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# An Assessment of Communication Strategies in Edinburgh, Scotland: A Focus on News Outlets Used by Select Audiences

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A Focus on News Outlets Used by Select Audiences

Agricultural Education, Communications and Technology

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May 2017

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	1
Introduction.....	2
Literature Review.....	7
Purpose and Objectives.....	17
Materials and Methods.....	17
Results.....	19
Summary and Conclusions .....	24
Recommendations.....	28
References.....	30
Appendix.....	34

## **Abstract**

*The purpose of this study was to discover which media outlets selected Edinburgh, Scotland consumers were using and why they chose those outlets to gain information. This study was conducted using a survey instrument with convenience sampling (N = 39) in Scotland during the summer 2016. It was found that social media is the primary source for news and timeliness is the most important factor when choosing a news source. Another objective for the study was to determine peak viewing times and primary topics of interest. Peak viewing times were observed to be mornings and evenings primarily. Primary topics of interest were political and entertainment. Recommendations for this study are focused on research and practice for each study objective. One recommendation is to conduct this research on a larger scale; while study results support previous findings outlined in the review of literature, the research from this study would have been enhanced with a larger sample. Additionally, industry should review the results and findings from this research and identify if social media efforts should increase in their communication efforts as a way to increase viewership in this digital era.*

## Introduction

### *History*

As the age of technology continues to thrive, the concern of media news sources retaining readership and viewership continues to grow. Consumers are gaining knowledge of world events using social media now more than ever, and it is impacting the amount of factual information readers are exposed to. Social media is contributing to myths and confusion in the news world because, in this age, anyone can be a journalist. It is important to look at the evolution of mass communication from print news to social media to better understand how consumers are gaining information.

Journalism has been a key component to the development of cultures and societies for centuries. As the world has grown, journalism has evolved and changed throughout the centuries to meet the needs and pace of the consumers. It started, though, with print news. “The first true newspaper in English was the London Gazette of 1666. For a generation, it was the only officially sanctioned newspaper” (Barber, 2015, para. 2). The first American newspaper appeared in Boston in 1690, “entitled Publick Occurrences” (Barber, 2015, para. 3).

“The first successful daily newspaper in Britain was printed in 1702” (Lambert, 2012, para. 1). “In the mid-19th-century, newspaper reporters began to use the telegraph as a means to get news to their newspapers quickly” (Lambert, 2012, para. 4). In 1880, the New York Graphic became the first newspaper to print a photo (Lambert, 2012, para. 4). The first tabloid newspaper in Britain was the Daily Graphic published in 1890; in 1891 it became the first British newspaper to print a photo (Lambert, 2012). ‘*Today*’ became the first color newspaper in Britain in 1986 (Lambert, 2012). Even within print news media changes were made to adapt to consumer’s needs.

Human innovation led to new forms of communications, including radio and television, all experiencing long periods of success (Lambert, 2017). The history of radio began with Guglielmo Marconi, an Italian inventor, who experimented with electromagnetic waves by trying to do short distance broadcasts in his back yard (PBS, n.d.). In 1901, Marconi founded his commercial wireless telegraph company and broadcast the first transatlantic signal (PBS, n.d.). In 1906, Reginald Fessenden sent the first long-distance transmission of human voice and music from his station in Massachusetts (PBS, n.d.). Astoundingly, his signal was received as far as Virginia. The first commercial radio station opened in 1920, KDKA out of Pennsylvania (PBS, n.d.). David Sarnoff saw an opportunity and “used radio to create the corporate empires at RCA and NBC” (PBS, n.d., para. 7). The period between the late 1920s and the early 1950s was considered “the Golden Age of Radio” in the United States (PBS, n.d., para. 8). “According to a 1998 Arbitron report, over 95 percent of Americans listen[ed] to the radio at least once a week” (PBS, n.d., para. 9). In a more recent study, it was found that 70 percent of Americans tune into radio each day (Nielsen, 2012).

David Sarnoff, the president of RCA invested \$50 million in the development of electronic television (Stephen, n.d.). In 1939, “RCA televised the opening of the New York World’s Fair,” and a speech by President Roosevelt, “who was the first president to appear on television” (Stephen, n.d., para. 3). Full-scale commercial television broadcasting started in the United States in 1947 (Stephens, n.d.). Viewers at this time could view a limited number of shows, including two 15-minute newscasts by either CBS TV News or NBC Camel News Caravan in 1948 (Stephens, n.d.). In 1956, “the networks had begun producing their own news film” (Stephens, n.d., para. 9). When they began to produce their segments, television networks started to directly compete with newspapers “as the country’s primary source of news”

(Stephens, n.d., para. 9). In the 1950s, the television became more common in homes, which caused the Golden Age of Radio to draw to a close.

As media popularity continued to grow in the United States, retailers in the United Kingdom (UK) began to feel the pressure of demand as consumers in Britain wanted the same luxuries available in the United States (Marcus, 2005). By 1922 in Britain, public opinion as well as the “spectacular growth and popularity of radio in the United States, had brought too much public pressure on the authorities to deny a full-service any longer” (Marcus, 2005, para. 1). They had been refusing permission for the regular broadcasting of radio in fear that it would interfere with the armed forces (Marcus, 2005). After a few months of deliberation, a company “to be known as the British Broadcasting Company [BBC] was to set up eight stations in major cities around the country; thus the BBC was born” (Marcus, 2005, para. 1). The BBC started daily transmissions in November 1922 (Lambert, 2017). In 1927, the company (BBC) restructured as a public corporation (Marcus, 2005). In 1934, “the BBC was to be entrusted with the development of television” (Marcus, 2005, para. 5). “The BBC, funded by a tax on the sale of television sets, established a worldwide reputation for producing quality programming” (Stephens, n.d., para. 15).

