

Running head: NETFLIX OR NEWS? AN EXAMINATION OF YOUNG CANADIANS'
APPETITE TO PAY FOR ONLINE JOURNALISM

Netflix or News? An examination of young Canadians' appetite to pay for Online
Journalism

by

Richard Macedo

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Royal Roads University
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

Supervisor: Dr. Jaigris Hodson
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COMMITTEE APPROVAL

The members of Richard Macedo's Thesis Committee certify that they have read the thesis titled Netflix or News? An examination of young Canadians' appetite to pay for Online Journalism and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the thesis requirements for the Degree of MASTER OF ARTS IN PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION:

Dr. Jaigris Hodson [signature on file]

Dr. Jennifer Walinga [signature on file]

Final approval and acceptance of this thesis is contingent upon submission of the final copy of the thesis to Royal Roads University. The thesis supervisor confirms to have read this thesis and recommends that it be accepted as fulfilling the thesis requirements:

Dr. Jaigris Hodson [signature on file]

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Abstract

This thesis explores factors that influence the willingness to pay (WTP) of young Canadian adults for digital journalistic/news content using the uses and gratifications (U&G) approach. U&G is a user-centred theory of examining how people use media to satisfy needs and desires. Using semi-structured interviews with 13 participants in the 18 to 34 age cohort as a data collection method, it emerged that the willingness to pay for online journalism/news content is currently low, although some participants are open to paying for online news that they would consider to be unique, or of high enough quality. Those who were not open to paying point to the non-exclusivity of online news as the chief reason. Participants appeared more willing to pay for non-journalism/news digital media, such as Netflix. Findings suggest that charging money for online journalism in this age cohort in Canada will be challenging given the multiplicity of media choices they have.

Keywords: willingness to pay (WTP), online news, digital journalism, digital media, information surplus, cross-media use, uses and gratifications (U&G)

Introduction

Media organizations have had a difficult transition from offline to online platforms with the traditional revenue model of advertising-supported journalism eroding (Gorman 2015). Advertisements on news websites typically do not generate sufficient revenues, (Kammer, Boeck, Hansen, & Hauschildt 2015), and the global recession from 2008 deepened the economic uncertainty for media organizations, particularly newspapers, while the industry was being affected by technological changes (Franklin 2014). Also, classified advertising was declining because it is more effective on the internet than in print (Picard 2008). Given the foregoing, media organizations began charging audiences directly for online news (Myllylahti 2014, Olsen & Solvoll 2018). The main challenge in reviving the troubled news industry is retaining young adults, (Lee & Chyi 2014), and a review of the literature showed that the willingness to pay for journalism has been widely studied outside of Canada, for example in Lee & Chyi (2014), Sindik & Graybeal (2011), and Kammer, Boeck, Hansen, & Hauschildt (2015), but little scholarship appeared examining the attitudes of Canadians. Given the above scenario, I explored the following research question:

What factors influence the willingness to pay (WTP) of young Canadians, aged 18 to 34, for digital journalistic content?

My study worked within an interpretivist paradigm, with uses and gratifications (U&G) used as the theoretical frame. U&G has been widely used in studies analyzing news and media use from the audience's perspective, for example in Lee & Chyi (2014), Lee (2013), Diddi & LaRose (2006), and Schroder (2015). My study used semi-structured interviews with 13 participants as a method to capture answers to 15 open-ended questions. Participants were asked

to discuss what types of news stories they value most, and on their willingness to pay for digital journalism/news. They were also asked to discuss their usage of digital media that is non-journalistic in nature, such as Netflix or Spotify. This is because of cross-media use under U&G whereby a wide range of media services are used on a single technical platform and a single technical device (Bjur et al. 2013). Audiences are now being asked to pay for a range of media online aside from journalism/news content, and people can access this media on the same device, for example on smartphones. The interview data was transcribed, coded, and analyzed for themes by the researcher. The purpose of this research was to explore the appetite of a younger cohort of Canadians to pay for digital journalistic/news content by providing a richer data set generated from the perspective of this specific demographic. This knowledge is germane to media organizations in Canada as they seek to remain economically viable online by charging for the content they produce.

I will first set the context for my thesis by elucidating the contemporary challenges for journalism as it transitions from an offline to online world. A review of the literature related to my topic will follow this. I will then explain the methodological approach and methods of data collection and analysis, then I will report on findings generated from the 13 semi-structured interviews. A separate discussion section will provide an analysis and implications of these findings. I will conclude this thesis with limitations and recommendations for future study.

Journalistic decline: Setting the Context

With the decline of print advertising and the concomitant migration of readers to digital desktop and mobile platforms, media organizations such as newspaper publishers have been searching for new economic models to remain commercially viable in the digital world (Gorman

2015); the issue is one of survival. During a period from 2008-2013, the Canadian Media Guild estimated media job losses nationally reached about 10,000 (Wong 2013); the print sector lost nearly twice that of the broadcast sector at 6,000. The loss of journalists and publications lessens the coverage of key decision-making bodies by removing a key pillar of accountability of those in political power to society in a liberal democracy (Fawcett 2018). Gorman (2015) interviewed journalists, news industry executives, and scholars about the state of Canadian journalism and a discussion with Catherine McKercher of Carleton University illustrates the preceding point regarding political accountability with the loss of news publications:

Everybody wants to cover the hurricane that blows through town. Everybody wants to cover the pop show. Everybody wants to review the movies...But not everybody wants to go sit through a planning committee at city hall every week for fifty weeks a year. Who's going to cover the kind of power centres in our society that don't exactly make it easy or sexy to go and cover them, and yet whose decisions have huge influence on us? (Gorman, 2015, p. 230).

The economic misfortune of what is often called the mainstream media, more specifically newspapers, has stemmed from a degradation of the display and classified advertising model that was successful in print, but has not been as lucrative online (Picard 2008). Franklin (2014) noted that the global recession from 2008 deepened the economic uncertainty for media organizations, while the industry was also being affected by technological changes. In particular, Franklin (2014) stated that the pace of change was most striking, which left publishers, industry analysts, and academics struggling to make their research findings and scholarly discussions relevant and timely. Picard (2008) noted that classified advertising was also declining because it is more

effective on the internet than in print, which was cited as problematic because it had been the main source of advertising growth for the previous decade and a half.

A transition from print publishing platforms to digital online news continues today, alongside a more contemporary transition of readers from desktop computers to mobile devices (Comscore 2018). The mobile world is stratified to include smartphones and tablets and further divided into mobile applications (apps) and mobile browsers. Given this transition, media companies worldwide began charging users for online journalism/news content, mainly through digital paywalls (Arrese 2016). A paywall is a digital mechanism that separates paid content from free content online (Sjøvaag 2016). The movement to online payments accelerated with the introduction of *The New York Times* (NYT) paywall in 2011, (The New York Times 2011), which has become a key reference point for the study of online payment-for-journalism/news content (Arrese 2016).

Review of the Literature

The 2019 Reuters Digital News report noted a small increase in the numbers paying for any online news whether by subscription, membership, or donation. The proportion paying for online news is strongest in the Nordic countries (for example, Norway, 34 percent; Sweden, 27 percent). In North America, the percentages were much lower, with the United States at 16 percent. In Canada, the appetite for news payment trails these countries by a wide margin: nine percent pay for online news (Reuters 2019). If payment-for-content is to work, users must value the information (Gorman 2015), but as noted in Swart, Peters, & Broersma (2017), the current digital news media landscape is characterized by an abundance of information. Not only has digitalization resulted in a proliferation of available news sources, but people now have more

power to navigate the news content they want to use, when, where, and how. While the audience's paying intent and the value of news information has been widely studied in countries such as the United States, Australia, Scandinavian countries, and in Europe, (for example in Olsen & Solvoll (2018), Chyi, Lee, & Holton (2015), Sindik & Graybeal (2011), Myllylahti (2014), Costera Meijer (2012), Price (2017)), little scholarship emerged about this topic in Canada as the following literature review will show. This literature review is divided into four sections: U&G: Cross-media; transition to digital; willingness to pay (WTP); and influences of information consumption. U&G: Cross-media examines the study of journalism/news and media use from a cross-media perspective. The transition to digital section explicates literature about the difficulty of the transition journalism has had from print, to desktop digital, and to mobile platforms, and discusses differences in how the audience values content on various platforms. The WTP section, a central focus of my research question, analyzes scholarship about the online payment strategies of media organizations. The influences of information consumption section explores studies on how audiences value journalism/news.

