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What is news?

An exploration of news consumption in Aotearoa New Zealand

comparing older and younger audiences

using a uses and gratifications lens.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the

requirements for the degree of

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Communication

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Kirsty J. Anderson

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Abstract

Technological and societal developments, including digital news, use of mobile devices, and the shared connections of social media, have impacted how and why audiences consume news. This study examined news consumption in Aotearoa New Zealand using a uses and gratifications lens, with a focus on the habits of those aged under 26 years of age and those over 26 years of age. The study produced three articles based on insights from focus groups to examine what audiences use for news, what they think is news, and what they do as a result of news. The articles indicated differences in habits between the two age cohorts, particularly in the use of social media and new media forms.

Together, the articles offer three findings towards the overall research question of understanding the factors affecting news consumption and the divergence in news consumption habits between older and younger audiences. Uses and gratifications theory is still relevant for understanding news choices, as needs drive media behaviours and desired gratifications. Although news values are a useful categorisation of the characteristics of news that resonate with audiences, they need to be re-examined in the current media environment. Finally, veracity is proposed as an emerging news value as audiences have more news choice, and it is a key factor determining what news audiences consume and why. This study proposes a new theoretical model for news consumption that includes uses and gratifications theory and news values framework to understand the factors involved in news consumption. This model is explored as a case study using audiences' responses to the media coverage of the death of Queen Elizabeth II in September 2022.

Acknowledgements

I have always been fascinated by how news shapes our views, how we use it to connect, and its impact on societies. My Master's thesis in 2002 was an analysis of what news made the front of New Zealand's newspapers and which news values were prominent. During that study, the Wellington Evening Post newspaper announced its closure, and there was commentary on the future of journalism. Twenty years later, technology and the internet have transformed the meaning of news and its place in our world. This led me to wonder how citizens were getting the information they needed, to live in and feel part of, our society. Consequently, the idea for this PhD was born.

Throughout the five years of my studies, the news media environment in New Zealand continued to go through significant shifts. News media, and specifically local media, played a significant role during the COVID-19 pandemic, and New Zealanders gravitated to regular broadcast news for the latest updates. Following the pandemic, many news media companies restructured their businesses to continue to attract audiences and revenue. This was a result of an economic recession, reduced advertising, and the rise of social media and other news channels. In 2024, one of New Zealand's major free-to-air channels TV3 NewsHub (owned by Warner Bros.) ceased compiling and broadcasting all news, and the other free-to-air channel TVNZ, reduced its news and current affairs services. These reductions brought into question the role of news, the viability of the range of media products, and how news supports our democracy. These changes show just how quickly the news world is changing, and why I was keen to explore, from the audiences' perspectives, what they understand to be news within this media environment.

I am very proud to submit this report after five years of part-time study. This is the culmination of a journey that continued alongside life challenges of a pandemic, cancer

treatment, the death of a family member, and a change in job, as well as the usual ebbs and flows of family life. Completing my PhD has been personally rewarding, and I would not be at this point without the amazing support and professional guidance I have received. Firstly, I would like to thank my professional supervisors, Professor Stephen Croucher and Associate Professor James Hollings. They took me on as a doctoral student, gave me continual support, believed in me, and we had fun along the way. Being a part-time doctoral student can be lonely. I appreciated the Massey University student support services and my wonderful doctoral student colleagues for their friendship and inspiration.

Thank you to the people who assisted with my research, particularly the participants who provided such valuable insights. Thank you to my work colleagues who supported me on my journey. Thank you to friends and family members who always asked where I was up to and how I was going. Sometimes it was hard to describe what stage I was at, but they always asked. I also pay tribute to my parents, who were both teachers and instilled in my sister, brother, and I the value of education and learning.

Finally, thank you to my husband and two children who have supported me through every stage of my PhD. Their belief that I would complete was unwavering. It was also by observing my children's news habits that I realised how dramatically news consumption was changing. I am very pleased to have finished and have been enriched by this journey.

Wellington, 11 March, 2025

Kirsty J. Anderson

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List of original articles

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- Article II:** Anderson, K. J. (2024). What audiences do with news: a broader definition of news consumption. *Media International Australia*, 0(0).
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X241270608>
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Chapter 1: Understanding news as communication

Whether it's your country or not, whether it's positive or negative, you can't be heartless and turn away from what's happening in the world. Everybody has their part to play in sharing news or understanding news. It's getting more information so you can make better decisions, support countries internationally whilst they're at war, or grieve over the Queen. (Edited comment from research participant, September, 2022).

1.1 Background and motivation for this study

News is a communication process that is central to our societies, and influences how we think and what actions we take. News has many meanings, from a new piece of information (“have you heard the news?”) to the journalistic products of trusted and factual information and the way in which we are informed about, and participate in, society (Schudson, 2018). News, through journalism, is considered a counter to the powerful political, legislative, judicial and commercial influences of society, enabling audiences to be informed and exposed to wider discussion and a diversity of views on issues (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2024). This role of news relies on a high level of trust by the public, in the news media as the provider of information that people can use (Strömbäck et al., 2020). News has maintained this role and audiences have understood how to find news to meet their needs. According to Tsfati and Cappella (2003) audiences make rational decisions and maximise their media use to ensure they have accurate information. They do not have the capacity to sort this information from within the wide range of information they have access to.

Researchers have used theoretical approaches such as uses and gratifications and news values to understand how audiences make their media choices and the news items that resonate with audiences. Both of these were developed in a time where there was less media and information choice.

The rise of information accessed on the internet has changed how audiences understand and consume news and the role of journalists as the principal providers of news to mass audiences. News has changed from radio, television and print to the dominance of online news and, more recently, a strong emphasis on short-form videos on social media platforms (Newman et al., 2024). With the internet, anyone can set up a platform to create content and distribute it widely. People's constant mobile connection means they can be participants in the news or the first distributors of content (for example, filming an event as it happens). New and interactive media make news consumption habits stronger because of audiences' constant connection to news and stimuli, leading to more chances for repeat behaviours (LaRose, 2010).

Audiences' broadening of their information seeking has challenged the commercial basis of the journalism industry by reducing its advertising revenue. This has led the industry to adapt its news offerings within a very competitive information environment. In addition, younger audiences are using more social media platforms and new media sources for information and they have less reliance on journalism, for information to meet their needs.

Scholars have explored the changing nature of journalism, definitions of news, and how uses and gratifications and news values can be used to understand news consumption. This paper adds to this scholarship by exploring understanding more about how uses and gratifications and news values and other factors that impact on news consumption. Understanding more about audience needs, can support journalism's role as a trusted, credible information provider (Deacon et al., 2024) and its role in connecting and informing societies (Cushion, 2023). This paper explores these themes, starting with three articles on news consumption examined these two age cohorts. It concludes with how this research contributes to theoretical understandings of news consumption.

1.2 Outline of this research study

This study sought to understand more about news consumption and to explore existing theoretical models to see if they were still relevant for the today's media environment. This research used focus groups and media diaries in September 2022 with twenty-five New Zealanders to explore questions about news and the differences between the younger and older cohorts of the participants. The research took place during the period of Queen Elizabeth II's death which provided a unique context to be discussing the role of news. The data from the focus groups was used to develop three articles on audiences' news consumption.

Article I

Anderson, K. J. (2024). What is news? Exploring differences in how younger and older cohorts use news in today's media environment. *Communication Research and Practice*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2024.2344997>

This article explored questions of what news sources were used by audiences, what they understand to be news, differences in news values between the older and younger cohorts, and their needs that are being met by news. This uses the theoretical frameworks of uses and gratifications and news values.

Article II

Anderson, K. J. (2024). What audiences do with news: a broader definition of news consumption. *Media International Australia*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X241270608>

This article explored what actions New Zealanders take after consuming news, what needs are being met with these actions, and the differences between younger and older

cohorts. It also used a lens of uses and gratifications to explore the links between audience needs and news.

Article III

Anderson, K. J. (Forthcoming). "I've grown up with the Queen": Responses to media coverage of Queen Elizabeth II's death. *Journal to be finalised*.

This article looked in-depth at audiences' responses to a major news media event: the death of Queen Elizabeth II. It examined how the reactions of the participants aligned with previous news research on celebrity deaths, within the lens of uses and gratifications theory. It explored these from the perspective of younger and older cohorts and had a particular focus on understanding links between uses and gratifications theory, news values and parasocial relationships.

These studies illustrate the role of news in New Zealand: what people value as news, what needs they are meeting with news, and what they do with news. The actions from news were widespread, from checking on local traffic to grieving for someone they have never met, because they have formed a virtual relationship with them from watching them on the news. These articles assist in illustrating the changing nature of the communication process between the journalist and the audience. This relationship is becoming more indirect as audiences form personalised and curated news consumption habits, and use a wide range of information sources. Many of the insights from this study align with news research in comparable countries, and therefore, illustrate a transformational period of how people consume news.

Together, these articles offer insights into understanding what motivates people to consume news, the types of news that people are attracted to, and the ways in which news fulfils people's needs. The studies explore the news sources that audiences use, the times they spend consuming news and particular patterns of behaviour; for example: sharing news, and

news source and content choices. These assist with understanding the communication process of news, its impact on informed societies, and the ways in which news creates shared social and cultural contexts. This thesis concludes with a discussion of the current media environment, the theoretical implications for uses and gratifications and news values, and a proposed model for understanding news consumption.

Table 1: Articles and the main research questions addressed

Article	Research questions
<p>Anderson, K. J. (2024). What is news? Exploring differences in how younger and older cohorts use news in today’s media environment. <i>Communication Research and Practice</i>, 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2024.2344997</p>	<p>RQ1: What news sources are used by news audiences?</p> <p>RQ2: What is news, for young and older news audiences?</p> <p>RQ3: What are the different news values between old and young generations of news consumers?</p> <p>RQ4: What needs are being met with news?</p>
<p>Anderson, K. J. (2024). What audiences do with news: a broader definition of news consumption. <i>Media International Australia</i>, 0(0). https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X241270608</p>	<p>RQ1: What actions do New Zealanders take after consuming news?</p> <p>RQ2: What needs are being met with these actions?</p> <p>RQ3: What are the differences in these actions between younger and older age groups?</p>
<p>Anderson, K. J. (Forthcoming). “I’ve grown up with the Queen”: Responses to media coverage of Queen Elizabeth II’s death. <i>Qualitative Research Reports in Communication</i>. <i>(This article was submitted to this journal initially but has been revised for consideration for another journal.)</i></p>	<p>RQ1: How did older and younger groups experience the Queen’s death through media?</p>

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 From Magic Bullet to audience-focused communication theories

Every day audiences receive mass media messages, in a range of formats and on a range of devices, which impact their lives and how they interact with others. Mass media produce forms of communication which disseminate messages widely and rapidly to audiences to impact them in some way (DeFleur & Dennis, 2002). Researchers over the past 100 years have used psychological and sociological approaches, to develop theories to explain and predict social phenomena and how to relate mass communication to aspects of our personal and cultural lives or social systems (Baran & Davis, 2012). The theories use observations of behaviour to explain why things happen and for mass communication, what we can learn about the process of communicator, communicating, and the receiver (audience).

In the 1920's, with the rise of film and radio, one of the first communications theories was developed: the magic bullet theory, also known as the hypodermic needle theory (Lasswell, 1948). In developing this theory social scientist Harold Laswell described the three functions of the mass media for audiences as: surveillance of mass media, correlation of events, and transmission of social heritage (Papacharissi, 2009). The magic bullet theory stated the media's power came from its ability to inject highly influential messages directly into passive and susceptible audiences (Neuman & Guggenheim, 2011; Nwabueze & Okonkwo, 2018). Based on this theory, audiences act on the message they receive because they have no other way of comparing the message and they cannot escape the media's influence. Audiences' needs and preferences, cultural and economic backgrounds, and lifestyles are not taken into consideration. During the 1940s, the focus had been on a propagandistic approach and audiences as a homogeneous group. For example, researchers

considered that political messages would lead people to vote a certain way. As more research was conducted, scholars began to establish, through studies of political communications and voting behaviour, that the media do not have uniform and immediate impacts on audiences. This was supported by the writings of Marshall McLuhan and other researchers who were shifting understanding of the media from simple messages, to understanding them as complex social tools (Quan-Haase, 2012).

The 1950s and 1960s saw developments in the understanding of influence, persuasion, and interpersonal communication and increasing awareness of the connection between mass media and social aspects. At the time, as new forms of media emerged, such as radio and television, there was widespread fear that mass media messages could be too persuasive and outweigh other influences, such as family and community. This environment led to research on the influence of the media on voters' choices and the development of the Limited Effects Theory by Paul Lazarsfeld (Lazarsfeld et al., 1944). The study's results indicated that neither radio nor print had as much influence on voters as had been suspected. According to this theory, audiences tend to select and interpret media messages in accordance with their existing attitudes and beliefs, and their use of the mass media tends to reinforce these. Hence the mass media has limited effects on influencing audiences in terms of voting change. The study found that many people relied more on opinion leaders for information for their voting, leading to what is called the two-step flow of communication approach; that is interpersonal interaction has a far stronger effect on shaping public opinion than mass media.

The 1960s and 1970s saw the decline of the Limited Effects Theory and continuing research to understand the media's impact on audiences such as the 1968 research on agenda-setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Agenda-setting focused on the association of the audience to the message. It suggested the media have a great influence on their audiences by

instilling what they should think about, instead of what they actually think, for example, by leading audience attention, and perceived importance to certain issues.

2.1.1 The development of the uses and gratifications theory

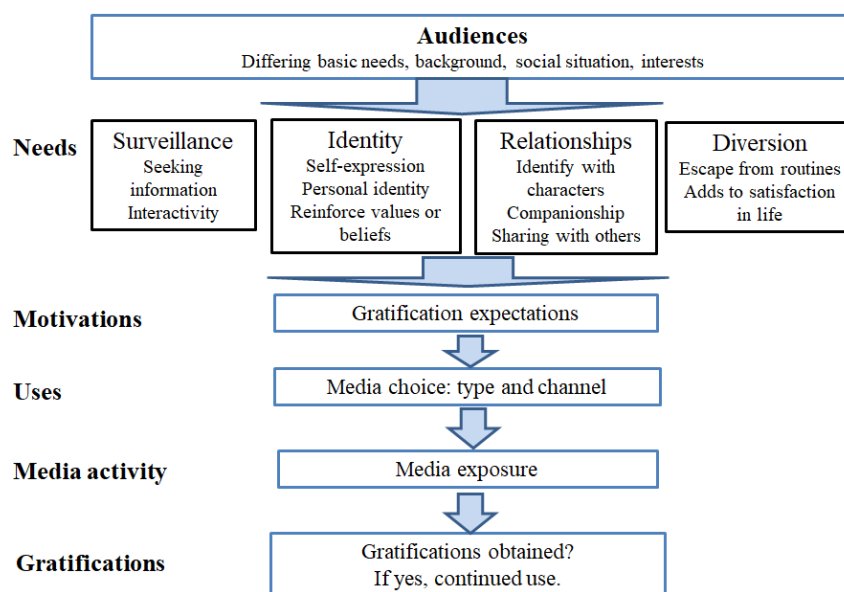
During the 1960s and 1970s, researchers continued to explore media impacts and the different needs of audiences. Jay Blumler and Denis McQuail examined people's motives for watching certain political programmes on television during the 1964 election in the United Kingdom (Blumler & McQuail, 1969). They categorised audiences' motives for viewing a certain programme and classified viewers according to their needs. This research led to the foundations of the uses and gratifications theory, a psychological communication perspective developed by Katz, Blumler and Guberich (Nwabueze & Okonkwo, 2018), that identifies how audiences use mass media.

The uses and gratifications theory differed from agenda-setting because of its focus on audiences' needs. An example of agenda-setting theory is when television news networks run the same news story as their lead story, which sets the topic of interest to audiences. The uses and gratifications theory identifies the audience needs for watching that news story; for example, to be entertained, share time with friends, or seek news information.

Early uses and gratifications studies described behaviours and categories of audiences' responses, for example, why people listened to radio formats, including quiz shows and soap operas, and how the media meet every day needs. Lazarsfeld and Herzog (Herzog, 1944) researched why people watch soap operas to learn about the two-way process of mass media and identified three gratification categories: emotional, wishful thinking, and learning. The researchers established the media do not have an all-powerful effect on audiences; audiences have the power to decide what they do with media content, if anything.

McQuail et al. (1972) proposed that the uses of different types of media could be grouped into four categories: surveillance, diversion, personal identity, personal relationships, and diversion. Surveillance is the need for information. Personal identity needs are to enhance one's own identity or identifying with a character or situation. Personal relationships' needs are to fulfil needs for companionship and relationships, and diversion was defined as the need to escape everyday lives and relax.

Figure 1: Uses and gratifications theory (McQuail, Blumler and Brown, 1972)



Katz et al. (1973) later added in an entertainment need factor and grouped the users' goals for media uses into five areas: being informed or educated, identifying with characters of the situation in the media environment, simple entertainment, enhanced social interaction, and escaping of the stresses of daily life. This theory was formalised in the 1974 publication by Blumler and Katz "The Uses of Mass Communication" and they defined the foundation of the theory as:

The social and psychological origins of needs, which generate expectations of the mass media of other sources, which led to differential patterns of media exposure (or

engagement in other activities), resulting in need gratifications and other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones. (p.20)

The uses and gratifications theory is a positivistic theory based on observing the socio-psychological aspects of mass media and it can be applied to a wide range of situations. The theory outlines five assumptions for use of mass media by users (Flaherty et al., 1998; Lin, 1999; Rubin, 1983; Temel & Özmelek, 2018). First, communication behaviour is goal-directed and people are motivated to consume media. Second, people select media to satisfy specific needs and desires. Third, media influence on behaviour is filtered through social and psychological factors. Fourth, media are in competition with other forms of communication for an individual's attention. Fifth, people are usually in control of media and therefore are not particularly influenced by it. Audiences' ideas about what they want from media, and which media best fits their needs, can be impacted by social situations and the individual's background, such as experience, interests, and education.

2.1.2 Focus on active audiences and the two-way communication relationship

The uses and gratifications approach diverges from earlier mass communication theories because it attempts to answer the question: "what do people do with media?" instead of the question "what does media do to people?" The theory seeks to understand what people do with the media, what uses they make of what the media gives them, what satisfactions they enjoy, and what part the media plays in their personal lives (Katz & Foulkes, 1962). In the 1980s researchers focused on the notion of active audiences and clarified that the level of audience activity varies and this can occur at different stages of media use. Rubin (1984) argued that audience motives are not always goal-oriented by distinguishing between ritualistic television viewing and instrumental viewing. Ritualistic viewing is when audiences consume media out of habit and do not necessarily receive gratifications. Instrumental

viewing is when audiences intentionally seek out media to satisfy their needs (Rubin, 1984). In their study of television news gratifications, Levy and Windahl (1984) supported the fundamental assumption of an active audience, but concluded that not all audiences are active to the same degree. The researchers identified three types of audience activity people engage in when using the mass media: pre-activity (behaviours taken in the selection of mass media content); duractivity (psychological attentiveness and personal involvement in the experience); and post-activity (behaviours taken after the experience, such as discussion or reflection).

The uses and gratification approach shifted research from the purposes of the communication to the purpose of the audience (Severin & Tankard, 1997) and added to the understanding of the process of mass communication. It views the relationship between the media and audiences as a two-way communication relationship with audiences having their own interpretation of the messages they receive. This audience activity can be examined in different ways, including intentionality, selectivity, attention, cognitive and emotional involvement, and the use of the media (Haridakis, 2012). Digital channels extend the concept of active audiences further, because those audiences have greater control over what they interact with, when they interact with it, and more content choices. Audiences are often described as 'users', to reflect their increased interactivity (Sundar & Limperos, 2013) and digital channels have broadened the scope of potential gratifications from media use.

2.1.3 From Maslow's Hierarchy of needs to media needs

The uses and gratifications theory stems from Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, a five-tier model from psychology explaining a person's basic needs, to more complex needs (Bridgman et al., 2019). The motivational theory states everything we do is to fulfil needs, such as physiological (food, clothing and shelter), safety and security, love and belonging,

esteem needs, and self-actualisation. The order was that people fulfil their basic needs before they fulfil more complex psychological and social needs. Scholars have subsequently questioned the exact order of these needs, particularly in non-Western cultural environments. In a similar approach to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the uses and gratifications theory examines how and what people do to fulfil their media needs. The objectives of the theory are to show the relations of mass communication and how it is used to gratify needs, establish the primary intentions of the media use, and determine the positive and negative aspects of media use on audiences.

Studies using the uses and gratifications theory examine uses, or motives, for the media use; social and psychological antecedents; and cognitive, attitudinal, or behaviour outcomes from the media consumption (Papacharissi, 2009). Motives influence audiences' actions to fulfil a need, want or behaviour. Social and psychological antecedents influence media selection including type of content, amount of use, motivation of use, and consequences of the media consumption. Studies examine use of a particular media channel or compare uses and gratifications across a number of media channels. Katz et al. (1973) identified 35 needs across five categories that motivate users to seek media for gratification: cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and tension release. Cognitive needs are to acquire information to increase knowledge and understanding. Affective needs strengthen emotional experiences. Personal integrative needs strengthen confidence and status and include cognitive and emotional elements. Social integrative needs connect and strengthen relationships with family and friends. Tension release needs relate to escape in terms of distancing from social roles and diversion from the issues of everyday life (Katz et al., 1973).

2.1.4 Understanding seeking and obtaining gratifications from media

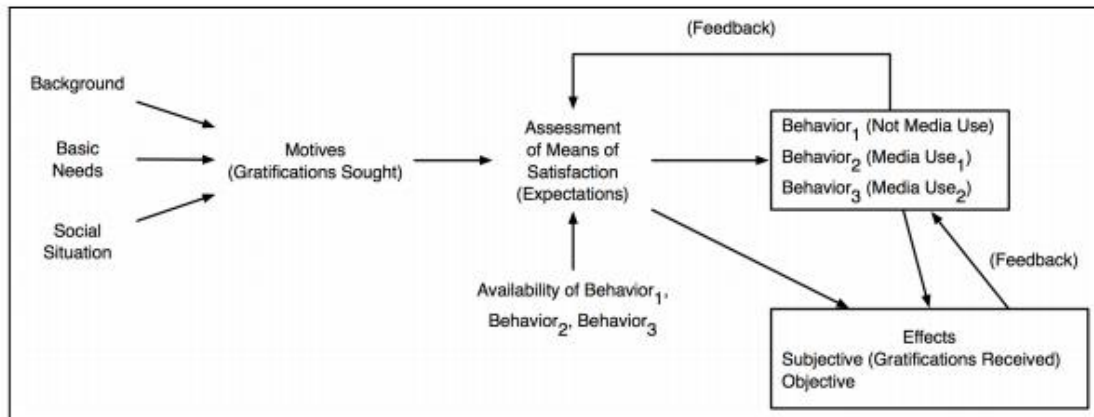
The uses and gratifications model is based on the understanding that audiences' behaviours are guided by the likelihood and value of the consequences they receive. Gratifications are the short-term and long-term cognitive and affective aspects obtained from use of the media that fulfil the original needs initiating the media use. Gratifications can be defined as the pleasure an individual feels when his or her needs are satisfied. Papacharissi (2009) defines them as "general dispositions that influence people's actions taken for the fulfilment of a need or want and behavior" (p. 139). Gratifications are the cognitive and affective aspects of gratifications obtained from the media. The degree to which someone is satisfied with the gratifications obtained from the media use can affect future media use motives or gratifications expectations (Lin, 1999).

