

# Where Young Adults Intend To Get News in Five Years

by Seth C. Lewis

*A survey of students at two universities found that young adults expect that five years from now they will get less of their news and information from social networking sites and more from older media, including print newspapers.*

For decades, journalists and scholars have been perplexed by twin troubles—young adults’ dwindling interest in news and their distaste for print newspapers in particular.<sup>1</sup> The trend has only accelerated in recent years. In 1972, nearly half of all college-age adults read a newspaper every day. Today, that number is down to 20 percent (and falling) among those ages 18 to 29.<sup>2</sup>

Against this backdrop, a 2008 survey of more than 700 newspaper editors around the world found that nearly two-thirds viewed the decline in young readership as the greatest threat to the future of newspapers.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, while young adults have migrated to the Internet, they are going for a host of reasons—most of which have nothing to do with news.<sup>4</sup> While much has been written about this generational shift away from news,<sup>5</sup> relatively little research has probed two issues at the heart of the phenomenon—perception and intention. That is, how do young adults perceive news today, and how do they intend to approach news in the future?

A broad body of literature has developed at this intersection of youth and news consumption, including more than 40 years of work on newspaper non-readers,<sup>6</sup> but most recent studies have neglected to address fully the new media sources that have become so prominent in the lives of young adults. In an age of Facebook and YouTube, the literature seems, perhaps like newspapers

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themselves, a bit old-fashioned. That “oldness” is an important deficiency in the ability to understand of young adults and their attitudes toward news, given the fast-changing nature of this demographic and the media they use. The topic calls for constant relevance. Even Mindich’s<sup>7</sup> research, one of the most widely cited works on this subject, was conducted mainly in 2001 and 2002, at a time when newspapers already were in decline, but long before the rise of iPods and Web 2.0. In just six years, the media landscape for young adults has morphed dramatically. This paper aims to fill that gap in the literature. In so doing, it takes a forward-looking focus, assessing how young adults intend to get their news five years from now and what that might portend for the future of news and newspapers in a digital age.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study is guided by two theoretical approaches: uses and gratifications<sup>8</sup> and the theory of reasoned action.<sup>9</sup> The former addresses how young adults perceive and access news, providing motivations for media use in the present. The latter considers the future of young adults and news, addressing the issue of intentions. This theory posits that behavioral intentions can be a powerful predictor of actual behavior.

### ***Uses and Gratifications***

The uses and gratifications approach, popularized in the 1960s and 1970s and still widely used today,<sup>10</sup> reacted to early limited-effects research by arguing that an active, rational audience chooses media to gratify needs and desires.<sup>11</sup> It ascribed power to the people. Since Berelson’s<sup>12</sup> famous examination of what readers missed during a newspaper strike in New York City, several gratifications typologies have emerged; one of the most enduring was proposed by McQuail, Blumler and Brown,<sup>13</sup> who said the primary reasons for using media could be categorized as diversion, personal relationships, personal identity and surveillance. Diversion was defined as entertainment or escape from routine. Personal relationships highlighted the media’s role in providing companionship and something to talk about with others. Personal identity involved value reinforcement through media, and surveillance referred to information that would help the user to accomplish something—the overall need to know “what is going on.”

### ***Theory of Reasoned Action***

Although the theory of reasoned action has been used in a variety of fields and has been part of research into adoption of new media,<sup>14</sup> there are no known published studies in the major academic communications journals that have applied the theory to news research. But where uses and gratifications falls short of explaining and predicting—and thus is criticized as a theory<sup>15</sup>—the theory of reasoned action is strong on both counts. This theory was developed

