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NEWS CONSUMPTION HABITS OF STUDENTS
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

by

Ford G. Clark

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
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NEWS CONSUMPTION HABITS OF STUDENTS
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

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University of Nebraska, 2010

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People in America today have many choices when it comes to the media. There are hundreds of channels available on cable or satellite television, hundreds of radio stations across the United States, as well as myriad newspapers. Many of these traditional media outlets have Internet websites available as well. Many studies have been done as well as current ratings, subscription information and website tracking to determine who is consuming news in this country. However, information about college students and news consumption is difficult to find. This study attempts to find out what, if any, news is being consumed, and through what media that news is found by students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Students will be surveyed in the College of Journalism and Mass Communications, the College of History, and the College of Education and Human Sciences at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Keywords: News Consumption, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, College Students

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Chapter 1, Introduction

People in today's world are inundated with media. Radio, television, newspapers, the Internet—people get different kinds of information in different ways. One thing is certain—all have been successful at one point or another, or else they wouldn't still exist. Now, niche companies are working their way into the marketplace, fundamentally changing the traditional model—it is no longer a question of how many media outlets people consume, it has become a question of which one, if any at all.

Researchers use different demographics to measure television and radio audiences. Ratings companies like Nielsen base their findings on how many people from a certain demographic are watching at any given time. Internet websites can track how many people have visited based on information from servers as well as Google and Yahoo Analytics.

This pilot study will look at how college students consume news. Where do they get their news, or do they consume the news at all? There is information available on the 18-25 age group but not all of those people are college students. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2009), as of 2007 there were 18.2 million college students in the United States. News consumption habits of college students are an important area of study, because it is not an area that is studied at length. One reason for this may be because there is a large turnover in student population every year. Students quit and graduate on a yearly basis, so the opinions of this group may also change yearly.

When it comes to this age group, there is some research—but it isn't good news for the traditional news media. Twenty-one percent of 18–34-year-olds regularly learned about the 2004 presidential campaign from comedy programs, specifically Saturday Night Live and Comedy Central's The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, which is similar to the 23 percent who reported getting campaign information from network news (Feldman, 2007).

Newspapers are seeing a trend similar to television news, which is that as people get older, they consume the news more often. “In a 2002 only 26 percent of 18–29-year-olds reported reading a newspaper the day before; 40 percent had watched television news. In contrast, 59 percent of those 65 and older read the newspaper, and 73 percent watched news on TV. The Internet, despite its promise, has done little to close this generational news gap: while 76 percent of 18–29-year-olds reported going online in 2002, just 44 percent claimed to have gone online for news at least once a week” (Feldman, 2007)

First, an operational definition of news media must be stated. For the purposes of this study, it is defined as Internet websites that are maintained by news gathering organizations (like CNN, Fox News, ABC News, newspapers etc.), television (both broadcast and cable), newspapers (paper version) and broadcast radio. These are the four widely used media that are prominent in the United States.

Secondly, an operational definition for news consumption must be posed. For the purposes of this study, news consumption is defined as actively seeking out news on

the Internet, television, or in print, and consuming for more than 15 minutes on an average day.

Chapter 2, Review of the Literature

Overview of all traditional media

For more than ten years, the number of people consuming news via traditional sources (print, television, radio) has declined, while the audience for online news has increased (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2008). This would seem to be good news for the Internet, but bad news for traditional sources. The tendency of young people not consuming the news has been going on for quite some time. In 1965, 67 percent of all people under the age of 39 said that they read the newspaper; while in 2002, only 28 percent of the people aged 18 to 29 read the newspaper (Feldman, 2007). However, many of those traditional sources are adapting their industries to meet the needs of their customers. Many of the Internet sources people are now consuming are Websites that are generated by the traditional media.

The people who actively seek out news are an older audience. The average age of people who regularly seek news in any medium is 52. However, that certainly does not mean younger people are not consuming news and not consuming news in the same way as the generation before them (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2008), and one might wonder at the future of traditional media.

Many Americans who do not actively seek out news are of the youngest demographic, which is the age group of 18 to 25 (Pew Research Center for the People

and the Press, 2008). However, that still leaves plenty of people who consume news—even if it isn't in a “traditional way.” Since 2006, almost 40 percent of all Americans say they get news at least three days a week online (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2008). This may be the reason that newspaper readership has declined by more than 20 percent since 1994, radio news consumption has fallen by 12 percent during that same period and nightly network news and local news viewership on television has fallen by almost 27 percent, also since 1994 (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2008).

Newspaper and Its Relation to the Internet

Print newspapers are disappearing. *The Tucson Citizen*, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *Rocky Mountain News* have stopped print operations along with a number of smaller papers (MacMillan, 2009). In 2007 alone, fifteen newspapers ceased operation. At the end of 2006, there were 1,437 daily newspapers. By the end of 2007, there were only 1,423. Also in that year, 49 evening papers disappeared (Journalism.org, 2008). However, many of those that have disappeared in print have moved exclusively to the web, like the *Christian Science Monitor* (Bird, 2009). There is also an issue when it comes to convergence in the television industry, even though Websites of television networks saw more people coming to their Websites than ever before (Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, 2007).

Newspaper circulation in the United States decreased by almost five percent from 2003 to 2008 (Journalism.org, 2008). According to the latest information,

circulation continues to drop. In the first few months of 2010, newspaper circulation was down 8.6 percent. Every newspaper in the top 25 ranked newspapers in America saw their circulation drop except the Wall Street Journal (Walker, 2010)

A report from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government says, "Like the cable and broadcast revolutions, the Internet revolution is redistributing the news audience in ways that has and will continue to benefit some news outlets, while harming others" (Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, 2007). This research, in particular, has shown that websites of nationally known newspapers and "brand name" television websites are gaining audience members (Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, 2007).

This is an issue for the traditional media, especially "local news organizations." Shorenstein (2007) says:

The Web particularly threatens daily newspapers. They were among the first to post news on the Internet but their initial advantage has all but disappeared in the face of increased competition from electronic media and non-traditional providers. The Internet is also a larger threat to local news organizations than those with national reputations. Because it reduces the influence of geography on people's choice of a news source, the Internet inherently favors "brand names"—those relatively few news organizations that readily come to mind by Americans everywhere when they seek news on the Internet.

So what is the future of the print media? Research has shown that people of all ages consume news in a steady stream of information bites" (Bird, 2009). People want news on demand and find it on the Internet. Some people used to plan their day around traditional media by reading a newspaper in the morning or evening or watching television news at a specific time. The 24 hour cable television networks started to change that, and the Internet has transformed it even further (Bird, 2009). Many print

organizations have begun to publish on the Internet, either completely or by having a coexisting website, and that looks to be the way things will continue, at least for now.

Television and Radio

While today's digital environment has altered the way print-based journalism operates, it has also altered the way the broadcast and cable media operate. Adaptation and convergence may well be the future of broadcast and cable. A report by the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism (2008) says:

More and more, listeners are tuning in not only from their homes and cars, but also from desktop computers. Some skip tuning in altogether and download audio podcasts for later listening. An increasingly large number are also tuning to radio broadcast via satellites, which has enjoyed rapid growth although its two pioneers merged in 2008 to form a single company. The move is toward listening to what you want, when you want it.

But that doesn't mean that all broadcast radio is on the decline. National Public Radio (NPR) is doing quite well in the broadcast field. As a matter of fact, NPR's national daily programming schedule is attracting more listeners than ever. Between 2000 and 2008, NPR's news programs, including "Morning Edition," "All Things Considered" and "Weekend Edition" increased their listenership by 6.8 million people per week. This is mainly due to the general decline of radio news in the rest of the country (Farhi, Consider this: NPR achieves record ratings, 2009).

That isn't NPR's only highlight. NPR is outdistancing television in morning shows. NPR's "Morning Edition's" average daily audience is 7.6 million. That is about 60 percent larger than the audience for the television news program "Good Morning America" on ABC Television and about one third larger than the audience for the

“Today” show, NBC’s main morning news show (Farhi, Consider this: NPR achieves record ratings, 2009).

One reason for these numbers is that 9/11 brought in many listeners, listeners who stayed. The other reason, according to the Washington Post (Farhi, Consider this: NPR achieves record ratings, 2009) is, “NPR’s rising popularity reflects the decline of news as a radio format (with other radio companies)...Producing an original newscast is expensive, especially compared with playing music or airing syndicated talk shows; many radio companies have pared back or eliminated their news departments as the industry has consolidated over the past decade.”