Until the 1970s, research into uses and gratifications theory concentrated on gratifications sought, and didn't focus on outcomes, or gratifications obtained. During the 1970s, researchers developed additional typologies of the uses people made of the media, to gratify social and psychological needs. Palmgreen and Rayburn (1979) studied viewers' exposure to public television to establish gratifications sought and obtained from the most popular television news programmes. They used five gratifications dimensions: general information seeking, decisional utility, entertainment, interpersonal utility, and parasocial interaction (maintaining relationships with media personalities as if they were real people). They found the uses and gratifications approach worked well as a complement to other determinant factors such as media availability, work schedules, and social constraints. This research states the gratifications sought from the media are determined by users' attitudes towards the media and users' beliefs about what a particular media channel can give them, and their evaluation of this material (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005). It also found the gratifications

users reportedly seek, are not always the same as the gratifications they obtain (Palmgreen et al., 1980). McLeod and Becker (1981) clarified audience satisfaction by concluding that gratifications sought and gratifications received were two different conceptual entities. Blumler (1979) identified three primary social origins of media gratifications: normative influences, socially distributed life changes, and the subjective reaction of the individual to the social situation.

Gratifications obtained are based on the audiences' pre-existing needs and not on the specifics of the media, and can affect what future gratifications are sought. For example, if audiences are entertained by the first episode of a programme, they may want to watch another television episode in the series. There are two categories of gratifications obtained: content and process. Content gratifications come from the messages produced by the media. Process gratifications come from the experience of using media (Cutler & Danowski, 1980). For example, an audience may watch a television documentary to learn information (content gratification) and to escape from their day-to-day life, or to feel connected with others watching the programme (process gratifications). Users assess which behaviours will best satisfy their given need or motivation prior to media selection. This choice will be influenced by an individual's prior experience with certain behaviours and familiarity and length of time using the media. Figure 2 outlines a uses and gratifications model by McLeod and Becker (1981) which illustrates the process.

Figure 2: Diagram of a uses and gratification model by McLeod and Becker (1981)



2.1.5 Expanding the uses and gratifications theory to other media

Since the 1970s the uses and gratifications theory has been used to examine a wider range of new media and online technologies than research focused on traditional forms of media such as television (Rubin, 1979, 1983), radio (Luo et al., 2011), and newspaper (Elliott & Rosenberg, 1987). It has provided “a cutting edge approach in the initial stages of each new communication medium: newspaper, radio, television, and now the Internet” (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 27). A typical research study will investigate motives for utilising a media channel or compare uses and gratifications across different media (Papacharissi, 2009). Computer-mediated communications have reinforced the usefulness of the theory to understand audiences’ media uses. These technologies have enabled the transmission, storage and retrieval of large amounts of information, and have led to “profound changes in media users’ personal and social habits and roles” (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 28). Researchers have applied the theory to understanding uses of new forms of television programming, mobile phones, internet use, social media use, instant messaging, mobile gaming and forms of entertainment. As it has been used so widely, this paper will only highlight specific pieces of research in regards to each of these media channels.

Researchers have continued to establish audiences' needs for watching media and how these needs may differ depending on the genre of the programme. Motivations found included: entertainment, passing time and fulfilling companionship needs (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007), surveillance and arousal (Farquhar & Meeds, 2007) and information, personal identity, entertainment, social interaction and integration (Agyekwena, 2006). In studies of reality television, voyeurism was the key distinguishing gratification (Nabi et al., 2006) and five factors were identified to explain programme choice preference: mood change, entertainment, pass time, personal identification with real characters, and vicarious participation (Ebersole & Woods, 2007). Research in uses and gratifications and media use has found different needs associated with ages and personalities. For example Huang's (2009) study found that high-school and college-aged participants' needs were gratified when news content could allow them to monitor their environment, identify personal values for truth, and have enough basic knowledge for conversations about news. With the advent of social media platforms such as TikTok, this preference for short forms of news has continued (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2020).

The internet has enabled audiences to use digital channels for a wide range of needs, in addition to mass media uses. Studies on the internet can be split into those that use a similar set of gratifications to traditional media and those that explore other needs, gratifications and uses (Krishnatray et al., 2009). The first category shows a very similar set of gratifications that relate to traditional mass media. For example, gratifications obtained include information seeking, amusement, surveillance, personal relationship, identity, establishing status and acquisition (Charney & Greenberg, 2002; Mukherji et al., 1998; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). In addition, Svennevig (2000) identified diversion, imagination, stimulation, and mood-changing and Eighmey and McCord (1998) found that

personal relevance was important. Korgaonkar and Wolin (1999) found uses that included: control of information, interactive control, social escapism, social gratification and informational gratification. Kaye and Johnson (2002) established that with political websites, interactivity was the most useful factor, whereas Song et al. (2004) explored the concept of the virtual community as a driver for internet use. They concluded that audiences obtain positive outcomes from both the process of using the internet and the content they use.

The second category of studies examines the internet as having a different set of gratifications that are unique to it. For example, Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) established that perceptions, socialization, psychological characteristics and attitudes influence behaviours and motives, and can influence choices of media. Ferguson and Perse (2000) established five motivational factors for web usage: entertainment, passing time, relaxation, escape, and social information. Leung's (2013) study of users of social media, (Facebook, blogs, and forums) concluded that content generation using social media, gratified five socio-psychological needs: showing affection, venting negative feelings, gaining recognition, getting entertainment, and fulfilling cognitive needs.

With mobile and multi-screen use, audiences can be engaged in two media forms at once. In a study of how Spanish youth use multi-screens when searching for news, five gratifications were found: the desire to obtain information in real-time, social interaction, comprehension, leisure and habit (Cuesta-Cambra et al., 2021). The researchers found the desire to obtain "information in real time", predicts multiscreen behaviour when searching for news. Three factors were relevant when predicting the duration of multiscreen use: information in real time, social interaction, and leisure. The study found that adolescents used television to watch news and a second screen to use messaging applications and social platforms.

Technological developments provide audiences with different expectations for media in terms of gratifications, so they are used differently. For example, an audience's need for social interaction may mean they prefer to watch their friend's video on Instagram rather than Facebook, because they prefer the format. Sundar and Limperos (2013) state that process gratifications can change with the characteristics of the media channel. They propose other influences impacting on users within the media channel can include: modality gratifications which allow different methods of content, agency-based goals which allow all to be agents of information, navigability-based goals allow users to navigate through the media, and interactivity-based goals. For example, a user may visit a social media platform to find out information, but other activities such as joining a group are advertised to them. Rui and Stefanone (2016) state: "media do not determine but either facilitate or restrict the satisfaction of certain needs, depending on technological affordances these media provide" (p. 404).

There are circumstances that impact when a specific medium will be chosen and how audiences choose between new media and more traditional forms (Eadi, 2009). Researchers have examined three predictors of audience needs for media use: (1) demographic, (2) psychological, and (3) environmental/contextual variables. Demographic variables include age, level of education, gender, and ethnicity. Psychological variables were first considered by McGuire (1974) and categorize people based on five dimensions: (1) extroversion, (2) neuroticism, (3) openness to experience, (4) agreeableness, and (5) conscientiousness (Eadi, 2009). The third major group of predictors has been external factors such as contextual and environmental factors. For example, there may be life conditions that alter the particular uses at a particular time (Katz et al., 1974). These external factors may interact with audience personality and other traits, creating a complex picture of media use.

The foundation of the uses and gratifications theory, that audiences seek out media to fulfil their social and cognitive needs, still stands true for media use today. Researchers have shown its application to a wide range of media channels and content. Uses and gratifications can explain audiences' motives for using and selecting media and content choices (Haridakis & Rubin, 2005) and can be used to describe other psychological effects and media selection behaviours from cross-cultural contexts (Lin, 1996). As media channels become more interactive and as users become even more active, for example, more interactivity of mass media (Rubin, 2009; Sundar & Limperos, 2013), audiences will have a wider range of needs and gratifications.

2.2 Theoretical and methodological opportunities

Studies have used the uses and gratifications theory, social scientific analysis and, for the majority, quantitative research to identify users' needs and how these are met with mass media television, radio and a range of new communication technologies. A review of this research has shown there is considerable overlap in the gratifications sought and received by users. This re-affirms that the needs are audience-based and the core needs apply to all forms of mass media.

There are five strengths of this theory in its study on the uses of media. First, it gives researchers insights into the impact of audiences from media use and supports the foundations of the receiver-medium-audience model, particularly in regards to mass media. Second, it can be used to study the interface between mass media and interpersonal communication, as it also examines social and interpersonal gratifications. This dual-use is particularly applicable, as social media platforms are used for mass media and interpersonal communication. The third strength is that it informs researchers about the choices that audiences make over one media form or another, and this is useful for comparing what may

seem like similar channels (e.g. a radio vs television news story). Its fourth strength is that it allows for a broad range of outcomes and can be used to identify a range of uses and gratifications. Finally, with new technology offering online monitoring and content analysis methods, the reporting of audience needs can be improved. This allows greater insights into audience needs that may be received via self-reporting.

Over time, scholars and researchers have suggested adaptations or new developments. In some cases, audiences are not always aware of their motivations or needs of specific media and may have difficulty reporting on them. This has led to methodical research issues such as the reliance on using self-reported data, the need to acknowledge audiences' limitations of recalling their media usage motives, and any interpretation issues (Babrow, 1988).

Researchers have also questioned the highly individualistic nature of the theory, the actual impact of the media on an individual, and whether any media impact is also a result of societal and cultural practices and situations. The media system dependency theory (Loges & Ball-Rokeach, 1993), states audiences' motives for media use are impacted by interactions of social institutions and media systems. A critical approach with the class-dominant theory supports this approach, as it views the media as a projection of the view of the minority elite, which controls it. This theory holds that those with the power over the media control content and channels, can impact what people consume, that is, the audiences' media choices have already been limited before they make their choices. Similarly, the culturalist theory claims that people interact with media to create their own meanings out of the images and messages they receive.

There have also been calls by researchers to update the motives for emerging media use (Rubin, 2009; Sundar & Limperos, 2013) to make them more specific. Xu et al. (2018) discuss that theoretical models of behaviour are not universal and cultural variations may be

behind motivations. For example, in some collectivist cultures, people may not wish to use social media to increase their social network. Another example is the recommendation by Rui and Stefanone (2016) to include the need “desire for fame” relating to the audiences’ fame-seeking process with some of the social media platforms and how these behaviours can be amplified amongst homogenous groups.

2.3 Expanding the uses and gratifications theory to social media platforms

Many studies have employed the uses and gratifications theory to explore audience needs and behaviours relating to social media platforms, because of its audience-centred approach and the fulfilment of specific needs (Dhir & Tsai, 2017; Dhir et al., 2015). Ng (2016) identified five gratifications related to social media: convenience; self-presentation; enjoyment; perceived risk, trust and control; and social influences: that is, the degree to which users interact with others online and perceive their presence. Lin and Utz (2015) also found social media gratifications included the user simply being distracted, by keeping in touch with friends and family, being part of the information loop, communicating with a partner, finding new love interests, and meeting new friends. Whiting and Williams (2013) found gratifications such as social interaction, information seeking, passing time, entertainment, relaxation, and the convenience of communicating were associated with social media. Overall, studies suggest that surveillance, relaxation, information, and entertainment seeking are by far the most important gratifications sought by users of social media (Barker, 2012; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016; Tanta et al., 2014; Whiting & Williams, 2013). Surveillance was the key gratification sought by adolescents in gender social media use, followed by entertainment (Lee, 2009).

The theory has been used by researchers on specific tools within new media channels, for example, selfies, and photo-tagging (Dhir & Torsheim, 2016; Dhir & Tsai, 2017; Malik et

al., 2015) and Twitter (Chen, 2011). These studies have established that audiences use these tools to fulfil social interaction needs, such as communicating, self-expression, self-presentation, maintaining social relationships and attention and seeking (Malik et al., 2015). Also considered, are functional needs such as feedback, escape, utility and inclusion (Chen, 2011). The role of gratification factors and user experience has been used to explain users' news sharing intention on social media (Ma et al., 2011). Status seeking was the strongest motivation in predicting news sharing intention, followed by sociality, that is the individual's desire to be part of a group and belong, and information acquisition. Social media platforms offer audiences different uses and gratifications as a function of their user characteristics and depending on what social media platform audiences use (Kircaburun et al., 2020; Rathnayake & Winter, 2018). This has led to a recommendation to move away from the type of media, to classification based on content, process, social and technology (Lin et al., 2005; Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

With their use of social media platforms, audiences are moving from recipients to empowered networks and producers of their own content (Lee, 2009; Loosen & Schmidt, 2012; Sundar & Limperos, 2013). There are now unique motives that were not captured in more original general television motivation scales, such as audiences using social media for professional reasons (Quinn, 2016). Cuesta-Cambra et al. (2021) also established that audiences using multi-screens may be meeting several needs at the same time while using multiple media platforms.

More recently, uses and gratifications theory has been used for researching use on specific platforms such as Be Real (Vaterlaus et al., 2024), TikTok (Falgoust et al., 2022; Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021), Instagram (Menon, 2022), Telegram (Lou et al., 2021), and Snapchat (Punyanunt-Carter et al., 2017). It has also been used to understand the nature of the

continued use of social media platforms (Ferris et al., 2021; Hsu et al., 2015). An overview of this research on different platforms shows alignment with the foundational gratifications including socialising, entertainment, status seeking, passing time, information seeking, convenience and personal identity. Researchers have also found needs and gratifications that are based on the affordances of the specific platform (Ferris et al., 2021), for example, customisability and the aesthetics of the platform or the interactivity of the platform (Hsu et al., 2015). Despite this increase in complexity in the application of the theory to new media forms, researchers can still use it to understand the original question: why do audiences choose one media platform over another and what gratifications do they receive?

2.4 Recent use of uses and gratifications approach for news consumption

Several recent studies have used uses and gratifications to understand motivations for news consumption. Recalde et al. (2025) examined gratifications from news consumption across 23 countries and found significant variations in motivations across age groups, particularly in informational, learning, entertaining, and social gratifications. They suggested that as individuals grow older, they have more inclination towards seeking information, whereas younger individuals are more likely to be motivated for learning, entertainment, and social reasons. Tandoc and Seet (2024) examined the link between motivations for news consumption, perceived importance of news, and willingness to pay for news in Singapore. They found entertainment, socialisation and personal relevance motivations were positively related to willingness to pay for news whereas the surveillance motivation was not related to willingness to pay for news. Saeed and Ullah's (2021) study explored uses and gratifications from news usage amongst students in Pakistan. This study found cognitive and tension-free needs were the main drivers of news media consumption. There has been very little research into motivations for news consumption using the uses and gratifications theory in New

Zealand. However, it has a high proportion of people interested in news and also a high percentage of news avoiders (Myllylahti & Treadwell, 2024).

2.5 Applying uses and gratifications theory to this study

The study used news values and uses and gratifications theory as frameworks to examine people's needs that are met with news and what they do with news. Both frameworks were developed before the digital transformation of news and have continued to be used as frameworks in news research, even with the changing nature of news.

The first two articles in this study employed uses and gratifications theory to examine what audiences consider as news and actions following news consumption. The third article examined uses and gratifications theory and news values as a case study of news consumption when a celebrity death occurs. Celebrity has been a consistent category of news over time and has expanded in recent years to be in all forms of news (Dubied & Hanitzsch, 2014). Queen Elizabeth II's death was considered a celebrity death, but it had even more significance because she was New Zealand's titular head of state. The article examined how uses and gratifications and the celebrity news value can lead to media interactions and the potential to explore parasocial relationships.

The term 'parasocial' was first introduced by Horton and Wohl (1956) to describe the one-sided relationship between a spectator and performer in regards to television and radio. It is defined as "the process of developing an imaginary relationship with a mediated persona both during and after media consumption" (Brown, 2015, p. 275). Parasocial relationships are shaped by repeated media interactions between the viewer and the performer. New technologies and social media have created more opportunities for sharing content and interacting with celebrities, increasing the potential for parasocial relationships (Boyd et al., 2022). When a celebrity death occurs, people's behaviour and responses can be stimulated by

the amount of media exposure to the celebrity death (Rubin & Perse, 1987). This study explored how the responses of New Zealand focus groups align with uses and gratifications and news values and if they reflected audiences' parasocial relationships with the Queen.

2.6 News values framework

News values are a framework for determining the newsworthiness of a story and its appeal to audiences. A longitudinal study (Parks, 2019) showed that over time, journalists have had ways of determining what makes the news although formal news values were not codified until the 20th century. Focusing on newspapers and broadcast news, in 1965 Galtung and Ruge identified a set of news values as predictors of news selection and audience interest. They described 12 news values: frequency, threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite people, reference to specific individuals, and reference to negative consequences (Galtung & Ruge, 1965, pp. 70-71). Their work proposed that journalists selected events on the number, intensity, and relative weight of the individual news factors (Eilders, 2006; Ziegele & Quiring, 2013). High levels of news values increase the affective and cognitive involvement of audiences with news items and lead audiences to engage with others about news (Ziegele et al., 2018).

News values are a taxonomy to conceptualise the dimensions and characteristics of the items that resonate with audiences. This classification can assist to explain similarities and differences amongst items, in this case, why one news item has more impact than another. The news values approach can be considered a taxonomic theory (Muntermann et al., 2015) as news values can explain what is happening but do not have predictive generalizations. News values are often measured by examining news stories rather than the

process and practices of journalists in making their section decisions (Caple & Bednarek, 2013).

Many of the fundamental values have not changed, such as relevance to audiences (Vraga & Edgerly, 2023) or proximity and conflict as news values (Jacobs & van Spanje, 2023). However, scholars have suggested a review of news values to differentiate journalism from other forms of information, and to reflect audiences' changing needs and consumption habits. For example, Harcup (2020) suggests new values for journalism's role in supporting democracy and public good. These include social surveillance on behalf of citizens, monitoring of power, recording of community action and self-activity, challenging of assumptions and stereotypes, surprise and novelty, and entertainment and humour.

News values have been used as an explanation of journalists' news selections, particularly when the distribution of news was simpler e.g. print newspapers. However, new forms of news consumption, such as news via social media, news aggregators and application have disrupted the direct relationship journalist have with their audiences and have impacted the flow of the newsworthy item to the end audience. Audiences have much more influence through their interaction with news on what stories are presented and as such, the concept of news values needs to be examined from the audiences' perspective.

Scholars have investigated news values in light of audiences' news consumption habits with social media platforms and digital phone use. With digital consumption habits, audiences are no longer only consumers of news. They are also secondary transmitters of news (Singer, 2014) and can have input into future news selection via their actions, such as clicking, commenting or sharing an item (Mast & Temmerman, 2021). Studies have identified news values such as visuality, shareability and sociability (Barclay & Francis, 2024); interactivity with the use, hypertext, and multimedia – the presentation and

distribution of the news story (Steensen, 2011). Further ones are shareability of a news story and its audio-visuals (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2020), and the use of infographics (Dick, 2014). Paulussen and Van Aelst (2021) draw the distinction between news values that are criteria for: identifying news, angles for how news is treated, and the use of visual cues for news. These studies add to the news values definition because, as well as the newsworthiness of the content of the story, journalists make decisions on how and where new stories are presented (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017). The literature shows a consistency of the seminal news values over time, but increasing discussion on news factors that can be applied within new media environments (Parks, 2019).

2.7 Definitions of news

Scholars have studied what makes the news and what can be defined as news, and many different definitions have been stated. News has been defined as an event, incident, or any sort of happening that is interesting and true (Rudin & Ibbotson, 2013) Or it is said to be the interpretation of happenings (Carey, 1989), or new information (Bednarek & Caple, 2017). News can also be described by the characteristics of what can be described as news and why audiences consume certain topics or information.

At a fundamental level, news is how societies (on a local and global level) communicate. In Wahl-Jorgensen and Schmidt (2020), this definition is used to describe journalism:

Journalism provides surveillance of and information about potentially relevant events and their context; to deliver commentary, guidance and information on complex issues; to provide the means for political access, expression, and participation; to contribute to a shared consciousness; and to add as critic and watchdog to hold the powerful to account. (p.110)

The basis of journalism and news-making is the collective understanding of what makes the news and what are traditionally defined ways of consuming news. This has impacts for informed and active citizens in society, as research has shown that more interpersonal discussions about the media and higher interest in the news media, can predict higher civic engagement (Erentaitė et al., 2012).

2.8 News consumption changes

The impact of the internet since the early 1990s has significantly changed the media environment and the channels through which news and information are disseminated and consumed. In the 1980s, a news article on a topic would be consumed by many audiences, all at once, on the main news programme on television, often in the early evening. The same topic today will be consumed in many formats, including video, text, audio, podcast, infographic, meme, and even dance. Some of these items will be produced by journalists, some by other writers (not accredited as journalists), and other articles will be written by audience members and shared on their social media platforms. Audiences may also not all be informed of the same news in the same way at the same time. Audiences may not actively follow news, but consider they will be informed via their internet use, social media and online social networks. This has been described as ‘News Finds Me’ perception (Gil de Zúñiga & Cheng, 2021; Park & Kaye, 2020). Audiences may also have the practice of “news snacking”: consuming news occasionally and sporadically without devoting much time to understanding and evaluating the content (Coster Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015).

Journalism has had to adapt to these changes and find new operating models to ensure that it continues its fundamental role in society. These have included news products targeted at younger audiences, more video content, and using social media platforms. For example, many traditional news sources are presenting news in short-form videos on TikTok and

Instagram (Saks & Hopkins, 2024; Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2020) and designing news for mobile devices (Westlund, 2012). These new forms of social media journalism have been defined as “the news offering of designated social media channels intended to inform young audiences on a daily basis” (Hendrickx, 2021, p. 1822). Social journalism has been described as the fourth wave of news production, diffusion, and consumption after print, broadcast and digital forms (Hendrickx, 2023).

2.8.1 Younger audiences’ news consumption

Research shows young audiences have different news consumption habits, are moving away from traditional news media sources, and may have a different understanding of news. There have always been generational shifts in how people consume news, but there is evidence that the differentiation today is greater than in the past and may signal a transformational change in news consumption (Eddy, 2022b).

In 2024, adolescents are the first generation to grow up entirely in a digital world. Adolescence is defined as the period of transitioning from childhood to adulthood, and research has expanded the definition and timeframe of adolescence up to 25 years of age (Jaworska & MacQueen, 2015). Adolescents are in a developmental stage in which they socialize and acquire habits that will affect them later in life. Young people understand technology and know how to use it in their daily lives. While they are not a homogenous group, there are common patterns of news consumption that have emerged in research. Studies have explored the differences between traditional media and news forms on informal social media (Edgerly et al., 2018; Geers, 2020; Hendrickx, 2021). Because young people are more likely to use news notifications, they no longer need to search for news based on their interests – it comes to them. They understand traditional definitions of news (incorporating objectivity, neutrality, factuality and timeliness) and have an increasing focus on

commentators, influencers, and young news creators, especially on YouTube and TikTok (Newman et al., 2024; Swart & Broersma, 2023). Understanding young people's news consumption can assist with their longer-term civic engagement and participation (Eveland & Scheufele, 2000). News sources are likely to be more familiar with traditional media while young people will be more used to digital forms of news (Taneja et al., 2018).

To understand why these issues matter to us as a society, we need to understand mass media as a communication process. Democracy depends on participation and news provides citizens with information they need to be now about and items they need to participate in (Schudson, 2018). Mass communication is producing and transmitting messages to large numbers of people and understanding the process by which those messages are sought out, understood, and influenced by audiences. Media organisations communicate news to audiences, and audiences construct the meaning of those messages and how they subsequently act.

The way people live in their digital worlds will continue to evolve, and particularly with the use of artificial intelligence tools, it will become even more automated and personalised. To prepare for this and to ensure that we maintain journalism's role as the credible source of news in society, we need to reconsider what audiences consider news, why it matters to them, and what they do with news. In this work, we also need to analyse these areas by age cohorts, to establish any age-cohort-specific actions. This research examines these issues in the New Zealand media environment.

The focus of this research was to understand more about differences in news consumption for older and younger audiences, in particular, look for the motivations of younger and older audiences in their news consumption and the characteristics of news that meet their needs. Research has shown that these two groups have big differences in their

consumption habits. For example, in Australia, the majority of Gen Z obtains their news from social media or searching via key words rather than accessing news websites directly (Park et al., 2023). Understanding what audiences recognize as news and what they do with it can provide theoretical definitions of news and support communication and journalism researchers. This study took place at a time of high media coverage of Queen Elizabeth II's death in September 2022 and provides a unique opportunity to examine these issues.

