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Where Are The News Media Role Models? A Study of Skepticism of the Mainstream News Media among Communications Graduate Students

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By

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Abstract

Recent research has shown that the consequences of news media skepticism can lead the public to disbelieve facts, have differing opinions about important issues, and to choose non-mainstream media sources to receive information. These reactions can be dangerous for the news media industry. It is important to gauge if communications graduate students, potential future media professionals, mistrust the mainstream news media. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between skepticism of the mainstream news media and news choices of communications graduate students. The author surveyed 76 communications graduate students at Grand Valley State University. Results showed that those who trust the mainstream news media are more likely to use mainstream sources and those who do not trust the mainstream news media are more likely to use non-mainstream sources. The author also found that students employed in the news media are less skeptical of the mainstream news media than those who are not.

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Situational Analysis

> You ought to feel sorry for me. I teach an undergraduate course in journalism ethics at a time when ethics seem to matter less and less in the conduct of professional journalists. My students and I want to believe that journalism is, in proto-investigative reporter Jacob Rus's stirring phrase, 'the noblest calling of all,' but then we glance at a newspaper or flip on a television and are reminded once again that it just isn't so…
>
> Codes say journalists should avoid pandering to lurid curiosity, but news organizations deliver frequent jolts of sex, blood, and scandal to capture public attention. Codes say journalists should identify sources whenever feasible, but even routine political stories now contain anonymous quotes. Codes say journalists should distinguish between news and advertising, but a profits-above-all mentality has eroded the line between the two. Codes say journalists should show compassion for people affected by tragedy or grief, but scoop-hungry reporters trample privacy and other rights underfoot in their mad rush to be first with the latest…When my students look around, what do they see? Editors mouthing moral platitudes while publishing slimy garbage. Reporters acting without restraint and being rewarded for it. News organizations claiming to preserve freedom but joining the heard of corporate behemoths crashing about the culture.

> Why should students take journalism ethics seriously? No one else apparently does.
>
> Recently a Gallup poll found that public confidence in the press is at a 15-year low. Journalists always seem somewhat surprised when surveys reveal that the public doesn't like or trust them. But how could it be otherwise? The press has shown about as much regard for ethics as the wrongdoers it so eagerly exposes---the president who lies under oath, the civil rights leader who fathers a child out of wedlock, the sports hero who batters his girlfriend, the movie star who snorts coke. Rather than help refurbish our shabby institutions, journalists have taken up residence in a decayed building on the same crumbling block (Good, 2001, p. 40).

These words, written by Howard Good (2001), coordinator of the journalism program at the State University of New York, speak about the struggles many journalism and media professors face daily as they attempt to prepare their students for a career in mainstream news media. It is a field they feel is in rough shape.

According to copy editor Michelle Johnson (2000), the number of colleges and universities teaching ethics in journalism and mass communication programs has more than doubled in the past two decades-a sign that educators are making a conscious effort to turn the tide in the journalism industry. While many professors and industry professionals may attempt to remain optimistic, others fear they are "fattening lambs for the slaughter" in the words of University of California, Berkley professor Neil Henry (1999, p. 68). Henry feels that his journalism students are being prepared to enter an industry that will immediately quash all ethical values students are so carefully and

strategically taught in school. Bob Steele of the Poynter Institute for Media Studies agrees. Steel writes that "Working journalists often are under such pressure to meet deadlines that they work and react automatically, making it difficult to change their behavior" (Johnson, 2000, p. 77).

Despite the negative feelings many educators in the journalism and mass communications field have toward the mainstream news media, it appears colleges are not having a problem getting students to sign up for both undergraduate and graduate journalism and communications programs. According to Lee Becker, Tudor Vlad, Jisu Huh, and Nancy Mace (2003), enrollment is increasing across the country. Becker and colleagues report that after a period of significant decline dating back to 1995, graduate enrollments in journalism and mass communication programs in the U.S. increased in 2002 by 20.8 percent (master's degree programs) and 13.4 percent (doctoral programs) compared to a year earlier. According to the researchers, this is one of the largest enrollments ever in the field and they feel enrollments will only continue to increase as the years go on.

While more students than ever may be signing up to major in journalism and mass communication at the school of their choice, many do not appear to stay in the field post-graduation. According to journalism professor Margo Wilson (2004) from California University of Pennsylvania, just 20 percent of students in journalism and mass communications programs choose a news editorial sequence for a career. Besides the often grueling duties, small salaries, and ego problems there may be in newsrooms, what Wilson reports as a reason her students leave the profession after graduation is arguably

more disturbing. "Some of my journalism majors find newspapers irrelevant. They'd rather troll the Internet for 'news' or catch 'The Daily Show'" (p. 25).

Is journalism education a lost cause?

University of California Berkley professor Neil Henry (1999) wonders if journalism education is a lost cause. Henry reports that just 31 percent of Americans ages 21 to 35 read newspapers regularly, down from 65 percent in 1965, and he notices this type of pattern even among his own journalism students. Henry became a journalist in the afterglow of Watergate and the Pentagon Papers-a time he feels was the industry's glory years; glory years he does not feel exist anymore for his students because of financial constraints and shifting news values. He describes his career in journalism as "the thrill of intellectual discovery and civic idealism." A sharp contrast, he feels, to the industry today where news media organizations search for the most sensational stories possible to attract more readers and ratings while ignoring important, but arguably dull, story topics like finance reform, foreign aid, or education. This leaves his students struggling to find role models to look up to as they study to become journalists. One of the main reasons Henry feels his students struggle to find role models is that there is just no way to trust the mainstream news media. According to Henry:

> My students observe 'objective' journalists happily traipsing back and forth between jobs in the news media and in government, taking enormous sums of money for speaking engagements with private-interest groups. They hear the publisher of a prestigious paper like the *Los Angeles Times* publicly promoting the closer working partnership he began to institute, shortly after he took the job, between the editorial department and the

> business/advertising departments, in hopes of creating higher earnings (p. 69).

Statement of the Problem

Several researchers have reported that a majority of Americans mistrust the news media and that credibility is a serious issue (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Gillespie, 2004; Henry, 1999; Jones, 2004; Kohut & Toth, 1998). According to Henry (1999), opinion polls show that Americans feel reporters regularly distort news and care more about attaining fame and celebrity than reporting accurately, and rank journalists with lawyers among the least-respected professionals in society. Henry reports that his journalism students feel the same way. If journalism and mass communication students cannot trust the mainstream news media as a whole, then how can they look to the mainstream news media for guidance and inspiration as they study to become a part of the profession? Many journalism and mass communications professors find it increasingly more difficult to present students with positive role models, which in turn, greatly hinders their ability to teach good, solid journalistic practices. Don Corrigan, a journalism professor at Webster University in St. Louis says ethical journalism is an oxymoron in today's newsrooms. He says "it's disingenuous to tell students to favor hard news over fluff or avoid doing flattering stories about advertisers when news organizations routinely engage in 'journalistic whoring'" (South, 2004, p. 11).

Kelly McBride, an ethics expert and columnist at the Poynter Institute, adds that even if students do learn good journalism in school, the industry can quickly change their habits. As she says:

> We do very little in our newsrooms to reinforce what is taught in college. As a result, as the students move into the professional world, they tend to lose any base they might have. Instead, newsrooms reinforce the principles of competition, ego, and capitalism (South, 2004, p. 12).

Significance of the Problem

Professor Yariv Tsfati of Haifa University, Israel (2002a & 2002b; 2003a & 2003b) has done significant research in the consequences of news media skepticism and the impact of skepticism on audience news exposure patterns. Tsfati feels that people try to attend to what they trust based on the general definition of trust as a consequential phenomenon-"relations over time between two sides; a trustor, the side that places trust, and a trustee, the side being trusted" (2002a, p. 2). Tsfati feels that when people trust mainstream sources, they consume more mainstream sources and when they mistrust mainstream sources, they seek alternative sources (online news sources and various small media outlets). According to Tsfati:

> The reason for reduced cooperation follows from the definition of trust. The mistrustor expects that the interaction with the mistrusted will lead to losses rather than to gains. Fear of being exploited by an opportunistic trustee makes the mistrustor less willing to interact cooperatively with the mistrusted. Hence, the lower the trust in one's teammates, the lower the teamwork; the lower the trust in another businessperson, the lower the chances of a deal. If we apply the principles of general trust to the news media contexts, we expect people who are skeptical towards the mainstream media to have less mainstream news as a part of their media

> diets. Rather, we should expect media skeptics to seek more alternative news sources than their trusting counterparts (2002a, p. 5).

Tsfati feels that it is crucial to continue to investigate the role played by audience trust in the mainstream news media in news exposure decisions and the suggestion that mainstream news media skepticism is associated with a desire for a variety of information from diverse sources. The author agrees and feels that research that examines the consequences of the growing public mistrust of the press is important to scholars, students, the general public, and current professionals in charge of the mainstream news media.

According to Tsfati, the news media bear the responsibility for feeding the public the raw materials necessary for existence according to the model of public opinion. Among these materials are facts, opinions, and issues. Can the news media fulfill these duties without people trusting them and in turn, seeking out alternative sources for news and information? Tsfati argues that answering this question requires research into the relationship between skepticism and media exposure. This relationship needs to be examined in communications students, many of whom may be planning to work in the very industry they seem to mistrust. Specifically, the author finds the study of this relationship especially important among graduate students in communications. These are students who have chosen to go beyond their undergraduate degrees and pursue a graduate degree in a field of study that could very well lead them to internships and paid positions at mainstream news media organizations. Many of these students may also go into the teaching profession-teaching future journalism and communications professionals. There is no doubt that graduate courses attempt to teach students to be

critical thinkers, but it is possible that graduate students in communications courses may be so critical, they could completely mistrust the mainstream news media and seek their news and information from alternative sources. There is a possible irony here-that many of these students could mistrust the institutions they are studying to become a part of or teach future students about. How can these students become positive additions to the media or the profession of media instruction when they do not choose to receive their news and information from mainstream news sources?

According to professor Diana Mutz (2004), as the choice of news continues to grow to countless cable news channels, Internet news and talk shows, young people are turning to entertainment sources such as "The Daily Show" and "Saturday Night Live" as a source for news. As Mutz says:

> Although the staff of 'The Daily Show' ridicules the idea that people use their show as a primary news source, a recent study funded by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press suggests that this is not at all ridiculous from their viewers' perspectives. As many people in the under-30 crowd cited 'The Daily Show' or 'Saturday Night Live' as a place where they got presidential campaign news as cited all three network news programs combined. This pattern represents a huge change relative to only four years ago (p. 33).

While today's mainstream news media may not be as inspiring as it once was and the role models may be increasingly hard to come across, a change must occur to keep future generations interested in news from sources that still attempt to be as objective as possible. Even though the lines may be greatly blurred between entertainment and news

in the mainstream media, what is perhaps more concerning is the fact that younger generations are choosing blatant entertainment sources and confusing them as news sources. The tracking numbers and advertisements tell us that younger generations are not turning to traditional news sources (Mutz, 2004). Professor Mutz has heard her students refer to the audience of traditional news programs as "dinosaurs."

The question to ask is why? Of course, there is no argument that society is moving faster than ever and that younger people want their news and information in convenient packages. They want to pick up blurbs about news as quickly as they can swipe their debit card and grab an espresso from a Starbucks drive-through window. Nobody argues that such speed leaves media organizations feeling as if they have to shorten their stories and offer more choices than ever. This has led to countless Internet sites, continuous streaming cell phone and iPod news updates, and endless boxes of moving text on CNN Headline News. In an effort to keep up with this speed and succeed in mainstream news media organizations where they can reach more people, many journalists may feel pressure to cut ethical corners. In extreme cases, situations arise like the plagiarism cases involving former *New York Times* reporter Jayson Blair and former *USA Today* Reporter Jack Kelly (South, 2004). Virginia Commonwealth University communications professor Jeff South describes the pressures journalists face in the industry today as "the 24/7 news cycle, news conglomerates' hunger for profits, and the star system in some newsrooms" (p. 10). With high-profile plagiarism cases popping up at America's most trusted and respected media institutions, it is no wonder that a growing percentage of the population mistrusts the mainstream news media.

Mistrust may be playing a part in why the younger generation is making different choices when it comes to news. If all they hear is how the news media cannot be trusted from Jon Stewart's jokes on "The Daily Show" and comedic sketches on "Saturday Night Live," then it is no wonder they cannot sit down to watch a network news program or read a newspaper-no matter how "entertaining" mainstream news media try to make their stories. For this reason, it is important for researchers to study how communications students, particularly graduate students who may go on to teach the future journalists of America, trust or mistrust mainstream news media sources. According to Professor Tsfati:

> Hypothesizing that media trust would play a role in audience exposure decisions makes much sense. If selectivity takes place, then people should try to avoid sources they mistrust. Those who despise journalists and perceive mainstream news to be inaccurate, sensational, and self-motivated should look for alternatives to these mainstream channels as they strive for consistency, or seek accurate information (2002a, p. 6).

Purpose of the Study

Research has indicated that media skepticism is certainly an issue. Research has also indicated the younger people are steering away from mainstream news media sources. While many have studied the sources of media audience skepticism, consequences of such mistrust have been largely overlooked. For the purposes of this study, the author is defining media skepticism in the same manner as Tsfati (2002b) has defined it for his research:

> ...media skepticism can be defined as *a subjective feeling of alienation and mistrust toward the mainstream news media*. For example, it is the feeling that the mainstream news media get in the way of society rather than help society. Media skepticism is the perception that journalists do not live by their professional standards; that journalists are not fair and objective in their reports, that they do not always tell the whole story, and that they would sacrifice accuracy and precision for personal or commercial gains (p. 4).

The author will use four characteristics to determine skepticism-accuracy, fairness, telling the whole story, and trustworthiness.

For the purposes of this study, mainstream news media sources are defined as local televisions news (local ABC, NBC, CBS, FOX, UPN, WB affiliates, etc.), network television news (CBS, ABC, NBC nightly news programs, *Primetime, 20/20, 60 Minutes, Dateline*, etc.), cable television news (CNN, FOX News Channel, MSNBC, etc.), local radio stations (AM of FM stations, including local NPR member stations), local newspapers/magazines (city, county, township publications, etc.), national newspapers/magazines (*New York Times, Washington Post, TIME*, etc.), and Internet Search Engine news pages (Yahoo, MSN, Google, etc.) which host news and information from Reuters, the Associated Press, and other mainstream sources. Corresponding Web sites to each of these mainstream news media sources are also included in these definitions, since almost all television news programs, radio stations, and newspapers/magazines have their own Web sites as an alternative source to display their content.

