plus, language is not transparent and demands significant analysis to determine what's actually being said among metaphorical, connotative and contradictory terms (Jensen, 1991; Pauly, 1991).

Finally, a person acting in a focus group can intentionally or unintentionally leave out information that could help the researcher; therefore, any researcher needs to be aware of what could potentially be missing from answers and look for the “presence of the absence” (Anderson & Jack, 1998, p.165). This is not an easy task and does represent another limitation of research involving humans. Nevertheless, speaking with people directly endures as the best way to explore attitudes and emotions that construct the cognitive scaffolding for how someone experiences and engages with various media platforms.

## CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS

Focus group participants were asked a range of questions to help answer the three research questions concerning engagement with editorial content for print, mobile and online platforms, potential social gratifications for print products, and possible relation of gratifications across platforms to the technology acceptance model factors. Some answers fell in line with both new and classic literature, though other responses diverged into compelling and relevant side-alleys.

### **Reader engagement across platforms**

Although this was a qualitative study, quantitative data on the types of words used by participants are interesting to note. Cost was mentioned throughout the three focus groups, but the factors most frequently mentioned revolved around expedience. In fact, a convenience/access paradigm for content showed up continually in the focus group discussions. Those two words were mentioned a combined 27 times in the focus groups pertaining to all three platforms. “Available” also showed up four times. On the opposite side, the most frequent negative word was distraction, most often involved with a lack of such nuisance in print and an excess of it online. “Distract” was mentioned 31 times in the focus groups in relation to all three platforms.

#### *Print*

Time-cost was a thread woven throughout the focus group conversations — back to the convenience/access issue. People expressed a sentiment that obtaining print

products was a chore, an out-of-the-way excursion compared to online or mobile, where content floats available and instantly at the touch of a button. Many felt they could not commit the requisite amount of time to read printed newspapers or magazines. Print was viewed as a “luxury,” a word mentioned by several participants in describing the act of reading print newspapers and magazines. Paul, 21, summed up this view with a futuristic scenario: “I have the image of an old guy in a bathrobe sitting by a fire smoking a cigar reading a newspaper. I think it will become a luxury, a rare luxury.” Comparatively, words such as “nice,” “relax” and “focus” were often associated with print. Most participants expressed the ability to pay more attention to the content in print, returning to that idea of focus, but one woman offered a digital-centric answer. Anna, 22, said, “It doesn’t matter because I’m so streamlined to my smartphone and the Internet and my computer.” Some participants explicitly stated they did not have time for print anymore, or they did not have the patience to wait for print. Seth, 24, said: “I usually feel bad about picking up *The New York Times*. Something will catch my attention on the front page, and I don’t have the time to read it. I’ll try to keep it nice and put it back. Usually, it’s all I feel like I have the time for.” He was a prime example of the time-cost many people associated with reading print. For Seth, print restricted him so much that he would actually read the front page and return the paper to the newsstand rack in a good-as-new condition.

Sharing printed articles was rare, and even here, a time-cost issue lay beneath the ability and motivation for sharing. Most said they would save a printed copy to give to a friend only if they thought they might see that friend in the next few days. Otherwise, participants said they were most likely to direct the friend to find it online. However, a

printed article is something that could be ignored, whereas online sharing has introduced what several participants called an “obligation” to read what a friend has shared, particularly if the article was posted on the receiver’s Facebook wall. Mike, 21, represents the majority of people in the focus groups with this comment about Facebook sharing: “I’d probably post it right on their wall, so in the off chance if I post it as an update, and they’re not on for a few hours, it could be so far down they wouldn’t even see it.” Some — like Rebecca, 21 — opted to post an article to their own wall so it would show up for all their friends: “I post it publicly. If there’s someone I think would particularly enjoy it, I’ll text them or send them a message, ‘Hey, you should check out what’s on my wall.’” There is a sense of public duty at play. But this also ties into the time-cost connected with print. People want to make sure their friends see and can read an article online with the least amount of effort put in to finding and retrieving it.

### *Online*

Participants agreed in near unanimity that they spent the most time reading articles online compared with the other two platforms. For these focus groups, online was not about content so much as credibility. People did not read much of their editorial content directly from media outlets, but rather from social networks, especially Facebook and Twitter. One woman set her browser’s homepage to Twitter because she said she used the site as a news aggregator. Many also performed simple searches on any topic they wanted to read about. With search engines, people sought familiar names and identification with media organizational brands to which they ascribed a high level of familiarity, and thus, trust. “Reputable” was used often in describing the decision of



which article to read. Sofie, 37, said: “I dig through when I’m searching for something on Google. I’ll look at the addresses before I click anything. I don’t want Blogspots and blogger sites and Typepads. I’m looking for the CNNs and *The New York Times* and some things a little more reputable.” She and several others said they would usually click a link to an article in the first few search engine results, but they actively parsed which link to follow by examining the names associated with the link. Respondents drew a clear divide between big media brands and amateur journalists, but within media brands, Anna disagreed with the notion that online and print products varied in quality: “I think it depends on what news source. I don’t think *The New York Times* online is less credible than *The New York Times* in print.”

People preferred online throughout the three focus groups. The major reason cited was the respondents’ constant presences online. As pointed out in the literature review, mobile phones are ubiquitous, but though people have their phones available more often, as these participants did, they seemed to actually read content online more frequently. One man commented that if he found an interesting article on his phone, he would make a mental note to read it later on his computer. Chase, 20, said: “Everything seems integrated now. Facebook, that’s where I get information. People get information from Twitter. You’re always around articles online.” In other words, online was preferred because it was the place where participants most often were — socializing, working and generally living their digital lives.

Another reason online was preferred dealt with its depth. From being able to access voices outside the mainstream to comparing coverage from major news organizations, participants cited the ability of online content to satisfy their wishes for

more content, especially articles related to the article they started reading in the first place. One site in particular, Stumbleupon, came up in a focus group, and the general sense was that the unexpected nature of what the site offers kept people coming back. Anna explained the attraction:

...[E]ven if you ran a search you never would have come up with this website. Which is so weird, like how could you have not found this page that you're totally hooked on? So while the whole process of stumbling can be addictive, like you want to keep pressing the button and keep getting this instant satisfaction because you're only on a page for five minutes at most. But once you're on the page, you've never seen it before, so it's totally engaging.

