



BEYOND THE SCREEN: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF NEWS CONSUMPTION HABITS, PREFERENCES, AND DRIVERS AMONG UNDERGRADUATE JOURNALISM AND NON-JOURNALISM STUDENTS

¹UGWUJA, Dorathy Ngozi

²EZE, Ogemdi Uchenna

^{1,2}Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Corresponding Author: EZE, Ogemdi Uchenna; ogemdi.eze@unn.edu.ng.

Abstract

This study comparatively examines news consumption habits, preferences, and drivers among undergraduate journalism and non-journalism students at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted with 400 undergraduates equally divided between journalism majors ($n = 200$) and non-journalism majors ($n = 200$). Grounded in the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), the study measured consumption patterns, platform preferences, and motivational drivers. Chi-square tests revealed significant differences across all dimensions. Journalism students reported higher consumption frequency (84.5% vs. 53.5%), greater preference for news websites (42.0% vs. 18.0%), and higher consumption of national/international news (83.5% vs. 43.0%). Non-journalism students favoured Instagram (52.5% vs. 36.0%) and entertainment content (94.0% vs. 66.5%). Regression analyses showed distinct motivational pathways: for journalism students, performance expectancy dominated ($\beta = .52$), while for non-journalism students, social influence ($\beta = .49$) and effort expectancy ($\beta = .40$) were strongest. Self-reported motivations converged: journalism students endorsed civic duty (68%), while non-journalism students cited social connection (69%) and entertainment (65%). The findings demonstrate that journalism and non-journalism students inhabit fundamentally different news ecosystems. For educators, the challenge lies in preparing students to produce news that reaches audiences unlike themselves. For the industry, adapting content for social platforms with accessible, engaging formats is imperative.

Keywords: news consumption, journalism students, UTAUT, social media, Nigeria

Introduction

The relationship between young adults and news media has long been a subject of scholarly concern, particularly as digital technologies continue to reshape the information landscape. For more than two decades, researchers have documented declining news consumption among younger generations, with profound implications for democratic engagement and the sustainability of traditional journalism (Mwangi & Lind, 2023; Clark, 2010). As Pew Research Center data have shown, while older adults consistently consume news across multiple platforms, those aged 18–29 demonstrate markedly lower engagement, with only 15 percent reading newspapers and nine percent using the web for news in the mid-2000s (Clark, 2010). This generational disconnect has only intensified with the proliferation of social media and mobile technologies.

Among the youngest adult populations, university students occupy a unique position. They represent not only the future news audience but, for those studying journalism, the future producers of news itself. Early studies at major journalism programs revealed that while journalism students consumed more

news than their peers, overall engagement remained surprisingly modest. Clark's (2010) study at the University of Nebraska found that only 34 percent of journalism majors spent meaningful time reading newspapers, while Anderson's (2007) research at the University of Missouri documented complex patterns of media substitution and complementarity as students navigated an increasingly digital ecosystem.

The intervening years have witnessed dramatic transformations. Smartphones have become ubiquitous, social media platforms have emerged as primary news gateways, and traditional media brands have scrambled to maintain relevance among younger demographics. Barrios-Rubio's (2024) recent work in Colombia demonstrates that young people now access news primarily through Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, yet surprisingly continue to value traditional journalistic brands, often through familial influence. Meanwhile, Adekambi and Agbolabori's (2018) application of the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) in Nigeria revealed that performance expectancy, effort expectancy, and social influence significantly predict students' intention to consume news online, though entertainment content dominates their actual consumption.

Problem Statement

What remains underexplored is how these contemporary patterns differ between students preparing for journalism careers and those in other disciplines. If journalism students are to effectively reach audiences like themselves, understanding the divergence in consumption habits, platform preferences, content choices, and underlying motivations between these groups becomes essential. This study therefore undertakes a comparative analysis of news consumption among undergraduate journalism and non-journalism students, examining not only what they consume and through which platforms, but also the factors—rooted in UTAUT framework—that drive their engagement. By illuminating these differences, the research aims to inform journalism educators seeking to prepare students for an industry that must bridge the growing gap between professional norms and the lived media experiences of the next generation.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the current patterns of news consumption (frequency, platforms, content preferences, and devices) among undergraduate students and to assess how these patterns differ between journalism and non-journalism majors.
2. To evaluate factors—including performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions, and self-reported motivations—that predict students' intention to consume news and their actual consumption behaviour, and to ascertain how these predictors differ between journalism and non-journalism majors.