Leslie Mitchell introduced Britain’s first high-definition public television program in August 1936 (Marcus, 2005; Lambert, 2017). This was three years before the first televised program in the United States. In November of 1936, “the world’s first regular high-definition service began transmitting to the 100 or so TV sets available in Britain” (Marcus, 2005, para. 10). By 1939, “programs were being broadcast seven days a week,” there were 23,000 TV licenses in use (Marcus, 2005, para. 19). Then, on September 1, 1939, after a large public ceremony, the “screens went blank,” Britain and the BBC were about to go to war, and the first

television era had ended (Marcus, 2005, para. 20). In 1945, the British government announced the restart of the BBC because the war had ended (Marcus, n.d). In June 1946, “the BBC Television Service re-opened with another official ceremony” like the one that closed the program in 1939 (Marcus, n.d, para. 13). The United States, “untouched by war delays” was already ahead of the UK in the television world (Marcus, n.d, para. 21).

After the television, more communication inventions were made. The first computer emerged out of World War II (History, 2011). These giant machines were mostly used for military or national security tasks. In 1969, the internet was created as a database for military communications this database was called ARPANET (Liener, Cerf, Clark, & Kahn, 2012). The microprocessor, created by Ted Hoff in 1971, paved the way for personal computers (History, 2011). In 1975, the first personal computer was launched by Micro Instrumentation and Telemetry Systems (History, 2011). Over time, more improvements were made to the personal computers. The biggest invention was the World Wide Web, which was invented by Sir Tim Berners-Lee in 1989 (WWW, n.d). Lee worked for a company called "Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire", or European Council for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Switzerland. “By the end of 1990, the first web page was served on the open internet, and in 1991, people outside of CERN were invited to join this new web community” (WWW, n.d, para. 8). The first tool to search the internet was created in 1990 by a McGill University student (Pew, 2014). In 1992, “the term ‘surfing the internet’ [was] coined and popularized” (Pew, 2014, para. 10). In 1993, “CERN places its World Wide Web technology in the public domain” (Pew, 2014, para. 13). According to a Pew (2014) research study conducted in 1999, “41% of adults are using the internet and the weather is the most popular online news attraction” (para. 42). In 2002, “55



million people now go online from work and 44% of those who have internet access at work say their use of the internet helps them do their jobs” (Pew, 2014, para. 54).

### *Today’s Communication Landscape*

Technological innovations have allowed for “increased speed to production and information delivery, reduced cost, improved accuracy, or transformed/improved the product” (Endres, 2001, para. 8). With these advances in technology, consumers are given more accurate information because journalists are able to revise the information quickly as new insights arise (Endres, 2001). Technology improvements and wider audiences reach resulted in an increase of mass production, which caused media ownership to be concentrated to fewer and fewer companies or people (Endres, 2001). “Corporations and government agencies now control most of the largest circulating newspapers, and the biggest radio stations, television networks, and programming production houses” (Endres, 2001, para. 9). As prices of personal computers and access to the internet became more accessible, electronic publication by individuals increased (Endres, 2001).

The audience of journalism grew exponentially after the new technology was implemented. Especially with the invention of the printing press, the price of newspapers, magazines, and books lowered (Endres, 2001). Since the price lowered, more people were able to buy and read these sources that gave more people the chance to stay informed—moving away from information only being for the elite (Endres, 2001). With the invention of radio and television, advertisements targeted more segmented and smaller audiences (Endres, 2001). Therefore, “because of technology, the potential audience of journalism and mass communication has gone from a small moneyed elite to a mass audience to a segmented audience, grouped by interest, socio-economic, demographic, and psychographic factors” (Endres, 2001, para. 10). The ability

to target specific small audiences allows companies to use their advertising money wisely by choosing specific outlets.

As journalism continued to change, it became more professional. Journalism started with no real standards or guidelines, “the first editors/journalists were little more than propagandist for one particular point of view or political party” (Endres, 2001, para. 11). When technology became more complex in the nineteenth century, “the craft of production split from the content function” (Endres, 2001, para. 11). This split allowed for “accuracy, fairness, and objectivity” to become accepted standards in the journalism world (Endres, 2001, para. 11).

Now, fast forwarding to 2015, communication services in the UK generated 56.5 billion in revenue (Ofcom, 2016). “Average household spending on TV, radio, internet, telephone and post in 2015 was 1426.80£” (Ofcom, 2016, p. 3). During the study conducted by OfCom (2016), “86% of UK adults now have internet access at home” (p. 11), and “nine in ten adults reported going online every day” (p. 5). Proving the internet is highly valued by UK adults for many reasons, including facilitating communications, following the latest news, or to simply prevent boredom (Ofcom, 2016). With the increase in internet usage by UK adults, it was found that “42% access news online” (Ofcom, 2016, p. 11). OfCom (2016) also collected data on radio usage in the UK, in 2015, and found 89.6% of the population listened to radio weekly, of those surveyed 53.6% were listening to BBC stations (p. 13).

