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STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND USE OF THE INTERNET AS A NEWS CHANNEL

Levi OBIJIOFOR, Ph.D.

The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia

&

Folker HANUSCH, Ph.D.

University of the Sunshine Coast, Maroochydore DC, Australia

Abstract

New technologies, in particular the Internet, have transformed journalistic practices in many ways around the world. While a number of studies have investigated how established journalists are dealing with and using new technologies in a number of countries, very little attention has been paid to how student journalists view and use the Internet as a source of news. This study examined the ways in which second and third-year journalism and arts students at the University of Queensland (Australia) get their news, how they use the Internet as a news channel, as well as their perceptions and use of other new technologies. The authors draw on the theoretical frameworks of uses and gratifications, as well as the media richness theory to explore the primary reasons why students use and perceive the Internet as a news channel.

KEYWORDS: Internet, New technologies, News, News source, University students, Australia

INTRODUCTION

New technologies have transformed journalistic practices in many ways across cultures. Newspapers in particular are under pressure in many developed countries to adapt to technological changes as revenues dwindle and new online business models are being explored. As a result, the Internet has become an immensely significant source of news for many in the developed world. Not surprisingly, there has been a surge in scholarly attention to how news is delivered online, as well as who is producing it and who is reading it.

However, while a number of studies have investigated how established journalists are dealing with and using new technologies in a number of countries (e.g. Fenton, 2010; Obijiofor, 2009, 2003, 2001; Singer, 2005; Deuze, 2003; Garrison, 2001; Henningham, 1995), very little attention has been paid to

how student journalists view and use the Internet as a news medium. Splichal and Sparks' (1994) seminal study of first-year journalism students in 22 countries around the world was conducted more than 16 years ago, long before the Internet became a mainstream news source for many people. In fact, in the developed world, the Internet has become an integral part of most students' lives, to the extent that these "digital natives" have been teaching their lecturers a thing or two about the Internet.

Beyond students' use of the Internet as a source of news, a number of studies have also examined students' use of the Internet in general. For example, Anderson (2001) examined how Internet use has affected the social or academic lives of university students. Kandell (1998) analyzed Internet addiction among students. Similarly, Kubey et al. (2001) examined the relationship between heavy Internet use and students'

academic performance, while Jones et al. (2009) studied how college students in the US used the Internet. In their study, Kubey et al. (2001, p. 366) note the increasing use of the Internet by university students while Jones *et al* (2009) report that students are “heavy users of the Internet” (2009).

Yet, as pointed out previously, there exist limited studies of exclusively journalism students’ use of the Internet as a news source. Considering that a vast majority of journalists in the Western world now have some tertiary education in communication or journalism field, it is important for us to examine how student journalists perceive and use the Internet in order for us to understand how the journalists of the future will engage with the Internet and other new technologies. In this study, we seek to understand whether journalism students use the Internet as a news channel to satisfy their news needs in light of other traditional forms of media such as radio, television, newspapers, and magazines. Although there is a growing body of research on Internet use by students, little is known about how these journalists of tomorrow source their news. Previous studies have shown that there are various reasons why students and the public use new technologies and their perceptions of the technologies (Jones *et al.*, 2009; Kaye, 2007; Wahid *et al.*, 2006; Kaye and Johnson, 2004; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000).

Against the preceding background, this paper reports the results of a survey that examined the ways and means by which second and third-year journalism students at the University of Queensland (Australia) receive their news, including their perceptions and use of the Internet as a news channel. The study serves as a foundation for a proposed much larger (global) study of journalism students’ use of the Internet as a news channel.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Many of the research studies on Internet use have been explained within the framework of uses and gratifications theory (e.g. Kaye, 2007; Kaye and Johnson, 2004; Charney and Greenberg, 2001; Papacharissi and Rubin, 2000). Morris and Ogan (1996) suggest that the uses and gratifications framework serves as a fundamental tool for investigating Internet use. The uses and gratifications perspective is valuable to our study because it provides us with insights into why media users select certain media over other forms of communication channels (Flanagin and Metzger, 2001, p. 154). The literature also shows that different media satisfy different kinds of audience needs (Perse & Courtright, 1993; Dobos, 1992; Lichtenstein & Rosenfeld, 1984). In this study, we adopt two theoretical frameworks namely the uses and gratifications perspective, and the media richness theory. These two frameworks are related but at the same time different.

