DEVELOPMENT OF A NEWS SUBSCRIPTION MOTIVATION SCALE

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ABSTRACT

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As news organizations face accelerated loss in advertising revenue, increasing

importance is placed on strategies to increase subscription sales. Although previous studies have

found several predictors of paywall, willingness to pay, and paying for news research, these

factors did not fit into one clear conceptual framework that links them together. In this

dissertation, I aim to introduce a new construct, *News Subscription Motivation,* that provides

theoretical linkages between different predictors of paying for news. Mixed method research was

employed to conceptualize and operationalize this new construct.

In Chapter 1, I discuss my thought process developing this study, the purpose of the

study, and why this topic matters in the context of digital economy. Chapter 2 includes a review

of previous research on what drives people to pay for news, and the literature on consumer

decision-making processes, consumer decision-making styles, and consumer motivation in

general. The need to develop a new construct and measurement tools that are specially designed

for news consumption was also addressed. In Chapter 3, I conducted 22 in-depth interviews to

generate possible dimensions of the construct, analyzed the qualitative data to propose a

conceptual framework and definition. Study 1 results suggested nine possible dimensions:

content utility, journalism quality, price, convenience, hitting the paywall, surveillance, being a

good citizen, brand reputation, and journalism. Conceptual definitions of each dimension were

also elaborated.

Chapter 4 focuses on the operationalization of News Subscription Motivation. An initial items pool was generated based on Study 1. After the pilot test, I recruited two independent samples, and they were respectively subjected to Exploratory Factor Analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analysis. The final scale included six dimensions with 19 items, and this scale demonstrated robust model fit and adequate convergent and discriminant validity. Six dimensions of News Subscription Motivation were identified: supporting journalism, journalism quality, triggered by the paywall, community attachment, price, and content utility.

In Chapter 5, I aim to establish the nomological validity of News Subscription Motivation. Factors extracted from Chapter 4 demonstrated statistically significant relationships with numbers of news subscription people report paying for, types of subscriptions people get, and individuals' intention to maintain their primary subscriptions in the next 3 months, 6 months, and 12 months. Finally, I discuss the theoretical and practical implications of the scale of News Subscription Motivation in Chapter 6.

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmothers, Li Yuzhen and Ren Xuemei.
Yuzhen was illiterate, and Xuemei never finished elementary school.
Thank you for making higher education possible for me.

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Having a chorionic health issue during doctoral studies has not been easy. I could not make it in this far if my health providers are not incredibly good at their job. I am grateful for

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Study Purpose

During doctoral studies at MSU, my work has mostly explored the reasons that lead to people paying for news subscriptions (e.g., Chen & Thorson, 2021). This research surveyed the a representative sample of U.S. population, compared the effects of several variables on amount of paying for news, and surprisingly, found that the perceived content quality of news and perceived societal value of news do not significantly affect what people pay for news. This finding suggests that, when it comes to paying for news subscriptions, people are not motivated by either concern for "news content quality" dimensions as they are defined by journalists, or for appreciation of the role that news plays in a democracy, such as representing the public and serving as the watchdog for the society. The evaluation of the news product, either its informational function or social impact, is surprisingly irrelevant to people's consumption decision of subscribing to news sources. Thus it is important for scholars to examine the decision-making process for paying for news subscriptions and explore other mechanisms motivating people's paying for news subscriptions.

For this reason, I intend to conduct a marketing-type study that aims to test whether a typology of "consumer decision styles," which was developed as a prediction model and can be used to predict who will or will not pay for news. The importance of news organizations figuring out what/who will pay for news is three-fold. First, the market of news, especially in a digitally based environment, is largely affected by network effects (Knieps & Bauer, 2016). The increasing number of subscribers will attract more advertisers, and it is found that circulation/subscription revenue is positively related to advertising sales (Chen, Thorson, & Lacy, 2004). Second, the price of digital products/services will tend toward zero in the digital

economy, and that makes it harder for paywalled news organizations to compete with their free alternatives. Search costs, reproduction costs, transportation costs, tracking costs, and verification costs will drop significantly and probably approach zero (Goldfarb & Tucker, 2019). The trivial cost further makes it possible for companies to set their price lower or even provide products/service for free. Hence it is important to understand what factors motivate people to pay for news subscriptions. Third, given news organizations also serve as "the fourth estate" in the society, increases in subscription revenue are not only crucial for news organizations' financial performance, but survival of these organizations may be critical from a societal and democratic functioning point of view (Schultz, 1998, p. 51).

Previous studies have found various predictors of paying behavior or willingness to pay for news, but there are no linkages between these factors from theoretical perspective. Predictors of paying behavior or willingness to pay include: individual characteristics such as demographics (Chyi, 2012; Chyi & Lee, 2013); news use related factors such as frequency (Chyi & Lee, 2013), habit strength (Chyi & Lee, 2013; Chen & Thorson, 2021), and format preference (Berger et al., 2015); price/cost/value of the news publication (Reuters Institute, 2020; Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017); content value, comprehensiveness, and quality (American Press Institute, 2018; Reuters Institute, 2020; Li & Thorson, 2015); attachment to the local community (Olsen, 2020; Goyanes, 2020); convenience of accessing news online or in print (American Press Institute, 2018; Reuters Institute, 2020); altruism motivations such as a belief in the value of funding good journalism and helping news organizations' get through the current financial crises (Goyanes, 2020; Reuters Institute, 2020); getting the latest update on what's going on in the world (News Media Alliance, 2019); continuance of reading when hitting a paywall (American Press Institute, 2018); and desire to follow a particular journalist (American Press Institute, 2018).

Additionally, none of these studies have thoroughly examined the decision-making processes involved in deciding to consume news and whether and how much to pay for it. In their widely-cited model, Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell (1978) argue that consumers' decision-making processes generally include five different stages: problem recognition, search, evaluation of alternatives to chosen brands, the purchase act, and evaluation of the purchase act after it occurs. However, this basic framework does not include some external factors that might influence the process. For example, a habitual user might automatically purchase a product without going through the decision-making process.

Another crucial factor is individual characteristics, as they determine the way people approach purchasing a certain product. The discrepancies in individual characteristics influence people's unmet wants and needs, and further affect activities within all five stages of decision-making processing (Engel et al., 1978). Hence, it is essential to understand individual consumer characteristics in order to understand them as they play a role in Engel et al's (1978) five-stage model.

Why Subscription Motivation Matters in the Digital Economy

The need to focus on subscriptions became an urgent matter as news organizations experienced drastic loss of revenues, first due to the loss of classifieds to Craigslist, and more recently to losses due to losing the competition with digital advertising. In 2021, Internet giants (Google, Amazon, Yahoo, Microsoft) and social networking companies (Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn) consumed more than 70% of the digital ad sales in the U.S (eMarketer, 2021). The rise of specialization websites also negatively affected newspapers' revenue from classification ads, and further, the overall financial status of the organizations. In Western Europe, the loss of classified ads accounted for 44% of news organizations' revenue decline. It has become clear

that advertising and classifieds can no longer be relied on to support newspaper companies, and that at least so far, the best alternative appears to be requiring users to pay the true cost of news content.   Therefore, understanding what drives people to purchase news subscription and further boosting the subscription revenue is paramount for news organizations to survive their financial crisis.

To understand the importance of subscription revenue, one must also understand how media organizations operate in multi-sided markets and the impact of network effects. News organizations, like many other media organizations, essentially operate in multi-sided markets. That is, they serve at least two distinct user groups: 1) audiences of news content, and 2) advertisers who are targeting the news publication's audience. While previous research has established the positive correlations between subscription and advertising revenue (Chen, Thorson, & Lacy, 2005), the case is even more so in the context of digital economy. According to Reuters Institute, about seven out of ten leading newspapers in the United States and the European Union are creating paywalls online (Simon & Graves, 2019). Thus a growing number of news organizations are operating and competing in digital multi-sided markets, in which the direct and indirect network effects are of great importance (Knieps and Bauer, 2016).

The growing significance of network effects also motivates companies to be more responsive to advertisers rather than users (audiences). Consumer sovereignty is still important, although it is indirect in multi-sided markets (Anderson, 2012). Yet, media companies still need to refine their products/services to first attract larger audiences, and then sell those audiences to advertisers. For news organizations, it means they need to focus on what value they are providing to their audiences, getting them to subscribe, and then eventually serving more and/or loftier advertisers. In other words, subscriptions revenues do not hurt, but rather help advertising

sales and the overall financial performance of the news organization. Thus, the exploration of what drives individual motivation to subscribe is important.

Getting more people to subscribe also taps into strategies of competition in the digital economy: 1) price competition would not work in the long run; and 2) quality competition will be vital. Price competition is problematic for news organizations because the price of digital products/services is significantly lower, as advertisers can provide cross-subsidies and digital technology has significantly reduced costs. Anderson (2009) argues that as it takes nothing for digital technology to reproduce and distribute ads (marginal costs equals zero). Goldfarb and Tucker (2019) also suggest that, in the digital economy, search costs, reproduction costs, transportation costs, tracking costs, and verification costs will drop significantly and eventually approach zero. The trivial cost further makes it possible for companies to set their price lower or even provide products/service for free. Chances to survive and thrive through price competition are slim.

Then, moving to an alternative direction, competition among news organizations will be heavily focused on quality of the product/service. Owen and Wildman (1992, pp.93) note that in the advertiser-supported model, television networks attract audiences through product competition, not price competition. The goal is to use quality news products to attract audiences, and then sell those audiences to advertisers. This conclusion is also suitable for digital multi-sided market of news, while news organizations have been relying on advertising revenue for decades. Then the strategic focus of companies would be how to create and deliver unique value for their consumers by improving the quality of their products and services (Kranz and Picot, 2016). From the consumers' perspective, the quality of news products is defined as the ability to

meet consumers needs and wants (Lacy, 1989), the present study begins the exploration of what

needs can be fulfilled through news subscription.

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CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Previous Research on Paying for News

At the national level, various factors were found to be related to paying behavior or willingness to pay for news. Age is the first significant factor – younger people show higher paying intent for online news. Men tend to have higher paying intent than women, and people who are more interested in news and who use more online news are more likely to pay (Chyi, 2012; Chyi & Lee, 2013). Preference for online formats also leads to higher news paying intent (Chyi & Lee, 2013) and customers' willingness to pay (Berger et al., 2015). Higher prices charged for news creates a negative impact on willingness to pay (Berger et al., 2015), and people are more likely to pay for online news when they perceive the price to be relatively "inexpensive" (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017). Fletcher and Nielsen (2017) also found that higher usage of public service media is positively associated with paying for online news. It is important to note that given subscriptions to the print newspaper are mostly bundled with access to digital content, the distinction of paying for what content format has considerably weakened. Other than these predictors, Chen and Thorson (2021) find that habit strength of news use, social identity motivations, and entertainment spending are also associated with how much people pay for news.

Research about what prompts people to pay for news have also been examined in the local context. Olsen (2020) expanded on the concept of perceived worthiness of news and readers' perception of proximity. She suggests that the perceptions of news and willingness to pay for news vary among local communities. For example, those who see local news as a vital part of community life are more likely to pay for news subscriptions than those who think local news is "over-exaggerating insignificant events." Additionally, Goyanes (2020) finds that

audiences' perceptions of the financial state of local news organizations, journalists' engagement with local communities, and readers' attachment to local community, users' local content creation, and social media use are highly predictive of paying for local news subscriptions.

From the perspective of current news subscribers, several studies have investigated why people pay for news (American Press Institute, 2018; New Media Alliance, 2019; Reuters Institute, 2020). Although these analyses are descriptive in nature, they do offer possible explanations of why individuals decide to purchase news subscriptions. News subscribers reported numerous reasons of paying: 1) Community - the community connection of accessing local news and supporting local news organizations; 2) Content - obtaining interesting, useful, and valuable content; 3) Convenience - convenience of accessing news and digital payments; 4) Cost – getting a cheaper price or a discount; 5) Response to paywalls – Being able to continue to read when the content is locked behind a paywall; 6) Altruism – funding and supporting good journalism; and 7) Getting the latest updates.

These factors, however, have been reported in an organic and exploratory way. How these factors could be linked together from a theoretical view is still unknown. In other words, which of these factors are most predictive?   Little research has investigated the overall research question, "what makes people pay for news," utilizing theories in the marketing field, let alone considering consumers' decision-making process. This dissertation aims to begin that exploration.

Consumer decision-making process

The most cited model for consumer decision-making process is the five-stage model proposed by Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell (1978). They suggest that when a consumer decides to make a purchase, he/she typically go through five different stages: problem recognition, search,

evaluation of alternatives to chosen brands, the purchase act, and evaluation of the purchase act after it occurs. At the problem recognition stage, people realize their need for a certain product that can mitigate or solve a focal problem. Next, hoping to satisfy the focal need, people search for information about available and suitable products. The evaluation stage is when consumers compare different options they have, and come up with what they think is the best (s). At the purchase stage, consumers go ahead and purchase the selected choice. During the after-purchase phase, consumers generate new perceptions and attitudes of the product based on their personal experience with it, creating perceptions and evaluations that will influence their repurchase intentions and behaviors.

To focus more on the stage of satisfaction of consumer needs, Darley, Blankson, and Luethge (2010) extended the EKB model by adding external factors that might influence consumers' decision-making process. They argue that the external factors can be divided into four categories: 1) individual differences such as personality, motives, and lifestyle; 2) social influences such as culture, class, and subgroups; 3) situational and economic factors; and 4) relationships to the online shopping environment. They argue that these possible external factors are important and therefore they are included here as we develop a model for news consumer's decision-making processes.

Consumer Decision-making Style

Consumer Decision-making Style is one of the marketing concepts that taps into the external factors of the decision-making process. To better understand and profile individual consumer characteristics, Sproles and Kendall (1986) developed a Consumer Styles Inventory, which identified eight types of consumer styles. The scale was adapted and tested in multiple countries, among different age generations, and across several product categories (e.g., Lysonski,

Durvasula, & Zotos, 1996; Bakewell & Mitchell, 2003; Zhou, Arnold, Pereira, & Yu, 2010; Kang, Johnson, & Wu, 2014). In general, it does a good job of predicting purchase intention (Prakash, Singh, & Yadav, 2018).

Through the conceptual lens, Sproles and Kendall (1986) define decision-making style as the mental orientation when individuals face a consumption decision. This mental orientation motivates individuals to look for affective and cognitive characteristics in the product before and during shopping events. Therefore, consumer style can be a determinant of the consumption decision. For example, while shopping for cars, a quality-driven consumer would look for cars that function well, while a fashion-driven consumer would prefer cars with innovative design and exterior. In sum, different consumer styles reflect people's preferences and attributes they value, which in turn influence their purchase decision.

Assumed in this approach is that consumers perceive shopping with different mental orientations that preexist the consumption process. Sproles and Kendall (1986) argue that consumer style is similar to one's "personality" in shopping. The notion of personality suggests that consumers could have some fundamental decision-making modes that make them approach shopping differently, thus creating variations in consumer preferences and tastes, which further lead to differences in purchase decisions. Essentially, determinants of the consumption decision are relevant to individuals' discrepancies in their inclinations towards purchasing products. Although Sproles and Kendall (1986) claim that these consumer styles are basic characteristics of individuals, predispositions can vary with the nature of the product. Attributes that are important for one product may not be identical for the another. Moreover, the cost of the product could also affect consumers' inclinations towards different attributes of the product. For instance,

consumers might value quality, function, and sustainability while buying a car that cost $25,000, but might prioritize novelty and aesthetic attributes over quality while buying a $20 dress.

As well as defining the concept of consumer style, Sproles and Kendall (1986) also development a measurement scale for various kinds of consumer styles. The instrument, Consumer Style Inventory, contains 40 original items and was first tested with a sample of the U.S. general population. Factor analysis of the items identified eight basic characteristics of consumer decision-making styles:

High quality-consciousness/perfectionism. This decision style emphasizes product quality. The present study follows Lacy's definition (1989) and refers to quality as the ability to fulfill the needs and wants of consumers. "Needs" refers to individuals' physical or psychological necessity and "wants" indicates consumers' conscious desire for something (Lacy, 1989). Consumers with this trait tend to pursue what they think is the best possible product and are reluctant to settle for something that does not meet their expectations (Kamaruddin & Mokhlis, 2003).

Price/value consciousness. This consumer style indicates consumers' desire to get low prices whenever it is possible. Price/value-consciousness consumers are sensitive to price changes and are more likely to respond to pitches for lower price and to accept discount prices when they are offered. They also tend to be comparison shoppers who aim to get a relatively low price for the choice they make.

Brand consciousness. Brand consciousness refers to individuals' emphasis on getting a well-known brand while making purchase decisions. Consumers with this trait prefer to shop at department stores where expensive and high-end brands are prevalent (Sproles & Kendall, 1986). This tendency of getting well-known brands is often associated with one's desire to use brands to

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demonstrate his or her social status (Nelissen & Meijers, 2011). Brand-conscious consumers also regard a higher price as indicative of better quality. Consequently, they tend to buy the best-selling and well-advertised products (Kang et al., 2014). As this definition indicates brand consciousness is both a heuristic for quality and desire to impress others for identity purposes, this factor might correlate with other factors.

