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Mass media usage during a natural disaster: LSU college students and Hurricane Katrina

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**MASS MEDIA USAGE DURING A NATURAL DISASTER: LSU COLLEGE
STUDENTS AND HURRICANE KATRINA**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
In partial fulfillment of the form
Requirements for the degree of
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in

Theanship School of Mass Communication

by
Pavica Juric
B.A., University of Zagreb, 2003
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ABSTRACT

A survey with 293 American and 68 international LSU students and three focus groups were conducted between November 2005 and February 2006 to determine the difference in media use between American and international LSU students in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina: What were students' main sources of information after the storm? What were their sources when electricity was out? Which source of information helped students feel less lonely? Which source of information helped students feel less stressful? Finally, which medium did the students believe, when compared to others, did the best job reporting on Hurricane Katrina? Second, the study explored how female LSU students differed from male students in media use and satisfaction after the storm.

Survey results showed that television was the primary source of information for both American and international students. For American students, coverage by local TV was both informative and comforting, and coverage of national TV was more informative. For international students, both local and national coverage were more informative. More American students listened to the radio as more of them did not have electricity. International students went online more to contact their friends and family abroad and American students used cell phones to talk to family members. Friends were the primary stress relief for both groups of students and the source that helped them feel less lonely. The largest number of both groups of students agreed that local TV did the best job in reporting on Hurricane Katrina. Overall, students gave the average grade B to American news media reports on Katrina. International students said they were more comforted using American media and got more information from them than from their native language media.

When considering gender, there was a significant difference between males and females in using mobile phones, sending text messages and getting information from family members.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

The range of communication media available to young people is rich, wide, and likely to continue to increase in the future. As the number and variety of media have increased across U.S. households, media use among young people has become more private and independent (Louie, 2003). Although media are usually the only credible information source for the public during a disaster event (Sood *et al.* 1987), data on how people access news in natural disasters are still lacking (Piotrowski & Armstrong 1998). Available literature mostly talks about media in general, often not including new media such as cell phones and text messaging. Also, the literature does not explain college students' use of media during natural disasters and does not explain if there is a difference in use between American and international male and female students, when they have the same local and national media available.

Purpose of the Study

By conducting three focus groups - two with American and one with international LSU college students - and a survey, this study will try to explain the difference in media use between American and international students at Louisiana State University in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina: What were students' main sources of information after the storm? What were their sources when the power was out? Which source of information helped students feel less lonely? Which source of information helped students feel less stressful? Finally, which medium when compared to others did the best job in reporting on Hurricane Katrina? Secondly, the study explored how female LSU students differed from male students in media use and satisfaction after the storm?

Also, international students were asked for their opinion on media coverage after Katrina as their uses differ from American students' use of media when they have the same sources available. Approximately a half million international students attend U.S. universities (Institute of Institutional Education, 2001). Such a group offers a special opportunity to understand how and to what extent people from other countries use media in the United States.

Contribution to Scholarly Literature

This study is important for a few reasons. First, media news reports are usually the only source of information for the public during a disaster (Sood et al. 1987), but most of the previous studies have focused on a single medium, such as television or radio (Masel & Hornig, 1993).

Second, media are the substitute for personal contact and sources of primary group affiliation (Cerulo, Ruane, & Chayko, 1992). However, as Perez-Lugo (2004) argued, only a limited number of studies addressed this function of the media in natural disasters. Most of the researchers do only content analysis of the media to determine how media reported during the period of crisis.

Moreover, while traditional media (newspaper, television, and radio) have been widely examined under the uses and gratifications paradigm (Morris & Ogan, 1996), new media (Internet, cell phones) also demand more theoretical attention and empirical effort. As Ruggiero (2000) suggested, the emergence of computer-mediated communication has revived the significance of uses and gratifications. Other mass media scholars also suggested that traditional models of uses and gratifications may still provide a useful framework from which to begin study of the Internet and new media communication (December, 1996). Examining the motivations for using the World Wide Web, Tewksbury and Althaus (2000) showed that traditional media gratifications and models can successfully predict a relationship between beliefs about the Web, and gratifications sought and obtained from its use.

Using both quantitative and qualitative research methods to find out the difference in media use between American and international and male and female LSU college students, this study will contribute to a better understanding of audiences' use of media during natural disasters. It will contribute better understanding of how international students differ from American students in media use to satisfy their needs.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In 2002, Bruce E. Pinkleton and Erica Weintraub Austin said people are likely to have trouble accurately recalling specific exposure to news media, especially television, and some measures of television exposure may ultimately obscure more than they reveal. Participants' answers to exposure questions may depend heavily on guessing rather than on actual experience (Price & Zaller, 1993).

When a crisis hits an entire community or nation, most people experience the event largely through the media (Rasinski, Berktoed, Smith, & Albertson, 2002). Perez-Lugo (2004) conducted interviews with residents of a city impacted by Hurricane Georges in 1998 to find out the victims' experiences of the disaster. She found that the media-audience relationship remains across disaster phases but its function changes with those phases. The media-audience relationship during the impact of the natural event is equally intense or even more so than in the other phases; and "it fulfills more functions than strictly the supply of information, such as providing emotional support and a sense of community" (p. 211).

Primary Sources of Information

The media play a critical role during all phases of natural disasters (Masel & Hornig, 1993) and the role of television has become increasingly important (Altheide, 1985). Television's influence as an information source during normal times carries over to periods of disaster and unless power is lost, it serves as the major outlet for hard news (Wenger & Quarentelli, 1989).

Generally, the overall dependency relationship between individual and media content is stronger when exposure to the media is higher (DeBoer and Velthuijsen, 2001). It is also stronger if media can satisfy more of the audiences' needs, or the issue in the news is unobtrusive,

meaning there is no information about it anywhere else. As Littlejohn (2002) explained, “First you will become more dependent on media that meet a number of your needs than on media that provide just a few” (p. 325).

In 1998 Piotrowski and Armstrong conducted a one-page questionnaire survey, which asked participants to indicate the frequency (daily, every few hours, hourly) of various information/news media sources on which they relied during the crisis period of Hurricane Danny. Their results showed that local TV coverage and local radio reports were major sources of information and news for the public. A minority of respondents noted using Internet weather sites and weather-band radio, while a third of the sample read the local newspaper. The findings were consistent with prior research. As Spencer (1992) showed, people especially like TV because of the public’s preference for visual imagery and dramatic impact. Television news gives priority to visual images over contextual information and emphasizes simple conflicts. (McClure & Patterson, 1976) On the other side, as Perez-Lugo found (2004), after Hurricane Georges electric service was suspended so people had no other option but to listen to battery-powered radio. People, she said, kept the radio on mainly because it served as a tie between isolated individuals or groups and “the others.”

Newhagen and Nass (1989) have argued that newspapers will always be at a disadvantage relative to television in surveys of public attitudes because the “separation in time and space between readers and the people who produce newspapers” (p.278). They said consumers rate more “personal messages as more accurate, more sincere, more responsible and more impartial than impersonal news sources” (p. 279). Preferring a name and a face and a voice with communication is human nature (Claussen, 2004). However, in 2001 a Sun, Chang and Yu study determined that access to media alternatives decreases dependency on mainstream media in China.

Following the Mount St. Helens volcano eruption in western Washington in 1986 Hirschburg, Dillman, and Ball-Rokeach found that the mass media were a more important source of information than interpersonal communication. They said that people continued to rely on the media even when initial information seemed misleading. After September 11, Wilson Lowrey (2004) did a study to examine dependence on media after the terrorist attack. He was concerned about why dependency level varies at the individual level, and what effect this variation has on the individual. Dependence was also high for television and print, while weaker for interpersonal communication, than radio and the Web. Lowrey in 2004 found that familiarity with a media type leads to finding that type more helpful in a crisis, so dependency on that media is greater.

In a study conducted by Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) a survey of 279 college students revealed uses and gratification theory's five motivations for using the Internet (ranked): interpersonal utility, seeking information, passing time, convenience, and entertainment. As Kaye and Johnson (2002) suggested, the uses and gratification theory is particularly well suited to studying the Internet. The vast amount of information available on the Internet is able to fulfill many needs. Thus, information - seeking is a primary function for using the Internet by both genders.