Users click a “stumble” button to generate another random piece of content, so what appears to hold people’s attention is the novelty involved. Meanwhile, some people again cited the credibility issue in their penchant for online content. Megan, 25, said: “You have to trust whatever newspaper you’re reading, but online there’s no skin in the game. You can click to another article to find a different perspective.” Hyperlinks stand out as a large part of this ability to swap between viewpoints and sources with little friction. Hyperlinks were viewed as a generally positive attribute, and were most often called upon to expand readers’ knowledge or help them check credibility. The groups were fairly consistent with how they described reading with hyperlinks. Few found them to be distracting, and most people clicked on them as they were reading only if they were confused about content or wanted a refresher on the context. If the participants were

familiar with the subject matter, they clicked hyperlinks after reading the story and only when the related content sounded particularly interesting.

### *Mobile*

The key for mobile these days, as mentioned earlier, is its ubiquity. People readily acknowledged they relied on their smartphones, but tablets were viewed as extraneous. For the people who didn't comment directly, this idea can be inferred by the fact nobody used tablets. Only one person in the focus groups owned a tablet, a Windows tablet he neither liked nor used. Several owned e-readers like the Kindle but tended to use them for books. The study included both tablets and e-readers in the mobile spectrum, but phones were the mobile device most common to this group of people. Smartphones ruled for these participants, but most of them did not read the majority of articles on their phones. The phones, similar to much literature written on the subject, provided a stop-gap for small chunks of time when they felt a laptop would be impractical or cumbersome. Seth provided a garden-variety reaction: "I probably don't read the bulk of stuff on my phone. ... It's real time, and I can do it while I'm waiting for something. I don't have to have my laptop out." Print would seemingly fill this gap as well, but, again, the convenience/access issue cropped up; these participants weren't carrying *The New York Times* with them, except maybe an app on their phone. Another interesting point is that in the board-centric portion of the study, where participants could throw out words or phrases they associated either positively or negatively with any of the three platforms, the participants generated the fewest number of strengths or weaknesses for mobile platforms compared with print or online.

Online and mobile platforms both support real-time attributes, but respondents assigned credit for real-time updates more to mobile. Paul was particularly enamored with the speed-of-life world mobile can deliver:

On my phone, I'll be reading the news, have a little banner saying a text message, jump to that, jump back to the news, jump to a different app where I'll look up something I read on the Reddit app. It's just boom boom boom, you know?

People admitted to reading on their phones while walking, driving, working out and watching TV; they read in the bathroom, during class and at lunch. As with any technology, however, a small group of the participants did not enjoy reading from their phones. Justin, 25, was representative of this camp, "I really don't take to reading the whole article on the phone because it's so annoying to keep scrolling over on such a small screen."

#### *Across the platforms*

Overall, participants seemed to be the most engaged with online content. Print and mobile both had distinct places, and though readers seemed to use their phones more frequently, their responses indicated they spent more time consuming and interacting with online content. Also, online had the most responses to the positive/negative attributes collected on the board. Many focus group members said they started their days by checking the news and reading articles online, and several retrieved or started reading articles in the morning that they then finished reading later in the day. In sum, readers

preferred and most enjoyed reading articles in print, but in reality they read the most content online. Contemplate a hypothetical couple who are frequent travelers: They love the mountains and want to visit other countries, but they also live in Denver. Skiing and hiking every day at a mountain 15 minutes from home requires the lowest ratio of effort (convenience, cost) to reward (access to content, or in this case, snow-capped peaks). Kilimanjaro and K2 and Everest remain pleasures that, given the time and money, they can visit and do, but at much less regular intervals.

### **Possible social gratifications for print**

A traditional social situation tied to print would be sitting in a room reading together or sharing magazines and newspapers, say, ones with interesting or useful articles someone wants to pass along. Generally, people in the focus groups did neither of these activities. Each of the three focus groups laughed at the prospects of reading print products with friends or handing over a physical copy of a magazine or newspaper. Exceptions did exist, based upon relationship. Friends were given a status of activity; participants talked of doing things with friends, but not reading print with friends. Significant others achieved a status of passivity; people interacted with boyfriends, girlfriends or roommates more often, and thus, it was considered acceptable to read print products in their presences. This again references the time-cost associated with print. Contrarily, many people did recall reading on laptops in the presence of both friends and significant others, as long as the others were reading, too.

Sharing articles was done nearly exclusively online. However, sharing and reading together are social gratifications in a personal sense, whether it's a "What's in it

for me?” notion of reading an article passed along or the fulfillment involved with spending time with friends or loved ones. Fascinatingly, what did appear in the focus groups was a sort of public social gratification. Participants across the three sessions associated an attribute of social activity to reading print in a public space. Reading a printed newspaper or magazine in a setting where others were present avoided the unacceptable impression of acting anti-social, a tag participants attached to reading content online or on a phone. Consider the following exchange:

Paul: I make an effort if I'm in a group or around other people, not to be on my phone. Whenever I have someone reading on their phone in front of me when I'm trying to talk to them, I think it's really disrespectful. It's different with a newspaper. For some reason, I don't know. It's easier for, you know, I don't know what it is. If someone were reading a newspaper in front of me, I guess I could reach over, and I could take a piece of the newspaper and read it too. Or you could kind of turn it and read it at the same time. It's more personable.

Justin: Bumping off that, there's a tradition involved. You can go back 120 years and think it's a common thing to see somebody on the street corner reading their newspaper, in a coffee shop reading their newspaper. This is a new phenomenon, two, three years old. It's just something that we're not as acclimated to. It's not as ingrained in us.

...

Thomas, 24: Yeah, it's hard to describe why, but it carries a different sort of impersonal nature to it as opposed to some sort of book or anything like that. I don't really know why.

Sofie: I feel like it's an eye contact thing. My eye contact with you when you're talking to me is different if my newspaper's laid out in front of me than it is if I have my phone an inch from my face.

The participants in that conversation touched on several issues. Print was considered more personable, but Justin offered the image of mobile reading as socially acceptable when it becomes as common as reading print products in a social environment. Other respondents considered people reading on phones to be less approachable. People viewed print as an acceptable part of the social fabric and mobile as a personal distraction from the group dynamics in settings with friends or acquaintances. This idea served as the proverbial two-way street. Some participants felt that others were more likely to distract them while they read on a mobile device or on their laptops and not so if they were reading a print product.

### **Print, mobile and online gratifications compared to TAM factors**

To recap, the technology acceptance model factors are perceived usefulness (how this technology will benefit a person) and perceived ease of use (how intuitive or easy to use this technology is). Related to the perceived ease of use for various platforms, "easy" was most often a word associated with online content.