Novelty/fashion consciousness. This decision style represents consumers' preference for discovering and purchasing innovative and novel products. Consumers with this trait usually take pleasure in keeping up with new styles and trends (Bakewell and Mitchell, 2003). Sproles and Kendall (1986) argue that novelty/fashion consciousness is fundamentally motivated by people's motivation for variety seeking.

Recreation consciousness. Recreation-conscious describes consumers who take pleasure from shopping and enjoy the stimulation of browsing and picking up products (Sproles & Kendall, 1986; Bakewell & Mitchell, 2003). This decision-making style suggests that shopping, in its very nature, is pleasant and entertaining. Marketing scholars also suggest that people who have higher hedonic tendencies enjoy browsing new products and obtaining new information while they are shopping (Kim & Eastin, 2012). Since recreation conscious consumers enjoy the process of shopping, they are more likely to take pleasure in single use purchase rather than habitual buying.

Impulsive/careless consumer. This decision style describes consumers who do not plan their shopping and are not concerned with how much money they spend (Sproles & Kendall, 1986). Bakewell and Mitchell (2003) also argue that consumers with this trait are more likely to show buyers' remorse.

Habitual, brand-loyal consumer. According to the original definition (Sproles &

Kendall, 1986), this consumer style is a characteristic that involves repetitively choosing the

same favorite brands and stores. Consumers with this trait tend to buy the same brand and go to

the same product provider again and again, and they are very less likely to withdraw their

financial commitments.

Confused by over-choice. Confused by over-choice describes individuals who have

difficulty making choices when multiple options are available to them. This decision style stems

from consumers' lack of confidence or inability choose and distinguish the numerous choices are

available to them. Consumers with this style tend to experience information overload (Bakewell

and Mitchell, 2003) and believe it is impossible to select products since there are too many

choices (Kang et al., 2014).

One caveat of the Consumer Style Inventory, however, is that the scale development

process never included qualitative prior analysis. While the concept of consumer style does

reflect external factors of the consumer decision-making process, the construct validity is

relatively weak without justifying why these eight dimensions are included and none others are.

Moreover, the scale was designed for the general context of shopping, and was developed before

digitalization. Thus, direct use of this scale would likely be problematic in today's research on

news consumption.

Consumer Motivation

Another important concept to take into consideration is consumer motivation. Ryan and

Deci (2000) argue that motivation is fundamental in psychology research as it is "at the core of

biological, cognitive, and social regulation." In early consumer behavior research, motivation

was the explanatory concept for why people buy (Britt, 1950), and was defined as the drives and

desires that lead to behavioral change (Bayton, 1958). In recent studies, Pincus (2004) emphasized how motivations stem from consumers' unmet needs. Mallalieu and Nakamoto (2008) contend that motivations are driven by consumers' desire to achieve specific goal(s). Other scholars have also highlighted the influence of fundamental motives and evolutionary needs on consumer behavior (Griskevicius & Kenrick, 2013; Schaller et al., 2017).

While a conceptual definition was not provided in the publication, Barbopoulos and Johansson (2016) note that consumer motivation is driven by the gain goal, the hedonic goal, and the normative goal. Three quantitative studies were conducted in Sweden to develop a scale. Participants were asked to answer the question "When you [insert consumption context and product here], how important it was for you too..." and rate each provided statements on a 5-point Likert scale.

The results demonstrated five dimensions of consumer motivation. The first one is labeled as thrift, which reflects consumers desire to get the cheapest price possible. Safety is the second dimension that describes consumers' goal to guarantee financial security and psychological well-being. Instant gratification reflects consumers' urge to have immediate satisfaction and comfort. The last two dimensions moral and social norms, represent consumers' aim to act within moral convictions and social conventions.

Barbopoulos and Johansson's (2016) scale of consumer motivation is limited in two major ways. First, although a literature review was conducted, the initial dimensions for developing the scale were not justified by qualitative research. Second, this study was executed in largely different contexts from news consumption in the U.S The participants were directed to think about their shopping experiences when getting groceries, deciding on times used for leisure, and making financial savings and investments. The survey instruments were originally

presented and tested in Swedish, and were later translated into English at the publication stage. Hence, the consumer motivation is likely not suitable to be directly used in news consumption surveys among Americans.

Proposing a New Construct: News Subscription Motivation

Although the overviewed scales of consumer motivation and consumer style provide instruments to survey news consumers, these scales have significant limitations. First, neither scale was initiated by the guidance of subjected qualitative research, thus their construct validity, and how these dimensions emerged and connected are problematic. Second, neither scale has been tested in the context of news consumption. Unlike other commodities, news products also have features of public goods, and offer societal value (Doyle, 2013). Thus, a new scale is needed, and development of this scale should include qualitative research and be specifically designed for news consumers.

The present study is intended to apply to a narrower focus with two more distinctions. First, antecedents of purchasing (buying) a product and donation (charitable) behaviors can be distinct (e.g., Park & Kim, 2003; Zhang, Cai, & Shi, 2021). In this project, I focus only on consumers' purchase of news subscription, rather than people's donation behaviors when it comes to news. Second, a distinction is important to be made for existing consumers and non-consumers, since significant attitudinal and behavioral differences can be found among these two groups (e.g., Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, & Allpress, 1990; Sohail & Al-Jabri, 2014). The present study focuses on people who are already buying or have bought news subscriptions in the past. Built on this, I thus propose a new construct: News Subscription Motivation, which examines news subscribers' motivation to purchase news subscription(s). The next chapter will discuss the conceptualization of this new construct.

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CHAPTER 3: CONCEPTUALIZING NEWS SUBSCRIPTION MOTIVATION

Method

Qualitative methods are powerful tools for refining existing or building new theories (Shah & Corley, 2006). Carpenter (2018) points out that qualitative research is an essential part of scale development. Since *News Subscription Motivation* is a new construct, its conceptualization and operationalization require qualitative research to build the foundation. The qualitative methods of focus groups or interviews are particularly useful in getting different perspectives on a topic. In the process of scale development, qualitative studies help researchers discover possible dimensions for the construct and generate potential scale items from participants' responses (Boateng et al., 2018).

Participants and Sampling

The present qualitative study was conducted in January 2021, when COVID-19 restrictions were still in place for in-person activities in the United States. It was necessary to conduct the study through Zoom. The effectiveness of using Zoom to conduct interviews and focus groups has also been attested by previous research (e.g., Archibald et al., 2019; Marques et al., 2020).

I decided to choose individual interviews over focus groups for two reasons. First, individual in-depth interviews allow me to investigate consumers' underlying issues more closely, and thus gather a more sophisticated understanding of people's motivation of paying for news subscriptions (Stokes & Bergin, 2006). Second, given possible technical issues during the video conferencing, individual in-depth interviews allow me to have more control over the data collection process and ensure the data quality of interview conversations.

The goal of the qualitative study is to gather information from news subscribers in the United States. Participants were recruited through an online research platform called Prolific. Prolific allows researchers to set parameters for the samples such as nationality, the primary language used, and whether the participant agrees to sign up for a video interview. I utilized Prolific to recruit participants through the following steps:

Step #1: I sent out a screening survey to get news subscribers. I set up an initial pool for participants who reside in the United States, are proficient in English, and agree to join a video interview study. Participants in this pool were invited to fill out a screening survey, which asked if they are paying for a news subscription, what publication and how much they are paying for it, and some basic demographic questions.

Step #2: I then looked through the data from the screening survey, gathered Prolific IDs for those who indicated paying for news, and then invited them to sign up for the interview study. 193 people completed the screening survey from step #1, and only 39 people indicated that they are subscribing to news. Among these 39 respondents, 35 were Caucasian, three were Asian, and one indicated being in an ethnic group other than Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, or Asian.

Step #3: Although a previous study by the American Press Institute (2018) noted that 88% of news subscribers are Caucasian, it is also crucial for the present study to include respondents from other races to understand why people pay for news subscriptions. Therefore, I launched another screening survey on Prolific. The participants' pool was set to recruit Hispanic and African American participants who reside in the U.S. and are proficient in English. 131 subjects participated in the screening survey, and 34 participants indicated they were paying for news subscriptions.

Step #4: I further sent out invitations for zoom interviews to 73 news subscribers from Step#2 and Step#3. 24 people signed up for interviews, but only 18 showed up for the interview. Among these 18 interviewees, only one of them was over 50 years old. Given previous studies indicated news subscribers tend to be older than non-subscribers and the general population (Thorson, Chen, & Lacy, 2020; American Press Institute, 2018), I decided to recruit more participants who are over 50 years old.

Step #5: To recruit participants who are over 50 years old, I went back to the list of news subscribers from Step #3 and Step #4, and shortlisted 9 participants who are over 50 years old. I also started another screening survey on Prolific targeting U.S. residents over 50 years old. 30 participants responded to the screening survey and I got six more news subscribers signed up for interviews. Eventually, four participants showed up for zoom interviews.

Step #6: During the interviews with the last four participants, it became clear to me that the qualitative interviews had reached saturation. Therefore, I stopped recruiting more participants for the qualitative study.

In total, I recruited 354 participants from the screening survey, and 79 participants were news subscribers. 22 news subscribers completed the interview, which leaves a 28% final response rate.

Summary of interview participants. The average age of interviewees was 35.8. The sample was mostly male (59.1%). White participants made up 54.2% of the sample. African American, Asian, and Hispanic participants each counted 13.6% of the sample. 18.2% of the participants completed high school and 4.5% went to some college. 9.1% of the interviewees have an Associate's degree, 36.4% have a Bachelor's degree, and 31.8% have a Master's degree or higher. In terms of income, 9.1% have less than $20,000, 22.7% earn $20,000 - $40,000,

27.4% have $40,000 - $60,000, 22.7% earn $60,000 - $80,000, and 18.2% have more than $80,000 for annual household income. 59.1% of participants indicated being strong Democrat, Democrat, and leaning Democrat. Independents take up 18.2% of the sample. Strong Republican, Republican, and people leaning Republican consist of 22.7% of the interviewees. The detailed demographics of each interview participant are illustrated in Table 1 on the next page.

Procedure

I conducted in-depth interviews with participants with semi-structured questions. Each participant scheduled their individual session with the author through *Calendly.com*, an online scheduling tool, and entered the zoom meeting through links automatically generated by *Calendly*. These interviews were conducted from January 13 to January 24, with sessions ranging from 20.1 minutes to 70.5 minutes.

At the beginning of each zoom meeting, I read consent forms to each participant and informed them about the purpose of the study, the compensation for completing the study, their rights to withdraw, and confidentiality. I also asked each participant whether they consented to be recorded by a voice recorder during the interview.

Interviewees were first asked about what news publications they are currently subscribing to, whether the subscription is digital or print, how much they pay for it/them each month, and how long they have been paying for it/them. Then they were asked why did they decided to pay for each news subscription. Follow-up questions such as "What do you mean by [KEYWORD OF THEIR REASONS]?" and "Can you tell me more about [KEYWORD OF THEIR REASONS]?" were asked to elicit more information. After interviewees responded, they were asked about subsequent factors from the literature review (American Press Institute, 2018; New Media Alliance, 2019; Reuters Institute,

Table 1. Overview of demographics of interview participants

Subject No.	Age	Gender	Race	Education	Income	Partisanship
1	31	Female	White	Bachelor's degree	$40,000 - $49,999	Independent leaning Republican
2	65	Female	White	HS diploma/GED	$10,000 - $19,999	Independent leaning Democrat
3	30	Male	White	Bachelor's degree	$100,000 - $149,999	Democrat
4	24	Female	Asian	Bachelor's degree	$30,000 - 39,999	Democrat
5	31	Male	White	Master's or higher	$100,000 - $149,999	Strong Democrat
6	20	Male	Hispanic	Associates degree	$60,000 - $69,999	Strong Democrat
7	64	Male	White	Associates degree	$40,000 - $49,999	Independent leaning Republican
8	31	Female	Hispanic	Bachelor's degree	$80,000 - $89,999	Democrat
9	25	Female	White	HS diploma/GED	$70,000 - $79,999	Republican
10	42	Male	Black	HS diploma/GED	$50,000 - $59,999	Strong Democrat
11	20	Male	White	Bachelor's degree	Less than $10,000	Strong Democrat
12	32	Male	White	Bachelor's degree	$20,000 - $29,999	Independent
13	53	Male	White	Master's or higher	$60,000 - $69,999	Strong Democrat
14	25	Female	Black	Master's or higher	More than $150,000	Democrat
15	65	Male	White	Master's or higher	$60,000 - $69,999	Republican
16	22	Male	Hispanic	HS diploma/GED	$40,000 - $49,999	Independent
17	21	Male	Black	Some college	$50,000 - $59,999	Democrat
18	40	Female	White	Master's or higher	$30,000 - 39,999	Independent
19	25	Male	Asian	Bachelor's degree	$20,000 - $29,999	Independent leaning Democrat
20	24	Female	White	Bachelor's degree	$30,000-39,999	Democrat
21	67	Male	White	Master's or higher	$40,000 - $49,999	Independent
22	31	Female	Asian	Master's or higher	$70,000 - $79,999	Independent leaning Republican

2020) or previous interview responses. These subsequent factors include 1) content, 2) affordability, 3) convenience, 4) hitting the paywall, 5) surveillance, 6) supporting good journalism or local news organization, 7) following a particular journalist, and 8) being a good citizen. Participants were asked, "How important was [SUBSEQUENT FACTOR] in your decision to pay for [NEWS SOURCE]?" If the participant indicated the subsequent factor is important, I asked them to explain why it is crucial. Finally, I asked participants if they have anything to add and have any questions regarding this study. The interview protocol can be found in the Appendix.

Preparation of Interview Data

All interviews were recorded by a digital voice recorder. Recordings were submitted to an AI transcription website, Temi.com. The original transcriptions produced by *Temi* resulted in around a 90% accuracy rate. The author first cleaned the transcripts by deleting personal information, the interviewer's audio line, and conversations that were irrelevant to news subscription motivation. Then recordings were played again to compare with the remaining transcripts. Mistakes and missing information were corrected in this step. Then, the interview data was submitted for qualitative analysis.

Thematic Coding

To identify possible dimensions for the construct, I referred to the theme development process suggested by Vaismoradi et al. (2016) and thematic coding steps by Carpenter et al. (2016).

At the initiation stage, an initial codebook was developed by the author. The preliminary dimensions were determined by the literature review: *content, affordability, convenience, hitting the meter (paywall), surveillance, altruism*, and *following a particular journalist*. After reading

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the transcriptions multiple times, I deleted the dimension for *following a particular journalist* and added two more dimensions: *brand reputation* and *being a good citizen*. Only one participant stated he paid for a news subscription to follow a particular journalist, while others did not think this is an important motivation. Instead, several participants offered a counterargument and indicated they decided to pay for news subscriptions because of the news brand, not the news writers. Meanwhile, one participant suggested that she paid for a news subscription because she wanted to be an informed citizen and thus be more involved in society. This motivation is also confirmed by some participants in later interviews in which they expressed desires to be informed and be active in the democratic process.

Then I also consulted two other researchers of the initial text clusters of why participants paid for news subscriptions. In this process, we identified two subthemes in the content category: *content utility* and *journalism quality*. Some participants paid for news subscriptions because they think the contents are useful in some way: either they found news useful to their work or investment, or the content is interesting, original, or unique and thus worth paying for. Meanwhile, some participants also indicated the superior journalism quality motivates them to pay. This division of how news subscribers want different things also reflects the difference between consumers needs and professional standard (Lacy & Rosenstiel, 2015). Thus the revised codebook included the following dimensions: *content utility, journalism quality, affordability, convenience, hitting the paywall, surveillance, altruism, brand reputation*, and *being a good citizen*.

To code the qualitative data, two coders were recruited to enhance the coding process and reduce possible issues of validity, reliability, and generalizability of the results (Carpenter et al.,

2016; Vaismoradi et al., 2016). At the time of the study, both coders were upper-level journalism students from a small primarily undergraduate institution in the Midwest.

The coding process proceeds as follows. First, two coders read through interview transcriptions multiple times, highlighted noteworthy contents, identified preliminary categories on their own, and wrote reflective notes. Second, I conducted a training session with the coders to review coding schemes and sample transcripts with applied codes. Then the coding team completed seven transcripts together during the training session. This step followed the train-practice-code approach by Giesen and Roeser (2020, Figure 1). Third, coders coded the remaining 15 transcripts independently and, in a subsequent meeting, compared the coding results and resolved the differences through discussions. Fourth, I further used the qualitative analysis software to identify any other additional themes that were missed by the coders. This step is completed through the cluster retrieval function by QDA Miner. Next, I changed the label "*altruism*" into "*supporting journalism*" in consultant with another expert, who suggested that some participants indicated their motivations to support news organizations are not entirely selfless since their investment to benefit the community could also benefit themselves. Finally, I concluded the coding results and drafted participants' narratives based on the analysis. A frequency of coding results is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Frequency of news subscription motivations among interview participants

News Subscription Motivations	Respondents	
	n	%
Content Utility	18	81.80%
Journalism Quality	15	68.20%
Affordability	19	86.40%
Convenience	10	45.50%
Hitting the Paywall	9	40.90%
Surveillance	11	50%
Being A Good Citizen	7	31.80%

Table 2 (cont'd)		
Brand Reputation	15	68.20%
Supporting Journalism	12	54.50%

Results

In this section I aim to illustrate emerging themes from the qualitative study. Based on these results, I hope to provide conceptual understanding for each suggested dimensions of *News Subscription Motivation*.