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by Fishbein and Ajzen<sup>16</sup> as a fusion of previous research on attitudes and behaviors linking the two concepts in a cause-and-effect relationship. The approach “assumes that people’s behavior follows reasonably from their beliefs, attitudes and intentions.”<sup>17</sup> Specifically, the theory posits that behavioral intention is a combination of one’s attitude toward that behavior and a social understanding of how others would perceive such behavior. Later, Ajzen<sup>18</sup> extended the theory to include another predictor of behavior—perceived behavioral control. This revised approach, called the theory of planned behavior, is a subset to and works in tandem with the original theory of reasoned action; together, they argue that behavioral intention can predict actual future behavior, as demonstrated through several meta-analyses of the empirical literature.<sup>19</sup>

The theory of reasoned action, while not developed with news or news media in mind, provides a theoretical link through which to analyze news intentions. Such applicability has been demonstrated in other fields. Since its formulation three decades ago, the theory of reasoned action has been used in research investigating education, smoking, cancer screenings and contraceptive use, among other disparate topics.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, while much of the research on reasoned action has studied behaviors for which the theory was not intended, a meta-analysis found that even in those cases Fishbein and Ajzen’s model retained its predictive power.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the theory of reasoned action can be applied with confidence to the study of news intentions. While this study cannot measure actual future behavior, it does assess attitudinal intentions, suggesting that how consumers think they will get news in the future indeed may predict their future actions.

## **Young Adults and News: Perceptions, Sources and Intentions**

In examining this demographic’s<sup>22</sup> relationship with news, this study emphasizes three aspects—young adults’ present perceptions of news, their sources now and in the future and their intentions toward news.

### ***Perceptions***

While anecdotal<sup>23</sup> and empirical<sup>24</sup> evidence suggests that young adults perceive traditional news to be boring, time-consuming and old-fashioned, there is room in the literature for considering a range of feelings about news, positive and negative. Based on the uses and gratifications typology,<sup>25</sup> how do young adults find identity, utility or diversion in news? Or, in light of work on the duty to stay informed as a motivator for news media use,<sup>26</sup> to what degree do young adults find civic purpose in news? Coming to understand positive as well as negative perceptions of news and finding patterns in those perceptions is a critical step in predicting how young adults will approach news in the future.

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### **Sources**

While many researchers have asked young adults how they get their news,<sup>27</sup> many such studies offered a narrow range of traditional media choices. Today's digital mediasphere demands that scholars examining this demographic consider the full range of media options for young adults, particularly those targeting their audience—entertainment and fake-news shows<sup>28</sup> such as “The Colbert Report,” social-networking sites such as MySpace and video-sharing sites such as YouTube. For example, while the time-displacement factor of television on newspaper readership has been considered,<sup>29</sup> what about the time displacement created by the hours spent on Facebook?

### **Intentions**

It is during the transitional years of young adulthood that lifelong news habits often are formed.<sup>30</sup> This raises the question: Do today's young adults expect to be more or less connected to traditional news? How often do they think they will get their news from the Internet, television, newspapers and other sources? A 2004 industry survey considered this question, asking 18-to-34-year-olds whether they expected to use various news media more, less or the same in three years. Some 44 percent of young adults said they would use the Internet more for news—ahead of newspapers (25 percent), local TV (25 percent) and cable TV (22 percent).<sup>31</sup> This issue of future news-use intentions for young adults, however, remains largely unexplored in the academic literature and calls for greater scrutiny in a highly fluid landscape of media abundance. Newspapers have long depended on the rising generation to grow up and become readers.<sup>32</sup> What can they expect from today's young adults?

## **Research Questions**

These considerations lead us to the following research questions:

### **RQ1:**

How do young adults perceive news, and what are their sources for news?

### **RQ2:**

What news sources do young adults expect to use five years from now, and how are those sources related to their perceptions of news today?