### *Perceived ease of use*

Between platforms, navigation was a frequent issue of debate. Print products were given the nod of approval because everything was there in front of a reader at one time, which allowed easy comparison and the simple navigation of page turns. Several participants commented on the ability of print to present everything in a cohesive package in the same moment, without the user having to worry about scrolling or clicking. Jacob, 25, described this: “My mind is just lazy. I’d rather not have to, even if it’s a PDF document, you still have to scroll up or down to see the whole thing in total, whereas if you open the page, boom that’s it. You can take in the whole message right there.” Screen size of mobile was a sticking point for many who preferred instead to consume snippets of content on their phones instead of entire articles. In spite of the real-time cravings, participants were leery of the ethereal qualities the Internet presents, speaking of content that changes or disappears. On the other hand, print products were lamented because they could not be updated in comparison to online or mobile counterparts. Shawn, 20, and Jacob described newspapers in nearly identical language though they were in separate focus group sessions. Jacob said, “With a newspaper you’re kind of stuck with what you’ve got,” and Shawn said, “With a newspaper you’re stuck with that one, like the *Chicago Tribune*. You’re stuck with the *Tribune*.” Others labeled print products as “not interactive” and “static.”

Related to navigation, distraction was a major issue for ease of use throughout the focus groups. Asked what aspects they would bring from print to online, participants noted the distraction levels they associated with the online and mobile platforms. Here, print won the day handily. Sofie said, “There’s not 20 links somewhere within it asking



you to go somewhere else so I'm at 20 different sites in five minutes." Several participants referenced reader modes that are available, where an article is quarantined and the background images, text, videos or ads are dimmed or blacked out. Nieman Lab has a good example of this on its website. Clicking a "zen mode" button converts the site with the article text isolated on a plain white background. Participants across the focus groups noted that reading online made it difficult for them to finish articles because they felt "sucked in," "burnt out" and "lost" in the "chaotic" atmosphere that reading on computers presents with related articles, multimedia and other distractions, both online and on their computers themselves. At least one person, Jacob, held no qualms about the distractions online: "I guess I'm not super duper distracted by what else is around there. If I want to read it, I'll read it." His attitude was a minority overall, but the viewpoint does stand as a stark measure of non-unanimity. Just as some people refused to read articles on their phones, others wholeheartedly tolerated the myriad attention grabs that fill the Internet in addition to the editorial content they attempted to read.

### *Perceived usefulness*

Usefulness was projected by these participants to be directly tethered to reputation. As discussed earlier in this section, "reputable" was often linked to online articles in terms of the choices people made for reading on a given topic. Kyle, 21, said: "I look at the websites, if it's something that I'm familiar with and I've read before. If it's something that sounds like an amateur website, I'll skip it until I find something that seems pretty credible." Alphabet soups of media organizations such as the BBC, CNN

and NPR were cited, as was the oft-quoted *The New York Times*. Familiarity bred content, not contempt, for these respondents.

More than half of the participants explicitly verbalized the care with which they curate their online selves when they share content, most often referring to Facebook. Most were concerned with how the content they shared appeared as a reflection of themselves toward the people with whom they shared it. People in the focus groups read, in one case more than once, the content they shared before it would subsequently have their name attached. Megan's comment was a usual example: "I'm pretty self conscious about what I post on the Internet with my name in front of it. ... I'm hyper aware of that stuff. I would never post something I didn't read, ever." Another woman described sharing an article under her name as "promoting it," and many respondents talked about the importance of knowing the viewpoints of the article they were sharing so that the article would either conform to or challenge the ideals of those with whom they were sharing.

#### *Charted TAM factors*

Parsing the words and phrases generated by participants to describe positive and negative attributes of all three platforms gave a sense of which descriptors related to the technology acceptance model factors and also related to the three major types of gratifications. The ideas and terms were submitted by participants in the beginning of each focus group and written on the whiteboard in the room. Terms in Table 1 appeared in at least two of the three focus groups, and they can be evaluated as falling into the three types of gratifications (Cutler & Danowski, 1980; Stafford et al., 2004). Positive

and negative signs show which attributes participants applied to print (P), mobile (M) or online (O). The fourth column illustrates the additional acceptance model factor that was added by Shin (2007), perceived availability, to describe users who perceive themselves to be “emotionally connected with the world, its resources and people” in real time (p. 475).

Table 1

Gratification type	Per. ease of use	Per. usefulness	Per. availability
<i>Content</i>			
Distraction (P+ O- M-)	X		
Related/additional content (O+)		X	
Static (P-)		X	
Immediacy (M+)		X	
Format (M-)	X		
Screen size (M-)	X		
<i>Process</i>			
Portable/access anywhere (M+)	X		X
Time-cost (P-)	X		X
Speed of access (O+)	X		X
Money-cost (P- O+ M+)	X		X
Search (O+)	X		X
Navigation (M-)	X		X
<i>Social</i>			
Easy to share (O+)	X		

### Other memorable findings

Print was described as “not engaging” for the on-the-board writing session in the third focus group due to its inability to support updateable and interactive content.

Therefore, “engagement” was defined in a literal way as the ability (or not) to have involvement with content. Additionally, many focus group members mentioned the

function of print serving as a type of treasure that they could keep after historically significant events; examples participants brought up included a favorite team winning the World Series, Osama bin Laden's death and the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Some people frowned upon email for sharing articles as they did not want to add to the crush of emails sent and received throughout any given day, but several others said they would use email to share an article, especially if they or the receivers did not use social media actively. Other participants said they would not open links in emails for fear of viruses. Although many people found news from links on Twitter, Facebook harbored the most trust with these focus group members as a result of the website's preview feature. When links are posted on Facebook, the site presents a headline, an opening paragraph and a picture along with the link. This assuaged much of the apprehension and was also notable because, as one man put it, Facebook's interface furnishes a more appealing display for catching attention than the bare bones of a simple link, referencing Twitter's sparse style.

Lastly, participants discussed cost negatively for print as an attribute that hindered their consumption, especially with regards to subscriptions. However, cost was a positive for both mobile and online. The respondents ignored the fact that cost remains a hindrance for those platforms, too. Computers, tablets, cellphones, cellphone plans, Internet carriers and wireless home routers all cost money, but more noticeably for these people, the content online and on mobile devices stays cost-friendly or free.

## CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

Responses from the focus groups provided a range of discussion areas. Some answers fell in line with both new and classic literature. For instance, many people said they started their day by checking news online, then checked online and mobile throughout the day and reserved print for the evening, similar to Ahlers (2006) idea of multi-channel media use, or using different media at different times of the day. However, other responses veered off into intriguing places.