For the purposes of this study, non-mainstream news media sources are defined as local, syndicated and/or satellite talk radio such as Rush Limbaugh, Howard Stern and corresponding Web sites, online Web logs (Blogs) and/or message boards, and word of mouth.

Finally, for the purposes of this study, the author will define employment in the news media industry as employment in print or broadcast journalism, public relations, or advertising, sales, or marketing for a news media outlet.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to answer the following research questions:

Q1: Is skepticism of the mainstream news media related to the way communications graduate students choose to receive their news and information?

Q2: Is there a difference in the level of skepticism of the mainstream news media between those who are employed with the mainstream news media and those who are not?

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter I presents an overview and history of mainstream news media skepticism and news media choices, as well as the challenges journalism and mass communications professors may face as they attempt to prepare students for the current media industry. Chapter II presents a review of the literature written and studies conducted about mainstream news media skepticism and news media choices-including the relationship between the two. Chapter III details the methods used to conduct the survey that was designed and used to answer both research questions. Chapter IV presents the findings

and results of the survey. Chapter V presents the conclusions and offers recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

A Loss in Public Trust

Research indicates that there is a significant increase in the number of people who distrust the news media. Many researchers have found a number of different causes for this media skepticism ranging from the recent increase of attention to journalistic mistakes, to the audience possessing strong opinions regarding controversial subjects, to a combination of prior beliefs and issue attitudes within the public (Boudreau & Glowaki, 1994; Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Johnson, Roberts & Leifer, 1975; Jones, 2004; Pew Research Center, 2005). Many researchers have examined the causes of media skepticism by studying the public's perception of media coverage during political campaigns and/or elections (Bennett, Rhine, & Flickinger, 2001; Watts, Domke, Shah, & Fan, 1999). The consequences of uncertainty in the source of information can ultimately lead the public to disbelieve the facts being presented to them or even think differently about what problems are most important in our society today, which can be dangerous for the future of the media industry (Tsfati, 2002a; Tsfati, 2003b; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003).

Survey Says

A variety of surveys from recent years show that more and more people continue to have negative opinions of the news media. According to the Pew Research Center (2005), public attitudes toward the press have become more negative over the years and the center's most recent poll found that the public is more critical of the press than ever before in a number of key areas such as patriotism, fairness, and perceptions of political bias. The center's latest survey was conducted in June 2005. The survey found attitudes

regarding performance of the media in those key areas to be at or near low levels in Pew Research Center trends dating back to the mid-1980s. Forty percent of those surveyed felt that news outlets are too critical of the U.S. Sixty percent of those who responded felt that media organizations are politically biased and 72 percent believed that news organizations tend to favor a certain side rather than treating all sides fairly. Seventy-three percent of those surveyed expressed that news outlets are not independent and instead are often influenced by powerful individuals and/or organizations. The survey also indicated a growing trend where respondents who categorized themselves as Republicans were more critical of the press than those who responded as Democrats. While the results of this survey seem to be detrimental to the news industry, the responses still offer some hope. The majority of respondents continue to insist that they "like" their mainstream news outlets. Eighty percent gave favorable ratings to their local daily newspaper, 79 percent to their local TV news, 79 percent to cable TV news networks, and 75 percent to network TV news (Pew Research Center, 2005).

A 2003 survey by the Pew Research Center attempted to find out if the news of former *New York Times* reporter Jayson Blair's blatant fabrication and plagiarism would have an impact of the public's critical opinion of the press. Surprisingly, the scandal had very little effect on media cynicism among the respondents' attitudes, although they were highly critical of the media in a number of issues. Their biggest criticism was faulting news organizations for inaccuracy. Sixty-two percent of the respondents felt that the press tries to cover up mistakes instead of admitting them. While the Blair scandal did not affect the respondents' overall cynicism, 58 percent still felt that all news organizations

"make up" stories either frequently (22 percent) or occasionally (36 percent) (Pew Research Center, 2003).

Another organization that often surveys the public regarding perceptions of the news media is The Gallup Organization. Each year, the organization conducts a "Governance Poll" and surveys Americans to indicate how much trust they have in a variety of U.S. institutions, including the media. The most recent data from September 2003 indicate that 14 percent of respondents have a great deal of trust and confidence in the media, 40 percent have a fair amount, 35 percent do not have very much and 11 percent have none at all. According to Gallup Poll Managing Editor Jeffrey Jones (2004) the erosion of public trust in the news media began in the mid-1970s following the Watergate scandal involving President Richard Nixon. Before Watergate unfolded, about 70 percent of Americans had a great deal or fair amount of trust in the news media. This is a great deal higher than only 14 percent from the most recent calculated survey results. In addition, Jones feels that a person's education level may contribute to their level of trust in the media. According to Gallup polls from 1997 to 2003, 61 percent of respondents with only a high school education or less said they had a great deal or fair amount of trust in the mass media, a significant difference from 49 percent or less in all other education groups ranging from "some college" to "post graduate" (Jones, 2004). According to Jones:

> One possible explanation for the differences is that those who take college courses are exposed to a broad range of perspectives and information, and are often required to evaluate competing perspectives, arguments or theories in a critical manner (p. 3).

A more recent Gallup Poll was conducted in 2004 after the fallout from CBS News' faulty reporting of President Bush's National Guard service record. The September 2004 survey was conducted just after the CBS News report started to be questioned by critics. The survey found a significant drop in media credibility to the lowest point in three decades. Forty-four percent of respondents expressed confidence in the media's ability to report stories accurately and fairly. That number was a significant decrease from a 54 percent response to the same question in a poll conducted one year earlier. The decrease is even more significant when one considers that the response to that question had been extremely stable in the past, fluctuating between 51 and 55 percent from 1997 to 2003 (Gillespie, 2004).

Several researchers have conducted their own independent surveys or analyzed information from large data samples collected during national surveys to attempt to find out if negative attitudes toward the media are growing. Andrew Kohut and Robert Toth (1998) found that trends in all attitudes toward the media were down. They found that while the press may still possess some credibility, it continues to decrease. Kohut and Toth reported that the most repeated complaint from the public regarding the media is that they are "inaccurate, unfair, and biased." Joseph Cappella and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (1997) found that confidence in those managing the news media decreased considerably from 28 percent in 1976 to 11 percent in 1993.

Cecilie Gaziano (1985) attempted to argue that there was no "credibility crisis," but her research still indicated that the public possesses some negative opinions of the press. She performed an extensive content analysis of four major media opinion polls from 1985 to prove that news organizations were not in as dire straits as so many surveys

led them to believe. Several highly publicized events heightened media's concern of public opinion including lawsuits filed against the media, the press being excluded from the Grenada invasion, and the public blaming the media for losing the Vietnam War. For these reasons, the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), the *Los Angeles Times,* The Gannett Center, and the *Times Mirror* all conducted widespread surveys to determine the average public opinion of the news media in 1985. Gaziano analyzed these four surveys, comparing the results and locating some contradictions. According to her end result, there was no "crisis" per say. However, she did point out that the public thought that the media could report more accurately and that they did not believe everything that was presented to them in the press. Gaziano argued that perfectly fair and balanced reporting is impossible because the public has its own biases and imperfections. She also felt that critical opinions of the media can be a positive thing because uncritical acceptance all of the time could be dangerous.

Gaziano and Kristin McGrath (1986) continued to analyze the same four polls one year later. The two researchers examined credibility issues in television versus newspapers and found that in almost every comparison, television did better than other media and that television preference increased as coverage moved from local to national and international news. Gaziano and McGrath also found that among the four studies, respondents were more likely to choose television over newspapers, despite the fact that newspapers received higher credibility scores. There was, however, one exception. The researchers reported that when it came to a controversial or complex local topic, just as many respondents relied on local newspapers for their information as the ones who chose television.

Causes of Mistrust and Hostility

University of Minnesota professor Mitchell V. Charnley (1936) introduced a significant problem with news coverage and in turn, started the ball rolling in media credibility studies. He mailed a survey to people cited as main sources in 1,000 news stories from three Minneapolis daily newspapers and asked them to identify errors. The result was that only about half of the stories were completely error-free. Since 1936, many researchers have studied media skepticism extensively and reported a number of different causes for hostile judgments of journalism.

Scott Maier (2002) feels that although newspapers frequently have errors, it is not the factual errors alone that cause a credibility problem. He surveyed sources quoted in local newspaper articles, using Charnley's research as a model, and found that the link between accuracy and credibility was not as direct as presumed. Although his news source respondents located errors in more than half of the stories surveyed, they were more concerned about the balance, perspective, and context of the stories than of the factual errors. The newspapers that were considered less credible were those that the sources felt relied on sensationalism, bias and failure to watch out for the interests of its readers.

Whether it is newspapers or television or other forms of media being studied, the list of possible causes of skepticism is quite extensive. One study indicated that trust in media declines as an issue is seen as more controversial (Roberts & Leifer, 1975). Similarly, another study reported that trust in media declines if a certain story is viewed as "bad" news (Stone & Beell, 1975). Other researchers feel that when people are highly involved with a topic and care a great deal about the information being reported

accurately, they tend to be more skeptical of the news media (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Yet another study suggests that mistrust of the media is the result of heightened attention to journalistic errors (Johnson, Boudreau & Glowaki, 1994).

Psychologists Robert Vallone, Lee Ross, and Mark Lepper (1985) propose that there are three explanations for hostile judgments suggesting bias in the media. They showed a video of network news coverage of the 1982 Beirut massacre to groups of pro-Arab and pro-Israeli students. The result was that both groups of students felt that the coverage contained a smaller percentage of positive references to their side and a larger percentage of unfavorable references. The researchers concluded that there are three explanations for a person's tendency toward media uncertainty when they are heavily involved with an issue. The first is a "different standards" explanation. This means that even if someone deeply involved in an issue watched a newscast that was balanced with equal time dedicated to both sides, they would still sense bias. This is because they tend to feel that their side's claims are more accurate than the other side, so they still consider an even amount of coverage to be inappropriate. A second possible explanation is the "selective categorization" explanation. This would mean that partisans with differing opinions would both recall the same items, but if the image, fact or argument were not exactly similar to their own opinion, than they would immediately consider the item to be hostile to their side. This proposes that even if a neutral fact was presented, the subject would assume the coverage was biased. A final explanation from Vallone and colleagues was the "selective recall" explanation. This suggests that subjects tended to remember extremely well images or facts against their side more than any other information presented, including information that was in favor of their side (Vallone, et al., 1985).

Researchers Roger Giner-Sorolla and Shelly Chaiken (1994) decided to test the explanation that people with strong interests in a certain issue tend to be more critical of the media using the model Vallone and his colleagues designed. They formed an experiment involving the two very controversial issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and abortion. Groups of subjects on both sides of the issue were shown television coverage of news stories about those topics and then they were asked to make judgments regarding bias and unbalance. The result was that people with opinions on both sides of the Middle East conflict judged coverage to be biased against their own side, duplicating the results concluded by Vallone and colleagues. However, the issue of abortion brought a much less consistent pattern of negative judgments of the news media. The reason for the inconsistencies was that Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken's research also showed that hostile judgments of the media will be made if the subject already believes that the news media is bias. Therefore, they concluded that the cause of negative media judgments is a combination of prior beliefs of bias and issue attitudes (Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994).

Albert Gunther (1992) suggested that it could be that a biased public is the cause of attitudes about the media being biased. Gunther analyzed the 1985 ASNE survey results and came up with two conclusions. The first was that the respondents' opinions regarding certain issues definitely played a role in their perceptions of fairness or credibility in media. The second conclusion Gunther reported was that media credibility is more a function of involvement than of variables that have been studied before such as media characteristics, audience demographics, or general skepticism. Therefore, Gunther concluded that trust in media is a relational variable, meaning it is based on the

audience's response to the information that is being presented and not due to the actual message sources being responsible (Gunther, 1992).

Gunther (1985) examined trust in media specifically in an earlier study by surveying a group of subjects about their attitudes towards the media based on both "issue attitude extremity" and political preference. Gunther tested the issue attitude extremity concept based on two prior theories discovered by other researchers. The cognitive response theory suggests that when someone is not involved with a topic, issues and ideas in the content of coverage do not receive very much attention and they simply adhere to "peripheral" qualities like credibility or source likeability. On the other hand, when someone is highly involved with an issue, they have a reason to pay attention to the actual information relayed in the message content so they ignore those peripheral clues (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). Social judgment theory also depends on involvement levels, but it works a little differently. This theory suggests that different levels of involvement are associated with different levels of acceptance, rejection or non-commitment concerning information about a specific issue. When a subject is highly involved with an issue, social judgment predicts a wider range of rejection and fewer messages end up in the person's "noncommittal" range. When a subject is less involved, the area of rejection is smaller and the person will receive more messages in the range of non-commitment and therefore, these messages are more likely to be considered (Sherif, Sherif & Nebergall, 1965).

For the first part of his study, Gunther wanted to examine how these two areas of theory could predict patterns of media trust. For the second part of his study, he wanted to determine how trust in media changes with extremity of political ideology. His results for

his first hypothesis suggested that there is a curvilinear relationship between attitude extremity and trust in news media coverage of a certain issue. This means that trust is highest when attitude extremity of an issue is lowest and that trust levels will decrease both when attitudes are highly polarized and when they are neutral. Gunther reported that both cognitive response theory and social judgment theory come into play with this curvilinear relationship. He suggested that the cognitive response theory explains the increasing trust in media between low and moderate attitude extremity and that the social judgment theory explains why trust is higher in the moderate than the high extremity condition. This relationship is shown in Figure 1 below (1985, p. 281).

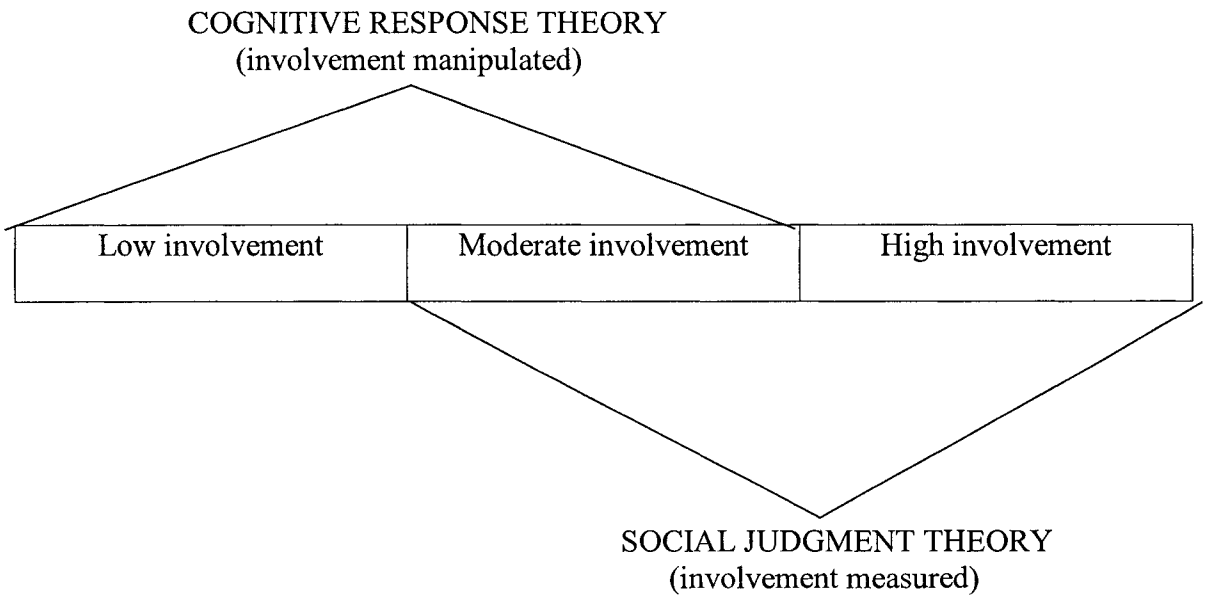

Figure 1. Cognitive response and social judgment theory levels of involvement.