U&G: Cross-media

Uses and gratifications theory (U&G) is a user-centered theory of media use that focuses on what people do with media, as opposed to what the media do to people (Haridakis & Humphries 2019). The transition to an online world has created new media choices for audiences, and thus new topics to explore, which is why this audience-centred approach was taken in my study. Examining contemporary audience views about how they use and value online news is important because users are key in a payment-for-content system (Gorman 2015). Early media use research, for example Lasswell (1948), posited several media functions,

including for a surveillance of the environment or disclosing threats and opportunities affecting the value position of the community and of the component parts within it. Since then, the corpus of research on media functions has expanded. Ruggiero (2000) suggested that the active audience concept is gaining credibility with newer media researchers, because emerging technologies provide users with a wider range of source selection. The author posits that as new communication technologies materialize, the range of topics for U&G research also expands. In U&G, people are “viewed as choosing media based on expectations of need satisfaction and as variably active in the process, not passive recipients of media fare” (Haridakis & Humphries, 2019, p. 140). People are viewed as being relatively purposive and goal-directed. Audiences are not always active users of media. For example, orientations described by Haridakis & Humphries (2019) range from passive to proactive, diversionary to utilitarian, or ritualistic to instrumental. A strand of contemporary U&G scholarship has studied cross-media phenomena, particularly as news consumption has shifted online. This move online highlights the process of convergence, which challenges traditional borders between different media (Bjur et al. 2013). Diddi & LaRose (2006), which studied news habits among college students in the U.S. in an internet environment, reported that the introduction of new sources of news has created a complex media environment. For college students, the new media environment has provided a wide range of choices in getting their daily news fix and that has created some distinctive news consumption patterns. “Specifically, the dichotomy between print and broadcast sources that has attracted much of the attention of communication researchers may now be defunct, at least among the college students in the present sample” (Diddi & LaRose, 2006, p. 204). The conventional news media feed online news habits by referring their audiences to websites, and this would encourage people to

go to the internet for news. “Meanwhile, the most popular online sources are ‘powered’ by content from conventional news sources. So, perhaps new consumption patterns arise while old ones continue due to persistent news habits and the cross-fertilization of those habits between media channels” (Diddi & LaRose, 2006, p. 205). Schroder (2015), using the U&G perspective, focused news research on how Danish citizens and consumers are navigating in today’s multi-media, mediatized news landscape: what news media do they use, and for what? “Metaphorically we regard the citizens as shopping in the ‘supermarket of news,’ taking news media from the shelves and putting them into their daily, weekly, or monthly ‘shopping carts’ according to what they find indispensable, necessary or enjoyable, what they have time for, what they can afford, etc.” (Schroder, 2015, p. 61). As noted by Schroder (2015), people draw on various resources for enlightenment and entertainment using cross-media news repertoires. Bjur et al. (2013) reported that emerging patterns of cross-media use are far more seamless and blurred, hybrid, and complex than they used to be. Use of new convergent media (for example the internet and smartphones) could allow users to use the same medium to achieve different gratifications.

The U&G approach has also been used to examine modern news use typologies. In a U&G study exploring audience motivations and news consumption, Lee (2013) reported that news audiences are more in control of what they consume because of a shift in news supply and demand. “For these reasons, the need for scholars and news professionals to understand news audiences and what drives their news choices in the new news environment is greater than ever” (Lee, 2013, p. 300). Based on the synthesis of key research in uses and gratifications, political communication, selective exposure, and media rituals studies, four major themes emerged in Lee

(2013): information-motivated, entertainment-motivated, opinion-motivated, and social-motivated news consumption. Lee (2013) explicated these news motivations:

Information-motivated news consumption: News consumption revolves around news use for surveillance, to fulfill the need to know, to understand what is going on in the world, and to keep up with the way the government performs its functions.

Entertainment-motivated news consumption: Entertainment-driven news audiences are those who prioritize gratifications such as comedy, entertainment, habit, ritual, excitement, and diversion.

Opinion-motivated news consumption: Opinion-motivated news consumption revolves around news use for opinion formation, affirmation, or avoidance. In other words, opinion motivations include the need to seek assistance in forming opinions on certain issues, to expose one to other viewpoints, and for views from like-minded individuals.

Social-motivated news consumption: Social motivations include the need to keep up with what those around us are talking about, to appear informed to others, to be more sociable, and to follow what one's friends are doing.

As shown above, the contemporary U&G scholarship on news and media consumption demonstrates how news, and more generally overall media use, has become more complex given media convergence. With the migration of journalism/news online, the audience has become exposed to a range of media services (both journalistic and non-journalistic) that can be accessed on a single device, for example a smartphone, tablet, or a desktop computer. This justified the need to examine not only how young Canadians are consuming news, and whether they're willing to pay for it, but also how they consume other media, and their attitudes toward paying

for these media as well. This is because distinct silos that previously existed (for example between newspapers, radio, and television) are dissolving as the latter three media can now be consumed on one device (Schroder 2015).

Transition to Digital

To study the modern news audience, it is important to focus on online media because that is where users have migrated to. This transition from offline to online has not been easy for news organizations. Nearly nine-in-10 Americans (89 percent) currently get at least some local news digitally and 41 percent do so often (Pew Research Center 2019). Results from Molyneux (2018) studying U.S. adults indicate that most people get news from multiple platforms (platforms here refer to the access point, for example mobile platforms, desktop computers). Users of each platform were identified as those who said they got news on that platform at least one day a week. About 95 percent of respondents reported getting news at least one day a week on two or more platforms; 82 percent of respondents in Molyneux (2018) reported getting news at least one day a week on three or more platforms. The shift from print to digital platforms for newspapers has been described as “purgatorial” by Carson (2015, p. 1037), who noted in a study of Australian newspapers that publications are not earning enough revenues from digital platforms to abandon print, but digital subscriptions are cannibalizing print subscription revenue. This resulted in the bundling of subscriptions to offset the problem. A survey by Chyi (2012) found 58.3 percent of respondents selected the print edition as their preferred format, followed by the web edition at 21.5 percent. This situation was also highlighted by Olsen & Solvoll (2018) as older customers already subscribing to print newspapers were less prone to changing behaviour, but also reluctant to use paywalled content online, which suggested a resistance of readers to

switch platforms. Chyi & Tenenboim (2017)'s longitudinal analysis of readership data (2007, 2011, and 2015) of 51 U.S. newspapers reinforced the print/digital purgatorial situation. It found that the print product still reaches far more readers than the digital product in these newspapers' home markets, and this holds true across all age groups. Olsen & Solvoll (2018) focused on print/digital strategies based on interviews with 20 local newspapers in Norway. The study suggests that paywalls represent two different strategies: first, a brake strategy in the user market, where the newspaper targets existing customers with bundled and differentiated products to secure subscription revenue. Second, Olsen & Solvoll (2018) outlined an acceleration strategy in the advertiser market focused on improving services with more relevant and valuable audiences and user behaviour insights from user data harvesting.

Aside from this transition from print to digital, another shift has occurred within the digital platforms with the emergence of the smartphone. Reuters (2019) reported that the smartphone continues to grow in importance for news, with two-thirds now using the device to access news weekly. Mobile news aggregators like Apple News and Upday are becoming a more significant force. Apple News in the United States now reaches more iPhone users (27 percent) than the Washington Post (23 percent). Comscore (2018) reported that device reach in Canada in 2017 was 87 percent on desktop and 82 percent on mobile. Further, Canadians are spending an increasing amount of time on mobile devices: 38 percent on smartphone apps, six percent on smartphone browsers, 12 percent on tablet apps, and three percent on tablet browsers. This compares to 41 percent of time spent on desktop. The Comscore (2018) data was corroborated by Nelson & Lei (2018) in the U.S. who found that, using web analytic data, the mobile news audience had overtaken the desktop news audience. In particular, the study cited the dominance

of apps. While audiences typically spend only a few minutes a month on average with individual news sites on their desktop computers or within mobile web browsers, they spend over two hours a month with individual mobile news apps. These findings are important because they demonstrate that a subset of the digital news audience is “stickier” than previously suggested (Nelson & Lei, 2018, p. 619-620); this means the audience appears to spend more time using mobile apps.

