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THE NEW NEWS: HOW THE DECLINE OF PUBLIC TRUST IN TRADITIONAL
NEWS MEDIA AFFECTS THE RISE OF THE INTERNET AS A MAINSTREAM
SOURCE FOR NEWS

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ABSTRACT

The news media has played an integral role in our democratic republic since its conception, often considered a “watchdog” on various institutions within our society. Yet while the American public once had high levels of trust in traditional forms of news media, like television broadcasts and newspapers, the past several decades have witnessed a steady decline of public trust in the press. As discontent with traditional news media grew, the Internet emerged as a new source of news and has recently witnessed a sharp rise in use for this purpose. Past research discusses two theories – the time displacement theory and the functional displacement theory – that suggest a relationship may exist between these two significant changes in the news media landscape. If novel forms of news media fulfill users’ needs that older media cannot, news consumers may supplement or even start to replace traditional sources with new ones. Using survey data measuring respondents’ perceptions of trustworthiness/accuracy and bias, this research tested whether or not high levels of distrust in traditional news organizations will lead to higher levels of usage of the Internet as a news source. Overall, the data consistently show a correlation between levels of trust and media usage. Even when controlling for gender and age, negative perceptions of news organizations’ trustworthiness/accuracy and bias tended to result in higher levels of respondents who solely relied on the Internet for their news. These results have interesting implications for the future of news media, as the public’s demand for credibility and trustworthiness has noticeable impacts on habits of news consumption.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1787, President Thomas Jefferson declared he would rather live in a nation without a government than in a nation without newspapers. Jefferson believed it was the free press's duty to be a "watchdog" on the government and hold individuals in power accountable for their actions (Gordon 2000). Without a free press, Jefferson warned, liberty would be lost. The news media has always played an integral role in American society: colonial newspapers spread news of revolution and generated public support of the movement towards independence. Muckraking journalists during the Progressive Era spoke out against the upper echelon of society to bring truth and power to the middle class with their investigative reporting. News outlets have uncovered scandals on Capitol Hill from Watergate to Monica Lewinsky, and most recently have exposed Former CIA Director Petraeus's affair with biographer Paula Broadwell.

Walter Cronkite, known as the "most trusted man in America," served as the CBS Evening News anchorman from 1961-1982. As one of the most respected figures in the country, Cronkite was in good company among other prominent journalists, news anchors, and reporters. Half a century ago, the news media were one of America's most trusted institutions, highly regarded as a credible source of information and transparency. The Roper Organization surveyed the general public about network news sources in

1964: 71% of the public thought the news institutions were fair; only 12% found them to be unfair (Ladd 2012).

Today, however, people are distrusting of many American institutions, with trust in the media having experienced the most severe declines. According to the Aspen Institute, the “stability, credibility, and integrity represented by mainstream newspapers, news magazines, broadcast news organizations, and early cable news operations has given way to rising public skepticism about the media” (Ziomek 2005, p. xi). The National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago’s General Social Survey (GSS) has measured public levels of confidence in the press and other national institutions annually since 1973. In 1985, 13-16% of the population had little trust in various press outlets, yet by 2004 these percentages had increased to approximately 40% (Ladd 2012). By 2008, an astonishing 45% of the American population expressed “hardly any” confidence in the press. Whereas only one in seven Americans gave major news organizations low marks for their level of credibility in 1985, almost half of all Americans now express severe mistrust in the institution once praised for exposing wrongdoing in other national institutions (Ladd 2012). In fact, 2011 was the first time an equal percentage of the public (42%) felt news organizations *hurt* democracy as those who felt news organizations helped protect it (Pew 2011).

As discontent with traditional journalism grew, the Internet arrived on the scene as a new source of news. The Internet, called “a giant public library” provides access to a huge expanse of information (Nie & Erbing 2000, p. 5). Its readily available, widely varied resources cause it to be highly competitive with the traditional news media: if newspapers and television broadcasts do not meet their audiences’ standards of

credibility or trustworthiness, the people can find what they want from this newfangled news outlet instead. Changing and improving technologies have led to an expansion of news media from which people can pick and choose for themselves how they want to consume their news. According to the Pew Research Center, this added level of choice has led to audience fragmentation between sources, and to declining audiences for many traditional news sources (2005). The percentage of the public that watches television news, reads the newspaper, or listens to news on the radio have all decreased since the 1980s, while the Internet is one of the only sources of news experiencing user growth (Pew 2011).

For now, the public still relies mainly on traditional news media rather than primarily on online sources. Yet the World Wide Web is becoming more of a presence as it reaches larger swatches of the public. The amount of news consumers flocking to it continues to increase rapidly. Whether the Internet will replace traditional media and drive them to extinction instead of simply serving as a supplement is the question of note for many media scholars. As trends show people are increasingly moving away from traditional media towards online sources, I am curious about their motivations. Tsftati and Cappella (2003) found that skepticism of mainstream media was related to lower levels of mainstream news viewing and higher levels of non-mainstream news consumption. For this thesis, I was eager to examine the truth of this assertion.

The guiding question behind my research was: **Is the American public's loss of trust in the traditional news media the driving force behind its growing usage of the Internet as a news source?** I sought answers through an extensive literature review as well as my own data analysis utilizing data sets from the Pew Research Center for People

and the Press. My findings inspire further questions and research, and I believe they allude to an exciting news media future for our society in its current digital age.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between the growing dependence on online news sources and the decline in trust in traditional media cannot merely be coincidental. Previous research has documented the decline of public trust in traditional media and the concurrent increase in usage of the Internet as a new source. In the following review of the existing literature, I examine these two major trends. Two theories, the time displacement theory and the functional displacement theory, provide supportive evidence of a correlative relationship between the two trends in news consumption. After reviewing the major trends, I will investigate to what extent the growing distrust of traditional media is related to the increased use of the Internet for news.

In 1974, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart suggested free press was an imperative “additional check on the three official branches” of Government, making it “the Fourth Estate” (Ladd 2012, p. 4). The press was praised as a purposeful, transparent watchdog that genuinely served the American public by keeping an eye on potentially corrupt politicians and societal leaders. Simply the fact the news media provided certain information to the public made it unquestionably trustworthy and significant. Nicholas Lemann, dean of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, discusses his memories of news media during his childhood in the 1960s in a 2005 article for *The New*

Yorker. Lemann would observe his grandfather reading *The New York Times*: “After finishing one article, he’d begin the next – who was he to decide what, of the material the *Times*’ editors had chosen to publish, he had the right to skip?” (Ladd 2012, p. 3).

News organizations have the ability to shape public opinion, and oftentimes media elites use this opportunity to their advantage, determining the content of news and the direction in which they seek to push public opinion (Bovitz et al. 2002). The growing concentration of traditional media ownership in a handful of large corporations that seek influence for themselves “has made mockery of the journalist as a courageous truth teller standing outside the halls of power” (Rosen 2012). The percentage of American adults who now believe news organizations are influenced by powerful people and organizations has reached 80% (Pew 2011). Although the free press has long been considered a tenet that upholds the values of a democratic society, the widely shared beliefs that news stories are usually inaccurate and unabashedly biased now shatter these idealistic views. While the public once celebrated its free press as a “watchdog,” it now questions media’s success in this role. Over Twitter, investigative journalist Phil Williams commented, the “press was more popular when viewed as standing up to power. Then it became part of power structure” (Rosen 2012). Unlike the days when people highly regarded newsmen like Cronkite for their trustworthiness, the news media now bear the brunt of American distrust: criticisms of bias, inaccuracy, immorality, unprofessionalism, and sensationalism abound.

Since 1985, negative opinions of the press have steadily increased and trust and confidence in news media has declined. Today, negative attitudes are at record highs (Pew 2011). Between 1985 and 2003, public opinion on factual reporting flipped: in

1985, a 55% majority believed news organizations were successful in getting the facts straight; yet by 2003, 56% viewed most reporting as inaccurate (Pew 2005). The trend has continued: by 2011, only 25% said news organizations get the facts straight, and two thirds of respondents said news stories are often inaccurate (Pew 2011). In 2003, *The New York Times* journalist Jayson Blair was caught using inauthentic information in his stories. The published fabrications would have incited and shocked readers from the 1970s and 1980s, yet current news consumers barely batted an eye. When the reporting scandal broke, 72% of the American public already felt news organizations commonly tried to cover up their mistakes rather than come clean (Pew 2011). According to Gordon, the loss of public trust is a leading cause of declining news audiences” (2000).