When it comes to the relationship between political ideology and trust in media, Gunther indicated that the connection between the two is more difficult to interpret. He believed that the relationship could reflect a combination of effects. First of all, his data found that in the majority of responses, extreme liberals or extreme conservatives on each end of the political spectrum both reported less trust in the media than more moderate

partisans. However, because even moderate partisans declared a low amount of trust in the media and also proclaimed a sense of liberal bias in the press, Gunther suggested that this view of liberal bias also plays a role along with political preference in the way the public trusts the media (Gunther, 1985).

Media Trust and Politics

Political events can greatly affect the public's trust in the news media. Prior to the 1970s, polling found that the majority of the public perceived the news media as fair and trustworthy. Watergate, however, changed this high level of trust. Michael Robinson (1974) reported that during the first hearings on Watergate, the public not only had less positive opinions about President Nixon and politicians in general, but their opinions of the news media became more negative as well. Robinson and Andrew Kohut (1988) analyzed Gallup polls and reported that even though the public tended to believe the media more than President Reagan, when his credibility ratings began to fall after news of the Iran-Contra scandal, the media's credibility ratings also began to fall. The researchers suggested that if there was an unresolved issue between the media and a political administration, that both would see credibility diminish. Researchers Michael Robinson and Margaret Petrella (1988) once again confirmed this theory by reporting that an argument between Dan Rather and George Bush during a CBS newscast in January 1988 lowered public approval of the news media and Rather in particular.

Norman Ornstein and Michael Robinson (1990) analyzed 1985 and 1989 Gallup polls and concluded that although the public still held positive opinions of the news media, a growing number of people did not believe the media's coverage of political issues. The researchers listed several reasons for this decline in credibility. One was that

the public reacted negatively to stories about a politician's personal mistakes. Ornstein and Robinson argued that a second reason for the decline was the increase in concern over blending news with entertainment. A third reason the researchers offered was that the media's negative reports about the government were viewed as negative if there was not a conviction, as there was in the Watergate scandal. According to Ornstein and Robison, people approve of bad news, as long as it is not bad news about political institutions.

S. Robert Lichter and Richard Noyes (1996) offer the idea that it is not just negativity in political coverage that causes the public to look down upon the media, but also that the public fault the media for coverage that is liberally biased. Other researchers have explored the connection between liberal bias and media skepticism. Mark Watts, David Domke, Dhavan Shah, and David Fan (1999) explored the shifts in public perception of media bias in three consecutive elections. The researchers also examined the shift in press coverage of liberal bias and the balance in basic coverage of presidential candidates. Their goal was not to argue whether or not there is a liberal bias in the news media, but rather to simply examine the public perception of such bias. Watts and colleagues analyzed public opinion polls along with news content from the 1988, 1992, and 1996 elections. Their results found that by examining the coverage in newspapers, there was not any serious libel in the basic coverage of the candidates in all three campaigns. Democrat and Republican candidates received relatively the same amount of exposure, as shown in Table 1 (p. 157).

Table 1

Paragraphs Favoring Candidates During Three Consecutive Elections

Paragraphs	1988	1992	1996
Favorable to Democratic Candidate	50.3% (n=29,378)	54.2% (n=47,530)	50.6% (n=64,123)
Favorable to Republican Candidate	49.7% (n=29,059)	45.8% (n=40,238)	49.4% (n=62,540)
Total	100% (n=58,437)	100% (n=87,768)	100% (n=126,633)

Watts and colleagues did, however, find that news self-coverage of media bias was more one-sided. Coverage of liberal media bias was consistently more present than coverage of a conservative media bias and furthermore, the amount of self-coverage of liberal bias in the media significantly increased from 1992 to 1996, as shown in Table 2 (p. 159).

Table 2

Paragraphs Suggesting A Liberal Or Conservative Bias In News Self-Coverage During Three Consecutive Elections

Claims of media bias	1988	1992	1996
Favors liberal/Democratic Candidate	79.1% (n=34)	71.8% (n=89)	91.0% (n=131)
Favors conservative/Republican Candidate	20.9% (n=9)	28.2% (n=35)	9.0% (n=13)
Total	100% (n=43)	100% (n=124)	100% (n=144)

Note. $x2=16.7$, $p<.001$

The researchers suggest that the increase in public perception of a liberally biased news media is the result of an increase of self-coverage of liberal bias and not bias in the basic coverage of the candidates (Watts et al., 1999).

Stephen Bennett, Staci Rhine, and Richard Flickinger (2001) explored the relationship between moral preferences and trust in the media to cover political issues fairly. This team of researchers analyzed data from the 1996 and 1998 National Election studies. The studies included variables such as exposure to and opinions regarding the news media, as well as partisanship, ideology and job performance opinions about the president and Congress. Their content analysis found that roughly two-thirds of the public have doubts about the news media's ability to report fairly and that people who rate themselves as having strict moral ethics tend not to trust the media to cover politics fairly. The researchers also reported that a person's perception of fairness in the news media corresponded with evaluations of governmental institutions. People who approved of the President and/or Congress' performance were more likely to rate the media as fair. Furthermore, Bennett and colleagues determined that the public's perception of how the media covered the Monica Lewinsky scandal also influenced the public's opinion about the press's fairness. When Lewinsky-related questions were included in survey questions from the 1996 and 1998 studies, presidential approval was associated with views of media fairness. Bennett and colleagues end their report with a very serious tone. They believe that unless the media addresses the public's increasingly negative perception of the press, then news organizations will experience more hostility and perhaps ultimately, complete ruin. The researchers quote the late Ithiel de Sola Pool, who wrote:

> No nation will indefinitely tolerate a free press that serves to divide the country and to open the floodgates of criticism against the freely chosen government that leads it... If the press is the government's enemy, it is the free press that will end up being destroyed (p.176-77).

What are the Consequences?

Many researchers have explored the causes of media skepticism, but not very many have examined the consequences of mistrust in the news media. Researchers in other industries have studied the negative effects of mistrust. Susan Johnson and E. Talitman (1997) concluded that when people trust their therapists, it can lead to success in their treatment. Similarly, E.J. Pask (1995) reported that when patients trust their nurses, it can have a positive effect on patient care and if they do not trust them, it could lead to a longer recovery. Could mistrusting the media negatively impact the way the public receives important information? According to extensive research performed by Haifa University, Israel, Professor Yariv Tsfati (2002a & 2002b; 2003a & 2003b), the answer is yes.

Tsfati's dissertation explored the possibility that media skepticism is a factor that influences a person's media exposure selections. Tsfati studied data from the National Election Study of 1996, General Social Survey, and three studies conducted at the Annenberg School for Communication during the 1996 and 2000 election years. His results found that skepticism is negatively related to exposure to mainstream news channels and positively related to non-mainstream channels such as Political Talk Radio and news sources on the Internet (Tsfati, 2002b).

Tsfati and Joseph Cappella (2003) explored the topic further by again analyzing the same large data sets to investigate the possibility that trust and mistrust in the news media are related to audience exposure patterns. The researchers duplicated the results from Tsfati's dissertation. They reported again that people who trust the mainstream media tend to watch or read mainstream news while those respondents who mistrust the

mainstream media tend to turn to non-mainstream sources on the Internet or radio. The researchers' data found that although both skeptics and non-skeptics did not differ greatly in terms of the total amount of news exposure, the skeptics' media diets contained significantly larger amounts of non-mainstream news. Tsfati and Cappella report that although there is a relationship, it was only a modest one.

> Even the most skeptical audience members watch the national and local news on television and read the daily newspaper. Although skeptics are somewhat less exposed to these channels on average, they still get much of their current affairs information from the media sources they mistrust. In other words, when it comes to audience relationship with news media, seeing is not necessarily believing, and believing and trusting are only moderately correlated with seeing (p. 518).

So why do some people watch or read what they do not trust? According to Tsfati and Cappella, there could be several explanations. The researchers suggest that even when people do not trust the media, they still turn to news because it satisfies other needs. They may gravitate towards mainstream news outlets because they want to be able to talk about current events with their friends or perhaps they want to simply be entertained or escape from the other events in their life. Tsfati and Cappella also suggest that the reason people continue to read or watch news they mistrust could be because even though skeptics are attempting to seek out alternatives to mainstream media, there are not currently any exact matches to the amount of information or the instant accessibility that mainstream media offer.

Further, Tsfati and Cappella (2003) suggest that the audience's media choices could also have an effect on the way they respond to questions of trust or mistrust. For example, those people who tend to choose non-mainstream news sources could become more skeptical of the mainstream media because those non-mainstream sources likely consist of heavier debate and discussion and stronger challenges.

> Attacks on mainstream journalism are more prevalent in alternative news outlets than in mainstream media. Perhaps exposure to these criticisms persuades audiences that mainstream journalists should not be trusted. For example, on his radio show, Rush Limbaugh claims that the media are biased and unfair in their treatment of candidates (e.g. that the *New York Times* is "one big campaign poster for Clinton") and that they use different standards when reporting on Republicans and Democrats. He argues that journalists are "out of touch with mainstream America" and that some of the feminist reporters are "anti-male." Limbaugh smears reporters, attacks their credibility and personal reputations, and ridicules journalists' ethics. Repeated exposure to such arguments on non-mainstream channels might convince audiences that mainstream media are indeed untrustworthy (p. 521).

Because of this possibility, Tsfati and Cappella feel that future research should implement "longitudinal" designs to try and find out if media choices are influenced by skepticism or if skepticism is caused by certain media outlets.

In another study of the consequences of media skepticism, Tsfati (2003a) explores the relationship between opinion climate perceptions and audience mistrust. Tsfati

analyzed data from the U.S. presidential campaign of 2000 to test his hypothesis that media mistrust plays a part in the climate of opinion. Based on his results, he concluded that when people did not trust the media, they rejected election result predictions and that when people did trust the media, they accepted election predictions.

Tsfati argues that his results have interesting implications for media scholars because they prove that the effects of the media are moderated by audience trust. He reports that one could argue that if skeptics refuse to accept the media's climate of opinion, it can be liberating because it makes the audience stronger by being critical and active. On the other hand, the audience could be perceived as inflexible because they refuse to give into the media's predictions. Tsfati also points out that his research results are not set in stone, meaning that media skeptics are not completely immune to the media's influence, but rather less susceptible to the predictions of the press.

> Not all skeptics rejected the media's climate of opinion and not all non-skeptics accepted it. Skepticism reduced the probability of agreeing with the media about the predicted winner, but other factors also played a role in determining individual opinion climate perceptions (p. 78).

Tsfati also feels that because a presidential campaign is such a hot button issue with a huge amount of media coverage and such a strong focus on who will win or lose, that the results of his study could have been convoluted by the election polls where strong political preferences tend to dominate responses. For this reason, he feels that further research should be done on media skepticism and opinion climate perception using a topic that is not such a hot issue where polls providing base-rate information are not so easily accessible to the press. Instead, Tsfati would be interested in seeing another study

done on a topic where the only measurements of the public's opinion climate are simply patterns and reactions from the audience. Tsfati feels a future study should measure how the audience reacts to the media's transmission of these cues and then further examine the relationship between media skepticism and public opinion perception (Tsfati, 2003a).

Another interesting topic that Tsfati (2003b) has researched is the association between media skepticism and agenda setting effects. Agenda setting is a concept introduced by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972) in a landmark hypothesis. The two researchers reported that agenda setting occurs because the media has the ability to tell the public what issues are most important via the stories communicated to the audience. Tsfati was interested in finding out if this agenda setting is affected by audience mistrust of the media. He examined large data sets from the 1996 National Election Study, and from data collected at the Annenberg School for Communication during the election years of 1996 and 2000, to test his hypothesis that agenda setting would be weaker for those who did not trust the media. Tsfati concluded that there was, on an individual level, a correlation between the two and that media skeptics tended to have different feelings about the perception of the most important problem facing the country than the non-skeptics. Although Tsfati is not sure if this information indicates that there is an effect of the media that has taken place, he believes that some would argue that there has been.

> Agenda setting scholars would probably interpret the correlation between media and public agenda as an "effect" of the media on the public. To the extent that it is indeed a media effect, we have learned that it is at least somewhat moderated by media skepticism. This was true for both print

> and televised agenda, despite the fact that in general credibility ratings of television news are higher than those of newspapers (p. 165).

The Need for More Research

Although Tsfati and Cappella have devoted much of their time and resources to researching the consequences of media skepticism, more extensive studies of the topic need to be done. Research has shown that there is certainly a decrease in the number of people who do not trust the news media. Several different reasons for such media skepticism have been reported by a number of researchers. Even though these reasons are no doubt interesting, what are also important are the outcomes of media skepticism. Recent research has shown that the consequences of an uncertainty in the public's source of information can lead them to disbelieve the facts being presented to them, have differing opinions about the most important issues in society, and also to choose non-mainstream media sources, which can be dangerous both the for the public and for the future of the media industry. There is no doubt the mainstream media needs to make some changes, whether they release their mistakes or not. As Cappella (2002) reported:

> The news outlets are not in the business of lying; they are in the business of transmission. In making their decisions, the media become vehicles of the replication of the 'mistrust meme' already existing in society. They do not create mistrust, nor do they create the events upon which mistrust is based, but they circulate stories of mistrust, cynicism, and disengagement in forms that maximize their selection and retention. It is in this sense that the media must bear part of the blame for the cynicism and mistrust found in society (p. 239).