2.9 The New Zealand news media environment

New Zealand is a Western democracy with approximately five million people. It has several news organisations with large audience share (including government-owned television and radio) and many small independent outlets (Hope et al., 2023). The mainstream news products in New Zealand generally follow the conventions of journalism in the United States and the United Kingdom (Phelan et al., 2012). Unique to New Zealand has been growth in Māori news sources, and guidance on inclusion of Māori worldviews and language in other media products (Hanusch, 2013; Hanusch, 2014; Rankine et al. 2022). It also has a growing number of Pacific media (Ross, 2017) serving Pacific communities.

The trends in the New Zealand media environment are consistent with comparable countries (Myllylahti & Treadwell, 2024; Newman et al., 2024). Media organisations are facing increased competition from international news sources, declining revenues from advertising, and significant changes to audiences' news consumption habits (Ministry of Culture and Heritage, 2022). Locally-produced media has lost significant audiences to the Meta and Google platforms, and better-funded international news (Beattie et al., 2024). For the last two decades New Zealand news media has experienced funding crises, reduction in staffing and a reduction in available outlets for audiences and fewer viewpoints (Ashwell,

2016; Loan et al., 2022). Throughout this change there has been minimal market regulation and low level of investment in public media (Thompson, 2019).

These items are impacting the nature and form of the news media. The number of enterprises working in newspaper publishing declined by 32 percent between 2000 and 2020, and journalist occupations decreased by half between 2006 and 2018 from 4284 to 2061 (Radio New Zealand, 2024). In 2024 there were reductions to the formal news and current affairs programmes on television. These crises for journalism have been described by Deacon et al. (2024) as issues of reaching audiences, having adequate resourcing, and maintaining the reputation of journalism. New Zealand is considered to have a less secure funding and a weaker regulatory system to support local news, when compared to other comparable democratic countries (Neff & Pickard, 2024).

According to the survey carried out by the government agency NZ On Air, 2023 was the first year when New Zealanders were spending more time using digital media than traditional media (NZ On Air, 2023). This survey of news consumers had age and life stage as the only consistently strong differentiators of media behaviour. Previous surveys have shown a younger generation among whom digital media dominates, a middle aged audience more divided between traditional and digital media, and a much older audience among whom traditional media is still most popular. The 2023 and 2024 surveys noted that the impact of age on media choice was diminishing as more older audiences use digital media and reduce the use of traditional media (NZ On Air, 2024; NZ On Air, 2023). The survey found the Government-owned television company TVNZ was the most trusted source for news and social media was not identified as a trusted source for news. New Zealand was suitable for this study because participants were exposed to the same news media environment and the focus groups could explore reasons behind shifting news consumption habits.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Overall research goal

The overall goal of this research is to understand more about news consumption in New Zealand, and how people use news to assist with their daily lives. The research uses a lens of uses and gratifications theory as the foundation for exploring audiences' needs for media use and how these needs have been met by mass media channels.

Studies using the theory initially used traditional media channels, but the use of the theory over the past 20 years has been applied to study technological communication platforms (Charney & Greenberg, 2002; Kaye & Johnson, 2002; Mukherji et al., 1998; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Ruggiero, 2000; Svennevig, 2000). These studies have shown the concepts are still relevant to these new communication forms. In fact, the concept of active users is even more important with these communication channels because of the greater control over what audiences interact with, when, and how (Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

Audiences have an abundance of information at their fingertips and are making daily choices about their media consumption to fulfil their needs (Dhir & Torsheim, 2016; Dhir & Tsai, 2017; Malik et al., 2015). A particular audience who is exposed to a wide range of information and news is young people. They use mobile devices, consume less traditional news, prefer to obtain news from social media, and are active participants in producing and disseminating news (Ku et al., 2019; Lowenstein-Barkai & Lev-on, 2021). Young people use their social platforms to meet their high needs for social integration and entertainment and also recognise news on these channels that meets their needs. This research explores the concept of news to help us understand news consumption for different age cohorts, using the theoretical approaches of news values and uses and gratifications theory.

3.2 Research questions

This study used focus groups and media diaries in September 2022 to explore information that could be used to answer the following research questions, within the New Zealand environment:

- What news sources are used by news audiences?
- What is news, for young and older news audiences?
- What are the different news values between old and young generations of news consumers?
- What needs are being met with news?
- What actions do New Zealanders take after consuming news?
- What needs are being met with these actions?
- What are the differences in these actions between younger and older age groups?
- How did older and younger groups experience the Queen's death through media?

3.3 Methodological approach

For this study qualitative methods were used, specifically focus groups and diaries, alongside open coding, to explore the concepts of news and enable a broader discussion. Conventional qualitative methods were chosen to obtain detailed information about people's news consumption, explore the existing theories on news consumption and explore any gaps in these theories (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2019).

Data was collected on demographics (age, sex, ethnicity, and level of education), time spent on news sources each day, and the most used media source. Each person was asked to complete a media diary and participate in a focus group. The mixed-methods approach was chosen to collect daily data on news consumption and explore this in the focus groups. The New Zealand environment provided a common context for the participants' discussion.

3.4 Participants and procedures

Twenty-five people participated in focus groups to explore their definition of news, the news sources they used, what they do with news, and any emotional responses they had to news. There were five focus groups of five participants and each group had a mix of participants aged 26 and under, and those over 26 years. Focus groups were chosen to explore more about participants' thoughts and preferences for their news consumption and to ensure that participants recalled all forms of news they consumed. The discussion in the groups also drew out further participation that would have not been possible with tools such as an online survey.

Participants were recruited by a research company, and were selected after a screening question to ensure that they did consume news regularly. This was an advantage as it meant that participants were more prepared for the focus groups. The participants all had participated in other forms of research (but not on this topic). Their previous experience meant they were familiar with online focus groups and discussing issues with people they didn't know. The recruitment ensured a range of participants across ages, gender, geographical locations and ethnicities. They were given a small incentive to participate in the study and sent reminders during the week of the diary data collection.

The participants were 13 men and 12 women, with nine participants aged 26 years and under, and 16 participants aged over 26 years. The age of 26 was chosen as the cut-off because people aged between 18 and 26 are in transition from home to adult life and they are a key group for forming media consumption habits (Antunovic et al., 2018). The ethnicity makeup was 15 New Zealand European, one British, three Asian, four Māori, and two Pasifika. All information was collected in line with the appropriate privacy and ethical standards and the study complied with appropriate university codes of ethics. The facilitator

of each focus group ensured that all participants were briefed on the nature of the research and what data was being collected.

3.5 Framework and methods

Participants kept a diary of their news consumption in an online spreadsheet in hourly units from 6am Monday, September 5, 2022 until 11.59pm Sunday, 11 September 2022.

They recorded what news they used, when, and whether they took action as a result of news.

They listed the time, source, and topic of their news consumption and identified three items each day that they considered news. Diaries are often used for this research to ensure reporting of news consumption and to provide context for the focus group discussion. The diaries assisted with recall of participants' media consumption. Two participants were unable to complete the diaries due to changed personal circumstances but attended the focus groups.

Participants took part in online five-person focus groups for 1.5 hours within two weeks of the diary collection week. The facilitator covered what participants considered news, where they got news from, and what actions they took as a result of the news, and what emotions they experienced. All interviews of the focus groups were recorded and transcribed. Using content analysis, the results were sorted into audiences' definitions of news, actions from news, and feelings/emotions from news consumption and reactions to Queen Elizabeth II's death.

3.6 Process of analysis

Data was collected on demographics (age, sex, ethnicity, and level of education), time spent on news sources each day, and the most used media source. Each person was asked to complete a media diary and participate in a focus group. The mixed-methods approach was chosen to collect daily data on news consumption and explore this in the focus groups. The New Zealand environment provides a common context for the participants' discussion. All

information was collected in line with the appropriate privacy and ethical standards and the study complied with appropriate university codes of ethics.

The diary information was collated by person, time and date, and news source. Each item was listed against the specified time. If more than one source was listed, these were listed at separate times. News sources used were counted as units (for one mention in an hour) and were categorized into traditional media New Zealand, traditional media international, social media, and new media and units were counted across the week. Traditional sources were formal branded journalism news sources, in New Zealand and overseas. Social media included platforms where people could connect and comment, and new media were other forms of news that didn't fit into the other categories, like YouTube and Telegram. There were occasions where participants accessed traditional news sources within these platforms; however the aim of the research was to identify the primary place that people went to for news. Each time was considered as a unit, and the units were totalled for each person, each news source, and for each day. With the news sources by person and day, these were converted to percentages for each person, and then averaged over the week, to normalize the data and manage a participant's strong liking for a news source. Items were only analysed if there was a specific news source or type mentioned.

3.7 News consumption results

Participants listed 63 news sources in their diaries, including traditional news sources such as television news, radio, printed newspapers, and major news websites; social media platforms, video platforms, podcasts and other online services. Of these sources 11 were overseas-based news websites, potentially more than usual due to the coverage of the Queen Elizabeth II's death. Table 2 shows the dominance of traditional news sources, with 72% of the total sources from traditional journalistic news sources in New Zealand and overseas.

Table 2: Units of consumption, by news sources category and age

News source category	Under 26 – total number of units	Under 26 – percentage	26 and over – total number of units	26 and over – percentage	Total units	Percentage of total units
New media	35	21%	24	5%	59	9%
Social media	59	35%	58	12%	117	18%
Traditional International	11	6%	45	10%	56	9%
Traditional New Zealand	65	38%	351	73%	416	64%
Total	170	100%	478	100%	648	100%

When analysed by age, this shows a difference in those participants over 26 using traditional news sources (83%) compared to those aged 26 and under (51%). It also shows a greater interest in using new media forms (e.g. Google News, YouTube) for those aged 26 and under (18%) compared to 5% for older participants. The dominance of traditional news sources may have been impacted by the coverage of the death of the Queen Elizabeth II or reflect the audience coverage of the large media outlets in New Zealand.

Table 3 shows the top five news sources overall were: Stuff.co.nz, TVNZ News, Facebook, New Zealand Herald website and NewsHub news. This was very similar to Myllylahti and Treadwell's (2023) study of news consumption, where the top five news sources were the same but ordered differently (NewsHub news ahead of NZ Herald website). Of the top ten news sources, seven were New Zealand-based media, with the additions of Facebook (number 3), YouTube (number 8), and Google News (number 9).

Table 3: Top ten most-visited news sources, by units of consumption

News source	Type of outlet	Number of uses - Participants aged 26 and under	Number of uses - Participants aged over 26	Total numbers of uses	Percentage of total uses in top 10
Stuff.co.nz	Traditional New Zealand media	13	66	79	17%
TVNZ news	Traditional New Zealand media	15	59	74	16%
Facebook	Social media	31	41	72	16%
NZ Herald website	Traditional New Zealand media	10	50	60	13%
NewsHub news	Traditional New Zealand media	13	31	44	10%
Radio NZ	Traditional New Zealand media	8	35	43	9%
Newstalk ZB	Traditional New Zealand media	0	31	31	7%
YouTube	New media	16	7	23	5%
Google news	New media	2	17	19	4%
Instagram	Social media	5	9	14	3%
Total		113	346	459	100%

3.8 Thematic analysis

3.8.1 News meanings

The focus of this study is on the definition of news. From the focus groups, 203 comments were collated and categories emerged as the data was coded. If a comment had two characteristics (for example, news was relevant and timely), it was included in two categories. A second analysis was completed on characteristics identified, that impacted the choice of news source. Instead of being counted individually, the comments were consolidated back into the individual participants to establish how many people raised the issue as a consideration in their choice of news source.

Analysis of these news characteristics reveals similarities to the existing taxonomies of news values of Brighton and Foy (2007) and Harcup and O'Neill (2017). Over time, news has maintained its characteristics of relevance, emotional news (good/bad news), topicality, entertainment, and celebrity/power elite and magnitude. Regarding the analysis on news values, there are four themes of news considered: a social connection, factual, relevant and topical. Together, they made up almost 70 percent of the comments from participants aged under 26 years and 44 percent of the comments from those over 26. The three areas where the older age cohort had a higher percentage of comments than the younger cohort were: celebrities/elite persons, local news, and news that elicited an emotional response.

3.8.2 Actions from news

The results were sorted into audiences' definitions of news, actions from news, and feelings/emotions from news consumption using content analysis. From the focus groups 112 comments on actions from news were collated and categories emerged as the data was coded. If a comment had two characteristics (for example, news was shared in several ways), it was included in two categories. The comments were re-checked against each participant to see who many actions they took. Finally, the comments were also sorted based on the needs of the uses and gratifications theory: cognitive needs, affective needs, personal integrative needs, social integrative needs, and escape needs or cathartic needs.

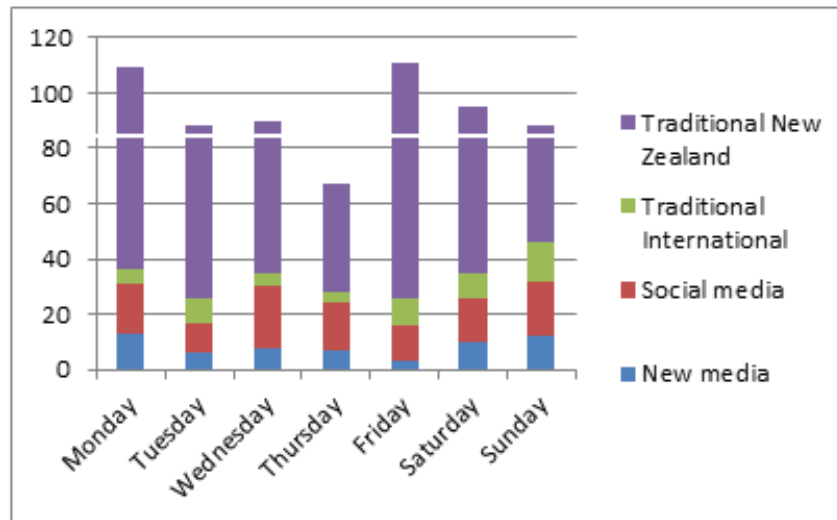
Table 4: Overall actions by participants, by age category

Category of action	Number of comments from participants 26 and under	Percentage of total comments from participants 26 and under	Number of comments from participants aged over 26	Percentage of total comments from participants aged over 26	Total	Percentage of total comments
Seek more information	8	19%	14	22%	22	20%
Discuss in person with friends and family	10	21%	12	18%	22	20%
Discuss with other people	8	17%	10	15%	18	16%
Share online publicly	7	15%	11	17%	18	16%
Make a decision	4	8%	7	11%	11	10%
Share online with friends and family	4	8%	7	11%	11	10%
Read the comments after an article	6	13%	3	5%	9	8%
Contribute to comments after an article	0	0%	1	2%	1	1%
Total actions (number of comments)	47	100%	63	100%	112	100%

3.8.3 Responses to coverage of Queen Elizabeth II’s death

The study showed high news consumption on Friday and increased consumption of international news sources from Friday to Sunday (Figure 1). The focus of this study was on the comments in relation to the media coverage of Queen Elizabeth II’s death. These comments were collated and categorised into four themes: parasocial relationships, reminiscing, and knowledge acquisition. These categories were also analysed by age and gender. Over 70 percent of the comments came from the older cohort, which reflected their lifetime exposure to the Queen through traditional news media.

Figure 3: Units of consumption, over the week, by category of media



3.8.4 Connections of the three articles

The three articles from this study add to the theoretical understanding of news, journalism, and audience responses. The first article explores the needs that people have for news and the characteristics they are seeking in news. This article aligns with the assumptions of the uses and gratifications that audiences will make choices on media based on their needs and that they will change media if these needs are not being met.

The second article examines what we do with news, and shows that people are likely to take actions from news. These actions are mainly in regards to building social connections or learning about their environment. The article suggests that audiences often seek news not just for information, but as a central part of existing in social circles. With the increase of online sharing this article also suggests that the news consumption is not only a journalist to audience relationship. It has the added dimension of the audience sharing this information widely within their networks (both online and in person), and often with their comments on the news item. This sharing of news can build social connections with families, friends, and networks of people of similar interest. The sharing also includes phatic sharing, where news

is shared but no reciprocal response is necessarily required from the person receiving the information.

The third article uses the theory of uses and gratifications and the news value of celebrity to explore responses to the media coverage of the death of Queen Elizabeth II in September 2022. Celebrity deaths have significant impacts because of the relationships people have with public figures, established through news and other media forms. Overall, participants over 26 years had more affective responses, and those under 26 years had more cognitive responses. With the older cohort, some participants had experienced more media interactions with Queen Elizabeth II, had stronger grief responses and connection to her but it was hard to determine the extent of any parasocial relationships. Celebrity as a news value continues to resonate with audiences, leading to more media interactions. In this case, there were strong reactions from participants, including sadness and a sense of loss, indicating a connection with the Queen. However, there was not enough data to fully indicate the extent of any parasocial relationships.

Chapter 4: Original articles

The three articles in this study explored news consumption. For each I have listed why the journal was chosen and included a copy of the article. The first two have been published and the third article is under consideration for publication.

4.1 Article I

Anderson, K. J. (2024). What is news? Exploring differences in how younger and older cohorts use news in today's media environment. *Communication Research and Practice*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2024.2344997>

This journal was chosen for its target audience, areas of interest and its relevance to the New Zealand and Australia research communities. *Communication Research and Practice* publishes research that contributes to international scholarship and practice in the field of communication. The journal aims to be broadly inclusive and interdisciplinary, with a particular interest in fields of: digital media and internet studies, organisational and interpersonal communication journalism, public relations and advertising, intercultural communication, international communication and political communication.

The journal is supported by the Australian and New Zealand Communication Association (ANZCA). Its focus is on research from scholars in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and the Asia-Pacific region, and research by international scholars if it is relevant to the Asia-Pacific region. The journal has an H-index rating of 16 on Scimago Journal and Country Rank and has a C rating on the Australian Business Deans Council ranking.



What is news? Exploring differences in how younger and older cohorts use news in today's media environment

Kirsty J. Anderson

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What is news? Exploring differences in how younger and older cohorts use news in today's media environment

Kirsty J. Anderson

School of Communication, Journalism, and Marketing, Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand

ABSTRACT

This study investigated how younger and older cohorts used news to meet their needs. It used diaries and focus groups with 25 New Zealanders to examine their news sources, characteristics of news they valued, and factors influencing their consumption. Using content analysis, this information was analysed through the lenses of news values and uses and gratifications theory. The findings showed news maintained a critical role in giving people information they wanted to know. Younger participants spent more than half of their time consuming news from non-traditional news sources and valued timeliness and shareability of news. Older participants generally used traditional news sources and had greater interest in elite persons, local news, and news that elicited emotion. Participants emphasised news credibility, suggesting veracity and live news are potential new news values. However, this study suggests personalised news consumption will disrupt the direct journalist/audience relationship and impact understanding of news value frameworks.

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Content analysis; focus groups; uses and gratifications; news values

News is critical to understanding our environment and participating in society yet it can have many meanings. News is perceived as a trusted source for factual and true information predominantly from the journalism industry (Park, Fisher, Flew, & Dulleck, 2020) and has gained special status for its role in informing citizens of what they need to know (Rantanen, 2009; Vraga & Edgerly, 2023). However, this status is under threat as new forms of news emerge and audiences' interactions with news change.

There is now a significant amount of news available at anytime, anywhere, and in multiple formats, giving audiences more control over what they consume and when. News coverage has become contemporaneous, giving commentary on events as they occur in real time (Karlsson, 2011; Sheller, 2015). News expectations have changed; younger generations have grown up used to digital media and are highly personalised and mobile news consumers (Fedeli & Matsa, 2018; Harcup, 2023; Newman, Fletcher, Eddy, Robertson, & Nielsen, 2023). As audiences use social media for other purposes they are increasingly using it as their main source of news and to engage in discussion, leading to multi-faceted news consumption (Choi, 2016; Haw, 2020).

CONTACT Kirsty J. Anderson kirsty.anderson@swa.govt.nz

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Audiences generally trust in traditional news to provide credible and factual information (Hermida, 2015; Tsfati & Ariely, 2014). However, the growth of 'fake news' (potentially misleading information) and the speed of digital content distribution can impact on audiences' perceived levels of trust, as journalists compete to produce timely and verified information (Hermida, 2015). Audiences with low levels of trust tend to prefer non-mainstream news sources (Fletcher & Park, 2017; Park et al., 2020) and selective news consumption can further erode trust of traditional media. As audiences have more choice and control over their news consumption, they may question the veracity of news, become overwhelmed, or intentionally avoid news altogether (de Bruin, Vliegthart, Kruikemeier, & de Haan, 2024; Park, 2019).

There is a research gap in understanding the motivations of younger and older audiences in their news consumption and the particular characteristics of news that meets their needs. Understanding what audiences recognise as news and what they do with it can provide theoretical definitions of news and support communication and journalism researchers. It can better connect audiences to news, making them more informed about issues that are important to them (Edgerly, 2022). This study took place at a time of high media coverage of Queen Elizabeth II's death in September 2022, and as such, provides a unique opportunity to examine these issues.

This study used news values theory and uses and gratification theory as frameworks for analysing perceptions of news. News values theory describes the characteristics of news and the criteria that underlie judgements about what makes the news. Uses and gratifications theory examines how audiences use mass media to meet their needs and receive gratifications (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011, p. 213). Both theories were developed before the digital transformation of news and have been applied to new forms of media. This study explores whether they are still useful in our understanding of news, and whether they can be used to identify news consumption differences between younger and older audiences.

Review of the literature

News is considered to be information about an event that is interesting, true, current and important (Bednarek, 2016; Bednarek & Caple, 2017; Carey, 1989). It provides vital information and maintains social and cultural contexts (Alexander, 2006; Bird & Dardenne, 1988; Shoemaker, 1996). More formally, news is factual and legitimate information produced by journalists as news products (Bogart, 1981; Schudson, 2001). Audiences can distinguish news from other types of information (Edgerly & Vraga, 2019). When news is seen to be propaganda, advertising or a political view not based on facts audiences may use the term 'fake news' to distinguish it from other news (Tong, Gill, Li, Valenzuela, & Rojas, 2020). News value theory is a framework for determining the newsworthiness of a story and its appeal to audiences (Koch, 1990). A longitudinal study (Park, 2019) showed that over time, journalists have had ways of determining what makes the news but formal news values were not codified until the 20th century. Focusing on newspapers and broadcast news, in 1965 Galtung and Ruge identified a set of news values as predictors of news selection and audience interest. They described 12 news values: frequency, threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite people,

reference to specific individuals, and reference to negative consequences (Galtung & Ruge, 1965, pp. 70–71). The theory proposed that journalists selected events based on the number, the intensity, and the relative weight of the individual news factors (Ziegele & Quiring, 2013).

Since this seminal study news values have continued to be re-defined and modified to the changing media environment. Harcup and O'Neill (2001) proposed updated values: the power elite, celebrity, entertainment, surprise, bad news, good news, magnitude, relevance, follow-up, and a story that fits the news organisation's agenda. Brighton and Foy (2007) suggested news values are 'often intangible, informal, almost unconscious elements' (p. 1) and proposed seven new news values: relevance, topicality, composition, expectation, unusualness, worth, and external influences (p. 26). A further study by Harcup and O'Neill (2017) resulted in a new set of news values: exclusivity, bad news, conflict, surprise, audio-visuals, shareability, entertainment, drama, follow-up, the power elite, relevance, magnitude, celebrity, good news, and the news organisation's agenda (p. 1482). Bednarek, Caple, and Huan (2021) examined news values in the context of the wider news distribution and suggested four perspectives: the material perspective of the event, the cognitive perspectives of the journalist, the social perspectives of the journalist, and the discursive perspective: how images and text are used. Kristensen and Bro (2023) suggest the choice of news article has led to new news values such as measuring audience experience, measuring audience behaviour (concepts of shareability of news) and the expected algorithmic behaviour, meaning the article continues to achieve more impact.