Overall ratings in broadcast radio and television news are down, mainly due to the fact that Nielsen (the major company that television and radio depend upon to tell them how many people are watching) changed the way in which it counts people and households. The Washington Post reported (Farhi, Tonight's big story: News viewers missing!, 2007) “starting in mid-2005, the ratings company began using ‘people meters,’ electronic boxes that automatically record who is watching what in a representative sample of 600 area households. The new system replaced ‘passive’ meters, which recorded what was on a set but not who was watching it, and diaries, which 400 sample respondents filled out with their viewing choices.”

Nielsen has made other changes. Beginning in January of 2009, it started to include college students in its estimates. Students who attend traditional colleges and universities as well as trade schools, culinary institutes and other higher educational institutions are now included both in dorm rooms as well as off campus apartments

(Kenner, 2007). Before January 2009, college students living away from home were not counted. However, these numbers will only count towards the total number of people consuming the news; there isn't a category to track college students' television watching in and of itself. While no rationale was given, one could assume it is to get a better overall estimate for the 18 to 25 demographic.

That doesn't mean people are not watching television. More people are watching television than ever before. As of 2009, Americans were watching 153 hours of television every month at home. Add to that the fact that many people are watching their television shows online or via their mobile phones or they are simply using a DVR to watch (NeilsonWire, 2009). The problem for television news companies is they aren't spending many of those 153 hours watching the news, nor are they using DVRs or online video to watch the news.

News consumption as a whole is on the downturn in radio and television in both national and local markets. To try to compete with other available media, local stations are trying new things like expanding news coverage. They are reporting sports and weather more times during the day, trying to grab viewers and listeners at different times of the day (Farhi, Tonight's big story: News viewers missing!, 2007). While this fragments the audience by splitting viewers among these broadcasts rather than attracting them to one single broadcast, stations are banking on higher numbers overall instead of numbers for one single program.

However, numbers still are not growing. As far back as the year 2000, the number of people viewing local newscasts was shrinking, and it was because of

increased competition from all types of media, not just another local station (Potter, 2000). Added to that is research showing people are not tuning into local news broadcasts anymore because they are turned off. They are annoyed by the tricks and gimmicks stations use to try to attract viewers (Potter, 2000). People were upset that local stations were using promotions like “special” reports, and every year the ratings continue to dwindle (Farhi, Tonight's big story: News viewers missing!, 2007).

Local news companies are having financial problems too. And the financial problems don't just stem from a struggling economy; most newscasts saw a decline in viewership over the last few years, even though there was an election in 2008 (Journalism.org, 2008).

Ratings aren't just going down for local newscasts either. Broadcast and cable ratings have decreased as well. According to Nielsen, the three major network nightly newscasts together only had 15.6 percent of all households viewing their broadcasts in 2008. That was down 2.5 percent from the year before. And the cable networks almost surpassed the broadcast networks in terms of news viewers in the same time slot, but they weren't quite able to do so (Journalism.org, 2008). Still, that leaves almost 70 percent of all households in the United States who aren't consuming news in the evening news time slot.

Another problem for broadcast news is that the audience is not a young one. In spite of attempts at attracting younger viewers, they have basically been unsuccessful. The average age of a typical network news viewer is now 61 years of age

(Journalism.org, 2008). And the United States Census Bureau (2010) points out, only 12.8 percent of all Americans are aged 65 and older—not a large segment of people.

Cable is not in a similar situation. The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (2008) says 39 percent of all Americans regularly watch cable television news at any time during the day. But, that research does not say how much is viewed; just that it is viewed regularly. It could be that people aren't tuning in for long, only enough to get a few headlines and then tuning back out. While cable ratings plummeted after the election in 2008, ratings began to rise again in 2009 (Journalism.org, 2008).

Television news websites are helping get the news out, and they are attracting younger people as well. “In December 2008, 72 percent of visitors to CBSNews.com and 61 percent at MSNBC.com were under age 50. And more than a quarter of the audience is under age 34” for both of those websites (Journalism.org, 2008). Thirty-seven percent of all Americans go to the Internet for news (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2008), so many who operate television stations may have reason to be optimistic, at least on this front.

Consider these facts: 36 percent of all people aged 18 to 24 watch cable news and 21 percent watch network news. Only 15 percent of all people aged 18 to 24 read newspapers, and only nine percent of all people aged 18 to 24 use the web for news (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2008). A recent Pew Internet and American Life report showed that young people ranked news consumption a distant sixth in their Web-usage habits – well behind e-mailing, instant messaging and interactive blog sites such as MySpace and Livejournal” (Moore, 2005)

All of this research begs the question, “Are college students consuming news; and if they are, then where are they getting their news?”

Chapter 3, Hypotheses

College students were studied in this thesis because they are a group that has not been studied in terms of their news consumption. Hypotheses that will be explored with this research are: 1) Students who are in a 400-level class are more likely to consume news than students in a 100-level class; 2) Students studying journalism are more likely to consume news than their peers 8664761 in another discipline; and 3) College students who consume news (defined as more than 15 minutes per day) are more likely to get their news from the Internet rather than traditional media (as defined in the operational definition of this thesis).

Chapter 4, Methodology

After approval by the IRB (Institutional Review Board) a 21 question survey was given to eight classes: Five 400-level classes in the College of Journalism and Mass Communications, the History Department and College of Education and Human Sciences and three 100-level classes were surveyed in the College of Journalism and Mass Communications, Classics and Religious Studies and the History Department. In this way, a good balance was achieved in numbers between the 400-level and 100-level classes, as the 100-level classes had, on average, greater numbers of students than the

400-level classes. See Appendix A for the oral instructions that were given to the students and the survey that was given.

In all but three of the 400-level classes in the College of Education and Human Sciences, the survey was given during a class period arranged beforehand with the instructor. The survey was given as randomly as possible, given to every third person in every row in the classroom. In three 400-level classes in the College of Education and Human Sciences, I went to the classes and told the students that I was collecting data for a thesis, and that I would be in a room in the same building as the classroom was in at certain times on certain days, and that they could come into that room to take the survey.

The categorical results from questions 19, 20 and 21 are more to establish a picture of who the students are who filled out the surveys. Some of these results will be used to compare news consumption habits, others will not.

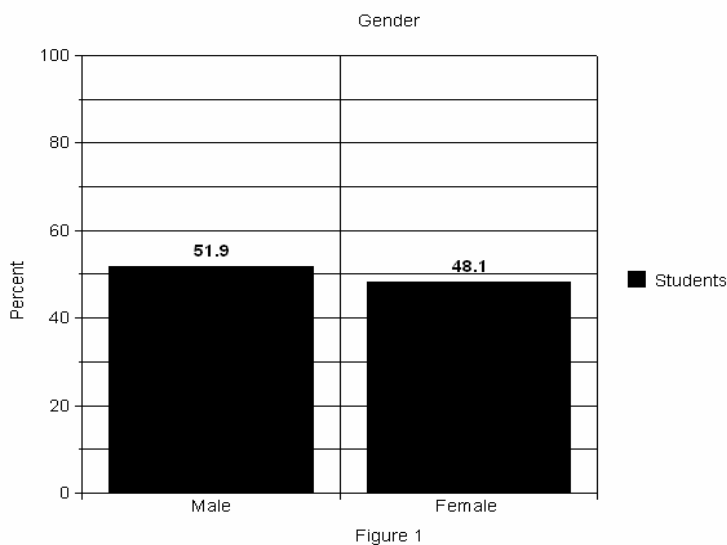
The support for the hypothesis will be determined by the data from the number of questions that support the hypothesis versus the data from the number of questions that do not support the hypothesis. However, the results from questions ten through 18 will not be discussed or used in this study. The results from these questions indicated that the students were confused when answering these questions.

The results from these surveys will not be generalized to the whole of college students. This non-probability study will only be able to compare and contrast the media habits of the students in those particular colleges, and the results will not be generalized to every student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The reason these

particular colleges were picked were: 1. Journalism students are assumed to have different news consumption habits than those in other disciplines, and; 2. All of the colleges and departments at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln were listed on separate pieces of paper and then two were drawn out of a hat. It is the hope of the researcher that the results of this study will be able to provide the basis for further research on the subject of college students and news consumption.

Chapter 5, Results

In the eight classes surveyed, 159 responses were gathered. The classes surveyed ranged from 20 people up to 150 in each class. It was observed that there seemed to be similar numbers of males and



females when the survey was given, and the official numbers found that to be true. Of the 159 people surveyed, 51.9 percent of the respondents were male and 48.1 percent of the respondents were female (Figure 1).