Trust, Credibility, and Bias

Today, even individuals working *within* the news media believe in increasing numbers that “lack of credibility is the single issue most often cited as the most important problem facing journalism today” and that “the press drives controversies rather than just reports the news” (Gordon 2000). Howard Fineman says due to the decreasing belief in the existence of a neutral, non-partisan mainstream press, “it’s hard to know now who, if anyone, in the ‘media’ has any credibility” (Ladd 2012, p. 4). Today, 63% of news consumers say news organizations are also politically biased in their reporting and over three-quarters of the population perceive a lack of fairness in the news (Pew 2011). Because trust is “the lifeblood of the media’s relationship with the people,” the erosion of credibility ratings for mainstream news organizations over the past few decades could have disastrous impacts on traditional news media and how the public views and uses

them (Pew 2005). For example, according to Johnson and Kaye (1998b), individuals with higher levels of reliance on the Internet tended to have higher levels of distrust in traditional forms of news media. Perceptions of trust, credibility, and bias of news organizations can have major effects on which forms of media the public chooses to use.

Trust

Trust, as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is a firm belief in the reliability or truth or strength of a person or thing and reliance on the truth of a statement (Dutton & Shepherd 2006). Trustworthiness is the degree to which an audience perceives the communicator's assertions to be valid (Jo 2005). The General Social Survey annually assesses Americans' moods and values, and has found an overall decline in levels of trust in American institutions. From the 1970s until today, trust in education dropped from 36% to 28%, trust in banks fell from 35% to 31%, trust in corporations fell from 26% to 17% and trust in religion dropped from 35% to 25% (Ladd 2012). Trust in the government is lower today than during the Watergate Era, and individuals tend to blame the media for this loss of trust (Smith & Paxton 2008). The press has experienced a more substantial decline in trust than other institutions; in the 1970s only 15% had little trust in the press, yet now only 11% currently have high levels of trust in news media (Ladd 2012). As levels of trust in the press decline, so too do people's confidence in news accuracy: Thorson et al. (2010) found that levels of trust in media are significantly correlated with perceptions of news credibility.

Studies of the Internet and its role as a news source suggest the medium's credibility is an integral factor in determining its impact (Flanagin & Metzger 2000; Johnson & Kaye 1998). That is, the Internet will have a major impact on news consumers

if it is deemed worthy of their trust. This assumption is based on Hon and Grunig's six dimension measurement scale to assess an organization's relationships with their constituents: it measures control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, commitment, exchange relationship and communal relationship (1999). The higher the levels of these dimensions, the higher the level of trust will be, and consequently the higher level of usage (Flanagin & Metzger 2000). So, if individuals find that certain forms of news media fall short in regards to trustworthiness, they will reduce their time spent with those subpar forms of media in exchange for a medium that is more trustworthy.

Credibility

Media credibility is defined as perceptions of a news channel's believability, as distinct from individual sources, media organizations, or the actual content of the news itself (Bucy 2003, p. 248). Other dimensions used to measure the concept of credibility include accuracy, bias, fairness, and completeness of information. Metzger et al. list several dimensions that help determine the level of news media credibility, including trustworthiness and expertise, fairness, bias, incompleteness, separation of opinion and fact, and accuracy (2003). Because of all the components of credibility, a multiple dimension approach is the norm in research studies and methods (Bucy 2003). Because audiences are more likely to read, watch, and listen to news provided by sources they trust and find credible, news institutions should take interest in their audience's opinions or risk rejection due to perceptions of lack of credibility (Thorson et al. 2010).

Rimmer and Weaver find that while frequency of use is not typically correlated with television or newspaper credibility perceptions, media choice measures are generally linked to higher credibility ratings (1987). Positive correlations between media credibility

and media use have been found from a variety of research on media credibility from the 1960s through the 1980s. In other words, people will use media they find credible. Current data that show news consumers trust their news medium of choice more than they trust the news media at large are aligned with this past research. While 66% says news organizations in general are often inaccurate, 62% claim the news organizations *they* use tend to get the facts straight (Pew 2011). Internet users have more certainty and confidence in the information they access online than do nonusers, and nonusers are generally more distrustful of the Internet overall (Dutton 2006). Wanta and Hu (1994) found that while there were no significant correlations between exposure to a certain medium and the perception of its credibility, there is a relationship between reliance (how dependent respondents were on a certain medium) and perceived credibility. Kiouisis (2001) found similar results, but only weak correlations between media use and credibility perceptions.

Various studies measuring and evaluating perceived credibility of traditional versus online information sources has not produced consistent results (Pew 1999, Johnson & Kaye 1998a, Flanagin & Metzger 2001). Some claim online sources are more credible than traditional media, and others claim just the opposite: Flanagin and Metzger (2000) contend that newspapers are perceived as most credible, yet Johnson and Kaye (1998a) argue that, at least among their sample of politically interested online users, online news literature is viewed as more credible than traditional media. Should future research find more definitive distinctions in credibility ratings, audiences will likely flock to whichever form of media is most credible overall.

Bias

Media bias has several unique effects on the public's demand for and subsequent interaction with news. First, rational individuals are skeptical of potentially biased news and as a result rely on it less when making decisions concerning their own lives. Second, media bias makes certain news stories seem more or less likely than others, reducing perceived credibility (Ladd 2012). Credibility is critical; if the public does not trust information posted in a certain medium, they are less likely to pay attention to that medium (Gaziano 1988). According to Jo (2005), when members of the public receive information they later discover is false, inaccurate, or skewed, they are likely to distrust the rest of the organization's information. Also, news consumers feel news media bias affects the content of the stories and what stories actually get airtime (Ladd 2012).

Ladd (2012) says a discrepancy exists between supply and demand in the mainstream news media institution. Members of the public express certain needs for their news media and the way the information is delivered: they want straightforward, unbiased, accurate news reports, as well as evidence of such balance and fairness (Ladd 2012). Most Americans prefer to have news without a political lean – this feeling is especially widespread among Internet users: 74% of online news consumers say they prefer non-partisan sources (Pew 2011). News organizations receive negative feedback from both sides of the aisle. *The New York Times* executive editor Bill Keller says, “Liberals perceive us, or claim to perceive us, as lapdogs of the Bush Administration, instigators of the war in Iraq, sellouts to big business and panderers to red-state prejudices” (Ladd 2012). The right gives the press grief as well: the general perception of American press is that it has a consistent liberal lean, and it is thus referred to as “the

liberal press” (Ladd 2012). A steadily increasing percentage of news consumers believe traditional news is sensationalized and biased (either to the right or left), as they feel news organizations are more concerned with ratings and making money than they are with delivering the full truth (Gordon 2000).

The gift of choice is one that could combat rampant media bias: due to decreasing trust in mainstream media and the growth in use of social media and other online sources for news, Ladd suggests this increase in competition creates a greater incentive for unbiased reporting (2012). The wider range of viewpoints online allows for more exposure and less biased summations of current events, unlike traditional media, which generally has a partisan skew or filters information particular corporations deem non-newsworthy (OECD 2010). Thus, with new news media emerging, people with little trust in mainstream media outlets can turn elsewhere. A small but growing minority is “taking solace in the multiplicity of news available on the Internet,” and Internet users report an increased sense of control over their news and a keener awareness of its credibility and accuracy (Gordon 2000, p. 301). According to Jo (2005), the level of interactivity the Web makes possible enhances the users’ control and increases satisfaction. Interactivity also encourages trust; thus, the Internet can have significant effects on relationship building between news organizations and news consumers in ways traditional media cannot (Jo 2005).