Literature Review

The relationship between young adults and news media has attracted sustained scholarly attention over the past two decades, driven by concerns about declining civic engagement and the sustainability of traditional journalism models. This review synthesizes existing research on college students' news consumption, with particular attention to studies comparing journalism and non-journalism students, the evolution of digital platforms, and theoretical frameworks for understanding media use.

Generational Decline in News Consumption

Longitudinal research has documented a consistent decline in news consumption among younger generations. Feldman (2007), cited in Clark (2010), reported that only 26 percent of 18–29-year-olds read a newspaper daily in 2002, compared to 59 percent of those aged 65 and older. Television news fared only slightly better, with 40 percent of young adults watching, versus 73 percent of older adults. Perhaps most

tellingly, while 76 percent of young adults went online regularly in 2002, only 44 percent used the internet for news at least weekly, leading Feldman to conclude that the internet had done "little to close this generational news gap."

The Pew Research Centre for the People and the Press (2008), referenced extensively in Clark's thesis, found that the average age of Americans who regularly seek news in any medium was 52. Among 18–24-year-olds specifically, only 36 percent watched cable news, 21 percent watched network news, 15 percent read newspapers, and a mere nine percent used the web for news. These figures painted a concerning picture for an industry already struggling with declining audiences.

Journalism Students as a Distinct Population

Early studies comparing journalism students to their peers revealed important differences. Clark's (2010) pilot study at the University of Nebraska found that journalism students consumed news at higher rates than non-journalism students across most measures. Eighty-four percent of journalism students read newspaper websites compared to 59 percent of non-journalism students, and 25 percent watched national nightly news versus 16 percent of their peers. However, Clark expressed concern that even journalism students showed "surprisingly modest" engagement, with only 34 percent spending meaningful time reading newspapers.

Anderson's (2007) research at the University of Missouri, one of the nation's premier journalism programs, examined media usage patterns among journalism students specifically. Her study found that internet use was positively correlated with newspaper reading among this population, supporting what she termed a "supplement rather than substitute" relationship between new and traditional media. Anderson also documented age-related differences within journalism programs, with older students demonstrating different consumption patterns than younger ones.

The Shifting Digital Landscape

More recent research has documented dramatic transformations in how young people access news. Barrios-Rubio's (2024) comprehensive study of 1,300 Colombian university students found that smartphones have become the dominant device for news access, with 97.7 percent of students using mobile phones for this purpose. Instagram emerged as the primary gateway to news (45 percent), followed by news websites and applications (30 percent). Notably, Barrios-Rubio found that despite the shift to social platforms, young people continued to value traditional journalistic brands, often due to familial influence—a finding that challenges assumptions about complete detachment from legacy media.

Mwangi and Lind's (2023) qualitative investigation explored why college students engage or disengage with news, identifying a fundamental disconnect between student preferences and industry output. Their focus group interviews revealed that students find traditional news formats unappealing and prefer content that is entertaining, visually engaging, and socially relevant. The authors warned of a "widening gap between current journalism curriculum and the needs and habits of the students in our classes."

Theoretical Frameworks for Understanding News Consumption

Adekannbi and Agbolabori (2018) applied the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) to examine news consumption among Nigerian undergraduates. Their survey of 249 students found that performance expectancy ($\beta = .461$), effort expectancy ($\beta = .421$), and social influence ($\beta = .319$) all significantly predicted students' intention to consume news online. Behavioural intention ($\beta = .189$) and facilitating conditions ($\beta = .184$) in turn predicted actual use. Notably, entertainment news was the most

popular content type, with over 80 percent of students consuming it, followed by national and international news.

The UTAUT framework, originally developed by Venkatesh et al. (2003), provides a robust theoretical lens for understanding technology adoption by identifying four key predictors: performance expectancy (usefulness), effort expectancy (ease of use), social influence (peer effects), and facilitating conditions (infrastructure support). This model has proven valuable across multiple cultural contexts and remains relevant for examining contemporary news consumption.