## **Method**

To answer the research questions, a Web-based survey was conducted of a random sample of college students at two large public universities. Through a Public Information Act request, a census of student e-mail addresses was

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obtained for both schools. The statistical software SPSS was used to select 15 percent randomly from each university, resulting in a combined survey population of 10,537 students. In February 2007, students received an e-mail inviting them to participate in the survey. The e-mail provided a personalized ID token. Several reminder e-mails were sent until the survey closed 10 days later. A total of 1,391 students completed the survey, representing a 16.3 percent response rate at one school and 9.4 percent at the other, for an overall response rate of 13.2 percent. While not desirable, the response rate is fairly typical for surveying young adults.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, in an era of increasingly weak response rates,<sup>34</sup> researchers have shown that lower rates of return do not necessarily result in diminished data quality.<sup>35</sup> For this study, only responses from students ages 18 to 29 were analyzed ( $n = 1,222$ ).

### *Perceptions of News*

To address RQ1, regarding young adults' perceptions of news, respondents were asked to rate 16 words and phrases that described their feelings about news and included the following: too time-consuming, boring, irrelevant to me, hard to understand, mostly negative, not enjoyable to read/watch, inconvenient, biased, informative, something to talk about, entertaining, part of my daily habit, helpful in making choices, part of my civic duty, easily accessible and objective/fair. The response options were drawn in part from dominant words and phrases respondents used to describe news and newspapers in a large biannual study of media use.<sup>36</sup> The response choices also were cast to gauge the degree to which perceptions of news were distinguished by the four areas of gratification in media texts<sup>37</sup>—personal identity (e.g., news as “my daily habit” and “my civic duty”), personal relationships (e.g., news as “something to talk about”), surveillance (e.g., news as “informative” and “helpful in making choices”) and diversion (e.g., news as “entertaining”). A factor analysis was used to tease out dimensions of feelings about news.

### *Present Sources for News*

Regarding present sources, students were asked, “How often do you get news and information from the following media sources?” Respondents reported media use on a four-point scale—never or seldom, 1-2 days per week, 3-4 days per week or 5 or more days per week. Media source options included: “The Daily Show,” “The Colbert Report,” “South Park,” David Letterman’s show, Jay Leno’s show, Conan O’Brien’s show, Facebook.com, MySpace.com, YouTube.com, blogs, online news sites (CNN.com, Yahoo.com), ESPN, cable TV news, local TV news, network TV news, radio, magazines, print versions of campus newspapers, print versions of other newspapers and other. Sources were listed so that media most popular among young adults appeared first, in part to maintain students’ interest in the survey.<sup>38</sup> The media sources also were specific, because young adults were more likely to recognize Facebook.com and MySpace.com than a vague category of “social-networking sites.”

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### *Future Sources for News*

To answer the aspect of RQ2 regarding young adults' future sources for news, respondents were given a question nearly identical to that above. It had the same list of 20 media sources, presented in the same order and with the same four-point scale. The question, however, was worded with the future in mind: "Five years from now, how often do you think you will get news and information from the following media sources?" The results were factor analyzed to reveal underlying dimensions of future news use. To connect these news intentions with present news perceptions and thus answer RQ2, an additional test was conducted: As new independent variables, the resultant dimensions of news perceptions were tested in cross-tabulations to find the degree to which they might explain the dependent variable—the expected frequent use of certain types of media in the future.

### *Independent Variables*

This latter analysis was accomplished first by creating additive scales based on the aforementioned factor analysis of news perceptions, which will receive a brief explanation here and more elaboration in the results section. [See Table 1] The items loading on each factor were added to create separate scales. Before creating the scales, the items were recoded so that higher values expressed stronger perceptions of news. For three dimensions, the following indices were constructed: time and effort consuming ( $M = 1.64$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ , range: 0-6, Cronbach's  $s = .53$ ),<sup>39</sup> satisfies civic and personal needs ( $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = 1.63$ , range: 0-6, Cronbach's  $s = .69$ ) and socially useful ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ , range: 0-6, Cronbach's  $s = .67$ ). The other two dimensions—devoid of fun and biased—were based on single variables each: "not enjoyable to read/watch" ( $M = .822$ ,  $SD = .631$ , range: 0-2) and "biased" ( $M = 1.35$ ,  $SD = .597$ , range: 0-2).