How various media stack up against one another in perceptions of trust, credibility, and bias is largely debated. Kiouisis’s research (2001) explored perceptions of news source credibility, and found people perceive Internet news as more credible than television news but less credible than print news. Johnson and Kaye (1998a) found online

media are viewed as slightly more credible than traditional media are, but the gap between the two forms was small. Over time, the data is changing: only two years before Johnson and Kaye's data, the Pew Research Center found traditional media more credible than the Internet (1996). As the use of the Internet continues to expand, perceptions of credibility are likely to continue to change as well (Johnson & Kaye 1998a).

Expanding Internet Usage

The number of adults using the Internet to find news is consistently increasing. One national study by the Pew Research Center reported that weekly use of online news tripled from 11 million to 36 million people in the United States between 1996 and 1998, which the center called "astonishing" (Greer 2003). Overall Internet usage in the United States – after increasing at astonishing rates over the past two decades – has recently stabilized at 76% as of February 2006. That means that at least 225 million Internet users – and counting – are relying on online resources for a wide range of purposes, and at rising levels of frequency as well (Pavlik 2008). While demographic factors like socioeconomic class, level of education, and gender once largely determined Internet access, Internet users are becoming increasingly mainstream. In just twelve months, the number of US households with a broadband Internet connection has increased by 28% - from 74.3 million in February 2005 to over 95.5 million in February 2006 (Pavlik 2008). The long-term impacts of the Internet upon various aspects of our society have yet to fully be revealed, but as individuals spend more time with the Internet and use it for a broader range of activities, the effects will become hard to ignore.

In the early 1990s, when personal computer use was slowly becoming more widespread in American society, women had less experience with computers than men. Women saw men as “better able to comprehend the Internet” (Newton 2001). They had higher levels of computer anxiety; these “technophobic factors” led to the development of a gender gap in Internet use. (Wasserman & Richmond-Abbott 2005). Bucy found male respondents reported significantly more Internet use than female respondents: among those on the Internet at least four days per week, men outnumbered women by a two to one margin (2000). Yet increasingly, women, non-degree holders, and lower income earners are joining the online community (Bucy 2000). The gap has since narrowed due to the accelerated growth of the Internet and the spread of access to the Internet since the 1990s; by 2000, the gender gap in Internet access has practically disappeared from statistically significant levels (Wasserman & Richmond-Abbott 2005). Further, age is a major determinant of Internet use. The Internet has already surpassed television as the main source of news for the under-30 age cohort, making today’s youth the first generation to prefer a computer to television (Pavlik 2008).

The Pew Research Center (2008) divided Internet news consumers into categories based on their differing habits of online use. *Integrators*, 23% of the news consuming population, get news from both traditional sources and from the Internet. They still mainly rely on traditional news media, but they use online sources as a supplement. *Net-Newsters*, 13% of the public, are savvier with and more reliant on the Internet. They are younger, more educated, and more affluent than the overall population (Bucy 2000). Gender differences exist within the net-newsters, as 58% of this group is male. Fewer than half still watch television news, and twice as many read political blogs and online

newspapers than printed ones. Internet news users “represent model citizens,” as they tend to be more politically interested and active, have higher levels of efficacy, and are more knowledgeable than the average citizen about news and politics (Johnson & Kaye 2004, p. 24). Finally, *traditionalists* still make up a sizable plurality of the population – 46% – and heavily rely on television news as opposed to online sources. Sixty percent of the traditionalists do not have more than a high school education, suggesting educational attainment still plays a key role in determining Internet usage. Data show 61% of college graduates go online for news while only 19% of those without a college degree utilize the Internet to the same degree (Pew 2008). It will be interesting to see how the continued expansion of the Internet among the American population as well as the aging of the overall population will impact these usage habits.

New vs. Old: The Impact of the Internet on Traditional News

The expansion of Internet is central to the shift in the news environment, as it has expanded the definition of what constitutes a news source. For generations, it was traditional media that shaped the issues and news the public received and therefore found salient (Sayre et al. 2010). The relative attention that mainstream media provides to particular news stories over others has generally guided public knowledge and public opinion (McCombs & Shaw 1993; Tan & Weaver 2007; Scheufele & Tewksbury 2007). McCombs and Shaw said, “Readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position” (1993, p. 176). But traditional media now share the stage with innovative platforms for conveying issue coverage and social controversy perspectives

(Sayre et al. 2010). New media has the opportunity to alter the dominance of traditional media in setting the political agenda. The Internet welcomes “citizen journalists,” and YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media are finding their place in the news circuit as well (Sayre et al. 2010). The power of traditional news media to dictate the flow of information will significantly decrease as more of their audiences turn to the Internet as a supplemental – or replacement – news source.

The rapid spread of online news outlets raises questions about the future of traditional newspapers and television news programs. Fidler (1997) said that in order for old media to exist alongside new media, old media must change. The emergence of the Internet has widened the scope of news, thus forcing traditional news media outlets to reorient and adapt in hopes of keeping up. Wilzig and Avigdor (2004) created a six-stage life cycle for older media to analyze the struggle to survive following the emergence of the Internet: birth, penetration, growth, maturity, and self-defense, followed by adaptation, convergence, or obsolescence. According to Wilzig and Avigdor, the survival chances of older forms of mass media will depend on whether they can evolve and converge with the Internet; if not, they will become obsolete (2004).

As audiences of traditional news organizations express declining trust in those institutions, their belief that online resources *include* information traditional news media *excludes* adds to the new media’s growing popularity. The allure of transparency is contagious. Freedom from the traditional mediums’ gatekeepers attracts news organizations and audiences alike to the Internet (Flanagin & Metzger 2000). As investigative reporter and creator of the political website *USA Watchdog* Greg Hunter said, “I guess I should be happy that mainstream media is in the tank, because Internet

sites like this one and many others are gaining popularity for exposing ‘the hard truth’” (Hunter 2010). Additionally, with the advent of Google, says technology expert Daniel Dubno, “everyone can research information and everyone can broadcast information” (Pavlik 2008, p. 74). The media elite does not solely get to deem what current events are newsworthy or not. Instead, the Internet makes *all* information readily accessible and thus gives the choice to the user.

While traditional journalists determine newsworthiness based a certain set of criteria – novelty, timeliness, proximity, and salience – today’s news audiences may have different criteria that traditional news outlets do not acknowledge (Sundar 1999). Therefore, some online news outlets may act in direct response to mainstream news coverage to provide a ‘corrective’ to perceived imbalances (Sayre et al. 2010). For example, Sayre et al. (2010) performed a study examining the impact of social media and online news coverage on mainstream media’s agenda setting in the context of California’s Proposition 8. “Prop 8” called for an amendment to the state constitution eliminating the right of same-sex couples to marry. In 2008, when the traditional news media chose not to cover Prop 8 protests, the Internet provided minority viewpoints an outlet (Sayre et al. 2010). YouTube and other online sites that welcome the sharing of all news items regardless of what the traditional media covers can be a conduit for information found lacking in mainstream news (Sayre et al. 2010). A social media platform like YouTube can bring attention to an issue that mainstream media are not and consequently share agenda-setting power with the once-hegemonic traditional media (Sayre et al. 2010).

Whether the exponentially rising number of Internet news outlets is a result or a catalyst of popular demand, it is clear that a large and ever-expanding audience for online news exists (Althaus & Tewksbury 2010). The Internet is a vehicle for reinvigorating a process in which the public once passively received information: production and dissemination of news online is much more interactive and multi-directional. Social theorist Max Weber once hypothesized that the media controlled the masses, and this control reduced the public to a “bewildered herd.” Yet as people are able to select the sources from which they receive their news, they are becoming active as participants and are less “bewildered.” News consumers no longer just consume; when people go online for news updates, they can then share the links via Twitter or Facebook, upload their own comments responding to posts, and interact with other users and the journalists. As Pavlik says, “They are no longer passive couch potatoes” (2008, p. 56). How then will this increase in Internet use alter the use of traditional media? Further, what explains this shift from traditional media to the Internet?