Content Utility. Several participants said the functional aspect of news content drove their decision to pay for news subscriptions. They see some utility of subscription content and believe they can directly benefit from the content they have purchased. Some noted that the content they get from news subscriptions is useful to their work, helpful for investments, and even "gets me coupons for grocery shopping". For example:

> They have a lot of articles that I could use for work. Sometimes when I need examples and case studies for my teaching I just go there and search for articles I could use. So eventually I was like, you know what, I'll just pay for it because it's worth the money (Participant 22).

> I never really thought about not paying for the *Wall Street Journal*. I mean, I need it for my investments. So I will just pay for it (Participant 21).

> Before COVID I do some temp[orary] jobs here and there to make some extra bucks. They have a good classified ads section that is very useful to me (Participant 10).

I'm a huge coupon clipper. It [the news subscription] gets me coupons for grocery

shopping (Participant 13).

In addition, some participants also reported that they pay for news subscriptions because

the content fulfills their interests and desire for exclusive and original content:

[I paid for the news subscription because] I like their comic section and sports. Haven't

missed a single day in 20 years (Participant 15).

I was tired of reading all the news criticizing Trump. To me, the media has slanted far too

liberal. I want to read some news that fits my values and stance more (Participant 1).

I chose [to subscribe to] this one because they always have the insider tips and analysis of

the international trade market that you can't find from elsewhere. I could be paying for

two or three other sources but still missing information I can get from this one. So why

not just pay for this (Participant 14)?

A big pull for me [to pay] is that they have original stories about the president and

investigative pieces about China (Participant 9).

Journalism Quality. Another common motivation expressed by participants is to get

quality news. Several participants mentioned they decided to subscribe because the news source

is fair, credible, provides balanced viewpoints, accurate information, and in-depth analysis. For

example:

What matters to me the most is [the news source] does fair reporting and is not slanted. A

few years ago the newspaper got really slanted so I canceled the subscription. Recently

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they have more balanced and fair reporting so I started [the subscription] again (Participant 7).

There's a lot of fake news out there and I want to make sure I get accurate information. I like how they hyperlink to official websites, update corrections, etc so I know they take journalism seriously and their news is credible (Participant 5).

I feel it's easy to get basic information online but it's not enough. Like you know how they report the numbers of covid cases or even the election polls, these are basic. But I also want some in-depth analysis and explanations of what this information means and how things will turn out. So getting *The Washington Post* helps me with that (Participant 20).

Affordability. Affordability is the most frequent subscription motivation stated by participants. Several news subscribers were driven by discounts, reasonable price, and value of their money in comparison of the quality they are getting:

I remember it was around Black Friday and they had a sale going on. I had been thinking about getting a subscription for a while, so I just took advantage of the promotion (Participant 5).

There's a lot of free content online so to me the price has to be reasonable. If the subscription is expensive, it's harder to pay money for news when I can definitely get news for free (Participant 3).

It also helped [decide to pay for the subscription] when we found out the paper in next

town costs about $400 more a year. [In comparison] *The Charles City Press* is cheaper

and more affordable (Participant 7).

It's also a good deal. I'm paying about $7 a month for the whole package. Worth every

penny I spend (Participant 10).

Convenience. The narrative of convenience emerged when participants stated their desire

to gain easy access to the content whether it is in digital or print format. For example:

If I pay, I will get full access to their content...I can go to their website, download the app

on my phone and tablet, and just read the news articles anytime I want (Participant 5).

I kind of just paid so I can use the app on my phone. It's way easier for me to get news

that way (Participant 8).

I bought the print subscription so I can get the newspaper delivered to my door.

Otherwise, I have to go to the post office that's 15 minutes away to get the paper

(Participant 2).

Hitting the Paywall. Encountering and getting around the paywall was also one of the

motivations reported by participants. There were multiple accounts associated with the paywall,

for instance:

I constantly use up the free articles and the rest are locked behind the paywall. So I just

decided to pay so I don't need to spend all the time searching for other free sources

(Participant 4).

I have to pay because that's the only way I can get around the paywall and read the articles I want [to read] (Participant 18).

Surveillance. The qualitative data also showed that respondents purchase news subscriptions to satisfy their needs for surveillance at both local and national levels. Some participants said it is important to subscribe to the local newspaper so they can know what is happening within the community. At the national level, several participants also expressed desires to get the latest updates and stay updated on current events. For example:

I guess you can say I'm nosy. I spend my whole life in this town and I want to know what's going on and what happened to whom...and often these are people I know [in real life] (Participant 2).

I think it's important to understand how the local government works and how are some decisions are made at the city council and so on. These are decisions that might affect me personally so I want to keep an eye on them (Participant 3).

I think that's [staying updated on current events] really the main reason why I signed up. For things like the event at Capitol on January 6 and the Biden inauguration, I just want a real-time reaction to things, and that's really what I'm paying for (Participant 5).

Being A Good Citizen. The motivation of being a good citizen emerged when I asked participants if there was anything they would like to add regarding why they decided to purchase a news subscription. One participant brought up this aspect (Participant 20) and was later confirmed by a few other participants. Participants emphasized their desire to stay well-

informed, and based on the information they have, they can be more involved with civic duties. For example:

It's about being a good citizen [why I decided to purchase a subscription]. You have to stay well-informed [...] and then act upon the information like who to vote, what issues to advocate, or even whether tell people to wear a mask or not. It's my obligation as a citizen to know what's going on and do something about it (Participant 2).

I would say it [being a good citizen] is very important for me [to subscribe to *LA Times*]. The Hispanic community was hit by COVID really hard and without *LA Times* I wouldn't know what's going on and how to get involved [...] how to help and do my part (Participant 6).

It [being a good citizen] definitely played a part when I decided to pay, or at least it's relevant. I know some people are like "I just want to mind my own business," but I think it's really important to be involved. Help work with folks to make stuff happen or stop or whatever it is that should be being involved. You can't do that, or at least do it right, without getting news from the local paper and know what's going on (Participant 13).

Brand Reputation. Participants also noted that the brand reputation is one of the deciding factors when it comes to purchasing a news subscription:

I want news, and NYT [The New York Times] is the best out there. I mean, when you think about newspapers, NYT is the first name that pops up. So it wasn't hard for me to pay for it (Participant 4).

One of the reasons [that I subscribed] is that my coworker said it [CNBC] has the best

news in our business [...] I probably will shop around a bit more if she didn't recommend

it to me (Participant 14).

I get the paper because it's the paper to get. It's been around for decades and everyone

knows about it. Want news about the town? This is the one to get (Participant 10).

Supporting Journalism. One concept that emerged from the interviews is participants'

motivation to support news organizations and journalists:

The second reason [I purchased a subscription] is that I want to support the journalists

who work there. It's about respecting their work. I have a lot of friends that are authors

and artists and they talk about people should be paid for what they do. And after a while,

it dawned on me that if I object to the newspaper, having a paywall, then I'm not helping

support those journalists. And I should be willing to support them too because they are

authors and they spend time and effort working on the news (Participant 2).

I think that the journalism industry is incredibly important and I do think that it's an

industry that has suffered in the last decade. Those jobs are paid less and harder to

maintain. So I do believe in supporting journalism like truth and getting the truth out

there is a really worthy cause. So it is important to me to make sure that that continues to

happen, especially as it starts to feel more threatened (Participant 4).

Part of it [the decision to subscribe] is to support the economy of the local community,

you know, help the newspaper stay in business and journalists keep their jobs. I used to

get the paper every day and then five times a week and now twice a week. [...] compare

to other towns it's nice to know that they are still in business. Otherwise, we won't get

coverage that's specifically about our town (Participant 7).

Construct Development/Definitions

In this study, *News Subscription Motivation* is defined as the factors that determine the

reasons why people purchase a news subscription. These reasons are underlying motives that

reflect individuals' unmet needs. And through paying for a news subscription, these needs can be

fulfilled.

During the qualitative interview, several collective narratives emerged. I have labeled

them as: 1) content utility; 2) journalism quality; 3) price/value; 4) convivence; 5) hitting the

paywall; 6) surveillance; 7) being a good citizen; 8) brand reputation; and 9) supporting

journalism. Each dimension is defined as the following:

Content utility refers to audiences' motivation to subscribe to a news source for content

that satisfies their specific needs for news information. This dimension measures the individuals'

desire to get news that is useful for them or fulfill their interests. Useful news and news of

interest include specific topics, original content, and content is exclusive to the news sources.

Journalism quality refers to people's motivation to subscribe to a news source for

superior quality in news coverage. This dimension measures individuals' desire for higher

quality information. News subscribers show a need for information that aligns with quality

journalism such as accuracy, credibility, depth of analysis and investigative efforts, and

objectivity.

Affordability refers to audiences' motivation to get the best value for their money when

subscribing to a news source. This dimension measures the individuals' desire to get a good deal.

They would prefer to pay for a news subscription when the price is reasonable, when it is relatively cheap compared to other options, and when it involves a discount.

Convenience refers to audiences' motivation to get easier, more effortless access while paying for a news subscription. This dimension measures the individuals' desire to have their news consumption experiences and processes as convenient and easy as possible. This includes features like easy access to news content whether it's digital or print, and ease of finding desired information.

Hitting the paywall refers to audiences' motivation to pay for a news subscription after encountering a paywall requiring to pay for the news or requiring them to subscribe. This dimension measures individuals' decision to pay for news when they are challenged with a paywall. This includes running out of free articles, wanting to read what's behind the paywall, and getting tired of trying to around the paywall.

Surveillance refers to people's motivation to subscribe to the news because of their need to survey the environment. This dimension measures the individuals' desire to keep up with what's going on in the world or their local community.

Being a good citizen refers to people's desire to behave consistently with the good citizenship norms. This dimension measures individuals' desire to act on the good citizenship norms, such as being a well-informed citizen and being engaged in social and community issues.

Brand reputation refers to audiences' motivation to pay for a news subscription because the news sources have a good reputation. This dimension measures individuals' motivation to pay for a news source that is a well-known brand or is well-known for its reputation.

Supporting journalism refers to audiences' motivation to pay for a news subscription for supporting journalisms and news organizations. This dimension measures the individuals' desire to support the welfare of journalists, news organizations, or the press in general.

APPENDIX

A Qualitative Study Examining News Subscription Motivations Protocol
- This scale measures the individuals' reasons why they decided to pay for news

Recruit participants from professional survey platforms:
- In the U.S.
- 18 years and older
- Have at least one active subscription of a news source

Send out a short pre-screening survey first ask demographics, whether they are paying for news, what sources they are paying for and how much, and then invite those subscribers back to zoom interview.

Zoom interview with participants:

Hi,
Thank you so much for participate in this study. I really appreciate you making time for this interview and share your insights with me.

My name is Weiyue Chen and I'm from Michigan State University. I'm a graduate student working with Dr. Esther Thorson at Michigan State University.

The purpose of this study is to discover people's motivations of paying for news subscriptions. I'm interested in how people decide to pay for news sources or not, and what are the reasons they decided to pay for news. People have a lot of different ideas about how to get the news, what kind of news they want, so there's no right or wrong answer here, just what your personal experiences and insights are.

I would love to hear your insights in this topic. Your participation in this study would only take about 30 minutes. Thank you again for your time and participation.

The information will only be accessible by the researchers. Your responses will be anonymous. You can withdraw from this interview at any time. You must be over 18 years of age to participate. Do you mind if I record your answers for the purpose of taking notes?

*(**TURN ON RECORDER**. Say something, anything, to make sure it's working. Interview follows. Let them know you're listening and encourage them to speak, but don't get involved in the conversation. Do ask follow-up questions on concepts and their meaning. Don't aim for a long interview, but if they want to go on, and the material's good, go with the flow. At the end…)*

Opening questions (warm-up):

1. Your participants ID [on the online surveying platform]?
2. What is your name?
3. What is your current occupation, or in other words, what is your current job?
4. How did COVID-19 affect your job ?

Questions:
What are they paying and how much
Be sure to ask for elaboration on concepts and what they mean by them. The goal of this study is to identify dimensions and items/item wording for those dimensions.
Use "What does that mean to you?" or "what does that word mean to you?"

1. [Subscription]
    a. What news publications do you subscribe to? Online? Print?
        a. How long have you been paying for each of these sources?
        b. How much do you pay for each per month? (if can't remember monthly payments, ask per year)
    b. Why did choose to pay for a subscription for news?
        a. What content do you feel makes your subscription a worthy investment?

    c. What are your motivations to continue your subscription?

2. [Donation]
    Some news organizations don't require payment to use them, but they ask for donations. For example, the Guardian newspaper in London just asks for donations. Wikipedia doesn't charge you to use its information, but it requests contributions.
    a. In the past year, have you made contributions/donations to any independent news sources (like Michigan Bridge, ProPublica etc)?
        a. Which news publications/organizations?
        b. If so, about how much in total for [insert news sources] in the past year?
    b. What motivated your contribution?
    c. About how long have you been donating to each of these sources?

Dimensions from Literature Review.
Skip the section if they already mentioned in their reasons. Check those they didn't mentioned in a logical order. Sometimes people will talk about the news sources they are not paying for. Make sure to redirect to the news sources they are paying for whenever it is possible. If they indicated one factor is important, ask them why.

1. [Content]
    How does the content have an impact on whether you decide to pay for news?
        a. How do you decide what content is worth paying for?

2. [Price/Value]

People often pay different amounts for subscriptions to news. For example, students often get discounted rates. Some news organizations offer special introductory deals when you first start to subscribe.

    a. Are you getting any discount for any publications?

    b. How important was a discount in determining why you decided to pay for news?

    c. What about being affordable in factoring in your decision to pay for news?

3. [Surveillance/Immediacy]

    a. How important was a getting latest update in determining why you decided to pay for news?

4. [Convenience] – delivery, easiness of getting information/news package, payment

    a. How important was convenience in determining why you decided to pay for news?

    b. Why you think about "convivence," what comes to your mind?

5. [Hitting the Meter]

    a. I'm going to give you an example in real life.

    Let's say that you're wanting to read some news stories online, and after reading a few stories on the same website, then a window bumps up saying "to read more stories, you need to pay for the subscription." This is what some people call "hitting the meter."

    How important was "hitting the meter" in determining your decision to subscribe to news sources?

6. [Support]

Some people also say that they pay for news to support good journalism or local news organizations.

    a. How important was supporting good journalism in your decision of paying for a news subscription?

        i. If important - What does "good journalism" mean for you?

    b. How important was support local journalism in your decision of paying for a news subscription?

7. [Follow a particular journalist] – *added this because this was one of the top reasons found by Reuters Digital News Report (35% of U.S. respondents)*

    a. Some people pay for a news subscription because they want to follow the stories from a particular journalist they like.

       How important was following a particular journalist in your decision of paying for news subscriptions?

8. [Being a good citizen] - *added this because one participants talked about this when I asked if there's anything to add*

9. Anything else you want to add?

Thank you again for your time and insight. It's appreciated.

(TURN OFF RECORDER. TRANSFER AUDIO FILE TO EXTERNAL DRIVE. NAME THE FILE WITH LAST NAME. Mark in file notes the day, time, length of interview and the full name of person and organization. Make a backup of the audio file. In your notes, jot down what you think were the main points of what the participant said.)

QUESTIONS THAT MIGHT COME UP:
Will this be published?
- Yes, that is our goal. We plan to try to get published in a scientific journal.

Will my name be used?
- No. We will identify respondents by a number, but we will not specifically say who you are or which organization you're with.

If I think of something else, may I contact you?
- Certainly. Again, I'm Weiyue Chen, and my e-mail is chenwe47@msu.edu;. If you have any questions about the study, my supervisor Dr. Thorson is also available at ethorson@msu.edu.

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CHAPTER 4: OPERATIONALIZING NEWS SUBSCRIPTION MOTIVATION

In this chapter, I aim to demonstrate the scale development process of News Subscription Motivation. First, I review existing scales that can be used in operationalizing News Subscription Motivation. Second, I generate and revise the initial item pool based on steps recommended by Carpenter (2018). Third, I conduct a pilot study to "rehearse" the full survey and identify possible problematic questions. Then, I submit the measurements to fully launch surveys for the Exploratory Factor Analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Finally, based on the results of the quantitative studies, this dissertation provides a rationale for identifying a News Subscription Motivation.

The Initial Process of Scale Development

Existing scales. Previous literature does not have specific and direct measures of News Subscription Motivation. However, several studies have developed measurement scales for price/value (Sproles & Kendall, 1986), surveillance (Vincent & Basil, 1997), and being a good citizen (Copeland, 2014). These measures (Table 3) were also taken into consideration while creating the initial items pool.

Table 3. Prior subscales developed in scholarly research

Authors	Items
Sproles & Kendall, 1986	**Price/Value** I buy as much as possible at sale prices. The lower price products are usually my choice. I look carefully to find the best value for the money.
Vincent & Basil, 1997	**Surveillance** - so I can understand the world - to find out things I need to know about daily life - it makes me want to learn more about things - because it helps me learn things about myself and others - it shows me what society is like nowadays - so I can learn about what might happen to me

Table 3 (cont'd)

	- it helps me judge what political leaders are really like
	- so I can keep up with what the government is doing
	- so I can talk with other people about what's covered
	- it helps me satisfy my curiosity
	- so I can learn what is going on the country and world
	Engaged citizenship norm
	Being active in politics.
Copeland, 2014	Form my own opinion.
	Vote in elections.
	Help people who are worse off.