Another finding that was relatively balanced was the level of the class that the students took the survey in. The results were that 44.2 percent of the respondents came from 100-level classes, and 50.6 percent of the respondents came from 400-level classes (Figure 2). The reason that 6.4 percent of the results are missing in this case is because

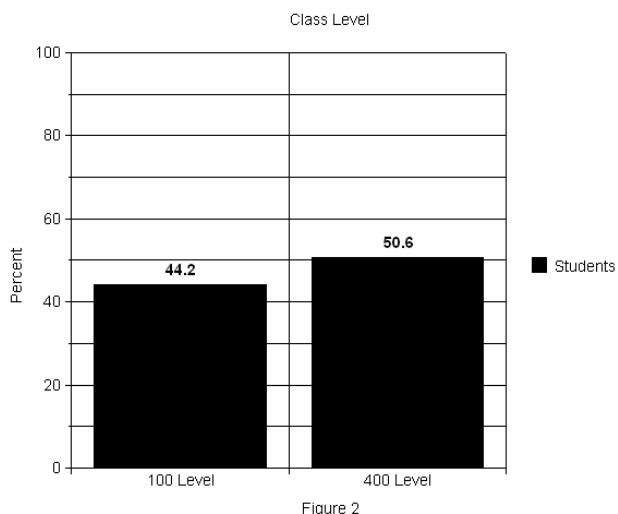


Figure 2

apparently that many of the students who were surveyed apparently were unaware that they were either in a 100-level or a 400-level class (they answered the question incorrectly).

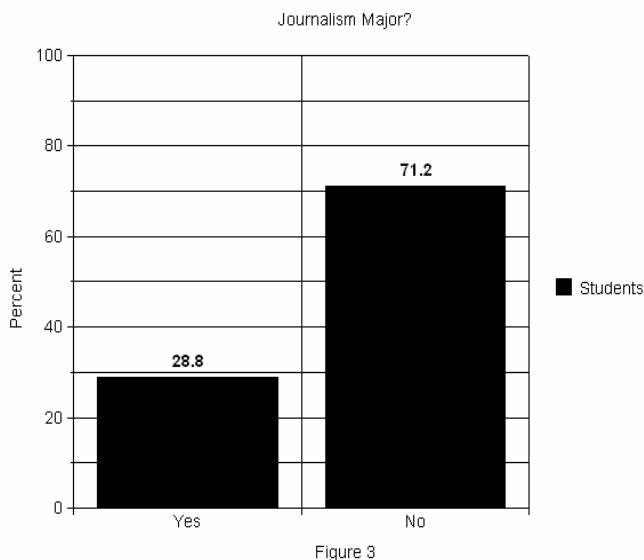


Figure 3

The third category of students sought from this survey was whether a student who took the survey was journalism major or a major from another college at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The people in the survey who indicated that they are a journalism student was

28.8 percent, while the people who indicated that they are not was 71.2 percent (Figure 3).

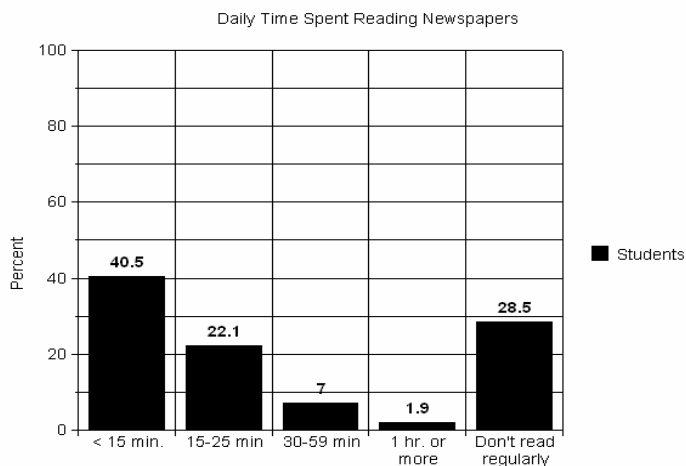


Figure 4

read the newspaper. Sixty nine percent of all students surveyed indicated that they either do not spend time reading the newspaper or spend less than 15 minutes per day reading the newspaper, while 31 percent said that they read the newspaper at least 15 minutes daily.

The first group of

questions dealt with consumption of newspapers (please refer to Appendix A for the full survey), both the paper version and the online version. Question 1 (Figure 4) dealt with how often students

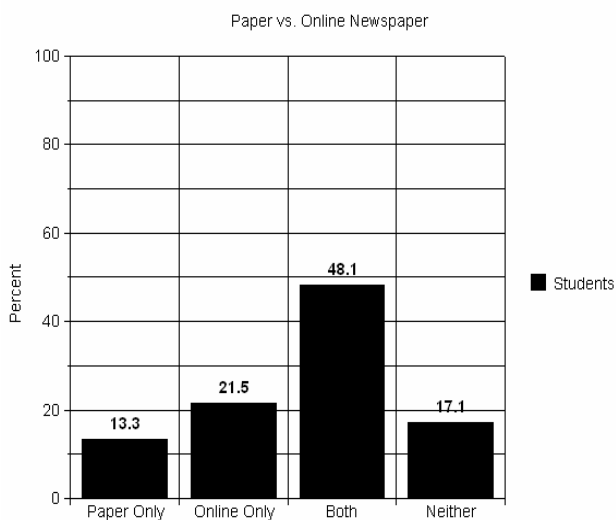


Figure 5

Question 2 focused on those who consume the news both online as well as the paper version. Seventeen point one percent of the students indicated they did not consume the newspaper, either online or the paper version (Figure 5). This

data shows when students are consuming the news with a newspaper, they are online almost 70 percent of the time instead of reading a paper version.

Question 3 asked about whether students consumed news from the newspaper

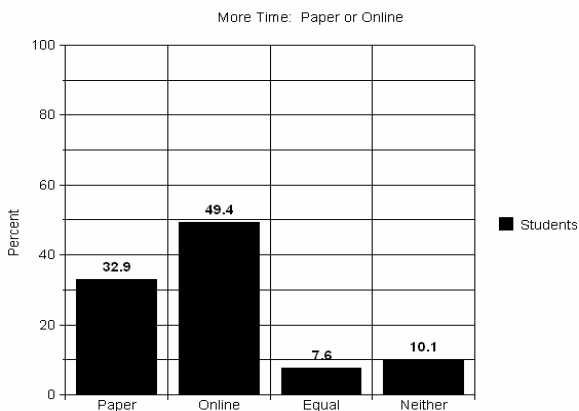


Figure 6

more online or more in the print version. This is similar to the previous question. Ten point one percent of the students surveyed indicated that they did not consume the newspaper (Figure 6), while 89.1 percent of the

students surveyed said they spent more time with the paper version, more time with the online version, or that they spent equal time between both.

Question four also asked about the number of newspaper websites a person

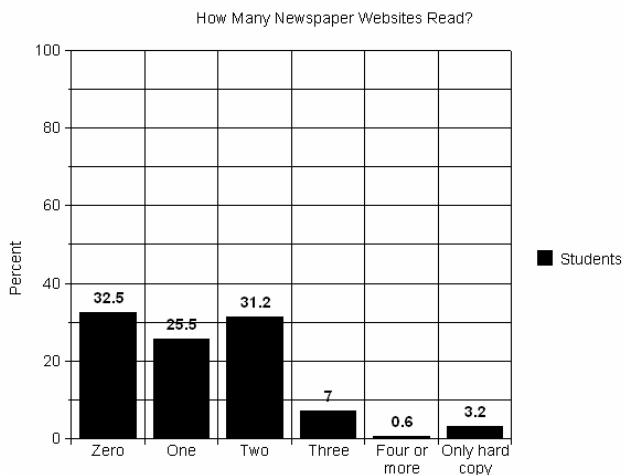


Figure 7

consumed. Sixty-four point three percent of the students surveyed spend time on at least one newspaper site per day, while 35.7 percent of the students who were surveyed said that they do not go to at least one newspaper site per day, or they only read the paper version

of the newspaper (Figure 7).