USES AND GRATIFICATIONS THEORY

The uses and gratifications framework views the audience member as active consumers of media contents, who make conscious decisions about what type of media and media content to expose themselves to. According to Kaye (2007, p. 129), “Uses and gratifications studies investigate how the audience uses the media rather than how the media use the audience.” Thus, uses and gratifications research tradition seeks to explore why people use media and what people do with the media (McQuail, 2005, p. 424). Therefore, the theory concentrates on media audiences rather than the media message (Littlejohn, 1992, p. 364). The key assumptions of uses and gratifications theory are:

- (a) that the audience for news and other genres of media content is active and goal directed.
- (b) that

media are an important source of need gratification whose fulfillment lies with audience choices, and (c) that media compete with other sources of need satisfaction (Bucy et al., 2007, p. 149).

Thus, uses and gratifications theory assumes that media audiences approach media with specific needs and for specific reasons. In the process, the media audience selects specific media content that would satisfy those needs.

MEDIA RICHNESS THEORY

The media richness theory argues that an individual's choice of media technologies is influenced by the characteristics of each medium. The theory arranges media on a scale ranging from 'lean' to 'rich' based on attributes such as "speed of feedback, variety of channels, personalness of source, and richness of language used" (Flanagin & Metzger, 2001, p. 157). This model of media use incorporates into its framework of analysis the proposition that media users tend to determine the richness of a medium by evaluating the difficulty or ease of the services the medium provides.

USEFULNESS OF THEORY TO STUDIES OF INTERNET USE

We adopted these theoretical frameworks because they not only explain why media (and new technologies) are selected and used by audience members but they also offer insights into how media technologies are used. Hence, there are theoretical implications for how and why people use the Internet. For example, in its early years, uses and gratifications research marked a major shift away from the trend in mass communication research because it projected the media audience as active individuals who make conscious decisions about types of media and purposively selecting media contents to satisfy their individual needs.

Prior to the emergence of the uses and gratifications theory, mass communication scholars had presented media audiences as a 'passive' and 'unthinking' group of people. However, following the emergence of the Internet and the range of choices available to Internet users, uses and gratifications approach is now deemed particularly relevant to studies that analyse why and how people use the Internet because "the role of electronic media audiences has evolved from passive 'viewers' or 'listeners' of media content into active 'users' of information and communication technologies" (Bucy et al., 2007, p. 149).

Kaye and Johnson (2004, p. 198) explain that uses and gratifications theory is particularly suited to the study of the Internet because "online technologies such as e-mail, bulletin boards and chat rooms are interactive applications that require audience members to be active users". Drawing on previous research, Kaye and Johnson, (2004, p. 199) argue that; in terms of gratifications that people seek using the Internet, "the Web tends to satisfy entertainment, escape and social interaction needs" (Kaye and Johnson, 2004, p. 199). However, they point out that "because different components of the Internet are functionally different than (sic) the Web and from each other, they may gratify different needs" (2004, p. 199). Concerning specific uses of the Internet and e-mail, some researchers reported that Internet and e-mail users identified information collection (and the ease of collecting information on the Internet) as major gratifications, they received using the Internet. The media richness theory explains the behaviour of these Internet and e-mail users because it proposes that media users tend to determine the richness of a medium by evaluating the difficulty or ease of the services the medium provides.

CRITIQUE OF THEORIES

Despite its theoretical and methodological relevance, uses and gratifications theory has been criticised for its excessively descriptive orientation, its theoretical inadequacies and for “relying too heavily on audiences for reporting their true motivations for media use” (Bucy et al., 2007, p. 150). Although Bucy et al. (2007: 150) suggested “less reliance on individual interpretations and more direct observation of actual behavior” as a way to reduce reliance on audience interpretations of their media use; the suggestion is somewhat simplistic because it ignores the fact that it is not possible for researchers to observe everything in a research context. The uses and gratifications theory has also been criticised for ignoring “the dysfunctions of media in society and culture” because it “sees media primarily as positive ways in which individuals meet their needs, without any attention to the overall negative cultural effects of media in society” (Littlejohn, 1992, p. 373).