Lee (2013) noted that with the shift from offline to online, information supply now outweighs information demand; importantly, audiences are now more in control of what they consume because of this shift in supply and demand. This has implications for news organizations looking to charge for content. That is because media users have myriad information, news, and other digital media options, as highlighted in Chyi (2009). “The amount of information available far exceeds what users can consume even if they want to and even at the price of zero” (Chyi, 2009, p. 94). News is becoming one of the many, if not unlimited, choices. Users pick whatever information they want — news or non-news. “In economic terms, news and non-news information in general are substitute goods given limited time and attention” (Chyi, 2009, p. 94-95). Swart, Peters, & Broersma (2017) characterized the current news media landscape as one that has an abundance of information. With the internet delivering a massive amount of facts, “wisdom reporting” has been promulgated as a concept for newspapers, for example in Gorman (2015). Postman (1999) also discusses the concept of wisdom reporting for newspapers in order to deal with the flood of information online. Using this approach, newspapers would need to offer readers a more thoughtful experience (Gorman 2015). Boczkowski (2010) reported findings from news homogenization among the leading online

media in the United States during the 2008 presidential election. The preliminary analysis showed that the diversity in what is reported is quite low, even during a period of major historical significance when resource constraints are relaxed and public interest in the news is higher than usual. In an age of information plenty, what most consumers get is more of the same (Boczkowski 2010). Price (2017) reported that a key step forward for *The Ferret*, a Scottish publication, would be to conduct research into the demographics and backgrounds of their membership, their motivations for subscribing, and their longer-term hopes and ambitions that might hold the key to their longer-term financial support. An examination of content production is part of this. “In fact, producing a lot of content that appears similar to what people can get from the mainstream media may actually prove detrimental to *The Ferret*’s prospects” (Price, 2017, p. 1346). They must, therefore, strike a balance between publishing enough to get noticed, while ensuring the nature and quality of that content is distinctive. Also important in the digital content discussion is the use of social media to access news. For many Canadians, social media is now a part of their daily routine. A Social Media Lab (2018) survey showed that an overwhelming majority of online Canadian adults (94 percent) have an account on at least one social media platform. The Social Media Lab (2018) survey showed that young people aged 18 to 24 are the largest adopters of social media.

As shown, media organizations — particularly ones focused on the printed word — are struggling to find their footing in the digital world, given the massive amount of information on the internet (Lee 2013, Chyi 2009). The audience has an abundance of access to information and news, myriad access points at their fingertips — desktop/laptop computers, mobile phones, and tablets. In addition, social media is becoming a more significant force, particularly for a younger

audience as shown in Social Media Lab (2018). Given this, traditional media organizations appear to still be struggling with the transition online where there is an abundance of information, a plethora of access points (for example, smartphones, tablets, desktop computers), and with services such as social media becoming more prominent. Information, and access to it, is not in short supply (Chyi 2009). A combination of technological, economic, and industry factors have played a central role in media companies charging for online content, (Arrese 2016), but achieving success has been difficult (Carson 2015). Importantly, Canada was largely missing from the foregoing scholarly conversation, which justified the need to study these online media phenomena from a Canadian perspective.

Willingness to Pay (WTP)

Despite being caught in the crosswinds of a changing media landscape from print to digital, and the difficulty in managing the relationships between print and digital platforms, (Olsen & Solvoll 2018), news media organizations have implemented various types of models that solicit payment in exchange for online content produced by journalists. This is where WTP has directly entered the scholarly conversation, for example in Myllylahti (2014), Sindik & Graybeal (2011), and Ladson & Lee (2017), because these payment models directly solicit money in exchange for access to online journalism/news content. The most popular type of revenue model is the paywall where people are prompted to pay for content, typically for a flat monthly or annual fee (Myllylahti 2014). A paywall is a digital mechanism that separates paid content from free content online (Sjøvaag 2016). Other ways to directly raise money that have been cited in the literature include micropayments, which is an à la carte business model where users are charged, typically per article, to access the content of online newspapers (Sindik &

Graybeal 2011). This contrasts the traditional, bundled paywall model. The most famous payment model is the paywall of the *New York Times* (NYT), which was erected in 2011 (The New York Times 2011). According to Myllylahti (2014), the number of paywalls in the United States has rapidly increased and in November 2012 there were 300 newspapers in the United States with paid online news content. At the beginning of 2013, different types of paywalls were fairly widespread among the quality press — financial, national, and some local newspapers (Arrese 2016). Myllylahti (2014) reported that variations have been adopted including: hard/full paywalls that include no access to content without a subscription; soft paywalls which include some free content; metered paywalls that restricts the number of free articles; and ‘freemium’ paywalls that include some free content, and charge for premium content.

Paywalls in the early days of implementation were finding little inroads as far as revenues. Myllylahti (2014) found that newspaper paywalls provided roughly 10 percent of media companies’ publishing/circulation revenues. Also, paywalls were softening and prices in some cases were decreasing as news corporations fought for new digital subscribers and revenues. The argument here is that the revenue generated by paid online news content is not substantial enough to make paywalls a viable business model in the short-term. Olsen & Solvoll (2018) studied the introduction of paywalls at smaller, local newspapers in Norway. Paywalls were used as a strategy to prioritize existing subscribers over “flyby” users without losing too much traffic. It also involved strengthening subscription relationships and transferring print relationships to the digital arena. Also, Olsen & Solvoll (2018) reported the paywall offered advertisers a more relevant audience, and the ability to gather user data, which offers better segmentation possibilities and targeted advertising. News media organizations have been

implementing other means to encourage payment for content, including ones that are more ‘unbundled.’ Sindik & Graybeal (2011) used a brand loyalty scale that surveyed undergraduate and graduate students at a large Southeastern U.S. university to find out their general willingness to adopt micropayments. The study indicated that brand loyalty increases user likelihood to adopt micropayments for online newspapers. A different variation on paid content has been using crowdsourcing to fund journalism, as studied in Ladson & Lee (2017). Given that 97 percent of the stories in their study received funding, it suggests that people are willing to pay for news stories that they believe to be noteworthy on crowdfunded platforms. The foregoing demonstrates the heterogeneity of revenue options being implemented at news organizations in an attempt to maintain commercial viability online.

Myllylahti (2014) acknowledged that the success of paid online news content in different countries might be dependent on cultural differences, reading habits, and print loyalty amongst other factors, which were not addressed in that particular study because of its scope. This illustrates the importance of studying paying intent for online journalism/news content from a uniquely Canadian perspective as people’s attitudes could differ from those in other countries. In addition, the literature showed that early implementation of paywalls was finding limited success, (Myllylahti 2014), although since that time online subscription services have proliferated, both for journalistic and non-journalistic content. Given the pace of change in journalism with the shift online, (Franklin 2014), and the emergence of myriad online payment models, it merited the continuation of the scholarly conversation in my study about payment-for-content and the audience’s willingness to pay for journalism/news.