Recently, researchers conducted studies to answer questions about how people use cellular phones. In 2005, DeBaillon and Rockwell attempted to determine differences in cellular telephone use according to gender and student-status. The impetus for the study came as well from uses and gratification theory. The project investigated uses of the cellular telephone among three groups (high school students, college students, and non-student adults). Results indicated that college students were the heaviest users followed by high school students and non-student adults. The results also revealed that the gender gap in cellular telephone use is narrowing, with

men and women reporting virtually equal usage. Only 10 percent of the participants in the study reported that they did not own a cellular telephone.

Dimmick, Sikand and Patterson (1994) argued that the cellular phone as a new medium unmistakably possesses elements characteristic of both unmediated interpersonal communication and mediated mass communications. It expands telephone services from an unmediated common carrier to multi-purpose content services including paging, voice mail, fax, data transmission, news and weather updates, stock information, and Internet access, among others. Keller and Noble (1987) differentiated telephone use into two broad motives or gratifications: intrinsic or social and instrumental or task-oriented. Intrinsic motivations of phone use refer to making calls to socialize (such as chatting, gossip, keeping family contacts, and having a sense of security), while instrumental motivations of telephone use concern the utility of calls (such as making appointments, ordering products, information - seeking and the like). Their findings show that social uses were more frequent than utilitarian uses.

International Students' Use of Media

Yang, Wu, Zhu and Southwell (2004) did a study to explore media use among international Chinese students in the United States. Their results suggested changes in the types of media used by Chinese students before and after they came to the United States. Use of some media, including local radio, Chinese newspapers, both broadcast TV and cable TV, significantly decreased after arrival in the U.S., indicating that Chinese students used television less after they came to the United States. Types of media that significantly increased in terms of use following arrival are U.S. movies, U.S. magazines and U.S. newspapers, use of email, online news, and online literature. Chinese students watch TV more to find out "what's going on in America" than finding out "what's going on in China," whereas they use the Internet more for finding out "what's going on in China" than for finding out "what's going on in the United States." The

Internet was a means of connection with family and friends in China. Therefore, Yang, Wu, Zhu and Southwell (2004) concluded that TV- watching continues to be viewed as a good way to get information about American culture, to adjust to American society and to improve English, perhaps even more so than in the case with Internet use. Also, they suggested that various media outlets may play very different roles in fulfilling those needs.

In contrast to American youth, Louie (2003) found that a high share of immigrant youth groups choose both ethnic as well as English-language media. Native language media could offer comfort and familiarity to immigrant teens who may still have difficulty with English and who may retain cultural values and perspectives from their region of origin. Alternatively, using ethnic media may serve social or family functions.

Also, in contrast to American students, international students may not have much contact with people in the host society. Moreover, limited proficiency in the English language might make it difficult to acquire information about the host society. Compared to U.S. students, television exposure may become more influential for foreign students because of its ubiquity and ease of access. In addition, the visual nature of the medium makes it easy to follow even for those with below-average language skills (Woo & Dominick, 2001). Still, international students, with less direct experience and less knowledge of American television formulas, might be less aware of the contrived and sensationalistic tricks used by TV to attract an audience (Tyler & Cook, 1984).

Media Functions

Immediately after disasters, the media conveys critical information to the public regarding the crisis, but it also provides psychological support to the stricken communities (Graber, 1980). Perez-Lugo argued in her 2004 study that during natural disasters mass media became a substitute for personal contact. Media provide their members with a strong sense of identity and

purpose and build strong and enduring emotional bonds. Media offer social support to individuals who might otherwise suffer social isolation. Dominick (1996) also concluded that media, apart from transmitting information, also have a “linkage” and “a social utility” function. Keeping the TV on helps people to overcome loneliness (Dominick, 1996) and reduce the negative effects of stressful life events in general (Turner, 1999). In 1995, in a study of the Loma Prieta earthquake, Massey uncovered alternative media uses to fulfill not only a need for information but for companionship during the recovery after the earthquake.

Investigating the characteristics of network television coverage of two natural disasters occurring within weeks of each other in the fall of 1989, Hurricane Hugo and the Loma Prieta earthquake, Walters (1993) found that television’s influence as an information source during normal times carries over to periods of disaster.

Media Satisfaction

Dautrich and Hartley tried to understand confidence in the media from the public’s perspective (Graber 1997: 381-84). How does the public perceive the media? More importantly, what are some of the factors that help explain variations in public perceptions of the media?

Theories of selective exposure and media use hold that individual characteristics affect media use and, therefore, the results of media use. Motivated citizens are especially likely to use newspapers to learn about politics (Culbertson & Stempel, 1986), and readers expect greater informational benefit from these sources (Chew, 1994). Gunther (1992) for example, found that the judgments of bias or fairness tend to be more critical for individuals who are more familiar with a subject. Rather than the frequency of media use, the authors claimed fairness, accuracy and completeness of media perception may more effectively demonstrate the outcomes of media use (Pinkleton & Austin, 2002).

In 2005 the Pew Research Center found that public attitude toward the press have become more negative in the last few years, but despite this criticism, most Americans continue to say they like mainstream news outlets.

In a 1985 study, about half of Americans said television was the most credible news medium, with only 25 percent saying newspapers (Clausses, 2004). Another study indicated the public views local television news more favorably than national television news (Hess, 1995). A 1998 Gallup Poll continued to show public preferences for CNN, public television, local television, and television newsmagazines over newspapers. Broadcast news has higher credibility than print, especially local television newscasts.

The Internet has only a narrow niche audience that uses it for news. Radio and TV talk shows and the infotainment shows do only slightly better. All of these sources rate particularly low in trust. Fifty percent of people said they cannot trust the accuracy of what they see or hear there. The Pew Research Center showed in November 1994 that males were more critical of the press coverage than females. Also, whites were more critical than blacks and Hispanics, older people more than younger people, and better educated more critical of press coverage than those of less education (Table 1.):

Table 1 - Rating of press coverage (1994)

	Excellent (%)	Good (%)	Passing (%)	Poor (%)	Failing (%)
Sex					
Male	7	25	38	18	11
Female	36	31	16	7	10
Race					
White	6	28	36	18	9
Black	6	40	30	11	6
Hispanic	8	54	25	7	4
Age					
18-29	9	39	33	11	6
60-69	9	33	33	14	8
Education					
College grad.	5	26	38	19	10
H.S. grad.	7	37	34	14	6
< H.S. grad.	14	40	30	11	3

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The main purpose of this study is to see if a difference exists in media use between American and international LSU students. The secondary purpose is to explore whether there were differences in media use between male and female LSU students in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

The research questions and hypotheses for the study are:

RQ1.

- a)** What were students' main sources of information after the storm?
- b)** Is there a difference between American and international students in their opinion about television coverage after the storm?
- c)** Is there a difference in their Internet usage after the storm?
- d)** Is there a difference in their radio usage after the storm?
- e)** Is there a difference in their newspaper usage after the storm?
- f)** Is there a difference in their cell phones usage after the storm?
- g)** Which sources of information helped students feel less lonely?
- h)** Which sources of information helped students feel less stressful?
- i)** Which medium did the best job in reporting on Hurricane Katrina?

H1. International students will depend on personal contacts for information more than American students.

H2. International students will use their native language media more than American media for reports on Hurricane Katrina.

R2. How will female LSU students differ from male students in media use and satisfaction after the storm?

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF MEDIA USE

Uses and Gratification Theory

This study is based on uses and gratification theory. Uses and gratification theory explains how different people use the same media messages for different purposes to satisfy their psychological and social needs and achieve their goals (Katz, 1959). Uses and gratification theory looks at what people do with media and why. Its origins are in the 1940s when researchers became interested in why audiences engaged in various forms of media behavior (Wimmer & Dominick, 1994). Some of the earliest media studies focused on problems of uses and gratifications: why women watch soap operas, the gratifications provided by quiz programs, the functions of newspaper reading and the motives for getting interested in serious music on the radio are famous examples. (Katz & Foulkes, 1962).

Five assumptions of uses and gratifications are:

- “1. The audience is conceived of as active; that is, an important part of mass media use is assumed to be goal oriented.
2. In the mass communications process much initiative in linking need gratification and media choice lies with the audience member.
3. The media compete with other sources of need satisfaction.
4. Individual audience members can give data that will set up the goals of mass media.
5. Value judgments about the significance of mass communications should be suspended while audience orientations are explored on their own terms” (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974, p. 27-33).