### **Reader engagement across platforms**

To reiterate, this study defined engagement as: *a process that balances the heuristic properties of interactivity with usage frequency and depth*, where depth referred to the amount of time spent with a particular medium.

Time-cost involved with finding and reading a print product was a recurring theme in these focus groups. Print was not seen as convenient enough for day-to-day consumption, but, rather, was interpreted as something akin to a reward — a weekend leisure activity or a chance to start the day slow or unwind before bed. As such, respondents tied the word “luxury” to print. In this quote from the findings section, Paul provided a hypothetical scenario: “I have the image of an old guy in a bathrobe sitting by a fire smoking a cigar reading a newspaper. I think it will become a luxury, a rare luxury.” But the quote continues: “If somebody has a nice evening off, you go get a newspaper. Yeah, I’ll stop talking.” His allegory was met with silence from other group members, and he verbally scolded himself. Later, he modified his story:

I don't know if luxury is a good word. Maybe like a nostalgic pastime. What's something people do now that's kind of impractical but people still do it because of the feeling associated with it? Like taking a bath. It's more efficient, or it's easier to take a shower. You're going to be more clean, and you have to wait for the bathtub to load up, but some people will come home and fill the bathtub up and take their time and just enjoy it.

His second story was met with less resistance. Paul's change was a form of "interest management" where a focus group participant downplays personal interest in a particular conversational offering to make the description seem more fact-like (Potter, 1996, p. 113). Nevertheless, Paul's first impression of luxury and his secondary analysis of comparing print to a bath — less efficient, but worthwhile on occasion — serves as a good summary of the feelings across the focus groups when regarding print products.

This time-cost paradigm was even reversed by participants when they spoke of sharing online. Sharing content is an action-oriented consequence of engagement (Oh et al., 2010), and several participants spoke to the "obligation" they felt to read articles shared with them, a sentiment in line with a Pew study that found more than two-thirds of Americans considered following the news a social obligation (PEJ, 2010b). Time-cost manifests itself in the perception of participants regarding this online obligation. People know their friends will see an article online, perhaps with a guilty conscience, but this is unlikely if an article is shared in print where it can be ignored more easily. Thus, time-cost becomes essentially a convenience/access problem for print. Comparably, these are also frequent topics in online and mobile journalism. Users of online journalism in other

studies sought convenience (Chyi & Yang, 2009) and easy access (Ingham & Weedon 2008). Availability has been found to be an influencing factor in mobile Internet users' motivation (Shin, 2007) and one of the most sought after gratifications for cellphones (Wei & Lo, 2006).

Online seemed to lack the raw qualities for engagement compared to the other two platforms; it generated neither the strong emotional connections of cellphones (Vincent, 2006; Best, 2009) nor the physical connections of printed products (Ytre-Arne, 2011). Surprisingly, though, focus group members spent the most time reading online. Regular use of media supports a clear indication of engagement (Calavita, 2003), and exposure time is a crucial factor when studying media use (McLeod & Becker, 1981). Participants' habits of the morning online news checkup matched literature that linked engagement to values and actions (Smith & Gevins, 2004), where values are exhibited in general habits (Verplanken & Holland, 2002). Although it seemed that online would not demonstrate the type of relationship indicated with both cellphones and print products, online sharing of articles compared favorably to the symbolic uses of personal and social identity maintenance ascribed to mobile devices (Wirth et al., 2008). The power value from Sagiv and Schwartz (2000), which describes social appearance, also identifies well with both online sharing and symbolic uses of cellphones. Plus, sharing and interacting with articles by clicking hyperlinks and other related media, acts frequently brought up in the focus groups, embody other elements of engagement in other research (Cover, 2006; Das, 2010).

So the overall reactions of focus group members point directly to them being most engaged with online editorial content despite some researchers' conclusions of online

content as inferior (Chyi & Yang, 2009). Even media companies have admitted that their online offerings are of lower quality than print products (CJR, 2010; Domingo, 2006; Russial, 2009). This result, the highest engagement with online content, baffles. Online claims neither the emotional attachment mobile boasts nor the physical relationship present with printed magazines and newspapers. Once again, the conversation must return to the convenience/access issue. People are lazy; people are savvy. Mobile is always there for a pick-me-up, a hit of digital interaction at the slightest chance of boredom, and print stands as an old guard at the gates of familiarity, history and quiet nights with the world presented in black ink and full-color glossies. Online, however, finds popularity in its association and necessary presence to aspects of daily life, not the least of which is nearly everyone's job. Online content isn't always the most visually compelling — grab the magazines and full-spread newspaper layouts for that. Online content isn't always the most convenient — riding a bus and reading a mobile device trumps the same situation with a laptop any day. But when people go online, as one participant said, they are always surrounded by content, content and more content.

Mobile was the medium most frequently used, but focus group members used mobile for reading in short bursts, typically while doing or waiting for some other activity. Literature reflects similar outcomes to the patterns of interaction described in these focus groups: reading mainly online, with smartphones used frequently but in shorter time increments for each use (Oulasvirta et al., 2011). Also, research from the Pew Center showed that people who get news on their phones are far more likely to be online daily and use more online news sources in a given day (PEJ, 2010b). The key takeaway from participants' responses about mobile platforms is that mobile provided



access to articles in conjunction with another activity. This was not print, where they could sit and spend time with it. This was not online, where they were typically connected more often but in a fixed location. Mobile was there when and where they were, on the go, and that could help explain why they felt the real-time component applied more to mobile than online.

However, mobile remains so pervasive because the devices offer not only a chance to read at any time in any place, but the devices also rely on emotional attachments because they endure as tethers to friends and family. This emotional component cannot be overstated, and the literature has demonstrated that “engagement” reaches beyond these physical actions to include cognitive and emotional components (Waal et al., 2005; Dunne et al., 2010). Moreover, prior literature addressed the mobile device, typically a phone, as an extension of a person’s body because it has become so ingrained into our personal space (Vincent, 2006; Richardson, 2007; Best, 2009). This second-nature status of the cellphone could explain why participants generated so few strength or weakness attributes for mobile platforms in the board discussion portion of the groups. Perhaps the idea of mobile devices has become so internalized that participants found difficulty in describing them with positive or negative aspects. For example, if the cellphone has become a de facto part of the body, how would a person go about naming the strengths and weaknesses of a hand or a foot?