Another way of examining newsworthiness, proposed by Shoemaker and Cohen (2005), focused on concepts of deviance and social significance as separate predictors of newsworthiness. Deviance refers to a characteristic of people, ideas, or events that sets them apart from others in their society. Social significance refers to the impact on a social system. If an item contains both, it results in an accentuated level of newsworthiness. The four elements of social significance include economic, cultural, public, and political dimensions, and the three elements of deviance include statistical, social change, and normative. News values in the social significance dimension include importance, impact, consequence, or interest. The deviance dimension includes news values of novelty, oddity, conflict, controversy, and sensationalism (Armstrong, McAdams, & Cain, 2015).

News values need to be considered within the current environment of an abundance of news, societal change, globalisation, and ongoing technological changes and their link to audiences' selection and retention of news (Eilders, 2006). Audience characteristics such as age, sex, or cultural identity may also have an impact on what audiences consider to be news.

Uses and gratifications theory focuses on audience need

Uses and gratifications theory proposes audiences are motivated to choose media to meet their specific needs and to obtain gratifications such as surveillance, information seeking, and keeping up with others (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974; Katz, Haas, & Gurevitch, 1973; McQuail, Blumler, & Brown, 1972). The categories of needs include: cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and escape or cathartic (Katz et al., 1973). The theory was developed in the traditional media environment and has been used to study new forms of media. The differences in the current media environment are that

audiences are exposed to large amounts of news, they can use tools to automate consumption based on their interest (Bastian, Helberger, & Makhortykh, 2021; Martens, De Wolf, De Marez, & Berendt, 2023) and they can consume information from multiple sources simultaneously (Pentina & Tarafdar, 2014; Tallam, 2021). Audiences can produce their own news, participate in a news story or online discussions, and influence future editorial decisions by clicking, liking, sharing, and commenting on news (Bergström & Belfrage, 2018). Audiences can control what news they receive and how they distribute and share it. Sharing news via social media channels increases the responsiveness and immediacy of the distribution of information, significantly changing news consumption when compared to consumption from traditional media sources (Lasica, 2003; Singer, 2011). These activities increase the role of news as a social activity and allow audiences to build their own repertoire of news sources (Lowenstein-Barkai & Lev-On, 2021; Picone, 2016).

The changes in audience participation can influence the development of news and newsworthiness (Domingo, 2019; Paulussen, 2016; Singer, 2014) and have led to additional audience needs. These include: modality (different forms of content), author agency to share content, interactivity, and increasing navigation to find news of interest (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Journalists' understanding of audience motivations for news can assist with understanding these new forms of audience participation (Meijer & Kormelink, 2021; Ruggiero, 2000) and how to produce news within this environment.

Current themes in media consumption

The relevance of the news values framework and uses and gratifications theory need to be considered in the modern news environment. For example, have new news values emerged from digital news and have others disappeared? How have news uses and gratifications changed, and are there differences among audience cohorts? Researchers have shown young people's interest in traditional media sources is declining, and their news consumption on social media and new forms of media is increasing (Bengtsson & Johansson, 2020; Notley, Dezuanni, Zhong, & Howden, 2017; Swart, 2023). The 2022 Digital News Report stated 39% of 18–24-year-olds use social media as their main source of news (Eddy, 2022). The 2023 Digital News Report showed younger people preferred searching and news aggregators over news websites (Newman et al., 2023). Younger audiences consume less news, use mobile devices more for news and often consume news on more than one device (Lowenstein-Barkai & Lev-On, 2021).

In regard to news characteristics, young people were more likely to be interested in timeliness, items of personal interest, necessary information, and entertaining information or opinions (Armstrong et al., 2015; Galan, Osserman, Parker, & Taylor, 2019; Papathanassopoulos et al., 2013). Younger audiences also want to see information about and relevant to their social group as it increases its 'news-ness' (Vraga & Edgerly, 2023). Patterns of news consumption change as the news environment changes and as consumer needs develop. There have always been generational differences in news consumption, as audiences' needs for news change throughout life and because audiences often form media consumption habits in their late teens and early 20s (Antunovic, Parsons, & Cooke, 2018; Meijer & Kormelink, 2021). However, the 2022 Digital News Report (Eddy, 2022) suggests these differences are becoming

more fundamental, with younger people (those aged 18–35) becoming more casual and less loyal news users.

With the increasing use of video, new technologies, and social media, audiences have a greater need to see information about events as they happen (Ilan, 2021). Ephemeral social media content can lead to positive immediacy gratifications, including a sense of presence and an experience of reality (Omar, 2014). As live content has become more popular on these platforms, audiences expect live coverage of news (Tandoc et al., 2018). Live content can also be linked to the issue of trust and authenticity in news. Studies have shown trust in news is generally lower among those who use social media for news and the level of trust depends on how people find news on social media, whether intentionally or accidentally, and their ability to recognise the source of the message (Kalogeropoulos, Suiter, Udriș, & Eisenegger, 2019; Newman et al., 2021; Park & Lee, 2023; Park, Fisher, McGuinness, Lee, & McCallum, 2021). Research by Fletcher and Park (2017) showed that in 11 countries, a preference for non-traditional news sources (digital outlets, blogs, or social media) was found to be associated with low levels of trust in news.

This study used New Zealand audiences to explore these themes in news consumption. New Zealand is a Western-style democracy with a population of around five million people. New Zealanders have a high interest in news and are consuming less news from traditional media and more from digital media (Ministry of Culture and Heritage, 2022; Myllylahti & Treadwell, 2023). A NZ On Air survey (2021) showed TVNZ News (television news) was the most widely used and trusted news source, followed by Stuff.co.nz (news website), NZ Herald (news website and newspaper), Radio NZ (radio), and Three NewsHub (television news). Since 2020 general trust in news has declined from 53% to 42% and New Zealand has a higher percentage of news avoiders than other comparable countries (Myllylahti & Treadwell, 2023). New Zealand was suitable for this study because diary data entry and focus group studies could be held in a similar media context, while still providing individual perspectives on characteristics of news. The results could also indicate reasons for the lowering levels of trust in news and increasing news avoidance within a specific context.

Research questions

The technological and societal changes in news have the potential to change audiences' understanding of news and their motivations for seeking out news. Audiences are consuming an increasing amount of news from multiple sources, and may find it difficult to find news that meets their needs. There is a research gap in understanding the motivations of younger and older audiences in their news consumption and the particular characteristics of news that meets their needs. The aim of this research is to better understand how news is defined, whether the characteristics of news need to be reconsidered, and what differences exist in the characteristics of news consumption between younger and older audiences. This study uses a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis to explore, within the New Zealand environment, the following research questions:

RQ1: What news sources are used by news audiences?

RQ2: What is news, for young and older news audiences?

RQ3: What are the different news values between old and young generations of news consumers?

RQ4: What needs are being met with news?

Method

Participants and procedures

Quantitative methods are commonly used to study news values and uses and gratifications as they can generate discussion and gain audiences' meanings on concepts (Antunovic et al., 2018; Lunt & Livingstone, 1996). For this study qualitative methods were used, specifically focus groups and diaries, alongside open coding, to explore the concepts of news and enable a broader discussion. Conventional qualitative methods were chosen to obtain detailed information about people's news consumption, explore the existing theories on news consumption and explore any gaps in these theories (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2019).

Twenty-five people participated in focus groups to explore their definition of news, the news sources they use, what they do with news, and any emotional responses they had to news. Participants were recruited by a research company, and all had participated in other forms of research (but not on this topic). Their previous experience meant they were used to online focus groups and discussing issues with people they didn't know. The recruitment ensured a range of participants across ages, gender, geographical locations and ethnicities. They were given a small incentive to participate in the study and sent reminders during the week of the diary data collection.

Data was collected on demographics (age, sex, ethnicity, and level of education), time spent on news sources each day, and the most used media source. Each person was asked to complete a media diary and participate in a focus group. The mixed-methods approach was chosen to collect daily data on news consumption and explore this in the focus groups. The New Zealand environment provides a common context for the participants' discussion. The participants were 13 men and 12 women, with nine participants aged 26 years and under, and 16 participants aged over 26 years. The age of 26 was chosen as the cut-off because people aged between 18 and 26 are in transition to adult life and they are a key group for forming media consumption habits (Antunovic et al., 2018; Valenzuela, Bachmann, & Aguilar, 2019). The ethnicity makeup was 15 New Zealand European, one British, three Asian, four Māori, and two Pasifika. All information was collected in line with the appropriate privacy and ethical standards and the study complied with appropriate university codes of ethics.

Participants kept a diary of their news consumption in an online spreadsheet in hourly units from 6 am Monday, 5 September 2022 until 11.59 pm Sunday, 11 September 2022. They recorded what news they used, when, and whether they took action as a result of news. They noted the time, source, and topic of their news consumption. They also identified three items each day that they considered news.

As this led to data on both news topics and news sources, this information was not categorised. The weakness of diaries is participants' ability to recall all their activities. In this case, many of the participants were habitual news consumers and could recall the main sources and topics during the week. The diaries provided data to assist participants' recall during the focus groups. Two participants were unable to complete the diaries due to changed personal circumstances but attended the focus groups.

The diary information was collated by person, time and date, and news source. Each item was listed against the specified time. If more than one source was listed, these were listed at separate times. News sources used were counted as units (for one mention in an hour) and were categorised into traditional media New Zealand, traditional media international, social media, and new media and units were counted across the week. Traditional sources were formal branded journalism news sources, in New Zealand and overseas. Social media included platforms where people could connect and comment, and new media were other forms of news that didn't fit into the other categories like YouTube and Telegram. There were occasions where participants accessed traditional news sources within these platforms; however the aim of the research was to identify the primary place that people went to for news. Each time was considered as a unit, and the units were totalled for each person, each news source, and for each day. With the news sources by person and day, these were converted to percentages for each person, and then averaged over the week, to normalise the data and manage a participant's strong liking for a news source. Items were only analysed if there was a specific news source or type mentioned.

Participants took part in online five-person focus groups for 1.5 hours within two weeks of the diary collection week. The facilitator covered what participants considered news, where they got news from, and what actions they took as a result of the news, and what emotions they experienced. All interviews of the focus groups were recorded and transcribed. Using content analysis, the results were sorted into audiences' definitions of news, actions from news, and feelings/emotions from news consumption. The focus of this study is on the definition of news. From the focus groups, 203 comments were collated and categories emerged as the data was coded. If a comment had two characteristics (for example, news was relevant and timely), it was included in two categories. A second analysis was completed on characteristics identified that impacted the choice of news source. Instead of being counted individually, the comments were consolidated back into the individual participants to establish how many people raised the issue as a consideration in their choice of news source.

Findings

News sources used by New Zealanders

The first research question explored what news sources were used by participants. They listed 63 news sources and 648 units of consumption over the week. Of the 23 participants, 22 consumed news on at least six out of seven days. The format of news was: 56% online news sources (including social media, videos and podcasts), 25% television, 16% radio, 2% newspapers, and 1% news from other people.

Table 1. Units of consumption, by news sources category and age.

News source category	Under 26 – total number of units	Under 26 – percentage	26 and over – total number of units	26 and over – percentage	Total units	Percentage of total units
New media	35	21%	24	5%	59	9%
Social media	59	35%	58	12%	117	18%
Traditional International	11	6%	45	10%	56	9%
Traditional New Zealand	65	38%	351	73%	416	64%
Total	170	100%	478	100%	648	100%

When the units of consumption were analysed by the media category (Table 1), 73% were traditional New Zealand and overseas journalistic news sources, 18% were social media, and 9% were new media sources. A breakdown by age cohort showed more than half (56%) of the news consumption by the younger cohort was of non-traditional news sources. The units of traditional news sources (New Zealand and overseas) used by those aged under 26 was 44%, compared to 83% for those aged 26 and older. The units of social media sources used by those aged under 26 was 35% and the units of new media sources (e.g. Google News, YouTube) was 21%. This compares to 12% and 5% for the older cohort, respectively.

Analysis of units of consumption by news source (Table 2) showed the top five news sources were: news website Stuff.co.nz, television news TVNZ News, Facebook, news website New Zealand Herald, and television news NewsHub. The similarity of these results to Myllylahti and Treadwell's (2023) study (which had the same top five news sources but had NewsHub ahead of the New Zealand Herald website) reinforces what we know about news sources New Zealanders use and shows this group is broadly representative of the New Zealand population. Social media and new media ranked number 3 (Facebook), number 8 (YouTube), number 9 (Google News) and number 10 (Instagram). Out of this top 10 source list, traditional media sources make up 72% (by units of consumption), social media sources 19% and new media 9%.

Table 2. Top 10 most-visited news sources, by units of consumption, from participants' diaries.

News source	Type of outlet	Number of uses – Participants aged 26 and under	Number of uses – Participants aged over 26	Total numbers of uses	Percentage of total uses in top 10
Stuff.co.nz	Traditional New Zealand media	13	66	79	17%
TVNZ news	Traditional New Zealand media	15	59	74	16%
Facebook	Social media	31	41	72	16%
NZ Herald website	Traditional New Zealand media	10	50	60	13%
NewsHub news	Traditional New Zealand media	13	31	44	10%
Radio NZ	Traditional New Zealand media	8	35	43	9%
Newstalk ZB	Traditional New Zealand media	0	31	31	7%
YouTube	New media	16	7	23	5%
Google news	New media	2	17	19	4%
Instagram	Social media	5	9	14	3%
Total		113	346	459	100%

When asked about their most frequently used news source, seven out of the nine younger participants named a social media platform and the older group cited radio, television and news websites. Usage of traditional New Zealand and overseas media sources increased on Friday, Saturday and Sunday with the coverage of Queen Elizabeth II's death.

Several participants did not search specifically for news but used applications and notifications from news sites. One participant, a 23-year-old female, described notifications as an easier way of consuming news:

I never think, 'I am going to see what is happening in news'. I'll pull out my phone and go on Facebook, and it's for other reasons. And then it pops up and gets my attention. So I'll click it, but I don't seek the news. It comes on the newsfeed. It's easier than sitting down for an hour news show.

News organisations use tools such as X (formerly Twitter), live blogging, breaking news, rolling news, push notifications and news alerts to manage the timeliness of news within a very competitive market (Rom & Reich, 2020). The 2023 Digital News Report reports the rise of video-led platforms for news, which reflects users' needs to see the news as it happens. A 52-year-old male said,

News is instantaneous. When I sit down and watch the evening news, the reality is that the majority of the news I'm watching, I've already managed to absorb and assimilate during the day.

In discussion on factors that influenced participants' selection of news (Table 3), 23 noted that veracity was important, that is, news had to be factual, true, and trustworthy. Out of this group, 15 used reputable news sources because they were factual and trustworthy, four sought live news because it came straight from the source without what they perceived as the filter and delay associated with journalistic processes, two did not trust social media for news, and another two had doubts about the accuracy of all news sources due to journalism agendas and filters. Other factors influencing audiences' news

Table 3. Themes Identified In focus groups that impacted on news selection.

Theme	Need (based on Katz, Haas, and Gurevitch (1973)	Perceived gratification	Number of participants who discussed this factor
Veracity of news choice – whether it could be relied on for truthful information	Cognitive needs	Knowing truthful information	23
News referrals – consuming news because others have sent it to them, or because algorithms deliver what they are interested in	Integrative needs	Knowing the content will be of interest	5
Balanced view – seeking news from many sources to make sure they are fully informed	Cognitive needs	Being fully informed	4
Mood of the participant – this indicated if they person wanted lighter or more entertaining news	Tension-release needs	Relaxation, entertainment, or being informed	2
Timeliness – the source was best for that time of day	Cognitive, affective or tension-release needs	Being up-to-date with the latest information	2
Format – participants have a preference for how news is presented e.g. visual appeal	Affective needs	Knowing the format will enable the audience to be informed	2

choices were being fully informed on a topic, being recommended news sources, what mood they were in, what news they needed at any given time, and personal preferences for the way content was presented. One participant, a 38-year-old male, said news needed to be verified to be news: 'We hear so much now about fake news. If the item or the information hasn't been verified or checked, then to me it's not news'.

To ensure credibility participants selected news sources based on their needs and their prior knowledge and experience of the news source. If they had doubts about veracity they would find other news sources. On occasion, they sought live video news coverage to ensure credibility, for example, one participant switched from the New Zealand news on Queen Elizabeth II's death to the BBC's live coverage as she perceived it was more credible. Another participant, a 59-year-old-female, said:

In Russia, a reporter was live filming from one of the cities where they were fighting. I was pretty overwhelmed because she was in a building, helmet on, and with safety equipment. That she was coming live was quite amazing because you actually felt what was happening. You could hear sirens in the background.

Characteristics of news by the different age cohorts

To answer the second research question, 'What is news, for young and older New Zealanders?' the participants' comments were coded into categories, based on the themes identified (see Table 4). Analysis of these news characteristics reveals similarities to the existing taxonomies of news values of Brighton and Foy (2007), Harcup and O'Neill (2017), and to the concepts of social significance and deviance (Shoemaker & Cohen, 2005). Over time, news has maintained its characteristics of relevance, emotional news (good/bad news), topicality, entertainment and celebrity/power elite and magnitude. News values such as conflict, surprise, and unusualness did not come through strongly in this study.

Of the 203 relevant comments on characteristics, 146 came from participants over 26 years of age and 57 from participants under the age of 26. Audiences under 26 years of age spent around half their time on news from social media and new media and they were more likely to question the veracity of information. They used news to obtain facts, for information that was personally relevant, and for social connection. To address potential information overload and concerns about veracity, the younger cohort had highly curated consumption methods. They used apps, news alerts and notifications based on areas of interest to receive the news they wanted. This can be explained by the persuasive use of mobile phones, the constant connection to social media platforms (with news on them) and the need to see information produced by others (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, & Matassi, 2018).

In regard to the third research question on news values, the four themes of news being a social connection, factual, relevant and topical made up almost 70% of the comments from participants aged under 26 years and 44% of the comments from those over 26. Three participants had routine consumption patterns of watching television news with their families. One participant said she shared news if she thought it would be of interest to her friends, but did not necessarily read the entire article herself. Maintaining social connection supports users' social and personal integrative needs and results in the

Table 4. Categories of news characteristics as identified in the focus groups

Category identified from focus groups (what is news)	Shoemaker and Cohen (2005) - main categories of newsworthiness	Relates to news values identified by Brighon and Foy (2007)	Relates to news values identified by Harcup and O'Neill (2017)	Percentage of comments from the focus groups		Quotations from the focus groups
				26 and under	26 and over	
News is used to maintain and build social connections	Social significance	Relevance	Magnitude, shareability	2.5%	15%	News makes you feel connected and you can talk to people about what is going on. (Male, 26)
News is factual and can be relied on for credibility.	Social significance	New category		1.9%	13%	If the item or the information hasn't been verified or checked, then to me it's not news. (Male, 38)
News connects with audiences' needs and interests.	Social significance	Relevance	Relevance	1.2%	12%	News is a piece of information that interests me. I won't read it if it doesn't interest me. (Male, 22)
News is about celebrities/elite people	Social significance, deviance	Worth, unusualness, external influencers	Entertainment, drama	7%	11%	We were talking about the Royals and I consider parts of it news, like how it's going to affect the world having Charles as King and all the things that go along with it. (Female, 47)
News elicits and an emotional response	Social significance, deviance	Relevance, unusualness	Surprise, entertainment, drama, unusualness	5%	10%	You can't be fearless and turn away from what is happening in the world today. (Female, 37)
News tells people about local events and activities.	Social significance, deviance	Topicality, expectation	Topicality	4%	9%	I need news to tell me what is going on locally. (Female, 40)
News is live, as the event is happening	Social significance	New category		4%	7%	News can be live and you can actually see first-hand, what's happening. (Male, 37)
News is entertaining	Social significance, deviance	Unusualness, worth, external influencers	Entertainment, drama	4%	7%	News can be entertaining. But I think, in the old olden days pre-internet, news was far, far more clearly defined. (Male, 45)
News is topical, current, new or timely.	Social significance	Topicality	Relevance	1.1%	4%	It was great to watch the full day coverage from One News as soon as the Queen passed away, but it was nice to watch BBC live because it's direct from the source. (Female, 37)

(Continued)

Table 4. (Continued).

Category identified from focus groups (what is news?)	Shoemaker and Cohen (2005) - main categories of newsworthiness	Relates to news values identified by Brighton and Foy (2007)	Relates to news values identified by Harcup and O'Neill (2017)	Percentage of comments from the focus groups		Quotations from the focus groups
				under	over	
News has meaning because it impacts a lot of people	Social significance, deviance	Relevance, expectation, unusualness	Magnitude	5%	5%	News is something that is applicable to a wide group of people and projects information in an accurate way. (Male, 21)
News has many viewpoints	Social significance	Composition	Relevance	0%	3%	If you seeing a video of something that happened, everyone's got their phones these days, and everything's captured, so you can see different views on things. (Female, 40)
News is negative information	Social significance, deviance	Unusualness	Bad news, conflict	4%	1%	I had a discussion with my team members about how a lot of the news is quite negative. (Female, 25)
News is a commercial product.	Social significance, deviance	External influences	News organization's agenda	2%	2%	You've got clickbait titles and images that really make people question them and they can be used as a tool to share stories, or even get more clicks, just to generate more money. (Male, 21)
Total				100%	100%	100%

gratification of social communication for example, one participant informed her entire family that Queen Elizabeth II had died, to make sure they were up-to-date.

The three areas where the older age cohort had a higher percentage of comments than the younger cohort were celebrities/elite persons, local news, and news that elicited an emotional response. The celebrity and emotional traits emerged as participants discussed Queen Elizabeth II's death. Interest in local news and celebrities/elite persons may reflect the type of information needed at different stages of life. Timeliness and topicality of news were of less interest for the older cohort group, with lower percentages for news being topical and needing to watch news live.

Needs being met by news consumption

In answer to the fourth research question on what needs are being met with news, participants used news to obtain gratifications such as surveillance, information-seeking, and keeping up with others. News topics included the death of Queen Elizabeth II, the war between Russia and Ukraine, national and local politics, crime and safety, the economy, and sports. Sixteen participants (65%) said the death of Queen Elizabeth II was a clear example of news because of its magnitude, impact on New Zealand as a country, and its emotional impact on audiences. News was used for practical information, such as finding out the price of groceries, bank interest rates, upcoming events, and preparing for emergencies. Several participants belonged to groups to keep up with their sports, hobbies, or community groups. In regard to using news to keep up with others, 18% of comments were on participants using news to maintain and build social connections with friends, family, colleagues, and other groups of interest.

The findings from this study align with the trends seen in research regarding use of news sources, how people access news, and the news topics that are of interest to audiences (based on the news values research). Given the small sample size for this study, the findings are predominantly of a qualitative nature. However, to provide context a quantitative analysis has also been carried out.

Quantitative findings

Traditional news sources were still dominant (73% of the units of consumption) alongside the use of social media and new media. The results showed the dominance of New Zealand's well-established main news websites, television and radio platforms, and an increased use of overseas traditional news sources later in the diary week, following the death of Queen Elizabeth II. The top 10 news sources showed participants were using Facebook, YouTube, Google and Instagram as news aggregators, viewing a range of news on these platforms.

Participants' perceptions of news were that it was factual and personally relevant information. They also described it as being used for social connection, evoking emotion, and covering celebrities/elite persons. It also covered local activities, was live, timely, and impacted many people. The results support the assumptions of uses and gratifications theory that audiences choose news sources to meet their needs and obtain gratifications such as entertainment/diversion, surveillance, personal identity, and personal

relationships. As a 37-year-old female said, 'News is to update myself on the current events around the world. It's just new information that's come in'. Within an environment of many news sources, participants chose news content and the format based on the gratifications they were seeking (for example, in-depth analysis, entertainment, or using news to form social connections via social media).

Qualitative findings

Live news and credibility are emerging news values

In answering the second question of what is news for young and older New Zealanders, many of the identified characteristics of news were consistent with the seminal news values theories. Examples of this were 'news is anything that's happened recently that's topical or of interest to the public', 'news affects big groups of people:', 'news is a piece of information that interests me' and 'news is about knowing what's going on, both in your backyard, nationally and internationally'. Alongside more traditional news values such as relevance, timeliness and magnitude, live news and credibility emerged as new news values. They both influence whether audiences consumed news and the value of news to them. Audiences sought live news for immediate gratifications and to maintain the sense of reality they received from their other digital media use such as social media (Omar, 2014). The need for immediate news is a result of technological changes shortening the time between an event and its news coverage and technology allowing reporting from anywhere at any time.