Time Displacement Theory

Time displacement theory is one potential explanation for the migration of a small minority of these anti-couch potatoes toward the Internet as a main news source. Time displacement theory suggests that time news consumers spend with new media will reduce the time they spend with traditional media (Kayany & Yelsma 2000). As available time for media consumption is limited and has not expanded along with the expansion of media options – in fact, in this day and age people seem to be busier than ever – the time displacement theory is logical: Kayany and Yelsma (2000) say media use is a zero sum

game. New must compete with old for finite resources: audience time (Dimmick et al. 2004). Some scholars say the emergence of a new medium will not cause major changes to the news media landscape, but others believe a revolution in the way people consume their news is occurring and will lead to the death of traditional media (Coffey & Stipp 1997). Nielsen (1998) coined a term, “mediacide,” meaning traditional media will die out and integrated web media will replace them.

Media researchers have investigated displacement effects with the advent of every new form of media and technology – TV, cable TV, VCR, and now computer mediated communication (Dutta-Bergman 2004). They ask respondents about the increases or decreases in time spent on traditional media after they start using new media. Kayany and Yelsma’s findings (2000) support the time displacement theory: they found that when one media strain emerges and gains popularity, it is at the direct cost of another form of media. In this vein, many believe Internet news outlets will draw audiences away from traditional media (Noack 1998; Brown 2000; Dimmick et al. 2004). According to Noack (1998), because online sites are able to “scoop” traditional outlets due to their up-to-the-minute reporting and publishing styles, television and print sources will lose their timeliness and become obsolete. Brown (2000) also notes the impending obsolescence of traditional sources: the Internet redefines the way people gather their news and reengages people in public affairs in a way traditional sources cannot. Tsao and Sibley (2004) agree that the growth of the Internet as a news source directly affects news consumers’ use of older media. For example, the decline in nightly network news viewing is reportedly greater for Internet users than non-users: While 26% of Internet users report regularly

watching a nightly network news broadcast, 35% of nonusers tune in regularly (Pew 2000).

In their research, Adoni and Nossek (2001) questioned whether growing Internet usage would significantly reduce consumption of old media. They found that the percentage of heavy television users was significantly lower among those who relied on the Internet on a regular basis. Studies regarding consumption of presidential campaign updates show the number of voters who cite the Internet as a main source of updates doubled between the 2000 and 2004 campaigns from 9% to 18% (Pew 2005). By 2012, the percentage of regular Internet users seeking campaign news online jumped to 36%, while the audiences for news broadcasts steeply declined (Pew 2012).

The Stanford Institute for the Quantitative Study of Society collected data from a random sample of individuals with Internet access to investigate the impact of Internet habits on their daily lives, including their consumption of traditional mass media. Based on the results of the study, Nie & Erbing (2000) say that the more time people spend using the Internet, the more they turn their back on the traditional media. Their results show that about 60% of heavy Internet users say that their time spent online is displaced from their time spent watching television, and that 34% report spending less time reading the newspaper (Nie & Erbing 2000). The Pew Research Center found that in 2000, one in three Americans went online for news – a significant increase over the 20% who found news online in 1998. Simultaneously, network news viewership fell from 38% to 30%, suggesting a potential displacement effect (Dimmick et al. 2004). Thus, these results – and the time displacement theory – support the possibility that as news consumers lose

faith in traditional media, they will view the Internet as a more worthy news source with which to spend their limited time.

Functional Displacement Theory and Uses and Gratifications

There are two forms of displacement effects: time displacement, as discussed, and functional displacement, which occurs when a new medium experiences heightened importance for meeting a need and old media become less important to fulfilling that same need (Kayany & Yelsma 2000). Dimmick et al. (2004) discuss the theory of uses and gratifications, which proposes that a new medium survives, grows, competes, and prospers by providing utility or gratification to its consumers. In the media industry, if a certain outlet gratifies the consumer, she will spend more time with that particular medium than with other media (Dimmick et al. 2004). The more people believe they can rely on the Internet as a news source, the less they will rely on traditional news media like printed newspapers and broadcast television. Historical patterns confirm that replacement of old media by new media can result from the introduction of new media technologies if they properly fulfill users' needs (Althaus & Tewksbury 2000).

For instance, functional displacement theory helps explain the decline in newspaper readership and the rise in use of the Internet, especially among today's youth: According to Pavlik (2008), young news consumers prefer the Internet due to the fact it gives users greater freedom and choice, and is far more interactive than newspapers or television. Younger Americans tend to attribute significantly less importance to traditional print media than their elders, and consequently the decline in readership among American youth has been sharpest: 31% of 18-24 year olds reported reading a

daily newspaper in 2008 as compared with a whopping 73% in 1970 (OECD 2010). Meanwhile, Pavlik (2008) says the number one activity for teens today is going online: 87% of American teens use the Internet regularly, and it is already the main source of news for 16-24 year olds (OECD 2010).

Based on the uses and gratifications theory, audiences will actively seek sources of information that best fulfill their needs (Vyas et al. 2007). If traditional news media fall short (due to limited content and rigid schedules, for example), the audience will look elsewhere to have their needs met and gratification opportunities claimed (Dimmick et al. 2004). So, if an individual perceives a medium to be superior for meeting a particular need or serving a particular function, they would be more likely to choose that medium over others (Althaus & Tewksbury 2000). While television is still the top news source for Americans, only the Internet continues to experience growth as a main source of national and international news.

Scholars and studies speculate why news seekers have changed their consumption habits and have started adopting the Internet as a news source. Johnson and Kaye's study (2002) noted several more motivations for usage of the Internet over traditional media, supporting its functional superiority in fulfilling uses and gratifications. Similarly, Stempel et al. (2000) conducted a study that suggests gratification opportunities on the Internet are greater than in traditional media, helping explain the migration. The fact that people use media strategically influences this change: they employ different media for different purposes and select among mediums based on how well each helps them meet specific needs or goals. For instance, heavy Internet users typically go online for news daily, and they tend to access the news continuously throughout the day, not only in the

morning or evening (OECD 2010). Online newsreaders can find the news through search engines, email newsletters, or aggregation tools. Sometimes they spend only seconds scanning through the headlines, while other times they make spend several minutes reading full articles. This tendency to receive news in a more fragmented way allows readers to mix different sources and to compile their own personalized information without having to passively soak in the news as it is presented to them (OECD 2010). “The new venues will give ordinary folks the ability . . . to cut through the political fog by downloading the facts for themselves,” says *Washington Post* reporter Howard Kurtz. (Johnson & Kaye 1998b). In this way, people get to be intentional and selective in their use of media (Althaus & Tewksbury 2000).

Similarly, convenience is a significant motivation for Internet use: more than half of Internet users – 56% – listed convenience as a main reason for online news consumption (Pew 2000). Time-pressured Americans seek news that will fit into their busy schedules: grazing on short stories and headlines online throughout the course of the day can be more conducive to their lifestyles than fitting in nightly network news broadcasts (Pew 2005). As Johnson and Kaye put it, “the Internet serves as a twenty-four-hours-a-day source, allowing people to access information whenever they need it,” and is a “political Wal-Mart” (2002).

Several surveys over time addressed the question of whether or not the Internet will be a substitution for traditional media, resulting in varied conclusions. According to Morris and Ogan (1996) and Palmgreen (1984), when a new medium becomes available, audiences will evaluate the usefulness of the new option relative to older media on which they currently rely. Instead of simply supplementing old sources, new sources can

sometimes become permanent, functional substitutes (Althaus & Tewksbury 2000). In 1998, when the Internet was still more of a novelty, perhaps it seemed crazy to substitute old media with new. Yet the needs online news fulfills that the traditional media cannot meet may tip the scales, as the Internet is rapidly developing into a functional alternative to traditional news sources; thus, the potential for media substitution is present.

Audiences shifting away from reliance on traditional news media and toward the web clearly prefer the offerings of the new medium (Althaus & Tewksbury 2000). The benefits digital news provides are plentiful: first is convenience – users can access the news at their own discretion; second, there are cost advantages for those with free Internet access; third, simultaneous scanning of several similar news sites to find out the viewpoints of a variety of sources on the same issue is possible (Vyas et al. 2007).

Further, the diversity of resources available online allows users to explore information not available through older media (Greer 2003). The Internet's freedom from censorship, speed of information diffusion, low distribution costs, global reach and interactivity make it well suited to the news industry (Duncan 2000).