Media Displacement and Complementarity

A persistent theoretical debate concerns whether online news displaces or complements traditional media. Anderson's (2007) literature review highlighted conflicting findings: Stanford Institute research (2000) found displacement effects, with heavy internet users reporting decreased newspaper reading, while Stempel's (1999) study found internet users were actually more likely to read newspapers than non-users. Anderson concluded that "the changes the Internet is undergoing and the changes in its use may be one of the reasons for these conflicting findings," suggesting that the relationship between old and new media evolves as technology matures.

Research Gap

While existing studies have examined college students' news consumption and, separately, compared journalism to non-journalism students, no recent research has combined these approaches within a unified theoretical framework that accounts for the contemporary platform environment. Clark's (2010) comparative study is now fifteen years old, predating the rise of Instagram, TikTok, and the smartphone as the primary news device. Barrios-Rubio's (2024) research, while current and comprehensive, focuses on Colombian students and does not specifically compare journalism majors to others. The present study addresses this gap by applying the UTAUT framework to compare news consumption patterns, preferences, and drivers among journalism and non-journalism undergraduates in the current media landscape.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine and compare news consumption patterns between journalism and non-journalism undergraduates at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN). The survey method was appropriate as it enabled standardized data collection from a large sample, facilitating statistical comparisons between the two groups.

Population and Sample

The target population was undergraduate students at UNN. A total of 400 students participated, equally divided between journalism majors ($n = 200$) and non-journalism majors ($n = 200$). The sample size of 400 was determined based on recommendations for regression analysis, requiring at least 10–20 cases per predictor variable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). The UTAUT model includes four core predictors of behavioural intention and two predictors of actual use, necessitating a minimum of 60–120 cases for stable parameter estimates. The sample of 200 per group comfortably exceeds this requirement, ensuring adequate statistical power for separate group analyses.

The equal distribution was a deliberate design choice to enable robust comparative analysis, ensuring observed differences reflect genuine variation rather than sample size disparities. Non-journalism

majors were recruited from the Faculties of Arts, Education, Engineering, and Physical Sciences to ensure disciplinary diversity.

Sampling Technique

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed. First, the Department of Mass Communication was purposively selected to represent journalism students, while four other faculties were purposively selected for non-journalism students. Second, convenience sampling was used to recruit individual participants within each faculty through student WhatsApp groups.

Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire on Google Forms, comprising four sections: Demographic Information, News Consumption Patterns, UTAUT Constructs, and Motivations. The questionnaire was pilot-tested with 30 students, leading to minor wording adjustments. Completion time was approximately 10–12 minutes.

Data Collection Procedure

Following ethical approval from UNN's Research Ethics Committee, data collection occurred in October 2024. The online questionnaire was distributed through faculty-specific WhatsApp groups. Data collection continued for four weeks, yielding 487 responses, of which 400 were complete and usable. The final sample was constructed by randomly selecting 200 complete responses from journalism students and 200 from non-journalism students to ensure balanced groups.

Results

A total of 400 undergraduate students completed the survey, equally divided between journalism majors ($n = 200$) and non-journalism majors ($n = 200$) recruited from the faculties of Arts, Physical Sciences, Education, and Engineering. The sample was predominantly female (58.0%), with a mean age of 20.4 years ($SD = 1.6$). The smartphone was the dominant device for news access, used by 96.0% of respondents, followed by laptops (35.0%).

RQ1: Patterns and Differences in News Consumption

Table 1 presents comparative data on news consumption patterns between journalism and non-journalism majors. Overall, students reported high levels of engagement, with 70.5% consuming news several times daily. However, significant differences emerged between the two groups across all measured dimensions. Journalism students reported substantially higher consumption frequency (84.5% consuming news several times daily) compared to their non-journalism peers (53.5%), $\chi^2(1, N = 400) = 41.28, p = .001$. This represents a difference of 31 percentage points between the two groups.

Regarding primary platforms, journalism students were more than twice as likely to use dedicated news websites or applications compared to non-journalism students (42.0% vs. 18.0%), $\chi^2(1, N = 400) = 27.89, p = .001$. Conversely, non-journalism students favoured Instagram as their primary news gateway, with 52.5% selecting this platform compared to 36.0% of journalism students, $\chi^2(1, N = 400) = 8.12, p = .004$.