According to the uses and gratifications theory, audiences differ in the gratifications they

seek from the mass media. Researchers usually classify the audiences' needs and gratifications into the following categories: diversion (escape from problems; emotional release), personal relationship (social utility of information in conversation; substitute of the media for companionship), personal identity (value reinforcement, self-understanding), and information (McQuail, Blumler & Brown, 1972). They say that audiences selectively choose media to meet individual needs, values, motives, and interests, to obtain diversion, entertainment, respite; and to solve problems of daily life.

However, the theory is not without critics. Critics of the uses and gratification theory say it is focused too narrowly on the individual (Elliot, 1974). They say it relies on psychological concepts such as need, and it neglects the social structure and the place of the media in that structure. Critics also say the theory claims that people are free to choose the media fare and the interpretations that they want (White, 1994).

This study will try to explain the difference in media use between American and international LSU college students in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina: What were students' main sources of information after the storm? What were their media sources when power was out? Which sources of information helped students feel less lonely? Which sources of information helped students feel less stressful? Secondly, the study explored how female LSU students differ from male students in media use and satisfaction after the storm?

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

To address these questions, three focus groups and a survey were conducted among LSU students who were in Baton Rouge at the time Hurricane Katrina hit the Louisiana coast on August 29, 2005. Students could not participate if they were not in town during the storm and two weeks after that.

In the first phase, focus groups were arranged to include 16 American and six international students, age 18 and older. Focus groups were conducted on November 14, 2005, with American students and on January 27, 2006, with international students. In the second phase, a survey conducted with 293 American and 68 international students at the LSU campus in February 2006 asked respondents to complete the questionnaire on their uses and satisfactions with the media after the storm. International students were given questionnaires in their ENGL 1051 classes in the week of February 20, 2006, and in front of Middleton library and the Union on the LSU campus. Most American students (70%) completed questionnaires in MC 2000, and the rest in front of the Middleton library and the Union. A few students who were not available in person were sent the survey through email. Participants spent approximately five to seven minutes on the survey. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were chosen for the study to provide richness of data on how different groups of LSU students use media in times of a disaster.

Focus groups

Procedure

In the first phase, subjects participating in three focus groups spent approximately 60 minutes interacting in response to basic questions about the hurricane and media coverage. Earlier, participants filled out a short questionnaire covering socio-demographic and media use information. In the first two focus groups, participants were American students, volunteers from

MC 3018 who were in Baton Rouge during Hurricane Katrina. In the first groups there were ten students, eight females and two males. The second group had six students, five females and one male. Their average age was 21. The third focus group was comprised of international students, two males and four females, average age 24, who also rode out the hurricane in Baton Rouge.

During all three sessions, the moderator uses an outline of open-ended questions to explore various aspects of the research topic. Before starting the discussion the moderator explained the purpose of the focus groups and encouraged everyone to participate in sharing their opinions. At the beginning of the discussion, participants introduced themselves. The discussion started with factual question in which participants gave information about what was happening after Hurricane Katrina.

Respondents openly discussed why they selected different sources for information after the storm, what kind of information they got from them and the difference between coverage of local TV stations and national TV networks. They explained reasons why they did or did not read newspapers and listen to radio; where they went online to get information about Katrina. They explained how they used cell phones and text messaging, and how they contacted their families. At the end, they made a decision on which medium did the best job when compared to others in reporting on Katrina, and why.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Focus groups were chosen as an instrument of this study as they provide valuable qualitative data not readily obtained with any other data-collection techniques (Quible, 1998). The method is useful because of its “explanatory power” (Jensen, 1991) that helps to interpret the quantitative information obtained from surveying.

Focus group interviews offer several advantages. First, they provide a significant quantity of beliefs, ideas, and attitudes because a participant’s response stimulates reactions from other

participants (Welch, 1985). Second, they give a sense of what makes people tick and a sense of what is going on with people's minds and lives that cannot be obtained with survey data. (ASA, 1997). Focus groups are useful for learning what participants think in addition to why they think as they do (Morgan, 1988). Focus groups can be quickly organized (Lydecker, 1986). They bring true motives and reactions to the surface (O'Donnell, 1988). Finally, focus groups provide the opportunity to study attitudes and opinions (Morgan & Spanish, 1984). According to Strauss and Corbin, qualitative methods can be used to explore substantive areas about which little is known or about which much is known to try to gain novel understanding. Also, they can be used to obtain details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions which are difficult to extract or learn through more conventional research methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

A disadvantage of the focus groups in this study was that volunteering participants may be more extroverted than the average individual (Byers & Wilcox, 1991). Also, American student volunteers were from the same department, and there is no way to compare the results from different groups in a strict quantitative sense.

Survey

Procedure

Participants were asked to answer a 24-item questionnaire designed for this study. The questionnaire included a combination of closed- and open-ended questions. The questions measured their information sources about Hurricane Katrina and their view of these sources in terms of uses and gratification theory. The selection of participants followed the criterion: They were living in Baton Rouge area at the time Hurricane Katrina hit.

The dependent variables for this study can be grouped into sections: sources of information about Hurricane Katrina; reasons students use media during natural disasters; and satisfactions

with media coverage of Hurricane Katrina. The questionnaire asked respondents to name their sources of information about the Katrina disaster: television (which station(s) or network(s),) radio (which station(s),) which newspapers, Internet site(s), mobile phone and active landline service(s), text messaging, friends (how many), and family (how many members). One question asked respondents to identify which of these sources “gave them all information they needed to know about what was happening after the storm,” “helped them feel less lonely,” “helped them feel less stressful,” “was the only available source.” Those categories were derived from the uses and gratification theory to explain what the audiences’ goals are when using different media messages. The next two questions asked respondents to choose which TV networks and TV stations were the most informative when reporting on Katrina. The following questions asked them to decide if the coverage of local TV or coverage of national TV were “more informative,” “more comforting,” “both informative and comforting,” or “none of it.”

Respondents also had to choose among national TV networks and local TV stations, which did the best job of reporting on Hurricane Katrina. One question asked them to grade the overall job that media did covering Hurricane Katrina, and another question asked them again to list their primary sources of information after the storm. The question measured the authenticity of the claim that dependence between individuals and media are higher in times when something important happens, and it is stronger than interpersonal dependence. Again, four questions asked them about reasons they watched TV, listened to the radio, went online and used cell phones a week after Hurricane Katrina. They could choose among different options: “to keep up with current issues and events,” “not to feel alone,” or “to be in a contact with a family and friends,” “to get relaxed,” or “to relieve boredom” and “because it was the only medium available.” Respondents could decide if they used media for these reasons “most of the time,” “sometimes,” or “never.” Also, they provided the information on whether they watched TV in language(s)

other than English, which one, and if they went online to sites other than English-language based and which language(s) it was.

Responses were measured on a simple rating scale, and options “don’t know” and “no response” was included. Answers were coded with arithmetic numbers starting with 1, and options “don’t know” and “no answer” were coded as 8 and 9. Consistent codes were used throughout the instrument.

The questionnaire (see appendix D) contained demographic items including gender, age and nationality. Respondents indicated whether they were male or female and their responses were treated as a dichotomous variable coded as "male=1" and “female=0."

Respondents were asked their age. Age variable was measured in years. At the end respondents were asked whether they are international or American students and answers were coded as “American=1” and ‘International=0.’

The instrument also contained a question about how long students were without power in their household in the first week after the storm and a screener questions asked respondents whether they were living in Baton Rouge at the time Hurricane Katrina hit. International students were asked how many years they have been living in the United States and the answers were coded in ages, and if they were more comforted using American media or their native language media after the storm. They were also asked if they got more information from American or from their native-language media. Finally, international students were asked the nationality they were from.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Survey method is chosen because it allows the researcher to examine many variables (demographic and lifestyle information, attitudes) and to use a variety of statistics to analyze the data. Survey research is easy to conduct and it is possible to collect vast amounts of data on large

numbers of people. Unlike focus groups, surveys provide precise quantitative information. McGraw and Watson (1976) define survey as “a method of collecting standardized information by interviewing a sample representative of some population” (p. 343). Whether survey methods are appropriate to a particular research project or type of survey depends on the purposes of the research (Hacket, 1981). However, there are some limitations of survey research that may appear in this study. The researcher cannot easily obtain a high response rate. Also, respondents get tired during answering questions.