According to Althaus and Tewksbury (2000), online news is superior to traditional media in regards to uses and gratifications. For now, though, the Internet remains a supplemental source among some cohorts, simply augmenting traditional news media (Davis & Owen 1998). In an early Pew survey of Internet use habits, 41% of online users said they turned to the Internet to get more information on stories first seen in traditional media (1999). Kiouisis's research (2001) suggests people often seek out various media outlets with parallel content in order to reinforce and complement information they have garnered elsewhere. Even more so now, Duncan (2000) says the

Internet fulfills additional needs beyond those traditional news media can serve. Kiousis (2001) sees the growing trend towards Internet dependency as a result of its heightened credibility, especially in relation to the decline of television credibility. Vyas et al. (2007) say the mere presence of the Internet as an alternative resource impacts judgments of old media, and according to Kiousis (2001), the introduction of online sources has actually changed public opinion of traditional media credibility.

The Internet is a Mecca of information that has reinvented the way we share news. Trends in news consumption show the Internet is already supplementing, and perhaps will eventually replace traditional news media as a new niche for news consumers. I believe these trends are due largely to the decline in trust in old-fashioned traditional news sources that are no longer able to stay relevant in the digital age. Public perceptions of traditional news media affect the rise of the Internet as a primary news source and the growth in the percentage of the population that relies on it. Based on the wide-ranging existing research, it is likely that the type of media an individual uses to garner information about current events is correlated to his or her trust in mainstream media.

Chapter 3

HYPOTHESIS

As the news media landscape shifts and evolves, catalyzing numerous changes in how the American public consumes its news and information, we must predict and ponder how these changes will impact our society en masse. According to Rimmer and Weaver (1987), a causal relationship exists between media credibility and media use. Therefore, if individuals consider traditional news media inaccurate and lacking in credibility, then they should reject them and find another medium more worthy of their trust. This theory further implies that if media are perceived as more credible, this will lead to increased readership or viewership or overall usage of that media (Rimmer & Weaver 1987).

Numerous studies tracking the public's reliance on news media show that trust in the traditional news media has been decreasing for many years. Why is this? Is it because of increased perceptions of biased reporting and inaccuracies in mainstream media, or because of the advent of the Internet as a news source? The guiding question behind my own research was: **Is the American public's loss of trust in the traditional news media the driving force behind its growing usage of the Internet as a news source?**

The time displacement theory and the functional theory, as discussed in the literature review, suggest that a relationship does exist between the usage of the Internet as a news source and the perceptions of traditional media source (Althaus & Tewksbury

2000; Dimmick et al. 2004). Functional theory suggests people will seek information from a medium that best fulfills their needs – people are logical, and will thus employ media that gratifies and satisfies (Vyas et al. 2007; Johnson & Kaye 2000; 2002).

Therefore, based on the functional theory, if the Internet fulfills uses and gratifications that traditional news media cannot, then the traditional media will be disregarded and replaced by the Internet (Johnson & Kaye 1998b; Flanagin & Metzger 2001; Althaus & Tewksbury 2000). As the decline in perceptions of traditional media credibility persists, the functionality of the Internet as a news source has the potential to usurp traditional news audiences by reinforcing negative public opinion of traditional media credibility and serving as a more fulfilling alternative (Duncan 2000; Kioussis 2001; Vyas et al. 2007).

According to the time displacement theory, as time spent with new media increases, time spent with old media will decrease, as time is a finite resource (Kayany & Yelsma 2000; Dimmick et al. 2004). Therefore, when old, traditional media fails to satisfy its users, a new medium will displace it because users do not want to spend inordinate amounts of time gathering news. In particular, when people fail to trust old media and there is a better option available, they will no longer spend time with the old media (Noack 1998; Brown, 2000; Kayany & Yelsma 2000; Dimmick et al. 2004). They will be more likely to spend their time with media that successfully fulfills their needs, which, in their case, is their quest for trustworthy, credible news sources. Based on the time displacement theory, individuals who utilize the Internet as a main source have displaced their use of traditional media as a result (Tsao & Sibley 2004; Noack 1998; Brown 2000; Kayany & Yelsma 2000; Dimmick et al. 2004).

Bearing these theories – as well as the shifting news media landscape and the steady decline in levels of trust in media institutions – in mind, I make the following hypothesis: **High levels of distrust (as measured by perceptions of accuracy and bias) in traditional news organizations (television, newspapers, radio, and magazines) will lead to higher levels of usage of the Internet as a news source.** So, levels of trust in news organizations should be higher among individuals who rely on traditional news media, while individuals who have lower levels of trust in traditional media will be more likely to rely on the Internet as their main source of news.

Chapter 4

RESEARCH METHODS

To test my proposed hypothesis regarding the correlation between Internet news usage and low levels of trust in news organizations, I used the Pew Research Center for People and the Press's July 2007 Political Survey and Media Update data set. The Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan fact tank that seeks to inform the general public about the various issues, attitudes, and trends currently shaping America. It conducts public opinion polling, demographic research, media content analysis, and other empirical social science research. The Pew Research Center for People and the Press is one of seven projects carried out by the research center. The project conducts survey research regarding American attitudes toward politics and policy.

The 2007 survey was conducted from July 25-29 and included a sample size of 1,503 adults. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the sampling error is plus or minus three percentage points. The survey was administered in two forms, with Form 1 administered to 753 cases and Form 2 used for 750 cases.

The Pew Research Center has a clearly delineated methodology for their survey procedures. For its national surveys, the center selects a random sample of both landline and cell phone numbers in all 50 states and Washington D.C. Response rates for the Pew Research Center's polls typically range from 5% to 20%, and are comparable to those for other major national opinion polls. These relatively low response rates do not have an

impact or indication of nonresponse bias, as declining response rates to survey polls across the nation are typical and not unique to these particular polls.

Methodology

To divide the respondents into two distinct groups – Traditional Media users and Internet Only users, I used Question 16 from the survey: *How do you get most of your news about national and international issues? From television, from newspapers, from radio, from magazines, or from the Internet?* A complicating factor within the data, however, was that the surveyor was instructed to “probe for additional response.” In other words, several of the respondents answered that they used two different sources as their main resources for news. Because I wanted to separate two key groups – Traditional Media users and Internet *Only* users, I consulted only the first response given. Of the 1,503 cases surveyed, 1,249 responded that they relied on traditional media (television, newspapers, radio, magazines, or other sources), while 254 responded that their main source of news was the Internet. Of these 254 responses, 171 were Internet Only users (and did not mention a form of traditional media even when “probed for additional response”). But sorting the data in this way, I was able to compare those who only used the Internet to those who still relied on traditional media.

Using measures of accuracy and bias in regards to media, levels of trust in media sources can be discerned. Thus, I used two survey questions to gauge levels of trust. The first, Question 21, asked: *In general, do you think news organizations get the facts straight, or do you think that their stories and reports are often inaccurate?* This question predicted the respondents’ perceptions of accuracy, and thus credibility and

trustworthiness, of news organizations. As I found in past research, these traits are closely related (Thorson et al. 2010; Bucy 2003; Metzger et al. 2003).

The second question, number 22, asked, *In presenting the news dealing with political and social issues, do you think that news organizations deal fairly with all sides, or do they tend to favor one side?* This question predicted the respondents' perceptions of bias in news organizations, and, as discussed in the literature review, bias plays a key role in determining media credibility (Gordon 2000; Metzger et al. 2003; Jo 2005).

When survey respondents are asked about perceptions of news organizations, television news outlets and other forms of traditional news media – generally newspapers – are typically central to people's impressions. Thus, in the survey used for my data analysis, when the respondents are asked how they think “news organizations” are handling particular issues, they are responding with *traditional media* in mind, despite what form of media they rely on personally (Pew 2011). So, even Internet Only users responded based on their judgments of traditional media sources. For the list of survey questions used for the data analysis, see Appendix A.