These emerging values of live news and credibility impact news values theory as this study suggests that even if the news items have other news values, audiences may still judge their value by their perceptions of the credibility of the items. News values are also based on journalists' understanding of what resonates with audiences but this relationship is being interrupted by personalised forms of news consumption. Audiences may use tools such as notifications to only select certain types of news, for example, only sports or entertainment or use other controls (for example, news aggregators) to draw on many information sources to survey their environment. Hermida (2010) refers to these new information gathering systems as ambient journalism. They may choose news based on sources, topics or format of news. Consuming news in this way requires understanding news literacy and technological literacy (Chan, Lee, & Chen, 2021; Vraga, Tully, Maksl, Craft, & Ashley, 2020).

These differences in how we consume news can be seen when we compare the news consumption of the older and younger cohorts in this study. The reasons behind the older cohort's use of more traditional news sources may reflect ritualised news behaviour over time, ingrained habits and trust in these sources (Peters, 2019). This cohort has established relationships with these sources to provide information to reduce uncertainty in their environment (Ostertag, 2020), whereas the younger cohort may still be testing sources that meet their needs. Fewer older participants mentioned factual accuracy as important, potentially because of their prior experience of receiving accurate information in traditional media. They may also prefer traditional media because it has local relevant news and meets their need to share reliable information in social settings.

In regards to what is news for the different cohorts, both groups used news for surveillance, searching for information, and learning about their environment. In terms of news values the younger cohort focused on personal and specific interests, while the older cohort had broader interests including local activities and general participation in society (e.g. voting in the local elections). These differences between younger and older cohorts may be the result of generational differences in motivations, for example, young people's personal and social interests compared to the older cohort's interest in wider participation in society (Boulianne & Shehata, 2022). The findings are also consistent with Vrada and Edgerly's (2023) findings that audiences seek out news that is about, and relevant to, people of their age and social group. This research signals that news consumption has evolved from traditional mass media to a more immediate, personal and interactive experience. Given this developing trend, news values as a theoretical approach may need to become more fluid to adapt to the changing relationships audiences have with news.

The study suggested there are differences between female and male participants in their characterisation of news value. Female participants showed more interest in celebrities/elite persons, discussed emotional responses to news more than men, and used more social media and new media (such as Google news and non-mainstream news websites). However, more research would be needed to explore whether these gender differences are due to the nature of the news content or the ways female audiences engage with news.

Needs and gratifications

The fourth research question sought to identify what needs are being met by news consumption. Uses and gratifications is still a relevant framework as participants said they needed to be informed about their world and use news to connect with other people. This aligns with the core purpose of the uses and gratifications theory: surveillance, information seeking, and keeping up with others. News was used for obtaining useful information and to keep up with personal interests such as sports, hobbies, or community groups. News was used to maintain and build social connections with friends, family, and colleagues, resulting in the gratifications of social connection, being altruistic, and sharing useful information with others. Participants described feeling sad, happy, anxious, and entertained by news, and wanting to discuss this with others, for example, by sharing a funny, entertaining or sad news item. When audiences post their own images, videos and other content on news it increases their involvement with news and gives them more opportunities to show an emotional response (Meijer & Kormelink, 2015). News has always been emotional (Peters, 2011) but the accepted practices of using emotion in journalism and involving audiences more have become explicit. In practice, this means audiences are receiving more emotion in their news and then sharing this content, resulting in further social and emotional gratifications. This study showed social and emotional gratifications were more likely to be sought by younger and female participants.

This study identified additional factors that audiences use to select news to obtain their intended gratifications. These include judging the reliability and truthfulness of a news source, knowing they will receive accurate and fulfilling information, and being

recommended a news source. In addition, audiences' personal needs can impact news selection including mood, audiences' needs at a particular time, and preferences for how content is presented, for example, video or text. The intended gratifications will be obtained if the audiences' needs can be met following the choice of source. If there are questions about the veracity of information, audiences may choose other sources to receive their intended gratifications. This aligns with the uses and gratifications approach that audiences will continue to use media that meets their needs and change media forms if their needs are not being met. For example, some participants changed from a new media source to a traditional news source to check that a story was true. This suggests that audiences' needs for understanding the veracity of their media choice sit alongside their other needs for surveillance, entertainment, social connection, and keeping up with others.

Limitations and conclusion

This study indicates the foundation of news lies in its ability to provide factual and relevant information to audiences that they can also use to maintain social connections. Given the small sample size, this study shows indicative trends rather than findings that can be generalised. The focus group had a small sample size of 25 participants and their perceptions were based on the New Zealand media environment in a week with a significant international news story (the death of Queen Elizabeth II). The study used self-reporting of news consumption habits, which can be limited by selective memory, misreporting, exaggeration, or different semantic interpretations.

Despite these limitations this study suggests indicative trends in media consumption. Audiences still use traditional media to meet their needs, and news values and uses and gratifications are relevant frameworks for understanding news consumption. Credibility is a key factor in audiences choosing news, making it an emerging news value. Credibility is based on the source's reputation and the audience's experience of that source. To satisfy needs for timeliness and credibility, audiences may follow an event as it is happening. Audiences are choosing news based on recommendations from people and social platforms, and their mood and preferences. Younger audiences are expanding their conceptual understanding of news, curating and searching for items of particular interest and moving to new forms of news. This is driven by an increased need for credible, timely and valuable information, to meet the needs for social connections and emotional gratifications.


This study indicates audiences want credible news to meet their needs and they want control and choice over their news consumption. News is maintaining its special status; however, younger audiences are using a more personalised approach to news consumption. This added level of personal choice has the potential to impact the theoretical understanding of new values. To maintain its position as reputable and trustworthy, the journalism industry needs to have practices to meet audiences' needs at different stages in their lives. Journalism can also demonstrate the credibility of its news to help audiences select what they need to receive their intended gratifications (Tandoc et al., 2018). Further research could delve deeper into the emerging news values and explore the needs audiences have for news, particularly with younger age groups. This would assist

the journalism industry to adapt news to ensure audiences receive the information they are seeking while maintaining credibility and trust in its products.

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ORCID

Kirsty J. Anderson  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8670-0344>

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4.2 Article II

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This journal was chosen for its target audience, areas of interest and its relevance to the New Zealand and Australia research communities *Media International Australia* is a peer-reviewed journal publishing scholarly research and reviews about media, telecommunications and cultural industries, policies and practices. Founded in 1976 and primarily focused on Australia and New Zealand, MIA aims to be inclusive, interdisciplinary and international. The journal has an H-index rating of 34 on Scimago Journal and Country Rank and is not on the Australian Business Deans Council ranking.

What audiences do with news: a broader definition of news consumption

Media International Australia

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Kirsty J. Anderson

Massey University, New Zealand

Abstract

Audiences can now access news anytime, anywhere and news spreads faster than ever before. This gives news a much broader role, amplifying and supporting social connection and knowledge acquisition. This study explores actions New Zealanders take after consuming news through the lens of uses and gratifications theory. Twenty-five participants kept a weekly diary of their news consumption and discussed actions they took following news consumption. Statistical analysis showed all participants took at least one action, including discussing news in person, sharing news online, seeking further information, or making a decision. Younger participants were more likely to share news with their friends or seek further information; the older cohort was more likely to share news publicly. The findings suggest that after consuming news, audiences may have subsequent needs and seek further gratifications, potentially leading to a second order of gratification within uses and gratifications theory.

Keywords

Focus groups, news definition, news consumption, uses and gratifications, young people

The digitalisation of news has changed how audiences interact with news and what they do after consuming news. Audiences can now access larger volumes of news across many formats, faster than ever. Audiences have a broad conceptual understanding of news (Ekström and Westlund, 2019; Hendrickx and Vázquez-Herrero, 2024) and can specify items as news, when compared to other information (Eggerly and Vraga, 2020). As such, news can include social media, information sources and news aggregators. Compared to news consumption via newspaper or television, audiences can respond faster to news by taking actions online or in person (Li, 2014; Papathanassopoulos, 2011).

Scholars have explored what motivates audiences to choose media, and to take actions including sharing news, participating in online discussions, researching more on a topic or taking civic

Corresponding Author:

Kirsty J. Anderson, School of Communication, Journalism, and Marketing, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

Email: kirsty.anderson@sia.govt.nz

actions. Online sharing and commenting allows audiences to participate more in the news process (Heinonen, 2011; Holton et al., 2014; Karlsson et al., 2015; Weber, 2014). This paper explores the actions people take following consuming news, with a focus on the motivations that drive these actions within older and younger cohorts.

Scholars have used uses and gratification theory to study the needs that motivate people to consume news and the gratifications they receive (Dafonte-Gómez, 2023; Pantic, 2020; Van der Wurff, 2011). Studies have examined the sharing of news on social media channels (e.g. Lee, 2013; Segado-Boj et al., 2019) and news consumption by age categories (Boczkowski, 2010; Lee and Ma, 2012). This study used the lens of uses and gratifications theory to explore actions audiences took after news consumption and why they took these actions. Qualitative research was carried out with a sample of New Zealanders, with a focus on comparing actions taken by the younger and older cohorts. This data was gathered in September 2022, at a time of the death of Queen Elizabeth II, the constitutional head of New Zealand. Her passing after a 70-year reign was a significant global news event and resulted in public displays of mourning. Ten days after her death, Queen Elizabeth II's funeral was the most-watched broadcast event ever, watched by 4 billion people in over 200 countries (Jackson, 2022).

Audiences seek news to meet their needs

News has always provided useful information based on people's needs, which is then shared through societies. Audiences notice, receive, find, read, share and store news, which is often factual information produced by journalists (Oh, 2023; Schudson, 2001). Uses and gratifications theory assumes audiences' media selection is goal-oriented, purposeful and driven by a desire to meet their needs such as surveillance of their environment, seeking information and keeping up with others (Katz et al., 1973; McQuail et al., 1972). The theory focuses on the needs audiences have when they are choosing media choice and that they are aware of their uses of media. Audiences will seek and obtain gratifications from their media use – and the gratifications obtained may not be the same as those sought (Hartmann, 2009).

Uses and gratifications theory can explain how individuals use mass communication to gratify their needs, to establish motives for media use and to identify positive and negative consequences of media use. Media use can serve cognitive needs, affective needs, personal integrative needs, social integrative needs and escape needs or cathartic needs (Katz et al., 1973). If these needs are not being met, audiences may change the source and format of media. Conversely, news sources will create new formats and content to compete against each other to meet people's needs. This competition is evident in today's news environment, where audiences can access many sources and formats of news.

Impacts of sharing news

Audiences consume news and actively participate in it (Purcell et al., 2010) by discussing it in person, sharing, or engaging with the topic online. The sharing of news assists knowledge acquisition and supports public connection, which is defined as: 'the various shared frames of reference that enable individuals to engage and participate in cultural, social, civic, and political networks in everyday life' (Swart et al., 2017: 906). Audiences discuss topics they have in common and 'media-stimulated interpersonal communication' (Rogers, 2000: 572) describes conversations in which the mass media is the primary stimulus of the conversation.

New technologies enable news to be shared widely and at speed, increasing its value as a social connector. Sharing news online is: 'the practice of giving a defined set of people access to news

content via social media platforms, as by posting or recommending it' (Kümpel et al., 2015: 2). Social media platforms enable users to identify others, share content, comment on items and communicate privately. Scholars have explored how news sharing meets needs such as: seeking information, staying socially connected (Karnowski et al., 2018; Picone, 2016), changing others' opinions, presenting themselves positively (Wong and Burkell, 2017), helping others (Boyd et al., 2010; Holton et al., 2014) and for entertainment (Lin and Lu, 2011). News experiences on social media platforms have been described as personalised, incidental, non-exclusive, granulated and social (Kümpel, 2022). The fragmentation of the news environment means not everyone has the same news at the same time, so this has increased the need to share information.

As a social connector, audiences can share news and their reactions for emotional purposes (Choi and Toma, 2014; Harber and Cohen, 2005; Rimé, 2009). Audiences choose communication channels to meet their emotional needs, depending on the valence and intensity of the events they experience. They may receive emotional and cathartic value from their sharing (Ibrahim et al., 2008), leading to a positive benefit to their emotional well-being (Choi and Toma, 2014). The sharing and discussing of news can also be merely to maintain social cohesion (Duffy and Ling, 2020). Phatic news sharing is where news is shared to 'create social rapport rather than to convey information' (Rettie, 2009: 1135). The motivation is the process of sharing and forming or maintaining a social connection (Costera Meijer and Groot Kormelink, 2021; Swart et al., 2017), and it includes where audiences share information online without reading or processing it (Ward et al., 2022).

Sharing online can have positive and negative results. Audiences can be more engaged in public forums and policy debates (Vaughan et al., 2018), more active in civic affairs (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012) and engage in reciprocal social processes (Holton et al., 2014; Oeldorf-Hirsch and Sundar, 2015). These benefits depend on the perceived credibility of the information, as items considered fake news may lead to negative impacts (Vosoughi et al., 2018). Audiences may also have lower levels of trust in the shared information, when compared to the original news source (Lee, 2020; Newman et al., 2021; Park and Lee, 2020; Park et al., 2021). As well as sharing and reading news from others on their social media platforms, audiences may also have content pushed at them, sorted by algorithms based on their previous news consumption routines. This impacts their consumption of news, as certain types of content may gain more prominence and frequency (Swart, 2021).

Audience needs such as information seeking, socialising and status seeking can increase the likelihood of sharing news on social media platforms (Lee and Ma, 2012; Park and Lee, 2020). A study of YouTube viewing and sharing motivations by Hanson and Haridakis (2008) found sharing was driven by interpersonal motivations. In particular, if the news was in a traditional format, viewers shared it for informational reasons and news that was comedy was shared for entertainment value. When individuals share news they consider their past social media sharing experiences (Lee and Ma, 2012), their desire to interact with the topic (Martin and Dwyer, 2019; Trilling et al., 2017), their needs for social gratifications (Bakshy et al., 2015; Krishnatray et al., 2009) and what they think other people are interested in (Ihm and Kim, 2024). Receivers' perceptions of trust in news can be influenced by who shared it rather than the original source of the story (Fisher, 2016; Sterrett et al., 2019).

As news outlets compete with each other for audiences, many journalists use viral journalism to promote news stories to gain maximum exposure and sharing (Denisova, 2023: 120). These tactics include using emotional triggers, being relevant and original and using visual clues to highlight articles that can be shared (Bright, 2016). This has also led to shareability as a news value, reflecting how journalists select stories based on their ability to result in sharing and comments (Harcup and O'Neill, 2017). Sharing news has also increased audiences' expectations for timeliness and

relevance of news (Ilan, 2021; Van Damme et al., 2015). A study by Weber (2014) found links between news factors, as defined by Galtung and Ruge (1965), in the news items and the level of engagement and interactivity with the comments on those items. Increased news sharing, both online and in person, amplifies news consumption, enabling news to spread much wider and faster, resulting in further actions.

Different cohorts' use of sharing news

Younger audiences, such as Gen Z (those born between 1997 and 2013), have had access to the internet and social media throughout their lives, increasing their accessibility to news (Boczkowski, 2010). They seamlessly integrate the digital and physical worlds and receive news from many platforms (Stahl and Literat, 2023). They are less likely to go directly to a news site or app and more likely to use social media or other intermediaries (Newman et al., 2023). They often consume news on more than one device (Lowenstein-Barkai and Lev-on, 2021) and are active media consumers within their social and cultural environments (Lancaster et al., 2012).

The shifts in news consumption habits are related to young people's motivations and stage in life. Lee's (2013) study found age was the most consistent predictor across four motivations for news consumption: information, social needs, entertainment and opinion motivations. This study suggested there was a divide in motivations for news consumption. Older participants were more likely to consume news for information and opinion purposes, and younger adults were more likely to be motivated to consume news for entertainment and social reasons. Young people value current information about their world and want to engage with their peers (Bengtsson, 2022; Tallam, 2021). Klopfenstein Frei et al. (2022) found incidental news consumption via social media decreased with age; people used more specific news apps and channels as they got older. Scholars have examined whether women and men have different needs for sharing information. Women are more likely to express their opinions subjectively, express emotions and emphasise social connections than men (Lin and Wang, 2020; Zhang et al., 2013).

Researching New Zealanders' actions from news consumption

The ability of news to connect people and communities has significantly increased with new technology forms and social media platforms. This research aims to understand what actions people take following news consumption, with a particular focus on a group under 26 years of age and a group 26 and older. This is because from late teens to early 20s is a time that audiences form media routines (Antunovic et al., 2018; Costera Meijer and Groot Komelink, 2021).

This study used New Zealand audiences to explore these questions. New Zealand is a Western democracy with approximately five million people. The news media market has several organisations with large audience share (including government-owned television and radio) and many small independent outlets (Baker et al., 2023). New Zealanders are consuming less news from traditional media, more from digital media, and have lowering levels of trust in news (Ministry of Culture and Heritage, 2022; Myllylahti and Treadwell, 2024). New Zealand media organisations are facing increased competition from international news sources, declining revenues from advertising and significant changes to audiences' news consumption habits (Ministry of Culture and Heritage, 2022). New Zealand was suitable for this study as participants were exposed to the same news media environment.

This study wanted to see if New Zealanders were expanding their news consumption with further actions and why. Thus, the following research questions are put forth:

RQ1: What actions do New Zealanders take after consuming news?

RQ2: What needs are being met with these actions?

RQ3: What are the differences in these actions between younger and older age groups?

Method

Participants and procedures

This study used focus groups and diaries, alongside open coding, to explore the concepts of news and its uses and to enable a broader discussion. This approach was chosen to explore existing theories but also allow for audiences to discuss widely their approaches to news (Croucher and Cronn-Mills, 2019).

The study had a total of 25 people who participated in focus groups and were asked to complete a media diary for one week. In the focus groups, participants explored their definition of news, the news sources they use, what they do with news and any emotional responses they had to news. The participants, chosen through a research company to achieve a range of participants across ages, gender, geographical locations and ethnicities, had previous experience with online focus groups. The participants received a small incentive to take part in the study.

Data was collected on demographics (age, sex, ethnicity and level of education), time spent on news sources each day, and the most used media source. The focus groups each had older and younger participants. In total, there were 13 men and 12 women, with 9 participants aged 26 years and under, and 16 participants aged over 26 years. The split was chosen to identify differences between the young cohort, who are transitioning to adult life, and the older cohort, who may have more established media habits. The ethnicity makeup was 15 New Zealand European, one British, three Asian, four Māori and two Pasifika. All information was collected in line with the appropriate privacy and ethical standards. This study complied with appropriate university codes of ethics.

The diaries covered the period from 6 am Monday, September 5, 2022 until 11.59 pm Sunday, 11 September 2022 and participants kept a diary of their news consumption in hourly units. Participants recorded what news they used, when and whether they took action as a result of news, and this information was used to support their participation in the focus groups. On the diaries they listed the time, source and topic of their news consumption. The diaries formed the background for the focus groups as they made it easier for participants to recall their media consumption and actions. Two participants were unable to complete the diaries due to changed personal circumstances but still attended the focus groups.

Overall, the diary information was collated by person, time and date and news source. Each item was listed against the specified time, and if more than one source was listed, these were listed at separate times. The categories of news sources used were: traditional media New Zealand, traditional media international, social media and new media. The definition of traditional sources was journalism news sources, in New Zealand and overseas. Social media included platforms where people could connect and comment, and new media included other channels such as YouTube and Telegram. Each time was considered as a unit. The units were totalled for each person, for each news source and for each day. The news sources by person and day were converted to percentages for each person, and then averaged over the week to normalise the data and manage a participant's strong liking for a news source. Items were only analysed if there was a specific news source or type mentioned.

There were five focus groups of five people, with a mix of ages and genders in each group. The focus groups were for 1.5 hours and took place within 2 weeks of the diary collection week. In the sessions, participants were asked what they considered news, where they got news from, the actions they took as a result of the news and what emotions they experienced. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The results were sorted into audiences' definitions of news, actions from news and feelings/emotions from news consumption using statistical analysis. The focus of this study is on the actions that people take after consuming news. From the focus groups, 112 comments were collated and the data were coded by inductive thematic analysis. If a comment had two characteristics (e.g. news was shared in several ways), it was included in two categories. The comments were re-checked against each participant to see how many actions they took as individuals. Finally, the comments were also sorted based on the needs of the uses and gratification theory: cognitive needs, affective needs, personal integrative needs, social integrative needs and escape needs or cathartic needs.

Results

Actions taken following news consumption

The first research question explored what actions New Zealanders took after consuming news. Analysis of the news consumption diaries showed participants listed 63 news sources and 648 units of consumption over the week. When the units of consumption were analysed by the categories of news sources, 73% of the items were from traditional New Zealand and overseas journalistic news sources, 18% of the items were from social media, and 9% of the items were from new media sources. A breakdown by age cohort showed that more than half (56%) of the news consumption by the younger cohort was from non-traditional news sources.

The diaries and focus groups had specific findings in relation to the news coverage of Queen Elizabeth II's death. Many participants discussed how it was a major news event with significance for New Zealand. The results showed high news consumption when this news was announced on the Friday and increased consumption of international news sources from Friday to Sunday, when compared to the other days.

From the focus groups questions on participants' actions following news consumption resulted in 112 comments. These were coded and grouped into eight categories: discussing news with friends and family, discussing news with other people, seeking more information, sharing news online publicly, sharing news online with friends and family, making a decision, reading comments and contributing to comments (see Table 1). The comments were also categorised by each person. Out of the eight categories of actions found, 15 people took between three and five actions following their news consumption. The other 10 people did either one or two of the actions.

Over one-third (36%) of the comments related to discussing news in person with friends and family (20%) or with other people (16%), showing the role of news in enabling face-to-face communication. The comments reflected motivations for sharing knowledge, building and maintaining social connections, and being altruistic in caring for others. Several comments related to habits formed during the COVID-19 pandemic to pass on news to keep people safe, for example, one participant always checked his father was current with the news because he was not on social media.

For dad, it's making sure. If he misses the six o'clock news, he doesn't have an outlet, he's not on Instagram, or Facebook, or anything. So I have to tell him things like 'the rules have changed: you don't have to wear your mask'. (Male, 24)

Table 1. Categories of actions following news consumption.

Category of action	Number of mentions	Percentage	Type of gratification	Comments from focus groups
Seek more information	22	20%	Being well informed	<i>If it's something that I'm relatively interested in, I'll do further research, look for more information regarding that until I'm satisfied I've learned what I wanted to learn about a topic. (Male, 20)</i> <i>You'll be reading the news about the weather before you go on vacation. You'll be checking, what do you need to do or what you need to bring? Or what would you expect going there? So it's like a reference as well. (Male, 31)</i>
Discuss in person with friends and family	22	20%	Social	<i>I watch the six o'clock news with my family. We have a routine, where if we're all in at home, dinner's at six, that way we can all talk about our days and developments. (Male, 21)</i> <i>I'll just have to talk to somebody about it. I just want somebody to know, aside from me, then I don't care whatever he or she does with it, but I just want somebody to know. (Male, 31)</i>
Share online publicly	18	16%	Social	<i>It is a conversation starter as well. I work from home. I'm not in the office all the time. So especially with my team, it might be something we discuss. (Female, 25)</i> <i>It's so easy to just tag someone in an article or on a post and they get it straight away. (Female, 25)</i>
Discuss with other people	18	16%	Social	<i>I enjoy being up-to-date. I like to know what's going on, and discussing it with other people. And whether that's my colleagues or my family, friends, hearing others' opinions on it. (Female, 25)</i> <i>We have an open plan office and we will chat about news. I share stuff, if I find it's a particularly poignant or interesting article, because people know about the topics generally. But you know, occasionally there's this really nice take on it. (Female, 47)</i>
Make a decision	11	10%	Being well informed	<i>The news tends to be the catalyst for what I decide to do, what job I decide to apply for, what movie I decide to watch or what interview I decide to look up. (Female, 31)</i>

(continued)

Table 1. Continued.