Item generation. An initial set of 82 items were generated based on participants' response during the interview. I extracted words, phrases, and statements that fit each dimension. Then, I added existing measures from previous studies to the items pool.

Expert feedback and pre-test. Once I gathered an initial pool of potential items, I sent them to three experts in scale development and news consumption to elicit feedback. Each expert responded through open-end feedback to suggest possible revisions. After the revision process, I had 73 items in the initial items pool.

A pre-test is also essential in the scale development process (Carpenter, 2018). Based on recommendations by Boateng et al. (2018), I followed the procedures by Morris et al. (2017) and conducted additional cognitive interviews on March 24 and March 25, 2021. Five more participants were recruited to participate in zoom interviews and provided their feedback for assessing the scale items. These interviews lasted from 17 minutes to an hour. In total, participants noted six items they found confusing or do not fit well in their dimensions (these items are #7, #19, #32, #50, #52, and #57). I marked these items and made further revisions.

Scale response categories and lead-in question. Weijters, Cabooter, and Schillewaert (2010) note that scales are fully labeled and with a midpoint provide more clarity to respondents.

The optimal numbers of response categories vary across studies. For example, some suggest that 7-point scales are optimal (e.g., Krosnick & Presser, 2010; Preston & Colman, 2000), while others suggest 5-point scales can yield better data quality (e.g., Contractor & Fox, 2011). Additionally, Dawes (2008) also notes that, in terms of data characteristics (mean scores, variances, skewness, and kurtosis), there is no statistically significant difference between data collected from a 5-point scale and a 7-point scale.

I chose to employ a 5-point response to improve my survey response rate. According to American Press Institute (2018), about 60% of news subscribers are over 60 years old, and about 90% of them are above age 40. Given the online format and a large number of survey questions, a 7-point scale would easily wear out the respondents, make them impatient, and more likely to withdraw from the study. Thus I argue a 5-point scale would be optimal for my research.

I also choose Item-Specific (IS) scales over Agree-Disagree (AD) scales. Research shows that participants exhibit deeper processing for IS scales than AD scales (Dykema et al., 2019; Höhne & Lenzner, 2017), and thus might lead to a more thoughtful response. Additionally, Hanson (2015) also find that IS scales generate more reliable responses than AD scales.

Therefore, participants will be responding to five categories of item-specific options: 1= Not at all important; 2= Slightly important; 3= Moderately important; 4= Important; 5= Extremely Important. The lead-in question is "*We want to know more about what motivates you to pay for a news subscription. Think about the news subscription(s) you are paying for right now or have purchased in the past. For each of the following statements, please rate the importance of each factor in explaining why you paid for it/them*." The entire items pool is listed in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Proposed items for developing news subscription motivation scale

Themes of each dimension

Content utility = benefits to self; Journalism quality = JRN Quality; Affordability=affordable price, discount; Convenience=effortless; Hitting the paywall=paywall; Surveillance= surveillance; Good citizen=be well-informed, engaged good citizen; Brand reputation=reputation of the publication; Support journalism=support news organizations and journalists' welfare.

We want to know more about what motivates you to pay for a news subscription. Think about the news subscription(s) you are paying for right now or have purchased in the past 12 months. For each of the following statements, please rate the importance of each factor in explaining why you paid for the subscription(s).	Not at all important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Important	Extremely important
Access information that is useful to me.	1	2	3	4	5
Read classified ads that are useful to me.	1	2	3	4	5
Collect coupons that are useful to me.	1	2	3	4	5
Acquire information that I find interesting.	1	2	3	4	5
Obtain information that I enjoy reading.	1	2	3	4	5
Learn about different cultures.	1	2	3	4	5
Acquire local news that I care about.	1	2	3	4	5
~~Expands my worldview.~~	~~1~~	~~2~~	~~3~~	4	~~5~~
Access unique content on topics I am unable to find elsewhere.	1	2	3	4	5
Obtain original content that I cannot find from other news sources.	1	2	3	4	5
The accuracy of information.	1	2	3	4	5
The trustworthiness of information.	1	2	3	4	5
The truthfulness of information.	1	2	3	4	5
The credibility of information.	1	2	3	4	5
Thorough reporting.	1	2	3	4	5
Investigative reporting.	1	2	3	4	5
Balances both sides of an issue.	1	2	3	4	5
Fairness in reporting.	1	2	3	4	5
Unbiased approach to news reporting.	1	2	3	4	5
Receive a discount to start the subscription.	1	2	3	4	5
Receive a discount for continuing the subscription.	1	2	3	4	5

Table 4 (cont'd)

	1	2	3	4	5
Get a good deal.	1	2	3	4	5
The price is reasonable.	1	2	3	4	5
The price is affordable.	1	2	3	4	5
The price is cheaper compared to other news subscriptions.	1	2	3	4	5
The price fits my budget.	1	2	3	4	5
The subscription package is a good value for money.	1	2	3	4	5
Accessing the news is an easy process.	1	2	3	4	5
The print publication is directly delivered to me.	1	2	3	4	5
The publication's website is effortless to use.	1	2	3	4	5
The publication's mobile application is easy to use.	1	2	3	4	5
~~Effortless to know what's going on when they send me email notifications summarizing the news.~~	~~1~~	~~2~~	~~3~~	~~4~~	~~5~~
~~Painless to determine what information is true.~~	~~1~~	~~2~~	~~3~~	~~4~~	~~5~~
Easy to decide what information is important to know.	1	2	3	4	5
The subscription package (for both digital and print) is convenient.	1	2	3	4	5
The payment process is trouble-free.	1	2	3	4	5
The publication only offers a few free articles.	1	2	3	4	5
The paywall popped up when I was reading an interesting article.	1	2	3	4	5
I kept finding articles that I wanted to read were behind a paywall.	1	2	3	4	5
I want to read what is locked behind a paywall.	1	2	3	4	5
I found it requires too much effort to search for articles that were behind a paywall.	1	2	3	4	5
I got tired of trying to get around the paywall.	1	2	3	4	5
I used up my quota for free articles.	1	2	3	4	5
I want to know what's going on in the world.	1	2	3	4	5
I want to keep up with what's happening in my local community.	1	2	3	4	5
I am usually curious about the latest events.	1	2	3	4	5
I want to understand my local government's decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
I want to understand how things work in the world.	1	2	3	4	5
I want to know about the possible changes that might affect me personally.	1	2	3	4	5
I want to know what society is like nowadays.	1	2	3	4	5
I want to find out things I need to know about daily life.	1	2	3	4	5
I want to talk competently about my community.	1	2	3	4	5
Be a well-informed citizen.	1	2	3	4	5
Get involved in the society.	1	2	3	4	5

Table 4 (cont'd)

Be active in politics.	1	2	3	4	5
Get involved with my local community.	1	2	3	4	5
Form my own opinion independently of others.	1	2	3	4	5
Help those who are worse off me.	1	2	3	4	5
Stay informed on how to vote in elections.	1	2	3	4	5
Make decisions based on rational evaluations of the situation.	1	2	3	4	5
The publication is a well-known news brand.	1	2	3	4	5
The publication has a good reputation for its journalism work.	1	2	3	4	5
My family and friends recognize this publication.	1	2	3	4	5
My family and friends speak highly of this publication.	1	2	3	4	5
The publication has been around for many decades.	1	2	3	4	5
The publication has been known for its national or local stature.	1	2	3	4	5
The news organization has a good standing.	1	2	3	4	5
Support journalists' important work.	1	2	3	4	5
Pay respect to journalists' hard work.	1	2	3	4	5
Help journalists keep their jobs.	1	2	3	4	5
Help news organizations stay in business.	1	2	3	4	5
Empower news organizations to continue monitoring power.	1	2	3	4	5
Support news organizations' coverage of my local community.	1	2	3	4	5
Empowering news organizations to continue monitoring power.	1	2	3	4	5
Protect freedom of the press.	1	2	3	4	5
Ensure the continuance of local news.	1	2	3	4	5

Pilot Study

Carpenter (2018) suggested that a pilot study of 50-100 people can be conducted to identify potential problematic questions. A pilot study was launched from March 25 to April 2 on Prolific. The full survey can be found in Appendix A. 121 news subscribers were invited to participate in the study, and 78 participants responded. 10 subjects did not pass the attention filter embedded in the survey, thus left us with 68 responses and a final response rate of 56.2%. A summary of participants' demographic is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Summary of demographics of participants in the pilot study

Gender		Education	
Male	61.8%	High school/GED	13.2%
Female	36.8%	Some college	22.1%
Non-binary	1.5%	Bachelor's degree	47.1%
Age		Postgraduate/professional degree	17.6%
18-29	50%	**Area of living**	
30-39	17.6%	Rural area	13.2%
40-49	7.4%	Suburban area	52.9%
50-59	16.2%	Urban area	33.8%
60-69	4.4%	**Partisanship**	
70-79	2.9%	Strong Democratic	22.1%
80 and above	1.5%	Democratic	27.9%
Race		Independent leaning democratic	17.6%
Caucasian	64.7%	Independent	13.2%
African American	8.8%	Independent leaning Republican	8.8%
Hispanic	16.2%	Republican	10.3%
Asian	8.8%	Strong Republican	0%
Other	1.5%		
Income			
Less than $25,000	11.8%		
$25,000 - $49,000	19.1%		
$50,000 - $74,999	32.4%		
$75,000 - $99,999	14.7%		
$100,000 and above	22.1%		

Because the pilot study had more items than valid respondents, the statistical software could not run the common factor analysis. To make the data valid for factor analysis, I deleted six items that were noted to be problematic in the pre-test (items #7, #19, #32, #50, #52, #57).

I first proceeded with examinations of data quality and did not find missing data or outliners. Then I examined the factorability of the data and found KMO value was .50, which is lower than the recommended value of .60 (Carpenter, 2018). This indicates the sample size is not adequate for the factor analysis. The Bartlett's test had (χ^2=2278; p < .00), which rejects the hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix. This suggests that factor analysis

might be useful for dealing with current data. Given the contradictory indications of KMO and

Bartlett's test, the results of the pilot study will have limited insights for predicting factors.

I conducted a Parallel Analysis through *JASP* software, and the scree plot suggests the

data contains five factors. As shown in Figure 1 blow, five of the eigenvalues are greater than the

average eigenvalues in the Parallel Analysis line, thus makes the five-factors solution the optimal

solution.
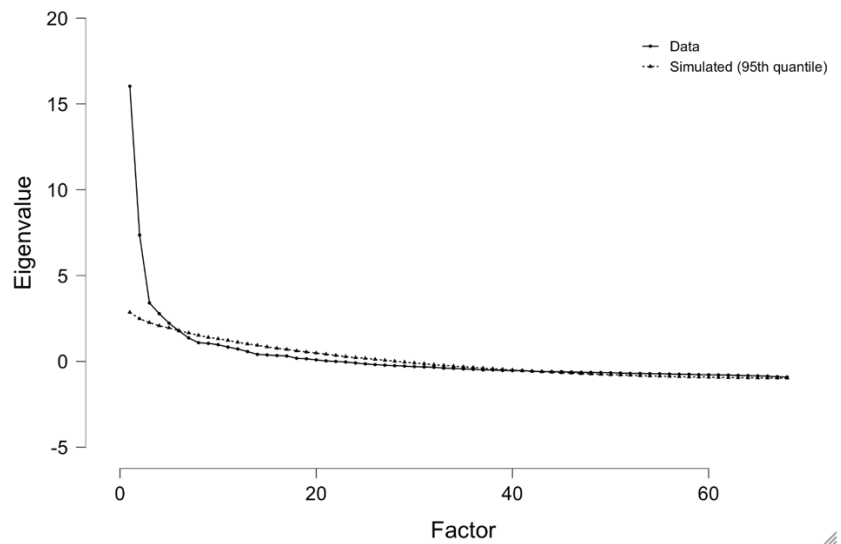
Figure 1. Plot from parallel analysis

I then conducted Exploratory Factor Analysis to identify factors and items. Given that the

data was not normally distributed, the principal axis factoring method was employed as the

extraction method recommended by Costello and Osborne (2005). The Promax method was

selected for rotation because oblique methods allow factors to correlate and is more suitable for

communications research (Carpenter, 2018). I set the factor numbers as five based on results

from the scree plot. Following the guidelines from Yong and Pearce (2013), I first removed

items that were cross-loading. Then I removed items that had a loading below .32 based on the

recommendation by Carpenter (2018). After this step, results showed that factor 1 and factor 4

contained items from two or more originally proposed dimensions, which increased the difficulty

to interpret and summarize the factors. Since other researchers (Costello & Osborne, 2005) also

suggest loadings above .50 indicate stronger loaders, I used .50 as the cut-off for minimum factor

loadings and eliminated three more items. The EFA results are illustrated in Table 6 below.

Table 6. EFA results for pilot study with factor loadings above .50

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
I want to find out current events I need to know about daily life.	.860				
I want to be informed about the latest news events.	.753				
I want to keep informed about governmental decisions and changes that might affect me.	.752				
I want to know what's going on in the world.	.724				
Access information that is useful to me.	.670				
The truthfulness of information.	.646				
Make decisions based on rational evaluation of the situation.	.624				
It is painless to discern what information is true.	.553				
Thorough reporting of news events and issues.	.548				
The credibility of information.	.522				
I kept finding articles that I wanted to read were behind a paywall.		.839			
I got tired of trying to get around the paywall.		.836			
I found it required too much effort to search for articles that were behind a paywall.		.824			
I used up my quota for free articles.		.779			
I want to read what is locked behind the paywall.		.751			

Table 6 (cont'd)

The publication only offered a few free articles.	.711			
The paywall popped up when I was reading an interesting article.	.675			
Help journalists keep their jobs.		.855		
Support journalists' important work.		.853		
Help news organizations stay in business.		.798		
Pay respect to journalists' hard work.		.795		
Empower news organizations to continue monitoring power.		.787		
Protect freedom of the press.		.702		
Empowering news organizations to continue monitoring power		.674		
The price is affordable.			.950	
The price fits my budget.			.807	
The subscription package is a good value for money.			.672	
The price is reasonable.			.657	
Get a good deal for the subscription.			.588	
I want to keep up with what's happening in my local community.				.902
Ensure the continuance of local news.				.869
Support news organizations' coverage of my local community.				.796
Collect coupons that are beneficial to me.				.572

Factor 1 mostly includes items from the originally proposed dimension of surveillance, content utility, journalism quality, convenience, and being a good citizen. It includes items such as "I want to find out current events I need to know about daily life;" "I want to be informed about the latest news events;" "I want to keep informed about governmental decisions and

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changes that might affect me;" "I want to know what's going on in the world;" "Access information that is useful to me;" "The truthfulness of information;" "The credibility of information;" "Thorough reporting of news events and issues;" "It is painless to discern what information is true;" and "Make decisions based on rational evaluations of the situation." The Cronbach's alpha of this factor equals .90.

It is worth noting that item #34 - "It is painless to discern what information is true" - an item originally from the proposed dimension of convenience clustered together with "The truthfulness of information" and "The credibility of information" from journalism quality. Therefore, I also marked this item to be problematic and will take it out from the final version of surveys for Explanatory Factor Analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analysis in later research stages.

Factor 2 reflects the "hitting the paywall" dimension, which includes items like "The publication only offered a few free articles;" "The paywall popped up when I was reading an interesting article;" "I kept finding articles that I wanted to read were behind a paywall;" "I want to read what is locked behind the paywall;" "I found it required too much effort to search for articles that were behind a paywall;" "I got tired of trying to get around the paywall;" and "I used up my quota for free articles." Cronbach's alpha equals .91

Factor 3 echoes the "support journalism" dimension proposed in conceptualization. It includes items such as: "Support journalists' important work;" "Pay respect to journalists' hard work;" "Help journalists keep their jobs;" "Help news organizations stay in business;" "Empower news organizations to continue monitoring power;" and "Protect freedom of the press." The Cronbach's alpha is .91.

Factor 4 reflects the proposed dimension of affordability. Items in this factor contain "Get a good deal for the subscription;" "The price is reasonable;" "The price is affordable;" "The price fits my budget;" and "The subscription package is a good value for money." Cronbach's alpha equals .85.

Factor 5 contains items from the proposed content utility dimension, surveillance dimension, and support journalism dimension. Three of the items indicated news subscribers longing for local news coverage. This factor includes items such as "Collect coupons that are beneficial to me;" "I want to keep up with what's happening in my local community;" "Ensure the continuance of local news;" and "Support news organizations' coverage of my local community." Cronbach's alpha equals .77.