Question 5 asked students about their online habits when they do choose to

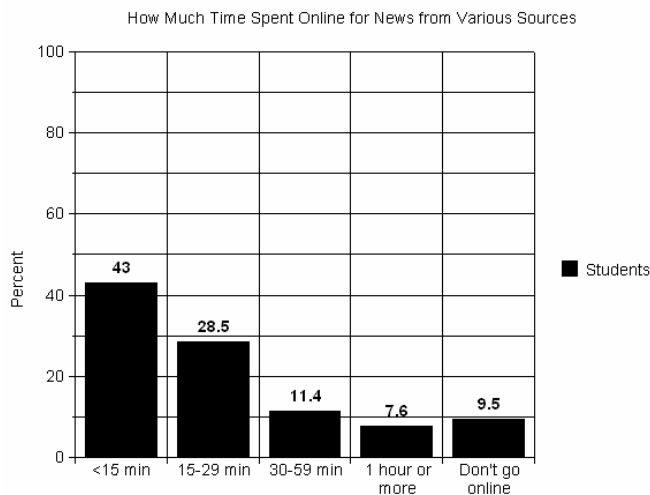


Figure 8

consume the news. Forty-seven point five percent of students who were surveyed said that they go online to consume news more than fifteen minutes per day, and 52.5 percent of students said they don't go online to

consume news (defined as 15 minutes or less, or not at all) (Figure 8).

Question 6 asked about radio news consumption. Twenty-seven point

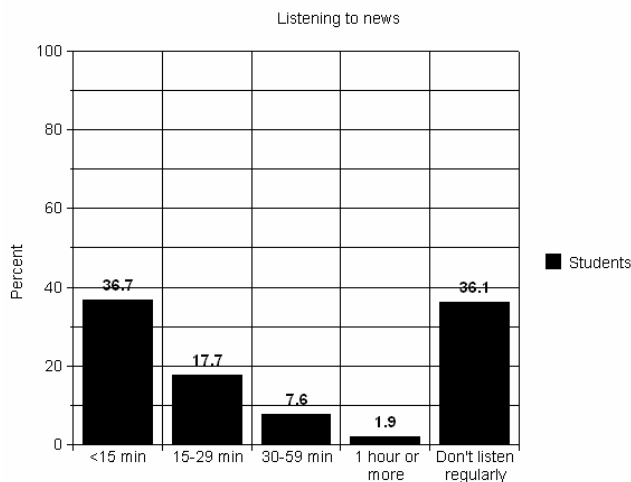


Figure 9

two percent of the students surveyed said they listen to news on the radio more than 15 minutes per day, while 72.8 percent of the students surveyed either listen less than 15 minutes daily or don't listen to the news on the radio

regularly (Figure 9).

Local news viewership among college students seems to be low as well.

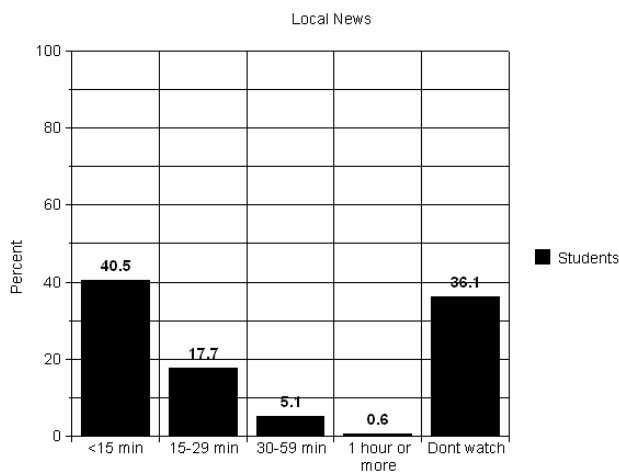


Figure 10

local news (defined as less than 15 minutes or not at all) (Figure 10).

Consumption of national nightly television news seems to have fewer viewers among this group than does local news. Question eight asked about the viewership of

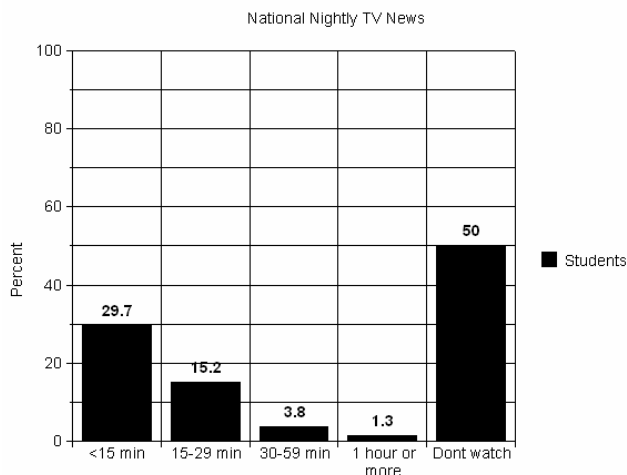


Figure 11

the students surveyed who said they do consume the national nightly news.

Question 7 asked the students about how much local news they watched. Just 23.4 percent of the students who were surveyed who said that they watch local news while 76.6 percent of the students surveyed said they do not watch the

nightly national news by the students. An even higher percentage than in question seven, 79.7 percent, says that they either do not consume the national nightly news or consume it less than 15 minutes per day (Figure 11). That leaves 20.3 percent of

Question 9 is about how much the students surveyed consume the news on cable

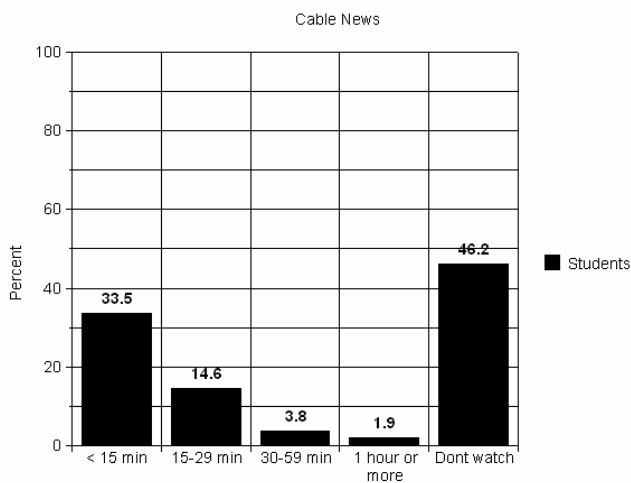


Figure 12

television. The question asked specifically about CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, including any programs like Larry King Live, Sean Hannity, etc. Twenty point three percent of the students surveyed said they watch cable news, and 79.7 percent of all

students answered this question that they either don't watch cable news or watch less than 15 minutes per day (Figure 12).

Chapter 6, Analysis of the Data

Hypothesis Number One

Hypothesis one: “Students who are in a 400-level class are more likely to consume news than students in a 100-level class. In this, crosstabs were run for questions one through nine comparing the two class levels for all students. Only the answers of questions one through nine will be used to determine whether hypothesis one is supported.

Please refer to the following two graphs for hypothesis number one.