To test these dimensions' influence on expectations for future news use

*In comparing perceptions and intentions, this study found that young adults who have positive perceptions of news— who find that it satisfies personal, social and civic needs, providing the kind of utility described by the uses and gratifications typology— were significantly likely to anticipate becoming regular users of traditional sources in the future.*

(RQ2), the new construct variables were split into dichotomous groups to reflect “strong” and “weak” feelings toward those perceptions of news. While the median has been treated as a traditional point at which to split variables,<sup>40</sup> in this study the 75th percentile was used. This was done in part because of the presence of one-variable dimensions (e.g., devoid of fun) that arose from the factor analysis, as well as the relatively limited response choices (a lot, some, not at all), the cumulative effect of which made it difficult to differentiate between those “strong” and “weak” in a uniform way across dimensions. Thus, this study instead classified the highest quartile as “strong” and the rest as “weak,” making the “strong” group more reflective of those respondents who indicated, on average, “A lot” in certain perceptions of news—e.g., they found news to be very time-consuming, very personally satisfying, or very socially useful. This dichotomous split at the 75th percentile thus provides a more meaningful measure.

### *Dependent Variables*

Next, this process of splitting additive scales (at the same 75th percentile) was repeated for each of the dimensions of future media use, which also were obtained through a factor analysis. [See Table 3] As before, the reliability of each scale was ensured: social networking ( $M = .957$ ,  $SD = 1.73$ , range: 0-9, Cronbach's  $= .79$ ), television news ( $M = 4.98$ ,  $SD = 2.73$ , range: 0-9, Cronbach's  $= .83$ ), satire and fake news ( $M = 1.18$ ,  $SD = 1.85$ , range: 0-9, Cronbach's  $= .81$ ), late night comedy ( $M = 1.13$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ , range: 0-9, Cronbach's  $= .78$ ), print and radio ( $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = 2.21$ , range: 0-9, Cronbach's  $= .57$ ) and online news ( $M = 2.01$ ,  $SD = .980$ , range: 0-3). Because of the split around the 75th percentile, it became possible to test, for example, how those “strong” on television news—those who expressed the greatest likelihood of becoming a frequent user in the future—were influenced by particular “strong” and “weak” perceptions of news today.

## **Results**

### *Profile of Young Adult Sample*

Of the 1,222 respondents ages 18 to 29, the mean age was just under 22 and 54 percent were female. Two-thirds of the respondents were white, 14 percent Asian or Asian American, 13 percent Hispanic or Latino, four percent African American or black and three percent other. The vast majority (nearly 80 percent) were undergraduate students. Nearly half of all respondents (48 percent) reported reading the print version of a newspaper—either the campus newspaper or another—at least three or four days per week, and 20 percent said they never or seldom read any newspaper.

Although the survey response rate was 13 percent, by factoring in sampling error it can be seen that the sample represented well the schools from which it was drawn. At the larger of the two southwestern universities, the ethnic breakdown of the respondents ( $n = 882$ )—77 percent white, 10 percent Hispanic,

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**Table 1**  
**Dimensions of Young Adults' Perceptions of News: A Factor Analysis**

