

News Consumption in the Case of the Garifuna People: Reaching the Audience or Not?

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The purpose of this research is to understand how social media is affecting the news consumption of minority cultures, both within and outside the U.S. Using natives of Central America with ancestral roots in Africa as research subjects, this research explores how the Garifuna culture experiences social media and how these media influence news consumption and perceptions. Using a grounded theory approach, in-depth interviews were

conducted in the United States and Honduras. The results of those interviews indicate that media can aid individuals within the Garifuna culture to perceive they have gained some knowledge of world news, yet in actuality, this knowledge is superficial at best.

Keywords: Garifuna, news consumption, social media

Communication has always functioned as “a great catalyst of hopes and fears and the key to recognition and identity” (Barbero, 1993, p. 25). Mass communication, then, can be considered a catalyst for identity on a global scale, bringing awareness to individuals about their specific places in the world. Mass communication forms the basis of most individuals’ knowledge about that world (Turan, Colakoglu, & Colakoglu, 2009). The mass media can thereby foster confidence about, security in, and control of that world (Yi & Sarvary, 2007). This is part of the *why* of media use, a popular area of communications research.

When examining why people use media, researchers must consider the variety of messages available to an audience (Christiansen, 2004). Entertainment may be just as important as actual news information when it comes to choosing a media outlet (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000). And in the case of immigrant consumers, individuals “may use ethnic media for entertainment purposes (since humor and entertainment are culturally loaded and difficult to appreciate cross culturally) and use host media for news and local events”

(Wei-Na & Tse, 1994, p. 68), taking more time and using more sources to do so (Christiansen, 2004).

Such activities are key aspects of uses and gratifications. A desire for personal control over one's media consumption in order to meet particular needs for entertainment and information should determine what choices individuals make (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000; Diddi & LaRose, 2006). And "to the extent that a medium is perceived as superior for meeting a particular need...people should be likely to choose that medium over others for fulfilling the need" (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000, p. 25).

Like no other technology before it, television quickly became "the chief common ground...[for] a large and heterogeneous national community" (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p. 176). Audiences accustomed to radio broadcasts and newspapers embraced the vividness of television news coverage. Suddenly, individuals and groups who were not able to experience the world outside of their own direct experiences could join a mass public as never before (Gerbner & Gross, 1976).

Television's ubiquity makes it "the central cultural arm of society" (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p. 175). No current event is salient to Americans until they see it on television news, and that salience is dependent on geographical location. Althaus, Cizmar, and Gimpel (2009) noted that "two voters may have similar individual traits, but because they live in different places they receive and interpret political information in different ways" (p. 251). They referred to this phenomenon as *neighborhood effects*—defined as "the tendency for people to be socialized by those around whom they live" (p. 251)—and that the markets responsible for such effects can explain "a large portion of variance in individual-level news exposure" (p. 268).

Television, however, is not the only medium used to gratify the need for information and identity. Since the advent of the Internet, the media environment has grown increasingly complex (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000), giving people an ever-increasing number of options designed to "transcend territorial frameworks" (Christiansen, 2004, p. 191). Such frameworks limited the ability of individuals to control their media environment. New technologies have changed all that, allowing people to actively use technology to fulfill whatever needs they may have.

The present research aims to show how such trends drive minorities away from television news and toward online news sources by looking at a group called the Garifuna. In order to maintain positive views about their native culture, the Garifuna get most of their information from online sources. The rest of their information comes from social media and other online outlets that keep them up to date with cultural news.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Regardless of the medium, specific messages are consumed based on the underlying drives of the individual (Dutta-Bergman, 2004). (This is contrary to the assumption that “audience demand for news...[is] influenced by characteristics of information supply” (Althaus, Cizmer, & Gimpel, 2009, p. 250).) Active consumers purposely look for media outlets and information in alignment with their personal interests (Dutta-Bergman, 2004; Yi & Sarvary, 2007; Palmgreen, Wenner, & Rayburn, 1980). The gratifications individuals seek will be reinforced (and future gratifications shaped) by that information, and the influence of each source will vary depending on the number of sources. Take television news for example. If individuals watch only a single program, they “would have their gratifications sought shaped more strongly by the gratifications obtained from this particular program” (Palmgreen et al., 1980, p. 184).