However, the non-mainstream media can be just as guilty of presenting incorrect or biased information based on their own political viewpoints. These non-mainstream outlets do not have the power of resources that the mainstream media have access to, a power that can be a benefit to the public if used properly. For this reason, it is important to find out not only why the public continues to mistrust its media, but how they are reacting to that skepticism. In particular, it is important the gauge how much potential future media professionals are struggling with mistrust of the mainstream news media. If students taking the time to continue their communications training in graduate school do not trust the media and do not feel they have good role models to learn from, than the industry could be in danger. The results of important studies of students could be extremely beneficial to an industry struggling to maintain its reputation and possibly, survival, in a cynical society.

Hypotheses

Based on the author's experience and research, the following are the hypotheses for this study. The variables for the first hypothesis are defined as: x_1 is the level of skepticism of the mainstream news media for communications graduate students who are non-users of a news media source and y_1 is the level of skepticism of the mainstream news media for communications graduate students who are users of a news media source.

H^1: There is a difference in the mean level of skepticism of the mainstream news media between communications graduate students who use a news media source and communications graduate students who do not use a news media source.

H_1: $\mu x_1 \neq \mu y_1$

For the second hypothesis x_2 is defined as the level of skepticism of the mainstream news media for communications graduate students who are employed in the mainstream news media and y_2 is defined as the level of skepticism of the mainstream news media for communications graduate students who are not employed in the mainstream news media.

H_2: There is a difference in the mean level of skepticism of the mainstream news media between those who are employed with the mainstream news media and those who are not.

H_2: $\mu x_2 \neq \mu y_2$

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Study Design Overview

A survey was designed to provide data to aid in answering the following research questions:

Q_1: Is skepticism of the mainstream news media related to the way communications graduate students choose to receive their news and information?

Q_2: Is there a difference in the level of skepticism of the mainstream news media between those who are employed with the mainstream news media and those who are not?

In October 2006, an online survey was sent to 76 graduate students in the School of Communications at Grand Valley State University in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The survey was comprised of a series of 12 questions related to the research topic. Participants were selected from a combination of class lists from graduate classes in Grand Valley's School of Communications that provided e-mail address contacts for the students. The researcher received permission from the graduate program advisor for access to the e-mail addresses. All participants received the survey via an e-mail that included a link to the survey hosted on the Web site www.surveymonkey.com.

Target Population and Sample Selection

The target population for the survey is all communications graduate students in the United States. The available population that was surveyed is a group of communications graduate students at Grand Valley State University.

Grand Valley State University was established in 1960. It is a four-year public university in western Michigan that provides undergraduate and graduate education to more than 22 thousand students. Allendale, Michigan is home to Grand Valley's main campus, situated on 1,237 acres 12 miles west of the city of Grand Rapids. Classes are also offered at the university's Pew Campus in Grand Rapids, the Meijer Campus in Holland, and through centers at Muskegon and Traverse City established in cooperation with local community colleges. Grand Valley offers more than 200 areas of study, including 70 undergraduate majors and 26 graduate programs. For the 2006-2007 school year, 23,295 total students were enrolled. Undergraduate student enrollment totaled 19,578 and graduate student enrollment totaled 3,717 ("Quick Facts About Grand Valley," 2006).

To be admitted to Grand Valley's Master of Science in Communications program, students have to complete a bachelor's degree, then apply and be approved. Communications M.S. majors need to complete 36 credits and either write a thesis or complete an approved project to graduate. At the time of the survey, Grand Valley communications M.S. enrollment totaled 76.

Instrumentation

The survey was designed to gather qualitative data. It contained a series of questions related to the research questions. Survey questions were carefully formulated utilizing a Likert Scale format to attain desired results. To increase the number of responses, the survey did not ask for the name of the participant and each survey was sent via e-mail through the survey design Web site www.surveymonkey.com to eliminate the need for students to mail their responses. The survey was patterned after one used by

professors Yariv Tsfati from the University of Haifa, Israel and Joseph Cappella from the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. Tsfati and Cappella have extensively studied the consequences of media skepticism and Tsfati's dissertation explored the possibility that media skepticism is a factor that influences a person's media exposure selections (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003).

Validity and Reliability

Before the survey was e-mailed to the student participants, a sample survey was reviewed by Dr. Michael Pritchard, advisor to Grand Valley's Master of Communications program. It was then reviewed and revised by Dr. Neal Rogness, professor of Statistics at Grand Valley, along with one of his student assistants, Jeff Breault. The researcher then performed a pilot study by sending a sample e-mail survey to 34 close friends and family members. After collecting their input, the researcher revised the survey to clarify questions and eliminate any confusion. The survey was then reviewed and approved (Appendix A) by the Grand Valley State University Human Research Review Committee.

Overview of the Survey Format

There were 12 total questions on the survey (Appendix B). Responses to the survey questions using the Likert Scale format were randomized to increase validity. The first question asked if the respondent was employed in the mainstream news media. Several examples were listed in parentheses including print or broadcast journalism, public relations, and others. The second and third questions were designed to gauge where students received their news and information most frequently. The next two questions were asked to determine respondents' general level of skepticism. Then, the

following four questions were designed to find out how skeptical participants were of mainstream news media. The final three questions in the survey were demographic questions to determine each respondent's gender, age, and ethnicity. These three questions were optional and were included in the survey only to aid readers of the study considering future research. Four of the questions on the survey were optional comment questions where students could add any further information to accompany their responses to each of the Likert Scale-formatted questions. It was explained in the informed consent letter attached to the survey (Appendix C) that the survey would be used for research purposes only. No money or incentives were offered or given to participants.

In the informed consent letter, survey participants were told that the survey results would be used for research to complete a master's thesis. The form assured survey participants that their names or any identifying information, including their e-mail addresses, would be kept confidential and that participation in the study was strictly voluntary. It also indicated that the comment questions and the demographic questions on the survey were optional. Participants were informed that data from the survey would be kept on the researcher's password-protected laptop computer for at least three years. Since the responses were anonymous, the researcher informed participants that there would be no way of identifying individuals who completed the survey.

Data Collection and Analysis

The surveys were e-mailed in October 2006. Fifty four of 76 students completed the online survey. The majority of the student participants responded by completing the survey via the Web site www.surveymonkey.com within two weeks. A follow-up e-mail was sent within one week of the initial survey release to remind participants who had not

yet completed the survey to do so. Data from the surveys were organized and calculations were made by the researcher with the help of Professor Rogness and Mr. Breault. Percentages of responses for each question were determined and tables were constructed to display the data.

Null Hypotheses

Per the author's hypotheses, results were expected to show different levels of mean skepticism of the mainstream news media and the mean of news media choice frequency, as well as the mean of career affiliation. As previously stated, for the purpose of this study, the author defined skepticism as a subjective feeling of alienation and mistrust toward the mainstream news media (Tsfati, 2002). With this in mind, the following are null hypotheses for this study. The level of significance was set at 90 percent for all null hypotheses. The variables for the first null hypothesis are defined as: x_1 is the level of skepticism of the mainstream news media for communications graduate students who are non-users of a news media source and y_1 is the level of skepticism of the mainstream news media for communications graduate students who are users of a news media source.

H_1o: There is no difference in the mean level of skepticism of the mainstream news media between communications graduate students who do not use a news media source and communications graduate students who use a news media source.

H_1o: $\mu x_1 = \mu y_1$

For the second null hypothesis x_2 is the level of skepticism of the mainstream news media for communications graduate students who are employed in the mainstream

news media and y_2 is the level of skepticism of the mainstream news media for communications graduate students who are not employed in the mainstream news media.

H_2o: There is no difference in the mean level of skepticism of the mainstream news media between those who are employed with the mainstream news media and those who are not.

H_2o: $\mu x_2 = \mu y_2$

CHAPTER IV

Findings of the Study

Survey Results

Seventy-six students received the e-mail survey from the researcher and a second reminder e-mail one week after the survey was sent; 54 students (71 percent) completed the online survey in a time period of three weeks.

As discussed previously, the first question on the survey asked students if they were employed in the mainstream news media. The second and third questions were designed to gauge where students received their news and information most frequently. The next two questions were asked to determine respondents' general level of skepticism. The following four questions were designed to find out how skeptical participants were of mainstream news media. The final three questions were demographic questions to determine each respondent's gender, age, and ethnicity. These three questions were optional.

Demographic Information

The majority of respondents (63 percent) were female and almost 36 percent (35.9 percent) were male; 34 females and 19 males. One student (1.9 percent) did not answer this optional demographic question. The highest number of respondents (33.3 percent) fell into the age range of 25 to 29. Nine students (16.7 percent) were ages 20 to 24, 12 students (22.2 percent) were ages 30 to 34, six students (11.1 percent) were ages 35 to 39, three students (5.6 percent) were ages 45 to 49, four students (7.4 percent) were ages 54 to 59 and only one student (1.9 percent) was 60 years of age or older. One student (1.9 percent) did not answer this optional demographic question. Forty-two students, the

majority of respondents (77.8 percent), were white, non-Hispanic. Four students (7.4 percent) were African-American, three (5.6 percent) were Asian/Pacific Islander, one student (1.9 percent) was African, one was Hispanic, and one was Native American. Two students (3.7 percent) did not answer the optional race question. See the following tables and figures for demographic results.

Table 3

Gender

Response	Number	Percent
Female	34	63.0
Male	19	35.2
No Response	1	1.9
Total	54	100.0

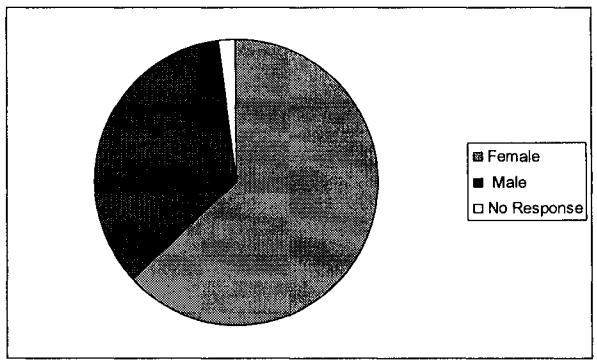

Figure 2. Gender.

Table 4

Age

Response	Number	Percent
20-24	9	16.7
25-29	18	33.3
30-34	12	22.2
35-39	6	11.1
40-44	0	0
45-49	3	5.6
50-54	0	0
54-59	4	7.4
60 or older	1	1.9
No Response	1	1.9
Total	54	100.0

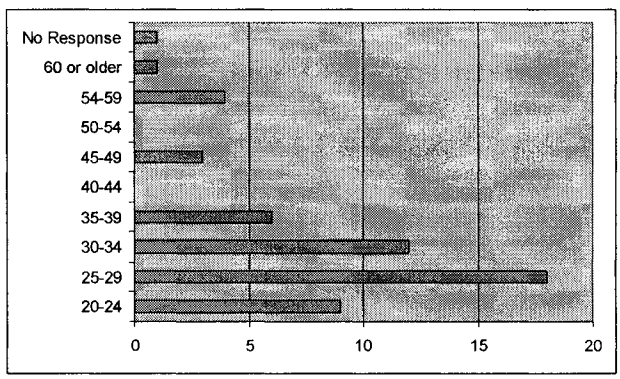

Figure 3. Age.

Table 5

Ethnicity

Response	Number	Percent
African	1	1.9
African-American	4	7.4
Asian/Pacific Islander	3	5.6
Hispanic	1	1.9
Native American	1	1.9
White, non-Hispanic	42	77.8
No Response	2	3.7
Total	54	100.0

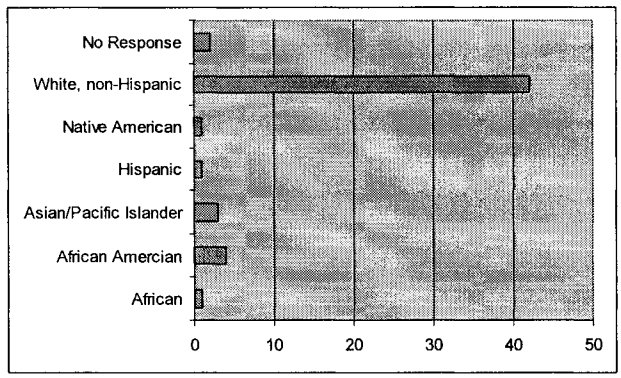

Figure 4: Ethnicity.

News Media Industry Employees

Thirty-nine students (72.2 percent) indicated that they were not employed in the news media industry, which was further defined as print or broadcast journalism, public relations, or advertising, marketing or sales for a news media outlet. (See Table 6 and Figure 5). Fourteen respondents (25.9 percent) answered that they were employed in the news media industry and one student (1.9 percent) did not answer.

Table 6

Employed In News Media

Response	Number	Percent
Yes	14	25.9
No	39	72.2
No Response	1	1.9
Total	54	100.0

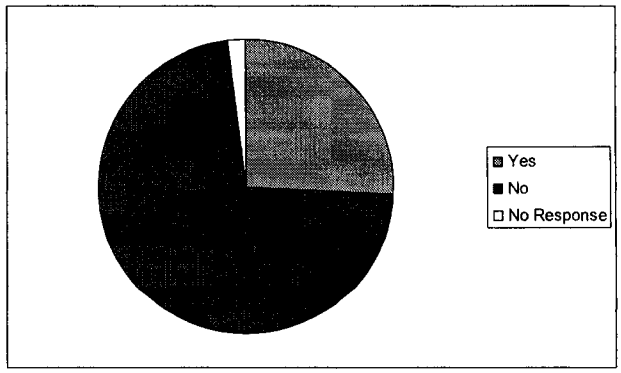

Figure 5. Employed in news media.

News Source Choices

When asked how often they received their news from local television news and corresponding Web sites, the majority of respondents (44.4 percent) indicated that they often receive their news from this source. (See Table 7). Three of the respondents (5.6 percent) indicated they never receive news from local television, nine respondents (17 percent) answered that they seldom receive news from local television, 11 students (20.4 percent) indicated that they sometimes receive their news from local television and seven students (13 percent) indicated that they almost always receive their news from local television.

Table 7

Receive News from Local TV News/Corresponding Web site

Response	Number	Percent
Never	3	5.6
Seldom	9	16.7
Sometimes	11	20.4
Often	24	44.4
Almost Always	7	13
Total	54	100

The largest group of respondents (53.7 percent) indicated that they sometimes and often receive their news from network television news and/or news magazine programs and corresponding Web sites. (See Table 8). Four respondents (7.4 percent) indicated that they never receive their news from network television news and programs, 11 students (20.4 percent) revealed that they seldom turn to network television news and programs, and eight students (14.8 percent) indicated that they almost always watch network

television news and programs to receive their news. Two respondents (3.7 percent) did not answer.