Across the platforms, there is a sense of intertwining engagement. Time-cost in print relates to the convenience of online and mobile; online sharing and personality maintenance reflects user relationships with their cellphones; mobile is everywhere but not for long spans of time like print or online reading sessions. A few participants

mentioned that mobile and online served as gateways to print. Some people would print out articles they found online or go online to read articles they started on their mobile phones. In the end, mobile and online content grow difficult to truly separate because both offer fluid information access that print cannot (Jackson, 2007; Lin, 2009). With minor concessions, mobile phones are essentially a traveling portal through which to enter the Internet. Thus, in some ways, there can be larger distinctions made between print and the combination of mobile and online platforms.

The website Stumbleupon offers an instructive summary of the contrast between what online and mobile offer versus print. Stumbleupon users can select preferences (à la the “The Daily Me,” Negroponte, 1995), and like or dislike content presented so the site learns to cater to users’ wishes. The website, with its Twitter and mobile app counterparts, pulls stories, photos, videos, animations and entire webpages to satisfy users’ preferences, and it maintains a social component where users can follow other users and view the most popular content. Several focus group participants reported using the site for hours, the type of time (and time-cost) typically devoted to print. A normal session involves several “stumbles” or clicks to the next content offered, but unlike hyperlinks, this content is not related. As such, the website provides a real-time feel, with new content tailored to individual preferences at the press of a button multiple times over. Such random activity appeared as a constituent to the distraction vilified by participants, but their remarks were quite opposite. On the other hand, “nostalgic” was a word several participants associated with print, the opposite of new and up-to-date. Stumbleupon has a much lower time-cost, yet people spend amounts of time that can be consistent with sitting down and reading a print product. Online and mobile news have information and

interaction value, but Stumbleupon achieves what has been called an “awareness reward value” that involves a user staying abreast of a “dynamically changing external reality” such as checking email often or in this case, continuing to click for a new stumble page (Oulasvirta et al., 2011, p. 113). Furthermore, Stumbleupon offers a guaranteed online and mobile version of the chance encounters often affiliated with print reading. Finding news online without looking for it happens often, at least daily for six in 10 Americans who are online news consumers (PEJ, 2010b). This incidental exposure is sometimes referred to as serendipity and often talked about in relation to print and the curated selection of content in a single copy of a newspaper or magazine (Yadamsuren & Heinström, 2011). Elements of chance or surprise have been found to be related to readers’ emotional reactions to stories (Yadamsuren & Heinström, 2011), and as previously noted, emotions are important to engagement.

Again, the convenience/access idea pops up. Stumbleupon guarantees a fresh experience, for all intents and purposes. Everyone who used the site said he or she had never “stumbled” on the same content twice. This mirrors a situation similar to print products in that most people who read a newspaper or magazine will read about a topic they have not thought about or encountered in a similar way. Depending on how active a user is, he or she could choose to have this experience online or with a mobile device. Or not. Stumbleupon, as the participants said, feeds a steady stream of randomness that does not feel like chaos or distraction to users in these focus groups. The site has a real-time continuity in a package that is streamlined for ease of use (a technology acceptance model factor), and Stumbleupon, in effect, curates the Web with a sense of organization that does not exclude randomization or interactivity.

### **Possible social gratifications for print**

Conventional social interactions involving print, such as sharing a printed magazine or reading together with friends, were laughed at in all three focus groups. Instead, social gratifications appeared when coordinated with a public atmosphere. Personal mobile interaction in public settings with a group of individuals was viewed as a social cold shoulder, whereas print was looked upon much more favorably as a platform able to be read in the company of others. Note that the participants implied that the “public” outing was not one filled with strangers. “Public” in this sense was being out with a group — be it friends, acquaintances, or otherwise — but in a defined set of people. This public/private split was not completely unknown in prior studies. In one study, the most cellphone interactions took place alone versus when study participants were with others (Oulasvirta et al., 2011). Mobile devices have been said to create a bubble of private space within public contexts (Groening, 2010; Hampton et al., 2010). But the reactions of these participants regarding reading print versus reading on a mobile device in a group setting contradict the idea of mobile as an extension of ourselves (Richardson, 2007). For these participants, that extension has a limit that ends with the addition of a human element. Possibly, the mobile-body augmentation argument could apply more strongly in solo situations and less so when people are accompanied by others who share even a minor level of social association, such as friends of friends as opposed to random strangers on the street.

Examination of social settings have been an important part of media research for decades (Freidson, 1953) and continue to be integral to inquiries based upon the uses and gratifications theory (Wirth et al., 2008). Reducing social isolation by interacting with

media is not a phenomenon restricted to the modern media era, and the idea has been brought up in television studies (Cutler & Danowski, 1980). However, such social contexts hold even more significance with the rise of a class of media specifically designated with that community-related moniker. Social media have changed how people interact online, but how does print relate to these social Internet worlds? There is a time and place for everything, and because mobile and online represent instantaneous connections to the world at large, these focus group participants carry few affections for that connected world when a person is involved in a group setting of any social impact. Petric et al. (2011) described media use as a “form of social action” and noted that social situations related to the Internet and mobile devices can be dramatically different from traditional media exposure (p. 119). Put differently, reading a newspaper or magazine in a group setting was viewed as a positive social action. Justin said he believed that a print product represented a pre-conceived choice, returning to an effect of effort and time-cost to acquire and remember to bring the newspaper or magazine. On the other hand, the social action of reading on mobile devices was seen as a social rebuff. The device became something to interact with instead of acknowledging the people around the user.

Freidson (1953) theorized that content alone does not address possible effects of the social settings in which people engage with a medium. Some respondents said print appeared more personable when around others compared to mobile. The content of the newspaper or magazine would not change and would be no more or less pleasing to the reader if consumed at home, alone on the couch. Yet in the social context, print transforms into a social attractor for these focus group members. Participants formulated their own theories on this issue. One man said print could be shared physically in a way

that mobile and online cannot, and a woman pinned print's social affability on the difference in eye contact for a print product versus a cellphone. People fiddle with their phones in public when they are alone to appear occupied (Humphreys, 2005), or in other words, social, but in group settings this behavior becomes a form of selected social isolation that was criticized by these participants. In sum, social gratifications for print occur not on a personal level but on a public level.

### **Print, mobile and online gratifications compared to TAM factors**

Perceived ease of use influences both technology use overall and it directly influences perceived usefulness (Davis, 1993), so ease of use will be the focus of this discussion. Print provides content in one glance, from a sidebar to a sweeping two-page spread. Participants were aware of this and criticized the navigational shortcomings of online and mobile. This can be seen to correspond to the way people read. In print, readers relax into a leisurely style called ludic reading (Nell, 1988), and online, readers tend to track a more aggressive style and scan in an F pattern down a page (Nielsen & Pernice, 2009). Most mobile-centered content, designed specifically for mobile platforms, is presented in a single column to aid reading. This format requires much more scrolling. Without explicitly describing this awareness, the participants favored the print all-in-one layout and longed for effortless navigation when they read online and on mobile devices.