### **Literature Review for Instrument Development**

After researching the evolution of mass communication outlets, the researcher wanted to observe the communication strategies used by citizens in the UK, specifically Edinburgh, Scotland. In order to observe these strategies a survey was determined to serve as the best assessment for discovering the publics’ preference regarding news outlet choices and frequency

of use. The questions within the survey were chosen based on the research identified in the following literature sections. A literature review was conducted to form each question in order to make sure the questions were relevant.

### **News Interests**

The first question within the survey evaluates which topics are of interest to consumers. The categories were chosen by comparing the major categories within several newspapers. The categories used in most of the newspapers included: education, politics, sports, etc. Those categories were then used in the survey. This is an important question because it displays which topics consumers are reading the most.

### **Peak Viewing Times**

The second question in the survey determined peak times for published, preferred news. Television and radio both have peak viewing or listening times. These times are when the largest percentage of news stories are published. According to Nielson, in America the “traditional [broadcast television] primetime is eight to 11 o’clock at night, Monday through Friday,” but it was discovered that more Americans “tune in from 9:15 pm to 9:30 pm than any other period during prime time” (Nielsen, 2011, para. 1). In comparison, UK prime time is “7 pm and 10 pm” with the highest viewer rating between 8 and 9 pm respectively” (TV Licensing, 2016, para. 13). Rajar is a surveying company that assesses listener ratings in the UK in the same way Nielson does in the United States. According to Rajar data, prime broadcast radio listening times are around meal times, which includes the “Breakfast Peak” 6am to 10am, afternoon 12pm to 2pm, and “PM Drive” 4pm to 7pm (Rajar, n.d., para. 2).

### **Type of News Media: Is social media dominating the news?**

#### *User media habits in the UK*

The third question in the survey sought to determine types of news media the participant used which could be TV, radio, social media, or print news. While researching it was noted that there is a trend of social media prevalence in the media ring (Ofcom, n.d.; Sedgi, 2014; Wakefield, 2016), and the researcher wanted to see if this would apply in Edinburgh, Scotland, specifically. “Of the 18-to-24-year-olds surveyed, 28% cited social media as their main source of news, compared with 24% for TV” (Wakefield, 2016, para.1). “The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism research also suggests 51% of people with online access use social media as a news source” (Wakefield, 2016, para 2).

According to a YouGov survey, 33% of smartphone users in the UK use social media as their first news source, and 48% use a news website or app as their first news source (Wakefield, 2016). In comparison, 48% of smartphone users in the US use social media as their first source of news and 23% use a news website or app (Wakefield, 2016). “This means Facebook is the most powerful force in global news, potentially offering publishers access to vast audiences but leaving them dependent on the whims of its algorithm” (Wakefield, 2016, para. 10). This algorithm was built around choosing links or sites that the user might like, or that friends of the user have liked (Wakefield, 2016).

According to a report by Ofcom, “41 percent of UK adults get their news from the internet or apps” (Sedgi, 2014, para. 1). “The top two news sources in terms of reach among UK adults are both TV channels, with BBC One being the most used 53%, followed by ITV1/ITV Wales/ UTV/ STV at 33%” (Sedgi, 2014, para. 7). The BBC website or app is currently the third most used news source at 24%, above the Sky News channel and the BBC News Channel (Sedgi, 2014).

“Researchers at the University of Oxford found a higher portion of people using online sources than bulletins on the BBC and other broad casters” (Williams, 2016, para. 2). “A poll for the university’s Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism found 72 percent of respondents turn to the internet, including social media, for news compared with the 70 percent watching television news” (Williams, 2016, para. 3). “The shift toward news served up by personalization algorithms is causing concern of missing out on events and challenging viewpoints” (Williams, 2016, para. 10). The concern is held by the consumers and by journalists trying to reach new consumers. This concern was caused by the increased use of Facebook as the primary news source. “Smartphone supremacy goes hand in hand with increasing news consumption on Facebook as users increasingly find news coming to them through social media feeds, alerts, and notifications” (Williams, 2016, para. 9).

A report by the Reuters Institute noted that “television news is rapidly losing touch with much of the population” (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016, para. 4). According to Rasmus Nielsen, Director of Research at Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, “television as a platform may well be about to face disruption on a scale comparable to what printed newspapers have experienced over the last decade” (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016, para. 8). “Television viewing in countries like the UK and the US have declined by 3 to 4 percent per year on average since 2012” (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016, para. 3).

As technology continues to evolve, the creation of on-demand and mobile video has begun to rule the consumer world. “The best programming seems to thrive in a world where on-demand, socially distributed, and mobile video viewing is more and more important” (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016, para. 10). “For younger people, beyond-the-box video (hand-held devices, like cellphones) accounts for half of all viewing in technologically advanced markets like the UK and

the US” (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016, para. 10). “Younger people especially seem increasingly indifferent to television news, although they embrace many forms of online video” (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016, para. 13). This development of digital, on-demand video sources has challenged the role of television news, the role in which it played over the last half century as “the most used, most valued, and most widely shared source of news” (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016, para. 16). “It also challenges the ability of public service television news to deliver on its mission, as well as its long-term political and popular legitimacy” (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016, para. 16). By 2014 in the UK, “the average number of hours of television news watched in the course of the year was down to 108 for all adults” (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016, para. 29). “In the UK and the US, online is the most important source of news for every age group under 44 [years]” (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016, para. 34).