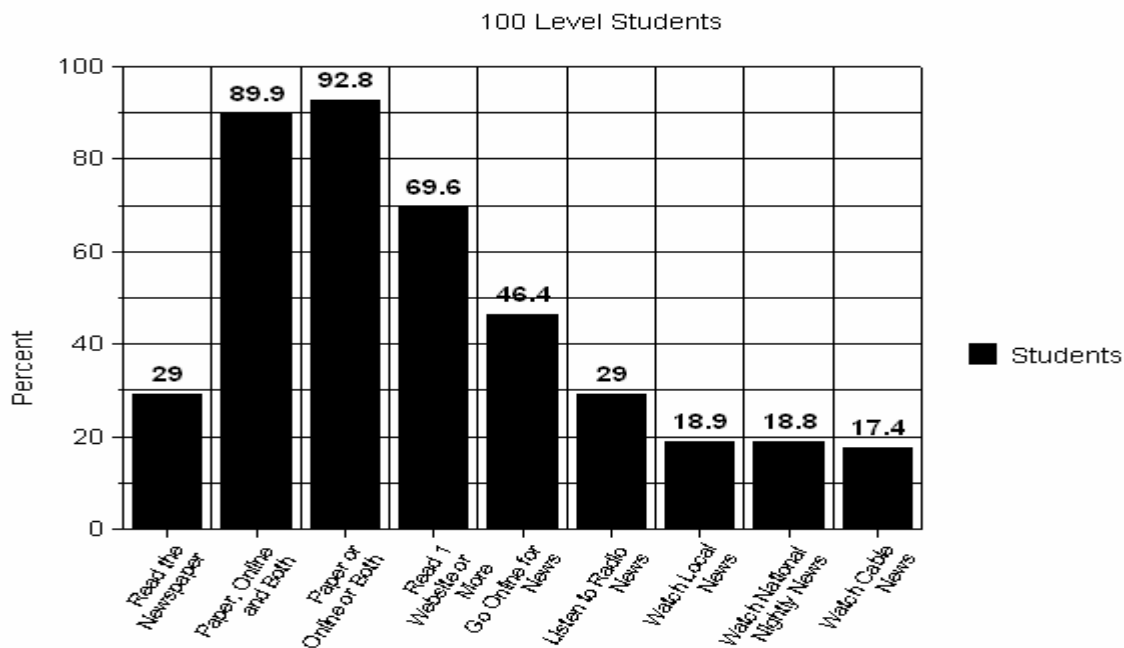


Figure 41

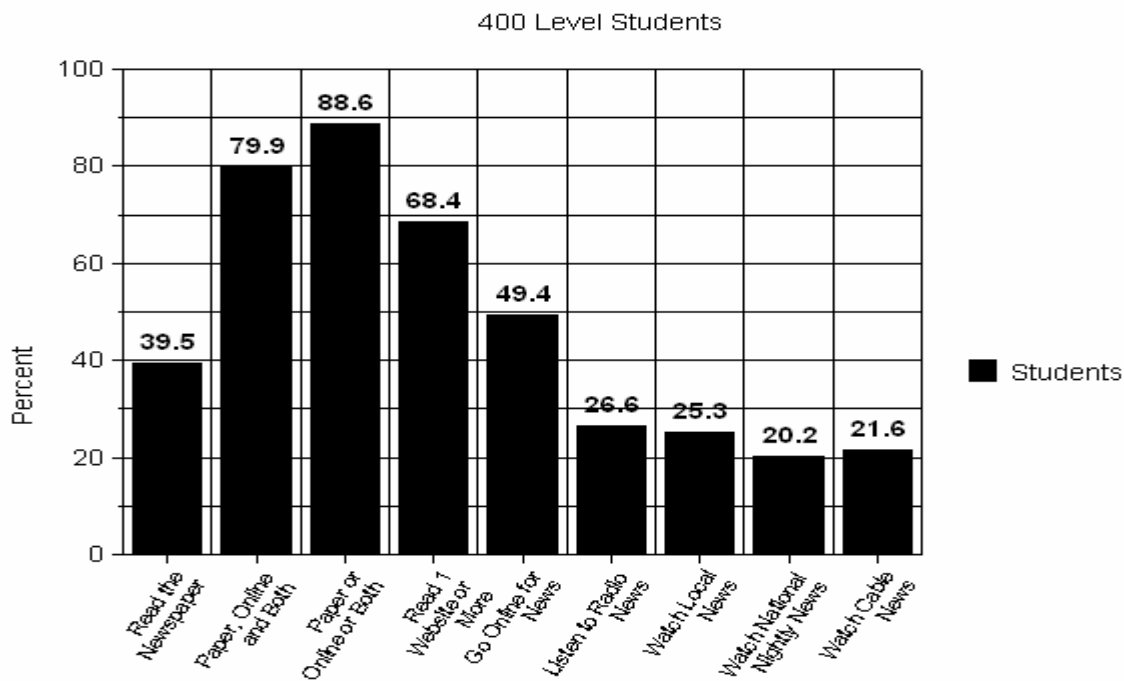


Figure 42

Question one asked, “On the average, how much time each day do you spend reading any newspaper(s)?” The response indicates that students taking 100 level classes read newspapers at a lower rate than do students taking 400 level classes. Twenty-nine percent of all students surveyed who are enrolled in a 100 level class read newspapers (as defined earlier in this paper) while 39.5 percent of all students surveyed who are enrolled in a 400 level class read newspapers.

Question two asked, “On the average day, do you read a PAPER version of your chosen newspaper(s) or do you read your chosen newspaper(s) ONLINE through the Internet?” Students surveyed from the 100-level classes consume the newspaper online as well as in print (89.9 percent) more than the 400-level students who were surveyed (79.7 percent).

Question three asked, “Would you say you usually spend MORE time online reading the paper version or MORE time reading the online version of your chosen newspaper(s)?” These percentages represent the number of student’s responses that said they spent time reading either the online version of their newspaper or the paper version, or spent equal time reading both. While this question asked about time, it was an opportunity for students to respond that they consumed news via the newspaper. Ninety-two point eight percent of the respondents in the 100-level classes said they read one or both, while 88.6 percent of the students surveyed in 400-level classes indicated that they consume either one or both version(s).

Question four asked, “Many national and local print newspapers also have websites on the Internet. On the average, how many newspapers do you regularly read

on their websites?” As in question number three, the 400-level students who were surveyed said that they do not go to newspaper websites as much as their 100-level brethren. Sixty-eight point four percent of the 400-level students surveyed indicated that they read newspaper Internet websites, as opposed to 69.6 percent of the 100-level students that took the survey.

Question five asked, “On the average, how much time do you spend each day getting news online from various sources?” Forty-six point four percent of the 100-level students surveyed go online to get news, and 49.4 percent of 400-level students who were surveyed said they go online to consume news.

Question six asked, “On the average, how much time each day do you spend listening to news on the radio?” The results of this question were such that one would wonder about the future of the radio news industry. However, that is another question for another research topic. In these results, 29 percent of 100-level students surveyed said that they consume radio news while 26.6 percent of 400-level students surveyed said that they do consume news on the radio.

Question seven asked, “On the average, how much time each day do you spend watching the local news about your viewing area on television?” Eighteen point nine percent of 100-level students surveyed said that they do watch local television news (as defined by more than 15 minutes a day), while 25.3 percent of 400-level students surveyed said they watch local television news.

Question eight asked, “On the average, how much time each day do you spend watching the national nightly news on CBS, ABC or NBC?” Eighteen point eight

percent of the students surveyed in the 100-level classes said they do watch the national nightly news, while 20.2 percent of students surveyed in the 400-level classes watch the national nightly news.

The final question used in this section is question nine, “On the average, how much time each day do you spend watching cable news (CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, including any programs like Larry King Live, Sean Hannity, etc.)?” Seventeen point four percent of the students surveyed in the 100-level classes said they watch cable news while the students in the 400-level classes who were surveyed said they watch cable news at a rate of 21.6 percent.

Hypothesis Number Two

Hypothesis number two “Students studying journalism are more likely to consume news than their peers in another discipline.” The results from questions one through nine will once again be use to determine the support for this hypothesis.

Please refer to the following two graphs for hypothesis number two.

Refer to the following two graphs for hypothesis number two.