	<i>I</i> <i>Time and</i> <i>Effort</i> <i>Consuming</i>	<i>II</i> <i>Satisfies</i> <i>Civic</i> <i>and Personal</i> <i>Needs</i>	<i>III</i> <i>Socially</i> <i>Useful</i>	<i>IV</i> <i>Devoid</i> <i>of Fun</i>	<i>V</i> <i>Biased</i>
Inconvenient	<b>.730</b>	-.026	-.158	.126	.091
Too time-consuming	<b>.665</b>	-.085	-.062	.170	.110
Hard to understand	<b>.570</b>	-.031	.100	.102	-.093
Easily accessible	-.486	.309	.333	.426	-.088
Part of my civic duty	-.050	<b>.817</b>	.061	-.034	-.010
Helpful in making choices	.011	<b>.755</b>	.221	-.178	-.187
Part of my daily habit	-.342	<b>.605</b>	.179	-.213	.002
Something to talk about	-.061	.188	<b>.809</b>	-.045	.012
Informative	-.077	-.008	<b>.729</b>	.014	-.279
Entertaining	-.010	.287	<b>.664</b>	-.308	.029
Not enjoyable to read/watch	.295	-.153	-.250	<b>.656</b>	.087
Mostly negative	-.012	-.048	-.012	.607	.466
Boring	.453	-.176	-.086	.566	-.004
Irrelevant to me	.328	-.290	-.052	.509	-.093
Biased	.036	.039	-.054	.131	<b>.827</b>
Objective/fair	-.043	.174	.125	.048	-.778
Eigenvalues	4.13	1.68	1.51	1.78	1.01
% Variance	25.8%	10.5%	9.4%	7.4%	6.3%

*Note.* Extraction method: Principal component analysis. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization. Primary loading of a variable on a factor is indicated by boldface type. Sample size equals 1,222.

8 percent Asian, 3 percent black and 2 percent other—compared favorably with the school’s actual demographic makeup: 73 percent white, 11 percent Hispanic, 8 percent “international,” 4 percent Asian and 3 percent black. Likewise, the sample ( $n = 340$ ) representing the second public university involved in this study reflected the school’s diversity. The sample group was 39 percent white, 29 percent Asian, 19 percent Hispanic, nine percent black and four percent other; the school’s actual demographic breakdown is 40 percent white, 19 percent Asian, 18 percent Hispanic, 13 percent black and 10 percent other. Moreover, the mean ages for the samples representing the two universities (21 and 23) reflected the nature of the schools themselves—the first a young, undergraduate-dominated university in a small town, the second a commuter school in a large metropolitan area. Thus, not only are the sample groups diverse, but the universities themselves are distinct culturally and geographically. The net effect is a more comprehensive and representative perspective on young adults’ relationship with news.

Nearly all respondents expressed at least some interest in news: 45 percent were “interested,” 52 percent “somewhat interested” and three percent “not at



all interested" in news. Gender and age emerged as significant factors in news interest. Males (53 percent) were more likely than females (38 percent) to say they were "interested" in news ( $X^2 = 28.57$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and 24-to-29-year-olds (56 percent) were more likely than 18-to-20-year-olds (39 percent) to consider themselves "interested" in news ( $X^2 = 22.88$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p < .001$ ).<sup>41</sup>

### *Dimensions of News Perceptions*

To understand the underlying dimensions of survey respondents' perceptions of news and thus answer RQ1, the words and phrases used to describe respondents' feelings about news were factor analyzed, as noted previously. As Table 1 shows, five dimensions emerged, describing major young-adult perceptions of news: time and effort consuming, satisfies civic and personal needs, socially useful, devoid of fun and biased. The time and effort-consuming dimension carried a negative tone, with high loadings of "inconvenient," "too time-consuming" and "hard to understand." The satisfies civic and personal needs dimension emphasized news as it relates to the individual—"part of my civic duty," "helpful in making choices" and "part of my daily habit." The socially useful dimension incorporated aspects of socio-cultural utility through news: "something to talk about," "informative," and "entertaining." The devoid of fun dimension was represented by news being "not enjoyable to read/watch," and the biased dimension spoke for itself.<sup>42</sup> With regard to the strength of each dimension (when 2 = "A lot," 1 = "Some," and 0 = "Not at all"), the average means indicated the extent to which respondents identified with each dimension as a whole: socially useful (1.39), biased (1.35), satisfies civic and personal needs (.963), devoid of fun (.822) and time and effort consuming (.547). In other words, relatively few respondents found news to be highly inconvenient and time-consuming, as compared to the number of respondents who found high social value in news.<sup>43</sup>

### *Sources for News, Now and in the Future*

Regarding young adults' sources for news now (RQ1) and in the future (RQ2), when respondents were asked how often they got news and information from traditional, online and entertainment sources, and how often they will get news from those sources in the future, it became clear that the use of some sources would increase while others would decrease. As illustrated in Table 2, young adults signaled that in five years they would regularly get more of their news and information from traditional sources and less from social-networking sites. Entertainment shows, such as late-night comedy and fake-news programs, showed little or no gain.