One limitation of media richness theory is that it fails to recognise the impact that collective experiences with, and perceptions of, media technologies will have on how audience members evaluate and select media (Flanagin & Metzger, 2001, p. 157). As Flanagin and Metzger (2001, pp. 157-158) argue, “it is not primarily the attributes of media that determine use, but rather such factors as assessments of needs fulfillment, appropriateness, social norms, and peer evaluations of media”. In fact, the social presence model of media accepts that the perceptions that people have of media are not only biased but are also influenced by the social milieu in which they are. “Influences can come from others, through vicarious learning, and from situational factors such as individual differences or those factors that facilitate (e.g., training, support) or constrain media use (e.g., geographic barriers and time

constraints)” (Flanagin & Metzger, 2001, p. 158). In other words, group dynamics, as well as individual and cultural differences can influence the way people perceive and use media technologies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a vast body of literature on how and why university students use the Internet (e.g. Jones et al., 2009; Anderson, 2001; Kubey et al., 2001; Kandell, 1998). Research in Africa and beyond suggests that students constitute the main consumers of Internet services in developing countries (Furuholt, et al., 2008; Omotayo, 2006; Kwansah-Aidoo and Obijiofor, 2006; Tanyeri et al., 2006; Mwesige, 2004; Sairose and Mutula, 2004; Odero, 2003; and Robins, 2002). In this context, we expect university students to use the Internet not only for accessing news but also for a range of purposes, such as to fulfill entertainment needs, to achieve their learning objectives, and to communicate with their friends, families and colleagues.

In Senegal, Robins (2002, p. 243) reported that a group of journalism students accessing an Internet café in the capital city Dakar were engaged in “writing email to one another and checking out entertainment sites”. In Nigeria, one study examined the level of Internet use by undergraduate students of Obafemi Awolowo University (Awoloye et al., 2008: 84) and found that the Internet was used “mostly for e-mail, information search and online chatting”. In a related study, Omotayo (2006) revealed that, among the reasons given by university students for accessing the Internet, e-mail communication, search for academic and sport-related information, as well as search for pornographic material featured prominently. In Pretoria, South Africa, Odero (2003) reported differences in the way postgraduate and undergraduate students used the Internet. For example, while postgraduate students used Internet

cafés mostly for educational activities, undergraduate students used the Internet for entertainment purposes such as chatting and listening to music.

In the Western world, the Internet has become an integral part of most students' lives. However, how and why do journalism students use the Internet as a news channel? This is the key question that we explore in this study.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in May 2009. Survey questionnaire was designed and administered directly to a total of 98 second and third-year journalism and arts students who studied the undergraduate course JOUR2221 (International Journalism and Mass Communication) at the University of Queensland, St Lucia campus in Brisbane, Australia. The copies of the questionnaire were specifically administered to students who attended the lecture on Monday, 25 May 2009. A total of 176 students were officially enrolled in the course but only 98 students attended the lecture on the day the copies of the questionnaire were administered. Of the 98 students who received the questionnaire, only 85 students (86.73 per cent) completed and returned valid copies.

The questionnaire consisted of 24 questions, two of which were open-ended. The rest of the questions were close-ended. They were designed to test the students' opinions on a range of issues; including their rating of the Internet as a news medium, their frequency of Internet use and the news media they rely on for news most of the time. They were also tested on the news outlet that serves as their main source of foreign news and the use of search engines to explore other materials of interest on the Internet.

We extrapolated and coded the unstructured responses into response categories. We analysed the data through cross-case analysis method. The process involved gathering markedly different and similar responses. Open responses were categorised according to degree of uniqueness or similarity. These were subsequently used in analysing the data. Owing to the relatively small sample size of this study, the results presented here should be treated as preliminary.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

We examined two main overarching research questions in this study. Each of the two main questions also contained sub-questions. Our first research question asked: To what extent do second and third year journalism students at the University of Queensland use the Internet as a news channel? Within this main question, we examined six sub-questions, namely:

1. What type of online news appeals to the students most?
2. How do journalism students perceive and use the Internet as a news source relative to traditional news media?
3. Why do they use the Internet?
4. What kinds of gratifications do journalism students seek to derive from using the Internet?
5. Other than the Internet, which other news channels do journalism students rely on for news most of the time?
6. How often do journalism students use Internet search engines to explore the various applications and resources on the Internet?