It has been found that most of the rating companies that view length of viewing, ratings, etc., have different ways of measuring the numbers given the format they are looking at (television versus online). The data were not technically comparable because they use different systems to measure, so it was difficult to make judgments on whether or not TV is becoming unstable in this digitally thriving world (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016). Television news producers are having a difficult time trying to use online video effectively (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016). “Even broadcasters like BBC or CNN, that have considerable reach online, still serve people with more text and images than video” (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016, para. 44). “Broadcasters have less control over where and how their content is consumed in this more distributed environment” (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016). “Netflix, Amazon, Facebook, and Google all operate in more countries than even the biggest international broadcasters” (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016, para. 54).

The digital platform is allowing consumers to view a variety of shows and videos from their mobile devices. It also allows them to demand a video any time they wish, and people usually do not pick the news. News does not have a long shelf life and is not usually unique, which adds to the reasons why news companies were challenged as they enter the digital age (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016). Distribution via third party websites such as Facebook and YouTube has become a prominent way of reaching a wider audience. In 2015, “BuzzFeed was estimated to generate more than 2 billion video views across multiple social media and video-sharing platforms every month” (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016, para. 74). BuzzFeed is one of the major companies that rely on third-party platforms to increase viewership (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016). The BBC has started to adopt a distributed strategy of short, sharable videos by using Youtube, Facebook, and Instagram (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016). Some live streaming apps like “Facebook LiveStream, Twitter’s Periscope, and Meerkat” offer opportunities to witness events, and much of the content is filmed by the public or “ ‘citizen journalists’ rather than professional news teams” (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016, para. 84).

According to the Reuters Institute’s Digital News Report, “mobile needs to be seen as a disruptive technology in its own right, one that affects every stage of news—from newsgathering, to production, distribution, and consumption” (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016, para. 85). Organizations that want to move to the mobile format must realize that the way they are presenting news has to change—“it has to be short, visual, timely, and hyper-relevant” (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016, para. 85). “Technological change has always had a major impact on journalism and media organizations—in the past through the rise of the printing press, radio, cameras, and the web. Mobile is now doing the same” (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016, para. 86).

### **Print vs. Electronic: Is print news dead?**

According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press in 2011, revealed that 41% of people in the United States get the majority of their national and international news from the internet (Penton Media, 2011). Since 2007, those 18 to 29 years old “who identified the internet as their top source of news has grown from 34 percent to 65 percent” (Penton Media, 2011, para. 3). Among 30- to 49-year-olds, 48% cited the internet as their top source for national and international news (Penton Media, 2011). “Television remains clearly the main news source among 50- to 64-year-olds” (Penton Media, 2011, para. 5). Among 50- to 64-year-olds, 71% said TV was their main news source, 34% of this group cited the internet as their top news source, and 38% identified newspapers as their main source (note: Pew surveys can add to more than 100 percent because respondents can select two main sources) (Penton Media, 2011). “Among those older than 65, the main news source selection was TV with 79 percent, newspaper with 47 percent, and internet with 14 percent” (Penton Media, 2011, para. 5). After observing these trends in the United States, the researcher thought it would be a good idea to ask this question of the people surveyed in Scotland to see if any of the trends were shared.

### **Why these sources? What factors do people focus on?**

In journalism when writing news, the most important factors are timeliness, proximity, credibility, reliability, and accuracy. According to an article written by the American Press Institute (API), “in general people want journalism to be fair, balanced, accurate, and complete” (API, 2016, para. 1). “The specific factors that lead people to trust and rely on a news source vary by topic,” for example, politics, traffic, and weather might need high trust values, but for other sources ease of use is more important, or being entertained is more important (API, 2016, para. 4). In a study conducted by the Media Insight Project, it was observed 85% of adults that were surveyed noted, “accuracy is a critical reason they trust a news source,” 76% noted



timeliness is a critical reason they trust a news source, 72 % sought concise writing, and 79% reported “political news consumers who highly value experts and data in reporting” were important (API, 2016, para. 8, table 1). This study also found that in order to be identified as trustworthy advertisements cannot interfere with the news, the site or app must load fast, and the content must work well on mobile phones (API, 2016, para. 12).

## **Determinants of Media Trustworthiness**

### *Uses and Gratification Theory*

When choosing a source for news, consumers tend to pick sources that fit their individual needs. The Uses and Gratification communication theory focuses on the needs of individuals. The five categories of needs include: (a) cognitive needs, (b) affective needs, (c) personal integrative needs, (d) social integrative needs, and (e) tension free needs (Communication Theory, 2010, para. 1). Consumers using media to acquire knowledge or information fulfill cognitive needs. Affective needs deal with emotions “pleasure and other moods of the people” (Communication Theory, 2010, para. 3). Personal Integrative needs is the self-esteem need. “People use media to reassure their status, gain credibility and stabilize” (Communication Theory, 2010, para. 4). Social Integrative needs “encompasses the needs to socialize with family, friends, and relations in the society” (Communication Theory, 2010, para. 4). Now, people use social networking to maintain connections with friends and family. Another example is watching the same series as one a friend to have new topics of discussion (Communication Theory, 2010, para. 5). Tension free needs is the need that people have to escape or relieve tension (Communication Theory, 2010, para. 6). Each person satisfies his or her tension free needs in an individualistic way.