To explore other possibilities, I also did a further cleaning of the factors using .70 as the cut-off point for minimum loadings. As a result, there were slight changes in the factor structure. The EFA results are shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7. EFA results for pilot study with factor loadings above .70

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
Help journalists keep their jobs.	.879				
Help news organizations stay in business.	.839				
Support journalists' important work.	.820				
Pay respect to journalists' hard work.	.791				
Protect freedom of the press.	.749				
Empower news organizations to continue monitoring power.	.706				
I got tired of trying to get around the paywall.		.835			
I kept finding articles that I wanted to read were behind a paywall.		.813			
I used up my quota for free articles.		.812			
I found it required too much effort to search for articles that were behind a paywall.		.787			

Table 7 (cont'd)

I want to read what is locked behind the paywall.	.736		
The publication only offered a few free articles.	.727		
I want to keep up with what's happening in my local community.		.969	
Ensure the continuance of local news.		.847	
Support news organizations' coverage of my local community.		.825	
I want to be informed about the latest news events.			.834
I want to find out current events I need to know about daily life.			.763
I want to keep informed about governmental decisions and changes that might affect me.			.747
The price fits my budget.			.959
The price is affordable.			.835

Factor 1 echoes the "support journalism" dimension proposed in conceptualization. It includes items such as: "Support journalists' important work;" "Pay respect to journalists' hard work;" "Help news organizations stay in business;" "Empower news organizations to continue monitoring power;" and "Protect freedom of the press." The Cronbach's alpha for factor 1 is .92.

Factor 2 reflects the "Hitting the paywall" dimension, which includes items like: "The publication only offered a few free articles;" "I kept finding articles that I wanted to read were behind a paywall;" "I want to read what is locked behind the paywall;" "I found it required too much effort to search for articles that were behind a paywall;" "I got tired of trying to get around the paywall;" and "I used up my quota for free articles." Cronbach's alpha equals .91.

Factor 3 contains items from the proposed surveillance dimension and support journalism dimension, but clustered items indicate news subscribers longing for local news coverage. This factor includes items such as "I want to keep up with what's happening in my local community;"

"Ensure the continuance of local news;" and "Support news organizations' coverage of my local community." Cronbach's alpha equals .92.

Factor 4 reflects the proposed dimension of surveillance needs. Items in this factor are: "I want to be informed about the latest news events;" "I want to keep informed about governmental decisions and changes that might affect me;" and "I want to find out current events I need to know about daily life." The Cronbach's alpha for factor 4 is .84.

Factor 5 demonstrates that news subscribers are also driven by the monetary price they pay for news subscriptions. Items in this dimension are: "The price is affordable;" and "The price fits my budget." Cronbach's alpha equals .89.

Discussion of Pilot Study Results

The purpose of conducting a pilot study is two-fold. First, researchers can identify skipped questions by participants and problematic items in the scale. I did not find any skipped questions by the participants. This is a direct result from setting "force response" function in the survey distribution software, which prevents participants from submitting their answers if there is a missing question. However, the pilot study does suggest one problematic item: "It is painless to discern what information is true." This item was originally designed to be included in the convenience dimension. However, after conducting factor analysis, it grouped with two items in the journalism quality dimension that describes trustworthiness and credibility. Therefore, I decided to eliminate this item from the final survey of the full launch for EFA.

The second goal of this pilot study is to identify possible dimensions. From two versions of EFA results, four factors consistently emerged: price/value, hitting the paywall, support journalism, and local news. Thus, I expect to see these four dimensions appear again in the full launch for EFA. In addition, I also expect to see more factors emerge, given the limited sample

size ($N= 68$) for the pilot study and an inadequate result of KMO test (=.50). The full launch of the EFA survey will have 400 participants and hopefully increase the data's factorability.

It also came to my attention that during the cleaning processes of factor analysis, items originally designed for "content utility" tend to cluster with other dimensions. While this can be explained by the smaller sample size ($N= 68$) for pilot the study and consequently the factorability of data, I decided to further revise items in this dimension. The theme of the "content utility" essentially highlights people's motivation to pay for news because they see personal benefits in getting a news subscription. The new proposed items are listed below in Table 8, and will be included in the next round survey for EFA.

Table 8. Revised items for content utility dimension

Conceptual Definition

Content utility refers to audiences' motivation to subscribe to a news source for content that satisfies their specific needs for news information.

Operational Definition

This dimension measures the individuals' desire to get news that is useful for them or fulfill their interests. Useful news and news of interest include specific topics, original content, and content is exclusive to the news sources.

Theme: personal benefits

Items

Access information that is useful to me.
Read news that are helpful to my work.
Gather information that is valuable to my daily life.
Read classified ads that are helpful to me.
Collect coupons that are beneficial to me.
Acquire information that I find interesting.
Obtain information that I enjoy reading.
Learn about different cultures.
Get news articles that are rewarding to my personal growth.
Access unique content on topics I am unable to find elsewhere.
Obtain original content that I cannot find from other news sources.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (Study 2)

After the pilot study, I revised the pool of items and submitted 77 items to conduct an Exploratory Factor Analysis. This study is labeled as Study 2 in my dissertation research.

Sample. I employed a professional survey company, Dynata (www.dynata.com) to recruit survey participants. The project manager from Dynata used email, text, phone alters and in-platform messaging to invite participants from their U.S. national panel. The incentives for participants were based on participants' completion rate, time, and quality. Participants who passed the quality screening by Dynata were provided cashable Dynata credits that are suitable for a 10-minute survey. The survey used in this study can be found in Appendix 2.

To maximize the generalizability of the final scale, the goal at this step is to get a sample quota that is relatively representative of news subscribers in U.S. From recent research on news subscribers, I selected the study by the *American Press Institute* (2018) for its large scale. In this study, API collaborated with 12 newspaper publishers and 90 newspapers from 47 states in the U.S., and they were able to collect responses from news subscribers across the country (N=4,113). Therefore, I used demographic quotas provided by API (2018) while recruiting participants.

A total of 1,174 subjects participated in the survey. An initial screening question was used to eliminate participates who are not news subscribers, which screened out 601 participants. Two attention checks also eliminated 156 invalid responses, which left 417 participants in the final sample (Response Rate = 35.5%). The size of 417 is above the five to one ratio for sample size suggestion made by Carpenter (2018). The demographic quotas roughly match the API study with a younger sample. Table 9 illustrates the demographic details of the API study, and Table 10 shows the summary of participants in Study 2.

Table 9. Respondents' demographics from the API (2018) study (N=4,113)

Age		Education	
18-39	7%	High school or less	5%
40-59	28%	Some college	26%
60 or older	65%	College degree and above	67%
Gender		**Race**	
Male	51%	White	88%
Female	47%	Other	12%
Income		**Living Area**	
under 50k	34%	Rural	17.00%
50k-100k	33%	Suburban	55.00%
above 100k	33%	Urban	28.00%

Table 10. Summary of participants in Study 2 (N=417)

Age		Education	
18-29	12.50%	Less than high school	0.20%
30-39	13.20%	high school or GED	12.50%
40-49	16.30%	Some college	24.90%
50-59	7.70%	Four-year college	33.80%
60-69	18.50%	Postgraduate	28.50%
70-79	28.50%	**Race**	
80 or older	3.40%	White	83.00%
Gender		Black	6.20%
Male	54.40%	Hispanic	4.60%
Female	45.60%	Asian	3.60%
Income		Indigenous/Alaskan Native	1.00%
under 25k	7.90%	Multiracial	1.00%
25k-49,999	24.70%	Other	0.70%
50k-74,999	22.10%	**Partisanship**	
75k-99,999	14.60%	Strong Democratic	21.80%
above 100k	30.70%	Democratic	20.40%
Living Area		Independent leaning Democratic	13.20%
Rural	18.50%	Independent	15.30%
Suburban	48.70%	Independent leaning Republican	7.20%
Urban	32.10%	Republican	11.80%
Missing	0.70%	Strong Republican	10.30%

Verifying data quality. According to recommendations by Carpenter (2018), I first examined the correlation matrix for all 77 initial items, ensuring all correlation numbers are above .30. I then submitted the data to Bartlett's Test of Sphericity and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Test for Sampling Adequacy. The result for Bartlett's Test was significant ($\chi^2 = 9493.25$, $p<.001$), and the KMO value equals .95. These results meet the recommended thresholds ($p<.05$ and $KMO \geq .60$), which indicates adequate data quality for conducting factor analysis.

Determining optimal number of factors. A Parallel Analysis was conducted to determine the best number of factors, following the suggestions by Carpenter (2018) and Watkins (2006). Parallel Analysis is considered a more suitable method for two reasons. First, the cut-off point for the scree plot is relatively subjective (Carpenter, 2018). Second, scholars argue that using eigenvalues greater than one often result in inaccurate extractions of factors (Carpenter, 2018; Kline, 2013).

The result of Parallel Analysis indicated the six-factor solution is optimal. To obtain the most accurate results, I also tested the five and seven factors in the EFA. However, the EFA set for five factors resulted in a single-item factor, and the EFA for seven factors resulted in an empty factor. Based on prior scale development recommendations, a factor needs to contain at least three items (Carpenter, 2018). Therefore, I determined six factors were to be extracted.

Factor extraction and rotation methods. Costello and Osborne (2005) suggest that the principal axis factoring method should be employed when the data was not normally distributed, and maximum likelihood method should be used when data fit normal distribution. I conducted a Mardia's Test for multivariate normal distribution in R, which rejected the null hypothesis (Skewness: $\beta = 1695.80$, $p<.001$; Kurtosis: $\beta = 6911.75$, $p<.001$). A Q-Q plot was also produced

in R to illustrate that data from Study 2 does not fit multivariate normal distribution (Figure 2). Therefore, principal axis factoring method was employed for factor extraction.
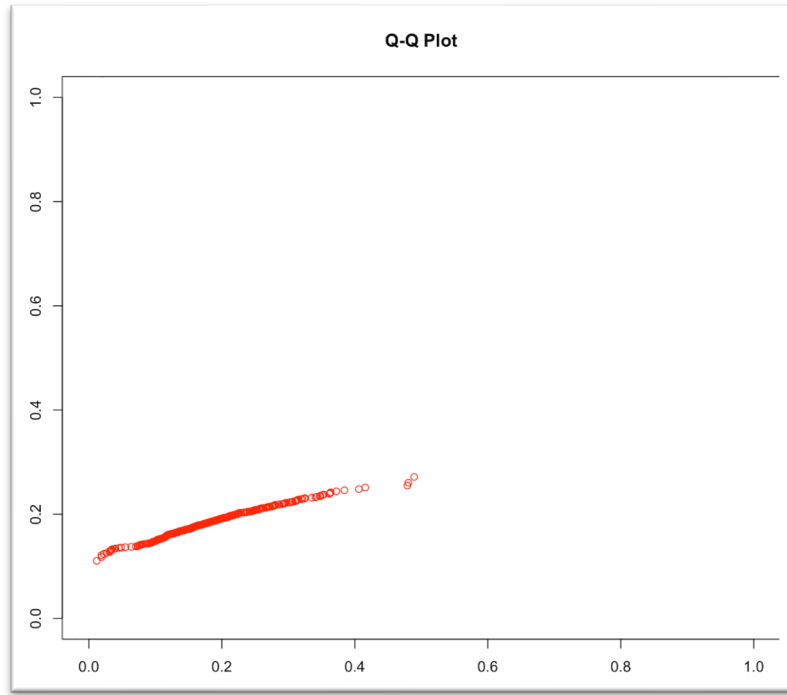
Figure 2. Q-Q plot from multivariate normality test

The Promax method was selected for rotation because oblique methods allow factors to correlate and is more suitable for communications research (Carpenter, 2018). I set the factor numbers as six based on results from the Parallel Analysis and submitted the data to EFA. The EFA was conducted through SPSS.

Item reduction. Following the guidelines from Yong and Pearce (2013), I first removed items that were cross-loading. Then I removed items that had a loading below .32 based on the recommendation by Carpenter (2018). After these steps, 39 items were eliminated. To further clean the scale, I followed the recommendation by Costello and Osborne (2005), which suggests factor loadings above .50 are more robust. Seven more items were deleted from this step.

To further reduce the number of items in the scale, I evaluated items in each factor based on face and content validity. Items that did not match the conceptual definition were also eliminated. For items that are similar with each other, I compared their factor loadings and retained the ones that has stronger loadings. In the end, a final scale of 19 items were attained, with three items left for Factor 1 to Factor 5, and four items were retained for Factor 6.

DeVellis (2016) also suggests researchers inspect the internal consistency of each factor. I calculated Cronbach's α, average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliabilities (CR) for each factor. Alpha values for all six factors ranged from .78 to .87, which meet the requirement of .70 (DeVellis, 2016). Fornell and Larcker (1981) recommend AVE to be .50 and higher, and Hair (1997) suggest CR to be above .70. The first five factors showed good internal consistency of AVE ranging from .54 to .70, and CR ranging from. 70 to .88. Factor 6 (content utility) demonstrate a good CR of .72, yet the AVE value (.40) is below recommendation.

It is also worth noting that Fornell and Larcker (1981, p.41) contend that AVE is "a more conservative measure," and based on adequate CR values alone, researchers can claim convergent validity of the construct is reached (Lam, 2012). Since CR value for all six factors are above .70, I retained Factor 6 in the final scale.

Final items. Table 11 demonstrates the final scale generated from EFA. Correlations between factors are shown in Table 12. All factor loadings are above .50, with communalities ranging from .44 to .75. The factor structure accounted for 60.67% cumulative variance. Factor 1 to Factor 6 were labeled as: *Supporting Journalism* (SJ), *Journalism Quality* (JQ), *Triggered by the Paywall* (PW), *Community Attachment* (CA), *Price* (PR), and *Content Utility* (CU).

Table 11. Exploratory factor analysis results (final scale)

Item		SJ	JQ	PW	CA	PR	CU	Communalities	Mean	SD
Factor 1: Supporting Journalism										
SJ1	Support journalists' important work.	**.88**	.03	-.03	-.05	-.03	.03	.75	3.55	1.20
SJ2	Help journalists keep their jobs.	**.82**	.00	.03	-.09	-.02	.04	.66	3.35	1.29
SJ3	Help news organizations stay in business.	**.81**	.01	-.01	.13	.05	-.13	.67	3.42	1.24
Factor 2: Journalism Quality										
JQ1	The credibility of information.	-.06	**.92**	.02	.03	-.02	-.05	.75	4.36	.89
JQ2	Unbiased approach to news reporting.	.04	**.78**	.03	.01	.03	-.03	.64	4.20	.98
JQ3	Thorough reporting.	.17	**.51**	-.06	-.06	-.01	.23	.56	4.13	.97
Factor 3: Triggered by the Paywall										
PW1	The paywall popped up when I was reading an interesting article.	-.07	.04	**.89**	-.01	-.08	.02	.69	2.37	1.39
PW2	I used up my quota for free articles.	.04	.00	**.82**	-.04	-.05	-.04	.61	2.29	1.39
PW3	I found it requires too much effort to search for articles that were behind a paywall.	.03	-.03	**.59**	.09	.16	-.05	.50	2.78	1.37
Factor 4: Community Attachment										
CA1	I want to keep up with what's happening in my community.	-.11	.03	-.07	**.90**	.02	.02	.74	3.85	1.14
CA2	I want to understand my local government's decisions.	.00	.04	.01	**.66**	-.03	.12	.55	3.84	1.08
CA3	I want to get involved with my local community.	.18	-.08	.14	**.61**	-.03	.01	.57	3.33	1.23
Factor 5: Affordability										
PR1	The price is reasonable.	.02	.06	-.08	.12	**.85**	-.16	.65	3.89	1.06

Table 11 (cont'd)

Item		SJ	JQ	PW	CA	PR	CU	Communalities	Mean	SD
PR2	The price is affordable.	.01	-.08	-.04	-.09	**.79**	.10	.59	3.92	1.02
PR3	Get a good deal when starting or continuing the subscription(s).	-.07	.04	.23	-.09	**.52**	.16	.51	3.42	1.18
Factor 6: Content Utility										
CU1	Gather information that is valuable to my daily life.	-.09	-.01	-.05	.11	-.04	**.79**	.56	3.88	.97
CU2	Obtain original content that I cannot find from other news sources.	.04	.06	-.01	.01	-.01	**.60**	.44	3.65	1.16
CU3	Obtain information that I enjoy reading.	.00	.11	-.01	.02	.08	**.59**	.53	4.05	.90
CU4	Get news articles that are rewarding to my personal growth.	.18	-.07	.07	.06	.08	**.51**	.54	3.49	1.16
Cronbach's α		.83	.80	.87	.81	.78	.79			
Explained Variance		36.58%	8.84%	5.39%	4.94%	2.94%	1.99%	Total	60.67%	
Eigenvalues		7.34	2.05	1.39	1.29	.91	.80			

Note: Factor loadings presented here are from the pattern matrix.

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

Rotation Method: Promax with Kaiser Normalization (Kappa=4).

Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

The question battery was: "Think about the news subscription(s) you are paying for right now or have purchased in the past 12 months. For each of the following statements, please rate the importance of each factor in explaining why you paid for the subscription(s)."

Table 12. Correlations between factors extracted from EFA

	SJ	JQ	PW	CA	PR	CU
SJ	--					
JQ	.49**	--				
PW	.37**	.08	--			
CA	.53**	.35**	.36**	--		
PR	.40**	.36**	.42**	.40**	--	
CU	.58**	.55**	.38**	.62**	.56**	--

Note: Correlations were calculated using pairwise deletion and Spearman's rank-order since the data were not normally distributed. ** indicates significance at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Factor 1 was labeled as *Supporting Journalism* as it contains three items that reflect participants' desire to support the journalistic effort, journalism workers and organizations. Items include: "Support journalists' important work;" "Help journalists keep their jobs;" and "Help news organizations stay in business."