These sub-questions were included because we were interested in exploring journalism students' use of the Internet for other purposes. For example, in order to determine the students' Internet skill levels, we asked the students whether they used Internet search engines to explore the various resources and applications on the Internet.

This sub-question was based on our assumption that ability to use Internet search engines would demonstrate the extent to which the students utilised the many important applications and resources available on the Internet. For example, Chachage (2001, p. 228) underscored the relevance of Internet search engines thus:

Search engines on the Internet are like catalogues in the library. A library can have a lot of resources, but if it doesn't have a key (catalogues) to show these resources, they become useless. The same is true for search engines on the Internet. The Internet can act as the biggest library in the world, but without search engines, locating the items one needs will be very difficult and time consuming.

Kaye and Johnson (2004, p. 198) also note that "...Web users actively search out information when they click on links or employ search engines, suggesting Web use is goal directed and that users are aware of the needs they are attempting to satisfy".

Our second major question asked: Which news medium constitutes the primary source of foreign news for journalism students? This question was driven by the fact that many of the students were overseas students. We felt they would be interested in foreign news, particularly news about their home countries. Based on this question, we posed two sub-questions, namely:

1. How do journalism students rate foreign news coverage in Australian media?
2. What role does foreign news play in journalism students' news consumption habits?

RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

The results presented here have been structured to reflect students' answers to the two main research questions, as well as the sub-questions.

Question 1: To what extent do second and third year journalism students at the University of Queensland use the Internet as a news channel?

Our results show that second and third-year journalism students at the University of Queensland are heavy Internet users. Of the 85 respondents, 75 (88.2 per cent) said they used the Internet every day, while another five (5.9 per cent) said they used it six times a week. However, we must note that frequency of Internet use does not tell us what the students are doing with the Internet. To find out how the students are using the Internet as a news channel, we asked them about the news media they relied on for news most of the time. The Internet proved to be their most popular source of news. Approximately 40.3 per cent named the Internet as the news media they relied on for news most of the time. This was followed by television at 31.9 per cent, newspapers at 22.2 per cent, and radio emerged a distant fourth at 5.6 per cent.

See Table 1.

Table 1 -- News media which students rely on for news most of the time

Channels	Number	%
Internet	29	40.3
Television	23	31.9
Newspapers	16	22.2
Radio	4	5.6
Total	72	100%

The results reported here are consistent with the findings of other studies. For example, Flanagin and Metzger (2001, p. 174) reported in their study that, "Of all channels, the Internet was the most highly used for getting information, over other technologies such as newspapers, television, books, and

magazines.” Flanagin and Metzger surveyed mostly undergraduate communication students in two United States’ universities in the Midwest and in the West Coast, including an additional sample of 180 respondents who did not attend college/university.

What this suggests is that, among the journalism student population in our study and in the study conducted by Flanagin and Metzger, there is a growing shift away from traditional news media as the primary source of news and information. Results in Table 1 have support in the literature. In fact, research evidence suggests that age or generational difference seems to affect media selection and use. A study by Coleman and McCombs (2007, p. 495) found that the younger generation (those aged between 18 and 34) “used the Internet significantly more often” than they used the traditional news sources such as newspapers and television. Conversely, the older generation used the traditional sources of news more frequently than they used the Internet. This suggests that age differences are reflected in media use. Lauf (2001) also reported evidence of the impact of age on media use. In a study of the determinants of newspaper readership for political information in Europe, Lauf (2001) found that “The strongest determinant of daily reading is age: an increasing number of young people do not read newspapers daily any more to inform themselves about current politics” (Lauf, 2001, p. 238). He reported that in all the European countries he studied, “age has become the strongest predictor for the daily use of newspapers as a source of political information” (Lauf, 2001, p. 238).

One possible reason for the growing use of the Internet as a primary source of news by the younger generation could be the fact that the Internet empowers users to determine the kind of news they want to read when they want to read it. Another possible explanation for Internet’s popularity as a primary source

of news for journalism students could be due to its breaking news capacity, that is, “the trend... for people to rush to the web for snippets of breaking news” (Obijiofor and Green, 2001, p. 96).