Category of action	Number of mentions	Percentage	Type of gratification	Comments from focus groups
Share online with friends and family	11	10%	Social	<i>If it's if it's going to rain, you might bring the washing in or a storm, you'll make sure all the windows are shut. (Male, 26)</i> <i>It's a form of communication. I have family members scattered all over the world. And we tend to share a lot of different local news. (Female, 37)</i> <i>There might be articles that I might share on our family page, things that I think my kids would be interested in. I'll share it with them and they'll either come back with a thumbs-up or a sad face. It's things I think that they would like and that they would find informative. (Female, 59)</i>
Read the comments after an article	9	8%	Being entertained	<i>I've seen so many comments on New Zealand Herald's Facebook page, because those comments get quite out of hand. The people are just commenting and they're not even tagging them to read the article. They're just tagging them to read the comments. (Female, 26)</i> <i>I just love the comments. I that's pretty much all I do on Facebook is read the comments on the New Zealand Herald, just a little bit of light entertainment. (Female, 38)</i>
Contribute to comments after an article	1	1%	Social	<i>If someone, posts a link that I know, I'll get straight on there and comment (Male, 41)</i>
	112	100%		

As this research was immediately following the news coverage of the death of Queen Elizabeth II, it led to sharing for emotional purposes, for example, one participant shared the news immediately with all of her family to make sure they had heard. Another participant discussed the negative news framing of a segment of Prince Charles' actions at Queen Elizabeth II's funeral with a friend. He subsequently changed his view on this issue after he and his friend discussed reactions to grief.

Timeliness was a factor, ensuring friends and family had information at the right time. Participants discussed news in person with people outside of their closest social circle, including work colleagues and neighbours. One participant, a healthcare assistant in a retirement home, described reading the news to residents as a way to stimulate discussion. Participants used news for social interaction as phatic communication to assist people with their lives.

There are articles I share on our family page that I think my kids would be interested in. I'll share it with them, and they'll either come back with a thumbs-up or a sad face. These are things that I think they would like and that they would find informative. (Female, 59)

Approximately one-quarter of the comments (26%) were regarding sharing information online. Participants shared news online on social media platforms, either in public, via a private message, or via a private group chat with selected friends and families. The purpose was to pass on information they thought was relevant and timely for others, based on understanding the recipient's needs and interests. People discussed sharing significant news items as well as items like cooking tips and sports news. One participant discussed how she used sharing for political purposes.

Mostly, I share things that might be a political statement about where I sit. If it's something that's important to me and if I agree with what the person is saying, and I've read it thoroughly, I might share it on my Facebook page. So it's me making a statement that I agree with it. (Female, 47).

Almost a third of the comments concerned knowledge acquisition, with participants doing further research (20%) or making a decision (10%). The motivations were to increase their knowledge, find out if something they had consumed was correct, find other information on that topic (e.g. different viewpoints), or find information to make a decision.

There's so much fake stuff on TikTok. That makes you question everything. That's why I have been doing my own research. When I hear something that's news to me I consider that news, but I also have to do the research behind it. (Male, 22)

Participants used news to assist with day-to-day activities such as traffic decisions, weather discussions, and participating in activities, as well as for broader society decisions such as who to vote for in elections.

The last 9% of the comments concerned reading or contributing comments at the end of an online news article. Participants said they enjoyed reading the comments to get different perspectives or for entertainment, as they often brought humour to a serious issue. Only one person said they contributed to the comments.

Needs that drive actions following news consumption

The actions following news consumption were sorted by the needs identified in uses and gratification theory: cognitive, social integrative, personal identity, affective and personal release needs.

Table 2. Actions sorted by needs from the uses and gratifications theory.

Category of action	Number of comments from participants 26 and under	Percentage of total comments from participants 26 and under	Number of comments from participants aged over 26	Percentage of total comments from participants aged over 26	Total	Percentage of total comments
Social interaction needs	20	43%	26	40%	45	41%
Cognitive needs	16	34%	29	44%	46	40%
Personal identity needs	3	6%	7	11%	10	9%
Affective needs	3	6%	3	5%	6	5%
Tension release needs	5	11%	–	–	5	4%
Total actions	47	100%	65	100%	112	100%

This showed the actions were predominately based on cognitive and social needs. There were slight differences in the cohorts, with more comments relating to tension release and affective needs mentioned by the younger cohort (Table 2).

Differences in actions by age and sex

The third research question explored the differences in these actions between younger and older age groups. Analysis by the age groups shows the group aged 26 and over was more likely to share news online publicly and seek out more information. Those aged 26 and under had high percentages for discussing news with friends and family, and with other people (Table 3). They were less likely to share news publicly than the older cohort. This difference was illustrated by this participant who described different groups for sharing online information.

The younger ones tend to share more funny social, Tik Tok items, but then the older ones tend to share more about news that is relevant to our lives. (Female, 37).

Analysis of the actions by sex (Table 4) shows a higher number for comments on actions to share news with friends and family and to share news online for female participants, when compared to male participants. Overall the results were similar, but the results indicated females shared news more online than male participants.

Discussion

The categories of news sources used were: traditional media New Zealand, traditional media international, social media and new media. The definition of traditional sources was journalism news sources, in New Zealand and overseas. Participants were asked to self-define news in their consumption, and the younger cohort's definition included a wide range of non-traditional news sources. This aligns with research that shows younger cohorts have a definition of news that is broader than journalistic sources.

The study indicates overall that news consumption leads to further actions, and, in many cases, supports social connection. All participants took at least one action, and most (19 participants) discussed news in person with other people. These findings align with uses and gratifications theory that users seek out news to meet their needs for information and social connection. However, there

Table 3. Overall actions by participants, by age category.

Category of action	Number of comments from participants 26 and under	Percentage of total comments from participants 26 and under	Number of comments from participants aged over 26	Percentage of total comments from participants aged over 26	Total	Percentage of total comments
Seek more information	8	19%	14	22%	22	20%
Discuss in person with friends and family	10	21%	12	18%	22	20%
Discuss with other people	8	17%	10	15%	18	16%
Share online publicly	7	15%	11	17%	18	16%
Make a decision	4	8%	7	11%	11	10%
Share online with friends and family	4	8%	7	11%	11	10%
Read the comments after an article	6	13%	3	5%	9	8%
Contribute to comments after an article	0	0%	1	2%	1	1%
Total actions (number of comments)	47	100%	63	100%	112	100%

Table 4. Overall actions by participants, by sex.

Category of action	Female – number of comments	Male – number of comments	Total
Discuss in person with friends and family	12	10	22
Seek more information	11	11	22
Discuss with other people	7	11	18
Share online publicly	11	7	18
Share online with friends and family	8	3	11
Make a decision	6	5	11
Read the comments after an article	4	5	9
Contribute to comments after an article	0	1	1
Total number of comments on actions	59	53	112

were differences in the way the younger and older audiences accessed and used news, reflecting their motivations. The older audiences were more likely to share news publicly, give their opinions and seek out information. Younger audiences were more likely to share news with their friends and family or discuss with other people. This aligns with Lee's (2013) study showing young adults are motivated to consume news for entertainment and social reasons.

This study suggests two findings to extend discussion on needs that drive news consumption. The first is that the need for social connection is the main driver in the sharing of news, particularly for the younger cohort. Audiences' primary need for using news for information has expanded to seeking information that also supports social relationships. The second finding suggests a second level of interaction can be added to uses and gratifications theory to have a broader view of news consumption.

Social needs drive sharing and discussing of news

Technological advances mean there are now increased ways of using news for social connection needs, for example, in person or online, with people's close family, or with people they have never met but with whom they share a mutual interest. Participants discussed that news gives people something to talk about and helps make people feel part of a community. By sharing news, people could do good in the community, assist with local problems, and ensure people had the information they needed in their lives (e.g. traffic information, safety information). They could also entertain, keep others up with trends, or have an in-depth discussion. Social needs were also met through phatic news sharing (Duffy and Ling, 2020) when people shared news because they thought the recipients would be interested but it did not matter if they read the full item. This sharing was based on the relationships people had with each other and their understanding of why they were receiving information. This relationship impacted the receiver's credibility of the item, aligning with Sterrett et al.'s (2019) study.

Social connection was also evident in answering the second research question of differences between the younger and older age groups in their actions after consuming news. The younger group's highest percentage was with social connection, and they had more actions relating to meeting tension release and affective needs. Younger participants discussed news within their social circles but were less likely to share news publicly. This aligns with Tallam's (2021) study showing young people's greater use of digital and social media platforms means they want to be constantly up-to-date with current news and connect with their peers. Costera Meijer's (2007) study found that young people used news as an incentive for a chat with friends, including bizarre, funny and abnormal events.

Women in the study were more likely to be social with news: sharing it with friends or family, sharing it publicly, and discussing it with friends, whereas men were more likely to discuss news with others outside of their friends and family. This aligns with studies that show women are more likely to share for social connections than men (Lin and Wang, 2020; Zhang et al., 2013).

Proposed secondary order of uses and gratifications process

The second finding of this study is the suggestion that a second level of interaction can be added to uses and gratifications theory to have a broader view of news consumption. This study indicates that audiences may have further needs after consuming news and take actions such as sharing in person, sharing online, seeking more information or making a decision. These needs are similar to the fundamental needs of the uses and gratifications theory and have resulting gratifications. People have always discussed news in person and via other methods, but this has been amplified by the digital changes over the past 20 years. Audiences' constant connection to mobile devices for many daily activities has made these actions quicker and easier, and expanded the actions people can take. Immediately after news consumption, audiences can share news in person, share or discuss news online, research further information (e.g. a new traffic route following bad weather), or purchase something they have read about. Aside from discussion in person, all of these actions can be done via their mobile devices.

When applied to news consumption, uses and gratifications theory could now be viewed as a two-order process: the first order of gratifications is from the initial news consumption to meet needs, and the second order of gratifications is the actions that follow to meet further needs. For example, people may search for news for cognitive needs, and then need to share that news with others, to maintain and support social connections. This study recommends that the practice of news consumption includes the initial action of consuming news and receiving

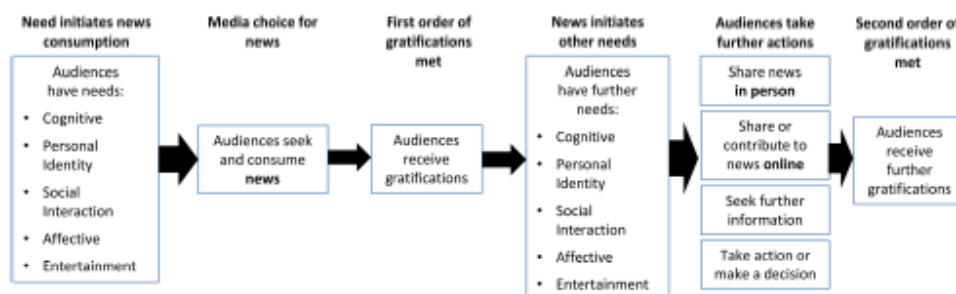


Figure 1. Actions following news consumption.

gratifications, the subsequent audience actions and gratifications and the relationship between these actions. It indicates differences in these actions between younger and older cohorts, meaning audiences' news consumption habits are evolving with new forms of news and new platforms (Figure 1).

This finding has implications for journalism in ensuring its information is relevant, digestible, shareable and relevant to people's needs. It also supports news products encompassing a wider range of information and formats to meet people's information and entertainment needs.

Limitations and conclusion

This study explored the actions people take after news consumption and how these actions differ by age cohort. It found that, overall, people took action after news, to look out for others, maintain social connections, seek further information, or make a decision. These categories align with the framework of uses and gratifications: audiences seek out news to meet their needs and receive gratifications, such as being informed and being connected to others. With technological advances and more sharing news online, the news consumption process has become more involved, and is not only the consumption of content but also the actions that follow. This could signal an expansion of the uses and gratification theory so it has two orders: the order of news consumption and the second of the action that follows, where the audience has further needs and seeks further gratifications (e.g. the need to discuss the news with friends and family). Audiences' needs in the first order may not be the same as the second order.

This study has limitations due to its small sample size of 25 participants living in New Zealand. Participants' recall of their media consumption may have been impacted by selective memory, mis-reporting, exaggeration, or different semantic interpretations of the requirements. Given the limitations of this study, further research would be needed with a wider group to analyse how the needs in the first order link to the needs in the second order.

News serves a vital communication purpose in our society by giving people the information they need for their daily lives and for broader participation in society. This study indicates that the news flow has been extended, with many people passing on information to others, in person and online. This alters the concept of news consumption as the news dissemination continues, and the item may change as it continues to be communicated. This study indicates news consumption may be a much broader practice than only receiving news; it enables essential social connection and knowledge acquisition in our societies. These findings have implications for those producing news to make news that is of value to audiences and news that they may want to share and take action on.


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ORCID iD

Kirsty J. Anderson  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8670-0344>

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4.3 Article III

Anderson, K. J. Forthcoming). “I’ve grown up with the Queen”: Responses to media coverage of Queen Elizabeth II’s death. *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication*.

This journal was chosen for its target audience, areas of interest and for its short-form research reports. *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication* is a scholarly, peer-reviewed annual journal sponsored by the Eastern Communication Association. The journal publishes brief qualitative and critical research essays of 2,500 words or less on a wide range of topics extending and enhancing the understanding of human communication. The journal is interested in topics such as intercultural, mediated, political, organisational, interpersonal and legal communication. The journal has an H-index rating of 16 on Scimago Journal and Country Rank and is not on the Australian Business Deans Council ranking.

An earlier version was not accepted for this publication and the article has subsequently been updated (new version in this thesis) for consideration by another journal.

Forthcoming:

**“I've grown up with the Queen”: Responses to media coverage of
Queen Elizabeth II's death**

Abstract

This study employs uses and gratifications theory and the news value of celebrity to explore comments from New Zealanders on the news coverage of Queen Elizabeth II's death. This was a unique media event because the Queen was an international celebrity, and was head of state of New Zealand. The comments on the media coverage were analysed by two age cohorts to explore the cognitive and affective responses of participants. Overall, participants over 26 years had more affective responses, and those under 26 years had more cognitive responses. With the older cohort, some participants experienced more media interactions with Queen Elizabeth II, had stronger grief responses but it was hard to determine the extent of any parasocial relationships. The paper concludes that uses and gratifications and news values can assist with understanding the relevance of media coverage of celebrity deaths and how audiences form connections to celebrities through news.

Key words: Uses and gratifications, news consumption, celebrity deaths, focus groups

“I've grown up with the Queen”: Reactions to media coverage of Queen Elizabeth II's death

The passing of Queen Elizabeth II on September 8, 2022, aged 96, after a 70-year reign, was a significant global news event and aligned with the news value of celebrity. Over 33 million people worldwide watched television coverage of the Queen's death (Yossman, 2022). This paper uses responses to the media coverage of her death to explore the links between uses and gratifications theory, the news value of celebrity, and the formation of parasocial relationships.

Uses and gratifications theory specifies audiences seek media to meet specific needs and obtain gratifications such as surveillance, information seeking, and keeping up with others (Katz et al., 1973; Katz et al., 1974; McQuail et al., 1972). When a celebrity dies, audiences will choose to use media to meet their needs and will change their choices if their needs are unmet. Audiences may show affective reactions such as adding public comments on media platforms (Papacharissi, 2019) or acting on causes championed by the celebrity (Brown et al., 2023; Myrick & Willoughby, 2019). Research has examined memorialising on Facebook following the deaths of Alan Rickman, David Bowie, and Prince (Gil-Egui et al., 2017); media discourse following Amy Winehouse's death (Hearsum, 2012); and public mourning rituals for Steve Irwin (Gibson, 2007) and Princess Diana (Brown et al., 2003). Previous research has shown responses are influenced by the person's connection to the celebrity, their age, their stage in life, and news consumption habits.

A news focus on elite people has been considered a news value since 1965, when Galtung and Ruge included it in their predictors of news selection factors (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). While other news values have been redefined, a focus on elite and famous people has remained consistent as a factor determining the newsworthiness of a story (Harcup &

O'Neill, 2001; Harcup & O'Neill, 2017) and led to a genre of celebrity news. In recent years, more celebrity news can be found across many news sources (Dubied & Hanitzsch, 2014; O'Neill, 2012). Celebrities have become primary role models (Brown et al., 2003), and the category includes politicians, people famous for their achievements, and people using social media to build their celebrity status (Hou, 2019).

News items with high levels of news values, such as the category of celebrity, increase the affective and cognitive involvement of audiences and audiences' engagement with others about news (Ziegele et al., 2020). As celebrity news resonates with audiences, they have more media interactions with celebrities, and these interactions can lead to a parasocial relationship with the person. The term 'parasocial' was first introduced by Horton and Wohl (1956) to describe the one-sided relationship between a spectator and performer in regards to television and radio. It is defined as "the process of developing an imaginary relationship with a mediated persona both during and after media consumption" (Brown, 2015, p. 275). Parasocial relationships are a distinct form of personal relationship, shaped by repeated instances of media interactions between the viewer and the performer. They are long-term, one-sided associations between audiences and media performers (Dibble et al., 2016). New media forms and social media platforms have amplified opportunities for audiences to connect with celebrities and potentially form parasocial relationships (Boyd et al., 2024; Marwick, 2015; Xu et al., 2022). Following a celebrity death, there is a positive correlation between the strength of the parasocial relationship with that person and the impact of grief: the deeper the connection, the deeper the grief (Hoffner, 2020).

The significance of the Queen's death for New Zealand

As head of state of New Zealand, Queen Elizabeth's death had significant cultural and political impact on New Zealand. The Queen features on New Zealand's currency, she

features in its legislative framework, and her role is represented in the country by a Governor-General. The Queen's formal constitutional role meant her death brought other dimensions to audiences' responses, alongside it being the death of a famous person.

The Queen's death was covered extensively by New Zealand media, and it contained many of the characteristics of a major media event as described by Dayan and Katz (1992). They describe a media event as taking place in public spaces, often live, confirming traditional authority, and focused on the past. Dayan and Katz's (1992) media event definition was when television dominated news consumption and before the advent of new media forms. They described media events as having three actor types: the organisers (mainly large actors like public bodies), the broadcaster, and the audience (Brügger, 2022). Dayan and Katz divided media events into contests, conquests, and coronations. Any sort of competitions are defined as contests; conquests are triumphant missions, historical accomplishments of extraordinary individuals. Coronations relate to rituals of passage such as weddings, coronations, and funerals of personalities. The Queen's death can be considered with the coronation category of Dayan and Katz. While the timing of the event was uncertain, there had been significant planning into the announcements and events that would comprise the media coverage for the two-week period of mourning and formal proceedings (Hallgren, 2024).

Media context

The media coverage of the Queen's death highlighted the symbiotic relationship between the royal family and the news media and their special celebrity status (Turner, 2014). Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953 was one of the first major events to be televised. The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge's wedding in 2011 was a worldwide media event, watched live by two billion people (Clancy, 2019), and was the first royal wedding supported by new

forms of media (Şuğu, 2012). The media focus is often on their personal lives as well as their constitutional duties (Randell-Moon, 2017).

New Zealand is a Western democracy with approximately five million people. The news media environment has several organisations with large audience share (including government-owned television and radio) and many small independent outlets (Hope et al., 2023). Over the last few years, New Zealand media organisations have faced increased competition from international news sources and social media platforms, declining advertising revenues, and significant changes to audiences' news consumption habits (Ministry of Culture and Heritage, 2022; Myllylahti & Treadwell, 2024; Newman et al., 2024). As new forms of media and social media have emerged, different ages are engaging with media in different ways. Young people have less interaction with traditional news and a strong focus on commentators, influencers, and news creators on social media platforms (Eddy, 2002; Geers, 2020; Newman et al., 2024; Swart & Broersma, 2023). The high-choice media environment can also lead to more personalisation of news selection and more news avoidance in younger groups than older cohorts (Edgerly et al., 2018a; Edgerly et al., 2018b).

Celebrity deaths

When a famous person passes away, especially a person of significance like Queen Elizabeth II, the intense media coverage and memorialising focuses people on what that person meant to them. When the Queen's death was announced, media coverage of the news monopolised many programmes and platforms (Frandsen et al., 2022), audiences stopped their daily routines, and the event was considered to have historical meaning. Alongside the mainstream media narrative of the Queen's death that evoked nostalgia and reverence, there was also a viral counter-narrative that emerged, which is part of today's modern media event (Hallgren, 2024). Significant mass media events can lead to amplification of content on an

issue, produced not by the mass media and other digital media and conversations online about the event (Hepp & Couldry, 2009). In the case of celebrity deaths, social media platforms can allow mourners from different backgrounds and locations to mourn collectively and contribute to memorialisation of the person (Papacharissi, 2015; Uwalaka, 2023). This social media engagement can then form part of the mainstream media coverage. A study by Uwalaka (2023) on users' comments on the Queen's death categorised those who responded on public forums as either grievors, who were sad; lauders, who adored her; accusers, who expressed anger towards the monarchy; or defenders, who posted justification for the accusations against the Queen. In another type of response, Rodríguez-Díaz et al (2024) found users responded by starting discussions on X relating to the fictional series *The Crown*.

In the United Kingdom, the BBC led the coverage of the Queen's death and set the tone for public mourning, which became symbolic with shaping national belonging (Clancy, 2024). The worldwide news coverage included reminiscing on her lifetime achievements and public displays of mourning. Ten days after her death, her funeral was the most-watched broadcast event ever, watched by 4 billion people in over 200 countries (Jackson, 2022). In relation to her death, scholars have examined the framing of death notices (Prasadini & Palupi, 2023), death metaphors in the media (Nuzulia & Firmonasari, 2023), condolences on Facebook (Mentari & Susiati, 2024), and the impact of parasocial relationships on worshipping and charity donations (Brown et al., 2023).

The New Zealand media have consistently covered royal family news, particularly during her ten royal tours to New Zealand. Their response was similar to the United Kingdom's: breaks to normal programming to cover the details, continuing live coverage, and special programs and commemorative newspapers (Basagre, 2022).

This study explores how the responses of New Zealanders in focus groups align with uses and gratifications and news values and if they reflect audiences' parasocial relationships with the Queen. It particularly explores the reactions to the media coverage of focus group participants under 26 years of age with those of participants aged over 26 years. Therefore, the following research question is put forth:

RQ: How did older and younger groups experience the Queen's death through media?

Method

This study used focus groups and diaries to generate discussion and gain audiences' meanings on concepts (Antunovic et al., 2018). Twenty-five New Zealanders (13 men and 12 women) participated in focus groups and completed a media diary for one week in September 2022. Participants were recruited by a research company, and all participated in other forms of research (but not on this topic). The recruitment ensured a range of participants across ages, sex, geographical locations, and ethnicities. Nine participants were aged 26 years and under, and 16 were over 26 years. The cohorts were split at 26, as people aged 18 to 26 are forming new media habits at that life stage (Antunovic et al., 2018).

Participants took part in online five-person focus groups for 1.5 hours within two weeks of the diary collection week. Participants were asked about their definitions of news, what news sources they used, what they did with news, and their emotional responses to news. The data were collected in line with appropriate privacy and ethical standards.