Items in Factor 2 were anchored towards the quality aspect of journalism such as credibility, objectivity and thoroughness of news reporting. Hence this factor was labeled as Journalism Quality. Items include "The credibility of information;" "Unbiased approach to news reporting;" and "Thorough reporting (of the publication)."

Factor 3 was defined as *Triggered by the Paywall*. This series of items described participants' purchase behavior when they encountered a paywall. There were other items in the initial pool that embed negative emotions (e.g., frustration of paywall), but items retained in Factor 3 demonstrated relatively neutral sentiment. Subscribers' motivation to pay was triggered when they encountered a paywall. Thus, I used *Triggered by the Paywall* as the conceptual label for this subscale. Items included: "The paywall popped up when I was reading an interesting article;" "I used up my quota for free articles;" and "I found it requires too much effort to search for articles that were behind a paywall."

Items in Factor 4 mostly reflected news subscribers' need for strong community connection, with a combination of keeping up with current events and local governments and taking actions to be involved in the community. Items include: "I want to keep up with what's happening in my community;" "I want to understand my local government's decisions;" and "I want to get involved with my local community."

Factor 5 was labeled as affordability since it described cost-related motivations for subscribers to pay. Items include: "The price is reasonable;" "The price is affordable;" and "Get a good deal when starting or continuing the subscription(s)."

Factor 6 was described as *Content Utility* as it reflected a common theme of individuals using the news subscription to fulfill their needs other than getting quality news. The information news subscription offered are deemed valuable and useful to individuals' daily life (e.g., original content, leisure, personal growth). Items included: "Gather information that is valuable to my daily life;" "Obtain original content that I cannot find from other news sources;" "Obtain information that I enjoy reading;" and "Get news articles that are rewarding to my personal growth."

Discussion of Exploratory Factor Analysis Results

The supporting journalism factor reflected people's recognition of the crisis news industry is facing. I did not label this factor as altruism since the motivation for supporting journalists or news organizations may not be entirely self-less. Furthermore, this factor also might be vulnerable to social desirability bias. Although there is little empirical evidence of whether news consumption is perceived as socially desirable, further research is needed to explore the correlation between motivations for subscribing to news and social desirability.

Items of journalism quality demonstrated American consumers' needs in the current state of journalism practice. The credibility item is a reflection of the proliferation of fake news (Pew Research Center, 2020). The unbiased reporting item is a reflection of the public's perception of increased media slant (Asbury, 2020) amplified needs for neutral coverage (Mitchell et al., 2018). Moreover, the inclusion of three items provides a more specific inspection of what matters to news audience. It also advances the measurements of "what journalism quality drives paying," comparing to the broader index of journalism attributes and writing quality in previous research (Chen & Thorson, 2021).

For the paywall factor, it is worth noting that the sentiments reflected in the items are neutral, not negative emotions such as frustration or anger. This might result from people's growing acceptable of paywall, which is consistent with the increased digital subscriptions in the past two years (Kalim, 2020). In addition, marketing research also suggested that some consumers are more impulsive when it comes to shopping (Sproles & Kendall, 1986)., and have a stronger need for instant gratification (Barbopoulos, & Johansson, 2016). Thus I speculate subscribers who are more likely to be triggered by the paywall would also exhibit other impulsive purchase tendencies. However, more empirical evidence is needed to support this assumption.

Findings of community attachment and price are consistent with previous studies in news consumption (Pew Research Center, 2019; Goyanes, 2020; Burger et al., 2015) and marketing research (Barbopoulos, & Johansson, 2016; Sproles & Kendall, 1986). For local news organizations, the community attachment factor also emphasizes their involvement in the local community and journalism's role in building a democratic society.

The content utility factor is a relatively weak factor with a lower AVE value and an explained variance below 2%. The included items described more abstract consumer needs (e.g., "valuable to my daily life," "rewarding to my personal growth") rather than concrete functionality of the content. Readers should consult the previous qualitative study to better understand this factor. Since this is an exploratory study, I decided to keep this factor in the final scale. More data is needed to test the factor model again for scale validation.

Scale Validation: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (Study 3)

To provide additional validity for the final scale generated from EFA, it is standard practice for scale developers to conduct another CFA, ideally with data from a new sample (Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). The goal at this step is to assess whether the measurement of items, factor structure, and function stand true with republication using a new sample or data from different time points. In other scholarship, this step is also labeled as "the test of dimensionality" (e.g., Boateng et al., 2018). Therefore, I collected another dataset to conduct CFA.

Sample and procedure. A second wave of the survey was launched through Dynata in September 2021, following the quota and recruitment methods for Study 2. However, to ensure the independence between two samples, Dynata also used a blocklist to prevent Study 2 participants from partaking Study 3. For participants who provided valid responses, Dynata issued cashable credits that are suitable for a 15-minute survey. The survey used in this study can be found in Appendix B.

A total of 2,059 subjects consented to take the survey. Two initial questions were set at the beginning to make sure only news subscribers' responses are collected. 1,217 individuals were eliminated from initial screening. The first attention check rejected 119 invalid responses,

and the second attention check also removed 203 participants. Finally, I further removed 14 responses that were completed within four minutes, which is deemed implausible given the survey length. Thus, the final sample consisted of 506 subjects (Response Rate = 24.6%). The demographic quotas also roughly match Study 2, and a summary of sample participants is illustrated in Table 13 below.

Table 13. Summary of participants in study 3 (N=506)

Age		Education	
18-29	6.3%	Less than high school	0.8%
30-39	13.0%	high school or GED	13.2%
40-49	17.2%	Some college	31.6%
50-59	9.3%	Four-year college	30.6%
60-69	20.0%	Postgraduate	23.7%
70-79	29.6%	**Race**	
80 or older	4.5%	White	83.6%
Gender		Black	9.1%
Male	53.4%	Hispanic	3.0%
Female	46.6%	Asian	2.4%
Income		Indigenous/Alaskan Native	0.2%
under 25k	8.3%	Multiracial	0.8%
25k-49,999	27.3%	Other	1.0%
50k-74,999	19.8%	**Partisanship**	
75k-99,999	18.2%	Strong Democratic	24.9%
above 100k	26.5%	Democratic	16.2%
Living Area		Independent leaning Democratic	8.9%
Rural	16.4%	Independent	17.6%
Suburban	56.3%	Independent leaning Republican	9.5%
Urban	27.3%	Republican	13.2%
		Strong Republican	9.7%

Results of CFA. I used *lavaan* package in R to conduct Confirmatory Factor Analysis. The results are further shown in Figure 3. In terms of fit indices, Boateng et al. (2018) recommend researchers report the chi-square test of exact fit, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Tucker Lewis Index (TLI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and

Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). For adequate model fit, RMSEA needs to be .06 or lower, and SRMR should be .08 or lower. TLI and CFI values above .95 are also considered indicators of good fit.

The six-factor solution showed good fit in the sample of Study 3. The chi-square test for the factor model was significant (χ^2 (137) =193.22, p < .001), with a χ^2/df ratio of 1.41. Both CFI and TLI exceeded the recommended value of .95 (CFI= .99, TLI= .99), which indicate excellent model fit. RSMEA= .03, and SRMR= .05, which also indicate adequate model fit. Thus, the six-factor model of the NSM scale demonstrates validity across different samples.
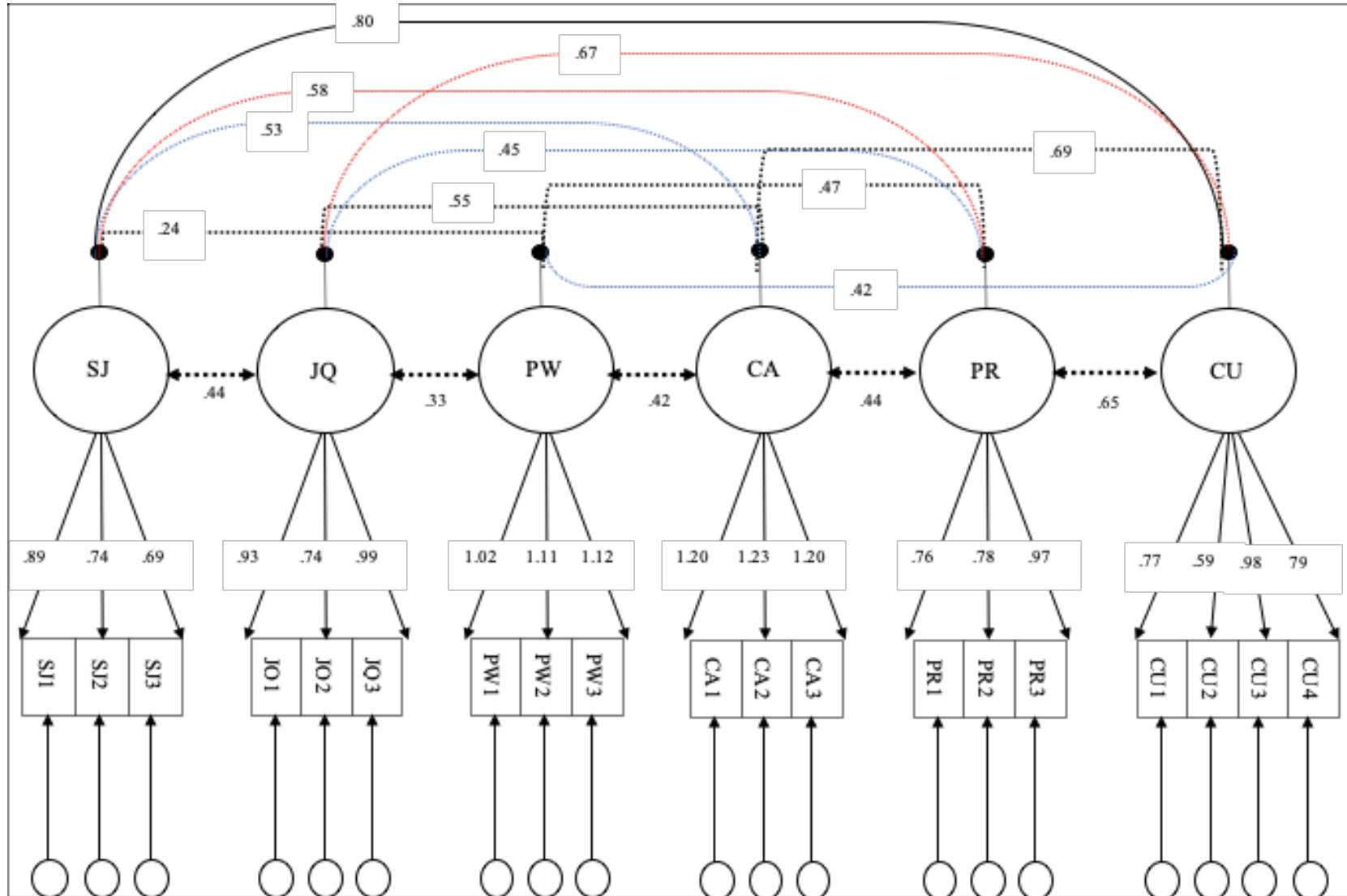
Figure 3. Confirmatory factor analysis results

Convergent and discriminant validity. The purpose of testing convergent and discriminant validity of the final scale is to establish the construct validity of *News Subscription Motivation.* Netemeyer et al. (2003) suggest the convergent validity is established when correlations are found between independent measures of the same construct. Since NSM is a newly defined construct, here I aim to demonstrate the convergent validity of NSM subscales. I looked for similar concepts for each factor of NSM, and the details are presented in Table 14 below.

Table 14. Similar subscales for factors of news subscription motivation

NSM Factors	Similar Concept(s)	Measures
Supporting Journalism	Helping Behaviors (ten Brummelhuis, van der Lippe, & Kluwer, 2010)	People can ask me for help if necessary.
		People can count on my help if they have difficulties.
		I often help people in need.
		If someone is absent, I'm willing to take over the work.
Journalism Quality	High-Quality Conscious Consumer, from Consumer Style Inventory (Sproles & Kendall, 1986)	Getting very good quality is very important to me.
		When it comes to purchasing products, I try to get the very best or perfect choice.
		In general, I usually try to buy the best overall quality.
Triggered by the Paywall	Impulsive Consumer, from Consumer Style Inventory (Sproles & Kendall, 1986)	I should plan my shopping more carefully than I usually do.
		I am impulsive when purchasing things.
		I often make careless purchases I later wish I had not.
	Instant Gratification from Consumer Motivation Scale (Barbopoulos & Johansson, 2016)	Get something that I wanted or needed for now.
		Satisfy immediate needs.
		Choose an option that increases my immediate comfort.
		Act in a way that was comfortable.

Table 14 (cont'd)

NSM Factors	Similar Concept(s)	Measures
Community Attachment	Community Attachment (Theodori & Theodori, 2015)	I feel like I belong in my community.
		Overall, I am very attached to my community.
		I like to think of myself as similar to the people who live in my community.
		I think I agree with most people in my community about what is important in life.
		I plan to remain a resident of this community for a number of years.
		If the people in this community were planning something, I'd think of it as something WE were doing rather than THEY were doing.
Affordability	Price Conscious Consumer, from Consumer Style Inventory (Sproles & Kendall, 1986)	I buy as much as possible at sale prices.
		I look carefully to find the best value for the money.
		I carefully watch how much I spend.
Content Utility	Gratification-Opportunities (Dimmick, Chen, Li, 2004)	For news that fits into my busy schedule.
		To get latest updates on news stories.
		To obtain news at the times I want.
		For stories on a variety of topics.
		To get information as quickly as possible.
		To use my time wisely.
		For a variety of choices in news coverage.
		For convenient access to news.

Bivariate correlations were calculated between each of the six NSM factors and their corresponding subscales. Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation was employed, and the analysis demonstrated all six dimensions of NSM are positively correlated with their corresponding scales at the .01 level. The correlation coefficient r_s ranged from .29 to .56. Thus the convergent validity is established.

Definitions and assessments of discriminant validity vary across the literature (Rönkkö & Cho, 2020). Since NSM is a newly developed construct without alternative measurements, the goal of establishing discriminant validity here is to provide evidence that NSM factors represent theoretically different concepts. I followed the suggestion of Henseler, Ringle and Sarstedt (2015) and computed the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT). The HTMT values among different factors (latent variables) ranged from .10 to .57, meeting the recommendation of below .85 (Henseler et al., 2015). Therefore, the discriminant validity of NSM is established.

Conclusion

To operationalize *News Subscription Motivation*, I generated a pool of potential items from the qualitative research, revised the items based on expert feedback, pretest, and pilot study. I also collected two samples of news subscribers in the U.S., developed and tested the scale through EFA and CFA. To further validate the scale, A total of six factors emerged, and the final scale showed robust fitness indices and strong evidence for convergent and discriminant validity. Therefore, I conclude the measurement items of NSM are reliable.

However, in a broader context, more research is needed to investigate where the construct of *News Subscription Motivation* fits into the theoretical framework of consumer behavior of news subscribers. In the next chapter, I tested how factors in *News Subscription Motivation* work as predictors. Through additional analysis, I aimed to demonstrate the importance of *News Subscription Motivation* and its essential connections of predicting and interpreting people's purchase behavior and intention when it comes to paying for news subscriptions.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Survey - Exploratory Factor Analysis (Study 2)

Screening Question

The following question is asked at the beginning so we could make sure we are surveying people who are news subscribers.

This survey is designed for people who are currently paying for a news subscription, or have paid for a news subscription in the past 12 months.

Are you currently paying for a news subscription, or have you paid for a news subscription in the past 12 months? (By "paying/paid," this study means "purchase," not "donate")

o   Yes, I am paying/ I have paid for a news subscription (1)
o   No, I do not pay for news (2)
o   I'm not sure (3)

Data Quality Question

We care about the quality of our data. For us to get the most accurate measures of your knowledge and opinions, it is important that you thoughtfully provide your best answers to each question in this survey. Do you commit to thoughtfully provide your best answers to each question in this survey?

○ I will provide my best answers (1)

○ I will not provide my best answers (2)

○ I can't promise either way (3)

Subscription Details

What news publication(s) are you currently paying for?