To fulfill their needs, most consumers tend to “gravitate toward subjects such as entertainment, sports, crime, and weather” (Boczkowski, Mithcelstein, & Walter, 2011, p. 377). When faced with such diverse messages, consumers may use multiple sources to gather information about one topic, a phenomenon called *media complementarity* (Dutta-Bergman, 2004). Consumers may also use the variety of physical media for different purposes, even within the same content area. Stempel, Hargrove, and Bernt (2000) noted that although different studies seemed to conflict with one another, “it became clear that people relied on TV and newspapers for different kinds of news” (p. 71).

In communication research, news has been operationalized as “narratives or collections of storytelling devices” (Rodríguez, 2007, p. 574) and “the key source of information for society” (Yi & Sarvary, 2007, p. 612). Both definitions imply that the news is vital to the construction of reality in any democratic society (Ruggiero, 2000). Such needs for information arose out of World War II, during which communications processes

became more modern and professional (Boczkowski et al., 2011), and the public felt the need to know what was going on in the world.

This demand for fresh information often causes media outlets to give the people the same information in a fresh way “rather than stimulat[ing] interest in the news” itself (Althaus et al., 2009, p. 252). Though the information is the same, the technological means of distributing that information “bring us the possibility of finally achieving industrial modernization, administrative efficiency, academic innovations” and so much more (Barbero, 1993, p. 25). Modern technologies are breaking down the barriers that have prevented the “sharing of similar professional norms of news work and commercial orientation of media across nations” (Boczkowski et al., 2011, p. 380). One of the most useful tools in doing so is the Internet.

Since the Internet hit the world stage in 1993, it “has become a major player and is having some impact on other media” (Stempel, Hargrove, & Bernt, 2000, p. 72). The newest major medium has thrived because it has provided ease, convenience, and constant access to information that people want (Dimmick, Chen, & Li, 2004). This impact continues to grow, perhaps due to the “capacity users have to track issues and events in much greater depth than...with traditional media” (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000, p. 21). This has caused some researchers to question the future of traditional media, particularly news media (Dimmick et al. 2004) because the Internet is drawing more and more users (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000; Stempel et al., 2000).

The future of each medium depends on what the users of that medium get out of it. Uses and gratifications theories are central to this idea, especially when one considers that individuals make deliberate choices not just about what they consume, but how they will consume it (Ha & Fang, 2012). Regarding this phenomenon, Ha and Fang (2012) noted that nearly 60% of those living in the United States get their news by mixing traditional media with online sources. Dimmick, Chen, and Li (2004) asserted when consumers slowly start to use one medium over those previously employed, they are increasing their gratification opportunities and *competitive displacement* occurs.

Displacement occurs when one medium permanently replaces another amongst consumers’ media choices (Ha & Fang, 2012). Personal computers, laptops, mobile phones, and (most recently) tablets “may be displacing the use of traditional media like

newspapers and television” (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 17) because they fill the same need for information with greater convenience. One reason for this displacement is that the Internet has something for everyone, an inherent trait of its infrastructure and purpose (Dicken-Garcia, 1998).

The Internet has also altered the way news is defined, viewed, told, and presented (Dimmick et al., 2004). One of the Internet’s inherent features is the emphasis on familiarity and informality not present in more traditional media (Dicken-Garcia, 1998). Users are able to find information they need and interact with those providing that information (Ruggiero, 2000). This interaction is increasing the displacement of traditional media by the Internet.

Other researchers do not feel that displacement is the primary issue in the Internet vs. traditional news media debate. Ha and Fang (2012) in particular thought “television may be able to keep its stronghold as a news medium for audience than other traditional news media” (p. 185) because of its high overlap with the Internet. Diddi and LaRose (2006) felt that the bigger issue was in whether new media (the Internet, 24-hour news networks, etc.) were “creating emergent news consumption patterns that differ in their nature and effects from the conventional print/television dichotomy” (p. 197). They felt this way because the dominant conventional media outlets were beginning to dominate the new media. And because the content of the old and new media outlets are coming from the same source, such outlets “seem to be serving as complements to each other” (Diddi & LaRose, 2006, p. 205).

Outlets serve as complements because people sometimes do not get what they want from a certain medium. If television is inadequate for their needs, they will use other media (newspapers, radio, etc.) to fill the gaps. (Stempel et al., 2000; Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000). “Internet users are more likely than non-Internet users to be newspaper readers and radio news listeners” (Stempel et al., 2000, p. 76), suggesting that the media chosen for gap-filling depends on the medium responsible for the gap in the first place. Althaus and Tewksbury (2000) suggested that this happens “because online technologies are woven into the daily fabric of life” (p. 23).