Influences of Information Consumption

Audience attitudes toward paying for online journalism/news has been emerging in scholarship in recent years. In particular, age as a factor for paying intent has been studied, including in Goyanes (2014), Lee & Chyi (2014), Chyi (2005), Chyi (2012), Olsen & Solvoll (2018), Kammer, Boeck, Hansen, & Hauschildt (2015), Sindik & Graybeal (2011), and Fletcher & Nielsen (2017). None of the foregoing studies explored a Canadian perspective. A Flamingo (2019) study of those aged 18 to 35 in the United States and the United Kingdom described attitudes toward payment as “not particularly positive” (Flamingo, 2019, p. 46). Some circumstances where young audiences might be willing to pay for news uncovered by Flamingo (2019) include: if they have a personal closeness to the brand and what it stands for; if the brand provides unique content that they need to learn and progress in their career; if a brand offers something unique that they would struggle to get anywhere else; and on occasion if their parents paid for their subscriptions. Young people will pay for entertainment (for example, Netflix) but the majority in Flamingo (2019) won’t pay for news because: news should be free; budgets are tight so if the news feels like a chore, they don’t want to have to pay for it, too; many under-35s have by and large grown up with unlimited ways to access news for free; payments don’t fit consumption — this audience values using multiple sources; and the perception that options are limited: monthly subscriptions don’t fit news habits yet it is the only method they are aware of. One common thread uncovered in the literature is that people in younger age groups have a higher WTP for digital content. Fletcher & Nielsen (2017) posit that one possible reason is that younger people are more likely to have a reference price above zero for other forms of digital media, which previous studies have shown to be positively associated with paying for news. This

latter point refers to Goyanes (2014) which found that (1) younger people are more likely to pay for online news than older people; (2) people who have purchased software programs, online movies or TV content, apps for tablets or smartphones, and eBook files are more likely to pay for online news; (3) people with a higher income are more willing to pay for online news than users with a lower income; and (4) users who have a moderate use of Twitter (at least once a week) are more willing to pay for online news than those who have never used Twitter (Goyanes, 2014, p. 744). Goyanes (2014) offers a possible reason for higher WTP in a younger cohort: younger people are more “wired” or accustomed to a digital world compared to an older demographic. This general finding of greater WTP amongst a younger audience, while for the most part cohesive in the literature, is not homogeneous. It is contradicted by Kammer et al. (2015), which reported that younger audiences seem less willing to pay for online news than older ones. Kammer et al. (2015) found that WTP in a younger-aged focus group increased when the subscription model offered a personalized dimension that distinguishes it from all the other general news input. This shows the importance of conducting a deeper qualitative examination about audience behaviours as simply studying age alone as an influence for WTP has limitations. This merited further scholarly study, given the disagreement in the literature on users’ demographics and its relationship to paying intent.

The perceived audience or user value of journalism/news content has also been studied. For example, Chyi (2005) found online users were reluctant to pay for online news access because free alternatives existed online and offline, meaning users did not perceive online news as something with unique value. Since then, scholarship has continued to explicate the value and perceived quality of content from the audience’s perspective. Lee & Chyi (2014) studied the

noteworthiness of media content in the United States. Noteworthiness is a phrase that relates to how people value information. Noteworthiness is conceptualized here as the integration of two elements: relevance and interestingness. Building on these two dimensions, the authors argue that in order for content to be perceived as noteworthy, news has to be either relevant or interesting to the audience (Lee & Chyi 2014). While demographic factors predict various aspects of news consumption, perceived noteworthiness is a more important factor that influences news consumption and “creates the kind of monetizing value that will set news organizations apart from other media providers in the age of information surplus” (Lee & Chyi, 2014, p. 816). An examination of the international crowdfunded publication *Byline* by Ladson & Lee (2017) found that more people are willing to pay more money for non-public affairs news compared to public affairs news. In other words, news stories involving sports, science and technology, crime, non-routine weather, and the arts are more likely to get funded than news stories that centre on activity of government, elected officials, political candidates, economic and business developments, and international affairs. Ironically, the majority of news stories on *Byline* are public affairs news, and the authors conclude this could explain why a minority of news stories achieved their funding goal. Cook & Attari (2012) in a study of the NYT found that the more that participants felt other free news sources were available, the more their value for the NYT decreased. Sindik & Graybeal (2011) found that the most loyal, frequent news consumers are the most willing to pay for news content online. On this score, the NYT had the most statistically significant brand loyalty values and also had the highest number of survey respondents (36 percent) stating that they would pay to read the NYT content online. Ladson & Lee (2017), Lee & Chyi (2014), and Cook & Attari (2012) did not study noteworthiness or

content preferences of Canadian users. Also, Sindik & Graybeal (2011) examined the perspective of American millennials; Canadian attitudes may differ, which justified the need to study this in Canada.

Gulyas, O'Hara, & Eilenberg (2018) emphasized the importance of audience research. They argue that an examination of audience perceptions of news, alongside motivations for and practices of news engagement and consumption, are needed in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of audiences and audience fragmentation in the digital age. Costera Meijer & Bijleveld (2016), Costera Meijer (2012), and Schroder (2019) studied the value and relevance of information to audiences, but the authors did not study paying intent. Costera Meijer & Bijleveld (2016) explored journalistic value from the audience's perspective in The Netherlands. The study argued four quality dimensions — urgency, public connection, understanding the region, and audience responsiveness — may provide a good starting point for journalists and news organizations who want to focus more on what users or audiences actually experience as valuable journalism. Costera Meijer (2012) reported that studies of journalistic quality should take the actual readers, listeners, and viewers of journalistic texts seriously. It reported on a different kind of research for measuring the public's news interests and preferences; one that concentrates on value — “what makes journalism precious for people and how news organizations can provide this” (Costera Meijer, 2012, p. 754). Nelson (2018) reported that a number of journalism stakeholders innately believe that if news publishers pay closer attention to understanding and communicating with their audiences, they will “find revenue they desperately need while providing impactful, public service journalism” (Nelson, 2018, p. 540). Lawrence, Radcliffe, & Schmidt (2018) found a continuum from “thin” engagement practices at

news outlets limited to off-the-shelf quantitative audience metrics, to “thicker,” more layered approaches being applied that include qualitative and in-real-life engagement, such as town hall meetings and other public events. “In particular, the ability to measure audience engagement quantitatively — especially in the context of economically and organizationally challenged outlets — may be contributing to a thinner, flatter view of the possibilities for public involvement in the news, along with some loss of a civic vision for interactive news” (Lawrence, Radcliffe, & Schmidt, 2018, p. 1225). Price (2017) offered an example of the value of qualitatively studying audience values and their effect on paying intent. The author examined *The Ferret*, which was founded in Scotland in 2015 as a co-operative. Drawing funding from a variety of sources — including grants, crowdfunding, training, and events — the organization relies heavily on subscriptions for its core business model. A survey asked respondents to put in their own words the reasons for them subscribing to *The Ferret*. The overwhelming majority of responses to this question cited an interest in supporting investigative journalism, and its social and democratic benefits, as a key motivation for subscribing. As shown above, journalism scholarship is emphasizing the views of the audience in deeper, richer ways, which aligns with my audience-centred qualitative study.

Schroder (2019) argued for the need to “complexify” our understanding of people’s news interests by studying them. On this score, my thesis qualitatively explored what types of online journalism/news content a younger Canadian audience values most, why, and their attitude towards paying for this type of content. This extends the conversation in Costera Meijer & Bijleveld (2016), Costera Meijer (2012), and Schroder (2019) which qualitatively examined audience perspectives on journalism/news interests, value, relevance, and quality. The deeper

examination of news views provides valuable information to online journalism organizations by providing ‘thicker’ or deeper qualitative data from the audience’s perspective (Lawrence, Radcliffe, & Schmidt 2018).

Methodology and methods

My study explored what factors influence the willingness to pay (WTP) of young Canadians for digital journalistic/news content. I worked within an interpretivist paradigm, using a qualitative approach, as the goal of the research was to rely on participants’ views of willingness to pay for journalism (Creswell 2014). For example, Qayyum, Williamson, Liu, & Hider (2010) took an interpretivist approach when studying the news-seeking and browsing behaviours of young adults. This approach was taken by the authors to obtain in-depth data rather than a survey, which would result in a broad but shallower picture. My research focused on a specific demographic — ages 18 to 34 years old — as retaining young adults is often portrayed as the main challenge in reviving the troubled news industry (Lee & Chyi 2014). I used uses and gratifications (U&G) as the theoretical frame, which emphasizes user behaviour; it focuses on what people do with media as opposed to focusing on what the media do to people (Haridakis & Humphries 2019).