Distraction was also a major issue for these focus group participants. Print was again viewed as superior. Participants hammered online advertisements, especially those that moved. And though they praised hyperlinks and related content for adding credibility

and depth of content online, such additional information was also viewed in a negative light for luring them away from an article they were currently reading. Participants also lamented shifting content online, such as bad hyperlinks, changing homepages and difficulty returning to the same article. Yet when asked what aspects of print they would bring to online or mobile, and vice versa, in a hypothetical perfect product, nobody mentioned a virtual table of contents like in a printed magazine. Few mentioned the search function as important to online and mobile content, and the idea of searching was rarely discussed in any of the focus groups. Searching plays a large part in making digital content easily accessible and convenient and has played an important role in other gratifications studies (Flavian & Gurrea, 2009; Ingham & Weedon, 2008). One hypothesis as to why these groups didn't mention such functionality is that the age range was low enough to where these participants might take searching for granted. The function has nearly always been available to them, whereas it might play a more critical role for those of an older demographic. The opposite of ease of use is considered to be effort of use (Davis, 1993) measured in connection with effort expectancy, which diminishes after increased experience with a given system (Venkatesh, 2003). Thus, younger people like these participants might have decreased their effort expectancy in regards to digital content and searching so much that the presence of the search function is not noticeable anymore. Indeed, a few focus group members did mention that the ability to search their hypothetical perfect print product would be favorable.

Ease of use has been shown to have a strong impact on trust (Gefen, 2003; Koch, 2011). On the other hand, the prior literature demonstrated that the ubiquity of mobile devices plays into the trust people apply to their cellphones (Best, 2009; Vincent, 2006).

Participants' terms they generated for the written board portion of the focus groups indicated that most words and ideas linked to perceived ease of use were negative for mobile platforms. Focus group results cannot be generalized, but if these same reactions to mobile ease of use come up in the larger population, one idea could resolve the conflict between a lack of trust (shown with negative ease of use, or high effort of use) and the surplus of trust due to the omnipresence of mobile platforms. Seen as a seesaw, these two divergent views might simply balance each other.

The other technology acceptance model factor, perceived usefulness, involves how useful a system is perceived to be by the end users. For the focus group members, content was useful if it was familiar. Many participants spoke of the range of content choices available on the Internet and with their mobile devices. Reputation was significant for nearly everyone. Given a broad topic, people said they sought out the most recognizable names, eschewing blogs and personal minutiae found online. Respondents thought these personal opinion websites were valuable in some cases, especially referring to those with expertise: baseball blogs kept by statisticians or how-to websites run by bike shop workers. When it came to reading content, however, most preferred an organization with a name brand. Strangely, costs, in the form of paywalls, did not come up in the discussions even though the literature predicted that people were prone to switch news sources with the advent of paywalls (PEJ, 2010a; Gentzkow, 2007). Quality of content was also discussed at length in the literature review, but quality relates favorably to perceived usefulness, too (Shin, 2007). This point is essential for media organizations. High-quality content tends to be more useful, so publishing compelling content that is well-researched — hyperlinked accordingly, of course — and well-written



can keep readers returning. This idea also pokes another hole in the assertion that online content is inferior (Chyi and Yang, 2009). The literature review showed that fact checking and copy editing of online content pointed to the fact that digital content is a quite inferior product on the surface. But as the technology acceptance model deftly illustrates, reality is perception, and readers in these focus groups perceived online as not just good enough but quality enough to not buy subscriptions for print magazines or newspapers. Some of this can be attributed to money, as several members cited cost as a limiting agent that restricted their consumption of printed products. An older, more affluent audience could differ markedly. But when conditions of the objective reality are such that online content is a measurably lower-quality product, subjective perception and perceived usefulness can be tied more strictly to the reputation of a given media outlet.

Curation of online identities in terms of how and what content people shared was a lengthy topic of discussion in each of the three focus groups. This relates back to familiarity and usefulness because the key piece of the pie in sharing content with others online was the idea that the person sharing was familiar with the content. Remember, many focus group members felt an obligation to read content shared with them on their social networks. That obligation was also internalized because everyone who said they shared content frequently said they read that content, too. If an article was to be shared, participants felt that knowing the article was vital because people could not predict the reactions of the public. In other words, whether they wanted to offer an article that followed convention or provoked a friend's worldview, they also needed familiarity with the content to speak to those friends of friends or relatives of friends, for example, who

could also comment on their shared post. That familiarity results from how useful the sharers perceived the article to be, first to themselves and then to others.

### **Discussion of theoretical implications**

Two parts of the study attract attention, specifically when examining Table 1, which charts the more common responses of group participants that were written on the board in regards to positive and negative attributes of print, online and mobile platforms. The table compares the technology acceptance model factors, plus a third, perceived availability, regarding digital (Shin, 2007) and the three types of gratifications: content, the value of the message; process, external benefits of communication; and social, interactive components applied to Internet and mobile platforms (Cutler & Danowski, 1980; Stafford et al., 2004). The design of this study was to downplay the actual content and view editorial content in general terms. Katz (2010), an influential researcher in the uses and gratifications theory, highlighted two relevant areas of media, technology and context, that serve as springboards for the theory. Technology aspects can be thought of as relating to process gratifications; for example, online content sharing represents media control, a type of process gratification (Stafford & Stafford, 1996). Similarly, context of information can be thought of in terms of social gratifications.

The first conspicuous theoretical implication lies in the crossing of the factors from each theory. Process gratifications were generally positive for online and mobile platforms and negative for print. The ideas that qualified under the perceived availability factor were the same as those that fell under perceived ease of use, which is not surprising given the fact that process gratifications relate to the use of media (Stafford et

al., 2004). Although Shin's 2009 study focused exclusively on broadband Internet in Korea, he concluded that process gratifications and "embedded gratifications" were the most dominant drivers of adoption and use (p. 51). These embedded gratifications were described as a user feeling connected to a network and their ability to "access information and content freely" (Shin, 2009, p. 52). Stated differently, the researcher was describing perceived availability, a concept he had formed a few years earlier (Shin, 2007). To summarize, process gratifications can be connected to perceived ease of use and embedded gratifications describe perceived availability. Focus group responses for this study merged an interrelated web of prior literature, adding merit to Shin's findings of major drivers for media use that also align with the previous conclusions that perceived ease of use is a dominant factor in the technology acceptance model because it influences perceived usefulness as well as overall end use (Davis, 1993). This line of thinking is further reinforced by the fact that social gratifications in this study were also tied to perceived ease of use.