CHAPTER 5 FINDINGS

The main purpose of this study was to see if a difference exists in media use between American and international and between male and female LSU students in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. A total of 361 students completed the questionnaire measuring their main sources of information after the storm, how they used information sources in terms of uses and gratification theory, and finally which medium when compared to others did the best job reporting on Hurricane Katrina. The data are presented and analyzed in this chapter.

Focus Group Results

Most participants in the three focus groups conducted to determine how students at Louisiana State University perceived media after Hurricane Katrina agreed that television and then the Internet did the best job reporting after the storm. Three students said: “I wanted to see damage more than anything. And I wanted to be up to date.” “On the Internet it was easier to find information; you can make it more specific for what you want; instead of sitting and waiting for information you want to hear.” “Online was fine. It was updated all the time and you could put a comment.”

The majority of participants said these two media were their primary sources of information. Asked about the difference in media coverage of national and local TV channels, the majority of American and international students said that national TV was more informative about what was happening in New Orleans. National TV, especially CNN and FOX, according to students of both groups, showed more dramatic footage of the event, while local coverage concentrated on comforting people and giving information where the shelters and charities were. Students said that they watched local channels, mostly WBRZ and WAFB, when they wanted a

more positive outlook. An American student said: “I preferred watching local as it was more personal. They would show your friends, people you work with.”

However, students perceived local TV to be less organized than national TV, which they watched more, not just because it was more informative, but also because it showed what was going in Mississippi. Several participants said they were not from Baton Rouge so they are not familiar with local channels: “I do not watch local stations usually. I think I got more information from national. They were always there. They did not stop.” A girl from Houston said: “I do not know about local news here. I believe that national TV channels were less biased as they are not from here. I think they provided more overall coverage than just from Baton Rouge.”

On the other side, international students could not say which one, national or local TV, did a better job in reporting on Katrina. They think that each of them did a good job in its own way. In contrast to American students, international students agreed that searching through channels gave them the variety they wanted after the storm. Three of them remembered: “Most of the time it was the same everywhere. Maybe CNN or national channels were more concerned with the national ratification of the problem than the local who were more concerned about people.” “In times like that you want variety, you want just different things. I think that local channels did a good job in quantity, but the quality was much better for the national one.” “I liked local because they showed people taking a shower after a week. On local they showed everything it was, without cutting anything.”

International students also shared the opinion with American students in the direction that national TV went. A girl from Lebanon remembered: “National channels were more negative. They were more critical in blaming Louisiana’s government. They have much more power and the other 49 governors to worry about.” Students in all focus groups agree that national

coverage started very early analyzing why it happened and criticized how this could have been avoided, but local coverage also did a good job in not cutting any information. A graduate international student said: "On local they would give the governor's speech completely, from the beginning to the end. I know I went to school later. I went to my professors' office and everybody was around the TV just to see what she had to say. They would air it entirely. You would not see it on national."

When considering radio stations, most participants of both groups could not recall the frequencies they were listening to as all the stations were similar. They turned on the radio mostly when the power was cut or when they were driving the car. They did not consider radio as having an advantage over other media in the aftermath of Katrina, but they said that radio helped local people who were affected by disaster, mostly those who lost contact with their families and friends. The majority of students in all focus groups agreed that they listened to the radio less when they got power back. An American sophomore admitted: "I listened to radio when I did not have power for a long time, for like three days." The second person added: "When I was in a car a day or two after I turned it on. I do not remember which channel I turned on, because it seemed all were pretty much the same." Another student said: "It was really not an advantage to listen to radio because I wanted to see the pictures. If you are looking for damage, you want to see the damage, not hear it." A girl from Baton Rouge noticed: "Radio helped people who were affected. That was the only need they had. When I switched to the radio, here is the number you can call. All on the radio was help to local people, who are the people who needed help. It was more local and more specialized." International student also remembered: "I felt guilty, because I usually listen to music in the car. People were dying, and you really do not want to be like dancing. Plus, there is no music to listen anywhere."

However, when students did not have power, radio gave them basic information, such as when the LSU would resume classes. A man from Spain said: “I was listening to KLSU to hear if we are going to have class the next day or not. And it was what happened around the LSU.”

The majority of American and international students did not read newspapers either because they were not on campus or in coffee shops where they usually get them, or because they do not have this habit. Some of them said: “At the time, TV and the Internet picked up breaking stories a lot quicker than newspapers.”

However, most of students read online newspapers, The Advocate or Houston Chronicle. International students mostly read their native-language newspapers as they felt more comfortable with the language or they just wanted to see how correctly they reported on Hurricane Katrina. A girl from Turkey remembered: “I looked at the Internet for Turkish newspapers because of the language; it was more comfortable for me. Also, it was different coverage in it. Some information was wrong actually, and I caught them when I was looking at other newspapers, like CNN website. But you still need them to judge what was correct and how it started.” Some students also said they trusted their native-language media more than American media: “I trusted more my newspapers that I would check from Spain, even in this matter of the hurricane I just trusted.” “They were just more objective than local newspapers or local TV, even national TV. For French people in La Monde, they talked about Mississippi, that you did not hear it at all, because everybody were talking about New Orleans.” Other students just wanted to see what their parents were reading or got information from them about what the newspapers in their country were writing. A girl from Bulgaria said: “In Bulgaria, the newspapers, everything was so exaggerated, the pictures and everything. Because in Bulgaria we do not have hurricanes, and people do not really know what does it mean. They watch them on the movies. When I read Bulgarian newspapers, it was really like Wow! I was really afraid. It was really bad. I do not

know what Bulgarians are thinking about the hurricane, but I am very sure, for them it is something really, really bad.”

Next to television, the Internet was the most used medium after Hurricane Katrina. Students went to see pictures, especially on nola.com, cnn.com, and foxnews.com and to see updated information. However, most of them admitted skipping through all articles and scanned only those that showed the damage. Three American students said: “I liked pictures on nola.com because they were closer to home, and they showed places I know, what my house was like. I went to nola.com. Right on the front they had photo album. I did not have to search anything.” “I just watched TV. Just if it was something more specific I went to the Internet and tried to find out.” “You can watch videos on the Internet and type keywords.” Students said Internet was less dramatic than other media, and also had still photos. A participant in the first focus group said: “I went to the Internet because I was tired of watching the same thing all over again. I went to the Internet to see different information, what was happening, something different, a different point of view of what was happening, not different facts. TV was more dramatic at one point. They really dramatized everything, the Internet was more detached.” Another student said: “I went to MSN. They had still photos, and I like still photos. They are much more powerful for me than video. I just kept looking at them, over and over again.”

While American students perceived that the LSU website was not updated promptly, international students were satisfied how the university informed them. The guy from Spain said: “It was useful. They said when school will start. I did not have power.” On the other side, a student from Houston remembered: “LSU.edu was one of the reasons I did not go home. We got such a notice. I am from Memphis and I wanted to go home and see my family, and I did not know if school is canceled or not. I could not afford to miss class, so I was stayed here.”

When considering blogs, the majority of both groups of students agreed that information from personal reporters and journalists was not too credible. Again, the girl from Houston admitted: "I personally do not like blogs and people... I would much rather have the TV or the radio or the newspapers or something telling me what was happening. I just found that lots of them were personal reporters and just telling their stories. I did not find it as useful." The guy in the same focus group said: "I cannot remember the specific site, but I do remember reading some things that were not particularly true and they changed them then." A man from Spain had a similar opinion: "It was really not a source of information, more a personal diary."

Both American and international students tried to use cell phones to contact family and friends. While regular cell phone calls could not get through, text messaging was working, although not all of the time. Students said they were frustrated missing phone calls and not knowing where their friends were. On the other side, their parents in other states and in other countries worried a lot. Although landlines were working, not many students had them available. A few girls said: "There was no way to get in touch with anybody. Sometimes even not through text messaging. The phone system was just messed up for a really long time after that." "I am from Alabama. My mom does not have text-messaging on her cell phone so I would text my friends in Alabama and they would call my mom and tell her that I am OK." "It just made you stressful because you could not get in touch with people." "Text-messaging worked. Calling did not work. My dad sent me text messages. We could eventually get through, but you need to keep calling, all over again." "The cell phone was my only source of communication with people."

Most international students said they contacted their families via computer, using web cams and email. The girl from Lebanon recalled: "My parents could not call me. They could not get through, so the Internet was working very good. I just chatted and emailed them. That was

working fine.” Another Bulgarian student said: “I told them nothing is the way it looks like. That it is not dangerous. That I am safe.”