The only media sources that young adults intended to use less in the future were those targeted to young adults: the campus newspaper (for obvious reasons, given that students will have left school in five years), social-networking sites (Facebook and MySpace), the video-sharing site YouTube and "The Colbert Report." Intended future use of "The Daily Show" and "South Park," programs also

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aimed at this demographic, remained about the same. Meanwhile, intended future use of “older” media aimed at a broader audience—such as television, non-student newspapers, radio and magazines—was expected to rise. In fact, regular print newspaper use was expected to increase nearly

**Table 2**  
**Traditional, Online and Entertainment Sources for News:**  
**A Comparison of Present and Future News Use**

<i>Source for news and information</i>	<i>Present</i>	<i>Future</i>	<i>% Change</i>
Network TV news	36%	63%	+75%
Non-student print newspapers	14%	41%	+193%
Local TV news	33%	58%	+76%
Cable TV news	33%	54%	+64%
Online news sites	58%	71%	+22%
Radio	36%	47%	+31%
Magazines	14%	23%	+64%
Tonight Show with Jay Leno	5%	9%	+80%
Late Show with David Letterman	4%	8%	+100%
Late Night with Conan O'Brien	5%	8%	+60%
Blogs	9%	11%	+22%
The Daily Show	13%	13%	0%
South Park	6%	6%	0%
The Colbert Report	12%	11%	-8%
YouTube.com	10%	8%	-20%
MySpace.com	15%	6%	-60%
Facebook.com	28%	8%	-71%
Campus newspaper (print version)	44%	9%	-80%

*Note: Sample size equals 1,222*

three-fold, from 14 percent to 41 percent. Likewise, regular use of TV news was expected to increase dramatically (up 76 percent, 75 percent and 74 percent for local, local and cable, respectively). Online news sites, which could be classified as “traditional” media in the sense that their content is largely supplied by newspapers and wire services, emerged as the dominant regular source for news, now (58 percent) and in the future (71 percent).

*Connecting Perceptions and Intentions for Media Use*

Knowing the underlying factors of future news use was an important step in linking perceptions of news now with intentions toward news later, thus answering RQ2. To capture those dimensions, future sources for news and information were factor analyzed. Six factors emerged: social networking, television news, satire and fake news, late-night comedy, print and radio and online news.<sup>44</sup> [See Table 3] These dimensions of anticipated media use in the future were compared with the present perceptions of news discussed previously.

Respondents with positive perceptions of news were significantly more likely to anticipate becoming heavy users of “traditional” news sources (i.e., the factors television news, print and radio and online news). Those who strongly feel that news satisfies their civic and personal needs, as compared to those “weak” on the same dimension, expressed an inclination for future use of TV