As part of the fabric of daily life, the Internet has been the catalyst for many social changes among its users as they are continually presented with new media choices

(Ruggiero, 2000). Younger people in particular have responded to the Internet as it has been around for most of their lives (as opposed to the lives of previous generations) (Ha & Fang, 2012). These social changes are both influenced by and have an influence on the culture of which they are part (Dicken-Garcia, 1998). This is especially true for immigrants, who combine their native media practices and culture with the practices and culture of their newer environment (Christiansen, 2004).

The practices immigrants choose to exercise depend on what information they seek; certain types of media are better than others for seeking out relevant content (Dimmick et al., 2004). Many immigrants use the media in order to stay connected to their homeland, which connection is vital to their lives, and with other immigrants. Such connections help them interpret the news content they consume (whether collectively or alone) (Gillespie, 2006). They “see the Web as the ultimate in community building and enrichment, through which users can create relationships online in ways that have never been possible through traditional media” (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 20). Not only does the Web create a community not restricted by geography, but the content therein is often geared toward certain locales (Dimmick et al., 2004), which can lead to an increase in the sense of community both with immigrants and their new environment.

Some immigrants choose to “reject behaviors of the new environment...because they believe strongly that they need to retain their cultural heritage” (Wei-Na & Tse, 1994, p. 60), a phenomenon called *ethnic affirmation*. The degree of affirmation is dependent on how well the immigrants understand the symbolic boundaries created by mass communication and “how these new boundaries confirm the value and power of collective identities” (Barbero, 1993, p. 26). Understanding can be achieved by observing how the home culture is portrayed on television, which can give the immigrants a sense of how relevant they are to the host culture (Gerbner & Gross, 1976).

Immigrants may feel that they are irrelevant to the host culture and therefore will seek media messages that reinforce this view (Gillespie, 2006). The Internet greatly enhances their ability to do this. Althaus and Tewksbury (2000) showed that those who do so read newspapers but discontinue using television as a news source. Online media also “obscure the line between the sender and receiver of mediated messages” (Ruggiero, 2000,

p. 15), which may cause consumers to be less skeptical of content they have an opportunity to create.

Many studies (Vargas, 2000; Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Turan et al., 2009; Dixon & Azocar, 2006) show that media messages portraying minority groups reinforce negative stereotypes in the public consciousness, a phenomenon called *symbolic annihilation*. Turan, Colakoglu, and Colakoglu (2009) found that on the rare occasions when Western media do cover Third World countries, non-Whites—people in or descended from Asia, Central and South America, and Africa—are portrayed as simpletons. Dixon and Azocar (2006) also noted two major ways in which minorities are misrepresented in Western media: Black adults are usually shown as being brutal criminals, and Latino adults are underrepresented in television news compared to reality.

Minority groups and developing countries participate in the global media for different reasons than those for dominant groups. The traditional view of global media is that it has a homogenizing effect on global culture (Segev, Ahituv, & Barzilai-Hahon, 2007), and the values of the dominant producers of media were thought to influence global consumers. Those countries that could not or would not participate in the dominant global media were termed “off the map” (Allen & Hamnett, 1995), and were considered to be left out of the global conversation. When countries did decide to participate in the global media system, it was usually for different reasons than developing countries. Kramer, Callahan, and Zuckerman (2012) argued that there have been three main motivations for minority cultures to participate in global media: (1) as an apparatus for foreign national use, (2) to preserve indigenous culture, and (3) to forge a national identity from diverse ethnic groups.

While the one-way downloading of culture homogeneity seems to be a trendy topic (see Friedman 2005, 2007), recently, there have been greater efforts to study the usage of cyberscapes in providing a locus of influence. Notable among these perspectives is the co-constitutionality between culture and media—media shape cultural identity and cultures shape media through usage (Kramer, 1993, 1995, 2012). If this is true, it means that cultures do not evolve into whatever is downloaded by the dominant media; rather, they co-evolve, or form a unique media ecology. The concept of co-evolution between media and

culture is an important part of the media ecology perspective, which privileges the individual culture's ability to adapt to the changing environment.

Based on the above discussion of changes in news consumption patterns, and about why consumers choose to consume news, the following research questions emerge:

RQ1: To what sources do minority cultures turn to keep informed about news and events around them?

RQ2: How do minority cultures feel about dominant news sources?

RQ3: How well informed do Garifuna feel they are about the world around them?

RQ4: What does Garifuna news consumption say about Garifuna culture? About their place in society?

RQ5: What can scholars of journalism learn from a study of Garifuna news consumption?