While international students said they use media more for information on what was going on, American students, especially from Louisiana recall having emotional response to media reports. A guy in the first focus group said: “I worried so much about New Orleans. I am not from there, but I have been there so often and know the French Quarter. I was kind of felt I was a part of it.” However, American students at LSU who were not from Louisiana admitted not having such strong emotional attachments. An American sophomore said: “I am sure if you were wondering where your family is, watching TV can make you even more stressful. I never had that emotional attachment. I am from Houston and we were not so affected. It was horrible, but I did not have a personal family connection to what was going on.”

Overall, students in the three focus groups concluded that the media did a good job in reporting on Hurricane Katrina. Three students said: “They all did a good job in their own way.” “I would give them a grade B because they really did the best they could. This is something that has never happened before in the South Louisiana and lots of them probably had family too that they wanted to be with too. They did the best they could.” “I would like it to be better, but at the same time I do not know how it could do it better.”

When considering the difference between the tone of coverage of American and international media, international students noticed foreign media to be more critical, more negative and blamed Americans for not preventing the disaster. Again, the girl from Lebanon remembered: “I remember something on one of the TVs. I do not remember the exact thing, but the guy who was reading something from a guy in Australia who was, not making fun of Americans, but saying: ‘Oh, just grow up and take it. You know, this is life. You used to have everything so perfect. When something like that happens, you freak out.’ I guess in Australia

they were reading much more negative maybe, or much more critical of the situation than we did.” International students justified such criticism. A senior girl from Poland noticed: “This is the country that is the leader in so many ways. Whenever you talk about globalism you talk about the United States, so whenever something like this happen to this country, whenever they could not manage to organize themselves, I mean people in every country would be making fun of them. They would be criticizing them.” However, students admitted natural disasters and riots are hard to prevent in every country. A graduate student from Europe said: “In France it was completely mess in November, with riots, and stuff, and like American media were joking because French people criticized the Americans after the hurricane: ‘Ok, look, you are criticizing us, but what is happening in your country?’ Nobody really wants to look at it. But when something happens, of course, media are going to show you.”

International students said media back home “got everything wrong,” so a few of them started their own blogs to describe the real situation. An international graduate student said: “In Romania, my parents called me, asking me if it was so bad. They heard about looters and Baton Rouge being under attack. That is why I had to write some news pieces and sent them back home.” She remembered Romanian media calling Louisiana the U.S. Balkan. Another international student said: “In Bulgaria, my mum told me they were soldiers coming here. It was dangerous and they said they would kill everybody who shows up on the street. In Bulgaria they would say Louisiana. They would not say the particular place.”

Still, two international students from Lebanon and Poland said their media were well informed and reported objectively. A girl from Poland recalled: “I do not think that news was exaggerated. My country is pretty similar to Bulgaria. We do not have hurricanes, and people tend to have some images in their head. As far as the news I read, I mean, that is just a small portion, I think that they were very precise. They got to the point.”

The most frequent comment in all focus groups was television being the best medium in reporting on Katrina because of its visual and up-to-date nature. The second most frequent comment was the usefulness of radio when power was out. Third, most participants said they went online to read newspapers as they did not have access to print papers.

Survey Results

Different methods were used to analyze survey results. First, frequencies, a descriptive statistics, were used to show demographic characteristics of the sample and percentages of students' use and opinion about the coverage of different media. Second, Chi-square tests were used to see if there are significant differences in media use and satisfaction with media between American and international and between male and female LSU students.

According to the descriptive frequencies analysis, 55 percent of American students who completed the survey were female and 45 percent were male respondents. The average age was 20, with a range of 18 to 38 years. Of the 68 international students who completed the study, 71 percent were male and 29 percent were female. The average age of international students was 25, with a range of 18 to 45 years of age. Students came from 24 different countries, ranging from Armenia (1) and Bulgaria (1) to highly-represented India (26) and China (6) (Table 2). Indian students were surveyed in greater numbers as they represent 30 percent of overall international students at LSU, and the purpose of this study was to have a representative sample.

For the first research question, section a): "What were students' main sources of information after Hurricane Katrina?" descriptive statistics analyses showed that 89 percent of American students chose television, 60 percent family, 53 percent friends, 49 percent Internet, 45 percent radio, 38 percent text-messaging, and 27 percent mobile phone or active landline. To compare, 84 percent of international students watched television, 35 percent contacted friends,

21 percent family, 18 percent radio, 16 percent newspapers, 10 percent mobile phone or active landline and 7 percent text-messaging (Table 3)

Table 2 - International students' home countries

	Frequency	Percent
Armenia	1	1.5
Bulgaria	1	1.5
China	6	8.8
Ecuador	1	1.5
Germany	3	4.4
Guatemala	1	1.5
Honduras	1	1.5
India	26	38.2
Japan	1	1.5
Lithuania	1	1.5
Mauritius	1	1.5
Nepal	3	4.4
Nicaragua	1	1.5
Nigeria	3	4.4
Palestine	1	1.5
Panama	2	2.9
Romania	7	10.3
Saudi Arabia	1	1.5
South Korea	1	1.5
Spain	1	1.5
Sri Lanka	1	1.5
Thailand	2	2.9
Turkey	1	1.5
Venezuela	1	1.5
Total	68	100.0

Survey results showed that 19 percent of American students did not have power for more than 48 hours after the storm. Only 7 percent of international students did not have power for such a long time. Every third international student had power all the time after the storm, and every fourth American students had it (Table 4). Chi-square analysis revealed that the differences between student groups was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 20.241$, $df = 5$, $p < .01$).

Table 3 - Primary sources of information after the storm

Rank of sources	American students (%)		International students (%)	
1	TV	89	TV	84
2	Family	60	Internet	75
3	Friends	53	Friends	35
4	Internet	49	Family	21
5	Radio	45	Radio	18
6	Text messaging	38	Newspapers	16
7	Newspapers	31	Mobile phone	10
8	Mobile phone	27	Text messaging	7

Table 4 - Hours without power after the storm

	American students (%)	International students (%)
0	23	31
Less than 10 hours	18	25
Between 10 and 24 hours	14	28
Between 24 and 48 hours	22	7
More than 48 hours	19	7
Do not know	4	2

As for the first question, section b): “Is there a difference in watching television after the storm,” the Chi-square test indicates that there was a significant difference between American and international students’ opinions about local TV coverage ($\chi^2 = 14.487$, $df = 6$, $p < .05$). The largest number of American students said, as Table 5a shows, coverage by local TV was both informative and comforting, and coverage by national TV (Table 5b) was more informative. For a larger proportion of international students, local and national TV coverage was more informative.

Table 5a - Opinion about coverage of local television

	American students (%)	International students (%)
More informative	29	41
More comforting	6	9
Both informative and comforting	34	18
Neither	11	3
Do not know	19	28

Table 5b - Opinion about coverage of national television

	American students (%)	International students (%)
More informative	48	49
More comforting	4	9
Both informative and comforting	10	15
Neither informative/comforting	28	7
Do not know	10	20

Television was the primary medium for both American (89%) and international students (84%), and there were no significant differences between the two groups ($p > .05$). Both American

and international students mostly watched CNN and FOX news. American students watched more different national networks than international students, who also watched local news stations, WAFB (16%) and WBRZ (13%) more than American students (8%) (Table 6).

The survey also asked students which TV channel was the most informative when reporting on Katrina. Americans were more likely to say FOX (26%) and CNN (17%). Foreign students said the most informative was CNN (54.7%) and after that FOX (18%). When considering local TV stations, a third of American students said the most informative was WBRZ, and a fifth said WAFB. For foreign students it was WBRZ (29%).

Students were asked if they watched TV in language(s) other than English and which one it was. Only 4 percent of American students responded to the question in comparison to 13 percent of internationals. American students reported watching the Spanish channel, while international students watched French, Russian, German, Hindu, Spanish, Tamil and Arabic programs.