Table 8

Receive News from Network News and/or News Magazine Programs/Corresponding Web site

Response	Number	Percent
Never	8	14.8
Seldom	11	20.4
Sometimes	14	25.9
Often	15	27.8
Almost Always	8	14.8
No Response	2	3.7
Total	54	100.0

In the cable television news and corresponding Web sites category, seven respondents (13 percent) indicated that they never receive their news from this source. Eleven students (20.4 percent) revealed that they seldom do, 11 (20.4 percent) indicated that they sometimes do, 15 (27.8 percent) indicated that they often do, and nine revealed that they almost always do. One student (1.9 percent) did not answer. (See Table 9).

Table 9

Receive News from Cable News/Corresponding Web site

Response	Number	Percent
Never	7	13
Seldom	11	20.4
Sometimes	11	20.4
Often	15	27.8
Almost Always	9	16.7
No Response	1	1.9
Total	54	100.0

When asked how often they receive their news from local radio stations and corresponding Web sites, the highest percentage of students (24.1 percent) indicated that they seldom do. (See Table 10). Seven students (13 percent) answered that they never receive their news from Local Radio Stations and Corresponding Web sites, 13 students (24.1 percent) answered that they seldom do, 10 students (18.5 percent) indicated that they sometimes do, 11 students (20.4 percent) answered that they often do, and 11 students (20.4 percent) answered that they almost always do. Two respondents (3.7 percent) did not answer.

Table 10

Receive News from Local Radio Station/Corresponding Web site

Response	Number	Percent
Never	7	13
Seldom	13	24.1
Sometimes	10	18.5
Often	11	20.4
Almost Always	11	20.4
No Response	2	3.7
Total	54	100.0

When asked how often they receive their news from local, syndicated and/or satellite talk radio programs and corresponding Web sites, the majority of respondents (55.6 percent) indicated that they never do. (See Table 11). Nine students (16.7 percent) indicated that they seldom receive their news from local, syndicated and/or satellite talk programs, five students (9.3 percent) answered that they sometimes do, five students (9.3 percent) indicated that they often do, and only three students (5.6 percent) indicated that they almost always do. Two respondents (3.7 percent) did not answer.

Table 11

Receive News from Local, Syndicated and/or Satellite Talk Radio/Corresponding Web site

Response	Number	Percent
Never	30	55.6
Seldom	9	16.7
Sometimes	5	9.3
Often	5	9.3
Almost Always	3	5.6
No Response	2	3.7
Total	54	100.0

Only three students (5.6 percent) indicated that they never receive their news from local newspapers and/or magazines and corresponding Web sites. (See Table 12). Eleven students (20.4 percent) revealed that they seldom receive their news from local newspapers and/or magazines and corresponding Web sites, 14 students (25.9 percent) indicated that they sometimes do, 13 students (24.1 percent) answered that they often do, and 11 students (20.4 percent) revealed that they almost always do. Two respondents (3.7 percent) did not answer.

Table 12

Receive News from Local Newspapers and/or Magazines/Corresponding Web site

Response	Number	Percent
Never	3	5.6
Seldom	11	20.4
Sometimes	14	25.9
Often	13	24.1
Almost Always	11	20.4
No Response	2	3.7
Total	54	100.0

When asked how often they receive their news from national newspapers and/or magazines and corresponding Web sites, the highest percentage of students (27.8 percent) indicated that they seldom do. (See Table 13). Ten students (18.5 percent) answered that they never receive their news from national newspapers and/or magazines and corresponding Web sites, 15 students (27.8 percent) indicated that they seldom do, 12 students (22.2 percent) responded that they sometimes do, eight students (14.8 percent) indicated that they often do, and eight students (14.8 percent) indicated that they almost always do. One student (1.9 percent) did not respond.

Table 13

Receive News from National Newspapers and/or Magazines/Corresponding Web site

Response	Number	Percent
Never	10	18.5
Seldom	15	27.8
Sometimes	12	22.2
Often	8	14.8
Almost Always	8	14.8
No Response	1	1.9
Total	54	100.0

Most respondents (74.1 percent) answered that they sometimes, often or almost always receive their news from search engines. (See Table 14). Only three students (5.6 percent) indicated that they never receive their news from search engines, and ten students (18.5 percent) revealed that they seldom do. One student (1.9 percent) did not respond.

Table 14

Receive News from Search Engines

Response	Number	Percent
Never	3	5.6
Seldom	10	18.5
Sometimes	13	24.1
Often	14	25.9
Almost Always	13	24.1
No Response	1	1.9
Total	54	100.0

The largest number of respondents (42.6 percent) indicated that they never choose blogs (Web logs) to receive their news. (See Table 15). Eighteen students (33.3 percent) indicated that they seldom receive their news from blogs, and nine students (16.7 percent) responded that they sometimes do. Only one student (1.9 percent) indicated that they often go to blogs for news and only one student (1.9 percent) responded that they almost always do. Two students (3.7 percent) did not respond.

Table 15

Receive News from Blogs

Response	Number	Percent
Never	23	42.6
Seldom	18	33.3
Sometimes	9	16.7
Often	1	1.9
Almost Always	1	1.9
No Response	2	3.7
Total	54	100.0

When asked how often they receive their news by word of mouth, only one respondent (1.9 percent) indicated that they never do. (See Table 16). Nine students (16.7 percent) responded that they seldom receive their news by word of mouth, 22 students (40.7 percent) responded that they sometimes do and 22 students (40.7 percent) responded that they often do. None of the students indicated that they almost always receive their news by word of mouth.

Table 16

Receive News by Word of Mouth

Response	Number	Percent
Never	1	1.9
Seldom	9	16.7
Sometimes	22	40.7
Often	22	40.7
Almost Always	0	0
Total	54	100.0

Six students listed optional comments after indicating their news source choices. Among comments made, one student offered, "The cable news programs that I watch are 'The Daily Show with Jon Stewart' and 'The Colbert Report,' not CNN, Fox News or

MSNBC." Another student commented, "I personally don't like to pay too much attention to the news because I think it's too depressing. Usually when I go out of my way to watch/read/listen to it, it's because I'm looking for something specific (which in that case I typically use the Internet)." Two students commented that they prefer BBC News. Other student preferences included National Public Radio (NPR) and the *New York Times*.

Institution Trust Levels

Students were asked to rate their level of trust in various institutions on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being "not at all" and 5 being "a great deal" so the author could determine the respondents' general level of skepticism. As discussed previously, the author modeled the survey after one designed by professors Yariv Tsfati from the University of Haifa, Israel and Joseph Cappella from the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. Tsfati and Cappella used various institutions to gauge a general level of skepticism among respondents for a similar media skepticism study (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). The institutions students were asked to rate were the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), their local Police Department, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), their state governor's office, U.S. Congress, the U.S. Military, and their local Township Officials.

Only two students (3.7 percent) indicated that they do not trust the FBI at all. (See Table 17). The majority of students (79.6 percent) ranked their trust levels in the FBI as a 2, 3, or 4. Eight students (15. percent) indicated that they trusted the FBI a great deal. One student (1.9 percent) did not respond.

Table 17

Level of Trust in the FBI

Response	Number	Percent
1-Not at all	2	3.7
2	11	20.4
3	16	29.6
4	16	29.6
5-A great deal	8	14.8
No Response	1	1.9
Total	54	100.0

Only two students (3.7 percent) indicated that they do not trust the CIA at all. (See Table 18). Again, the majority of students (81.5 percent) ranked their trust in the CIA as a 2, 3 or 4. Seven students (13 percent) indicated that they trust the CIA a great deal. One student (1.9 percent) did not respond.

Table 18

Level of Trust in the CIA

Response	Number	Percent
1-Not at all	2	3.7
2	15	27.8
3	17	31.5
4	12	22.2
5-A great deal	7	13
No Response	1	1.9
Total	54	100.0

Only one student (1.9 percent) indicated that they did not trust their local police department at all. See Table 19. The majority of respondents (72.2 percent) ranked their trust level in their local police department as a 3 or 4. Six students (11.1 percent) ranked

their trust in their local police department as a 2. Eight students (14.8 percent) indicated that they trust their local police department a great deal.

Table 19

Level of Trust in the Local Police Department

Response	Number	Percent
1-Not at all	1	1.9
2	6	11.1
3	17	31.5
4	22	40.7
5-A great deal	8	14.8
Total	54	100.0

Only one student (1.9 percent) indicated that they did not trust the FDA at all. (See Table 20). The majority of respondents (70.3 percent) ranked their trust in the FDA as a 3 or 4. Ten students (18.5 percent) ranked their trust in the FDA as a 2. Five students (9.3 percent) indicated that they trust the FDA a great deal.

Table 20

Level of Trust in the FDA

Response	Number	Percent
1-Not at all	1	1.9
2	10	18.5
3	18	33.3
4	20	37
5-A great deal	5	9.3
Total	54	100.0

None of the respondents indicated that they did not trust their state governor's office at all. (See Table 21). Fifteen students (27.8 percent) ranked their trust in their state governor's office as a 2, 21 students (38.9 percent) ranked their trust in their state

governor's office as a 3, and 15 students (27.8 percent) ranked their trust as a 4. Three students (5.6 percent) indicated that they trust their state governor's office a great deal.

Table 21

Level of Trust in the State Governor's Office

Response	Number	Percent
1-Not at all	0	0
2	15	27.8
3	21	38.9
4	15	27.8
5-A great deal	3	5.6
Total	54	100.0

The students ranked their trust in the U.S. Congress lower than any of the other institutions. (See Table 22). Three students (5.6 percent) indicated that they did not trust the U.S. Congress at all. Twenty 21 students (38.9 percent) ranked their trust as a 2, 22 students (38.9 percent) ranked their trust as a 3, six students (11.1 percent) ranked their trust as 4, and two students (3.7 percent) indicated that they trust the U.S. Congress a great deal.

Table 22

Level of Trust in the U.S. Congress

Response	Number	Percent
1-Not at all	3	5.6
2	21	38.9
3	22	40.7
4	6	11.1
5-A great deal	2	3.7
Total	54	100.0

A larger number of respondents indicated that they had more trust in the U.S. Military. (See Table 23). Only one student (1.9 percent) indicated that they do not

trust the U.S. Military at all. Fourteen students (25.9 percent) ranked their trust in the U.S. Military as a 2, 13 students (24.1 percent) ranked their trust as a 3, 13 students (24.1 percent) ranked their trust as a 4, and 13 students (24.1 percent) responded that they trust the U.S. Military a great deal.

Table 23

Level of Trust in the U.S. Military

Response	Number	Percent
1-Not at all	1	1.9
2	14	25.9
3	13	24.1
4	13	24.1
5-A great deal	13	24.1
Total	54	100.0

Only one student (1.9 percent) indicated that they did not trust their local township officials at all. (See Table 24). Nine students (16.7 percent) ranked their trust in their local township officials as 2, 28 students (51.9 percent) ranked their trust as a 3, and 15 students (27.8 percent) ranked their trust as a 4. Only one student (1.9 percent) responded that they trust their local township officials a great deal.

Table 24

Level of Trust in Local Township Officials

Response	Number	Percent
1-Not at all	1	1.9
2	9	16.7
3	28	51.9
4	15	27.8
5-A great deal	1	1.9
Total	54	100.0

None of the students responded to the optional comment section regarding their trust levels in the various institutions. In order to ensure the reliability that trust levels in the eight institutions accurately measure the student respondents' general level of skepticism via a five-point Likert scale, the author ran a Cronbach's Alpha analysis. This assessment shows how well the set of eight institutions measure a general level of skepticism. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability rating was high with a score of .823, confirming that the five-point Likert scale and eight institutions measure a general level of skepticism very well. As Table 25 shows, the mean level of skepticism in various institutions ranged between 2.69 on the low end and 3.56 on the high end on a scale of one to five. This shows that the students were somewhere in the middle on how much they trust these various institutions, which shows that this particular group of respondents was not overly skeptical in general. As Table 25 shows, Student respondents were the most skeptical of U.S. Congress, ranking this institution the lowest on a scale of one to five. Students were the least skeptical of their local police department, ranking this institution the highest on a scale of one to five.

Table 25

Mean General Skepticism Levels

	FBI	CIA	PD	FDA	State Governor	Congress	Military	Township Officials
Mean Skepticism Level	3.32	3.13	3.56	3.33	3.11	2.69	3.43	3.11

Mainstream News Media Skepticism

Students were presented with various statements about mainstream news media organizations as a whole and employees of mainstream news media organizations so the

author could determine the respondents' general level of skepticism of the mainstream news media. They were asked to indicate whether they agreed with the statements on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being "not at all" and 5 being "a great deal."

When asked if they think mainstream news media organizations as a whole are fair, none of the respondents indicated that they believe that news media organizations are fair a great deal. (See Table 26). Three students (5.6 percent) indicated that they believe news media organizations are not fair at all.

Table 26

News Media Organizations are Fair

Response	Number	Percent
1-Not at all	3	5.6
2	20	37
3	27	50
4	4	7.4
5-A great deal	0	0
Total	54	100.0
Mean Ranking		2.59

None of the respondents indicated that they believe mainstream news media organizations tell the whole story a great deal. (See Table 27). Ten students (18.5 percent) indicated that they believe news media organizations do not tell the whole story at all. The majority of the students (74 percent) chose either a 2 or 3 to rate news media organizations as telling the whole story.

Table 27

News Media Organizations Tell the Whole Story

Response	Number	Percent
1-Not at all	10	18.5
2	22	40.7
3	18	33.3
4	4	7.4
5-A great deal	0	0
Total	54	100.0
Mean Ranking		2.29

Only one of the respondents indicated that they believe news media organizations are accurate a great deal. (See Table 28). Again, the majority of students (70.4 percent) chose either a 2 or 3 to rate news media organizations as being accurate.

Table 28

News Media Organizations are Accurate

Response	Number	Percent
1-Not at all	3	5.6
2	15	27.8
3	23	42.6
4	12	22.2
5-A great deal	1	1.9
Total	54	100.0
Mean Ranking		2.87

When asked if they think mainstream news media organizations can be trusted, only two of the respondents (3.7 percent) indicated that they believe they can a great deal. (See Table 29). None of the students believed that news organizations cannot be trusted at all, but the majority of respondents (75.9 percent) chose either a 2 or 3 to rate news media organizations as being trustworthy.

Table 29

News Media Organizations Can Be Trusted

Response	Number	Percent
1-Not at all	0	0.0
2	19	35.2
3	22	40.7
4	11	20.4
5-A great deal	2	3.7
Total	54	100.0
Mean Ranking		2.93

Three students filled in the optional comment section after rating the statements about mainstream news media organizations. Among comments made, one student offered, "I do not lump all mainstream media together. I segment, carefully selecting the ones I think can be trusted (e.g., NPR) and avoiding the ones I think cannot be (e.g., Fox News)."