Participants noted the time, source, and topic of their news consumption in hourly units from 6 am Monday, September 5, 2022 until 11:59 pm Sunday, September 11, 2022. The diaries were sorted by person, time and date, and news source, against the specified time. The sources were categorised into: traditional media New Zealand, traditional media international, social media, and new media. Traditional sources were formal, branded

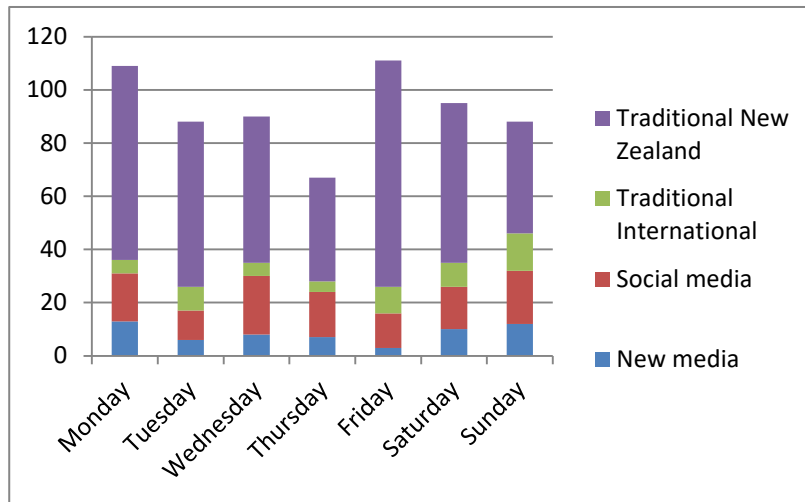
journalism news sources in New Zealand and overseas. Social media included platforms where people could connect and comment, and new media were other forms of media such as YouTube and Telegram. Each time was considered as a unit and totalled for each person, news source, and day. The news sources by person and day were converted to percentages for each person and averaged over the week to normalise the data and manage a participant's strong liking for a news source.

All focus groups were recorded and transcribed and sorted into four areas: definitions of news, actions from news, emotions from news, and comments on the Queen's death. This article's focus is the last group of comments, which were categorised into three themes: affective cognitive responses (sad), affective cognitive responses (annoyed), and cognitive responses. Affective responses (sad) were comments on participants' grief, affective responses (annoyed) were comments that the media coverage was overwhelming, and cognitive responses were about seeking knowledge on the implications of the Queen's death. These comments were analysed by age and sex.

Results

In the week analysed, participants used 63 news sources and consumed 648 units of news. The majority (73%) were from traditional New Zealand and overseas news sources, 18% were from social media, and 9% were from new media sources. The results showed high news consumption on Friday and increased consumption of international news sources from Friday to Sunday (Figure 1). More than half (56%) of the younger cohort's news consumption was from non-traditional news sources.

Figure 1: Units of consumption over the week, by category of media



The focus groups had 36 comments specifically on the media coverage of the Queen’s death. Participants described it as a major news event due to its magnitude, significance to New Zealand, and emotional impact. The majority of the comments (26) were from women, with 19 from women over 26 years of age. Ten comments were from men: eight from those over 26 years of age. The comments were categorised into three categories: affective responses (sad), affective responses (annoyed), and cognitive responses.

Older cohort had more responses to the Queen’s death

Over 75 percent of the comments came from the older cohort, which reflected their exposure to the Queen through traditional news media. For example, one participant said,

I’ve grown up with the Queen, my whole life. When we went to the movies, we would stand up before the movie began, and they would play God Save the Queen. I grew up watching her when special events happened. (Female, 69)

A 39-year-old participant made sure everyone heard the news as soon as possible, in the same way as she would for the death of a person she had a direct relationship with:

“When the Queen died, it was a shock to me. I was messaging everybody to ask if they had

heard about the Queen. Everybody had heard except for one person.” Another participant (47 years) said, ‘It’s a very stark, historic occasion, and it’s bringing a lot of people together.’”

During the data collection week, more than half (56 percent) of the news consumption by the younger cohort was on non-traditional news sources (Anderson, 2024), and the Queen’s death was perceived as less important to them. For example, a young participant said the news was less relevant to them than their personal interests.

News that interests me would be Nate Diaz winning his fight in the UFC against Max Holloway. That's news to me, but that's not news to my auntie. In the same way, I don't have much interest in any of the Queen's dealings. (Male, 21)

Affective responses and media choices

The media coverage of the Queen’s death included the mourning rituals, funeral details, and topics that directly impacted New Zealand audiences, such as videos of her past visits to New Zealand. Given her 70-year reign, for most New Zealanders, she was the only monarch that they had known. Thirteen comments related to participants having affective (sad) responses. Nine of these comments contained emotion to describe participants’ reactions, such as “very sad,” “big feel,” “shock,” “royalty as a shared passion,” and “grieving.” One person said she was surprised by the strong reaction to her death.

A large part of the people's reactions has been the impact of the historical nature of the situation because she was in power for so long. Everyone knew she was going to die, and most people don't really care about the monarchy. It's been surprisingly impactful, and a lot of people are surprised at how somber they felt. (Female, 47)

Participants made media choices based on the type of coverage they wanted. For example, a 37-year-old participant said, “It was great to watch the full-day coverage from One News as soon as she passed away, but from there it was nice to watch BBC live because

it's direct from the source.” Another discussed paying for an international news source because they wanted more coverage: “We didn’t have Sky television at the time, but we put it back because we wanted to watch the Queen.”

Eight of the comments were affective responses (annoyed) and described the participants’ annoyance with the volume and extent of the news coverage, as they did not see relevance for them. One participant stated the Queen was an important person; however, he did not like the wall-to-wall coverage and stated the news needed to maintain focus on other significant events like the Ukraine war, the launch of NASA’s Space Launch System rocket, and an uncrewed Orion spacecraft around the moon (other news items at the time). Another participant opted to watch more comedic reflections of the media event with counter-narratives: “I remember Trevor Noah was trending on Twitter because of his opinion on the Queen passing. It was all over social media – everyone was really engaged and sharing it” (Male, 31).

Cognitive responses

Fifteen comments were focused on obtaining more knowledge about the Queen and the implications of her death for New Zealand. This is consistent with uses and gratifications theory, which suggests people consume news for knowledge and personal relevance. In today’s environment, the internet and digital technologies enable citizens to very quickly search for information on a topic. This need for information can increase in times of crisis or uncertainty, when people are trying to make sense of the situation and reduce their feelings of confusion or helplessness (Uwalaka, 2023). As an example, one participant said:

Everything was overshadowed by the Queen. I gobbled up everything I could. I’d hear something on the radio, and I’d google it to get a better understanding of the historical events. (Female, 55)

Given the constitutional implications for New Zealand, participants discussed the new role for King Charles III, whether New Zealand's currency would change, and if the Queen's Birthday public holiday would become King's Birthday.

Discussion

This study showed the news coverage of Queen Elizabeth II's death resulted in affective responses of sadness and annoyance and cognitive responses with participants in the focus groups. This is consistent with uses and gratifications theory that people seek news to meet their specific needs. Older participants used media to meet their social, emotional, and cognitive needs, and younger people were focused on meeting their cognitive needs. The results also reflect celebrity as a news value, as the Queen's death was a major worldwide news event. Several older participants expressed their connection to the Queen, reminisced, discussed previous royal family dramas, and sought more knowledge about the royal family. They had seen news coverage of the Queen their whole lives and expressed their grief for her, even when their relationship was only developed through media interactions. Participants described sad emotions and talking to others about the Queen as part of their grieving process.

The younger cohort did not have the same emotional responses. In line with research on media consumption for this group, they used different news sources. Their use of new media and social media meant they were exposed to less coverage of the Queen's death, and they had different experiences of the news coverage. The study indicated they were more likely to be exposed to counter-narratives on the news item than the mainstream legacy narrative. Reflecting the categories of Uwalaka (2023), the comments from the focus groups have the impression of some participants being categorised as 'grievers': those who were sad; and 'lauders': people who adored her. None of the comments fell into the 'accusers' or

‘defenders’ category. This can possibly be explained by the focus groups’ line of questioning being on news specifically, rather than the Queen’s role and legacy. However, there were comments from some participants about being indifferent to the Queen’s death and therefore annoyed at the domination of it in the news media.

Celebrity deaths have significant impacts because of the relationships people have with public figures, established through news and other media forms. Celebrity as a news value continues to resonate with audiences, leading to more media interactions. In this case, there were strong reactions from participants, including sadness and a sense of loss, indicating a connection with the Queen. However, there was not enough data to indicate the extent of any parasocial relationships.

The deaths of significant public figures, such as Princess Diana in 1997 and Queen Elizabeth II, resulted in increased news consumption and public displays of sadness and aligned with the categorisation of media events by Dayan and Katz (1992). Participants in this study who wanted more news on the Queen used television as their main source of news but also sought out other media forms. Overall, the mainstream news coverage created a shared news experience, building social and cultural context. Alongside this, participants used social media to connect with friends and family about the Queen’s death. This is consistent with Hepp and Couldry’s (2009) discussion on how the definition of a media event had expanded to include other digital media and conversations online as well as collective memorialising.

This study has limitations due to its small sample size of 25 participants living in New Zealand. Participants’ recall of their media consumption may have been impacted by selective memory, misreporting, exaggeration, or different semantic interpretations of the requirements. The research was intended to explore audiences’ meanings and use of news;

the focus on the media coverage of the Queen's death was incidental to the main focus of the research. However, the audiences' insights can illustrate responses to a significant celebrity death and understand more about people's connections with celebrities that are mostly formed through mass media. Further research would enable exploration into age and gender differences, exploration of parasocial relationships, and how people choose their news coverage of a celebrity death. It could also examine the differences between the mainstream media narrative (generally one-way communication) and other more interactive narratives on social media platforms.

Celebrity deaths will continue to be significant news events and covered by news sources (traditional and non-traditional). Television is often the leading news platform because of its visuals and its ability to bring live news to consumers. However, as consumption becomes more personalised, the coverage may become more diversified as audiences choose their level of coverage and their preferred media platform. This will be based on their connection with the person, who they want to connect with, and what needs they have (for example, affective, cognitive). Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953 is considered to be the beginning of television news as a mainstream storyteller. Almost seventy years later, her death was a significant worldwide news event. It showed the power of mass media to draw citizens together, the changing nature of major media events within social media environments, and insights into audiences' relationships with celebrities, formed through mass media.

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Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Current media environment

This study sought to understand the factors that influence news consumption and to explore existing theoretical models to see if they were still relevant for the today's media environment. It explored what motivates people to consume news, the types of news people are attracted to, and how their needs are met by news. These insights are important in understanding how news contributes to informing people about their societies. This chapter describes the current media environment for news consumption, discusses the key findings of this study, and explores the implications of these findings for understanding news consumption.

5.1.1 Definitions of news are simple yet problematic

As the news media environment has moved to digital platforms, audiences have broadened their definition of news from only newspapers, radio and television to a wide range of sources and formats of news. This has led to scholars defining news as an event or happening, as well as using the characteristics of the information, as described by audiences to interpret if it can be classified as news (Bednarek & Caple, 2017; Rudin & Ibbotson, 2013). In this study, participants used both methods to define the concept of news. They described impactful events that were clearly news, for example, the death of Queen Elizabeth II, and they described categories of news that were important to them, for example, local crime news. Participants had a broader understanding of news than only information from journalistic sources. This aligns with Vraga and Edgerly's (2023) definition of news-ness as "the extent to which audiences characterize specific media as news" (p. 420). Their studies conclude that the proximity (in terms of age) of the groups represented in the news and relevance are key components of "newsness". The participants' responses highlighted a

normative view of news, for example, television news programmes, with a wider range of sources and news, including blogs, videos and other information that was of interest to them.

This study found audiences are using a wide range of sources to consume news, and the majority were online. The 2024 and 2023 Digital Reports confirmed news retrieval has largely shifted online, and social media platforms dominate news sources' websites and mobile apps as the way to online news consumption (Newman et al., 2023; Newman et al., 2024). The mobile phone is the most common way to access news (Molyneux & Haskell, 2024) and gives users constant connectivity. The more often social media users come across news incidentally, the less time they spend consuming news from traditional news sources (Park & Kaye, 2020). News on social media is associated with the practice of “news snacking”: consuming news occasionally without devoting much time to understanding and evaluating the content (Coster Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015). This practice is accentuated by algorithms installed in the platforms that control the flow of news information based on the personal characteristics of the social media users and the posting habits of those they frequently connect with. With these practices, audiences can select when they consume news, the news they consume, and for how long. This is very different from the traditional practice of audiences consuming the same news at the same time (such as the television evening news).

Journalism is responding to the competitive environment with new forms of news, seeking regulatory approaches to support their sustainability, and developing new ways of selling news as a product. News sources are adapting content for new platforms such as changing the length and formats of stories, adding interactive features (Hase et al., 2023) and producing platform-specific short video-based news content (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2020). In Australia and New Zealand the media companies and governments are investigating

regulatory options to sustain the local media platforms. For example, in 2021, the Australian Federal Government enacted the Australian News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code as an attempt to regulate news on social media (Bossio et al., 2022). In New Zealand, media companies have sought voluntary agreements with social media companies (Hope et al., 2023). Journalism is also exploring new forms of selling its value.

News through journalism has had different versions of commodification, e.g. newspaper sales, but these have frequently been dependent on supplementary funding from advertising. Audiences can now access news and other information for free. This has forced the journalism industry to explore alternative funding options and balance business needs with the normative role of journalism to provide information of public interest (Momoh & Emmanuel, 2023). To differentiate themselves from other information services and offer a better quality of content, journalistic news sources are exploring sponsorship or subscription options (Harcup, 2023; Myllylahti & Meese, 2024). Audience data and analytics can assist with understanding what audiences are consuming and what they would be willing to pay for. Paying for news has the potential to affect audiences' perceptions of news, and may lead them to view news from other commercial entertainment services, they purchase over the internet. News as a concept has always been understood, yet hard to exactly define. These changes in the environment disrupt the normative definitions of news (Ekström & Westlund, 2019; Hendrickx & Vázquez-Herrero, 2024) and lead to audiences having evolving interpretations of news.

5.1.2 Credibility as a filter for news consumption

This study has highlighted audiences' considerations of credibility in consuming news. Audiences are bombarded with much more "news" information and cannot verify all of the information they need to know about their world, so they make choices based on what

they think are reliable news sources (Harcup, 2023). As audiences consume more news on social media platform, they are likely to connect with people of similar views to them. As such, they may perceive the information to be more credible as it comes from their contacts, and are less likely to question the veracity of the information (Del Vicario et al., 2016). Audiences may also have different needs for veracity, depending on whether they are using news for information or other needs like entertainment or diversion.

The perceptions of veracity come from the news source, the format and the news content. This trust is built up from habitual use of these news sources over time and knowing that the information is factual. Audiences consuming news from news brands are likely to have higher levels of trust in those sources than in consuming news from social media or non-journalist sources. This is because these sources do not have the verification processes and practices that are central to journalistic processes. These sources also have more user-generated content and can spread information quickly (without the time for the verification). Audiences may have needs for choosing these sources, for example, audiences may use TikTok to meet entertainment needs rather than as a primary source of news (Lan & Tung, 2024) and as such, they may not have a focus on the veracity of the item. Accessing news on social media has been found to impact the trust audiences have in the news media generally (Park et al., 2020). There is an opportunity for journalism to promote its role in providing credible and factual information to be a differentiating factor from other sources which may be considered less trustworthy for news.

To maintain its audiences, the journalism industry needs to have practices to meet the range of needs of its audiences at different stages in their lives. In addition, it can demonstrate the credibility of its news to help audiences select what they need, to receive their intended gratifications (Tandoc et al., 2018). As technology continues to evolve, journalism will

continue to change how it presents and distributes news to meet audiences' needs. A strategy for this is for news sources to have higher visibility of their editorial independence and verification processes (Park et al., 2023). Evidence has indicated the use of scientific sources, statistical data, data visualization and transparency of the source of the original information, can assist with establishing credulity of information (Henke et al., 2020). It also helps provide more information about the news source's approach to transparency (Masullo et al., 2022). New sources can also feature live blogs, which can present short timely factual updates to audiences to help present credibility (Pantic, 2020).

5.1.3 News consumption encompasses actions from news

This study found that following news consumption, audiences take actions to maintain social connections, seek further information, or satisfy other needs. These categories align with the framework of uses and gratifications: that is, people seek out news to meet the needs they have and receive gratifications, such as being informed about their society. News as a communication process has always been a social process, as citizens share information about their environment. With digital and social media platforms, the opportunities to share have grown and the news consumption process has become more involved. This leads to a potential expansion of the uses and gratifications theory. Accordingly, it has two orders: the order of news consumption and the second of the action that follows, where the audience has further needs and seeks further gratifications (e.g. the need to discuss the news with friends and family). Audiences' needs in the first order may not be the same as those in the second order. As the news dissemination continues, the item may be framed differently and meet different needs, for example, adapting a news item into a funny item for a social media platform. News consumption can be considered a much broader practice than only receiving news; it enables essential social connection and knowledge acquisition across societies.

5.2 Key findings

This study has three key findings for understanding news consumption. The first is that uses and gratifications remains a useful theory to describe the underlying needs that people have and the gratifications they are seeking, from news consumption. Secondly, as the news environment is now more complex, the new values framework is not sufficient to understand all of the different factors that influence news consumption. Finally, with high choice media environment, audiences have stronger needs for knowing how to tell the credibility of items, so veracity is proposed as a news value. Each of these findings will be explored below, followed by discussion on what the findings mean for the New Zealand news environment.

5.2.1 Uses and gratifications is still a useful theory

Uses and gratifications theory can be used to explain some of the parts of news consumption. It examines how audiences use mass media to meet their needs and receive gratifications (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011, p. 213). The theory proposes audiences are motivated to choose media to meet their specific needs and to obtain gratifications such as surveillance, information seeking, and keeping up with others (Katz et al., 1973; Katz et al., 1974; McQuail et al., 1972). This study showed many examples where participants are being clear about the needs they had, for example, understanding their environment, building knowledge and connecting with others. It also showed people changing media sources, when these needs were not being met. This is consistent with other recent studies (Falgoust et al., 2022; Lou et al., 2021; Vateraas, 2021) using uses and gratifications for media consumption which found the gratifications identified were consistent with gratifications in the foundational studies for the research. In addition, research on new media has shown that audiences make the most of the unique features of each platform and, therefore, seek and

receive other gratifications e.g. immediacy gratifications with TikTok (Dias & Duarte, 2022). These findings support the discussion by Sundar and Limperos (2013) for a secondary set of more nuanced gratifications for new interactive media platforms. Understanding these features will assist journalism develop new forms of news content and formats. It can also inform decisions for news sources on audiences' willingness to pay for news content.

While uses and gratifications is a useful way to identify needs and gratifications for media use, news values also impact on news choices. This was illustrated by the third article in this study, which showed how news values and uses and gratifications has the potential, through media interactions, for audiences, to develop parasocial relationships. News consumption can illustrate audiences' relationships with celebrities and public figures. When a celebrity death occurs, audiences choose media to meet their needs and will change their choices if their needs are not being met. The majority of participants in this study responded to Queen Elizabeth II's death by watching more media and showing their feelings of sadness and grief. However, the younger cohort did not watch as much traditional media and did not have the same parasocial relationships. As the news market becomes more fragmented and has more to offer for people's particular needs, the coverage of celebrity deaths in the news may change. They are also used to a wide range of influencers and micro-celebrities sharing their daily personal lives on social media and often having direct contact with the celebrities. This study indicates that, while celebrity deaths still have major impacts on news, the way audiences respond is changing. There is far more news choice for audiences, and extended coverage of celebrity deaths does not fit with the practice of shorter news consumption habits among younger people.

5.2.2 News values are not enough to understand news consumption

New values have been researched and modified to explain patterns in news consumption. They are a taxonomy to conceptualise the dimensions and characteristics of the items that resonate with audiences. The news values that impact on whether an item is chosen by journalists as newsworthy have become more complex since the original theory proposed by Galtung and Ruge (1965). Developments in audience news consumption methods and the competitive news environment have led to the addition of new categories for identifying factors that impact news selection. This study proposes these relate to the presentation and distribution of the news item, the changing forms of news to attract audiences, the involvement of audience behaviour in the news selection process, and understanding the application of new values for different audience groups.

Journalists make judgments on the newsworthiness of the story but also on how and where new stories are presented (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017). New forms of news consumption, such as news via social media, news aggregators, and applications, have disrupted the direct relationship the journalist has with the audience and potentially impacted the flow of the newsworthy item to the end audience. Audiences can consume news on news websites, on social media platforms, and via news aggregators (Kristensen & Bro, 2024). When compared to consumption via more traditional methods, the journalist-audience relationship can be more indirect, with less emphasis on the journalist or the news source brand. Audiences have more choice and control over what they consume and how. For example, a journalist will use their professional training to produce an article that resonates with their audiences. Audiences may choose to view or read it directly, or it may be sorted by algorithmic patterns via social media or news filters, altering how it is seen by its intended audience. With the new sources for news, audiences have a broader range of potential uses and gratifications from their news

choices, for example, presenting their political views on a topic. These changes have led to new categories of how news is presented, including visuality, shareability and sociability (Barclay, 2024). Also emerging are interactivity with the use, hypertext, and multimedia – the presentation and distribution of the news story (Steensen, 2011); shareability of a news story and its audio-visuals (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2020), and the use of infographics (Dick, 2014).

Journalists are adapting how they tell their stories to appeal to different audiences, such as using narrative storytelling instead of the hard news format of the inverted pyramid and more entertaining formats (Kulkarni et al., 2023). Casero-Ripollés et al. (2020) identify six categories of new formats for local journalism: storytelling, interactivity, multimedia, image, streaming, and transmedia. To support journalism's role in society, Harcup (2020) suggests news may need to be measured against one or more of the following criteria: social surveillance on behalf of citizens, monitoring of power, recording of community action and self-activity, challenging of assumptions and stereotypes, surprise and novelty, and entertainment and humour. These new forms can conflict with the normative ideals of journalism as being factual and objective (Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2015).

Within journalism, data and algorithmic tools are increasingly being used to monitor audiences' news consumption behaviours, present news in more individualised approaches, and promote the news source brand to maintain audiences in a competitive environment (Schjøtt Hansen & Hartley, 2023). These mechanisms can impact the traditional roles of journalism in choosing news (Scheffauer et al., 2024; Tandoc, 2014). The newsworthiness and selection of articles now, consider past audience engagement on articles, as well as journalistic practices and knowledge on what resonates with audiences. New agencies may also have to rely on the algorithms of third parties, such as social media platforms, to ensure

their material is consumed by audiences. Mast and Temmerman (2021) argue that the range of actors involved in the news process makes it difficult to analyse news values.

News values are not universal and there are significant differences in news values, news media systems and time spent consuming news across countries (Wilkinson et al., 2021). When applying news values, consideration had to be given to the audience needs of a particular group. For example young people have different interpretations of news values than older audiences and have different views on the role of journalists and news organizations (Eddy, 2022a). In this research, younger audiences often distinguished between ‘*the news*’ as the traditional agenda of politics and current affairs, and ‘news’ as a much wider category including sports, entertainment, celebrity gossip, culture, and science (Eddy, 2022a).

The literature shows a consistency of the seminal news values being applied over time to news, and the importance of identifying the factors in news that make items more newsworthy. Because the current media environment is much more complex than when the seminal news values theory was developed, researchers have discussed additional categories of news values to identify other elements that determine newsworthiness and news selection. Further research would be needed to identify the full range of factors and how these relate to the needs of audiences in their news consumption.

5.2.3 Veracity has become a news value

This study indicated a strong desire from participants to know the veracity of the news they were consuming. Some chose news sources as they knew they were credible; others chose news sources regardless of the perceived credibility and said they would do their checking of the information. This suggests that audiences use veracity as a filter when selecting news, making it a news value. Audiences’ credibility with news impacts their level

of trust in the news and perceptions of the media source's perceived standards, transparency, lack of bias, and fairness in terms of media representation (Henke et al., 2020; Newman et al., 2024). Veracity is a core factor in some audiences' news consumption, and if they don't receive it, they will not receive their gratifications and will change their media choice. The concept of veracity has emerged because of the high choice media environment and the lack of gatekeeping on many news platforms. Audiences have also become more used to watching live events on their social media platforms, so their expectations for news coverage have shifted. To satisfy needs for timeliness and credibility, audiences may expect to be able to follow an event live and directly as it is happening. If they don't find this within their normal news choices, they will choose another media source.

Audiences' needs for veracity may vary with the type of news they are seeking, for example, a promotional item for an event in a news source may not need to be as accurate as a traditional news story. As audiences diversify their news consumption, some may choose to consume widely and make their own choices about the credibility of an item. They may continue to use a news source, even though it has a lesser perceived credibility because they want to be entertained (e.g. news reels on social media platforms). Further research could focus on how audiences' perceptions of credibility are based on the source of the news, the format, or the content and to understand more about how this impacts news media use.