**Table 3**  
**Future Sources for News and Information: A Factor Analysis**

	<i>I</i> <i>Social</i> <i>Network'</i>	<i>II</i> <i>TV</i> <i>News</i>	<i>III</i> <i>Satire,</i> <i>Fake</i> <i>News</i>	<i>IV</i> <i>Late-</i> <i>Night</i> <i>Comedy</i>	<i>V</i> <i>Print,</i> <i>Radio</i>	<i>VI</i> <i>Online</i> <i>News</i>
MySpace.com	<b>.810</b>	.100	.120	.103	.058	-.020
Facebook.com	<b>.807</b>	.069	.066	.157	.111	-.080
YouTube.com	<b>.771</b>	-.033	.139	.145	-.037	.219
Blogs	.513	-.205	.125	.025	.049	.493
Local TV news	.051	<b>.893</b>	-.027	.090	.135	.032
Network TV news	.002	<b>.851</b>	-.021	.108	.142	.036
Cable TV news	.023	<b>.723</b>	.025	.047	.220	.249
The Colbert Report	.077	-.009	<b>.905</b>	.140	.038	.058
The Daily Show	.074	.027	<b>.891</b>	.128	.073	.042
South Park	.198	-.037	<b>.667</b>	.162	.010	.013
Jay Leno	.146	.109	.072	<b>.824</b>	.063	.005
Conan O'Brien	.105	.027	.197	<b>.792</b>	.046	.080
David Letterman	.159	.095	.179	<b>.770</b>	.132	.026
Magazines	.147	.074	.037	.024	<b>.768</b>	.156
Non-student						
print newspapers	-.080	.221	.013	.152	<b>.634</b>	.097
Radio	-.022	.364	.027	.021	<b>.559</b>	.023
Campus newspaper						
(print version)	.408	-.017	.073	.086	.501	-.074
Online news sites	.018	.217	-.018	-.044	.046	<b>.814</b>
ESPN	.012	.139	.102	.238	.232	.426
Eigenvalues	4.34	2.74	1.71	1.35	1.06	1.01
% Variance	22.8%	14.4%	9.0%	7.1%	5.6%	5.3%

*Note: Extraction method: Principal component analysis.*  
*Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization.*  
*Primary loading of a variable on a factor is indicated by boldface type.*  
*Sample size equals 1,222.*

news (36 percent versus 23 percent,  $p < .001$ ), print and radio sources (30 percent vs. 18 percent,  $p < .001$ ) and online news (54 percent vs. 36 percent,  $p < .001$ ). Likewise, those who strongly find news to be socially useful were more likely than their “weak” counterparts to expect to become frequent users of the same “traditional” sources in the future: television (39 percent vs. 22 percent,  $p < .001$ ), print and radio (29 percent vs. 18 percent,  $p < .001$ ) and online news (49 percent vs. 37 percent,  $p < .01$ ). Meanwhile, those with negative perceptions of news indicated the opposite in many cases. Those who strongly believe news is devoid of fun were significantly less likely to anticipate becoming regular users of traditional sources in the future. Those who strongly feel news takes too much time and effort not only showed a disinclination for traditional sources,

but also were more likely to anticipate becoming heavy users of social networking and late-night comedy for their news and information in the future. Thus, in connecting perceptions with intentions, we see that young adults who find utility in news today are significantly likely to anticipate becoming regular users of traditional sources in the future, in stark contrast to their counterparts with negative perceptions of news.

## Discussion And Conclusion

The results indicate that a better understanding of attitudinal perceptions and intentions can help us understand and estimate how young adults—a demographic vital to the future of newspapers<sup>45</sup>—expect to approach news and information as they grow up in a digital age.

Overall, respondents anticipated getting less of their news and information from social networking, entertainment and fake-news programs—the very media targeted to their demographic—and more from traditional news sources. In some cases, the shift is striking: Regular print newspaper use is expected to increase nearly three-fold, from 14 percent to 41 percent; other traditional sources also showed dramatic increases. Such findings seem to contradict evidence that today's young adults, unlike previous cohorts, are less likely than ever to pick up the newspaper habit.<sup>46</sup> Yet, it is possible that these assessments of the future represent social modeling in the present; that is, respondents think reading newspapers, as opposed to connecting on Facebook, is something older people do.

This leads to a second key finding. In comparing perceptions and intentions, this study found that young adults who have positive perceptions of news—who find that it satisfies personal, social and civic needs, providing the kind of utility described by the uses and gratifications typology—were significantly likely to anticipate becoming regular users of traditional sources in the future. By contrast, young adults with negative perceptions of news, particularly those who find news to represent too much time and effort, were more inclined to seek news and information from social networking and late-night comedy as opposed to traditional sources. Alternatively, we might interpret these findings as evidence that young adults who have positive perceptions of news are more likely to associate mature adulthood with traditional media. That alone would be interesting in that it suggests young adults see traditional sources to be “serious” and important.