Another student commented, "I may trust a news organization to consistently offer me the same slant or misinterpretation of events, but I don't really trust any of them to be unbiased or tell me the whole story."

A third student offered, "I feel that media doesn't 'intentionally' leave out details of a news story, but items can be missed because they were never uncovered."

After rating statements about mainstream news media organizations as a whole, students were then asked to rate the same statements about employees of mainstream news media organizations. When asked if they believe employees of news media organizations care about being fair, only three respondents (5.6 percent) believed that employees of news media organizations care about being fair a great deal. (See Table 30).

The majority of students (68.5) chose either a 2 or 3 to rate employees of news media organizations as being fair. One student (1.9 percent) did not respond.

Table 30

Employees of News Media Organizations are Fair

Response	Number	Percent
1-Not at all	3	5.6
2	17	31.5
3	20	37
4	10	18.5
5-A great deal	3	5.6
No Response	1	1.9
Total		100.0
Mean Ranking		2.87

As for telling the whole story, only one respondent (1.9 percent) felt that employees of news media organizations care about telling the whole story a great deal. (See Table 31). The largest number of respondents (38.9 percent) rated employees as middle of the road (3) when it came to being fair. One student (1.9 percent) did not respond.

Table 31

Employees of News Media Organizations Tell the Whole Story

Response	Number	Percent
1-Not at all	4	7.4
2	15	27.8
3	21	38.9
4	12	22.2
5-A great deal	1	1.9
No Response	1	1.9
Total	54	100.0
Mean Ranking		2.83

When asked if they believe employees of news media organizations care about being accurate, only one respondent (1.9 percent) felt that employees of news media organizations did not care at all about being accurate. (See Table 32). The largest number of respondents, 23 (42.6 percent), rated employees as middle of the road (3) when it came to being fair. The second highest number of respondents, 17 (31.5 percent), rated employees as a 4 when it came to being accurate. One student (1.9 percent) did not respond.

Table 32

Employees of News Media Organizations are Accurate

Response	Number	Percent
1-Not at all	1	1.9
2	8	14.8
3	23	42.6
4	17	31.5
5-A great deal	4	7.4
No Response	1	1.9
Total	54	100.0
Mean Ranking		3.28

None of the respondents felt that news media organizations did not care at all about being trustworthy. (See Table 33). The majority of students (85.2 percent) rated employees of news media organizations as a 2, 3, or 4 when it came to being trustworthy. Only six students (11.1 percent) felt that employees of news media organizations are trustworthy a great deal. Two students (3.7 percent) did not respond.

Table 33

Employees of News Media Organizations are Trustworthy

Response	Number	Percent
1-Not at all	0	0.0
2	13	24.1
3	19	35.2
4	14	25.9
5-A great deal	6	11.1
No Response	2	3.7
Total	54	100.0
Mean Ranking		3.25

Overall, students seemed to rate employees of mainstream news media organizations higher than the news media organizations themselves. As Table 34 shows, the mean rankings for news media employees were higher in all four categories-fairness, telling the whole story, accuracy, and trustworthiness.

Table 34

Summary of News Media Skepticism Mean Rankings

	Fair	Tell Whole Story	Accurate	Trustworthy
News Media Organizations	2.59	2.29	2.87	2.93
News Media Employees	2.87	2.83	3.28	3.25

The author asked students to rate employees only in four additional categories and the mean rankings rose significantly-indicating a higher level of skepticism. When asked if they believe employees of news media organizations care about reporting the story first, none of the respondents felt that employees of news media organizations do not care at all about reporting the story first. (See Table 35). The largest number of respondents, 29 (53.7 percent), felt that employees of news media organizations care a great deal about

reporting the story first. One student (1.9 percent) did not respond. The mean ranking was the highest level in this category, 4.20.

Table 35

Employees of News Media Organizations, Reporting Story First

Response	Number	Percent
1-Not at all	0	0.0
2	3	5.6
3	8	14.8
4	13	24.1
5-A great deal	29	53.7
No Response	1	1.9
Total	54	100.0
Mean Ranking		4.20

When asked if they believe employees of news media organizations care about pleasing corporate sponsors, only one respondent (1.9 percent) felt that the employees do not care at all about pleasing corporate sponsors. (See Table 36). The largest number of respondents, 20 (37.0 percent), felt that employees of news media organizations care a great deal about pleasing corporate sponsors. One student (1.9 percent) did not respond. Again, the mean ranking was quite high, at 3.91.

Table 36

Employees of News Media Organizations, Pleasing Corporate Sponsors

Response	Number	Percent
1-Not at all	1	1.9
2	4	7.4
3	14	25.9
4	14	25.9
5-A great deal	20	37.0
No Response	1	1.9
Total	54	100.0
Mean Ranking		3.91

None of the respondents felt that the employees do not care at all about satisfying management/owners. (See Table 37). The largest number of respondents, 23 (42.6 percent), felt that employees of news media organizations care a great deal about satisfying management/owners. One student (1.9 percent) did not respond. Once again, the mean ranking was high at 4.13.

Table 37

Employees of News Media Organizations, Satisfying Management

Response	Number	Percent
1-Not at all	0	0.0
2	2	3.7
3	12	22.2
4	16	29.6
5-A great deal	23	42.6
No Response	1	1.9
Total	54	100.0
Mean Ranking		4.13

When asked if they believe employees of news media organizations care about making money, none of the respondents felt that the employees do not care at all about making money. (See Table 38). The largest number of respondents, 22 (40.7 percent), felt that employees of news media organizations care a great deal about making money. One student (1.9 percent) did not respond. The mean ranking was again very high, at 4.19.

Table 38

Employees of News Media Organizations, Making Money

Response	Number	Percent
1-Not at all	0	0.0
2	1	1.9
3	10	18.5
4	20	37.0
5-A great deal	22	40.7
No Response	1	1.9
Total	54	100.0
Mean Ranking		4.19

As Table 39 shows, students ranked employees of news media organizations the highest on a scale of one to five. This indicates that students are more skeptical of mainstream news media employees when it comes to reporting the story first, pleasing sponsors, satisfying management, and making money.

Table 39

Summary of Additional Employee Mean Rankings

	Reporting Story First	Pleasing Sponsors	Satisfying Management	Making Money
News Media Employees	4.20	3.91	4.13	4.19

Five students filled in the optional comment section after rating the statements about employees of mainstream news media organizations. Among comments made, one student offered, "Media people in general are scumbags."

"I don't think that they care about truly being trustworthy as much as they do making us (the viewers) perceive them as trustworthy," one respondent commented.

"I believe there are employees who want to be able to tell the whole story, be accurate, trustworthy, etc. but they are constrained by the 'rules' of the news organization, its management and owners," another student commented.

Yet another student offered, "It is harder to quantitatively analyze the motives of employees because reporters, camera operators, producers, directors, newsreaders, editors, managers, sales, etc. may all think differently. Is a reporter who wants to report a story that may offend a corporate sponsor who is then overruled by a general manager or editor considered disingenuous?"

In order to ensure the reliability that the five-point Likert scale questions about both mainstream news media organizations as a whole and employees of mainstream news media organizations accurately measure the students' level of skepticism in the mainstream media, the author ran a Cronbach's Alpha analysis on eight of the 12 statements the students responded to. When running this analysis, the author matched the four statements about news media organizations as a whole with the first four matching statements about employees of news media organizations. This measured the students' skepticism levels of mainstream news media organizations and employees of news media organizations together based on four characteristics-accuracy, fairness, telling the whole story, and trustworthiness. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability rating was extremely high with a score of .915, confirming that the five-point Likert scale questions about mainstream news media organizations measure the level of skepticism of mainstream news media organizations very well. Since each of these items were measured on a scale from one to five, the mean values on a combined scale for the overall measure of news media skepticism range from eight (8 x 1) to 40 (8 x 5).

Comparative Statistics

According to Steve Creech, President of Statistically Significant Consulting, LLC (2006), the t-test is likely the most commonly used statistical test. The two-sample t-test is used to compare the means of two independent samples. The results of the t-test will produce a p-value, and if this p-value is less than 0.05 it is considered very strong evidence and the null hypothesis may be rejected, leaving the alternative hypothesis assumed to be true. For this study, the author ran a t-test for 10 of the 11 null hypotheses and the p-value results varied for each.

Mean Skepticism Levels and News Media Choices

Before running t-tests on each of the ten news media choices, the author first combined the frequency of student media choices into two different categories; never and seldom; and sometimes, often, and almost always. For the purposes of this study, students who chose never and seldom will be referred to as "non-users" and students who chose sometimes, often, and almost always will be referred to as "users." The author then went through three steps to determine if a t-test was appropriate for each category based on graphs that showed normal and abnormal distribution of scores, equal variances, and independent scores. The t-test results proved appropriate for nine of the 10 categories. An alternative statistical test was used for one of the media categories. A confidence level of 90 percent was used for all 10 of the tests. The author chose a 90 percent confidence level for this study because the relationship between news media skepticism and frequency of choice is a topic that has not been extensively researched. Based on this 90 percent confidence level, three of the 10 tests showed statistical significance. See the following tables for category result groupings and corresponding statistical test results.

Table 40

Combined Mean Skepticism of Mainstream Media*

Media Categories	Users	Non-users
Local TV	23.58	20.08
Network TV	23.77	20.00
Cable News	23.73	21.39
Local Radio	22.90	22.9
Talk Radio**	22.46	23.05
Local Newspaper/Magazine	23.78	20.57
National Newspaper/Magazine	23.07	22.71
Search Engine	26.87	23.46
Blogs**	20.91	23.45
Word of Mouth**	22.62	23.4

*+/- a margin of error of 4%
**Non-mainstream source

A t-test was appropriate for analyzing the relationship between the students' frequency of choosing local television news and their mean level of skepticism of the mainstream news media. This t-test produced a p value of .059. At a 90 percent confidence level, this p value is < .10. This means that the t-test results are statistically significant. As Table 40 shows, non-users of local television news had a combined mean skepticism level of 20.08 and users had a combined mean skepticism of 23.58.

A t-test was also appropriate for the network television news category. This t-test produced a p value of .029. At a 90 percent confidence level, this p value is < .10. This means that the t-test results are statistically significant. As Table 40 shows, non-users of network television news/corresponding Web sites had a mean skepticism level of 20.00 and users had a mean skepticism level of 23.77.

A t-test was used for the cable television news/corresponding Web sites category. This t-test produced a p value of .157. At a 90 percent confidence level, this p value is

greater than .10. This means that the t-test results are not statistically significant. As Table 40 shows, non-users of cable television had a combined mean skepticism of 21.39 and users had a combined mean skepticism of 23.77.

A t-test was also used in the local radio category, producing a p value of .998. At a 90 percent confidence level, this p value is greater than .10. This means that the t-test results are not statistically significant. As Table 40 shows, the combined mean level of skepticism of the mainstream media was the same at 22.90 for users and non-users.

In the talk radio category, a t-test produced a p value of .747. At a 90 percent confidence level, this p value is > .10. This means that the t-test results are not statistically significant. As Table 40 shows, students talk radio non-users had a combined mean level of skepticism of 23.05 and users had combined mean level of skepticism of 22.46.

In the local newspaper/magazine category, a t-test produced a p value of .068. At a 90 percent confidence level, this p value is < .10. This means that the t-test results are statistically significant. As Table 40 shows, non-users of local newspapers/magazines had combined mean level of skepticism of 20.57 and the students who sometimes, often, or almost always choose local newspapers/magazines as a source had a combined mean level of skepticism of 23.78.

In the national newspaper/magazine category, a t-test produced a p value of .819. At a 90 percent confidence level, this p value is > .10. This means that the t-test results are not statistically significant. As Table 40 shows, non-users of national newspapers/magazines had a combined mean level of skepticism of 22.71 and users had a combined mean level of skepticism of 23.07.

A t-test was not appropriate for analyzing the relationship between the students' frequency of choosing search engines for news and information and their mean level of skepticism of the mainstream news media. This is because the three assumptions necessary to complete a t-test were not met. Therefore, a similar, alternative test called a Mann-Whitney U test produced a p value of .474. At a 90 percent confidence level, this p value is > .10. This means that the Mann Whitney U test results are not statistically significant. As Table 40 shows, students who do not use search engines as a source for news and information had a combined mean level of skepticism of 23.46 and the students who use search engines had a combined mean level of skepticism of 26.87.

A t-test in the blog/message board category produced a p value of .186. At a 90 percent confidence level, this p value is > .10. This means that the t-test results are not statistically significant. As Table 40 shows, students who do not use blogs/message boards had a combined mean level of skepticism of 23.45 and the students who use them had a combined mean level of skepticism of 20.91.

Finally, a t-test was appropriate for analyzing the relationship between the students' frequency of choosing word of mouth for news and information and their mean level of skepticism of the mainstream news media. This t-test produced a p value of .698. At a 90 percent confidence level, this p value is > .10. This means that the t-test results are not statistically significant. As Table 40 shows, students who do not use word of mouth had a combined mean level of skepticism of 23.40 and the students who use word of mouth as a source had a combined mean level of skepticism of 22.62.

Comparative Statistics for Media Choices and Career Affiliation

Table 41

Combined Mean Skepticism of Employees and Non-Employees

Employees	Non-Employees
25.36	21.70

A t-test was appropriate for analyzing the relationship between the students' career affiliation with the mainstream news media and their mean level of skepticism of the mainstream news media. This t-test produced a p-value of .039. At a 90 percent confidence level, this p value is < .10. This means that the t-test results are statistically significant. As Table 41 shows, the students who were employed in the news media had a combined mean level of skepticism of 25.36 and the students who were not employed in the news media had a combined mean level of skepticism of 21.70.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions and Recommendations

Review of the Null Hypothesis

The author hypothesized that there would be a difference between the mean level of skepticism of the mainstream news media and the mean frequency of various news media choices. The author also hypothesized that there would be a difference in the mean level of skepticism of the mainstream news media between those who are employed with the mainstream news media and those who are not. The variables for the first null hypothesis are defined as: x_1 is the level of skepticism of the mainstream news media for communications graduate students who are non-users (students who never or seldom choose a news media source) and y_1 is the level of skepticism of the mainstream news media for communications graduate students who are users (students who sometimes, often, and almost always choose a news media source). For the second null hypothesis x_2 is the level of skepticism of the mainstream news media for communications graduate students who are employed in the mainstream news media and y_2 is the level of skepticism of the mainstream news media for communications graduate students who are not employed in the mainstream news media. The level of significance was set at 90 percent. The null hypotheses were:

H_1o: There is no difference in the mean level of skepticism of the mainstream news media between communications graduate students who do not use a news media source and communications graduate students who use a news media source.