_____

Please indicate the MONTHLY PRICE you are paying for the following sources (If you are not paying any money, please just fill in "0"):

-    National newspaper (e.g. The New York Times, The Washington Post) --Digital only subscription

_____

- National newspaper (e.g. The New York Times, The Washington Post)--Print and digital subscription bundle

_____

- Local newspaper in your own town/community--Digital only subscription

_____

- Local newspaper in your own town/community--Print and digital subscription bundle

_____

News Subscription Motivation Scale

We want to know more about what motivates you to pay for a news subscription. Think about the news subscription(s) you are paying for right now or have purchased in the past 12 months. For each of the following statements, please rate the importance of each factor in explaining why you decided to purchase the news subscription(s).	Not at all important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Important	Extremely important
Access information that is useful to me.	1	2	3	4	5
Read news that are helpful to my work.	1	2	3	4	5
Gather information that is valuable to my daily life.	1	2	3	4	5
Read classified ads that are helpful to me.	1	2	3	4	5
Collect coupons that are beneficial to me.	1	2	3	4	5
Acquire information that I find interesting.	1	2	3	4	5
Obtain information that I enjoy reading.	1	2	3	4	5
Learn about different cultures.	1	2	3	4	5
Get news articles that are rewarding to my personal growth.	1	2	3	4	5
Access unique content on topics I am unable to find elsewhere.	1	2	3	4	5

Obtain original content that I cannot find from other news sources.	1	2	3	4	5
The accuracy of information.	1	2	3	4	5
The trustworthiness of information.	1	2	3	4	5
The truthfulness of information.	1	2	3	4	5
The credibility of information.	1	2	3	4	5
Thorough reporting.	1	2	3	4	5
Investigative reporting.	1	2	3	4	5
Balances both sides of an issue.	1	2	3	4	5
Fairness in reporting.	1	2	3	4	5
Unbiased approach to news reporting.	1	2	3	4	5
Receive a discount to start the subscription.	1	2	3	4	5
Receive a discount for continuing the subscription.	1	2	3	4	5
Get a good deal.	1	2	3	4	5
The price is reasonable.	1	2	3	4	5
The price is affordable.	1	2	3	4	5
The price is cheaper compared to other news subscriptions.	1	2	3	4	5
The price fits my budget.	1	2	3	4	5
The subscription package is a good value for money.	1	2	3	4	5
Accessing the news is an easy process.	1	2	3	4	5
The print publication is directly delivered to me.	1	2	3	4	5
The publication's website is effortless to use.	1	2	3	4	5
The publication's mobile application is easy to use.	1	2	3	4	5
Easy to decide what information is important to know.	1	2	3	4	5
The subscription package (for both digital and print) is convenient.	1	2	3	4	5
The payment process is trouble-free.	1	2	3	4	5
The publication only offers a few free articles.	1	2	3	4	5
The paywall popped up when I was reading an interesting article.	1	2	3	4	5
I kept finding articles that I wanted to read were behind a paywall.	1	2	3	4	5
I want to read what is locked behind a paywall.	1	2	3	4	5
I found it requires too much effort to search for articles that were behind a paywall.	1	2	3	4	5
I got tired of trying to get around the paywall.	1	2	3	4	5
I used up my quota for free articles.	1	2	3	4	5
I want to know what's going on in the world.	1	2	3	4	5
I want to keep up with what's happening in my local community.	1	2	3	4	5
I am usually curious about the latest events.	1	2	3	4	5

I want to understand my local government's decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
I want to understand how things work in the world.	1	2	3	4	5
I want to know about the possible changes that might affect me personally.	1	2	3	4	5
I want to know what society is like nowadays.	1	2	3	4	5
I want to find out things I need to know about daily life.	1	2	3	4	5
I want to talk competently about my community.	1	2	3	4	5
Be a well-informed citizen.	1	2	3	4	5
Get involved in the society.	1	2	3	4	5
Be active in politics.	1	2	3	4	5
Get involved with my local community.	1	2	3	4	5
Form my own opinion independently of others.	1	2	3	4	5
Help those who are worse off me.	1	2	3	4	5
Stay informed on how to vote in elections.	1	2	3	4	5
Make decisions based on rational evaluations of the situation.	1	2	3	4	5
The publication is a well-known news brand.	1	2	3	4	5
The publication has a good reputation for its journalism work.	1	2	3	4	5
My family and friends recognize this publication.	1	2	3	4	5
My family and friends speak highly of this publication.	1	2	3	4	5
The publication has been around for many decades.	1	2	3	4	5
The publication has been known for its national or local stature.	1	2	3	4	5
The news organization has a good standing.	1	2	3	4	5
Support journalists' important work.	1	2	3	4	5
Pay respect to journalists' hard work.	1	2	3	4	5
Help journalists keep their jobs.	1	2	3	4	5
Help news organizations stay in business.	1	2	3	4	5
Empower news organizations to continue monitoring power.	1	2	3	4	5
Support news organizations' coverage of my local community.	1	2	3	4	5
Empowering news organizations to continue monitoring power.	1	2	3	4	5
Protect freedom of the press.	1	2	3	4	5
Ensure the continuance of local news.	1	2	3	4	5

Demographic Questions

What is your age?
o   18 - 29 (1)
o   30 - 39 (2)
o   40 - 49 (3)
o   50 - 59 (4)
o   60 - 69 (5)
o   70 - 79 (6)

o   80 or older (7)

What is your gender?
o   Male (1)
o   Female (2)
o   Non-binary (3)
o   Other (4)

What is your race?
o   White (1)
o   Black or African American (2)
o   Asian (3)
o   Hispanic (4)
o   Other (5)

Please indicate your annual household income before taxes.
o   Less than $10,000 (1)
o $10,000 - $19,999 (2)
o $20,000 - $29,999 (3)
o $30,000 - $39,999 (4)
o $40,000 - $49,999 (5)
o $50,000 - $59,999 (6)
o $60,000 - $69,999 (7)
o $70,000 - $79,999 (8)
o $80,000 - $89,999 (9)
o $90,000 - $99,999 (10)
o $100,000 - $149,999 (11)
o   More than $150,000 (12)

What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?
o   Less than high school (1)
o   High school graduate or GED (2)
o   Some college (including tech/vocational, some community college, associate's degree)
(3)
o   Four year college degree/bachelor's degree (4)
o   Postgraduate or professional degree, including master's, doctorate, medical or law degree
(5)

Where do you live?
o   Rural area (1)
o   Suburban area (2)
o   Urban area (3)

Which of the following best describes your party affiliation?
o   Strong Democrat (1)

o Democrat (2)
o Independent leaning Democrat (3)
o Independent (4)
o Independent leaning Republican (5)
o Republican (6)
o Strong Republican (7)

Appendix B: Survey - Confirmatory Factor Analysis (Study 3)

Screening & Intro

Q1 This survey is designed for people who are paying for a news subscription, or have paid for a news subscription in the past 12 months.

Are you currently paying for a news subscription, or have you paid for a news subscription in the past 12 months?

○ Yes, I am paying/ I have paid for a news subscription. (1)

○ No, I do not pay for news. (2)

○ I'm not sure. (3)

Q2
Consent Form

Q3 We care about the quality of our data. For us to get the most accurate measures of your knowledge and opinions, it is important that you thoughtfully provide your best answers to each question in this survey.

Do you commit to thoughtfully provide your best answers to each question in this survey?

○ I will provide my best answers (1)

○ I will not provide my best answers (2)

○ I can't promise either way (3)

Paying for News

P0 Please indicate the **MONTHLY $ PRICE** you are paying for the following sources. (Please only fill in numbers. If you are not paying any money, please just fill in "0"):

P1 National news publications (e.g. The New York Times, Newsweek) --Digital only subscription

_____

P2 National news publications (e.g. The New York Times, Newsweek) --Print and digital subscription bundle

_____

P3 Local news publications in your own town/community--Digital only subscription

_____

P4 Local news publications in your own town/community--Print and digital subscription bundle

_____

P5 In the past 12 months, about how many different **news publications** have you paid for a subscription fee?

	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
# of paid news publications	

PF0 We would also like to know more about your possibilities of continuing your current news subscription(s).

PF1 Thinking about the ***primary*** news publication you are currently paying for, how would you rate your likelihood of continuing the subscription in the future?

(e.g., your answer of 35 would indicate a 35% of chance to continue the subscription)

	0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100
In the next 3 months	
In the next 6 months	
In the next 12 months	

News Subscription Motivation

We want to know more about what motivates you to pay for a news subscription. Think about the news subscription(s) you are paying for right now or have purchased in the past 12 months. For each of the following statements, **please rate the importance of each factor in explaining why you paid for the subscription(s).**

Response Categories: 1 = Not at all important, 2= Slightly important, 3= Moderately important, 4= Important, and 5= Extremely important

Thorough reporting. (1)
Unbiased approach to news reporting. (2)
The credibility of information. (3)
Understand my local government's decisions. (4)
Keep up with what's happening in my local community. (5)
Get involved with my local community. (6)
I found it requires too much effort to search for articles that are behind a paywall. (7)
The paywall popped up when I was reading an interesting article. (8)
I used up my quota for free articles. (9)
Help journalists keep their jobs. (10)
Support journalists' important work. (11)
Help news organizations stay in business. (12)
The price is reasonable. (13)
The price is affordable. (14)
Get a good deal when starting/continuing my subscription(s). (15)
Gather information that is valuable to my daily life. (16)
Obtain information that I enjoy reading. (17)
Get news articles that are rewarding to my personal growth. (18)
Obtain original content that I cannot find from other news sources. (19)
Please select "Slightly important" for this question. (20)

Corresponding Subscales

CS0 We are also interested in your life outside of the news world. Please share your opinion with us.

CS1 Please tell us how well each statement describes you.

Response Categories: 1= Does not describe me at all; 2=Does not describe me very well; 3= Describes me somewhat; 4= Describes me well; 5= Describes me very well.

Getting very good quality is very important to me while shopping. (1)
When it comes to purchasing products, I try to select the very best or perfect choice. (2)
In general, I usually try to buy the best overall quality. (3)
I feel like I belong in my community. (4)
Overall, I am very attached to my community. (5)
I like to think of myself as similar to the people who live in my community. (6)

I think I agree with most people in my community about what is important in life. (7)
I plan to remain a resident of this community in the future. (8)
If the people in this community were planning something, I'd think of it as something WE were doing rather than THEY were doing. (9)
I should plan my shopping more carefully than I usually do. (10)
I am impulsive when purchasing things. (11)
I often make careless purchases I later wish I had not. (12)
People can ask me for help if they need it. (13)
People can count on my help if they have difficulties. (14)
I often help people in need. (15)
If someone is absent, I'm willing to take over the work. (16)
I buy as much as possible at sale prices. (17)
I look carefully to find the best value for the money. (18)
I carefully watch how much I spend. (19)
Please select "Describe me well" for this question. (20)

CS2 **When you decided to use your money**, how important is it for you to…
Response Categories: 1 = Not at all important, 2= Slightly important, 3= Moderately important, 4= Important, and 5= Extremely important.

Get something that I wanted or needed for now. (1)
Satisfy immediate needs. (2)
Choose an option that increases my immediate comfort. (3)
Act in a way that is comfortable. (4)

CS3 **Thinking about the news publication(s) you have paid for**, please rate how helpful are these publications in satisfying your needs as listed below:

Response Categories: 1 = Not at all important, 2= Slightly important, 3= Moderately important, 4= Important, and 5= Extremely important.

For news that fits into my busy schedule. (1)
To get latest updates on news stories. (2)
To obtain news at the times I want. (3)
For stories on a variety of topics. (4)
To get information as quickly as possible. (5)
To use my time wisely. (6)
For a good variety of choices in news coverage. (7)
For convenient access to news. (8)

Demographics

D1 What is your gender?

○ Male (1)

○ Female (2)

○ Non-binary (3)

○ Other (4)

D2 What is your age?

○ 18 - 29 (1)

○ 30 - 39 (2)

○ 40 - 49 (3)

○ 50 - 59 (4)

○ 60 - 69 (5)

○ 70 - 79 (6)

○ 80 or older (7)

D3 Which race or ethnicity do you identify with the most?

○ White (1)

○ Black or African American (2)

○ Hispanic or Latino (3)

○ Asian American (4)

○ Indigenous/Alaskan Native (5)

○ Multiracial (6)

○ Other (7)

D4 Please indicate your annual household income before tax.

○ Less than $25,000 (1)

○ $25,000 to $49,999 (2)

○ $50,000 to $74,999 (3)

○ $75,000 to $99,999 (4)

○ $100,000+ (5)

D5 What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

○ Less than high school (1)

○ High school graduate or GED (2)

○ Some college (including tech/vocational, some community college, associate's degree) (3)

○ Four year college degree/bachelor's degree (4)

○ Postgraduate or professional degree, including master's, doctorate, medical or law degree (5)

D6 Where do you live?

○ Rural area (1)

○ Suburban area (2)

○ Urban area (3)

D7 Which of the following best describes your party affiliation?

○ Strong Democrat (1)

○ Democrat (2)

○ Independent leaning Democrat (3)

○ Independent (4)

○ Independent leaning Republican (5)

○ Republican (6)

○ Strong Republican (7)

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CHAPTER 5: TESTING NEWS SUBSCRIPTION MOTIVATIONS AS PREDICTORS

In this chapter I show the nomological validity of the *News Subscription Motivation* construct. Specifically, I want to demonstrate how factors of NSM work as predictors and fit into the broader theoretical framework of paying for news research. In the following sections, I first develop research questions that employ NSM construct. Then I clarify the dependent measures and submitted NSM factors as independent variables in the data analysis. Finally, I present the results and discussed the findings.

Research Questions

Previous research of paying for news have investigated several dependent measures: intent to pay for news (Goyanes, Artero, & Zapata, 2021; Chyi, 2012), willingness to pay for news (Berger, Steininger, & Hess, 2015; Chyi, 2005), whether currently paying for news or not (Goyanes, 2020), and the monetary amount paid for news (Chen & Thorson, 2021). In the present study, I argue that NSM serves as primary driving factors in people's decision to purchase a news subscription. The stronger the motivations are, the more likely people end up buying the news subscription.

Yet, given NSM contains several factors, I also expect a more complex relationship between different subscription motivations and purchase behaviors. Moreover, the purchase behavior of news consumption can be further specified as: 1) the monetary amount people are paying for news; 2) the quantity of publications a news subscriber is paying simultaneously; and 3) the likelihood/intent to continue the subscription in the future. Therefore, the present study asks:

RQ1: What are the relationships between news subscription motivations and the monetary amount people pay for news subscriptions?

RQ2: What are the relationships between news subscription motivations and the quantity of people's news subscriptions?

RQ3: What are the relationships between news subscription motivations and subscribers' intent to keep their subscriptions in the future?

Particularly, this present study investigates:

RQ3a. What are the relationships between news subscription motivations and subscribers' intent to keep their subscriptions in the next 3 months?

RQ3b. What are the relationships between news subscription motivations and subscribers' intent to keep their subscriptions in the next 6 months?

RQ3c. What are the relationships between news subscription motivations and subscribers' intent to keep their subscriptions in the next 12 months?

Additionally, given the increasing differences between national and local news consumption (Sands, 2019), it is also necessary to examine how different motivations lead to the purchase of local and national news. Thus we ask:

RQ4: Are determining motivations for subscribing to national news and local news different?

Dependent Measures

Paying for news. Four items were used to measure for paying for news. I asked subjects to fill in their monthly payment for (1) national news publications– digital-only subscriptions, (2) national news publications – print and digital bundle, (3) local news publications – digital-only subscription, and (4) local news publications – print and digital bundle. *Paying for news in total* was measured by summing up all four items; *Paying for print and digital bundles* was measured as the sum of items (2) and (4); *Paying for digital-only subscription* was measured as the sum of item (1) and (3); *Paying for national news* was measured by summing up (1) and (2); and *Paying*

for local news was measured as the sum of the following two items: (1) local newspaper –

digital-only subscription and (2) local newspaper – print and digital bundle.

Subscription of national/local news. Subscription of national/local news was indexed as

categorical variables with 1=Yes and 0=No. Responses of paying $0 for national or local news

subscriptions were recoded as 0, and any other dollar amount paid were recoded as 1.

Quantity of paid news publications was measured by one single item. Participants were

asked to report to the question "In the past 12 months, about how many different news

publications have you paid for a subscription fee?"

Intention to keep the news subscription had three separate measures for different time

range of next 3 months, 6 months, and 12 months. Participants were asked to answer the question

"Thinking about the <u>primary</u> news publication you are currently paying for - how would you

rate your likelihood of continuing the subscription in the future?" and they were given a sliding

scale to rate their likelihood of keeping the news subscription from 0% to 100%.

A summary of descriptive statistics of all the dependent variables in this chapter can be

found in Table 15.

Table 15. Descriptive statistics of dependent variables

Continuous Variables	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	Range
Monthly Payment for News Subscriptions in Total	32.94	43.10	0.00	350.00	350.00
Monthly Payment for National News Subscriptions	14.89	32.02	0.00	350.00	350.00
Monthly Payment for Local News Subscriptions	18.05	26.11	0.00	240.00	240.00
Monthly Payment for Print & Digital Bundle	21.10	33.21	0.00	240.00	240.00
Monthly Payment for Digital-Only Subscriptions	11.84	22.89	0.00	200.00	200.00
Number of News Subscriptions	2.00	1.77	1.00	10.00	9.00
Subscriber Retention - Next 3 Months	79.00	30.17	0.00	100.00	100.00
Subscriber Retention - Next 6 Months	77.35	30.73	0.00	100.00	100.00
Subscriber Retention - Next 12 Months	74.58	31.91	0.00	100.00	100.00
Categorical Variables	**Response**			**Percent**	
Subscription of National News	Yes=1			50.9%	
	No=0			49.1%	

Table 15 (cont'd)

Subscription of Local News	Yes=1	75.3%
	No=0	24.7%

Results

RQ1 asks the relationships between news subscription motivations and the monetary amount people pay for news subscriptions. Table 16 illustrates the multiple linear regression results of predicting how much people are paying for news subscriptions. Here I have reported the beta value (standard coefficients), p-value (statistical significance of coefficients), and explained variance (Adjusted R^2 for each model). Triggered by the paywall is positively associated with how much subscribers pay for national news subscriptions (β= .12, p<.05) and digital-only subscriptions (β= .14, p<.01). Community attachment is positively related to how much people pay for local news subscriptions (β= .15, p<.01). And affordability motivation is negatively associated with the monetary amount people pay for news subscription in total (β= -.11, p<.05), local news subscriptions (β= -.11, p<.05), and print and digital bundle (β= -.11, p<.05). However, it is worth noting that the Adjusted R^2 for each model are below 6%. This indicates comparing to NSM, other variables might be better at predicting how much people pay for news subscriptions.