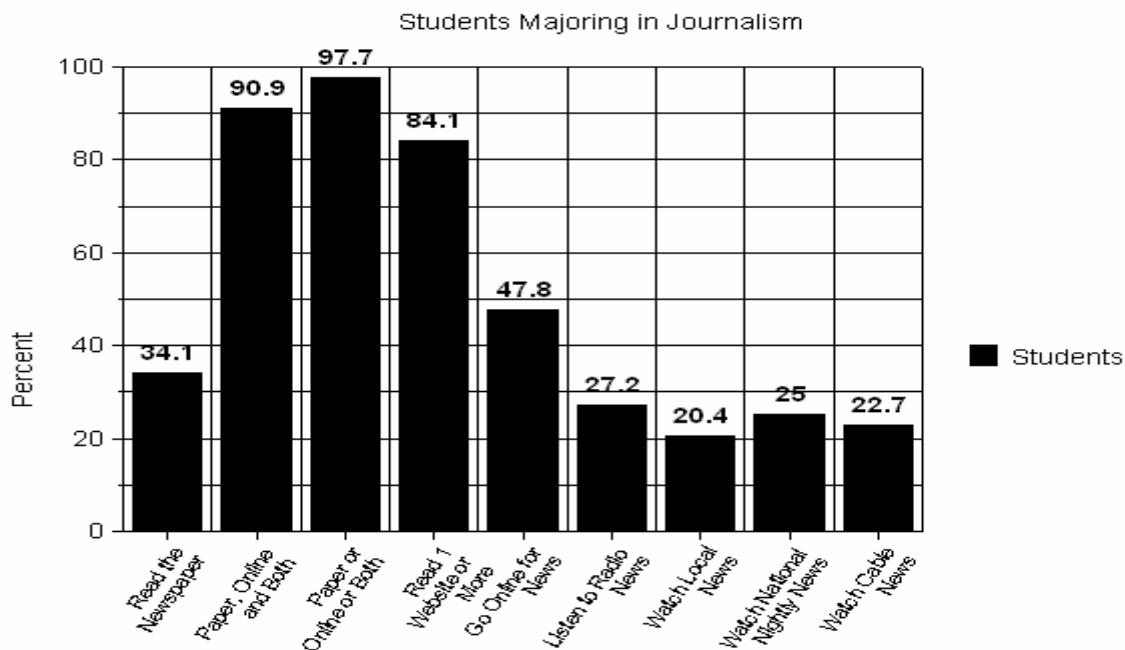


Figure 43

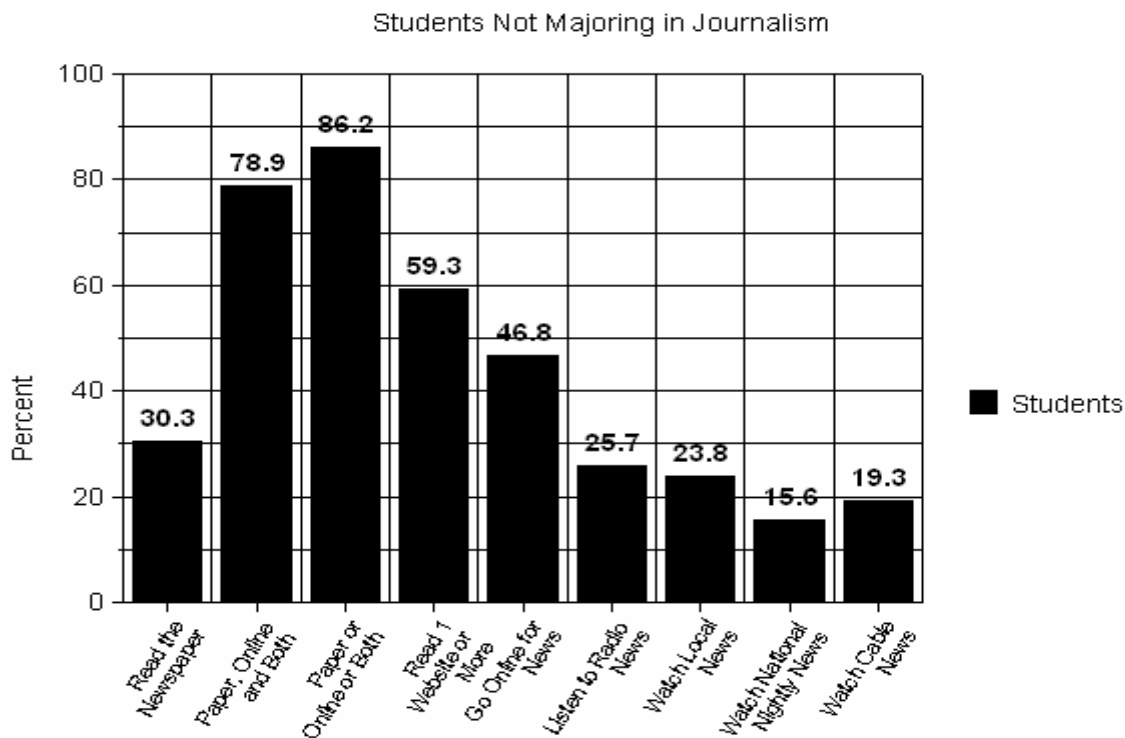


Figure 44

Question one asked, “On the average, how much time each day do you spend reading any newspapers?” Thirty-four point one percent of all the journalism majors surveyed said that they do spend time reading any newspapers, while 30.3 percent of all non-journalism students surveyed said that they read any newspapers.

Question two asked, “On the average day, do you read a PAPER version of your chosen newspaper(s), or do you read your chosen newspaper(s) ONLINE through the Internet?” Students who were surveyed, for one reason or another, answered this question differently than they did question one. However, this data can still be used to determine if the hypothesis in question is supported. Ninety point nine percent of the journalism students who were surveyed indicated that they consume either the paper version or the online version of the newspaper, while 78.9 percent of the non-journalism students surveyed said that they read either the paper version or the Internet version of the newspaper.

Question three asked, “Would you say you usually spend MORE time reading the paper version or MORE time reading the online version of your chosen newspaper(s)?” As in the previous section, this question asks about if a student spends more time with either the paper version or the online version of the newspaper; but it also gave the students another chance to answer that they do not consume the newspaper, either online or using the paper version. Ninety-seven point seven percent of the journalism students surveyed answered this question that they spend time reading either the paper version of the newspaper or the online version or both. Non-journalism students who were surveyed answered this question such that 86.2 percent read either

the paper version of the newspaper or the online version of the newspaper or both. This question may have confused the students surveyed, because the numbers vary a bit from earlier questions.

Question four asked, “Many national and local print newspapers also have websites on the Internet. On the average, how many newspapers do you regularly read on their websites?” Eighty-four point one percent of the journalism students who took the survey said that they read newspaper websites, while 59.3 percent of the non-journalism students who were surveyed said that they read newspaper websites.

This data shows a huge disparity between respondents, much larger than any other question in the survey

The results from question five, “On the average, how much time do you spend each day getting news online from various sources?” are much closer than the results from the previous question. Forty-seven point eight percent of the journalism students surveyed said that they go online for news from various sources, and 46.8 percent of non-journalism students surveyed said that they go online to consume news from various sources.

Question six asks, “On the average, how much time each day do you spend listening to news on the radio?” This statistic is again close. Twenty-seven point two percent of the journalism students surveyed said that they listen, and 25.7 percent of non-journalism students surveyed said they listen to radio news.

In the next question, for the first time in this section, non-journalism students show that they consume a part of news more than journalism students.

Question seven asks, “On the average, how much time each day do you spend watching the local news about your viewing area on television?” Twenty point four percent of the journalism students surveyed said that they watch local news, while 23.8 percent of all journalism students surveyed said that they do not consume the local news.

Question eight asks, “On the average how much time each day do you spend watching the national nightly news on CBS, ABC or NBC?” Twenty-five percent of the Journalism students surveyed said that they watch the national nightly news, while 15.6 percent of non-journalism students surveyed said that they watch the national nightly news.

Question nine asks, “On the average, how much time each day do you spend watching cable news (CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, including any programs like Larry King Live, Sean Hannity, etc.)?” Twenty-two point seven percent of the journalism students surveyed said that they watch cable news, while 19.3 percent of non-journalism students surveyed said that they watch the cable news.

Hypothesis Number Three

The third hypothesis is, “College students who consume news (defined as more than 15 minutes per day) are more likely to get their news from the Internet rather than traditional media (as defined in the operational definition of this thesis).” The results from questions two, three, four, five and 13 will be used to determine if this hypothesis is supported.

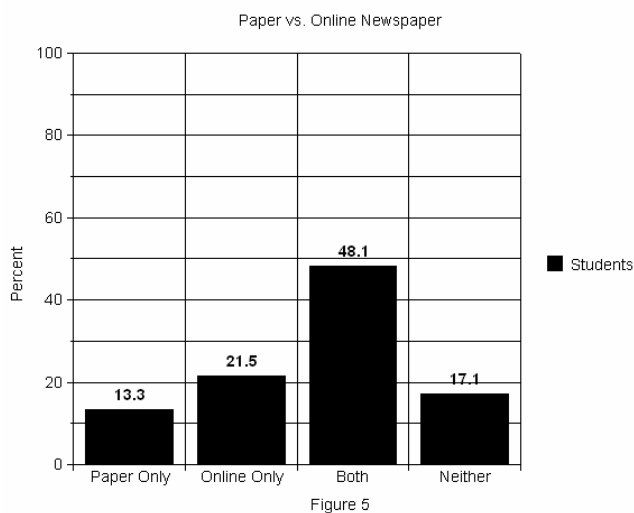
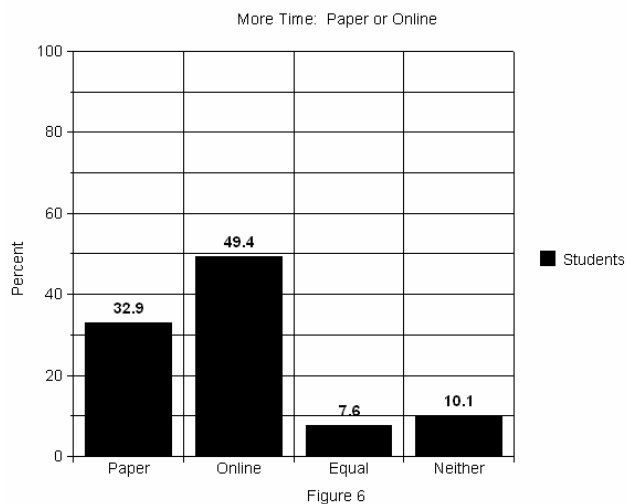


Figure five shows the results from question two, “On the average day, do you read a PAPER version of your chosen newspaper(s), or do you read your chosen newspaper(s) ONLINE through the Internet?” Twenty-one point five percent of the

students surveyed said that they go online to consume their chosen newspaper(s), while only 13.3 percent of the students surveyed say that they consume the paper version of their chosen newspaper(s). The fact that 48.1 percent of the students surveyed said they consume both does not affect whether this thesis is supported.