Table 6 - Television stations viewed after Hurricane Katrina

Rank	American students	%	International students	%
1	CNN	19	CNN	38
2	FOX	15	FOX	18
3	ABC	11	WAFB	16
4	WBRZ	9	WBRZ	13
5	WAFB	6	Weather Channel	7
6	CBS	5	CBS	6
7	Weather Channel	5		
8	MSNBC	3		
9	WWLTV	2		
10	Other	12		

For the first research question, section c): “Is there a difference in using the Internet after the storm,” the Chi-square test showed a statistically significant difference between American and international students ($\chi^2 = 15.233$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$). The Internet was the second most important medium for both groups of students; however, in a survey, three-fourths of the international students said that they went online, compared to a half of Americans who went online. The most visited websites were CNN (www.cnn.com) and the Weather Channel (www.weather.com). American students also went to local sites, such as www.nola.com and internationals went to sites of their native language media, such as www.delfi.it, www.naver.com (Korea), www.elmundo.es (Spain), www.btv.bg (Bulgaria), www.spiegel.de (Germany) and www.gbg.bg (Bulgaria) Also, more international students visited LSU website (Table 7).

Table 7 - Internet sites visited after Hurricane Katrina

Rank	American students	International students
1	CNN.COM	WEATHER.COM
2	WEATHER.COM	CNN.COM
3	NOLA.COM	INTERNATIONAL SITES*
4	WWLTV.COM	LSU.EDU
5	FOXNEWS.COM	YAHOO.COM
6	MSN.COM	GOOGLE.COM
7	YAHOO.COM	2THEADVOCATE
8	LSU.EDU	FOXNEWS.COM
9	GOOGLE.COM	MSN.COM
10	MSNBC.COM	

* WWW.DELFI.IT, WWW.NAVER.COM, WWW.ELMUNDO.ES, WWW.BTV.BG, WWW.SPIEGEL.DE, WWW.GBG.BG

For the first research question, section d), “Is there a difference in listening to the radio after the storm,” international students listened to the radio less than American students, and that difference was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 16.898$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$)

Radio was the third most important medium for 44 percent of American students and 18 percent of international students; however, just half could recall the stations that they listened to after the storm. American students were mostly tuned to news on 870 AM and 1150 AM and international students listened to National Public Radio (Table 8).

The majority of Americans said they listened to radio because it was the only available medium to them, while only 12 percent of international students said it was the reason to listen to the radio.

For the first research question, section e), “Is there a difference in reading newspapers after the storm,” the Chi-square analysis revealed that there existed a statistically significant difference in the reading of newspapers between American and international students ($\chi^2 = 5.791$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). Newspapers were sources of information for a third of the American and only 15 percent for foreign students. The largest number of those who read newspapers read The Advocate. (Table 9).

Table 8 - Radio stations listened to after Hurricane Katrina

Rank	American students	%	International students	%
1	870AM (WWL)	4	NPR	3
2	98.1 (WDGL)	4	102.5	1
3	102.5	3	KLSU	1
4	1150 AM (WJBO)	2		
5	NPR	2		

Table 9 - Newspapers students read after Hurricane Katrina

Rank of newspapers	American students	%	International students	%
1	ADVOCATE	18	ADVOCATE	10
2	DAILY REVEILLE	3	NYTIMES	3
3	NYTIMES	2	USTODAY	3
4	TIMES PICAYUNE	1	DAILY REVEILLE	1

As for the first research question, section f: “Is there a difference in using phones after the storm,” the Chi-square analyses showed that the difference in phone use between American and international students was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 8.173$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$). 27 percent of Americans used cell phones or an active landline, compared to only 10 percent of foreign students who used a cell phone or landline after the storm. Both groups of students mostly used Cingular, then Sprint and Verizon services (Table 10). Also 38 percent of American students sent text messages as compared to 7 percent of internationals. Again, the difference between student groups was significant ($\chi^2 = 24.013$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$)

Table 10 - Phone services used after Hurricane Katrina

Rank	American students	%	International students	%
1	CINGULAR	14	CINGULAR	6
2	SPRINT	4	SPRINT	1
3	VERIZON	2	T-MOBILE	1
4	T-MOBILE	2	VERIZON	1
5	ALLTEL	1	LANDLINE	1
6	NEXTEL	1		
7	BELL SOUTH	1		

American students used cell phones to contact family and friends and to relieve boredom. International students used it for the same reason but less frequently.

Hypothesis 1, that International students will depend on personal contacts for information more than American students, was not supported. Half of American and a third of international students reported contacts with friends. American students talked to four friends on average and internationals to three friends on average after the storm. The Chi-square test revealed that a significant difference between American and international students ($\chi^2 = 6.844$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$).

Family was the major source of information for 60 percent of the American and 21 percent of the international students after the storm. Three times more American students reported that their families were sources of information after the storm and the difference between them and international students was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 34.506$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). For the highest number of students, their parents, then sisters and brothers, uncles and aunts provide information after the storm (Table 11).

Table 11 - Family members contacted after Hurricane Katrina

Rank	American students		International students	
		%		%
1	MOTHER/FATHER	44	MOTHER/FATHER	13
2	BROTHER/SISTER	12	BROTHER/SISTER	7
3	AUNT/UNCLE	10	AUNT/UNCLE	1
4	GRANDMA/PA	10	GRANDMA/PA	1
5	COUSINS	5		

As for the first research question, section g and h: “Which source of information helped students feel less lonely and which source helped them feel less stressful,” for both American and international students friends were the major stress relief and the source that helped them

feel less isolated (Table 12a. and 12b.).

Table 12a - Sources used to feel less lonely after the storm

Rank	American students	%	International students	%
1	FRIENDS	67	FRIENDS	43
2	FAMILY	48	TV	26
3	TEXT MESSAGING	29	INTERNET	19
4	MOBILE PHONE	8	FAMILY	12
5	TV	8	TEXT MESSAGING	12
6	INTERNET	7	MOBILE	7
7	LANDLINE	6	RADIO	3
8	NEWSPAPERS	2	NEWSPAPERS	3
9	RADIO	1	LANDLINE	1

Table 12b - Sources used to feel less stressful after the storm

Rank	American students	%	International students	%
1	FRIENDS	64	FRIENDS	43
2	FAMILY	44	TV	24
3	TEXT MESSAGING	22	FAMILY	18
4	TV	7	INTERNET	15
5	INTERNET	6	TEXT MESSAGING	9
6	MOBILE	5	MOBILE	6
7	LANDLINE	3	NEWSPAPERS	6
8	RADIO	2	RADIO	3
9	NEWSPAPERS	2	LANDLINE	0

As for the first research question, section i: “Which medium, when compared to others, did the best job in reporting on Katrina?” the largest number of American (44%) and international (32%) students agreed that local TV did the best job. The second place, students from both

groups put national TV. Also, more international (18%) than American students (8%) think the Internet did the best job in reporting on Katrina. However, more international (19%) than American students (11%) could not decide which media did the best job (Table 13). The Chi-square analysis showed that there were no significant differences in rating media reports on Hurricane Katrina between American and international students ($p>.05$).

Table 13 - Opinion about media that did the best job in reporting on Hurricane Katrina

Rank	American students		International students	
		%		%
1	LOCAL TV	44	LOCAL TV	32
2	NATIONAL TV	24	NATIONAL TV	27
3	INTERNET	9	INTERNET	18
4	RADIO	8	RADIO	4
5	NEWSPAPERS	4	NEWSPAPERS	0
	DO NOT KNOW	11	DO NOT KNOW	19

Hypothesis 2, that International students will use their native language media more than the American media for reports on Hurricane Katrina, was not supported.

Not only were international students more positive than American students in grading American media coverage, but also nine in 10 international students said they were more comfortable using American media than their native-language media, and the same number said American media gave them more information than their native- language media.

As for research question 2, “How will female LSU students differ from male students in media use and satisfaction after the storm?” Chi-square tests were run to determine if there existed significant differences in media use and satisfaction with media between male and female LSU students. Results revealed that there existed significant differences between genders in their

phone use ($\chi^2 = 3.144$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$), text- messaging use ($\chi^2 = 9.934$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$), and in contacting their families ($\chi^2 = 11.680$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). More female (28%) than male respondents (19%) used cell phones or active landlines and also more females than males sent text messages. Female students (62%) contacted their families more than male students (21%). Use of other sources (TV, radio, newspapers, Internet, friends) and satisfaction with media did not vary by gender.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The most prominent and certain conclusion to be drawn from these data is that media were the primary source of information for both American and international students after Hurricane Katrina, but they were not their primary stress relief and not the primary source that helped them feel less lonely. The findings indicated that media were substitutes for personal contact, as Perez-Lugo (2004) argued, but for a certain demographics and to a certain degree. First, they were substituted by international students who did not have as many direct contacts with friends, and who used chats and email to talk to their family abroad. They were also substitutes for American students, more so females than males, who were coming from outside Louisiana, and who used cell phones to contact their family. These findings demonstrate two things. First, new media (Internet, cell phone), under uses and gratification theory, compete with traditional media, friends and family, in terms of stress and loneliness relief during disaster. And second, there existed a significant difference in how American and international students used those media and, unexpectedly, how male and female respondents used cell phones.