## **State Media: TV Licensing – is BBC controlling the market?**

According to the BBC's (2016) annual report, the company has six public purposes. These six purposes include: 1) sustaining citizenship and civil society, 2) promoting education and learning, 3) stimulating creativity and cultural excellence, 4) representing the UK (its nations, regions and communities), 5) bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK, and 6) delivering to the public the benefit of emerging communications, technologies, and services. Additionally, 96% of UK adults use BBC Television, radio, or online each week (BBC, 2016). The BBC maintains nine television channels, 15 network radio and local radio stations, Online (BBC Online and BBC iPlayer), and BBC World Service. In the 2015-2016 timeframe, 88% of the BBC licensing fee was used for the features noted previously, and totaled 3,342 million pounds (BBC, 2016).

The BBC works on a charter basis, meaning that the government has to renew its charter for it to remain an independent organization. According to the polling done by the government in response to the charter renewal, 80% of respondents said the "BBC serves audiences well or very well," 56% of respondents want the BBC to "provide more" (BBC, 2016, p. 10). The public demands that the BBC remain "independent of political and commercial influence" (BBC, 2016, p. 10). The license fee revenue gathered by BBC allow it to remain independent of government control, the BBC uses this fee to be a public broadcaster not a state broadcaster in order to fulfill its mission to "inform, educate and entertain the public" (BBC, 2016, p. 10).

The BBC is governed by the BBC Trust (BBC, n.d.). The trust "sets the strategic direction, measures performance and holds the BBC Executive to account" (BBC, n.d., para. 2). The Executive Board is "responsible for the operational management of the BBC" and its three commercial subsidiaries "BBC Worldwide, BBC Studioworks and BBC Global News" (BBC, n.d., para. 5).

## ***TV Licensing***

Television programming in the UK differs from the United States in the sense that America is a free market where producers use advertising to fund their programs. In the UK, a tax also known as a Licensing fee is applied. A licensing fee was used to fund TV, radio, and online services of the BBC (“The Licence Fee”, n.d.). “The License Fee allows the BBC’s UK services to remain free of advertisements and independent of shareholder and political interest” (“The Licence Fee”, n.d., para. 6). On average a TV license cost 145.50 pounds for color and 49 for black and white (TV Licensing, 2016).

### ***Does BBC create a monopoly?***

Some argue the BBC is reaching a monopoly status, which is why they have come under pressure from ministers to rein in their “soft news” content such as “magazine articles, recipes, and travel advice” (Foster, 2016, para. 1). With the BBC’s vast output of free news content, it is becoming “impossible for commercial rivals to compete” (Foster, 2016, para. 4). The BBC has committed to becoming more “tightly focused on video content, and limited to a core news service” (Foster, 2016, para. 6). Tatton Parliament Member, George Osborne, stated that “If you’ve got a website that’s got features and cooking recipes – effectively the BBC website becomes the national newspaper as well as the national broadcaster” (Foster, 2016, para. 9).

Alongside being accused as a monopolizing company, the BBC has a long history of being accused of political bias as well (Ayton, 2001). “The evidence suggests that perception of the BBC’s output is affected not so much by the quality of its journalism but by its establishment reputation” (Ayton, 2001, para.12). During the strike in 1926, “Winston Churchill wanted the government to commandeer the BBC” (Ayton, 2001, para. 18). It was ultimately decided against, but fear of government control continued (Ayton, 2001). “Examination of the BBC’s written

archives show that from the very earliest days of the BBC, there have been accusations of political bias” (Ayton, 2001, para. 21). In order to avoid the bias claims, the BBC was confused about what they should do, “at first any mention of politics or controversial subjects was forbidden except in the context of news” (Ayton, 2001, para. 23). “It would be unthinkable nowadays to imagine the BBC’s Director General helping the Prime Minister to write his campaign broadcasts, but it happened” (Ayton, 2001, para.24). “Perceptions of BBC bias is a complex phenomenon that seems to be influenced by journalism, psychology and the nature of the relationship—real and imagined—between broadcasters and politics” (Ayton, 2001, para. 36).

Literature outlined in this section guided the development of the survey used to assess Scotland consumers’ perceptions of current news outlets, why those outlets were selected, and the media in which those news sources presented themselves.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this study was to assess participants’ interest and perceived trustworthiness of specific news outlets. The specific objectives were to:

1. Identify factors used by consumers to select a news outlet.
2. Identify news topics of interest to readers.
3. Identify time of readership to determine peak-news consumption times.
4. Identify media channels of choice (print, online, television, or social media).

### **Methods and Materials**

This study utilized convenience survey sampling to assess citizens of Edinburgh, Scotland’s perceptions of various news outlets in order to determine what communication strategies were important to the Scots. This study involved determining why people were

choosing news sources and what characteristics of a news source were most important to the public.

The population for this study consisted of citizens attending various events in Edinburgh between May 27 and August 10, 2016. Some of those events or locations included Scotland's Rural College, The 2016 Highland Games, and interviews conducted on the streets of Edinburgh. Prior to traveling to Scotland, a survey was developed. Institutional Review Board approval was gained, and the survey was assessed for face and content validity by three agricultural communication experts. In Scotland, the instrument was distributed to willing participants. Thirty-nine citizens participated in this study. Each survey was numbered so it corresponded to each response. All surveys were anonymous.