METHODS

The changing nature of media, and particularly news consumption, detailed above raises questions about the minority responses to dominant media forms. What causes minorities to consume or not consume mainstream news? Do minorities follow the same trends in news consumption as the dominant groups? These media trends include (1) a general decrease in TV news viewership – particularly among younger generations, (2) an increase in new and social media use for news and awareness about society, and (3) a consumption of news that is in harmony with established beliefs of the consumer. In selecting a subject pool for this research, care was given that the subjects would reflect these newer trends.

Participants

The authors chose the Garifuna for this study for four main reasons. First, there is a general lack of research on the Garifuna people and no research relating to the Garifuna and media use. Second, the Garifuna are virtually absent in mainstream media and relatively unknown by others outside of Central America, yet there are a significant number of them in both Central America and in the United States. Third, the Garifuna have succeeded to varying degrees in maintaining their identity and language, despite the pressure from surrounding host cultures and languages. Fourth, the Garifuna have significant immigrant communities inside the U.S. and are attempting to integrate into

society. They receive great pressure from African-Americans to identify with that culture because of their skin color. Yet they also receive great pressure from the various Latino populations to identify with that culture due to the Spanish language that most Garifuna speak. Last, this culture fits within the general definitions of a “minority culture” mentioned above. This cultural group receives experiences both physical and psychological pressures from a number of dominant and subdominant cultures, including Hispanic, African American, and general United States culture. These dynamics lead to an ideal population to study news consumption and decisions that are made on what to consume.

A set of subject pool criteria was developed in order to select participants. Subject pool selection criteria addressed two main components: (1) the changing nature of news consumption and (2) the minority population’s use of social media. While researchers sought to determine the extent of media use among participants, subjects were not excluded based upon their access to social media. Researchers first determined the participants’ access to social media and the forms of social media available. Then, participants were queried about their usage of social media. Garifuna cultural participants were selected because they fit these two pre-established categories in the following ways:

1. These individuals are members of a minority culture spread over a large geographical area.
2. Many Garifuna members are currently living outside of their ancestral homeland.
3. The individuals were highly motivated to stay connected with their home culture or with loved ones outside the home culture through social media.

Because of their unique experiences, Garifuna culture has been the focus of varied research, including dominant language selection (Bonner, 2001) and native rituals (Green, 1998).

Garifuna

The Garifuna people are a group of Black Latinos, descended from West African slaves (Caribs) and Arawak Indians. In 1797, the British removed the Garifuna from the Caribbean island of St. Vincent, placing them on the island of Roatan, off the coast of Honduras. From there, these people moved to the mainland and established villages along

the coast from Belize to Nicaragua (England, 1999). It is estimated that the worldwide Garifuna population numbers about 600,000. Currently, there are approximately 300,000 Garifuna living in Central America, while many more (an estimated 100,000) have migrated into various areas of the United States, with principal groups located in New York, Los Angeles, and New Orleans. There continue to be strong cultural ties between those living in traditional homelands and those in the United States (England, 1999, Gonzalez, 1998).

The Garifuna are a very tight-knit population, perhaps attributable to their history of forced relocation. They have their own language, music, and religion. Most have family members who have emigrated to the United States, or elsewhere, in order to help support family members in the homeland. Even before social media, the Garifuna maintained strong ties with other Garifuna, and new technology has allowed that contact to increase. Published research has shown how the Garifuna have used social media to strengthen their language and preserve their culture, maintaining strong relationships even across great distances (Johnson, 2015; Johnson & Callahan, 2013). Researchers in this study determined that investigating how news is consumed through the same use of social media is a logical addition to established research.

In all, 60 members of this culture living in 8 distinct areas were involved in this research. Participants were identified and solicited based on their age, gender, and geographical location. The intent was to construct a sample reflecting Garifuna demographics in age and gender. Geographically, the intent was to sample the same demographic diversity among those living in various cities in the United States, a relatively large city in Honduras, and multiple traditional small villages. A local Garifuna guide was obtained in each area and helped identify potential participants based on specified criteria. No effort was made to select participants based on their use or non-use of media, in order to reflect a degree of randomness. The guides did not know the intent of the research ahead of time, other than the researchers were asking questions about the Garifuna culture. The geographical background of the participants was diverse, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1
Locations of Garifuna Participants

Geographic Location	Participants
United States	22
New Orleans	8
New York	7
Los Angeles	7
Honduras	38
Tornabe	11
Limon	10
Triunfo de la Cruz	9
Los Cayos Cochinos	4
La Ceiba	4

The three cities in the United States represent significant populations of Garifuna immigrants, as well as varied cultural surroundings. In Honduras, the researchers spent significant time living in the traditional villages of Tornabe, Limon, and Triunfo de la Cruz. Researchers also visited Los Cayos Cochinos, an island off the coast of Honduras inhabited almost exclusively by Garifuna. La Ceiba is one of the larger Honduran cities surrounded by Garifuna villages and was included to get a feel for differences in a larger city versus smaller and more traditional villages. The average age of respondents was 37, with a median age of 38, and a mode of 34.