H_1o: $\mu x_1 = \mu y_1$

H_20: There is no difference in the mean level of skepticism of the mainstream news media between those who are employed with the mainstream news media and those who are not.

H_20: $\mu x_2 = \mu y_2$

Implications of the Findings

For the first null hypothesis, the author ran separate t-tests for all ten news media choices and as discussed previously, some t-test results were statistically significant and some were not. As Table 42 shows, the author was able to reject the first null hypothesis in three of the ten news media categories based on the p value produced by each t-test.

Table 42

H_1o T-test Results Summary

Media Choice	Combined Skepticism* for Users	Combined Skepticism* for Non-users	P value	H_1o Decision
Local TV	23.58	20.08	.059	reject
Network TV	23.77	20.00	.029	reject
Cable News	23.73	21.39	.157	fail to reject
Local Radio	22.90	22.90	.998	fail to reject
Talk Radio**	22.46	23.05	.747	fail to reject
Local Newspaper/Magazine	23.78	20.57	.068	reject
National Newspaper/Magazine	23.07	22.71	.819	fail to reject
Search Engine	26.87	23.46	.474***	fail to reject
Blogs**	20.91	23.45	.186	fail to reject
Word of Mouth**	22.62	23.4	.698	fail to reject

*+/- a margin of error of 4%
**Non-mainstream source
***Alternative statistical test used to produce P value

Local television news.

In the local television news category, the author is able to reject null hypothesis H_1o in the local television news category. Based on t-test results, the author is able to conclude that there is a difference between the mean level of skepticism of the

mainstream news media between communications graduate students who use local television news as a source and communications graduate students who do not use local television news as a source. This difference suggests that they may change how often they turn to local television news based on how much they trust or do not trust the mainstream news media.

The results also showed that non-users of local television news had a combined mean skepticism level of 20.08 and users of local television news had a combined mean skepticism level of 23.58. On a scale of eight to 40 (as discussed previously, the scale of 1 to 5 multiplied by 8 media categories) with eight being the most skeptical and 40 being not skeptical at all, these results show that students who do not use local television news as a source for news and information are more skeptical of the mainstream news media than the students who do use local television news.

Network television news.

Based on t-test results, the author is also able to reject the first null hypothesis in the networks television news category. This indicates that there is a difference between the mean level of skepticism of the mainstream news media between communications graduate students who use network television news as a source for news and information and communications graduate students who do not use network television news as a source for news and information. This difference of means suggests that students may change how often they turn to network television news based on how much they trust or do not trust the mainstream news media.

As Table 42 shows, non-users had a combined mean skepticism level of 20.00 and users had a combined mean skepticism level of 23.77. Because a lower number

means more skeptical and a higher number means less skeptical, this means that students who do not use network television news to receive their news and information are more skeptical of the mainstream news media than the students who are users of network television news.

Cable television news.

Because t-test results were not statistically significant, the author must fail to reject null hypothesis H_1o in the cable television news category. The author is able to conclude that there is no difference between the mean level of skepticism of the mainstream news media between communications graduate students who do not choose cable television news as a source and communications graduate students who do choose cable television news as a source.

However, the results also show that students who do not use cable television news as a source had a combined mean skepticism level of 21.39 and the students who use cable television news as a source had a combined mean skepticism level of 23.77. This shows that non-users of cable television news are more skeptical of the mainstream news media than the students who are users.

Local radio.

T-test results were not statistically significant in the local radio category, so the author must fail to reject null hypothesis H_1o in this category. The author can conclude that there is no difference between the mean level of skepticism of the mainstream news media between users and non-users of local radio.

In this category only, the results showed the same combined mean level of skepticism of 22.90 for both students who were users and students who were non-users of local radio.

Talk radio.

Based on t-tests results in the talk radio category, the author must fail to reject null hypothesis H_1o and conclude that there is no difference between the mean level of skepticism of the mainstream news media between students who do not choose talk radio as a source for news and students who do choose talk radio as a source.

However, since the results in Table 42 also show that students who responded as non-users of talk radio had a mean skepticism level of 23.05 and the students who responded as users of talk radio as a source had a mean skepticism level of 22.46. Since a lower number means more skeptical and a higher number means less skeptical, the author is able to conclude that the students who use talk radio as a source for news and information are slightly more skeptical of the mainstream news media than the students who do not use talk radio.

Local newspapers.

In the local newspapers/magazines category, the t-test results allow the author to reject the first null hypothesis in this category. This indicates that there is a difference between the mean level of skepticism of the mainstream news media between communications graduate students who do not use local newspapers/magazines as a source for news and information and communications graduate students who use local newspapers/magazines as a source.

As Table 42 shows, the students who do not use local newspapers/magazines had a mean skepticism level of 20.57 and the students who do use local newspapers/magazines as a source has a mean skepticism level of 23.78. Therefore, the author is able to conclude that non-users are slightly more skeptical of the mainstream news media than users in the local newspapers/magazines category.

National newspapers.

In the national newspapers/magazines category, the author must fail to reject null hypothesis H_1o. The author can assume that there is no difference between the mean level of skepticism of the mainstream news media between users and non-users.

However, the results in Table 42 also show that non-users had a combined mean skepticism level of 22.71 and users had a combined mean skepticism level of 23.07. The author is able to conclude that students who do not use national newspapers/magazines as a source for news and information are slightly more skeptical of the mainstream news media than the students who do use national newspapers/magazines.

Search engines.

Results of a Mann Whitney U test results are not statistically significant in the search engine category, so the author must fail to reject the first null hypothesis. The author can conclude that there is no difference between communications graduate students who do not use search engines and communications graduate students who do use search engines.

However, as Table 42 shows, the students who do not use search engines had a combined mean skepticism level of 23.46 and students who do choose search engines as a source had a combined mean skepticism level of 26.87. The author is able to conclude

that non-users of search engines are more skeptical of the mainstream news media than users of search engines.

Blogs.

Based on t-test results in the blogs category, the author must fail to reject the first null hypothesis and conclude that there is no difference between the mean level of skepticism of the mainstream news media between blog users and non-users.

Interestingly, the results in Table 42 also show that students who do not use blogs/message boards had a combined mean skepticism level of 23.45 and the students who use them had a mean skepticism level of 20.91. This difference in the combined mean levels of skepticism is similar to the talk radio category in that blog users are more skeptical of the mainstream news media than non-users.

Word of mouth.

Finally, in the word of mouth category, the author must fail to reject null hypothesis H_1o. The author can assume that there is no difference between the mean level of skepticism of the mainstream news media between communications graduate students who do not use word of mouth as a source for news and information and communications graduate students who do use word of mouth as a news source.

As Table 42 shows, students who do not use word of mouth as a source for news and information had a combined mean skepticism level of 23.40 and the students who do use word of mouth as a source had a combined mean skepticism level of 22.62. This means that users are more skeptical of the mainstream news media than non-users, similar to both the talk radio and blogs categories.

Skepticism and employment.

Table 43

H_2o T-test Results Summary

Combined Mean Skepticism* Employees	Combined Mean Skepticism* Non-Employees	P value	H_1o Decision
25.36	21.70	.039	reject

*+/- a margin of error of 4%

As Table 43 shows, t-test results allow the author to reject null hypothesis H_2o. The author is able to conclude that there is a difference in the mean skepticism score for those who work in news media versus those who do not work in the news media. This difference shows that skepticism is affected by whether or not one works in the news media.

The results also showed that the students who were employed in the news media had a combined mean skepticism level of 25.36 and the students who were not employed in the news media had a mean skepticism level of 21.70. This means that the communications students who are employed in the news media are less skeptical of the mainstream news media than students who are not employed in the news media.

Overview of the Results

Overall, the author was able to reject the first null hypothesis in only three of the ten news media categories, but the combined mean levels still showed interesting differences between users and non-users of each news media source. In the mainstream categories, with the exception of local radio, the author found that non-users are more skeptical of the mainstream news media than users. In the three non-mainstream categories – talk radio, blogs, and word of mouth - it was just the opposite. In these three

non-mainstream categories, users appear to be more skeptical than non-users. The author can therefore conclude based on results of this study that when communications graduate students trust the mainstream news media, they are more likely to use mainstream sources and when they do not trust the mainstream news media, they are more likely to use non-mainstream sources.

The author was able to reject the second null hypothesis, indicating that communications graduate students who are employed in the news media are less skeptical of the mainstream news media than communications graduate students who are not employed in the news media. There could be several reasons for this, including the possibility that students who work for the mainstream news media feel they understand how the industry works or feel more comfortable with it, and may be able to feel less skeptical of media organizations and employees because of their connection.

In addition to the author's two research questions, the very basic survey results show some interesting trends. Overall, the students do not have a great deal of trust in either mainstream news media organizations as a whole or employees of mainstream news media organizations. The author was able to gauge a general level of skepticism by asking the students how much they trusted various institutions. Mean levels of general skepticism showed that this particular group of students was not overly skeptical. However, when asked about their trust in news media organizations and employees of news media organizations on a scale of one to five with one being not at all and five being a great deal, a very few number of the students chose number five. In fact, in two statements students were asked to answer such as the degree to which they believe news media organizations as a whole care about being fair and the degree to which they believe

news media organizations care about telling the whole story, none of the students felt they cared a great deal. Interestingly, the students did seem to feel that employees of news media organizations were slightly more trustworthy than the news media organizations as a whole, although not by very much. They still did not rate employees very high on the skepticism scale. The majority of skepticism ratings seemed to be middle of the road, a two or three on a scale of one to five. This does not show overwhelming enthusiasm for an industry these students are already working in or possibly training to join.

Although the majority of students did not seem to frequent blogs, word of mouth, and talk radio quite often, the author finds it disturbing that respondents indicated that these options were a source for news and information at all. In fact, eight students responded that they almost always or often turn to talk radio for news and information, two students indicated that they almost always or often turn to blogs for news, and 44 students responded that they often and sometimes receive their news and information by word of mouth. While talk radio, blogs, and word of mouth are certainly readily available and prevalent, these sources have no responsibility to be objective or fact-based in any way. The author expected comments from students pointing out this fact, but not a single student indicated problems with these three options listed with the other mainstream news media sources.

The comments from the survey were very interesting, particularly from the student who answered seriously that he or she chose Comedy Central's "The Daily Show" and "The Colbert Report" to receive news and information, the student who referred to media people as "scumbags," and the student who commented, "I believe

there are employees who want to be able to tell the whole story, be accurate, trustworthy, etc. but they are constrained by the 'rules' of the news organization, its management and owners." The author noticed negative opinions in the news media in more comments from students such as one who responded, "I personally don't like to pay too much attention to the news because I think it's too depressing. Usually when I go out of my way to watch/read/listen to it, it's because I'm looking for something specific (which in that case I typically use the Internet)" and another student who commented "I may trust a news organization to consistently offer me the same slant or misinterpretation of events, but I don't really trust any of them to be unbiased or tell me the whole story."

From all of the survey results received, the author is able to determine even without descriptive statistics that this group of communications students definitely has some seriously negative opinions about the mainstream news media. With 25.9 percent of the students employed in the profession and with the remaining 72.2 percent potentially considering a future career in the industry or teaching position instructing future journalists and media employees, the author feels that these survey results could certainly be considered disturbing.

Recommendations for Study Modifications

While reviewing the research results, the author noticed that in two of the categories in which the author failed to reject null hypothesis H_1o -cable television news and blogs-t-tests produced p values just slightly larger than .10. It is possible that with a larger sample size or more specific questioning, null hypothesis H_1o might have been rejected in these categories. Since the non-mainstream sources (blogs, word of mouth, and talk radio) were included, the author feels comedy shows such as "The Daily Show,"

"The Colbert Report," and "Saturday Night Live" should have also been included. It would have been interesting to gauge how many students really are turning to these sources for news and information.

The author surveyed a group of students that were available easily via e-mail, but visiting classes to have students take surveys on the spot could have proved more effective and potentially provided a larger sample size. Finally, the author feels that specifically focusing on one news media source at a time may produce more meaningful results.

Recommendations for Further Study

The author has identified three factors, which if adjusted, may provide stronger insight into the link between skepticism of the mainstream news media and news exposure decisions among communications students. The recommendations for further study are: the isolation of news media sources; the isolation of student employment status and the measurement of skepticism of journalism/communications instructors.

Isolation of news media sources.

One of the difficulties of this study was trying to include all possible news media sources. As the list of sources continues to grow, the author kept adding more choices during the survey design process. In addition, students may feel strongly about how much or little they trust one source over another and it may be difficult for them to combine their trust levels in different sources all at one time. The author suggests researchers study skepticism of individual news media sources among journalism/communications students one at a time. For example, future research could gauge how much journalism/communications students trust their local newspaper. Another study could

determine how much journalism/communications students trust their local television stations' newscasts, and so on. In this study, the author included both mainstream and non-mainstream sources in the choices for news media. Future researchers could isolate these sources into separate studies and perhaps further eliminate any confusion among student respondents.

Isolation of student employment status.

Although the author determined how many student respondents in this study were employed in the news media, it would be interesting to see the results of a study that would include a question asking students if they had plans or goals to remain in the profession, or to find a position in the news media if they were not already employed in the news media industry. This research should also include questions about these students' levels of skepticism in the industry. A study such as this could provide specific data for the professors in charge of certain journalism/communications programs as they determined how to design coursework to benefit students.

Measurement of skepticism among journalism/communications professors.

The author feels that along with communications students, skepticism of the mainstream news media among communications instructors should also be studied. Since professors offer guidance and instruction to students potentially considering a career in the news media industry, it would be interesting for future research to gauge how much or how little journalism/communications professors trust the mainstream news media. Such a study could also provide specific data for journalism/communications programs in their design of coursework for students.

Suggestions for Industry Improvement

While many feel the news media is far from what it once was, there is still hope for the industry and the author wishes to provide some insight on some possible solutions, remedies, or at the very least - ideas for minor improvement.

Ethical education.

To begin, change can happen with the very students who this study explores. Education can be the best tool for stirring up the desire for change industry-wide. According to Virginia Commonwealth University communications professor Jeff South (2004), in the light of recent plagiarism scandals, American colleges and universities seem to be catching on that there is a need to teach more ethics courses in journalism and mass communications programs, even though journalism schools have been teaching ethics since the 1920s. A 2004 survey showed that about 37 percent of journalism and mass communications programs require students to take a course in media ethics, compared to a 1992-93 study that showed only about 25 percent of the programs required an ethics course. South reports that beyond just adding ethics courses, more and more educators are reviewing how and why they teach ethics. Kelly McBride, an ethics expert at the Poynter Institute, suggests that ethics not only should be taught as individual course but integrated into all courses.