Thottam (1999) has suggested that the Internet’s popularity as a news source may be attributed to the fact that online news is, in general, free. He also identified three major ways through which the Internet is challenging traditional media, in particular newspapers. One way is that newspapers are losing their breaking-news function. The second way is the decline in newspaper readership that he attributed to the proliferation of new technology-based leisure activities. The third way is the drop in advertising revenue. *The Economist On-line* (1999) believes that newspaper readership is declining owing to growing competition for people’s time. According to *The Economist* (1999, web document): “Over the years, technology and economics have produced more and more ways of occupying people’s leisure hours: more television channels, more magazines, more theme parks, and now video games, chatrooms and all the other delights of the digital age”. Nevertheless, Obijiofor and Green (2001, p. 95) argued that competition for people’s time and the presence of other traditional news sources such as television and radio do not offer all the reasons for the decline in newspaper readership. In their view, “anecdotal and research evidence suggest the percentage of adult newspaper readers has been on the decline long before the emergence of the Internet” (Obijiofor and Green, 2001, p. 95).

In terms of the type of online news that appealed most to the students, breaking news reported on the Internet was ranked particularly highly, with a total of 37.7 per cent of the students saying this was the most appealing aspect of the Internet for them. This finding supports arguments presented by

Obijiofor and Green (2001). When news events break, such as the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, the December 26, 2004 Asian tsunami, and the July 2005 terrorist bombings in London, news consumers are more than likely to rush to the Internet for initial reports. However, in the era of Web 2.0, electronic mail and social networking sites (such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Flickr, etc.) also proved popular, with 24.7 per cent of the students naming these as the second most appealing. Entertainment news ranked third (13 per cent), while sports and international news were each named by only 7.8 per cent of the students. See Table 2.

Table 2 -- Type of online news that appeals most to students

Items	Number	%
Breaking News	29	37.7
Email/social networking	19	24.7
Entertainment News	10	13.0
Sports News	6	7.8
International News	6	7.8
National News	3	3.9
Games	2	2.6
Total	77	100%

Overall, the journalism students in our study tended to rank the Internet better than other news media. Just over one-third (37.3 per cent) believed the Internet was a better news provider than traditional media, while 45.8 per cent ranked the Internet about the same as other news media. However, only 10.8 per cent of the students rated the Internet as worse than other news media, with 6 per cent offering no opinion. It is important to explain that, even though over 45 per cent of the students ranked the Internet about the same as other news media, however, when the students were asked to identify the media they relied on for news in general, the Internet emerged as the popular choice (see Table 1). The same trend occurred when the students were asked to nominate their main source of foreign news. Again, the Internet emerged as the dominant foreign news channel (see Table 4).

When the students were asked about the Internet's weaknesses compared to traditional media, the students showed clear awareness of the drawbacks of the Internet. A large number of the respondents cited potential problems with accuracy, authenticity of sources, information overload, reliability and credibility of Internet news content, sources and providers, and the digital divide that made it difficult for some people to access the Internet in some places. Listed in Table 3 (below) is a sample of the views expressed by the students in regard to the weaknesses that hinder the Internet as a news channel:

Table 3 -- Perceptions of weaknesses of the Internet as a news channel

Internet's weaknesses relative to other media	Students' comments
Problems of authenticity and accuracy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Difficult to differentiate quality news from the bogus news. 2. Factual errors due to the immediacy of the medium. 3. Its authenticity is questionable. 4. Difficult to verify authenticity with some sites. Also the potential for unqualified people to contribute means accuracy may be compromised. 5. The pressure to scoop other Internet news sites can result in inaccurate reporting because deadlines are so tight. 6. Information is quickly updated but it might contain wrong information, and quality might not be good. 7. Anyone can report, become biased and not as factual. 8. Inaccuracy; lack of professionalism; news aggregators not news generators. 9. Not knowing whether information is correct or if it has been edited. 10. Often inaccurate as it is rushed. 11. Anyone can add his or her personal information even if it is wrong. 12. Anyone can post anything – creates inaccuracies.
Accessibility problems	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not accessible to everyone. 2. Accessibility; equality. If you can't afford a computer, you can't access the Internet. 3. Not everybody has access to Internet. 4. Have to have a computer to use it.
Reliability and credibility	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lots of news providers with no credibility. 2. Everyone thinks they can write journalism but it's the quality of news that, in the end, suffers. 3. Credibility, due to the widespread usage of citizen journalism online. 4. Source credibility – There is so much information on the Internet it can be hard to tell what's true. 5. Sometimes stories aren't written as well, harder to follow/understand because of immediacy. 6. Inability to verify sources. Emphasis is on getting news out as quickly as possible, without first checking facts. This could be said of most news mediums now though. 7. The immediacy makes fact checking a rushed process which means that incorrect information may be posted. 8. Because it is so fast paced, it leaves room for error. Journalists are no longer ensuring they have the full story.