Qualitative Survey

The researchers used an open-ended survey consisting of seven different lines of questioning to illuminate the process of minority media use. While this study was primarily interested in newer forms of media use, such as the Internet, the questions were purposefully general to see to what extent new media responses would surface. The goal was to understand the impact of newer media forms on overall media usage and specifically on news consumption. The survey instrument and procedure received Institutional Review Board approval. Each question was designed to reveal personal experiences in the media process, including new media. These areas included:

1. How do Garifuna people consume news?

2. From what sources do Garifuna tend to inform themselves about society?
3. What types of media are the most important to Garifuna, and do the participants have access to and use the indicated types of media?
4. In what ways do Garifuna use the various types of media—particularly social media?
5. In what ways do Garifuna use media to maintain ties with friends and family across large distances?
6. What level of awareness (or perceived awareness) of world, regional, and local events do participants have?
7. What are feelings of the participant about the coverage of his/her culture in mainstream news media?

Surveys were conducted in the language most convenient to the participant—the majority were conducted in English and Spanish, with a few in Garifuna. Researchers were both fluent in English and Spanish, and a Garifuna guide was used to translate for surveys conducted in Garifuna. Each survey was recorded and transcribed.

Using Constant Comparative Analysis, this analysis inductively approached data collection with no a priori scheme (Charmaz, 2000; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Each interview was transcribed, read, and reread. During open coding, similar responses were identified by moving back and forth within the dataset as the categories were formed (Lindloff & Taylor, 2011, Bisel & Arterburn, 2012). Next, similar categories were grouped together and the analysis moved to compare and contrast these larger categories of data. Lastly, these categories were then compared back with individual responses to ensure that the categories accounted for the level of nuance and force within the participant responses (Bisel & Arterburn, 2012). Constant comparative analysis is useful for establishing categories from qualitative data (Dey, 1993; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 1990). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that this method “stimulates thought that leads to both descriptive and explanatory categories” (p. 341). The advantage of comparative analysis is that it demonstrates the basic mode of understanding and how it structures the experience of reality (Hyde & Smith, 1979). The analysis gave special attention to statements or stories describing the application of media experiences and how these statements were communicatively framed by the participants. This analysis of firsthand adaptation

narratives allows researchers to identify theoretical elements and show their role in the adaptation process.

RESULTS

The research findings highlight several important elements regarding minority media use and level of awareness. These include 1) the general shift away from dominant news sources and toward news coming from social and, to a lesser extent online, media, 2) a near absence of TV news consumption, 3) a greater perceived level of awareness of current events, and 4) a lesser actual level of awareness of overall current events, but greater connectivity to events related to the native culture.

In-depth interviews revealed overall that Garifuna people – both in Central America and in the U.S. – have almost completely stopped watching television news and now rely heavily on online and social media sources to keep informed. They also reveal that Garifuna strongly prefer news related to their own culture and people as compared with general news items.

Shift away from dominant news sources

The trend of shifting away from TV and other dominant news sources is more prevalent among the Garifuna people than it is even among the younger generations in the U.S. Of the 60 people sampled, 32 (53%) said they only consumed news if they ran across it on social media – mostly Facebook. Participants were asked specifically about many common news sources, such as CNN and CNN.com, NYTimes.com, FOX News, even top Spanish language news sources like CNN en Español, ABC (Spain) and Clarin (Argentina). Participants were also asked about top local news sources both in Honduras and the U.S. Responses indicated that these dominant sources were only visited if they were linked from a friend inside social media.

When questioned about the reasoning for only consuming news if it appears on social media, respondents tended to agree that if news was important enough, it would appear on social media – thus indicating that many Garifuna use social media as a filter for what is the most important news to consume. One respondent, who researchers will call Ingrid, mentioned that what is important to her social group becomes important to her.

Excerpt 1: Ingrid. There's too much negative news that doesn't really apply to me. But if my Garifuna friends find news that they think is important, they will share it and then I will read it. But really what I like is to get news from my friends. That's what matters to me.