One would also expect that international students would get more information from their native-language media and would be more comforted using native-language media; however, the biggest majority of international students were better informed and more comforted using American media. Students in the international focus group remembered that “media back at home got everything wrong.” They said they read their native-language newspapers and watched their native-language television because they felt more comfortable with the language or to see what their parents were seeing so they could compare their countries reports about Katrina and

American media coverage of the storm. More research on media content should be done to verify their content and more similar studies done to generalize the results.

The study found that television was the primary source of information for both American and international students, and there were no significant difference between those two groups. The findings are expected and consistent with previous research. Wenger and Quarantelli found that television's influence as an information source during normal times carries over to periods of disaster. Unless power is lost, it serves as the major outlet for hard news (1989). People like TV because of its visual imagery and dramatic impact and as one student in one focus group said "We want to see the damage." Furthermore, both groups of students mostly watched CNN and FOX news, but they found local news to be more informative. Another study indicated that the public views local television news more favorably than national television news (Hess, 1995).

The difference between American and international students existed in opinion about TV coverage. While Americans found local TV to be more informative but also comforting, international students found local TV mostly informative. In focus groups American students said that local TV showed "everything it was, without cutting anything." It showed people taking a shower after a week," and "gave the governor's speech completely." The findings support the uses and gratification theory. People seek comfort from media, but only when they have an emotional attachment to these media. As focus groups with American students showed, participants from Baton Rouge were more strongly attached to their local media than participants from other parts of Louisiana, Texas or Tennessee who were not familiar with local media. However, the survey asked students only if they are American or international, and if they were in Baton Rouge during Hurricane Katrina, but future surveys should ask American students the exact place they were from.

Not having power may explain why there was a significant difference in listening to the radio between American and international students. As surveys showed more American students did not have power. The explanation may be that more of them stayed off the campus, and more international students on the campus. However, the study did not ask students their dormitory or apartment addresses and future studies should also question those circumstances.

Most American students listened to battery-powered radio only when the power was out to get the basic information such as when the LSU would resume classes or when the power would come back. The majority of students in the survey did not find it too informative or comforting and could not recall the frequency. Participants in focus groups said that “radio helped local people who were directly affected by disaster, mostly those who lost contact with their families and friends.” They said it was not an advantage to listen to the radio, or read the newspapers, if you have other media available and a chance to see the damage.” Perez-Lugo had similar findings after Hurricane George in 2004. When electric service was suspended people had no other choice but to listen to the radio and Pinkleton and Austin (2002) warned that people might have problems in recalling specific exposure to media.

Newhagen and Nass (1989) argued that newspapers will always be at a disadvantage relative to television, and findings in this study confirm that trend. As expected, college students did not read a lot of newspapers after the hurricane, as they said “at the time, TV and the Internet picked up breaking stories a lot quicker than newspapers.” They also said they did have access to them as they did not go to coffee shops and on campus where they usually get them. Still, more American students read newspapers than internationals, and that difference was statistically significant. A possible explanation might be that more American students had a car to go to such places, while more international students relied on online newspapers. Future research should

examine what the focus groups suggested: international students usually get newspapers on campus and American students in coffee shops.

Next, the study demonstrated that, as Kaye and Johnson (2002) suggested, the uses and gratification theory is well suited to studying the Internet as the vast amount of information available there is able to fulfill many needs. The Internet was the second most important medium for both groups of students, but there existed a significant difference in how American and international students used the Internet. In the survey, three-fourths of the international students said they went online, compared to a half of the Americans who went online. Furthermore, international students said the reasons for going online was not just read the news, but to email and chat with their families abroad while American students in focus groups said they went online to find out more specific information they could not get on television, to see still photos or just get a different point of view of what was happening. On the other side, international students said they use chats, emails and webcams to contact their families abroad. Survey results showed that the Internet was the second medium that helped international students felt less stressful and isolated.

American students used cell phones to contact family and friends and to relieve boredom by calling people. They also used cell phones for information when classes would resume. International students used then for the same reason but less frequently. These finding support DeBaillon and Rockwell (2005) study that cell phones can be used both as a mass media (news and weather update) and a tool for interpersonal communication (chatting). Students in all focus groups said they were frustrated by missing phone calls and not knowing where their friends were. Participants in American focus groups said they could not get in touch with their families, and were mad at cell phone companies for a long time after Hurricane happened. They said the

phone system was messed up while their bills were regularly coming. International students also remembered “the cell phones were not working well, but the Internet was.”

Survey results showed that after Hurricane Katrina female students were more dependent on cell phones than male students. The majority of women in three focus groups said they missed cell phones working so that they could talk to their moms, while males said they told their parents before the storm where they are going to be, so they would not worry too much.

Next, the majority of American and international students agreed that local television, and then national television, did the best job in reporting on Hurricane Katrina. They said local television was more positive and was close to home. Also, local stations showed people and did not cut information as national did. A few students in focus groups said local TV stations were on for 24h, and even they have more rumors they “were always there.” The findings were not surprising as television was a primary media source for the majority of students, and Piotrowski and Armstrong’s showed that local television coverage was major source of information and news for the public during the crisis period of Hurricane Danny.

Overall, students in surveys gave the average grade of B to American news media reports on Katrina. It was also an average grade that the American public gave to media in normal times. However, in the focus group students did not divide their opinion about the best media so strictly and most often commented that they all did a good job in their own way. They said that media did the best they could as they faced the event that has never happened in the South Louisiana.

This study was limited in a few ways. First, it attempted to focus on students at Louisiana State University and those who were staying in Baton Rouge at the time Hurricane Katrina hit the Louisiana coast. Second, the study was planned and conducted four to six months after Katrina happened, so many students may have had trouble recalling specific exposure to media. The samples for the focus groups were not randomly selected, but depended on volunteers. In

two focus groups consisting of American students existed strong stimulus for second respondents to follow the first respondents. When talking about television, all respondents said national television was more informative, but also more negative. The same trend existed in the international focus group when students were talking about their native-language media and the perception of accuracy of news reported. Furthermore, international students could give more responses based on direct experience with media. One girl worked for Australian television and another wrote her blog and sent her stories abroad. Finally, the international students were older than their U.S. counterparts. This study did not address this issue as the average age of Americans and the average age of international students being similar to the average ages of those groups in the overall LSU population.

However, this study had several strong points: first, it examined how new media (the Internet and cell phone), under the uses and gratification theory, compete with traditional media and other sources of information in times of disaster, and second, it examined what the differences are in their use between American and international LSU students. As Masel and Hornig (1993) proposed, the study did not concentrate on a single medium, but it concentrated on all media and other sources that provide information and companionship. It also justified White's (1994) criticism of Uses and gratification theory: his claims that people are free to choose the media fare and the interpretations they want. In times of disaster, as this study proved, people rely on media that are available, and then the ones with which they are most familiar. Considering that students may not have all media available after Hurricane Katrina, the study accepted Elliot's (1974) argument that uses and gratification should not focused too narrowly on the individual and neglect the social structure and the place of the media in that structure.

Research about uses and gratifications is extremely important as new types of media emerge and change the public's routine of looking for information. It is important not just for

uses and gratification practitioners, but also for the telecommunication industry, as cell phones, text-messaging and wireless technology, play an extremely important role in students' lives. As this study showed, new media possess both an informational and social dimension for its users, whether they are American or international students.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM FOR FOCUS GROUPS

Mass media coverage during a natural disaster: LSU college students and Hurricane Katrina

This study is being conducted to find out the difference in media use between American and international LSU students in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina: what were students' main sources of information after the storm, what were their sources when the power was out, how students used information sources in terms of uses and gratification theory, how they perceived the difference between coverage of local TV stations and national TV networks, and finally which medium when compared to others did the best job in reporting on Hurricane Katrina. Pavica Juric, a master's student in the Manship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University, is conducting this study.

Your participation is voluntary and any information you give us will be completely confidential. You do not have to answer all of the questions, and you may withdraw from participation at any time. You will not be penalized in any way. You must be 18 or older to participate.