Figure six shows the results from question three, “Would you say you usually spend MORE time reading the paper version or MORE time reading the online version of your



chosen newspaper(s)?” Forty-nine point four percent of the students surveyed said that they consume more online news than the actual newspaper, while 32.9 percent of the students surveyed said that they consume the paper version of their chosen newspaper(s)

more often. The other parts of the question do not help to determine whether the hypothesis is or is not supported.

Figure seven represents question four, “Many national and local print newspapers also have Websites on the Internet. On the average, how many newspapers do you regularly read on their websites?” Thirty-five point seven percent of all students surveyed

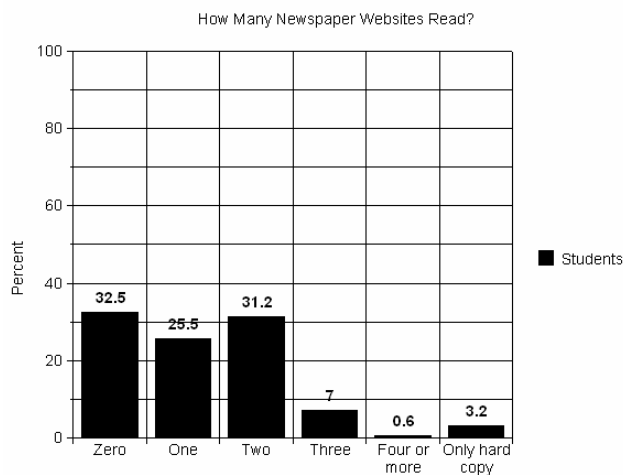


Figure 7

indicated that they do not consume newspaper websites, while 64.3 percent of all students surveyed said that they go to at least one newspaper website regularly.

Figure eight is a representation of question five, “On the average, how much

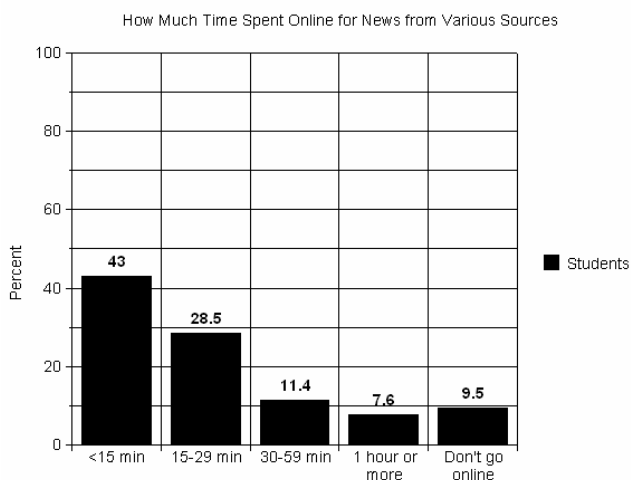


Figure 8

time do you spend each day getting news online from various sources?” Fifty-two point five percent of all students surveyed said that they do not go online to consume news from various sources, while only 47.5 percent of all students surveyed said they

do go online to consume news from various sources.

Chapter 7, Conclusion and Discussion

The data from this non-probability study cannot be used to generalize the news consumption habits of all college students, or even the students overall at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The data can only be generalized to the news consumption habits of the students present the day the survey was given in the classes who were surveyed.

The three hypotheses in this study were supported. Hypothesis number one was supported, albeit slightly. “Students who are in a 400-level class are more likely to consume news than students in a 100-level class.” Results from five of the nine questions in the survey support the hypothesis.

Hypothesis number two, “Students studying journalism are more likely to consume news than their peers in another discipline,” was overwhelmingly supported. In every question asked but one (question seven, “On the average, how much time each day do you spend watching the local news about your viewing area on television?”) the results showed that the journalism students spent much more time consuming news than that of their non-journalism peers.

Students majoring in journalism are the ones who will be disseminating the news to the masses in the future, while students who are not majoring in journalism won't. However, since many of the students who took this survey are studying the education field, it may cause some concern. It can be argued that these students will influence new generations of people in this country, and if they are not interested in the news, how will they get their students interested? It is also disconcerting that many of the students who took this survey were in a history class, and one might presume that there is a strong

correlation between what is happening in the present and what happened in the past. However, many 100 level classes in the history department are required for all majors and just because a student is in a history class does not mean that student is a history major.

Hypothesis number three, “College students who consume news are more likely to get their news from the Internet rather than traditional media (as defined in the operational definition of this thesis),” was supported as well. Data from three of the questions pointed to Internet news consumption, while data from only one of the questions pointed to non-Internet news consumption.

While this pilot study did show evidence of support for the initial hypotheses, it did raise a number of issues. One of those questions was why college students and particularly journalism students don’t show more interest in news.

The college students who took the survey also indicated that they do not listen to radio news. More than 70 percent of students surveyed said they don’t consume news on the radio, and less than ten percent said they listen to radio news more than 30 minutes a day. This may be due in part to the overall decline of radio news (Journalism.org, 2008), it may be due in part to the fact that most FM stations in Lincoln are dedicated to music and it may be due in part to the fact that many times, radio newscasts are many times only 5-10 minutes in length. This could be a fallacy of the study. The question pertaining to radio should have been worded differently, to take account of this fact.

Local news viewership for the group studied is low, and that should be a concern for local stations. More than 75 percent of those surveyed said they do not watch local news, and less than six percent actually watch the local news for more than 30 minutes per day. This may be another fallacy to this study. If a person watches the television news for more than 30 minutes, then they are watching more than one newscast when it comes to local and national nightly news. In future studies, this should be taken into account and a question should be asked according to this fact.

Overall, the news is not consumed by a large percentage of the students who took part in this survey. Newspapers (at least on the Web) have the strongest following with the students who took this survey, which came at a bit of a surprise, since people 18-29 say they get 70 percent of their news via the television (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2005). One reason for this might be that not all students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln are from Lincoln, and students may be reading newspapers from their home towns some of which may be more easily accessed via the Internet.

Another group that should be concerned with the results of this pilot study are Journalism professors. Journalism faculty tries to give students “real-world” experience. But if students want to take advantage of this experience it is valuable to have some knowledge of local, national and world events. In the professional news gathering world, it is imperative that reporters know the events that are transpiring about them. This study does not indicate that journalism students have a strong interest in any news.

As shown in the literature review, newspapers are struggling and some are even going out of business (Journalism.org, 2008). However, many newspapers have either developed complimentary websites or have moved their content to the Internet completely. One of the reasons for this is declining readership. This study seems to validate that many of the students who took this survey do not read the printed newspaper. But, many students are continuing to read the newspaper online. As it appears that college students are consuming their news on the web more than by any other means, newspapers should continue to put content on the Internet, and even expand that coverage.

This pilot study, while it cannot be generalized to the student population as a whole, indicates that college students do not consume news at a high rate. Perhaps this means that current college students do not have the same connection to news events as previous generations and this seems to be a continuing trend. Whatever the case, it is alarming to see that college students consume the news at a low rate.

Perhaps the most interesting discovery in this study was that the broadcast news industry is in trouble if all college students feel the way that the students feel who took the survey. Radio news consumption is low or nonexistent, as is consumption of the local news and national nightly news. Broadcast news is almost a century old, which is young in terms of media in general, and it seems to be that an even younger entity (the Internet) is overshadowing broadcasting as the media of choice.

It is a concern that broadcast news will continue to decline. The results of the study show that broadcast news is not an important part of the lives of these college

students. How will the broadcast news industry react? What will they do to attract listeners and viewers in this demographic?

Many students who were surveyed do not use their phone to get news or news updates. Many news website owners are beginning to try to tap the vast number of people who have a mobile device wherein they can get these updates. However, it was interesting to find out that the college students who were surveyed do not take advantage of this ability.

This study does not compare favorably in some instances to other studies, and compares favorably in other instances. For example, cable news audiences are seeing ratings that are somewhat encouraging (The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2008), but this study showed that college students, at least, don't watch cable news often (only 22.3 percent of the students who took this survey said that they watch the cable news).

Listening to radio news was something that also compared unfavorably. Journalism.org (2008) says that radio news ratings are relatively good, while in this study, students basically said that they don't listen to radio news. Only 27.2 percent of the students in the survey said that they listen to radio news more than 15 minutes per day.