The instrument consisted of seven questions that assessed participants' news topic preferences, consumption rate of news, type of news media used, which sources they used, why they chose those sources, and why they perceived that source as trustworthy or reliable (see Appendix Item 1). A business card was distributed to each participant that outlined the contact information for the primary researcher, Dr. Leslie Edgar, and the IRB coordinator. Each participant who completed a survey received one of the business cards so if they had further questions regarding the survey they could contact the person of choice.

The researcher planned to capture both the survey and audio responses of participants. However, once in country the primary researcher found that no one would allow the recordings. Therefore, the research method was modified to taking detailed notes while surveying individuals.

Data analysis consisted of computing frequencies and percentages of responses. The surveys were used to seek preliminary, potential trends in responses and to evaluate the

communication methods provided. An objective of the study was to observe the mode by which people gained news-based information to determine which media sources were believed to be most accurate and trustworthy.

## **Results**

Thirty-nine people participated in this study. Females represented 62% of participants while males comprised 38%. The majority of the participants were in the 21 to 40 year age range (52%), followed by 41 to 60 age range (46%), and 2% were over 70 years of age. Almost all participants (95%) received a college or university level education, and the remaining 5% went through secondary school.

Concerning news topic preference, the participants were asked to pick from six topics of interest when reading news. Participants were able to select more than one topic of interest. The six topics outlined in the survey were political, entertainment, sports, art & culture, education, and a fill-in-the-blank noted as other. Political news was the largest area of interest (79%), followed by entertainment (74%), and Art & culture (62%). The “other” option contained 21% of participants who wrote in areas of interest. Other topics of interest included Science & fun (12.5%), Agriculture (12.5%), Local and National News (12.5%), General Scottish News (12.5%), World (12.5%), Beekeeping (12.5%), Environmental (12.5%), and International (12.5%).

The second question was used to identify when the participants of this survey consume news. Answers were used to determine trends in the best times for disseminating news based on participants’ time preference for consuming news. Participants were able to pick from four options 1-3 times daily, 3 or more times daily, 1-3 times a week, and 3 or more times per week. Media consumption was highest in the mornings. Additional times are noted in Table 1.

Table 1

*Question 2: Viewing Times (N=39)*

Duration	<i>n</i>	%	Viewing Times	<i>n</i>	%
1-3 times daily	24	62	Morning	24	62
3+ times daily	8	21	Afternoon	9	23
1-3 times a week	6	15	Evening	17	44
3+ times a week	1	2			

The third question was used to observe what media participants used for news. They were able to select from four options—newspaper, radio, television, social media. They were able to select more than one of the options. The most used media source was social media (67%). Other options are noted in Table 2.

Table 2

*Question 3: News Source (N=39)*

Source	<i>n</i>	%
Social Media	26	67
Radio	23	59
Television	22	56
Newspaper	13	33

The second part to question three was used to see which news sources were being used by participants. This was an open-ended response question. BBC was identified as the most preferred news source (67%) for the open-ended responses. BBC owned companies provided by respondents included BBC, BBC app, Radio 4, Radio 2 and Channel 4 news (89%). Other sources are noted in Table 3.

Table 3

*Question 3a: Specific Sources (N=39)*

Source	<i>n</i>	%
BBC	26	67
Other	14	36
Guardian	8	21
Radio 4	4	10
Sky News	4	10
BBC app	2	5
Radio 2	2	5
Facebook	2	5
Huffington Post	2	5
Local radio stations	2	5
Twitter	2	5

The fourth question in the survey was used to determine if participants preferred print or electronic sources for their news. They could choose both options. Electronic was preferred by 90% of the participants and print was preferred by 15%.

The fifth question was used to identify participants' reasons for using specific resources. They were able to pick from five options plus an "other" option for fill-in-the-blank responses. The five options were credibility, accuracy, timeliness, reliability, and proximity. They could pick more than one option. Timeliness (64%) was the most common reason for using a specific news source, followed by credibility (49%), and reliability (49%).

Table 4

*Question 5: News Traits (N=39)*

Trait	<i>n</i>	%
Timeliness	25	64
Credibility	19	49
Reliability	19	49
Accuracy	15	38
Proximity	9	23
Other	4	10



Question six was an open-ended response question to determine why participants perceived the sources they listed in question three as trustworthy or reliable. Participants are denoted by numbers and include their source preference. There was an 87% response rate to this question. Respondent answers are provided in Table 5.

Table 5

*Question 6: Trustworthiness*

Participant	Source	Responses
1	Guardian, Independent, BBC, Huff Post	“Left wing media generally is. BBC is pretty biased nowadays.”
2	Radio 4	“Reputation is strong, been going a long time, knowledgeable presenters/ guests, well researched content”
3	The Guardian	“because the Guardian publishes Lindsey Germans articles”
4	BBC website, Guardian	“News is not sensationalized—rational and true to source”
5	Sky News	“not always”
6	BBC	--
7	BBC	“because its been around for so long”
8	BBC Radio 2, BBC news	--
9	Radio 4, BBC news, Facebook	“because I believe the radio and the TV to be a credible source and regulated”
10	BBC	“its one of the original British news and media corporations and its funded by the public and government”
11	Guardian, the News Lense: International Edition	“relatively speaking, it appears more trustworthy than other media (CNN, BBC, RT)”