For my research, I wanted not only to consider Internet Only users and Traditional Media users as whole, broad populations, but to control for Age and Gender as well. By doing this, I would be able to discern if age or gender explained the relationship between media trust and relying on the Internet for news. From the extensive July 2007 data set, I utilized the AGE, GENDER, Q16 (MEDIA USED), Q21 (TRUST/CREDIBILITY), and Q22 (BIAS) variables to work with further. When examining the data, I was able to compare male Internet Only users to male Traditional Media users, female Internet Only users to female Traditional Media users, over 40 year old Internet Only users to over 40

year old Traditional Media users, and finally, 40 year old and under Internet Only users to 40 year old and under Traditional Media users. I was then able to see the impact of these demographic features on the relationship between levels of trust in mainstream media and resulting media usage habits.

Table 1. Survey Respondents – Total Counts

Survey Respondents (N)					
			Media Usage		Total
			Internet Only Users	Traditional Media Users	
All		Total Count	171	1249	1420
		% of Total	12.0%	88.0%	100.0%
Gender	Women	Total Count	67	675	742
		% of Total	9.0%	91.0%	100.0%
	Men	Total Count	104	574	678
		% of Total	15.3%	84.7%	100.0%
Age	Over 40	Total Count	82	993	1075
		% of Total	7.6%	92.4%	100.0%
	40 and Under	Total Count	89	256	345
		% of Total	25.8%	74.2%	100.0%

Chapter 5

DATA ANALYSIS

Data Analysis Process

To test my proposed hypothesis, I utilized the SPSS statistical software. I ran several cross tabulations in the software to determine the relationships between the variables. As my hypothesis considered level of trust the determining factor of type of media usage, I considered this the independent variable.

I ran cross tabulations for each of my subcategories for both of the questions that determined level of trust – Q21 (TRUST/CREDIBILITY), and Q22 (BIAS). For example, I first compared media usage overall (without controlling for demographic variables) with levels of trust. If perceptions of trust (based on credibility and bias) had no impact whatsoever on media usage, then as Internet Only users accounted for 12.3% of the total sample of 1,420, one would expect that the Internet Only users should also account for close to 12.3% of the respondents for each answer option. Based on my hypothesis, Internet Only users should make up a larger percentage of the respondents who report that news organizations are not trustworthy and are biased than within the total sample.

I then calculated Pearson's Chi-Square test for each grouping of data in order to determine the statistical significance of the association between the two variables (level of trust and type of media used).

Results

Based on the various cross tabulations, it appears the data are consistent overall with my hypothesis. Across the board, the percentages of positive responses in regards to news organizations' accuracy ("get the facts straight") and bias ("deal fairly with all sides") were noticeably higher amongst the Traditional Media users than the Internet Only users. Percentages of negative responses regarding accuracy and bias were higher amongst the Internet Only users. This finding insinuates that overall, as levels of distrust and perceived bias increased, the percentage of Internet Only users increases as well.

Below are the cross tabulation tables that display respondents' perceptions of trust in news organizations. First, the levels of trust among the total sample are displayed. In Table 2, the relationship between perceptions of news organizations' accuracy and type of media used is shown. The results show that when stories are viewed as often inaccurate, a higher percentage of the respondents report using the Internet only for news. We can draw this conclusion based on the fact that while Internet Only users account for 12.3% of the total sample, they account for 14.3% of the respondents who feel news organizations tend to be inaccurate. Thus, the results support my hypothesis. Furthermore, based on the chi-square test, the difference is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Similarly, in Table 3, levels of trust based on perceptions of news organizations' bias are compared with form of media used. The results show that when news organizations are perceived as favoring one side, a higher percentage of the respondents report using the Internet for news. Internet Only users accounted for 13.8% of the respondents who felt news organizations tended to favor one side. On the reverse side,

while Traditional Media users account for 87.7% of the total sample, they account for 92.0% of the respondents who feel news organizations deal fairly with all sides. The relationship between perception of bias and form of media used by respondents was also found to be statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, and similarly supports my hypothesis.

Table 2: Trust in News Organizations (total sample)

2007: Trust in News Organizations						
			In general, do you think news organizations get the facts straight, or do you think that their stories and reports are often inaccurate?			Total
			Get the facts straight	Stories often inaccurate	Don't know	
Media Usage	Internet Only	% of Total	9.2%	14.3%	13.0%	12.3%
	Traditional Media	% of Total	90.8%	85.7%	87.0%	87.7%
Total		Count	547	765	108	1420
		% of Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Pearson Chi-Square Test:			Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	
denotes statistical significance at the 95% confidence level			7.165	2	0.028	

Table 3: Perceptions of News Organizations' Bias (total sample)

2007: Perceptions of News Organizations' Bias						
			In presenting the news dealing with political and social issues, do you think that news organizations deal fairly with all sides, or do they tend to favor one side?			Total
			Deal fairly with all sides	Tend to favor one side	Don't know	
Media Usage	Internet Only	% of Total	8.0%	13.8%	8.8%	12.3%
	Traditional Media	% of Total	92.0%	86.2%	91.2%	87.7%
Total		Count	339	968	113	1420
		% of Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Pearson Chi-Square Test:			Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	
denotes statistical significance at the 95% confidence level			9.372	2	0.009	

I then had to control for gender. As past research has suggested that styles of Internet use are associated with gender (Bucy 2000; Newton 2001; Wasserman & Richmond-Abbot 2005), it was essential to determine whether or not the relationship between trust and media usage was a product of the respondents' gender. I found that my hypothesis was again supported by the results, which are displayed in Tables 4-7. For both men and women, they were more likely to be Internet Only users if they had negative perceptions of trust and bias in news organizations: when stories were viewed as often inaccurate and when news organizations were perceived as favoring one side, a higher percentage of the respondents – both male and female – report using only the Internet.

In regards to perceptions of trust and accuracy, Table 4 shows that while male Internet Only users accounted for 15.3% of the total male sample, they made up a larger percentage – 17.8% – of the respondents that felt news organizations’ stories were often inaccurate. Similarly, Table 5 shows that the female Internet Only users made up a larger percentage of those respondents with negative views of news organizations’ accuracy than they did within the total female sample. Female Internet Only users accounted for 9.0% of the female population and 10.3% of the respondents that felt stories were often inaccurate. After running a chi-square test, neither relationship was statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, but the relationship between male media users and perceptions of accuracy was significant at the 90% confidence level. Table 6 shows the relationship between male media users and perceptions of news organization bias while Table 7 shows the same relationship among female media users. Again, the relationships expressed by the data confirm the hypothesized direction. The relationship was statistically significant at the 95% confidence level for men. Although it was not statistically significant for women, and men are slightly more likely to view news organizations as inaccurate and bias, the relationship is still in the expected direction.

Table 4: Trust in News Organizations (men)

2007: Trust in News Organizations: MEN						
			Facts straight or stories inaccurate?			Total
			Get the facts straight	Stories often inaccurate	Don't know	
Media Usage	Internet Only	% of Total	11.2%	17.8%	18.6%	15.3%
	Traditional Media	% of Total	88.8%	82.2%	81.4%	84.7%
Total		Count	258	377	43	678
		% of Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Pearson Chi-Square Test:			Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	
*stat. sig. at 95% confidence level			5.409	2	0.067	

Table 5: Trust in News Organizations (women)

2007: Trust in News Organizations: WOMEN						
			Facts straight or stories inaccurate?			Total
			Get the facts straight	Stories often inaccurate	Don't know	
Media Usage	Internet Only	% of Total	7.3%	10.3%	9.2%	9.0%
	Traditional Media	% of Total	92.7%	89.7%	90.8%	91.0%
Total		Count	289	388	65	742
		% of Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Pearson Chi-Square Test:			Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	
*stat. sig. at 95% confidence level			2.06	2	0.357	

Table 6: Perceptions of News Organizations' Bias (men)

2007: Perceptions of News Organizations' Bias: MEN						
			Deal fairly with all sides or do they tend to favor one side?			Total
			Deal fairly with all sides	Tend to favor one side	Don't know	
Media Usage	Internet Only	% of Total	9.3%	17.8%	11.4%	15.3%
	Traditional Media	% of Total	90.7%	82.2%	88.6%	84.7%
Total		Count	161	473	44	678
		% of Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Pearson Chi-Square Test:			Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	
stat. sig. at 95% confidence level			7.165	2	0.028	