Content preferences revealed the starkest divergence between the two groups. Journalism students consumed national and international news at nearly double the rate of non-journalism students (83.5% vs. 43.0%), $\chi^2(1, N = 400) = 76.92, p = .001$. Even more pronounced was the difference in consumption of

politics and business news, with 57.0% of journalism students following these topics compared to only 7.5% of non-journalism students, $\chi^2(1, N = 400) = 107.84, p = .001$. Conversely, entertainment news dominated the diets of non-journalism students, with 94.0% consuming this content compared to 66.5% of journalism students, $\chi^2(1, N = 400) = 46.15, p = .001$.

Time spent on news also differed significantly between groups. Nearly two-thirds of journalism students (63.0%) devoted 30 minutes or more to daily news consumption, compared to just over one-quarter (28.5%) of non-journalism students, $\chi^2(1, N = 400) = 59.52, p = .001$.

These findings collectively indicate that journalism and non-journalism students inhabit fundamentally different news ecosystems, with journalism students demonstrating more frequent engagement, preference for dedicated news platforms, consumption of harder news content, and greater time investment, while non-journalism students favour social platforms and entertainment-oriented content.

Table 1. Comparative News Consumption Patterns by Major

| Variable | Category | Journalism (n =200) | Non-journalism (n =200) | χ^2 | p |
|------------------|------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|----------|-------|
| Frequency | Several times daily | 169(84.5%) | 107(53.5%) | 41.28 | 0.001 |
| Primary platform | News websites/Apps | 84(42%) | 36(18%) | 27.89 | 0.001 |
| | Instagram | 72(36%) | 105(52.5%) | 8.12 | 0.004 |
| News type | National/International | 167(83.5%) | 86(43%) | 76.92 | 0.001 |
| | Entertainment | 133(66.5%) | 188(94%) | 46.15 | 0.001 |
| | Politics/Business | 114(57%) | 15(7.5%) | 107.84 | 0.001 |
| Time Spent | 30 Mins + | 126(63%) | 57(28.5%) | 59.52 | 0.001 |

Note. Percentages for news type exceed 100% due to multiple responses.

RQ2: Drivers of News Consumption

To examine factors predicting news consumption, separate multiple regression analyses were conducted for each group using the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) framework.

Table 2 presents standardized beta coefficients for predictors of behavioural intention and actual use, alongside self-reported motivations.

The regression models revealed distinct explanatory pathways for each group, accounting for substantial variance in both intention (adjusted $R^2 = .38$ for journalism students, $.45$ for non-journalism students) and actual use (adjusted $R^2 = .29$ and $.33$, respectively).

Journalism Students. For journalism students, Performance Expectancy—the belief that consuming news is useful for professional and academic success—was the dominant predictor of behavioural intention ($\beta = .52, p < .001$). Social Influence also contributed significantly but to a lesser degree ($\beta = .22, p < .05$). Notably, Effort Expectancy did not significantly predict intention for this group ($\beta = .15, p > .05$), suggesting that ease of access is not a determining factor for journalism students once they have formed the intention to consume news. Behavioural intention, in turn, strongly predicted actual consumption behaviour ($\beta = .48, p < .001$). Facilitating Conditions did not significantly influence use for this group ($\beta = .12, p > .05$), indicating that infrastructure and access barriers do not impede their news consumption.

Non-Journalism Students. For non-journalism students, a markedly different pattern emerged. Social Influence ($\beta = .49, p < .001$) and Effort Expectancy ($\beta = .40, p < .001$)—the perceived ease of accessing news—were the strongest predictors of behavioural intention. Performance expectancy, while significant, played a substantially diminished role compared to journalism students ($\beta = .20, p < .05$). Both behavioural intention ($\beta = .30, p < .01$) and facilitating conditions ($\beta = .35, p < .001$) directly predicted actual use, suggesting that infrastructure and access barriers remain relevant constraints for this group. Unlike journalism students, for whom intention alone sufficed, non-journalism students' actual consumption depends partly on external support conditions.