12	BBC 1 news, local radio stations, or radio 2 in Scotland	--
13	BBC app, TV	"It's the BBC!!"
14	Twitter	"used by so many"
15	Guardian	"less evidence of bias or political?"
16	BBC, The Times newspaper	"BBC- I consider more trustworthy/ reliable than the times- the BBC aims to be impartial and by a charter to try to ensure this overseen by an impartial body."
17	BBC Radio 4	"good interrogation of sources, fair handling of both sides of an argument, quality journalism"
18	BBC, Sky	"BBC is renowned across the world"
19	BBC radio	Not Commercial
20	BBC News (TV and Website), BuzzFeed, Guardian, Observer	"I think all media is subject to some level of bias but I feel that the BBC and the Guardian are more reliable than some other sources"
21	BBC	"I hear it a lot. It covers a large span"
22	BBC website	"BBC has very strong worldwide reputation- only deals in fact not speculation"
23	BBC/ Sky news	"authoritative source- something I have grown up with"
24	BBC	"yes- mostly"
25	BBC radio, several news paper websites, google now	"BBC news is a highly authoritative source, with newspapers and websites, I always use a variety or sources to get a balance of information"
26	BBC News	"it's a respectable news source"
27	BBC	"national not sure just feel its most traditional and trustworthy"
28	Sky TV, Radio Scotland	"you hope that they are telling the truth"
29	Breakfast Time TV	"public service"
30	Guardian, ESPNFL, BBC	"you cant change a sports score"

31	MSN, BBC, Huffington Post	“BBC- established reasonable source, MSN & Huff- more "of interest" items than hard news”
32	Channel 4 news	“they cover news stories thoroughly and they also cover news stories that other sources don’t- i.e. across the world”
33	BBC news app, BBC news, agri news print	--
34	Facebook- BBC CNN	“because it is the BBC and CNN, the bodies are themselves credible”
35	Radio 2, Guardian	“generally trust the BBC and the guardian over some other sources”
36	BBC news	“I hope BBC is trustworthy”
37	Radio 4, Twitter	“frequency”
38	BBC	--
39	BBC website	“reputation”

### **Summary and Conclusions**

In an effort to understand the meaning behind the survey findings of this study, the researcher compared research objectives of this study to similar results found in literature. One of the primary objectives for this study was to identify topics of interest. This was the first question asked in the survey. Each person chose many topics of interest but the top three were Political (79%), Entertainment (74%), and Art and Culture (62%). The major categories being education, politics, sports, etc. This was an important part of the survey because as stated in the literature review section, it displays which topics consumers are reading the most.

The next objective for this study was to identify peak viewer/reader times. This was an important part of the study because it will help companies identify the best time to place ads or send out information. The results of this study noted that participants prime time for consuming

news was mornings (62%), followed by evening (44%). This supports previous literature noting that meal times are the highest traffic times for both television and radio (Rajar, n.d.). According to Rajar (n.d.), prime listening times are around meal times, which supports the data that was collected within the surveys. Rajar (n.d.) further reported that the “Breakfast Peak” is 6am to 10am, afternoon 12pm to 2pm, and the “PM Drive” 4pm to 7pm (para. 2).

The next objective for this study was to identify the media outlets most used by the participants. Participants chose social media as their primary news outlet (67%), followed by radio (59%), TV (56%), and newspaper (33%). This finding supported literature showing social media is becoming a dominant news source in the UK (Wakefield, 2016). Social media ranking highest within this study supports the data found in another question, which compared electronic sources to print sources. In that question, it was found that 90% of the respondents consumed news via electronic sources. Previous research found that in the age range of 18-to-24 year olds, 28% cited social media as their main source of news, compared to television at 24% (Wakefield, 2016, para. 1). This study supported these findings since social media was the primary choice of participants. Williams’ (2016) found that “smartphone supremacy goes hand in hand with increasing news consumption on Facebook as users increasingly find news coming to them through social media feeds, alerts, and notifications” (para. 9). A study by Reuters Institute also supported findings in this study, by stating that “51% of people with online access use social media as a news source” (Wakefield, 2016, para. 2). Additionally, “41 percent of UK adults get their news from the internet or apps” (Sedgi, 2014, para.1). Nielsen and Sambrook (2016) found in the UK and the US, online is the primary source of news for every age group under 44 years old.

The final objective for this study was to identify factors used to select a news outlet. This was observed to be primarily timeliness. Timeliness (64%) was the most important factor according to consumers surveyed in Scotland followed by credibility (49%) and reliability (49%). News has a tendency to be viewed as something that needs to be quick. However, participants in this study were not as concerned with credibility (49%). This data did not support the data shown within the study conducted by the Media Insight Project, which explained that consumers look for accuracy over all else (API, 2016). According to their study, it was observed that the highest percentage of Americans chose accuracy as the primary reason for trusting a news source followed by timeliness (API, 2016). It was originally hypothesized that the UK would show similar results as America, but the results from the survey found that a source was chosen because of timeliness over credibility.

The Uses and Gratification communications theory was used to form the sixth question of the survey which focused on the needs of individuals and how their reasoning to support a source as being trustworthy is inherently tied to their individual needs. This question was used to observe why people find the resources they get news from to be trustworthy or reliable. BBC (67%) ranked the highest (see Table 3). Companies that are owned by the BBC equate to 89% of the participant responses. The BBC owns two of the top three news sources used in the UK by adults; these news sources are BBC One and the BBC website or app (Sedgi, 2014). According to a study conducted by OfCom, 89.6% of the population listens to the radio weekly and 53.6% of those listen to BBC stations (2016). The studies presented by Sedgi (2014) and OfCom (2016) were supported by the finding that 89% of the participants chose BBC owned sources.