Table 7: Perceptions of News Organizations' Bias (women)

2007: Perceptions of News Organizations' Bias: WOMEN						
			Deal fairly with all sides or do they tend to favor one side?			Total
			Deal fairly with all sides	Tend to favor one side	Don't know	
Media Usage	Internet Only	% of Total	6.7%	10.1%	7.2%	9.0%
	Traditional Media	% of Total	93.3%	89.9%	92.8%	91.0%
Total		Count	178	495	69	742
		% of Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Pearson Chi-Square Test:			Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	
*stat. sig. at 95% confidence level			2.331	2	0.312	

Following the gender controls, I controlled for age to confirm that the relationship between trust and Internet use was not simply a product of the respondents' age. Past research has shown that, like gender, age is strongly related with levels and styles of Internet use (Pavlik 2008; Bucy 2000; Pew 2008; OECD 2010). I first determined the relationship between perceptions of trust/accuracy and perceptions of bias among media users older than 40. Following that, I found the relationship within the sample of respondents ages 40 and under. Again, the results, as displayed in Tables 8-11, support my hypothesis. While the relationships between levels of trust and media usage hold regardless of age, there was an interesting difference between age groups: Internet Only users within the older sample appear to be far less trusting in news organizations overall than the younger Internet Only users. Based on the data, lack of trust was consequently a greater influence on media usage among the older sample. Within the older sample, Internet Only users made up only 3.3% of respondents who felt news organizations deal fairly with all sides, yet they account for 10.7% of the respondents who claim news organizations tend to favor one side. This 7.4% jump insinuates that perceptions of news bias have a major impact on the type of media used by the respondents within the older sample. A similarly wide split occurred in the older Internet Only users' views of news organizations' accuracy as well. The relationships within the older respondents' data not only supports my hypothesis, but were found to be statistically significant as well.

Among the younger cohort, the data failed to reach statistical significance, but they are in the direction expected and thus support my hypothesis. Internet Only users make up a substantially higher percentage of the total sample of younger media users: they account for 25.8% of respondents age 40 and under, showing that younger news

consumers are using the Internet as their sole source of news at higher rates than older news consumers are. Yet while older news consumers seem to rely on the Internet mainly when they have low levels of trust in news organizations, this relationship was not as strong among younger respondents.

Table 8: Trust in News Organizations (older than 40)

2007: Trust in News Organizations: OLDER THAN 40						
			Facts straight or stories inaccurate?			Total
			Get the facts straight	Stories often inaccurate	Don't know	
Media Usage	Internet Only	% of Total	4.0%	9.8%	10.5%	7.6%
	Traditional Media	% of Total	96.0%	91.2%	89.5%	92.4%
Total		Count	396	604	76	1075
		% of Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Pearson Chi-Square Test:			Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	
stat. sig. at 95% confidence level			11.47	2	0.003	

Table 9: Trust in News Organizations (40 and younger)

2007: Trust in News Organizations: AGE 40 AND UNDER						
			Facts straight or stories inaccurate?			Total
			Get the facts straight	Stories often inaccurate	Don't know	
Media Usage	Internet Only	% of Total	22.5%	29.8%	21.2%	25.8%
	Traditional Media	% of Total	77.5%	70.2%	78.8%	74.2%
Total		Count	151	161	33	345
		% of Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Pearson Chi-Square Test:			Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	
*stat. sig. at 95% confidence level			2.568	2	0.277	

Table 10: Perceptions of News Organizations' Bias (older than 40)

2007: Perceptions of News Org.s' Bias: OLDER THAN 40						
			Deal fairly with all sides or do they tend to favor one side?			Total
			Deal fairly with all sides	Tend to favor one side	Don't know	
Media Usage	Internet Only	% of Total	3.3%	10.7%	3.4%	7.6%
	Traditional Media	% of Total	96.7%	89.3%	96.6%	92.4%
Total		Count	244	754	87	1075
		% of Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Pearson Chi-Square Test:			Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	
stat. sig. at 95% confidence level			12.58	2	0.002	

Table 11: Perceptions of News Organizations' Bias (40 and younger)

2007: Perceptions of News Org.s' Bias: AGE 40 AND UNDER						
			Deal fairly with all sides or do they tend to favor one side?			Total
			Deal fairly with all sides	Tend to favor one side	Don't know	
Media Usage	Internet Only	% of Total	20.0%	28.1%	26.9%	25.8%
	Traditional Media	% of Total	80.0%	71.9%	73.1%	74.2%
Total		Count	95	224	26	345
		% of Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Pearson Chi-Square Test:			Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	
*stat. sig. at 95% confidence level			2.319	2	0.314	

All the results appear to be consistent with my hypothesis. A clear correlation was found between levels of trust (as measured by perceptions of accuracy and perceptions of bias) and media usage. In my hypothesis, I projected that negative perceptions of news organizations' trustworthiness/accuracy and bias would result in higher levels of Internet Only users. Among the total sample, the relationship in the data was consistent with my hypothesis and was statistically significant. When I controlled for gender, the relationship was similarly consistent with my hypothesis, although the relationship appeared to be stronger within the male media user sample; the difference was statistically significant within the male sample. Although the data in the female sample did support my hypothesis in the direction expected, the data were not statistically significant.

When controlling for age, the relationship between levels of trust and media usage was also apparent, with the data amongst the sample over 40 showing statistical significance in the direction expected. Interestingly, the older sample's usage of the Internet was greatly affected by levels of trust at what appeared to be a larger degree than for the younger sample. The younger sample's data were also interesting, however, as Internet Only users accounted for over a quarter of the total sample, showing that younger news consumers are relying solely on the Internet at much higher rates than older news consumers are. While the relationship between levels of trust and media usage were not as strong among the younger sample, they may be relying on the Internet for other reasons, while the older respondents may migrate to the Internet as a main source of news only when they find traditional news sources lacking in accuracy or impartialness. Regardless, when controlling for each variable, the relationship between levels of trust

and form of media used remained constant with the data, lending support to my hypothesis.

Chapter 6

DISCUSSION

Limitations of the Research

One of the main limitations of this study is its sole reliance on secondary data. Due to the relative newness of using the Internet as a news source and the multifaceted dimensions of the Internet as a medium, it was also impossible to guarantee the information gathered within the survey data clearly aligned with what I was looking for. There is limited data with respect to the motivations of individuals for using this particular medium for news acquisition. It is always difficult for collected data to necessarily suggest trends in the motivations behind people's actions instead of simply the actions and habits themselves. For instance, past survey research (Bucy 2003) establishes that use of a particular medium correlates with high credibility ratings for that medium, but does media use lead to enhanced perceptions of credibility, or do people use media they already consider to be credible?

While it seems likely that the decline of trust in conventional media sources has contributed to the increase in news consumers' usage of the Internet as a main news source, it is difficult to deduce whether the decline of trust in traditional media instigates higher levels of Internet use or if higher levels of Internet use instigate decreased trust in traditional media. Survey research may help establish whether or not use of a particular medium correlates with high credibility ratings for that channel, but survey studies are

limited in that they generally are unable to address sequence: they cannot properly answer the question of whether media use leads to heightened perceptions of credibility or if people flock to media they already perceive to be credible (Bucy 2003; Flanagin & Metzger 2000).

Surveys also tend to rely on the respondents' personal reflections of past behaviors – in this case, media use – so their estimations are prone to distortion and social desirability biasing. People may skew their responses in accordance with what they feel is more socially acceptable. Further, potential sampling error, which always exists to some degree in survey data, must also be taken into account when assessing the implications of this research and data analysis.

Implications for Future Research

I hope that my findings open the door for further research regarding the shifting media platforms available to the public and the impact of this shift on traditional news media outlets. I want my thesis to guide future research towards making strides in related areas: how this societal change impacts and will continue to affect people's knowledge of news and politics; whether or not these changes will further reduce reliance on traditional media; and as we continue to pursue a wide range of sources for news and political information, if this will alter voting behavior from one generation to the next and if it renders Weber's social hypothesis of "the bewildered herd" passé.