Many of the references in this study said that newspaper circulation and readership was down (Feldman, 2007, Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, 2007, Journalism.org, 2008, MacMilan, 2009, Moore, 2005, Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2008, Walker, 2010) but many students in

this study responded that they still read the newspaper both by the paper version as well as online (see the results from questions one through four).

However, prior research also shows that people are going to the Internet more and more for news (Bird, 2009, Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, 2007, Moore, 2005, Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2008,). Hypothesis number three was supported, so the results from this study are similar to that of what the research showed—that people are going online more and more for news.

This study also backed up research that said older people consume news more than younger people (Feldman, 2007). Since the majority of students in this study were “typical” college aged students, and they showed that they were as disinterested in the news as the research showed.

Many students who were surveyed do not use their phone to get news or news updates. Many news website owners are beginning to try to tap the vast number of people who have a mobile device wherein they can get these updates. However, it was interesting to find out that the college students who were surveyed do not take advantage of this ability.

Many students who were surveyed do not use their phone to get news or news updates. Only 15.1 percent of the students said that they get news updates on their phone. Many news website owners are beginning to try to tap the vast number of people who have a mobile device wherein they can get these updates. However, it was

interesting to find out that the college students who were surveyed do not take advantage of this ability.

Again, it is the hope that the results from this survey inspire further research. It would be interesting to find out if the hypotheses were valid at multiple institutions rather than just one Midwestern university. It is likely that students in other regions of the country would have different news habits than students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

It may also be interesting to determine what kind of news college students are consuming. Do they consider sports to be news or entertainment to be news? Also, do college students consider programs such as “The Daily Report” news or infotainment? It is certain that further research needs to be performed on this subject.

Limitations to the Study

There were a few problems with this study. First, since colleges have a large turnover rate every year, the results from this type of survey are only good on a yearly basis. Second, the survey had some minor problems with the questions asked. The term “News Consumption” should have been better defined to the students who took the survey. Questions ten through 16 obviously confused the students, as the results from those questions were quite different than those from questions one through nine. Third, the questions in the survey may not have been direct enough when it came to the Internet. And more questions should have been asked about various websites from radio, local news, national news, and cable news. This would have made the results more concrete.

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Appendix A

This was read to the students before the survey was given.

My name is Ford Clark and I am a graduate student in journalism at the University of Nebraska Lincoln campus. I am writing a research thesis on how college students consume the news. I would like you to fill out a short survey on your news consumption habits. Even if you do not feel as though you regularly consume news, please take time to fill out the survey. Those who do not regularly consume the news are an important part of this project, as are the people who do regularly consume the news. This short survey should only take you five to ten minutes.

This survey is anonymous, no names will be asked for. The findings will be presented as a small picture of how college students consume the news. If you would be interested in receiving a summary of the findings later, I can arrange to send it to you; simply send me an email at clarkfamily1990@gmail.com with your name and mailing address.

There is no risk to you in taking this survey. It is an anonymous survey, so your name or personal information will not be saved or used in any way.

Your participation in the study will not have any impact on my grade for the thesis. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with me or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

I will distribute the survey randomly to every third person. Please fill out the following survey as honestly as possible. The survey will only take a few minutes.

It is required that you be 19 years of age to complete this survey. By taking this survey, you are acknowledging that you are at least 19 years old. If you are not 19 years of age, you are not eligible to take this survey. Please let me know if you are not 19 years old. If I hand you a survey, please pass it to the person on your left to complete. If you do not wish to take the survey, then please pass the survey to the person on your immediate left. If the survey gets to a person in your row who already has a survey, please pass the uncompleted survey back to me.

This anonymous survey will take you approximately ten minutes to complete. Please circle one answer per question that BEST describes your news consumption habits. When you have completed the survey, please pass the survey down your row so that I may collect it.

If you have any concerns about this project, you can contact the UNL Institutional Review Board at 402-472-6965, you can contact me at 402-314-7501, or Amy Struthers at 402-472-3528.

Thank you for your time!

This anonymous survey will take you approximately ten minutes to complete. Please circle one answer per question that BEST describes your news consumption habits.

It is required that you be 19 years of age to complete this survey. By taking this survey, you are acknowledging that you are at least 19 years old. If you are not 19 years of age, you are not eligible to take this survey. Please let me know if you are not 19 years old, and I will find another student to take this survey.

By completing this survey you are giving your consent for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and me to use this information in my Master's Thesis, and possibly used in future research as well.

1. On the average, how much time each day do you spend reading any newspaper(s)?
 - a. <15 min. _____
 - b. 15-29 min. _____
 - c. 30-59 min. _____
 - d. 1 hour or more _____
 - e. Don't read local paper regularly _____

2. On the average day, do you read a PAPER version your chosen newspaper(s), or do you read your chosen newspaper(s) ONLINE through the Internet?
 - a. Paper version only _____
 - b. Online version only _____
 - c. Both paper and online _____
 - d. Neither one _____

3. Would you say you usually spend MORE time reading the paper version or MORE time reading the online version of your chosen newspaper(s)?
 - a. More time paper version _____
 - b. More time online version _____
 - c. About equal _____
 - d. Don't read either one _____

4. Many national and local print newspapers also have Websites on the Internet. On the average, how many newspapers do you regularly read on their websites?
- a. Zero _____
 - b. One _____
 - c. Two _____
 - d. Three _____
 - e. Four or more _____
 - f. Only read hard copy of newspaper(s) _____
5. On the average, how much time do you spend each day getting news online from various sources?
- a. <15 minutes _____
 - b. 15-29 minutes _____
 - c. 30-59 minutes _____
 - d. One hour or more _____
 - e. Don't usually go online for news. _____
6. On the average, how much time each day do you spend listening to news on the radio?
- a. <15 min. _____
 - b. 15-29 _____
 - c. 30-59 _____
 - d. 1 hour or more _____
 - e. Don't listen to radio news regularly _____

7. On the average, how much time each day do you spend watching the local news about your viewing area on television?
- a. <15 min. _____
 - b. 15-29 min. _____
 - c. 30-59 min. _____
 - d. 1 hour or more _____
 - e. Don't watch local television news regularly _____
8. On the average, how much time each day do you spend watching the national nightly news on CBS, ABC or NBC?
- a. <15 min. _____
 - b. 15-29 min. _____
 - c. 30-59 min. _____
 - d. 1 hour or more _____
 - e. Don't watch national nightly news regularly _____
9. On the average, how much time each day do you spend watching cable news (CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, including any programs like Larry King Live, Sean Hannity, etc.)?
- a. < 15 min. _____
 - b. 15-29 min. _____
 - c. 30-59 min. _____
 - d. 1 hour or more _____
 - e. Don't watch cable news regularly _____
10. Why do you watch the national broadcast news on television?
- a. I don't watch the news on television
 - b. It keeps me informed on events
 - c. There's nothing else to watch
 - d. I just like to watch the news

11. Why do you read the paper (paper version)?
 - a. I don't read the paper
 - b. It keeps me informed on events
 - c. There's nothing else to do
 - d. I just like to read the paper
12. Why do you watch cable news?
 - a. I don't watch the news on television
 - b. It keeps me informed on events
 - c. There's nothing else to watch
 - d. I just like to watch the news
13. Why do you go online to look for news?
 - a. I don't go online for news
 - b. It keeps me informed on events
 - c. There's nothing else to look at on the Internet at that time
 - d. I just like to see the news on the Internet
14. Why do you listen to the news on the radio?
 - a. I don't listen to the news on the radio
 - b. It keeps me informed on events
 - c. There's nothing else to listen to
 - d. I just like to listen to the news
15. Why do you watch the local news on television?
 - a. I don't watch the news on television
 - b. It keeps me informed on events
 - c. There's nothing else to watch
 - d. I just like to watch the news

16. When the news comes on TV or the radio, what do you do?
- a. Turn to another station/channel
 - b. Zone out, I don't listen, but I stay on the same station/channel
 - c. Listen intently
 - d. Halfheartedly listen
17. I usually find out what is happening in the world by:
- a. Word of mouth
 - b. Radio/TV/newspaper/web
 - c. I get updates on my phone
 - d. I sometimes hear random things around campus
 - e. I don't care what is happening
18. Do you get news updates on your phone? Yes No
19. Gender: 1. Female _____ 2. Male _____
20. Are you journalism major? Yes No
21. Please circle the level of class you're taking this survey in:
- a. 100
 - b. 200
 - c. 300
 - d. 400 or higher