5.3 Findings for the New Zealand news environment

This research has indicated patterns of news consumption in New Zealand that are similar to comparable countries such as younger audiences consuming news on social media and a decline in consumption of some of the legacy news sources. Audiences are finding news from a wide range of sources locally and internationally. A unique factor of the New Zealand media environment is that it has a small number of large news organisations with

large audience share and the domination of these sources came through in the focus group discussion. This use of the major sources is also linked to the habitual nature of news consumption; people have regular news habits that are built up over time. Examples in the diaries and focus groups included listening to the radio each day on the way to work, or reading online news websites daily on work breaks. These habitual use patterns were mainly with the older cohort, reflecting that they have more established news consumption patterns and trust in these new products. In comparison, younger audiences, in general, tended to be explorative with their choices of news uses. While there are patterns in age group, no age group is homogenous, and each person has their own personalised habits. This research illustrated the increased use by New Zealanders of news from international news sources. This is consistent with commentary from Beattie et al. (2024) but may have increased as a consequence of media coverage of Queen Elizabeth II's death during the data collection period. This trend also could indicate that when a significant international event occurs, audiences may choose international news from where the event happened, rather than local coverage of the event, particularly if they wish to see live coverage. The research findings can assist to understand the characteristics of news that New Zealanders value, and how it impacts their repeat behaviours for news consumption.

This research has illustrated the amount of news sharing and social connection that takes place through news. While much of this in earlier days was face-to-face, the internet has led to more and faster sharing of news. News sharing has emerged from the sharing on social media platforms and the agency that has been provided to audiences with these platforms, for example, sharing news with their own comments. This has implications for journalism in regard to the shareability, interactivity and timeliness of news content, for example, producing shorter forms of shareable news content more often. This approach may

work for younger audiences and can be described as news snacking concept (Ohme & Mothes, 2023) where the number of news encounters increases but the encounters are reduced in duration. This may lead to New Zealand journalism sources using a range of content models and practices to meet the needs of different audiences, for example, investing in the production of short-form videos which have a higher news quality to compete with social media platforms (Newman & Cherubini, 2025).

5.4 Theoretical implications for understanding news consumption

Technological developments have changed the news environment by offering more content, formats and mobility of news consumption. Many of the theories of news consumption, such as uses and gratifications, were based on the model of audiences using one particular news source at a time. Today's news audiences may be consuming multiple media platforms at once, many with overlapping functions (Yuan, 2011).

This research into New Zealanders' news consumption habits has reflected the changing practices of news consumption and led to questions about what audiences use to navigate through the high choice information environment to ensure they receive news that is important and relevant to them. It has also indicated different practices amongst age cohorts in their news use but these age groups are not homogeneous. To answer the question of how audiences choose their news, this study proposes a new theoretical model for news consumption that includes uses and gratifications theory and news values framework to understand the factors involved in news consumption. It then uses the audiences' responses to the media coverage of the death of Queen Elizabeth II in September 2022 as a case study to illustrate this model.

5.4.1 New model for factors impacting on news consumption

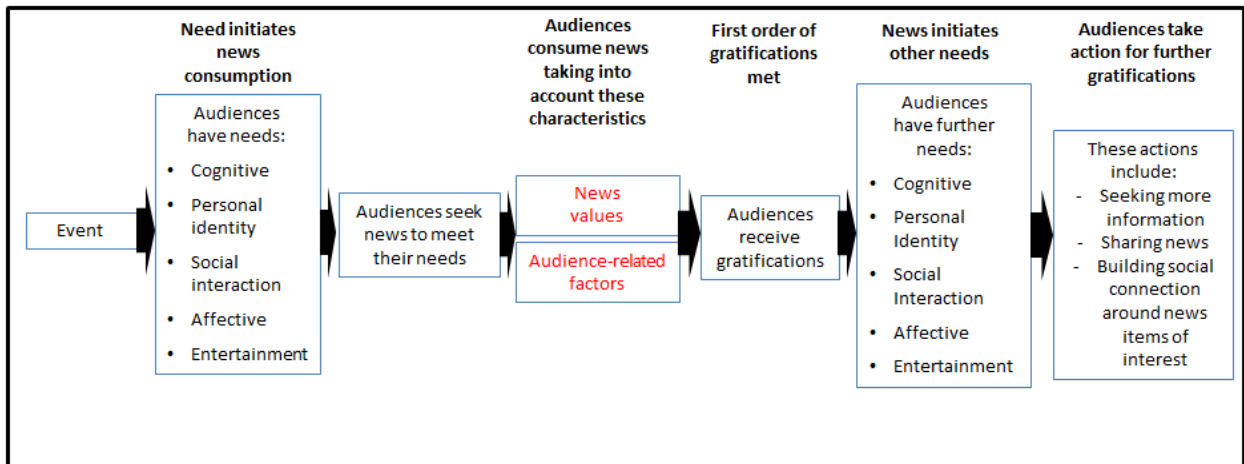
This study has explored uses and gratifications theory and news values taxonomy to understand the choices audiences make with their news consumption and concludes that they need to be examined together when exploring news consumption. Uses and gratifications theory can identify the needs for which people choose news, such as cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and escape or cathartic (Katz et al., 1973). The needs may be initiated by an event that sparks their need, and they seek news to meet that need. Much of the current research on news consumption highlights the foundational uses and gratifications from news consumption as described above, but also shows an emerging set of new gratifications from the affordances of new media forms and social media platforms.

The news values taxonomy can be used to conceptualise and classify the dimensions and characteristics of the new items audiences choose. News values include traditional categories related to the content of the news item, such as proximity, relevance and new categories relating to the form of the news item that audiences prefer, including visual appeal, share-ability. Audiences will then receive gratifications from their media use, and this may inspire other needs or actions for further gratifications, for example, sharing the news on a social media platform. This proposed model of news consumption is illustrated in Figure 2.

This diagram can be applied to any demographic of audiences and any form of news, for example, young audiences may have more social integrative needs, focus more on celebrity or sports news, and want to consume news via social media in the same way as their friends. Applying crime news to this model, participants in this study had needs for safety, sought out local crime stories, and shared them with their friends and family. A local crime story fits with the original news values of proximity, relevance, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, and reference to negative consequences. Therefore, a crime news item will

lead to cognitive and affective reactions in people, and specific secondary actions for further gratifications (i.e. sharing the story to inform others about any perceived risk in the environment).

Figure 4: Model of news consumption



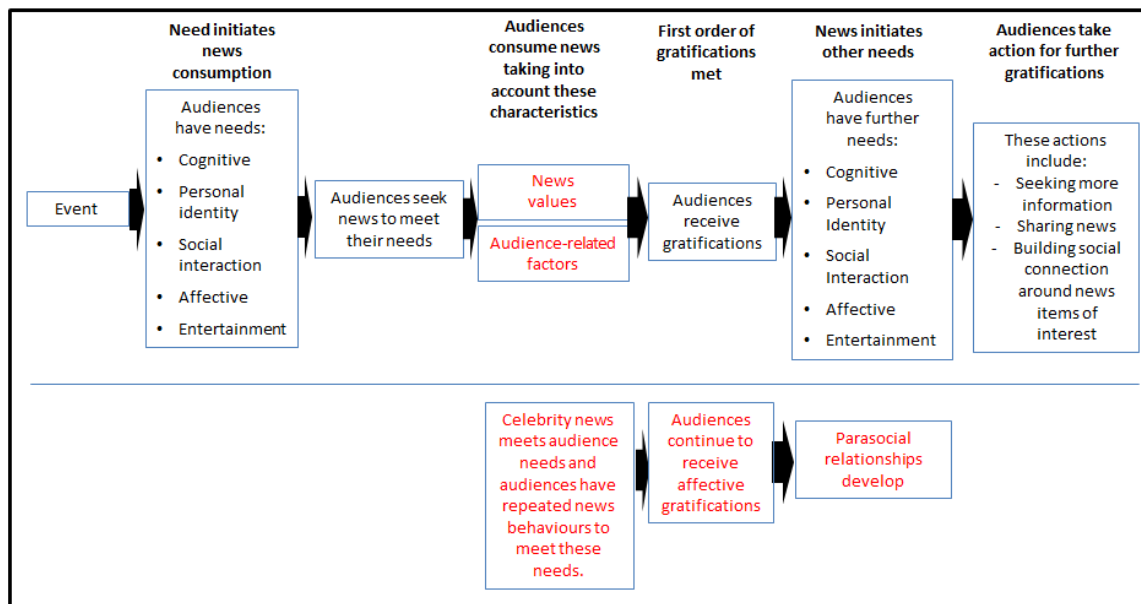
In applying the news values filter over news selection, audiences can make active choices about what they consume, or avoid news altogether if it is not considered relevant to them. A study by Edgerly (2022) found low news consumption was related to a disinterest in politics, news not being relevant to the audience, and a low understanding of how to access news in a digital environment. In addition, if audiences only receive news on social media, news curation may mean only groups with strong connections see certain articles (de Zúñiga et al., 2021). The introduction of subscription services means that while some stories fit with traditional news values, their consumption is based on subscriptions, so some audiences may not consume their items.

Over time, audiences will use news values to form media habits which then further impact their news consumption. Future research could examine news consumption using this model, and breaking it into: audience needs, news values, and audience-related factors.

5.4.2 Uses and gratifications, news values and parasocial relationships

The third article in this study uses audiences' responses to the death of Queen Elizabeth II to illustrate the links between uses and gratifications theory, news values, and the creation of parasocial relationships through repeated media interactions (see Figure 3).

Figure 5: Model of news consumption with parasocial relationships as a case study



Audiences consume news to gratify their needs, and in doing so, they engage on an affective level with news content. Over the past few years the pervasiveness and volume of celebrity news have increased, meaning celebrity as a news value has become significantly more common than other news values (O'Neill, 2012). Factors that could be driving this are: cross-promotional interests of media owners, journalists' links to the public relations industry, and competition within the news media for audiences (O'Neill, 2012). It has also come about as a result of the mediatisation in our society – the media becoming a storyteller on society – and changing society values (Dubied & Hanitzsch, 2014).

As celebrity news has increased and audiences are exposed to more coverage of a particular celebrity or public figure, audiences receive repeated gratifications from their

interaction in the news with that person and potentially develop parasocial relationships. These relationships become even more evident when a celebrity death occurs, resulting in audiences having strong affective responses and engaging more with that person than they did previously, for example, watching more news coverage or discussing with friends. In this study, participants showed strong emotional reactions to the Queen's death, such as sadness and grief, and some of the older participants showed a strong connection to her ("I've grown up with the Queen"). However, there was not enough data in this study to establish if there were strong parasocial relationships.

Further research could develop a model for uses and gratifications, news values, and the impacts on parasocial relationships. This could be a longitudinal study to understand how these relationships develop, more about the nature of them, and what happens when a death occurs for those that hold parasocial relationships.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and the future of news

6.1 Understanding news consumption

A wide range of factors have been discussed in this thesis on how, where, and what news audiences consume and what they do after consuming news. Many of the news consumption trends indicated in this New Zealand research are similar to those found in comparable countries. The traditional model of the direct journalist-audience model has been interrupted with intermediaries between the journalist and audience, or other news sources altogether. The study's findings support research (for example, Antunovic et al., 2018; Park & Kaye, 2020) indicating audiences are using personalised news consumption tools to manage their time and receive information of interest to them and share this information with their social circle. The volume of information on social media networks, from friends, news sources, and other sources, can enable people to feel informed without visiting traditional news sources. This form of news consumption will grow with the increased use of artificial intelligence tools and more sophisticated social media curation. Audiences can also create news, participate in news, and help news consumption through on-sharing. This environment has impacted audiences' definitions of news, consumption patterns, how they gauge credibility, and what actions they take following news consumption. All of these things make understanding news consumption more complex.

The study has proposed news and gratifications theory remains a useful model alongside news values, to study news consumption. Needs and gratifications in media use have historically been measured by focus groups and survey interviews, with the survey questions modified, as required for different media forms (Menon, 2022). Sundar and Limperos' (2013) analysis of studies of uses and gratifications between 1940 and 2013 on different forms of media, found substantial overlap between gratifications obtained from old

and new media. However, the new forms of news have additional features such as customizability, accessibility, aesthetics, and simultaneity of activities (Lou et al., 2021). These affordances of the technology suggest a different approach to measuring uses and gratifications than has been used in traditional media (Ruggiero, 2000; Sundar & Limperos, 2013). The way the news is presented can shape additional distinctive audience needs and new gratifications (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). For example, while using Instagram, people have found it gratifying in meeting their needs of convenience, expression of opinion, and obtaining knowledge about others (Whiting & Williams, 2013). The traditional gratifications sought and obtained were classified into two categories: content gratifications and process gratifications. A third category of social gratifications has been suggested (Lou et al., 2021; Stafford et al., 2004; Sundar & Limperos, 2013), which emphasizes the social connections that can be made with news.

The environment of news consumption is continuing to change, and there are many potential areas for future research, particularly with New Zealand audiences. Further work could be carried out on the definitions of news and audience categorisation of different forms of information. This would assist in defining the particular role of journalism in the provision of news. The proposed model for news consumption could be tested to understand more about audience needs (particularly for demographic groups), what they consume, and the personal factors that impact their choices.

Studies could explore the differences between what makes the news in news sources with the flow of those news items via websites, social media platforms, and new media. This would need to account for the intermediaries involved in the flow of news from journalists to audiences, such as social media platforms and news aggregators. This could also include taking a news repertoire approach, as proposed by Geers (2020), to first identify news

repertoires based on platform use and then examine news content preferences within the different repertoires. This research could include cognitive interviews and online news consumption tracking as used by the Pew Research Centre (Barthel et al., 2020) with very specific definitions and questions. Surveys on news consumption can be difficult due to errors and self-reporting, so different forms of surveys are required to match up audiences' patterns of news consumption (Konitzer et al., 2020).

Future research could also explore trust in news media and build on the research of Edgerly (2022) to understand factors that lead to audiences avoiding news altogether as well as factors that can increase audiences' trust in news sources. This will become more important as artificial intelligence is used in journalism for items such as automated content, production, data mining, news dissemination, and content optimization (Kotenidis & Veglis, 2021). This research would inform future commercial strategies for journalism that allow it to offer relevant news in a sustainable business model.

Within New Zealand, future research could explore the characteristics that appeal to audiences of the major media players, and more about their motivations for seeking out news on social media platforms or international news sources. Research could also examine Māori and Pacific media sources to establish how those audiences consume news and the cultural elements which impact on understanding their choices.

Finally, future research could further explore the links between uses and gratifications theory, news values (particularly celebrity), and parasocial relationships. This could be a longitudinal study to understand how these relationships develop, the nature of the media interactions, and the responses of those impacted by a celebrity death to their parasocial relationships.

6.2 Study limitations

This study offers insights for media and journalism studies, but a number of limitations need to be acknowledged. It had a small sample size of 25 participants based in New Zealand. Their perceptions of news were based on the New Zealand media environment, and in a week with a significant international news story (the death of Queen Elizabeth II). The study also used self-reporting of news consumption habits, which can be limited by selective memory, misreporting, exaggeration, or different semantic interpretations. Despite these limitations, this study has indicated theoretical and practical implications for news consumption, which will be of use to communication and journalism scholars for further audience research. Further studies could be carried out with specific demographic groups, to explore needs and news habits. Research could also look at factors within these groups that drive news consumption habits, such as level of education, attitudes towards the news media, and personal traits (such as in Kaspar & Fuchs, 2021). Further research could also examine the styles and formats of news to determine which best meet audiences' needs; for example, understanding why short-form videos are increasingly popular for news.

6.3 The future of news

Understanding the theoretical underpinnings of news consumption can help to describe audience behaviours and protect and enhance the civic role of news in society. Audiences have never had access to so much information 24 hours a day. The reach of a significant news event can be instantaneous and worldwide. Audiences can tailor information to their specific needs and can add share items with their own comments, furthering the exposure of the event. This environment brings changes that may undermine the role of news in informing citizens. These include reducing use of traditional news sources, a rise in misinformation and disinformation, and an increased use of artificial intelligence tools and

algorithms to send content based on preferences and past experiences. These trends have been seen in New Zealand with a reduction in audiences using mainstream media sources.

However, the current environment can also be seen as a stage in the development of news, similar to when journalism faced other significant changes (for example, from newspaper to television news) and an opportunity to innovate in news consumption. News and journalism has evolved over the years to meet audiences' basic needs, as described in uses and gratifications theory, for information about their environment, to be connected to others, and to be entertained. The advantages for audiences in today's media environment are the abundance of choice of content and formats of information, the instant and constant connection people can have with news, and the increased role of news in connecting people and societies. Understanding the factors impacting news consumption can assist to maximise these advantages.

This study offers theoretical findings to assist with understanding the factors involved in news consumption and suggests ways for journalism to continue meeting audiences' needs as the credible news authorities. Journalistic news practices have evolved and will continue to adapt to respond to audiences' needs. While there will be some audiences who will not actively seek out news, there will still be a demand for quality, factual, and trusted information to satisfy audience needs. The different consumption patterns may result in a reset of the special status of journalism with a stronger emphasis on trust and credibility. As the high choice media environment puts commercial pressure on journalism sources, new forms are emerging, such as citizen journalism, ambient journalism, micro-blogging (Hermida, 2010), and alternative journalism. These forms may be tailored towards groups of audiences, for example, those who want to hear different voices in citizen journalism. For example, in New Zealand, the rise of Māori and Pacific media sources creates a different

context for news consumption. In addition, technology is enabling forms of immersive journalism, using virtual reality tools to enable audiences to feel like they are on the scene of a news event (Greber et al., 2023). In the future there is also likely to be more sophisticated interactivity features for audiences and new conversational interfaces (Newman & Cherubini, 2025). These new forms allow people who may not have been represented by mainstream news media, to have a voice and may lead to increased awareness and levels of engagement.

Through initiatives such as promoting credibility, transparency of processes, and news literacy education, journalism can maintain its special status of communicating on issues that are relevant and important to audiences. Building this value will enable the industry to develop new commercial models to ensure financial viability. News consumption has undergone profound changes in the past twenty years, and audiences have changed how their needs are met. The future will bring even more change as generations who have grown up completely in digital environments, create news consumption habits and news as a concept will continue to transform to meet people's needs.

It's important to be informed about the world around you because otherwise you can't really operate in it. I think sharing news, whilst a lot of it is really other reasons we've said, is just so you can actually continue to exist in the world.

(Edited comment from research participant, September, 2022).

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Appendices

Appendix One: Article III correspondence

A version of this paper was submitted to the *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication* in September 2024 (acknowledgement below). It was not accepted for publication and this thesis contains an updated version. The revised article will be considered for another journal.

From: journalshelpdesk@taylorandfrancis.com <journalshelpdesk@taylorandfrancis.com>
Sent: Sunday, September 15, 2024 6:41 PM
To: Kirsty Anderson <kirsty.anderson@swa.govt.nz>
Subject: Revised submission received for Qualitative Research Reports in Communication (Submission ID: 249637594.R1)



Dear Kirsty Anderson,

Thank you for submitting your revised manuscript.

Submission ID	249637594
Manuscript Title	"I've grown up with the Queen": Responses to media coverage of Queen Elizabeth II's death
Journal	Qualitative Research Reports in Communication

If you made the submission, you can check its progress and make any requested revisions on the [Author Portal](#).



Thank you for submitting your work to our journal.
If you have any queries, please get in touch with journalshelpdesk@taylorandfrancis.com.

Kind Regards,
Qualitative Research Reports in Communication Editorial Office

Appendix Two: Statement of Contribution forms


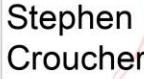


We, the student and the student’s main supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the student’s contribution as indicated below in the Statement of Originality.

Student name:	Kirsty Jane Anderson		
Name and title of main supervisor:	Professor Stephen Croucher, Head of School, Communication, Journalism, and Marketing		
In which chapter is the manuscript/published work?	Chapter 4: Original articles		
Describe the contribution that the student and members of the supervisory team have made to the manuscript/published work: ¹ The student conceived the idea, carried out the research, did the analysis, and wrote the article as sole author.			
Please select one of the following three options:			
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	The manuscript/published work is published or in press Please provide the full reference of the research output: Anderson, K. J. (2024). What is news? Exploring differences in how younger and older cohorts use news in today’s media environment. <i>Communication Research and Practice</i> , 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2024.2344997		
<input type="radio"/>	The manuscript is currently under review for publication Please provide the name of the journal:		
<input type="radio"/>	It is intended that the manuscript will be published, but it has not yet been submitted to a journal		
Student’s signature:	 Kirsty Anderson <small>Digitally signed by Kirsty Anderson DN: cn=Kirsty Anderson, o=ou, email=ivoociera@gmail.com, c=NZ Date: 2024.11.20 18:00:09 +1300</small>	Main supervisor’s signature:	 Stephen Croucher <small>Digitally signed by Stephen Croucher DN: cn=Stephen Croucher, o=Massey University, ou=School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing, email=s.croucher@massey.ac.nz, c=NZ Date: 2024.11.22 08:41:40 +1300</small>
<i>This form should be placed at the beginning of each relevant thesis chapter.</i>			


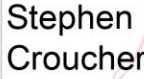
¹ Refer to the Massey University Publishing and Authorship guidelines ([OneMassey for staff](#), [Stream for students](#)) and/ or [Contributor Roles Taxonomy \(CRediT\) guidelines](#) for guidance.

STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION DOCTORATE WITH PUBLICATIONS/MANUSCRIPTS

We, the student and the student's main supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the student's contribution as indicated below in the Statement of Originality.	
Student name:	Kirsty Jane Anderson
Name and title of main supervisor:	Professor Stephen Croucher, Head of School, Communication, Journalism, and Marketing
In which chapter is the manuscript/published work?	Chapter 4: Original articles
Describe the contribution that the student and members of the supervisory team have made to the manuscript/published work: ¹ The student conceived the idea, carried out the research, did the analysis, and wrote the article as sole author.	
Please select one of the following three options:	
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	The manuscript/published work is published or in press Please provide the full reference of the research output: Anderson, K. J. (2024). What audiences do with news: a broader definition of news consumption. Media International Australia, 0(0). https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X241270608
<input type="radio"/>	The manuscript is currently under review for publication Please provide the name of the journal:
<input type="radio"/>	It is intended that the manuscript will be published, but it has not yet been submitted to a journal
Student's signature:	 <p>Kirsty Anderson <small>Digitally signed by Kirsty Anderson DN: cn=Kirsty Anderson, o=ou, email=woozienz@gmail.com, c=NZ Date: 2024.11.20 18:03:33 +1300'</small></p>
Main supervisor's signature:	 <p>Stephen Croucher <small>Digitally signed by Stephen Croucher DN: cn=Stephen Croucher, o=Massey University, ou=School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing, email=s.croucher@massey.ac.nz, c=NZ Date: 2024.11.22 08:42:09 +1300'</small></p>
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Describe the contribution that the student and members of the supervisory team have made to the manuscript/published work: ¹ The student conceived the idea, carried out the research, did the analysis, and wrote the article as sole author.	
Please select one of the following three options:	
<input type="radio"/>	The manuscript/published work is published or in press Please provide the full reference of the research output:
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	The manuscript is currently under review for publication Please provide the name of the journal: Qualitative Research Reports in Communication.
<input type="radio"/>	It is intended that the manuscript will be published, but it has not yet been submitted to a journal
Student's signature:	 <p>Kirsty Anderson Digitally signed by Kirsty Anderson DN: cn=Kirsty Anderson, o=ou, email=woozienz@gmail.com, c=NZ Date: 2024.11.20 18:07:04 +1300'</p>
Main supervisor's signature:	 <p>Stephen Croucher Digitally signed by Stephen Croucher DN: cn=Stephen Croucher, o=Massey University, ou=School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing, email=s.croucher@massey.ac.nz, c=NZ Date: 2024.11.22 08:42:51 +1300'</p>
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