Self-reported motivations aligned closely with these quantitative predictors, providing convergent validity for the UTAUT findings. Journalism students overwhelmingly endorsed civic and professional duty (68.0%) and academic requirements (53.0%) as primary motivations for news consumption. In stark contrast, non-journalism students cited social connection (69.0%) and entertainment (65.0%) as their main drivers. These motivational differences correspond directly to the UTAUT predictors: journalism students' emphasis on duty and academics reflects their high performance expectancy, while non-journalism students' focus on social connection and entertainment aligns with their social influence and effort expectancy pathways.

Together, these findings indicate that journalism and non-journalism students are driven by fundamentally different motivational structures. Journalism students consume news because they perceive it as professionally useful and personally meaningful, and their intentions translate reliably into behaviour regardless of access barriers. Non-journalism students, by contrast, are propelled by social dynamics and ease of access, requiring both peer influence and supportive conditions to convert intention into actual consumption.

Table 2. Predictors and Motivations for News Consumption by Major*

| Variable | Journalism (n = 200) | Non-Journalism (n = 200) |
|---|----------------------|--------------------------|
| UTAUT Predictors (β) | | |
| Performance Expectancy → Intention | .52*** | .20* |
| Social Influence → Intention | .22* | .49*** |
| Effort Expectancy → Intention | 0.15 | .40*** |
| Behavioural Intention → Actual Use | .48*** | .30** |
| Facilitating Conditions → Actual Use | 0.12 | .35*** |
| Adjusted R ² (Intention model) | 0.38 | 0.45 |
| Adjusted R ² (Use model) | 0.29 | 0.33 |
| Primary Motivations (%) | | |
| Civic/Professional Duty | 68 | 15 |
| Social Connection | 28 | 69 |
| Entertainment | 21 | 65 |
| Academic Requirement | 53 | 12 |

*Note. UTAUT cells are standardized beta coefficients (β). Motivation cells represent percentage of respondents endorsing each motivation. PE = Performance Expectancy, SI = Social Influence, EE = Effort Expectancy, BI = Behavioural Intention, FC = Facilitating Conditions. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.*

Discussion of findings

The findings of this study illuminate fundamental differences in how journalism and non-journalism students engage with news, extending and updating earlier research while providing new theoretical insights through the UTAUT framework. This discussion interprets these results in light of existing literature and considers their implications for journalism education and the news industry.

Consistent with Clark's (2010) findings at the University of Nebraska, this study confirms that journalism students consume news at significantly higher rates than their non-journalism peers. Clark reported that 84.1% of journalism students read newspaper websites compared to 59.3% of non-journalism students—a pattern that echoes in the present study's findings that 83.5% of journalism students consume national and international news compared to 43.0% of non-journalism students. This persistent gap, observed across a fifteen-year interval, suggests that majoring in journalism either attracts individuals with pre-existing news interest or cultivates such interest through curriculum and professional socialization, or both.

However, the present study reveals that this advantage extends beyond simple consumption frequency to encompass the entire news ecosystem. Journalism students not only consume more news but also prefer different platforms (dedicated news websites over Instagram), different content (politics and business over entertainment), and invest substantially more time. This finding addresses Clark's (2010) concern that "journalism students don't show more interest in news" by demonstrating that, at least in this sample, journalism students do indeed demonstrate substantially greater engagement.

The platform preferences documented here reflect the dramatic transformation of the media environment since earlier studies. Barrios-Rubio's (2024) research in Colombia found that Instagram had become the primary gateway to news for 45% of students, a pattern closely mirrored in the present study where 52.5% of non-journalism students cited Instagram as their primary platform. This represents a decisive shift from the era when Clark (2010) and Anderson (2007) conducted their research, when newspaper websites and television dominated the landscape.

Yet notably, journalism students in this study buck this trend, with 42.0% preferring dedicated news websites and applications compared to only 18.0% of non-journalism students. This divergence suggests that journalism education may instill not only greater news interest but also more intentional, platform-specific news-seeking behaviours. As Mwangi and Lind (2023) noted, there exists a "disconnect between the students and the news industry which continues to produce content that doesn't meet their needs." Journalism students, however, appear to have developed strategies for accessing news that bypass this disconnect, actively seeking out dedicated news platforms rather than relying on incidental exposure through social media.