Consistent with the methodological approach outlined above, I used semi-structured interviews with 15 open-ended questions as a method to capture answers from 13 young Canadians. Participants were asked to describe factors that led to WTP for journalism/news in their own words in order to provide a more detailed data set to then code and organize thematically. Three important selection criteria for participation in this study included being a resident of Canada, having experience with digital media, and belonging to a cohort of young

adults, as noted earlier. Studying younger audiences' paying intent has been the subject of scholarship outside of Canada. For example, Sindik & Graybeal (2011) examined the perspective of U.S. college students' willingness to adopt micropayments for online newspapers. The authors surveyed this cohort in the U.S. because the millennial population has the highest internet consumption habits; along a similar vein, my research question focused on digital journalistic/news content, so the digital experience of the participants was important. The 18 to 34 age cohort established for my study was used in Kwok Choon (2018), which studied Quebec young adults' privacy practices and their relationship to privacy using Facebook and Twitter. The 18 to 34 age group was also used as a range in Kammer, Boeck, Hansen, & Hauschildt (2015), Lee & Chyi (2014), and Chyi, Lee, & Holton (2015) when studying specific age groups and media use. I used these studies to establish my definition of younger audience/young adult.

In Kwok Choon (2018), 20 young adults were selected for a qualitative study. The goal in that case, as in my study, was not to have a representative sample of media users but rather to understand the practices of this small group of users and infer patterns. Schroder (2019) conducted a qualitative analysis of the news repertoires of 24 people drawn from around Oxford in the United Kingdom as a way to measure audience preferences. The range of respondents in my study was not a representative sample, but instead offers detailed responses from a particular group of users. As noted by Ayres (2012), researchers who use semi-structured interviewing develop a written interview guide in advance, which was followed in my study. The interview guide included 15 open-ended questions, which allowed participants to answer in their own words, in keeping with the interpretivist paradigm. The use of semi-structured interviews has been used in other studies exploring journalism issues qualitatively. Lawrence, Radcliffe, &

Schmidt (2018) conducted semi-structured interviews with a number of senior editors and journalists at news outlets across the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. Interviews were chosen in this case “in order to gain insight” into how each news outlet is approaching engagement substantively, strategically, and in terms of allocation of resources (Lawrence, Radcliffe, & Schmidt, 2018, p. 1225). Likewise, in Ferrer-Conill & Tandoc Jr. (2018), in-depth interviews with newswriters were used as a data collection method. As noted by the authors, in-depth interviews allow for a deeper interrogation of informants, with the aim of understanding their perceptions and experiences. This was also the rationale for using interviews in my study; the topic of WTP of a younger audience in Canada has not been widely studied, as shown in my literature review, so a deeper interrogation was necessary in order to better elucidate user perspectives regarding online journalism/news payment.

Participants

Participants were recruited using snowball, or network, sampling whereby an email was forwarded to an initial group of people. This initial group of contacts was known to the researcher and they were asked to recruit participants using the study’s outlined criteria. This recruitment method helps to access specific populations (Browne 2005). In this case, I had limited access to people in the 18 to 34 age cohort, so snowball sampling was used to expand the pool of potential interview participants. This was also a recruitment method used in Robinson & Deshano (2011), and Edgerly (2017).

I attracted 13 participants to take part in the semi-structured interviews. Each participant was emailed a letter of invitation and an interview consent form detailing the research project, measures to be taken by the researcher to maintain participant anonymity, and the process of a

timely withdrawal from the research project should they wish to do so. Seven of the participants were living in B.C. and six in Alberta at the time interviews were conducted; ages ranged from 19 to 32 with an average age of 25. The highest level of education completed by participants was a master's degree (one participant); all participants had completed at least some post-secondary education (bachelor's degree, certificate program) or were enrolled in a post-secondary program of some kind. The interviews were all conducted by phone from June 5, 2019 to July 14, 2019, and the data was captured by a digital recorder to ensure answers were verbatim. All the interviews were carried out by the researcher and each lasted from a range just under 20 minutes to 50 minutes. The interview data was then transcribed by the researcher, read over with the recordings to cross-check for transcription accuracy, then read again to explore for general themes and for memoing. The interview data was then analyzed more deeply by coding and theming the data.

Data Analysis

The interview data was coded inductively using first cycle in vivo coding. Codes were then condensed during a reanalysis of the original coding work, and the data was examined for themes and organized on a spreadsheet for analysis. In vivo, or inductive coding, was chosen to analyze this data because of the importance placed on the views and perceptions of the participants. Codes were taken from words or short phrases found in the qualitative data record; the terms were used by the participants themselves (Saldana 2016). Thematic analysis is widely used by qualitative researchers because of its power to yield insightful interpretations that are contextually grounded (Lapadat 2012). As a sensemaking approach, thematic analysis is a tactic for reducing and managing large volumes of data. Thematic analysis was used to analyze

qualitative data in Gulyas, O'Hara, & Eilenberg (2018) to find and explore thematic connections, where analytical categories were formed and amended in an iterative and flexible process.

Themes that emerged from the analysis of the literature were analyzed with the interview data and examined for similarities, contradictions, and to help enrich the data in my discussion of the findings. Both short and long quotes were used in the report of findings in my study to help illustrate the participants' perspectives.

Definitions

Willingness to pay (WTP) is a specific and important term that was explored in my study. It was examined by asking for participants' attitudes about paying for digital journalistic/news content. WTP in my study is being defined as whether someone is open to the idea of paying for online digital journalistic/news content (Price 2017).

Digital journalistic/news content is another key term in my study, and it was important that interview participants were clear about what was meant by digital journalism/news. Therefore, I used the definition of journalism promulgated by Shapiro (2014): "Journalism comprises the activities involved in an independent pursuit of accurate information about current or recent events and its original presentation for public edification" (Shapiro, 2014, p. 555). This content is published in digital form, including on desktop and mobile applications. This definition was sent to the participants.

The findings and discussion in my thesis are divided into separate sections for the purpose of clarity. I will first report the findings of my thesis, which will detail themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews. Rich descriptions, augmented by long and short verbatim quotes from the participants, were used in the findings section to accurately and fairly

report their views and perceptions. The discussion section will provide analysis and implications of these findings.

Findings: Willingness to Pay

Participants in my study displayed a low willingness to pay (WTP) for journalism as only one of the 13 participants indicated that they currently pay directly for news content. Four participants who indicated they were open to paying for digital/online news would do so if the offering were unique, of high quality, or presented on a platform or in a manner they deemed valuable enough to pay for. On the other hand, those who were not open to paying cite the pervasiveness of news information online as a prime reason for not subscribing; in other words, they can find it elsewhere, as several participants stated, which appears to be a problem related to information abundance, or the surplus of information, as highlighted by Chyi (2009). The themes below emerged during an analysis of participant data. These thematic headings (bolded below) were generated from the participant interviews:

Get it elsewhere: Eight of the participants were not open to paying for online journalism/news for the foreseeable future. The wide range of freely accessible news content was cited as the primary reason. This phenomenon of the ability to find the same or similar content in alternate sources was often cited by participants, and this will be analyzed further in the discussion section when addressing the supply/demand of information in the digital world, as promulgated by Chyi (2009). The phenomena of being able to find news content elsewhere was illustrated by this participant:

If there's some sort of news item that's behind a paywall I'm sure it's being reported somewhere else that isn't so just because there is so much, umm, access to

information now if you can't find it from one source, you can probably go find it from a different one (Participant 11).

Google search: When asked what they would do when encountering a paywall after clicking on a link from a social media feed, all 11 active users of social media said that they would not pay. If they were interested enough after encountering a paywall, participants would generally search for it on Google to see if it was available elsewhere:

I would go back to Facebook, I wouldn't, umm, put any payment information or anything and yeah, I would either exit out of the pop-up window or tab or open a new tab or just hit the back button and go back to Facebook, because like I said, I'm not interested in paying for news information so I can either try to look up that story for free on Google or I'll just not worry about that story (Participant 3).

It should also be noted that one participant does not access news sites directly, and instead uses Google as the starting point for news. Three participants mentioned hearing about news through word of mouth, or news being broadcast in the background, and if it interests them, they will research the topics in more detail online.