In classifying young adults and their attitudes toward news, it is important to recognize, of course, that they are not monolithic—they are not uniformly disinterested in news, as popular portrayals often suggest. While it may be true that many in this age group take a dim view of news, a certain class of young adults strongly believes it will become heavily engaged in traditional news content across media platforms. This group of future news users looks for utility in news: personally, civically and socially.

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For the news industry at large and print newspapers in particular, these findings offer a glimmer of light amid a fog of declining ratings and readership.<sup>47</sup> If more than 40 percent of young adults expect to become regular newspaper readers in the future, who are these readers and how can they be won over? Perhaps the lesson for the industry is that in trying to attract and hold the elusive young-adult reader, newspapers should narrow their approach. Instead of fashioning quick-read briefs or tabloid editions for time-pressed consumers, newspapers ought to consider if they are chasing the wrong crowd. This study indicates that those who find news to be time-consuming and laborious today are likely to remain turned off to traditional news content, whether in print or online, in the future. Thus, instead of trying to be all things to all young people,<sup>48</sup> newspapers should begin trying to woo those young adults already inclined to becoming future readers—those who strongly feel that news satisfies their personal, civic and social needs. These young adults want value-added, utility-oriented news that gives them help in making choices, something to talk about with friends and a sense of their place in the world. They expect to be entertained as well as informed. Rather than simply *less* (e.g., shorter stories), perhaps young adults want *more*—that is, more tools for accomplishing “jobs to be done.”<sup>49</sup>

## Future Research

This paper provided a first step toward understanding how young adults expect to approach news in the future based on their perceptions of news today. Because of its exploratory nature, this study had inherent weaknesses. It surveyed college students, who are more affluent and better educated than young adults in general, it used a Web-based survey that left little room for open-ended feedback and it had a relatively low representation of minorities. And yet, this exploration served an important bridging function—connecting uses and gratifications with reasoned action, linking perceptions with intentions and fusing concerns of the industry and the academy alike regarding the future of news and the “vanishing newspaper.”<sup>50</sup>

### Notes

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38. While such question construction raises the possibility of ordering effects, it is important to note that Web surveys, more so than phone interviews, allows respondents to see choices within the larger context of the survey, and thus lessen the primacy effect—see, e.g., Dillman, *Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method*. Moreover, the researcher felt that a randomized question order here and elsewhere would have been disjointed and potentially confusing to respondents.

39. Note that while the exclusion of "hard to understand" would have increased the Cronbach's alpha level to .59, the variable was retained because of its relatively high loading on the factor analysis (see Table 1) and its logical inclusion with these other "negative" feelings toward news. Moreover, for exploratory analyses such as this, in which the number of items is few, low levels of alpha (e.g., .50) do not unduly attenuate validity coefficients, as noted by Neal Schmitt, "Uses and Abuses of Coefficient Alpha," *Psychological Assessment* 8, no. 4 (1996): 350-353.

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41. Given that the 24-to-29-year-olds in this study were mostly graduate students, such differences in news interest might have less to do with age than it does with level of education, which long has been associated with higher news media use.

42. Note that "easily accessible" did not load high on any one dimension, and "mostly negative," "boring," and "irrelevant to me," while loading fairly high on *Devoid of Fun*, also loaded comparatively high on other factors. Thus, these were dropped from further analysis.

43. The low mean for *Time and Effort Consuming* might speak to the relative ease with which college students, as opposed to young adults at large, have convenient access to news in the form of a free campus newspaper. Yet, it's important to note that the *Time and Effort Consuming* dimension, while seemingly minor, explained the largest share of variance.

44. Note that Blogs, Campus Newspaper and ESPN were excluded because they loaded high on more than one factor.

45. World Editors Forum, *Trends in Newsrooms 2008*.

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