In fact, when looking deeper into Garifuna news consumption, no clear leader in news source could be discovered. News sources were so diverse that researchers were not able to recognize many of them. Many sources Garifuna used were blogs, others were websites that offered humorous takes on real news, or aggregators of news.

Near absence of TV news viewership

In fact, one noticeable item in the data is that most Garifuna interviewed in this study do not consume TV news at all. Only two of the 60 participants (3%) had watched any portion of a news broadcast on television during the course of the month previous to the interview. Both of those participants indicated the desire for current and visual information in huge news events as the reason they had tuned in to TV news. Because these interviews took place in 2011, they mentioned the death of Osama Bin Laden and the earthquake and subsequent tsunami in Japan as reasons to turn to TV news.

Participants were asked about these two news events specifically. 49 participants (82%) had heard of the tsunami in Japan, but got their news from posts they saw in social media and links to outside sources. Of those, 39 participants had watched video of the event (79%) from online sources, mostly YouTube, but some from major Internet news sources. Aside from the two who tuned in to TV news for the event, all participants indicated they wanted to see video of the disaster, but said they could see more current video than what TV news had to offer by searching online. Both of the two participants who watched TV news gave the same reason for turning to TV – reliability of information. Another participant, called Jose for this study, hinted that this is something most people do not fully understand.

Excerpt 2: Jose. I don't usually watch TV news. But if something big is happening and I want accurate information, I turn on the TV because I know the reporters will only say things they know to be true. It's also easier than searching through everything online. I look at reports my friends send on Facebook too, but some of

these things I don't always trust are real. But people on Facebook think they are. At least my friends do.

About half of the participants said they do not watch TV news because they cannot identify with most of the news presented. All of those said that there is never any news that really relates to Garifuna people, and if it does, it is nearly always negative in nature. About half of those interviewed in the U.S. mentioned news reports of Garifuna festivities painted as drunken, loud parties that were causing problems for the local community as the only appearance of Garifuna people in the news. And they also mentioned that the term "Garifuna" was never used. One participant who lives in a major U.S. city, called Jasmin by researchers, showed frustration over this fact.

Excerpt 3: Jasmin. Why should I watch TV news? They don't even know who we are. We live in their community and they know nothing about us. What does it say when they don't even use the word Garifuna? No. If I watched TV news, I'd start thinking like everyone else – that Garifunas aren't important cause we are never there. If nobody knows about us it's like we don't exist to the world.

Jasmin and many other respondents indicated that their perception of their people is that most do not watch TV news at all. The majority of respondents expressing this position indicated the lack of their own people in the news – and how the news presented on TV lacked relevance to the Garifuna – as reasons for not consuming TV news.

Perceived level of awareness

A common theme that came up with nearly all participants was that the Garifuna who consume news as it appears in social media all felt like they had a greater level of awareness of events in the world. This result comes with one caveat: they felt they were aware of the world and local events that were most relevant to them. The best example of this comes from some of the comments about another major news event of 2011 – the royal wedding. A major theme in the interviews was that Garifunas cared little for Prince William's wedding to Kate Middleton and their public kisses. The vast majority of those interviewed said they had heard briefly about this event – usually from a non-Garifuna friend in social media, but never bothered to read about it. In general, Garifuna living in the U.S. knew about the event, while those living in Honduras did not – with very few

exceptions. When asked about the event, respondents nearly unanimously expressed a general ambivalence to the event. Jose is an example of this:

Excerpt 4: Jose. I don't get why people are so interested in this (the wedding). I almost unfriended a few American friends on Facebook because of their sharing news about it. None of my Garifuna friends are talking about it and why should they? It has nothing to do with us.

On the other hand, nearly every participant felt they were more connected to the news of the world through social media. A common theme was that if something was important enough for people to talk about on social media, they would hear about it and thus become aware.

As one might expect, Internet access for Garifuna living in the U.S. was found to be quite high. Of the 22 people interviewed in the U.S., 18 had Internet access in their homes. All 18 that had the Internet in their homes had broadband-speed access. This does not indicate that these were all more wealthy immigrants; indeed, many of these respondents were in very tight economic situations—four of them were illegal immigrants, surviving on whatever small jobs they could find to support their family. Of the four respondents who did not have Internet access, all four had social media accounts and used the Internet on their mobile phone or at the home of a friend or neighbor. Of those that used the Internet at another person's house, frequency of use was almost daily. All 22 interviewees unanimously indicated that using social media was a necessity for them because they needed to communicate with Garifuna friends and relatives across the country and, most importantly, back in Central America. All 22 interviewees used social media.