Secondly, when deconstructing the gratification types and their relations to technology acceptance model factors, one can begin to compare how gratifications are perceived positively and negatively in light of their continued use as prescribed by the technology factors. In other words, when a platform clusters around positive or negative attributes, the research might move toward a more predictive explanatory element. This could help the uses and gratification theory reach beyond the typical list of reasons why people engage with media, a common criticism (O'Donohoe, 1994). For example, the mobile platform was viewed negatively under content gratifications that also qualified as ease of use factors; positive attributes for the online platform fell in the process

gratification category and related to both ease of use and availability factors. Combining these theories might begin to trace a clear path toward predicting how media platforms are changing in the eyes and experiences of research participants.

Twenty years from now, this study could be used as a historical placeholder, a piece of research that observed a volatile time in media use and consumption habits tied to the strengthening market of smartphones, the rise of tablets and the saturation of social networking. That this research would persist as a historical mile-marker assumes a complete transformation and an acceptance of a new normal. Perhaps readers will never meet that bar; technological change itself might act as the normal, thus making this historical reasoning rather less important. Instead, this study exploits the traits of two theories that might be used together in the future and applied to research of media use and consumption in times of rapid technological change. This would keep the current study relevant if the future indeed carries change as a constant. The theories, though separated by decades, have notably evolved in a similar and convergent pattern in the past several years by addressing social contexts. Stafford et al. (2004) added social gratifications to the former process and content gratifications, and Shin (2007) introduced perceived availability, a social construct, to the prior factors of perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness. With further research like this study, the two theories could certainly continue to complement each other and reach a point where the academic use of one without the other happens rarely. If the “perception equals reality” equation is believed, linking the perceptions of the technology acceptance model to the realities of consumption described by uses and gratifications prevails as nothing short of pragmatic.

## **Discussion of other findings**

Reputation was discussed earlier in this section as integral to focus group readers in terms of their connection to big media brands. Trust has also been considered in this study. Focus group readers largely favored Facebook when sharing articles online because the website provides a preview with a headline, picture, opening line and a link to the article. Readers know what they are getting as opposed to email or Twitter, which provide only links, or most online searches, which might or might not allow previewing. Predictability is a part of trusting relationships (Mayer et al., 1995), and media companies have an edge in the way they present content (Picard, 2005). If these focus group participants are examples of a larger persuasion toward content appearance, large media organizations could take advantage of this reluctance in clicking a lone link. Magazine and newspaper brands can continue to package content accordingly and perhaps thrive among news aggregators by providing these trustworthy details when they publish articles digitally.

Participants labeled cost as a negative print attribute and a positive for online and mobile characteristics. What they ignored were the costs associated with those other platforms, specifically the cost of a computer or smartphone. The function of each platform could contribute to the lost idea of cost. Computers and smartphones provide other roles beyond the delivery of content, but distribution of content stands as a print product's manifest function, so the cost cannot be portioned out across a range of uses. Furthermore, the hardware for online and mobile platforms costs money, but the content on those platforms persists as cost-friendly or completely free. Print products happen to be the hardware and the content in one package, and thus, participants perceived print as

the most costly of the three platforms. During focus groups, the moderator explicitly stated the study focused on comparing or contrasting platforms, but it is possible that the participants were describing not the platforms but the content itself as being more or less expensive.

## CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

Ruggiero (2000) stated that uses and gratifications models must expand to include digital concepts such as interactivity and asynchronicity. Adding factors pulled from the technology acceptance model helps shape the conclusions drawn from the focus group responses. Overall, the findings of this study can be condensed in a few words. Print is a publicly social medium that grants respite to technological distractions, yet the medium carries a heavy time-cost. Online claims neither the physical magnetism of print nor the personal friendship capacity of mobile, but the Internet always exists conveniently close to readers in a presentation more appealing than the tiny screens through which many connect to their world. Mobile devices, particularly smartphones for this study's participants, supply users with provisional time-fillers capable of being called upon in almost any time or location.

On the surface, the three platforms appear to offer content and be consumed in divergent and unconnected ways. Readers engage with each platform differently and at different times. Still, a more rigorous examination in this study has shown that print, online and mobile platforms can indeed be thought with a unified, three-of-a-kind mentality when studied through the discerning theoretical lenses of uses and gratifications and the technology acceptance model. The overlaps that exist are striking and, in some cases, quite unexpected. As with all good research, this study has its flaws and is not conclusive. Rather, the findings here add to the literature regarding new media and can be a starting block for further inquiries and analyses.

## **Limitations**

First, the size the study is a limitation because with 14 participants across three focus groups, this study represents a tiny slice of attitudes, perceptions and emotions regarding print, online and mobile media. Demographics of the participants could also provide considerable limiting characteristics. The oldest member was 37 years old, but most participants were closer to 25. A larger study consisting of several groups in the age range of 40 to 70 years old could also provide additional and different insights. Likewise, these participants were all wealthy enough to afford laptops and smartphones with data plans for interacting with content. Disposable income levels limit the types of media people consume and could affect how they access and engage with such content. Using focus groups can open up new ideas, but the group setting can also restrict some viewpoints, especially those that are radical or vary markedly from the overall tone of the group. At least one example of this was cited, where a man retracted a former statement after the unfavorable response from his group members. This suppression of ideas is a limitation of focus group studies. Finally, the research used the same order of questions for all focus groups, starting with print, moving to online and ending with mobile. Results might differ if the participants perceived the order to carry some weight, even though they were told the order of discussion was only for convenience and did not demonstrate relative importance of one platform versus another.

At a theoretical level, this study is somewhat limited by criticisms of the uses and gratifications theory which deal with a person's ability to verbalize gratifications. Some participants articulated their media uses and gratifications well and even offered theories as to why they felt one way or another. Nevertheless, a room full of unknown people



transpires as a less than ideal setting for people to dig deeply enough into themselves to elucidate the uses and gratifications that move beyond the superficial. A person tends to avoid embarrassment or controversy in a group setting and might not reach the depths of self-introspection necessary to capture some of their true uses and gratifications, those that could create awkwardness within a group of relative strangers — for example, if someone used a cellphone to fend off loneliness. Moreover, a person might not even be conscious of certain gratifications, such as the loneliness-avoidance example, and those gratifications would not be accessible to the researcher through any kind of direct questioning. These types of sincere uses and gratifications can, through direct or indirect omission, not be included, and thus present a limitation in accordance with the use of the theory.