	<p>9. It's not entirely reliable because anybody can upload information which may not be true.</p> <p>10. Credibility issues – anyone is able to post material and information on the Internet – without reliable sources.</p>
Information overload	<p>11. There is so much information on the Internet; it is hard to filter it down to a few stories of interest sometimes. Info overload.</p> <p>12. You have to search for news and I don't really like reading off a computer. I prefer newspaper or tv.</p> <p>13. Probably quality and sheer amount of content (too much seems to lead to deterioration of quality). Lack of credibility – ease of access for anyone wishing to blog/report.</p> <p>14. Too many authors and stories; can't clarify all.</p>

When students were asked about the Internet's impact on newspapers, an interesting picture emerged. While, on the one hand, a large number of students believed that new technologies had improved the quality of newspapers, however, the students were also more likely than not to agree that the Internet would destroy newspapers in the future. For example, just over one-third (35.3 per cent) thought new technologies had improved the quality of newspapers, while 41.2 per cent agreed either somewhat or strongly with the statement which suggested that the Internet would destroy newspapers. In contrast, 31.8 per cent of the students disagreed with the statement which suggested that the Internet would destroy newspapers as a news medium. Overall, 44.7 per cent of students were optimistic about the future of journalism practice in Australia, while 18.8 were pessimistic. A little over one-third of the students – 36.5 per cent – were indifferent.

When we examined the ways in which students received news about events overseas, the importance of the Internet as a news delivery channel became even more crucial. While the Internet was named as the main source of general news by just over 40 per cent of the students (see Table 1), an even higher number – 55.7 per cent – named it as their main source of foreign news. See Table

4. Again, television came second at 24.1 per cent, followed by newspapers at 19 per cent. Radio was an even less significant source of foreign news, at only 1.3 per cent. The fact that many of the students were from overseas countries may have accounted for the results.

Table 4 – Main source of foreign news

Channels	Number	%
Internet	44	55.7
Television	19	24.1
Newspapers	15	19.0
Radio	1	1.2
Total	79	100%

When students were asked to explain their reasons for identifying the Internet or any other media as their main source of foreign news, a range of reasons emerged. For the Internet, the reasons include its accessibility and convenience, the diverse nature of foreign news published online, and the international dimension/focus of foreign news published online. For television, the reasons included ease of access and convenience, accuracy, credibility and the visual element of television news. The students who selected newspapers as their main source of foreign news listed

newspapers' credibility and consistency, the clear structure/format of foreign news sections in newspapers, trust and ease of delivery of newspapers. Surprisingly, trust was an element the students did not associate with other media. The only student who nominated radio as his/her main source of foreign news identified low cost of radio and the ease of access to radio. See Table 5. These results, which show students' perceived attributes of the Internet and other media that influenced their choice of each

medium as a source of foreign news, are relevant because they offer insights into certain media attributes that inform their use. It is therefore important to explore the reasons why the students are attracted to each medium. As Flanagin and Metzger (2001, p. 172) pointed out, "in the contemporary media environment, it is important to go beyond media attributes, such as print (text) or video, and consider users' conceptions of a medium's functional image in assessing media choice and usage".

Table 5 -- Reasons why each medium was selected as main source of foreign news

Media	Reasons why each media was selected as main source of foreign news
Internet	<p><u>ACCESS AND CONVENIENCE</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Easy access to foreign news. 2. The Internet is the most convenient way to read the news. 3. It is easier to gain access to specific news from countries, and TV news is generally pretty bad. 4. The Internet is my source as I am usually on there everyday and it's convenient to access. 5. I receive live updates from the BBC. This is done through the firefox web browser. 6. BBC.co.uk is my homepage. It is easy to read. It reports news immediately; it has lots of links to help in understanding the issue. 7. I am an overseas student, so I depend on Internet to get foreign news (including news about my country). 8. Internet – very easy to access international news – large scope. 9. Despite all its setbacks, it is the lesser evil. I find I can access the news that directly interests me. I can also revisit the page and share it with friends. I have no time to watch TV and use their scheduling. With magazines, there is not much selection in comparison to the Internet but I do use political magazines also. 10. The Internet is more convenient and also has a larger foreign news section than newspapers, radio and television. 11. I am on the Internet everyday so it is easy to simply find news on the Internet rather than going out and buying a newspaper. 12. It is easy to find significant international stories on the net, as they are often highlighted. <p><u>INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION/FOCUS</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The news I come across on the Internet is more international. 2. I am an international student here in Australia. Therefore, the