In Honduras, the results were surprisingly similar. Access and use was less prevalent, though not nearly as much as expected. Of the 38 interviewees, only 12 had Internet access in their home (31%). What was unexpected was that 34 respondents had social media accounts. Of those four respondents that did not have accounts, two were nonagenarians, well-respected elders in the village who did not even know what social media was. Even the religious leaders, or *buye*, had social media accounts. Those that had no Internet access in their homes yet still used social media accessed the Internet at a neighbor's house. This was not limited to blood relations. The sense of community that

leads all Garifuna to call other Garifuna by familial titles such as “uncle,” “grandma,” or “cousin” makes it quite normal for village members to share one another’s Internet connection. In addition, mobile phone access was common in nearly a third of the interviewees. Access to the Internet and social media is not a problem in the Garifuna community.

The result is that they feel more aware of events around them – especially those in the U.S. The theme of awareness was less prevalent among participants in Honduras, but still relevant. One participant, researchers called Pablo was a good representative of this common theme in the data.

Excerpt 5: Pablo. You look at Facebook. It’s saturated with Garifuna. We think that not only does it bring Garifuna together, but it also helps us to know what is going on in the world. If there is a world news that goes on, we hear about it. Social media is bringing the world together. That never happened before.

Actual level of awareness

As opposed to the perceived level of awareness of world and local news, researchers observed that the actual level of awareness was significantly less than the perceived. This was analyzed by discussing in the interviews a number of world news items with the participants. Those news items from 2011 included: the passing of a same-sex marriage initiative in New York, the Joplin, Missouri tornado, the Anthony Weiner Twitter scandal, the stepping down of Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, riots in London and other cities, the death of North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, and the aforementioned tsunami in Japan, death of Osama Bin-Laden and the royal wedding.

Not surprisingly, the 22 U.S. participants had a greater level of awareness of U.S. news events and a very low level of awareness of world news events. Of the three U.S. news events discussed, 20 of the 22 participants in the U.S. had heard of both the tornado and the same-sex marriage initiative. Only two of the 22 participants had heard of the Twitter scandal and neither one knew what it was about. Of those that had heard of the same-sex marriage initiative in New York, none knew any details other than passing of the initiative. Of those that had heard of the tornado, all of them heard about it through social media and most had seen pictures of the devastation, but knew little else.

Regarding world news events, only two of the 22 U.S. participants knew of the riots in London, or the death of Kim Jong-il. Only nine had heard of the death of Bin Laden. 11 had heard of the resignation of Mubarak. The numbers get a bit larger for the bigger events. 20 of 22 had heard of the tsunami and the royal wedding. All 22 of the U.S. Garifuna participants had first heard of the news events (both U.S. and world events) on social media. Only two respondents searched out news from any of these events beyond that which was posted on social media, and those two were the only respondents who knew more than headline information about the news event.

Of the 38 participants in Honduras, only three had knowledge of at least two of the three U.S. news items. All three of those participants had spent time in the U.S. and had social media connections with some residents there. Regarding the world news items, similar numbers were found compared to Garifuna living in the U.S. Four of the 38 participants had heard of the riots in London or the death of Kim Jong-il. But 31 of the 38 had heard of the tsunami and the wedding, though most had heard through social media and demonstrated only knowledge of headline material relating to the events. Of most interest is that of the 38 participants living in Honduras, none had searched out local or dominant Honduran or world news sources for the information. They only read what was shared in social media – including any links that took them to articles in Spanish outside of social media. None living in Honduras had viewed any TV news in the previous month.

So, while nearly all Garifuna expressed a perceived heightened awareness of local and world events, very few (two of 60) had knowledge beyond a headline of major news events and a majority had not even headline knowledge of all but the biggest world news items. The researchers concluded that the actual level of awareness was significantly less than perceived.

Greater intercultural connectivity

The use of social media among the Garifuna people has created a non-physical space for Garifuna that is quite elaborate. Perhaps due to the close nature of this culture, the Garifuna use social media to connect with and stay connected to other Garifuna all over the world. The most-used social media site is Facebook, with 90% of the interviewees owning a Facebook account. But more interesting is the fact that, of those who have Facebook accounts, the great majority of their friends are also Garifuna.

One interviewee, spoke of the importance of social media to her and other Garifuna.

Excerpt 6: Ingrid. I use email a little, but mostly I use Facebook. In fact, almost all my friends on Facebook are Garifunas. The only exceptions are a couple of people from work, but I don't really communicate with them on Facebook much. It's mostly Garifunas.