### **Future research**

Replicating this study with a more diverse collection of focus group members could add to the data and conclusions gleaned from the small population in this study. Specifically, focus groups in a future study should have a more expansive age range. Although the groups contained twice as many males as females, evidence of gender-specific consumption does not suggest a more balanced gender sample would provide significantly different results. The Pew Research Center's 2012 State of the Media report found digital news consumers to skew slightly more male, but the bigger difference came when breaking down demographics by age. Digital news consumption dropped significantly for survey respondents older than 50, but tablet users tended to be middle-aged (PEJ, 2012). A future study should talk to people who are older because a split has

been shown to occur between “digital natives,” those who grew up with more technologies, and “digital immigrants,” those who get acquainted with digital media much later in their lives (Prensky 2001). However, recent research has also pinned this native/immigrant construct less on age and more on experience with a given technology, so a study could focus on people who self-identify as less experienced digital users (Brown & Czerniewicz, 2010; Helsper & Eynon, 2010).

Another qualitative study could also use one-on-one interviews or have participants actually use various media platforms with the researcher as part of a think-aloud protocol. Interviews could give participants the breadth of time and attention necessary to tease out more earnest or deep-seated uses and gratifications for analysis with that theory. One interesting qualitative study would build upon the social issues brought up in these focus groups, particularly the idea that online and mobile platforms provide a social medium, but once in public, they transform into anti-social devices and print takes a star turn as the socially acceptable medium of choice.

Qualitative methods have the potential to shape questions and ideas for a quantitative survey concerning engagement with media for a larger sample of readers and users. Focus groups are adept at finding the whys and hows, but a survey based on these findings could further assist this inquiry by adding the “how much?” and help move the ideas discussed in this study closer to generalizable territory. Word frequencies found in this study are not applicable in a qualitative sense, yet they would be salient to the construction of a survey. Other threads of possible research can be found by clarifying the role of tablets as the market for those devices saturates, utilizing a strict dichotomy of digital versus print gratifications or applying some of the minor theories mentioned in

this paper as the main theoretical constructs of further studies. Future research possibilities are enticing, yet this study stands by itself as a worthwhile time commitment in what will surely be a growing area of research concerning the tug for attention between traditional media and new platforms.

## APPENDIX 1

MODERATOR: Thank you all for coming. I appreciate you spending part of your night with us. Basically a focus group is a discussion that centers around a topic, and tonight we'll be focusing on your interaction with different types of media. There are no wrong answers here. I'm just trying to get a feel for your experiences. I want to learn more about how you use print magazines and newspapers, Internet websites and your mobile phones. But please turn your phones off at this time.

This session will be audio and video recorded, but your identities will remain confidential in the final written report. I have completed IRB training, and I am knowledgeable about anonymity procedures. Tapes and audio files will be destroyed after I have finished writing the final report. As a participant in this study, you retain the right to leave or drop out of the study at any time without penalty. None of the questions are particularly personal, but you do have the option to not answer any question that might make you uncomfortable.

I'm looking for all sorts of opinions here. If one person says something and you don't agree, please speak up and offer a contrasting view. Please do try to talk one at a time, as I will need to transcribe these sessions later. I might interrupt the conversation every so often to make sure we cover a range of topics and still leave on time. I am interested in everything you all have to say.

Help yourself to snacks at any time as we go. One quick note: When I use the word "platform," I'm referring to the types of ways you can read an article. For this focus group, we'll be talking about print, online and mobile platforms, which include phones,

tablets and e-readers. Are there any questions before we begin? First, we'll talk about print magazines and newspapers.

#### WARM-UPS

Which newspapers do you typically read? How about magazines?

What do you read on your mobile devices?

About how often do you read content in print, online or on a mobile device? Daily?  
Weekly?

How about more generally, on which one do you read the most articles or spend the most time with? If you read most articles in print, rank that first.

MAIN -- [[On the board, keep a running list of pros and cons for each platform.]]

Let's talk about what you think are some strengths and weaknesses...

What do you like about reading an article in a printed newspaper or magazine?

Are there any downsides?

What do you like about reading an article online? Downsides?

How about reading on a tablet or smartphone? Downsides?

Which of these qualities are most important?

What about the hyperlinks? Do you read an entire article and then click on hyperlinks, or click as you read through?

Do you find that you pay more or less attention when reading articles on a given platform?

Say you've heard good things about an upcoming issue of a magazine or tomorrow's newspaper, but articles are also available online. Do you wait for the print product or do you go for the Internet? Why?

ALTERNATE: Do you typically read articles in print first or do you go online to read before the print copy is delivered or before you buy a print copy?

Could anyone see a time when you would read magazines or newspapers online only, meaning no more print? How about only from a mobile device?

Let's say you need to find an article online, not a specific one, just something to learn more about a topic. Do you look on specific sites — like the *Chicago Tribune* or *TIME* — or do you prefer to search on social ranking sites like Digg or Reddit? Why?

Do you use those social rankings? Does that social aspect add anything to articles for you or is it more of a novelty?

If friends have an article to share, how do they do that? Email you, put a link on Facebook, print it out for you, tell you in person?

Is there a difference for you if they post it on your wall, message, tweet it?

Are there certain types of articles your friends post? What do you think are your friends' motivations for posting?

Has anyone specifically purchased a print newspaper or magazine because a friend told you about a story or you heard about a story in the issue?

What are some reasons you would share an article with a friend?

Do you read everything you share? Do your friends read everything they share?

Anyone go from just the headlines?

Talking about any of these platforms, how does the amount of time you have available factor in to any of these platforms?

An article is accessible online, but you've initially read it in print. When you read it, you're not online where you can fire off a link. How do you share those with friends? Lend the magazine? Print them out? Link to them?

Do you ever sit and read newspapers or magazines with your friends? Read on laptops together?

Where do you usually read newspapers or magazines, your physical location? How about online magazine or newspaper articles? Mobile articles?

Are there certain times of day when you prefer one platform versus another?

ALTERNATE: Do you have any kind of regular schedule for reading articles? Something like a reading the newspaper each morning or a magazine before bed?

Imagine a hypothetical perfect media product, something new where you can have the best attributes from these platforms. Are there any aspects of print you wish you could have online?

How about aspects of online or mobile you wish you could have in print?



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