	<p>only source of foreign news is the Internet, where I could check online newspapers and access news from my country.</p> <p>3. The Internet usually highlights news which is more ‘internationally-centred’ as it is difficult to categorise and cater to specific audiences geographically like TV, radio, newspapers and to an extent magazines.</p>
<p>TV</p>	<p><u>ACCESSIBILITY/CONVENIENCE</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Easy and accessible at home. 2. It is convenient and I don’t have to go out of my way in getting to that particular news source. 3. TV is easily accessible and networks have news programs every couple of hours. Meanwhile, hours can and are interrupted by breaking news. 4. Mainly watch the news while dinner is being cooked. It is the most accessible. 5. It is the most convenient and frankly, easily explained. 6. I watch the news getting ready in the morning. 7. You get information quickly and you can easily compare it to other channels (e.g. Channel 7 to SBS) by switching channels. 8. Because it is convenient to sit down and watch/listen actuality of news such as the video footage and all compiled into news programs. 9. I watch the news every night, and I am not a huge reader of newspapers, so I would have to say that TV is my main source. <p><u>ACCURACY, CREDIBILITY AND VISUAL ELEMENT</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It’s visual. I can see best what is going on and know that the information is pretty much guaranteed to be correct. 2. I watch SBS news and Foreign Correspondent (ABC TV) as I feel these programs provide the most accurate news coverage. <p><u>RELEVANCE</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. As a foreign student, I don’t buy local newspapers. Thus, I stick to watching the news.
<p>Newspapers</p>	<p><u>CREDIBILITY/CONSISTENCY</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Credibility and consistency. 2. I find newspapers offer the most detailed and consistent reports on foreign events. 3. I like reading newspapers. It’s nice and relaxing to go through a paper as you can scan many stories instead of just looking up a specific one. 4. Tend to be more credible and give the WHOLE story. <p><u>CLEAR STRUCTURE/FORMAT</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clearly structured. Newspapers have a clear foreign news section that can be read easily; so you don’t have to go searching for info. 2. When I want to learn about foreign news, I read the foreign news section.

	<p><u>TRUST</u></p> <p>3. Newspapers are more trustworthy than the Internet; they enable us to gain a wider knowledge of the subject.</p> <p>4. I can generally trust what’s in the newspaper. I can get a range of topics and views offered to me instead of me looking. I like the analysis in newspapers too. The Internet is really just good for breaking news as it happens.</p>
Radio	<p><u>EASE OF ACCESS/LOW COST</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I often listen to the radio as it’s a cheap and easy way of accessing news.

In general terms, the quality of foreign news in Australian mainstream news media was rated as fairly adequate, with 51.2 per cent of the students choosing this option. However, one-third of the students (34.5 per cent) thought it was inadequate, and an additional 7.1 per cent believed the quality was poor. In contrast, only 1.2 per cent thought the Australian mainstream news media provided comprehensive foreign news coverage. As a result, four out of ten students (40.5 per cent) said they were dissatisfied with foreign news coverage in Australian mainstream media, while 31 per cent said they were satisfied. Close to one-third of the students, or 28.5 per cent, did not express an opinion in this regard.

Nevertheless, in terms of accuracy of foreign reports, a few students agreed with the statement which suggested that foreign news reports in Australian mainstream news media were mostly inaccurate. Only 13.1 per cent agreed either somewhat or strongly with this statement, while 35.8 per cent disagreed somewhat or strongly. One out of two respondents neither agreed nor disagreed.

Single most important issue in journalism education in the 21st century

Asked to identify what they considered to be the single most important issue in journalism education in the 21st century, a large number of the journalism students identified the ability to use new technologies on the job. See Table 6.