When asked about other Garifuna, Ingrid said that she thinks others are a lot like her. Facebook is used to connect with Garifuna across the world.

This does not necessarily mean that the Garifuna have physically met everyone on their friend list, though they commonly talk like they are related to each other. In fact, with very few exceptions, the author observed that the Garifuna in Honduras knew the majority of interviewees in the U.S. and vice versa. When Ingrid was asked about one of the author's contacts in Honduras, she immediately indicated familiarity. "Oh, you mean 'Yellowman,'" she said, giving the subject's nickname. When the author went to Honduras, he found greater success locating this subject using his nickname rather than his given name. Nearly everyone knew who he was, even in different villages. Ingrid had no reason to know this other interviewee, but she knew him from Facebook. This is not an isolated incident. Countless times the author was able to connect with someone through another Garifuna's Facebook account.

Another spoke of how important staying connected with family in Honduras was to the Garifuna. These same thoughts were expressed by the Garifuna in many different cities and villages.

Excerpt 7: Jose. All of us have family still in Central America, and Facebook seems to be the best way to keep in touch with them. There aren't many of us, so we all tend to know each other to some degree. We keep close. We know what each other is doing. It's part of who we are.

The Garifuna people are naturally connected through close ties – even across great distance. But this new form of communication through social media has been accepted by the people and used to great extent to enhance that connectivity. So many Garifuna feel that the news that pertains best to them is the news that comes from other Garifuna – or that which affects Garifuna people.

Excerpt 8: Pablo. I feel that I am closer to them through Facebook. Facebook is more widely used to have events in the villages. It's like everyone is a reporter. People put up messages or photos of the events that have been done in the village and that makes me feel a lot closer to the village. The majority of them have Facebook, and I think it does a lot to preserving the culture. If people put up pictures of the events, they don't say, 'I'm not going to put that up because I'm embarrassed or something,' [because] I think that Garifunas are one hundred percent proud to be Garifuna. Well, I really am.

DISCUSSION

Despite the claim that global media is marginalizing minority cultures and causing global homogenization, this research found that newer forms of social media are in fact creating virtual cultural cyberscapes that are extending minority cultures. The Garifuna cultural response to social media can be demonstrative of the positive impact of social media minority perspectives (Johnson & Callahan, 2013). The larger implication, though, is that news consumption is changing as a result of social media. While we have discussed this for years now in the U.S., especially among the younger generations, this has not been addressed among minority populations.

Daniel Berkowitz (2011) outlines three vantage points or dimensions from which news should be studied. Those are Journalistic, Sociological, and Cultural. The first two vantage points contrast the latter chronologically and epistemologically, giving weight to a claim that the cultural vantage point needs to be studied further. The observation of the authors of this study is that because the Garifuna culture relies on social media so extensively as a means of extending its geographical boundaries – even more extensively than many other social media users – and because this culture has traditionally had such a highly developed interpersonal relationship structure, news transmitted through social media comes to have a greater level of interest than news encountered through other means.

As an exploratory look at minority use of new media, this research is limited in its ability to broadly apply the findings to any sort of minority/social media/news consumption

model. More work needs to be done to understand the process of social media integration of global minority perspectives in the news.

While this study begins this process, it does not extend beyond the scope of this one minority population. However, as a “Latino” group, the Garifuna could offer insight to news producers that may show how the fragmentation of the audience along cultural lines may require a shift in paradigm about how to frame news to smaller audiences. TV news has been in pursuit of the Latino audience for some time. This research suggests that much still needs to be done.

This research does have some limitations. First, the limited sample size makes it hard to generalize results to the larger group. Although the sample size is indicative of the overall Garifuna population, the further division of Garifuna by age, location, education and other demographics, makes generalization difficult. Second, it is problematic to generalize these results to other Latino communities. For one, the tight-knit nature of the Garifuna culture makes it hard to contextualize results to other cultures. This can be seen in the fact that there is not much difference between U.S. and Honduran Garifuna in awareness of news events. When the majority gets news from social media (which is not bound by geography), results will tend to be similar regardless of location.

But the major implication of this research is that news outlets must produce content that is relevant to the audience. News producers must keep this in mind now more than ever. To the extent this is accomplished, news that is relevant to the audience spreads through social media and becomes useful to the intended audience. This audience is no longer bound specifically by geography, but, as Berkowitz suggests, it is an audience more sociologically and especially culturally bound.

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Online Connections

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