One suggestion for further research on this subject would be to place study participants in different media settings within an experimental situation. This will better enable the researchers to control the environment. They can program the sequence of

events and thus can assess respondents' perceptions of credibility of various media immediately as they occur, instead of having respondents subjectively reflect on past motivations behind media behavior and usage.

There are many directions further research can take, following the analysis and conclusions of my own study. I believe my thesis work can set the stage for a broad range of future research that will hopefully begin to answer a number of questions pertinent to our contemporary media landscape. The rapidity of the changes taking place within our society is unparalleled, and social research must attempt to keep up.

I raise several questions for further exploration: Are news consumers with the highest levels of mistrust in mainstream media the most likely to rely on online sources for their news? How do these trends shift over time? If it is indeed true that the public's usage of traditional media is declining in relation to the expansion of the Internet as a news source, what does the future have in store for the free press as an institution? By continuing to question our habits of news consumption, we can hypothesize how the news media environment will shift, and what impacts on our society these shifts may have.

Conclusions

According to Pew Research Center studies, levels of use of television and newspapers as main sources of news have steadily declined for decades. Simultaneously, use of the Internet as a new news source has been on a rapid upswing. Interestingly, during the same time span, levels of public trust in the traditional news media have declined. Research suggests that perceptions of credibility, bias, and trust play key roles

in how the public opts to consume its news. Therefore, the decline in trust in traditional news media likely helps explain the downward trend in traditional news reliance, as well as the increased use of the Internet for news consumption. As Rimmer and Weaver (1987) discovered, there is a causal relationship between media credibility and media use. Thus, it is no coincidence that the Internet news audience is especially critical of traditional news organizations and is apt to criticize news organizations for their biases and inaccuracies (Pew 2007). High levels of distrust in traditional media has pushed news users to new sources of news, as perceptions of higher credibility in certain media will instigate higher levels of usage of that media (Rimmer & Weaver 1987). Inspired by the time displacement theory and the functional displacement theory, my own findings support Rimmer and Weaver's conclusions regarding the impact of trust and credibility on news media usage. Low levels of trust in news organizations are in fact correlated with higher levels of Internet reliance. The implications of this research could help predict the future of news media and news consumption.

Innovation is central to the improvement of media, according to Pavlik (2008). Digital technology offers a wide range of possibilities for the evolution of news media; it already produced significant changes in media diversity, public engagement in media, and enhanced content (Pavlik 2008). Opportunities for interaction, innovation, and collaboration and discussion are much richer than they once were, and they are available to wider swatches of the population; no longer is it solely the upper echelon of society or the institutions themselves that control media and news distribution and consumption (Pavlik 2008). We cannot return to the news media landscape of the pre-digital age; traditional media's hegemony is no more. Online news sources allow for discussion and

discourse among their audiences, empowering the people and allowing them the opportunity to stop being passive recipients of news. Furthermore, heightened interactivity could lead to heightened transparency and again hold news media accountable for objective accuracy (Pavlik 2008). Perhaps the public will eventually rely on the press to uphold its role of watchdog in our democratic society once more.

Scholars assert that rapid, reliable transmission of news and events – and the public’s resulting comprehension of that news – are essential to the survival of a free and self-governing society (Ladd 2012). Thus, traditional media’s inability to maintain relationships with their audiences built on trust may render it ineffective and irrelevant. The weakening of the traditional news media as an institution and the growing fragmentation of audiences invites new media to take the reins. Those who flock to the Internet for news are among those who have lost faith in mainstream media (Pavlik 2008). In fact, my thesis contends that it was the loss of trust that contributed to the migration to the Internet. Perhaps these new news sources will renew the public trust in the press as an institution, even if the digital age press is in fact starkly different from the press upon which previous generations so heavily depended.

Appendix A

The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the interpretations presented or conclusions reached based on analysis of the data.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS JULY 2007 POLITICAL SURVEY / MEDIA UPDATE FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE C

ASK ALL:

- Q.16 How do you get most of your news about national and international issues? From television, from newspapers, from radio, from magazines, or from the Internet?
[ACCEPT TWO ANSWERS: IF ONLY ONE RESPONSE IS GIVEN, PROBE FOR ADDITIONAL RESPONSE] {9-06 Gen Next; 8-06 mod}
- 1 Television
 - 2 Newspapers
 - 3 Radio
 - 4 Magazines
 - 5 Internet
 - 6 Other (VOL.)
 - 9 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
- Q.21 In general, do you think news organizations get the facts straight, or do you think that their stories and reports are often inaccurate? {6-05}
- 1 Get the facts straight
 - 2 Stories often inaccurate
 - 9 Don't know/Refused [VOL.]
- Q.22 In presenting the news dealing with political and social issues, do you think that news organizations deal fairly with all sides, or do they tend to favor one side? {6-05}
- 1 Deal fairly with all sides
 - 2 Tend to favor one side
 - 9 Don't know/Refused [VOL.]
- Q.23 In general, do you think news organizations are pretty independent, or are they often influenced by powerful people and organizations? {6-05}
- 1 Pretty independent
 - 2 Often influenced by powerful people and organizations
 - 9 Don't know/Refused [VOL.]

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ACADEMIC VITA

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EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA *Fall 2009 – Spring 2013*

Schreyer Honors College
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B.A. in Sociology
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Vesalius College, Brussels, Belgium *Spring 2012*

CIEE Study Abroad: Business, Culture, and Communications

HONORS AND AWARDS

- Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society *Spring 2012 – present*
- Sociology Student Marshal *Spring 2013*
- Evan Pugh Scholar Award *Spring 2012*
- The President's Freshman Award *Spring 2010*

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Teaching Assistant, EDTHP 234H: Leadership Jumpstart *Fall 2009 – Fall 2010*

Advised service groups on networking, event planning, logistics, and execution
Graded student essays and presentations

Teaching Assistant, SOC 406: Sociology of Deviance *Fall 2012*

In charge of tracking course attendance, grading student work

Campus Campaign Coordinator for Teach For America *Aug. 2011 – Jan. 2012*

Led TFA's Penn State marketing campaign
Conducted presentations and information sessions
Delegated tasks to campus interns

Programs Intern for The Second Mile, State College *May 2011 – Aug. 2011*

Planned summer camps for 300+ at-risk youth

Maintained participant database; facilitated public outreach

Programs and Operations Assistant: Starfinder Foundation, Philadelphia *May – Aug. 2010*

Coached nightly soccer camps for 8-14 year old inner-city children
Mentored high school students involved in the Senior Leaders education program
Created on-site library, facilitated the donation of 100+ books for student use

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Lab Assistant

Fall 2009 – Fall 2010

Worked for Dr. David Puts, Asst. Professor of Anthropology
Research focus: Patterns of human response to sex hormones
Ran experimental studies and surveys; collected and input data

Research Assistant

Spring 2011 – Fall 2012

Worked for Dr. Katerina Bodovski, Asst. Professor of Education and Sociology
Research focus: Comparative and International Education
Developed Literature Reviews, compiled research

ACTIVITIES

Bike & Build: Providence to California Cross-Country Cyclist

June 2012 – Aug. 2012

Raised \$4,870 for national affordable housing efforts
Pedaled 4,114 miles across the United States
Dedicated 100 hours on 11 build sites to construct houses for first-time homeowners
Delivered educational presentations about Affordable Housing to various communities

Penn State IFC/Pan-Hellenic Dance MaraTHON

Morale Captain, THON Weekend Development

Fall 2012 – Spring 2013

Direct 40 committee members
Trained in EMS to ensure the safety of 710 marathon dancers
Coordinate safety regulations/logistics for events preceding and during THON

Springfield Organization Recruitment Captain

Fall 2010

Led THON Organization's recruitment efforts

Schreyer Honors College Scholar Advancement Team

Fall 2010 – Fall 2012

Help with recruitment and attend events for alumni, donors, and future students

Penn State Crew Team

Fall 2010 – Fall 2012

Public Relations Chair: publicized events, maintained relationships with alumni/donors

Computer Seminar for the Elderly Service Project

Fall 2009

Worked with 6-person team to develop and lead seminar for 30 senior citizens
Resulted in measured, improved computer literacy for 100% of participants