Offer something exclusive: Four participants described attributes needed in a journalism/news product they would be open to paying for. The main attributes included: if specific information was provided that they could not find elsewhere; one participant would pay for podcasts where he felt a "connection" to the host and if he valued the content; and if a journalism product offered multiple sources of news in one place (this latter reason will be highlighted in the findings discussing the importance of accessing multiple viewpoints in news

under the “multiple sources” theme). Participant 13 highlighted the importance of exclusivity when considering whether to pay money for online news content:

I wouldn't be opposed to having a subscription, but again it would have to either offer something exclusive or offer it in a way that's more than just links and notifications because I could get that with any free app (Participant 13).

Participant 9 was more interested in subscribing to podcasts, but would consider ‘traditional’ online publications (traditional meaning the written word) if the news information was of high enough quality:

So, umm, I guess part of it too is the personality behind the podcast is very important and so, umm, if it's a, like, a big personality that I really like, enjoy and feel that I engage with and they're offering something unique like, I don't know, some sort of like guests or some sort of, I don't know, something to make it special, umm, yeah, I would for sure. I would like to support them through money (Participant 9).

The lone participant that currently paid money for journalism/news subscribes to *The Athletic*, an online publication that specializes in sports journalism. The participant cited a willingness to pay for content that is consumed on a regular basis, to economically support a particular artist or writer, and also discussed the importance of the content itself as a factor:

So, it's actual, like, beat writers that, like, get in the locker room, umm, and talk directly to the team, umm, so it is a totally different perspective than say, for instance, just like an analyst that's, like, sitting behind a desk somewhere (Participant 12).

Multiple sources: News variety and maintaining access to multiple viewpoints was identified as important for several participants, and also a limiting factor for paying intent. In

other words, participants would not want to limit their diversity of viewpoints and sources of news information. These two participants encapsulate this theme:

The content would have to be, umm, kind of a one-stop place to shop sort of thing where you can get kind of a diverse amount of content and you're only paying one fee for that (Participant 10).

I wouldn't pay because sometimes with news you kind of get only one voice and one perspective, umm, so I just wouldn't like to do that because I like to get a perspective from all, even if I don't agree with it (Participant 7).

Expensive: The cost of subscriptions was also a theme that emerged from participants, and cost and payment options will be explicated in the discussion. Four participants highlighted cost as a possible factor on whether or not to pay money for journalism. One participant cited the fact money was tight as a university student:

Well, just currently I'm in post-secondary so it's pretty expensive and I don't have a lot of spare money to spend on things like that (Participant 4).

As reported above, the audience in my study displayed a low willingness to pay. Participants who are open to paying for digital/online news would do so if the offering were unique, of high quality, or presented on a platform or in a manner they deemed valuable enough to pay for. On the other hand, those who are not open to paying cite the pervasiveness of news information online as a prime reason for not subscribing; in other words, they can find it elsewhere, as several participants stated. This will be examined in the discussion on information surplus.

Findings: News interests

Before answering questions, participants were all provided with a definition of journalism/online news, which was that “news comprises the activities involved in an independent pursuit of accurate information about current events or recent events and its original presentation,” consistent with the definition from Shapiro (2014). Participants were then asked to discuss the types of news stories that are most important to them, personally, and to explain reasons why this is the case. They were not provided with a predefined list of news story-types, so as to not restrict their answers. Despite this, definite patterns emerged. Participants cited local news, world news, politics (whether local, provincial, national, or international), as the main areas of interest. They also expressed a deep interest in content others are sharing or discussing online. This shows that participants do have an interest in news to meet certain information gratifications, but they displayed a low willingness to pay for this content. This disconnect between news interest and payment intent will be explicated in the discussion section.

Local news: Participants cited the desire to keep track of what is happening in their community as a reason why local news was so important. This includes keeping tabs on new building developments, the effect of higher business taxes on favourite restaurants, and local crime. Participant 8 summed up the general sentiment on local news: “I feel like local news is very important. It just keeps me aware of what’s going on around me and I think that’s important.”

World news: Participants also expressed an interest about happenings in the broader world — both in the United States and overseas. This includes tracking major world events, natural disasters, or international stories sparked by an interest in world travel. Participant 8

spoke about the importance of monitoring what is happening in other countries, and reflecting on the impact on this participant's own life: "I just feel like world news interests me because I get to know about other lives, and other cultures in different countries, umm, and how that impacts me and my community."

Politics: Participants were interested in political news for several reasons: due to personal interest; the effect of political decisions on their day-to-day lives; work-related political interest; the importance of being an informed citizen; a general interest in the active U.S. political scene; and a heightened interest in politics due to election campaigns, or major scandals such as the SNC-Lavalin affair.

People sharing: The cohort of participants in my study expressed a deep interest in the information others are sharing or discussing online, including from friends or other journalists on social media. This causes them to take an interest in the particular subject:

It gives me a place where I can see what many other people from different places are thinking about that specific situation, umm, and, umm, it also alerts me to things that I'm not aware of. Sometimes the news doesn't have everything, umm, but there is, umm, there is things that are not on the news that are happening in the world that I see there and then I do research on and I look online to see, like, where else is that being said?

(Participant 8).

Participants were also asked to describe where they prefer to get their journalism/news content: in print, desktop computer, mobile browser, mobile apps, podcasts, or television. Mobile apps or mobile browsers were the most popular choice. Mobile apps or browsers were used to access news for 10 of the 13 participants. This method was cited by participants mostly due to

convenience, since mobile phones are most accessible. Desktop (or laptop) was the second most popular choice, with nine users reading news on that platform. Desktop was cited as a platform to read more deeply into a subject, while mobile was a method to scan headlines and receive quick bites of information. This answer from one of the participants sums up the usage of the mobile and desktop platforms:

So first it would be mobile browser probably, umm, just because my phone is always on me and, umm, my phone also personalizes, kind of, the news that I receive any time that I open the browser so, kind of, whether I like it or not, I get access to news through there. And then the next would be my laptop computer, which is where I would do, umm, the majority of, like, research on news things that I'm specifically trying to look for (Participant 10).

Podcasting was the next most popular way of accessing journalism/news content. Participants 7, 9, 11, 12, and 13 have accessed podcasts for news. Participants 9 and 13 highlighted podcasts as a convenient method to access news, particularly while traveling or commuting to work. When asked an open-ended question regarding other methods in which they receive or access online journalism/news content that were not listed, two participants cited radio. Nobody cited terrestrial television, and Participant 1 accessed the paper at work. This was the lone reference to consuming news in print.

Findings: Social media

Social media is another of the myriad options for participants to access news, which will be included in the discussion on cross-media use and information surplus. Participants in my study are active on social media, which was not surprising, given the findings of the Social

Media Lab (2018) survey that showed an overwhelming majority of online Canadian adults (94 percent) have an account on at least one social media platform. This survey showed that young people aged 18 to 24 are the largest adopters of social media. Facebook was the most common with young people 18 to 24 at 95 percent. This was in line with findings in my study, as 11 of the 13 participants were active on social media, and all 11 of these active users had a Facebook account. Participants were asked to describe their interaction with news content on the social media accounts they used. Each participant was asked what would lead them to click on a social media posting that included a link to content.

Title and picture: This was the dominant positive predictor of whether participants would click on a link, with 10 participants citing presentation — this theme refers to the visual elements: the photo, video, or information contained in the headline, (the implications of which will be explicated in the discussion), and encapsulated by the theme of “title and picture” generated from the data:

It’s generally the title and the picture and it’s just if it intrigues me to click on it. And then, generally, speaking, it will show underneath that news story, umm, related news stories and then I’ll look through those related news stories (Participant 1).

Umm, the headline. The headline is usually the only thing you can see with a little description of what it is. But if it seems like a headline is, like, a news story that I’d be interested in, and want to know more about, then I’d click on it and read it (Participant 5).