An example of this finding is respondent number ten, the BBC is trustworthy because “it’s one of the original British news and media corporations and it’s funded by the public and

government.” After conducting a review of literature and the survey, the researcher found that the BBC is considered “consumer owned” because of their licensing fee, they have a strict code of serving the public. Based on the data, consumers feel that this is true; BBC is considered trustworthy not only because of its longstanding but also because it is there to please the consumer and has no political ties. As described in the literary analysis, the BBC uses the licensing fee to fulfill its mission to “inform, educate and entertain the public,” without government interference (BBC, 2016, p. 10).

Respondent number 2, mostly uses Radio 4, which is a BBC-owned radio station, as their main source for news. They believe it is trustworthy because “reputation is strong, been going on a long time, knowledgeable presenters/guests, and well researched content.” Respondent number 7 chose the BBC “because its been around for so long.” Respondent number 13 had one of the most interesting responses after choosing the BBC by using the reasoning of “It’s the BBC!!” as why it is trustworthy.

The researcher was not surprised with the overwhelming choice of the BBC as a trustworthy source of news because of what was found in the lengthy literary analysis of that corporation. According to the study conducted by the BBC (2016), 96% of UK adults use BBC Television, radio, or online each week. This survey supports those findings, in which 89% of the respondents cited BBC owned companies as their primary news source. The prevalence of the BBC supports the research found in the literature analysis that explained the fact that corporations and government agencies now control most of the largest newspapers, radio stations, and television networks—the BBC is one of those corporations (Endres, 2001). The BBC will continue to have a strong hold on the public because of their longstanding reputation and their wide reach across many cultures and audiences.

## **Recommendations**

The primary researcher, in this study, believed that the data collected could be used by various communication departments or companies to alter their communication strategies in order to inform the public more efficiently. After conducting the research, it was found that this was a preliminary idea of the information that could be gathered, and that there is a possibility for more rich data analyses if the survey was conducted again. Limitations to the research were largely due to the small participant numbers sampled. In order to move forward with this research it was important to present recommendations for both practice and research.

First, this study should be replicated with a larger audience group. A larger scale assessment would provide a clearer picture of why timeliness was seen as more important when compared to credibility. In practice, news companies could use this data to know that the faster you can get a story out the more likely you are to get viewership.

Second, in further research, questions focused on gauging the reasons why people are looking at news, as in are they looking for knowledge or just entertainment, will become increasingly important. In practice, print companies can use this to draw readers in by presenting more articles or facts about politics or entertainment.

Third, this study should be expanded to cover more people, which will allow the peak viewing times to be defined. Peak news times were found to be in the morning and evening every day. In practice, it is recommended that broadcast companies promote their most interesting news stories in the morning or evening because that is when the most people are listening.

Fourth, when continuing this study the data for the question identifying media outlets will be made stronger by having a larger pool of responses. Data for this question could also be made stronger by specifying if a participant follows a certain news outlet or if they saw a news article

from it being shared on social media, for instance on Facebook. Social media was found to be the primary news outlet in this study. In practice, it is important for companies to take these results and establish a strong social media standing to increase viewership.

This was a small sample of consumers in Edinburgh, Scotland but the data supports the research that was conducted previously during the literature analysis that would warrant someone continuing the research. Possible study improvements when replicating this study would be to: 1) survey more people and 2) ask follow up questions to get more in-depth opinions on news media trustworthiness.

After surveying more people and getting clearer data, it would be useful for corporations to look at this data to see what makes people believe certain sources over others. It is becoming apparent that the readability and user friendly options within a website are more important now than ever, so it would be useful to see how that plays into what sources are being chosen. This was supported by the survey findings that establish social media as the dominant news source among adults in the UK. In the age of the internet dominating all news outlets it is important for news sources to understand how they are perceived as reliable on a website interface. If this research were to be conducted again, the researcher would tighten the scope and ask more detailed questions about why people choose a website, is it the color scheme, no advertisements, the layout, etc. This is recommended after researching the communication theory based on source credibility. This would help companies understand the need for analyzing color pallets and layout instead of only looking at content.



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## Appendix

### Item 1: Communication Strategies in Scotland: Survey

1. What news interests you? (Check all that apply)

Political  Entertainment  Sports  Business  Art & Culture  Education  Other

2. How often do you consume news? (Check one)

1-3 times daily  3+ times daily  1-3 times a week  3+ times a week  Monthly

If daily, what time of day do you usually look for news? (Check one)  Morning

Afternoon  Evening

3. What types of news media do you use? (Check all that apply)

Newspaper  Radio  Television  Social Media

What is the name of the source you normally get news from? (Name of source(s))

4. Is this/Are these a print or electronic source?

Print  Electronic

5. Why do you use this source for your news? (Check all that apply)

Credibility  Accuracy  Timeliness  Reliability  Proximity  Other:\_\_\_\_\_

6. Why do you perceive it as trustworthy or reliable?

7. Demographics:

Male  Female

Age: (Check one)

Under 20  21-30  31-40  41-50  51-60  61-70  71-80  Over 80

Level of Education: (Check one)

Primary School  Secondary School  College

Occupation:\_\_\_\_\_