The UTAUT analysis provides perhaps the most novel contribution of this study, revealing fundamentally different motivational structures between the two groups. For journalism students, Performance Expectancy—the belief that news consumption is useful for professional and academic success—dominated as a predictor of intention ($\beta = .52$). This aligns with Anderson's (2007) observation that journalism students' media use is shaped by their professional aspirations. The strong predictive power of performance expectancy suggests that journalism students have internalized the professional norm that staying informed is integral to their future careers.

For non-journalism students, by contrast, Social Influence ($\beta = .49$) and Effort Expectancy ($\beta = .40$) emerged as the dominant predictors. This pattern resonates with Mwangi and Lind's (2023) qualitative finding that students are motivated by "social connection" and prefer news that is easily accessible. It also extends Adekannbi and Agbolabori's (2018) Nigerian study, which found social influence to be a significant predictor of news consumption intention ($\beta = .319$), though in their mixed-sample study, performance

expectancy ($\beta = .461$) was actually stronger. The present study's comparative design reveals that aggregating journalism and non-journalism students may mask important subgroup differences.

The self-reported motivations provide convergent validity for these UTAUT findings. Journalism students' endorsement of civic and professional duty (68%) and academic requirements (53%) directly reflects their high performance expectancy. Non-journalism students' emphasis on social connection (69%) and entertainment (65%) corresponds to their social influence and effort expectancy pathways. These motivational differences suggest that the two groups are not merely consuming different quantities of news but are engaging with news for qualitatively different reasons.

An important theoretical finding concerns the differential role of facilitating conditions. For journalism students, facilitating conditions did not significantly predict actual use ($\beta = .12$, ns), suggesting that once they form the intention to consume news, infrastructure barriers do not impede them. For non-journalism students, however, facilitating conditions significantly predicted actual use ($\beta = .35$, $p < .001$), indicating that access barriers remain relevant constraints.

This finding extends Anderson's (2007) discussion of whether online news "supplements rather than substitutes" for traditional media. For journalism students, intention alone suffices—they will find a way to consume news regardless of access conditions. For non-journalism students, the pathway from intention to behaviour is more fragile, dependent on supportive conditions. This suggests that efforts to increase news consumption among non-journalism students must address not only motivation but also access and ease-of-use barriers.

The findings carry several implications for journalism educators. First, they suggest that journalism programs are successfully cultivating news consumption habits that differ markedly from those of the general student population. Journalism students' preference for dedicated news platforms and their consumption of hard news content align with professional norms and expectations. This is encouraging news that addresses Clark's (2010) concern that "this study does not indicate that journalism students have a strong interest in any news."

However, the findings also reveal a challenge. If journalism students are learning to navigate dedicated news platforms while their future audiences increasingly rely on incidental exposure through social media, a gap may emerge between how journalists consume news and how their audiences do. Mwangi and Lind (2023) warned of a "widening gap between current journalism curriculum and the needs and habits of the students in our classes." The present study suggests that this gap may be even wider when considering that journalism students are not representative of their generational cohort in terms of news habits.

This suggests that journalism curricula should include explicit instruction on how to reach audiences who consume news through social platforms, who are motivated by social connection rather than civic duty, and who require low-effort access. As Barrios-Rubio (2024) noted, "the media industry must strengthen productive routines that address the transmedia narrative linked to current affairs and journalistic elements with the capacity to attract young people." Training journalism students to create content that meets their peers where they are—on Instagram, motivated by social connection—may be as important as training them in traditional reporting skills.

For the news industry, these findings underscore the challenge of engaging young audiences who are not already predisposed to news consumption. The non-journalism students in this study represent the majority of their generation, and their preferences for entertainment content, social platforms, and low-effort access align with patterns documented by Adekannbi and Agbolabori (2018) and Barrios-Rubio (2024).

The industry faces a choice. It can continue producing content that appeals to the minority of young people who already consume news intentionally (like the journalism students in this study), or it can adapt its content and distribution strategies to reach the majority who encounter news incidentally through social platforms and are motivated by social connection and entertainment. The latter approach would require embracing what Mwangi and Lind (2023) termed "infotainment"—presenting serious news in formats that are visually engaging, easily shareable, and integrated into the social media experience.