Findings: Non-journalistic digital media

As noted earlier, participant willingness to pay for online news is low. This contrasts with non-journalistic digital media, which includes services such as Netflix, Apple Music, and

Spotify. All participants except one currently pay for one form of a non-journalism online streaming service on an individual or family account. Netflix was by far the most popular non-news digital service paid for by participants in my study, with 10 of the 13 having an individual or family subscription to the video streaming service. Music streaming services were the next most popular non-journalistic media service used by participants in my study with seven participants or their families paying for either Spotify or Apple Music. Other streaming services participants or their families currently pay for include: Crave TV; Google Music/Google Play; DAZN; Twitch; Dropout; and Amazon Prime. The most prevalent reasons for subscribing to these various services included the following: the ability to customize with playlists; original content; for entertainment; as a way to pass time; and not having to view advertisements. These views demonstrate the dominant perspectives on non-journalistic digital media uses:

Playlists: Umm, my favourite thing about Spotify is that you can download songs to listen to when you're offline. So, that's the main reason why I use it. And then, you know, just again, it's a very wide selection of music. You can create your own playlists, you know, access it anywhere because you can download offline (Participant 5).

Produce own content: I feel Netflix especially now has quite, like, high-quality content and now they produce their own content as well, umm, that I quite like and enjoy so I find it quite worthwhile, again, because I think it really has, like, superseded television for me (Participant 9).

Entertainment and pass time: Umm, Netflix to me is truly just entertainment or a way for me to pass time for sure (Participant 6).

No commercials: Well I pay for Netflix, again just ease of use, it's very accessible.

Umm, no commercials is a big thing, a big reason why a lot of people use it (Participant 5).

As shown here, it emerged that the willingness to pay for online journalism/news content is currently low, although some participants are open to paying for online news that they would consider to be unique, or of high enough quality. Those who were not open to paying point to the non-exclusivity of online news as the chief reason, and this will be further explicated in the discussion below. Participants appeared more willing to pay for non-journalism/news digital media, such as Netflix, and the implications of this for journalism will be explicated in the discussion section.

Discussion: Participants Use News but have a low WTP for it

As shown in my findings, the young Canadian adults studied here do use online journalism/news to meet specific information gratifications, but the willingness to pay for this content is low. These participants use non-journalistic forms of online/digital media, but the willingness to pay for this content is high. This demonstrates an active audience in the process of selecting media under U&G, as noted by Haridakis & Humphries (2019). In other words, participants here appear to be discerning in how they value certain media; journalism is used but does not appear to be valued to the same extent as non-journalism when they are asked to pay. Only one of 13 participants currently paid for journalism/news content. Despite the low paying intent, these participants were not disconnected from news. For example, they use multiple devices to access news, primarily on mobile applications and browsers, followed by the desktop and laptop. The dominant uses of news were local news, world news, political news, and interest in news that others are sharing online. Participants in my study also access news via social

media, which is in line with the Social Media Lab (2018) survey that showed young people are the largest adopters of social media. The four participants open to paying for news would do so for content they consider to be unique, or of high enough quality; to support a writer or artist, or content consumed on a regular basis; podcasting where there was a connection to the host; and if news were located in one spot where diverse content could be accessed for a fee. On the other hand, participants in my study widely pay for non-journalism digital media. The most prevalent reasons for subscribing to these services include: the ability to customize with playlists; original content; for entertainment; as a way to pass time; and not having to view advertisements.

Examining reasons for this disconnect between news use and payment or payment intent forms a starting point for media organizations aiming to coax young adults into paying for news in a payment-for-content system. Some key questions that should be asked based on my findings include: are news organizations providing relevant journalism/news information a younger audience values? Are they doing so on their preferred platforms (for example mobile), and are they presenting this content in ways that connect to younger audiences? Highlighting this latter point, Flamingo (2019) reported that for younger audiences, news brands' behaviour on their own websites or on social media is not always in line with the content, format, and style of how users interact with each platform. On the point of customization (a preference reported in the examination of non-journalistic digital media), Kammer et al. (2015) found that WTP for news in a younger-aged focus group studied increased when the subscription model offered a personalized dimension that distinguishes it from all the other general news input. There are implications here for Canadian media organizations seeking to charge for their content. Is exclusive, unique, or valuable content being presented, and is it being presented on platforms

that young adults prefer, with options that align with their online consumption patterns, for example customization on non-news digital media?

Aside from the type of content being produced, and its presentation, there also is the question of how news organizations are charging for news content — does it fit with the needs of young adults? In my study, four participants highlighted cost as a possible factor on whether or not to pay money for journalism. One point that should be noted is that non-journalistic digital media is available on shared or family accounts, something that was not raised by participants in my study discussing news payment. This option for news subscriptions was suggested by Flamingo (2019) as something news organizations should consider. As noted earlier, the Flamingo (2019) study of those aged 18 to 35 in the United States and the United Kingdom found a couple of key problems with payment options: that payments don't fit consumption — this audience values using multiple sources (which participants in my study highlighted as important); and the perception that options are limited: monthly subscriptions don't fit news habits yet it is the only method they are aware of. Myriad options exist aside from the flat monthly or annual fee (Myllylahti 2014). Other payment methods include micropayments, which is an à la carte business model where users are charged, typically per article (Sindik & Graybeal 2011) and crowdsourcing to fund journalism (Ladson & Lee 2017). Given the findings of my study, and the options highlighted in separate studies, media organizations should examine payment options, in addition to the type and presentation of content, when trying to encourage young adults to pay for news.

Discussion: U&G Cross-Media Use

Participants in my study displayed cross-media use, a concept noted in U&G studies focusing on audience media use, (Schroder 2015), and the blurring of lines between platforms (Bjur et al. 2013). Audiences build media repertoires in order to meet their specific media gratifications. For journalism specifically, audiences actively select among news sources based on their ability to gratify their needs for information, entertainment, social interaction, and escapism (Diddi & LaRose 2006). Participants in my study use multiple media and multiple sources to satisfy these gratifications. For online journalism, a constellation of mediums, platforms, and content types combine to form a participant's news repertoire (Schroder 2015). Participants in my study use mobile apps or browsers (the dominant access points for news in my study) for a cursory check, and desktop (or laptop) for deeper news reading. Podcasting is used as a convenient method to access news, particularly while traveling or commuting to work. Participants are also active users of social media, and use this source to consume news. News interests add to participants' news repertoires. Three categories of news interests, (local/world/politics), are consistent with information-motivated uses, in which news is used for surveillance, to fulfil the need to know, to understand what is going on in the world, and to keep up with the way the government performs its functions, as noted in Lee (2013)'s U&G model. Participants also demonstrated news interests consistent with Lee (2013)'s social-motivated news consumption U&G model; for example, participants in my study expressed a deep interest in the information others are sharing or discussing online, particularly on social media. In this case, social-motivated news consumption includes the need to keep up with what those around us are

talking about, to appear informed to others, to be more sociable, and to follow what one's friends are doing (Lee 2013).

The presence of non-journalistic sources in participants' media repertoires complicates matters for journalism organizations seeking to charge users for content. A user's media repertoire is broader than a news repertoire because it includes a wider array of media (Bjur et al. 2013). As noted by Schroder (2015), the fact that audiences are cross-media isn't new — for example people have accessed newspapers and magazines in print. They have also combined the use of these print platforms with television and radio. What's different with the digital age is the blurring of lines — cross-media use is becoming more seamless and blurred, hybrid, and complex (Bjur et al. 2013). This appears to present a problem for the journalism business, which is trying to charge users directly for content. For example, someone could use a smartphone to access a news app, podcast, Netflix, or a music streaming service such as Spotify. If younger people are deciding which services to pay for, where will digital journalism/news fit into what I will call a user's *media payment repertoire*, a neologism for the purposes of this discussion. This refers to the constellation of digital media content a user is willing to pay for. The prospects are not positive for journalism, given the results of my study and other examinations of young adults' low paying intent for journalism/news when compared to non-news digital media. As discussed earlier, Myllylahti (2014) acknowledged that the success of paid online news content in different countries might be dependent on cultural differences, reading habits, and print loyalty amongst other factors. Flamingo (2019), which studied 18 to 35 year old adults in the United States and the United Kingdom, reported that young people will pay for entertainment (Spotify, Netflix, Hulu) but the current overwhelming majority won't pay for news. An

examination of audience media preferences in Reuters (2019) found that seven percent of under 45s would pick news over everything else for the next year (if forced to choose just one subscription for the next 12 months), compared to 15 percent of those 45 and over. In Flamingo (2019), no news app, with the exception of Reddit, was within the top-25 apps used by respondents. When present, they represented comparatively small levels of daily use. These findings are consistent with my study. In this cross-use media environment where users have a plethora of media choices, news appears to be the least-popular choice in participants' media payment repertoires.