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact Pavica Juric at 225-573-5342. If you would like to continue with this study, please sign this form and let the assistant know you are ready to begin.

Thank you for your time.

Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM FOR THE SURVEY

Mass media coverage during a natural disaster: LSU college students and Hurricane Katrina

This study is being conducted to find out the difference in media use between American and international LSU students in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina: what were students' main sources of information after the storm, what were their sources when the power was out, how students used information sources in terms of uses and gratification theory, how they perceived the difference between coverage of local TV stations and national TV networks, and finally which medium when compared to others did the best job in reporting on Hurricane Katrina. Pavica Juric, a master's student in the Manship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University, is conducting this study.

Your participation is voluntary and any information you give us will be completely confidential. You do not have to answer all of the questions, and you may withdraw from participation at any time. You will not be penalized in any way. You must be 18 or older to participate.

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact Pavica Juric at 225-573-5342.

Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

Good morning and welcome to our session today. Thank you for taking the time to join our discussion of how media covered the Hurricane Katrina disaster. My name is Pavica Juric and I am a graduate student at Manship School. I want to find out more about LSU students' opinion of media coverage of Hurricane Katrina after the storm hit Louisiana in August 2005; what were your information sources about Katrina, what is your opinion about different media coverage in terms of uses and gratification theory, and what is the relationship between your individual characteristics (nationality, age, religion and party affiliation) and your view of different information sources.

You were selected because you have certain things in common that are of particular interest to me. You are all LSU students, and you used different media to obtain information about Katrina. Almost all of you said that you watched television, read newspapers and went online to obtain information about the storm. I am particularly interested in your views that will help me to analyze what are the perceptions of media among LSU students.

Today we will be discussing your experiences and your opinions about media coverage during Hurricane Katrina. There are no right or wrong answers but rather different points have said. of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others

Before we begin, let me share some ground rules. This is strictly a research project. Please speak up – only one person should talk at a time. We're tape recording the session because we do not want to miss any of your comments. We will be on a first name basis this morning, but in later reports no names will be attached to comments. You may be assured of complete confidentiality. Keep in mind that we're just as interested in negative comments as positive comments, and at times the negative comments are the most helpful.

Our session will last about an hour. Let's begin. We've placed name cards on the table in front of you to help us remember each other's names. Let's find out some more about each other by going around the room one at a time. Tell us your name and your favorite media.

Please, provide the following information about yourself:

1. **How old are you?** _____
2. **Are you:** M / F
3. **Do you consider yourself to be:**
 - a) White
 - b) Black
 - c) Asian
 - d) American Indian
 - e) Other
 - f) Don't know
4. **Do you consider yourself to be:**
 - a) Republican
 - b) Democrat
 - c) Independent
 - d) None/Don't know
5. **Are you:**
 - a) American student
 - b) International student

APPENDIX D

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Were you living in Baton Rouge at the time Hurricane Katrina hit:

- a) YES
- b) NO

If your answer is **YES**, **GO** to the next questions.

If your answer is **NO**, please **DO NOT** continue the survey. This survey is only for those students who were staying in Baton Rouge when Katrina hit the Louisiana coast.

2. In the first week after the storm, how long were you without power in your household?

- a) 0
- b) Less than 10 hours
- c) Between 10 and 24 hours
- d) Between 24 and 48 hours
- e) More than 48 hours (two days)

- f) Do not know
- g) No response

3. What were your sources of information about the Katrina disaster (check all that apply): ! If you are international student include also name of your native language media if you use it.

- ___ Television (which station(s) or network(s)?) _____
- ___ Radio (which station(s)?) _____
- ___ Newspapers (which newspaper(s)?) _____
- ___ Internet (which site(s)?) _____
- ___ Mobile Phone or Active Landline (which service?) _____
- ___ Text Messaging _____
- ___ Friends (how many?) _____
- ___ Family (who?) _____

4. These are some reasons why people use media during natural disaster. Think about your needs after Hurricane Katrina, and next to each statement write a source (ONE or MORE) of information: television (1), radio (2), newspapers (3), Internet (4), mobile phone (5), active landline (6), text messaging (7), friends (8), family (9) that:

a) Gave you all information you needed to know about what was happening after the storm

b) Helped you feel less lonely _____

c) Helped you feel less stressful _____

d) It was the only available source _____

e) (other) _____

5. Which of these TV networks, would you say, was the most informative when reporting on Hurricane Katrina?

a) I did not watch any TV network

b) CNN

c) ABC

d) CBS

e) NBC

f) FOX

g) CNBS

h) MSNBC

i) Other _____

j) None of them

k) Do not know

6. Which of these TV stations, would you say, was the most informative when reporting on Hurricane Katrina?

- a) I did not watch local TV
- b) WBRZ TV 2 (ABC)
- c) WAFB TV 9 (CBS)
- d) WVLA TV 33 (NBC)
- e) WGMB TV 44 (FOX)
- f) Other _____
- g) None of them
- h) Do not know

7. Would you say that coverage of local TV was:

- a) More informative
- b) More comforting
- c) Both informative and comforting
- d) None of it
- e) Do not know

8. Would you say that coverage of national TV was:

- a) More informative
- b) More comforting
- c) Both informative and comforting
- d) None of it
- e) Do not know

9. Comparing national television networks, local TV stations, radio, newspapers and the Internet, which one do you think did the best job, when compared to others, in reporting on Hurricane Katrina?

1. National TV
2. Local TV
3. Radio
4. Newspapers
5. Internet

8. Don't Know
9. No response

10. In your opinion how did the American news media report on Hurricane Katrina?

- a) Excellent
- b) Good
- c) Fair
- d) Poor
- e) Terrible

- f) Don't know
- g) No response

11. Would you say that your primary source of information after the storm was (check one):

1. Media
2. Friends
3. Family

12. Please circle, how often you watched TV for the following reasons a week after Hurricane Katrina:

- a) I did not watch TV
- b) To keep up with current issues and events
Most of the time Sometimes Never
- c) Not to feel alone
Most of the time Sometimes Never
- d) To get relaxed
Most of the time Sometimes Never
- e) TV was the only medium available to me
Most of the time Sometimes Never

13. If you have watched TV in language(s) other than English, which one it was: _____

14. Please circle, how often you listened to the radio for the following reasons a week after Hurricane Katrina:

- a) I did not listen to the radio
- b) To keep up with current issues and events
Most of the time Sometimes Never
- c) Not to feel alone
Most of the time Sometimes Never
- d) To get relaxed (listening to music)
Most of the time Sometimes Never
- d) Radio was the only medium available to me
Most of the time Sometimes Never

15. Please circle, how often you went online for the following reasons a week after Hurricane Katrina:

a) I did not go online

b) To keep up with current issues and events

Most of the time

Sometimes

Never

c) Not to feel alone

Most of the time

Sometimes

Never

d) To get relaxed

Most of the time

Sometimes

Never

e) Internet was the only medium available to me

Most of the time

Sometimes

Never

16. If you went online to sites other than English-language based, which language(s) it was:

17. Please circle, how often you used cell phone for the following reasons a week after Hurricane Katrina:

a) I did not use cell phone

b) To keep up with current issues and events (weather, news)

Most of the time

Sometimes

Never

c) To be in a contact with a family and friends

Most of the time

Sometimes

Never

d) To relieve boredom by calling people

Most of the time

Sometimes

Never

e) Cell phone was the only medium available to me

Most of the time

Sometimes

Never

Please, provide the following information about yourself:

18. How old are you? _____

19. Are you:

0) Male

1) Female

20. Are you:

0) American student

1) International student

Only for INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS:

21. How many years have you been living in the United States? _____

22. Would you say that after the storm you were more comfortable using:

a) American media

b) Your native language media

23. Would you say that after the storm you get more information from:

a) American media

b) Your native language media

24. Which country are you from? _____

THANK YOU!

VITA

Pavica Juric was born in Pozega, Croatia, on July 23, 1980. She attended the University of Zagreb where she earned the degree of bachelor of arts in journalism in September of 2003. Pavica has worked as a journalist in Croatian political and cultural weekly, *Hrvatsko Slovo*, for four years, and was co-editor for the same publication in 2004. She has also edited *Croatian Democratic Union* monthly publication. In the Fall 2006 she is going to continue her doctoral program in the Department of Communication Studies at Louisiana State University. Her research interests include media effects and communication between genders.