The finding that non-journalism students' actual use depends on facilitating conditions also suggests that industry efforts to reduce access barriers—such as optimizing for mobile, reducing data costs, and integrating with popular platforms—could meaningfully increase consumption among this group.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, as with Clark's (2010) study, this research was conducted at a single university and cannot be generalized to all college students. Regional and institutional variations likely exist. Second, the cross-sectional design cannot establish causation—it remains unclear whether journalism programs cultivate news habits or simply attract students who already possess them. Longitudinal research tracking students throughout their academic careers would help address this question. Third, the study focused on general news consumption patterns rather than specific topics or platforms. Future research might examine how journalism and non-journalism students engage with specific types of content (e.g., local news, political news) and specific platforms (e.g., TikTok, podcasts) in greater detail. Barrios-Rubio's (2024) finding that podcasts are gaining traction among young audiences, for instance, warrants further investigation.

Finally, qualitative research building on Mwangi and Lind's (2023) approach could provide deeper insight into why these differences exist and how non-journalism students might be more effectively engaged. Understanding the lived experience of young news consumers—their frustrations, their gratifications, their social contexts—would complement the quantitative patterns documented here.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that journalism and non-journalism students inhabit fundamentally different news ecosystems, shaped by distinct platform preferences, content choices, motivational structures, and barriers to access. These differences, while consistent with patterns observed over the past fifteen years, have become more pronounced in the contemporary platform environment. For journalism educators, the challenge is to prepare students who consume news like professionals to produce news that reaches audiences who consume news like their non-journalism peers. For the news industry, the findings underscore the urgency of adapting content and distribution strategies to meet young audiences where they are and on their own terms.

Recommendations

First, journalism educators should integrate practical training in social media storytelling into their curricula, teaching students to adapt serious news into engaging formats for platforms like Instagram and TikTok to bridge the gap between professional norms and the consumption habits of general audiences. Second, media organizations must prioritize low-effort, mobile-optimized content distribution strategies that integrate seamlessly with social platforms, addressing the effort expectancy and facilitating conditions that significantly influence non-journalism students' news engagement.

Third, journalism programs and industry stakeholders should collaborate on research exploring the social motivations driving news consumption among general students, using these insights to develop content that appeals to peer connection and entertainment rather than relying solely on appeals to civic duty.

including performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions, and self-reported motivations—predict students' intention to consume news and their actual consumption behaviour, and how do these predictors differ between journalism and non-journalism majors

References

- Adekannbi, J. O., & Agbolabori, D. M. (2018). News consumption on the internet by undergraduate students of public universities in Nigeria. *Indian Journal of Information Sources and Services*, 8(2), 99-107.
- Anderson, E. (2007). Media usage of journalism students of the University of Missouri-Columbia [Master's thesis, University of Missouri-Columbia].
- Barrios-Rubio, A. (2024). Information consumption habits of young Colombian university students. *Journalism and Media*, 5(3), 915-932. <https://doi.org/10.3390/journalmedia5030058>
- Clark, F. G. (2010). News consumption habits of students at the University of Nebraska [Master's thesis, University of Nebraska-Lincoln]. DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska-Lincoln. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/journalismdiss/10>
- Feldman, L. (2007). The news about comedy: Young audiences, The Daily Show, and evolving notions of journalism. *Journalism*, 8(4), 406-427.
- Lind, C. (2023). In S. C. Mwangi & C. Lind, An exploration of the news consumption habits of college students: Implications for journalism education. *Teaching Journalism & Mass Communication*, 13(2), 22-30.
- Mwangi, S. C., & Lind, C. (2023). An exploration of the news consumption habits of college students: Implications for journalism education. *Teaching Journalism & Mass Communication*, 13(2), 22-30.
- Pew Research Centre for the People and the Press. (2008, August 17). Key news audiences now blend online and traditional sources. Retrieved January 31, 2026 from <http://people-press.org/report/444/news-media>
- Stempel, G. H., III, Hargrove, T., & Bernt, J. P. (2000). Relation of growth of use of the Internet to changes in media use from 1995 to 1999. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 77(1), 71-79.
- Tabachnick, B. G., & Fidell, L. S. (2013). *Using multivariate statistics* (6th ed.). Pearson.
- Venkatesh, V., Morris, M. G., Davis, G. B., & Davis, F. D. (2003). User acceptance of information technology: Toward a unified view. *MIS Quarterly*, 27(3), 425-478.