> Ethical decision-making has to be taught across the curriculum. It is a skill that needs to be developed, not a set of questions and answers. It is a reporting tool, also. It is an editing tool. It is part of the craft, and it should be taught that way (p. 12).

South provides some excellent tips he gathered from around the industry for educators who wish to teach media ethics. They include asking students to chart how many lies they have told in a week and how many times they were tempted to lie, but told the truth, asking students to create personal ethics codes, having students write about their journalistic values at the beginning and the end of each semester, and having students study real-life ethical dilemmas and the consequences of making bad decisions.

Additionally, communications educators themselves are also doing some new learning and need to continue to keep learning more about ethics so they can teach their students to survive in the media industry. Ethics workshops such as "The impact of infotainment on media ethics and democracy" held at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications' annual convention in August 2004 are a good sign for the industry.

While good ethical education cannot turn an immoral person into a moral one, as research has shown (Johnson 2000), teaching all students to make good decisions has a positive effect on them as they move out into their careers-a potential domino effect on the entire media industry. The result could be an industry that more people are prone to trust, including communications students.

Go straight to management.

While ethical education is increasingly important for journalism and communications students; once they graduate, they have to receive more support from news media management. As University of South Florida professor Jay Black puts it, "If management is not ethical, then these people are in limbo" (p. 77). Continued professional development is an obvious tool for change, but beyond that, news media

managers have to know when they are making wrong decisions that can affect the long term opinions of their viewers, readers, and listeners. University of California, Berkley Professor Neil Henry (1999) suggests that journalism educators need to do a better job of joining together to continuously monitor the mainstream news media and enforce change by disclosing every mistake noticed. While this seems extremely time-consuming, Henry argues it is possible:

> Perhaps we can add to our traditional mission the task of standing together and shaming the news media, individually and collectively, in public and in private, when we see them making bad decisions. We should call them to account (p. 70).

Pay attention to a younger audience.

Finally, mainstream news media organizations need to pay attention to their under 30 audiences that are slipping drastically. Henry suggested news media organizations should consider offering more paid positions and paid internships to this demographic, to make them feel proud to be in the industry and to shift the focus of some stories to a younger crowd.

A 1994 study that had a group of students ages 18-23 investigate several national and local newspapers and news magazines concluded that this age group was seriously overlooked in coverage of major stories. The students put together a final report for the media that basically summed up to the desire for more coverage of their generation. As one student summed it up:

> We're not asking for just more articles to focus on us, but we are asking to be included more in the news that is carried. If the media can broaden their

> coverage to show that we have thoughtful viewpoints and good values, we will be taken more seriously. We're still young, but we're growing and learning; we're working hard (Bishop, 1997, p. 1).

Beyond just including the under 30 age group in stories that are ethically sound, news media organizations have to package the stories in a way that is still appealing in this age of so much choice. This may mean more financial investment for updated technology, and many mainstream news media organizations have caught onto this need with interactive Web sites, news cell phone and e-mail updates, etc. Still, the content of this new technology, while short, still must be solid information-real journalism. As University of Pennsylvania Professor Diana Mutz describes the challenge:

> If journalists produce fair-minded, high quality news, and yet citizens do not eagerly consume it, it is most often claimed that it is the citizens who are to be faulted for their civic lack of duty. But if journalists and journalism schools abdicate their responsibility to inform the public by simply blaming them for their poor taste, they will thereby render themselves irrelevant. Moreover, they will lose a potentially important role in arbitrating the many issues raised by this evolution in news genres. I don't know if you are practicing an old form of parody and satire, or a new form of journalism (p. 35).

Final Thoughts

All of these suggestions are no doubt optimistic and arguably idealistic, but they are all possible. While change would certainly be slow, it can happen if the desire exists.

As someone who spent five years as a news reporter and producer at two local television stations, it saddens the author to report that skepticism exists even among those "on the inside." The author decided to leave the news media industry after experiencing firsthand a variety of ethical challenges-from feeling pressured to cover stories to please corporate management, to being asked to leave out portions of a story for time purposes, to airing one-sided or inaccurate stories due to constant pressure to fill time or meet a deadline. These are negative experiences indeed for a communications graduate student preparing to teach students the importance of good old fashioned, solid journalism. Despite these experiences and a decision to leave the industry, the author still has hope and feels the desire to teach others the importance of good journalism and hopefully, create some small change with the next generation of journalists and news media professionals.

So, where are the role models? They may still exist, if few and far between, and they may need to start speaking out against the very industry that pays their bills to inspire change and gain back the trust of their public. In the words of CNN Chief International Correspondent Christiane Amanpour (2000), the industry is in trouble, but there is still some hope. She believes journalists everywhere need to fight to save the profession they love and she speaks about this openly:

> I still have many years left in me, if I still have a job, but that's what I'll tell me son when he's old enough to torture me with painful questions. I'll tell him I am a believer and that's why I still do it. And I believe that good journalism, good television, can make our world a better place. And I really believe good journalism is good business (p.9).

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APPENDIX A

HRRC Approval Letter

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY
www.gvsu.edu

October 4, 2006
Proposal No.: 07-46-H
Approval Date: 10/3/2006
Category: Expedited
Expiration Date: 10/2/2007
Title: *The Consequences of Mainstream News Media Skepticism, Master's Thesis*

Dear Ms. Hugelier:

Grand Valley State University, Human Research Review Committee (HRRC), has completed its review of this proposal. The HRRC serves as the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Grand Valley State University. The rights and welfare of the human subjects appear to be adequately protected and the methods used to obtain informed consent are appropriate. Your project has been **APPROVED.** Please include your proposal number in all future correspondence. The first principal investigator will be sent all correspondence from the University unless otherwise requested.

Revisions: The HRRC must review and approve any change in protocol procedures involving human subjects, prior to the initiation of the change. To revise an approved protocol including a protocol that was initially exempt from the federal regulations, send a written request along with both the original and revised protocols including the subject consent form, to the Chair of the HRRC. When requesting approval of revisions both the project's HRRC number and title must be referenced.

Problems/Changes: The HRRC must be informed promptly if any of the following arises during the course of your project. 1) Problems (unexpected side effects, complaints, etc.) involving the subjects. 2) Changes in the research environment or new information that indicates greater risk to the subjects than existed when the protocol was previously reviewed and approved. 3) Changes in personnel listed on the initial protocol, e.g. principal investigator, co-investigator(s) or secondary personnel.

Renewals: The HRRC approval is valid until the expiration date listed above. Any project that continues beyond the expiration date must be renewed with a continuing review form that can be found at http://www.gvsu.edu/forms/research_dev/FORMS. A maximum of 4 renewals are possible. If you need to continue a proposal beyond that time, you are required to submit a new protocol application for a complete review.

Closed: When your project is completed or if you do not anticipate the study to extend past the one year approval, please complete and submit a closed protocol form. You can find this document at http://www.gvsu.edu/forms/research_dev/FORMS.

If I can be of further assistance, please contact me at 616-331-3417 or via e-mail: reitemep@gvsu.edu. You can also contact the Graduate Assistant in Faculty Research and Development Office at 616-331-3197.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

Paul J. Reitemeier, Ph.D.
Human Research Review Committee Chair
301C DeVos Center
Grand Rapids, MI 49504

APPENDIX B

Survey

DIRECTIONS: Please try to answer every question in the survey. The comment and demographic questions are optional.

Results from this survey will only be reported in statistical summary form. Your identity is confidential; please do not include your name on this survey.

Thank you for your cooperation and assistance with this research.

CAREER AFFILIATION

1. **Are you currently employed in the news media industry (print or broadcast journalism, public relations, advertising, marketing or sales for a news media outlet)?**

   ____ Yes
   ____ No

NEWS AND INFORMATION SOURCES

2. **How often do you receive your news and information from the following sources?**

Local Television Station/Corresponding Web site (Local ABC, NBC, CBS, FOX, UPN, WB affiliates)
Never____ Seldom____ Sometimes____ Often_____ Almost Always_____

Network Television News and News Magazine Programs/Corresponding Web site (CBS, ABC, NBC nightly news, Primetime, 20/20, 60 Minutes, Dateline, etc.)
Never____ Seldom____ Sometimes____ Often_____ Almost Always_____

Cable Television Station/Corresponding Web site (CNN, FOX News Channel, MSNBC, etc.)
Never____ Seldom____ Sometimes____ Often_____ Almost Always_____

Local Radio Station/Corresponding Web site (Local AM/FM stations, including local NPR member stations)
Never____ Seldom____ Sometimes____ Often_____ Almost Always_____

Local, Syndicated, and/or Satellite **Talk** Radio/Corresponding Web site (Rush Limbaugh, Al Franken, Howard Stern etc.)
Never____ Seldom____ Sometimes____ Often_____ Almost Always_____

Local Newspaper or Magazine/Corresponding Web site (City, Township, County Publications, etc.)
Never____ Seldom____ Sometimes____ Often_____ Almost Always_____

National/International Newspaper or Magazine/Corresponding Web site (New York Times, Washington Post, TIME, etc.)
Never____ Seldom____ Sometimes____ Often_____ Almost Always_____

Internet Search Engine News pages (MSN, Yahoo, Google, etc.)
Never____ Seldom____ Sometimes____ Often_____ Almost Always_____

Blogs and/or Message boards
Never____ Seldom____ Sometimes____ Often_____ Almost Always_____

Word of Mouth
Never____ Seldom____ Sometimes____ Often_____ Almost Always_____

3. **COMMENTS ON THE ABOVE QUESTION (optional):**

INSTITUTION TRUST LEVELS

4. **Please indicate the level of trust you have in the following institutions on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not at all and 5 being a great deal.**

Your local police department
(1) Not at all____ (2)____ (3) ____(4)____ (5) A great deal____

Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)
(1) Not at all____ (2)____ (3) ____(4)____ (5) A great deal____

U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
(1) Not at all____ (2)____ (3) ____(4)____ (5) A great deal____

State Governor's Office
(1) Not at all____ (2)____ (3) ____(4)____ (5) A great deal____

U.S. Military
(1) Not at all____ (2)____ (3) ____(4)____ (5) A great deal____

The Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI)
(1) Not at all____ (2)____ (3) ____(4)____ (5) A great deal____

Your local Township government officials
(1) Not at all____ (2)____ (3) ____(4)____ (5) A great deal____

U.S. Congress
(1) Not at all____ (2)____ (3) ____(4)____ (5) A great deal____

5. **COMMENTS ON THE ABOVE QUESTION (optional):**

MAINSTREAM NEWS MEDIA-The following two questions will ask you about mainstream news media organizations AS A WHOLE (i.e. local and national television/radio news, newspapers, magazines and corresponding Web sites).

6. **On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not at all and 5 being a great deal, please indicate the degree to which you think mainstream news media organizations:**

Are fair
(1) Not at all____ (2)____ (3) ____(4)____ (5) A great deal____

Tell the whole story
(1) Not at all____ (2)____ (3) ____(4)____ (5) A great deal____

Are accurate
(1) Not at all____ (2)____ (3) ____(4)____ (5) A great deal____

Can be trusted
(1) Not at all____ (2)____ (3) ____(4)____ (5) A great deal____

7. **COMMENTS ON THE ABOVE QUESTION (optional):**

EMPLOYEES OF MAINSTREAM NEWS MEDIA-The following two questions will ask you about the EMPLOYEES of Mainstream News Media Organizations.

8. **On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not at all and 5 being a great deal, please indicate the degree to which you think the EMPLOYEES of mainstream news media organizations care about:**

Telling the whole story
(1) Not at all____ (2)____ (3) ____(4)____ (5) A great deal____

Being fair
(1) Not at all____ (2)____ (3) ____(4)____ (5) A great deal____

Being accurate
(1) Not at all____ (2)____ (3) ____(4)____ (5) A great deal____

Being trustworthy
(1) Not at all____ (2)____ (3) ____(4)____ (5) A great deal____

Reporting the story first
(1) Not at all____ (2)____ (3) ____(4)____ (5) A great deal____

Pleasing corporate sponsors
(1) Not at all____ (2)____ (3) ____(4)____ (5) A great deal____

Satisfying management/owners
(1) Not at all____ (2)____ (3) ____(4)____ (5) A great deal____

Making money
(1) Not at all____ (2)____ (3) ____(4)____ (5) A great deal____

9. COMMENTS ON THE ABOVE QUESTION (optional):

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION-The following questions will ask you about demographic information. The questions are optional. Results will not be analyzed and will only be reported to aid readers of this study who are considering future research.

10. What is your sex?

___Male
___Female

11. What is your age?

___20-24
___25-29
___30-34
___35-39
___40-44
___45-49
___50-54
___54-59
___60 or older

12. What is your ethnicity?

___Asian/Pacific Islander
___African American
___Alaskan Native
___Hispanic
___White, non-Hispanic
___Other (please specify) _____

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Letter

Dear Student,

With this e-mail, I am writing to ask for your input as part of a wide range of information I am gathering on news media skepticism. Please take just a few minutes to click on this link and complete an online survey. Your status as a Communications graduate student makes your perceptions extremely valuable to me. The information compiled from the survey will be included in a thesis for a Master of Communications degree from Grand Valley State University.

A copy of the survey has been sent via e-mail to 76 GVSU Communications graduate students. The survey has been designed to take no more than five to ten minutes to complete and your identity, along with your e-mail address, will remain confidential. Your name should not be included on the survey to ensure confidentiality. The surveys will not be numbered or coded. Descriptive statistics will be used to analyze the data. If you choose to identify yourself in the optional comment questions provided, any identities will be removed and results will be listed in the following format: "According to one Communications graduate student from Grand Valley State University..." No subject identifiers will be used in any published reports or other presentations of the research results. The optional demographic questions are included only to aid readers of this study who may be considering future research on a similar topic.

The data will be reviewed by myself, Dr. Michael Pritchard, graduate advisor for Grand Valley State University's Master of Communications program, and Dr. Neal Rogness, Professor of Statistics at GVSU. You are not obligated to participate in this survey. Your completed online survey will serve as informed consent and will be used in data results and possibly for future publication.

You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators or Grand Valley State University. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no specific benefits available to you for your participation in this research project and no benefits to the general welfare are likely to result. Completed surveys will be stored on the researcher's password-protected laptop computer and will be kept for at least three years.

Please take a few moments to complete this online survey by following the instructions provided. I am hoping to have the surveys returned within the next week or two. Thank you for your time and contribution to this research. If you have any questions or concerns, please call me at the number listed below. For questions regarding rights of research subjects you may contact: Dr. Paul J. Reitemeier, Chair of the Human Research Review Committee, 301C DeVos Hall, Grand Rapids, MI 49504, (616) 331-2281.

Respectfully,
Lindsey Hugelier
Grand Valley State University