Metaphorically, Schroder (2015) regards citizens as shopping in the supermarket of news, taking news media from the shelves and putting them into their daily, weekly or monthly shopping carts "according to what they find indispensable, necessary or enjoyable, what they have time for, what they can afford, etc." (Schroder, 2015, p. 61). This metaphorical 'supermarket of news' must be taken a step further to include a 'supermarket of media' with the blurring of media lines (Bjur et al. 2013). Users can use multiple media, both journalistic and non-journalistic, from the same access point, for example on computers and smartphones. New media platforms have created more blurred and complex cross-media use, (Bjur et al. 2013), and these platforms host myriad media (news, music, online streaming, social media) that users are being asked to pay for directly via subscriptions. Participants in my study showed a clear preference toward paying for non-journalistic content. This shows that cross-media use has created an exigency that news organizations must contend with. Convincing young Canadians, such as the ones studied here, to pay for news when their inclination to pay is already quite low will likely be difficult in a blurring cross-media world. News organizations are competing for

inclusion in young users' media payment repertoires with media streaming services that younger audiences appear more inclined to pay for at present.

Discussion: Information Surplus

When examining the willingness to pay for journalism/news, the internet's "culture of free," or attitudes that "news must remain free" are often cited as key reasons for the public's ambivalence toward paying for news (Goyanes 2014, Picard 2008). In my study, participants who are open to paying for digital/online news would do so if the offering were unique, of high quality, or presented on a platform or in a manner they deemed valuable enough to pay for. On the other hand, those who are not open to paying cite the pervasiveness of news information online as a prime reason for not subscribing; in other words, they can find it elsewhere, as several participants stated. This appears to be a problem related to information abundance, or the surplus of information, as highlighted by Chyi (2009). "The overabundance of information and the speed at which more information is created carry important implications" (Chyi, 2009, p. 93). The implications are that with information readily accessible online, the audience has an abundant buffet at its disposal; not only has digitalization resulted in a proliferation of available news sources, but people now have more power to navigate the news content they want to use, when, where, and how, as noted in Swart, Peters, & Broersma (2017). Indeed, findings in my study suggest an active audience, as highlighted by U&G, (Haridakis & Humphries 2019), and participants in my study appeared to understand the abundance of news and media choices it has. This is demonstrated by the actions participants take when hitting a paywall — they will simply look for information elsewhere, with the confidence they will find what they're looking for.

Boczkowski (2010) reported findings from news homogenization among the leading online media in the United States during the 2008 presidential election. The preliminary analysis showed that the diversity in what is reported is quite low, even during a period of major historical significance when resource constraints are relaxed and public interest in the news is higher than usual. In an age of information plenty, what most consumers get is more of the same (Boczkowski 2010). Given the audience's discernment and plethora of options, and suggestions that unique content could lead to paying intent, it begs the question of how news providers can make their products stand out from the crowd, and valued by the audience to the extent it is willing to pay for it. As noted earlier in the discussion on cross-media use, the online environment introduces a further wrinkle as other non-journalistic/news media services are continuing to muscle in on the growing online payment-for-content trend including Netflix, Apple Music, and Spotify, which users in my study and other studies, (Flamingo 2019), appear more willing to pay for. In other words, "users pick whatever information they want — news or non-news" (Chyi, 2009, p. 94-95). As noted in my review of the literature, in economic terms, news, and non-news information in general are substitute goods, given limited time and attention (Chyi 2009).

Given that the audience has to value journalistic/news information in order to pay for it, (Gorman 2015), news organizations must focus relentlessly on their news and information needs. With other forms of media also charging money directly for access (as noted earlier with Netflix, Apple Music, Spotify, and others), news is just one of many available media choices. As noted, Nelson (2018) reported that a number of journalism stakeholders innately believe that if news publishers "pay closer attention to understanding and communicating with their audiences, they

will find revenue they desperately need while providing impactful, public service journalism” (Nelson, 2018, p. 540). This type of focus on the audience is occurring at *The Ferret* in Scotland. For example, Price (2017) reported that a key step forward for *The Ferret* would be to conduct research into the demographics and backgrounds of their membership, their motivations for subscribing, and their longer-term hopes and ambitions that might hold the key to their longer-term financial support. An assessment of content production is part of this. The content examination by the *The Ferret* points back to other discussions of content production, for example wisdom reporting in journalism, as noted in Gorman (2015) and Postman (1999), as a means to newspapers finding a place in a crowded online world of information and facts. With the internet delivering a massive amount of facts, “wisdom reporting” would implore newspapers to offer readers a more thoughtful experience (Gorman 2015). Of course, a relentless focus on the audience and any concomitant content innovation does not guarantee economic success, but it could help news organizations attain a deeper understanding about motivations that underpin audience behaviour, (Flamingo 2019), and set up better alignment with the news needs of young adults — such as the ones studied here — in the age of information surplus and cross-media use.

Conclusion

Using semi-structured interviews with 13 young adults in the 18 to 34 age cohort in Canada, it emerged in my study that their willingness to pay for online journalism/news is currently low. Just one participant currently pays for any type of online journalism/news service. Four participants who were not current subscribers to a journalism/news product were open to paying for online news, and described attributes needed in a journalism/news product they would be open to paying for. The main attributes included:

- if specific information was provided that they could not find elsewhere,
- one participant would pay for podcasts where he felt a “connection” to the host and if he valued the content,
- and if a journalism product offered multiple sources of news in one place.

It should be noted that news variety and maintaining access to multiple viewpoints was identified as an important factor for several participants, in general, and also a limiting factor for paying intent. Those who were not open to paying point to the non-exclusivity of online news as the chief reason. Participants were more willing to pay for non-journalistic digital services such as Netflix. When asked what motivated them to pay for this type of media, several themes emerged, including:

- the ability to create customized playlists,
- for original content produced,
- for entertainment and as a way to pass time,
- no commercials (for example, no advertising).

In sum, charging money for online news in the age cohort studied here will likely be challenging given the abundance of media choices available online and competition from other forms of media, such as Netflix. News providers wanting to charge young adults for content will likely need to focus relentlessly on this audience’s news information needs — this includes, among other factors, gaining a deep understanding about what type of news content they value, their platform preferences, how they want news presented, and payment options. This does not guarantee younger Canadians will pay for journalism/news content, but it might give the news

business an opportunity to, at the very least, better understand the news information needs of an age cohort that appears to be willing to pay for Netflix, but less inclined to do so for online news.

Limitations and future work

My study was cross-sectional and focused on audience perspectives at one point in time (June-July 2019). Also, given the qualitative nature of my study, and the fact participants are concentrated in two provinces (British Columbia and Alberta), findings cannot be generalized to the 18 to 34 age cohort for the entire Canadian population. Future work could include compiling a more representative sample of the young adult Canadian population and its WTP for journalism and non-journalistic media. Work that is more longitudinal in nature is also recommended, given a rapidly changing media environment. It is also recommended that the audience's subscription saturation point is measured from a cross-media user perspective to establish where news fits on their media payment repertoires.

It is recommended that media scholarship, and media practitioners in Canada, continue to focus attention on the audience and how it values online news; audience views and perceptions of journalism will be critical because the audience holds the key to success in a payment-for-content model. This includes an examination of all age cohorts, aside from the views of young adults, as studied here. Also, given the information surplus concept, an analysis of the uniqueness of content that appears online in, for example, metropolitan city Canadian newspapers is suggested to measure the homogeneity, or heterogeneity, of their offerings. Further, media scholars should interrogate why Canadians' willingness to pay for online news is much lower when compared to other countries — nine percent pay for online news in Canada, compared to 16 percent in the U.S., and 34 percent in Norway (Reuters 2019). For younger

audiences, conducting deeper research is recommended to determine why they are less willing to pay for news when compared to non-journalistic media, what type of journalism/news this cohort values, why, what specific payment options it prefers, and how the news business can better meet their news information needs. Focus groups and other qualitative methods are recommended in order to collect more detailed data.

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