Table 6 -- Single most important issue in journalism education in the 21st century

Item	Number	%
Ability to use new technologies on the job	35	42.7
Willingness to observe code of ethics in professional practice	23	28.0
Knowledge of and ability to apply the law	3	3.7
Knowledge and understanding of international affairs	17	20.7
Other	4	4.9
Total	82	100%

Among “Other” issues listed by four respondents were: getting the story as factual as possible; having a practical understanding of the social fundamentals of communication;

and professionalism. One respondent wrote: “All of the above”.

The large number of students who identified ability to use new technologies on the job may have been influenced by their familiarity with technology. After all, as Hamilton (2004, p. 196) explained, "Going online involves some interaction with technology".

Based on the results presented in Table 6 and in Table 1, we can say that a large percentage of the students not only use the Internet as their main news channel but also believe that ability to use modern communication technologies on the job is an important factor that will define how journalists do their job and the skills that would be required in 21st century journalism practice. This particular finding reinforces the usefulness of new technologies as essential tools for journalism practice in the digital era.

CONCLUSIONS

In this study, we found that second and third-year journalism students at the University of Queensland are heavy Internet users. We also found that the Internet was the most popular source of news for journalism students. Over 40 per cent of the students named the Internet as the channel they relied on for news most of the time. The results showed a growing shift away from traditional news media as the primary source of news and information. The shift toward the Internet suggests that age or generational difference is reflected in media selection and use. Breaking news reported on the Internet was the main type of online news that appealed most to the students. When news breaks, news consumers are more than likely to rush to the Internet for initial reports. Potential issues that undermined Internet's effectiveness as a news provider included problems associated with accuracy, authenticity of sources, information overload, reliability and credibility of Internet news content, sources and providers, and the digital divide that hampered Internet access to people in some parts of the world.

While the Internet was named by the journalism students as their main source of general news (over 40 per cent), an even higher number (55.7 per cent) named it as their main source of foreign news. Students believed the single most important issue in journalism education in the 21st century was the ability to use new technologies on the job. This finding reinforces the usefulness of new technologies as essential tools for journalism practice in the digital era.

A number of important conclusions can be drawn from the results presented in this study. Theoretically, uses and gratifications theory views media audiences as active consumers of media contents, who make conscious decisions about what type of media and media content to expose themselves to. Thus, uses and gratifications research seeks to explore why people use media and what people do with the media (McQuail, 2005, p. 424). Results from this study show that students are highly selective of the news media that gratifies their news needs, as well as the range of online news topics which they expose themselves to. Consequently, the choices that students make in their news consumption and the principal avenue through which they gratify their news needs can be explained within the uses and gratifications theory. For example, the choice of the Internet as the main source of general news and foreign news highlights the importance of the Internet as a news delivery channel, regardless of the news genre.

Students are quite clear about the kind of news service the Internet provides to them. The selection of the Internet over other available news media suggests that students make conscious decisions about their choice of news media and news topics because the Internet fulfills a niche in their news needs. The traditional news media that did not

satisfy the students' hunger for general and overseas news were not selected by the students. Thus, we argue that the journalism students in our study made deliberate decisions about aspects of the Internet services that satisfied their needs, such as the need to keep up-to-date with local, national and international news.

Similarly, aspects of the results of this study highlight the importance of the media richness theory in explaining journalism students' selection and use of the Internet as a primary channel for accessing general news and international news. Media richness theory argues that the choice of media technologies is influenced by the characteristics of each medium, such as "speed of feedback, variety of channels,

personalness of source, and richness of language used" (Flanagin & Metzger, 2001, p. 157). Some of these attributes are reflected in comments the journalism students made for selecting and using the Internet (see Table 5).

The study also found that a large percentage of the journalism students believe the ability to use new technologies on the job is an important factor that will underpin how journalists approach their tasks and the skills that would be required in journalists of the 21st century. This view strengthens the usefulness of new technologies as essential tools for journalism practice in the digital age.

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About the Author

Levi OBIJIOFOR, *Ph.D.* is a Senior Lecturer in Journalism. School of Journalism and Communication. The University of Queensland, St Lucia, Brisbane, Qld 4072, Australia Email: l.obiiofor@uq.edu.au

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Folker HANUSCH, *Ph.D.* is a Senior Lecturer in Journalism. School of Communication, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences University of the Sunshine Coast Maroochydore DC, Qld 4558, Australia Email: fhanusch@usc.edu.au