Table 16. Predicting the monetary amount subscribers are paying for news subscriptions

	News Subscriptions in Total	National News Subscriptions	Local News Subscriptions	Print & Digital Bundle	Digital-only Subscriptions
	β	β	β	β	β
Age	.01	-.08	.08	.08	-.12*
Income	.15**	.10#	.13*	.14**	.09#
Education	.08	.14*	.00	.09	.03
Female	.01	-.01	.02	.05	-.07

Table 16 (cont'd)

White	.01	-.01	.03	.02	-.01
Partisan	-.06	-.06	-.04	-.06	-.04
Supporting Journalism	.02	.08	-.04	-.02	.07
Journalism Quality	-.04	.01	-.06	-.04	-.01
Triggered by the Paywall	.08	.12*	.01	.02	.14**
Community Attachment	.08	-.04	.15**	.11#	.01
Affordability	-.11*	-.06	-.11*	-.11*	-.06
Content Utility	.07	.02	.08	.08	.02
Adjusted R^2	*4.4%*	*5.6%*	*3.7%*	*5.8%*	*5.4%*

Note: $^#$ p < .10, * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.

RQ2 investigates the relationships between news subscription motivations and how many news subscriptions people are paying at the same time. Table 17 demonstrates the hierarchical linear regression results of predicting the quantity of paid news publications. Results shown that the more motivated people are in supporting journalism (β= .11, p<.05), being triggered by the paywall (β= .26, p<.001)., and being involved with the local community (β= .10, p<.05), the more news subscriptions they have.

Table 17. Predicting the quantity of publications subscribers are paying for

		Number of Publications			
		Model 1		Model 2	
		β	SE	β	SE
Age		-.32***	.05	-.19***	.05
Income		.04	.07	.04	.06
Education		.13*	.09	.12*	.09
Female		-.11*	.16	-.10*	.15
White		-.09*	.22	-.05	.21
Partisan		-.05	.04	-.03	.04
ΔR²		*14.0%****			

Table 17 (cont'd)

Adjusted R²	*12.9%*		
Supporting Journalism		.11*	.03
Journalism Quality		-.03	.04
Triggered by the Paywall		.26***	.02
Community Attachment		.10*	.03
Price		-.04	.03
Content Utility		.00	.03
ΔR²		*9.0%***	
Adjusted R²		*21.1%*	

*Note: # p < .10, * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.*

RQ3 asks the relationships between news subscription motivations and subscribers' intent to keep their subscriptions in the next 3 months, 6 months, and 12 months. The hierarchical linear regression results are presented in Table 18.

As shown in Table 18, triggered by the paywall and price demonstrate consistent negative associations with intention to keep the news subscription in the next 3 months (Paywall: β= -.14, p<.001; Price: β= -.14, p<.01), 6 months (Paywall: β= -.13, p<.01; Price: β= -.15, p<.01), and 12 months (Paywall: β= -.12, p<.01; Price: β= -.18, p<.01).

Other motivations, however, have exhibited positive relationships with the intention to keep the news subscriptions. Content utility was found to be a significant predictor for the likelihood of continuing the news subscription in the next 3 months (β= .19, p<.01), 6 months (β= .17, p<.05), and 12 months (β= .13, p<.05). Supporting journalism showed positive relations to intention to keep paying for news in the next 6 months (β= .11, p<.05) and 12 months (β= .12, p<.05). Additionally, the positive effect of journalism quality started to show at the 12 months mark (β= .13, p<.05).

RQ4 asks if there are different driving factors for subscribing to national news and local news. Table 19 illustrates the logistic regression results of predicting the purchase of national

and local news subscriptions. Subscripting to national news was positively related to supporting journalism (β= .12, p<.01) and journalism quality (β= .18, p<.01), but negatively associated with community attachment (β= -.29, p<.001). Subscripting to local news exhibited a positive association with community attachment (β= .48, p<.001), but a negative relation to price ((β= -.12, p<.05).

Table 18. Predicting subscribers' retention in the future

	In the Next 3 Months				In the Next 6 Months				In the Next 12 Months			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Age	.28***	.81	.25***	.86	.28***	.83	.26***	.87	.26***	.86	.23***	.91
Income	.01	1.14	.01	1.11	-.01	1.16	-.01	1.13	-.01	1.21	-.01	1.18
Education	-.03	1.55	-.06	1.53	-.01	1.58	-.04	1.55	.02	1.65	-.01	1.62
Female	-.07*	2.67	-.09*	2.62	-.08#	2.71	-.11*	2.66	-.07	2.83	-.10*	2.78
White	.00	3.71	.01	3.64	.00	3.77	.02	3.69	-.04	3.94	-.03	3.85
Partisan	-.08#	.64	-.05	.64	-.08#	.65	-.04	.65	-.09#	.68	-.05	.68
ΔR^2	8.6%***				9.1%***				7.8%***			
Adjusted R^2	7.5%				8.0%				6.7%			
Supporting Journalism			.09	.44			.11*	.44			.12*	.46
Journalism Quality			.09	.66			.10	.67			.13*	.70
Triggered by the Paywall			-.14***	.42			-.13**	.42			-.12*	.44
Community Attachment			-.02	.51			.00	.52			.02	.54
Price			-.14**	.55			-.15**	.56			-.18**	.58
Content Utility			.19**	.57			.17*	.58			.13*	.61
ΔR^2			6.8%***				7.3%***				7.5%***	
Adjusted R^2			13.4%				14.4%				13.2%	

Note: # $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 19. Predicting paying for national or local news subscription

	National News		Local News	
	B	OR	B	OR
Age	-.50***	.61	.07	1.07
Income	.22	1.25	.01	1.01
Education	.48***	1.62	-.15	.86
Female	-.26	.77	-.50#	.61
White	-.15	.86	.45	1.57
Partisan	-.10	.90	.00	1.00
Supporting Journalism	.12**	1.13	-.05	.96
Journalism Quality	.18**	1.20	-.13	.88
Triggered by the Paywall	.07	1.07	-.03	.97
Community Attachment	-.29***	.75	.48***	1.62
Price	-.01	.99	-.12*	.88
Content Utility	.04	1.04	-.07	.93
Cox & Snell R^2	28.3%		20.8%	
χ^2	168.02***		118.11***	

Note: Logistic regression beta and odds ratio are reported.
# $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

The aim of this chapter is to test how factors for NSM work as predictors and fit into the broader theoretical framework of paying for news research. While all the other models demonstrated a good fit, the regressions predicting the monetary amount people pay for news resulted in inadequate total explained variance. Although the significant relationships can still add insight to current scholarship, there might be other unidentified variables better predict how much people are paying for news. Another possibility is that, since news subscriptions are generally cheaper than other media subscriptions, the dependent variable of how much people are paying could also have a relatively low variance. Thus, NSM has better ability explaining "paying or not paying" rather than "paying for how much."

The present study also demonstrated different motivations for purchasing local and national news. Community attachment, of course, plays a vital role in subscribers' decision to pay for local news. Yet for purchasing national news subscriptions, the key motivations are supporting journalism and journalism quality. This further reflects news audiences' needs at different levels. At the local level, news consumption is tied up to one's civic life. It is also possible that participants don't think local journalism has quality comparing to local news organizations. While at the national level, the importance of journalism – how it informs the public and the recognition of journalistic efforts – contributes more in consumers' decision-making process.

In terms of how many publications people are paying for, paywall, supporting journalism, and community attachment are shown to be the major driving factors. Community attachment, of course, weighs in when people add local news sources to their existing repertoires. On the other hand, the effect of paywalls can be explained by consumers' impulsive purchase style and needs for instant gratification. In other words, it is not that paywalls have a general effect on people to get more news subscriptions, but they are particularly useful for a certain group of consumers. The most important finding of this model, therefore, is the effect of motivations for supporting journalistic efforts. While all NSM factors are important, subscribers' needs can be fulfilled when they only pay for one or two news sources and find other information for free. People who recognize the importance of journalism are more likely to purchase more news subscriptions.

The last research question, an investigation of people's intention to keep their news subscription in the future, revealed different driving factors for short-term and long-term decision-making. While price and paywall are effective in getting people to subscribe at the beginning, the negative associations indicate they cannot ensure subscribers' continuation of

purchases. It is also interesting to see how different motivation started to weigh in at different time marks. For example, content utility demonstrated effects as early as 3 months, supporting journalism mattered at the 6-month mark, yet the journalism quality factor only started showing a positive relation at the 12-month mark. This comparison also indicates the significance of journalism quality for sustaining newsrooms in the long run.

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CHAPTER 6: GENERAL DISCUSSION

The overarching goal of this dissertation is two-fold. First, given the known predictors of paying for news are scattered in different pieces of journalism research, I aim to provide a theoretical framework that links them together. Thus, the construct of *News Subscription Motivation* was proposed to describe the fundamental motivations for paying for news. Second, I aim to provide a concise and easy-to-use scale for future research to measure people's motivations for purchasing news subscriptions. A qualitative study of 22 in-depth interviews and two waves of surveys were conducted to develop and validate the new scale. In this chapter, I discuss the findings from my results and then elaborate on the major contributions from the perspectives of theoretical and practical implications.

Discussion of the Scale Development Results

In this dissertation, I have created a new scale of what drives people to pay for news subscriptions. The final scale resulted in 19 items and six factors in total, and each factor is labeled and defined as a news subscription motivation. These motivations are: supporting journalism, journalism quality, triggered by the paywall, community attachment, affordability, and content utility. In the following section, I discuss how news subscription motivations identified in this study link to and are different from previous research.

Supporting Journalism has the highest explained variance in the present study. The items reflect subscribers' desire to recognize journalists' and news organizations' efforts and help improve their financial security. Although previous research has touched on this aspect, prior analyses were descriptive in nature and emphasized journalism's societal value as an institution. In particular, 31% of survey participants from the American Press Institute study (2018) indicated they subscribe to news in the hope to support journalism's role in society, especially

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when it provides "truth" and serves as a trustworthy source for the public. Reuters Institute (2020) also reported a "support" motivation in people's reasons to pay for news. In this qualitative study, one participant suggested they pay for news subscriptions that support their political stance after President Trump's election in 2016. Meanwhile, 51% of survey subjects from the U.S. indicated wanting to help fund good journalism. In quantitative research, Goyanes (2020) also found that if people perceive their local news organizations are not in good financial standing, they are also more likely to subscribe to local news. Despite some overlap with previous literature, my items in this factor are unique in highlighting people's desire to improve journalists' personal efforts and job security.

Journalism Quality is also an important motivation that drives people to pay for news subscriptions. Some research addresses the quality aspect through the comparison with free information online (Reuters Institute, 2020). In the report by American Press Institute (2018), journalism quality was referred to as the publications' accuracy, the publication of corrections, and fair reporting. In other studies, news quality is measured through newsroom investment (e.g., Chen, Thorson, & Lacy, 2005) and how well the article is written in general (Chen & Thorson, 2021). However, the present study highlighted three aspects that drive individuals to pay for news: credibility, an unbiased approach to reporting, and thorough reporting. Extensive scholarship has been done on this topic (e.g., Meyer, 1988; Gaziano, 1986; Gantz, 1981), but there has been little linkage between credibility and paying for news. Credibility studies also suggest multiple dimensions in measuring this concept, such as accuracy, authenticity, trustworthiness, fairness, unbiased, and completeness (Appleman & Sundar, 2016; Meyer, 1988; Gaziano, 1986). In this dissertation, the journalism quality measure had two items that touch on credibility: One item about an unbiased approach to reporting, and the other measure is a single

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item with a broad label of "credibility of information." Future research could usefully utilize more detailed credibility measures and further explore the relationship between news credibility and paying.

Triggering by the paywall was the third factor that was identified as a news subscription motivation. This factor is consistent with previous research. According to American Press Institute (2018), about 50% of digital subscribers were triggered to pay for a news subscription when they hit a paywall meter. In my results, the items reflected subscribers' desire to continue reading (the paywall popped up in midst of reading an article, or used up the quota for free articles), and desire to avoid extra effort getting around the paywall. While testing the convergent validity of the final NSM scale, the "triggered by the paywall" factor also showed positive correlations with instant gratification and impulsive consumer style from marketing research (Barbopoulos & Johansson, 2016; Sproles & Kendall, 1986). Thus, my findings here suggest that paywalls are particularly effective for people who demonstrate stronger needs for instant gratification - and in the news consumption context, stronger needs for continuing reading news articles on the spot.

Factor 4 is labeled as *Community Attachment*. Goyanes (2020) found that the more local residents feel attached to their community, the more likely they would subscribe to their local newspaper. American Press Institute (2018) also noted that when participants explained reasons to subscribe in their own words, 30% of them expressed the desire to have access to local news and to stay connected to the community. Items in my results also reflected such attachment (get involved with the local community) but also demonstrated individuals' surveillance needs for keeping up with what is happening and understanding local governments' decisions.

It is also important to note that community attachment was not in the dimensions that emerged from the qualitative interviews. Items loaded in this factor are from dimensions of surveillance and being a good citizen, but have common wording "local" and "community" in the motivation statements. This suggests the importance of future and deeper examinations of drivers of community attachment and how attachment influences people's motivation to pay for news.

Affordability is the fifth factor in the NSM scale. It reflects news subscribers' emphasis on getting a reasonable price or discount when starting or continuing a news subscription. Previous studies have also found people's perception and evaluation of how expensive the product is to them before making the purchase decision, and the same is found in the willingness to pay for news (Berger et al. 2015). The more inexpensive consumers perceive a product, the more likely they will pay for it. Similar factors were labeled as "price/value-conscious" consumers in the Consumer Style Inventory (Sproles & Kendall. 1986) and "thrift" in the Consumer Motivation Scale (Barbopoulos & Johansson, 2016).

In the present study, I decided to label this factor "Affordability" instead of "Price." Based on the definition in economics, price is determined by and reflects the relationship between supply and demand (Stigler, 1966). However, the items loaded in this factor mostly demonstrated people's desire to pay for news at a reasonable, affordable monetary amount or receive a discount. Therefore affordability is a better name than price.

The final factor is content utility. The common theme of items reflected consumers' motivation that getting a news subscription is useful to them in some way (e.g., getting information valuable to daily life, obtaining original content, etc.). Although a previous study found that 40% of current news subscribers noticed numerous interesting and useful articles

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(American Press Institute, 2018), researchers noted it to be a background factor that serves as a precondition for people to subscribe. However, the statistical results of the NSM scale showed a direct linkage between people's motivation to pay for news and their perception of how useful or interesting the news content might be.

The identification of the content utility factor also advances theories in media economics and content quality. Lacy (2000) uses the term "expected utility of media" to describe audiences' perception of how the media information will meet their needs and wants. He also posits that increased utility to audiences would result in increased use of the news organization's product, and thus improve the news organization's subscription and advertising revenue. However, this proposition has never been tested by empirical research. Thus, the content utility factor in the NSM scale provides evidence that supports Lacy's perspective.

In sum, the factors identified in the NSM scale are consistent with previous research on paying for news. The final scale of NSW also advances the current scholarship by adding a theoretical framework of consumer motivation that links together different predictors of paying for news. Compared to existing scales that examine consumers' decision-making styles and motivation to purchase, NSM is also unique in its context of news consumption. The scale development process was also subjected to rigorous methodology standards, and the final scale is concise and easy to use in future research.

Discussion of NSM as Predictors of News Paying Behavior

In Chapter 5, I aimed to test the nomological validity of the NSM scale. In doing so, I employed several regressions to investigate how different NSM factors predict subscribers' news paying behaviors.

Explained Variance. Only one model failed to yield an acceptable explained variance in a targeted dependent variable. After controlling for demographic variables, multiple linear regression results showed only 3.7% to 5.8% variance for models using NSM factors to predict how much subscribers are paying for news subscriptions. One possible explanation for this is the current NSM scale is focused on current subscribers' reasons why they subscribe, which measures a question of "pay or not pay," rather than how much they pay. Another reason might be that news subscriptions are generally cheaper than other media products with monthly costs ranging roughly from $1 (e.g., most starter deals) to $10 (e.g., *The Washington Post* All-Access subscription). When calculating the regressions, the low range of subscription prices also affect the variability of the dependent variable, which might also result in the low explained variance of the regression models.

In general, factors in NSM exhibited good predictability for other news paying behaviors, with total explained variance ranging from 13.2% to 28.3% (after including demographics). These news paying behaviors included how many publications subscribers are paying for at the same time, whether they are paying for national or local subscriptions, and the likelihood of maintaining their primary news subscription in the next 3-12 months. The R-square changes for adding NSM factors were also statistically significant.

It is also important to note that in some regression models, demographic variables accounted for more explained variance than NSM factors. For instance, in the model of predicting the quantity of paid news subscriptions, demographic variables accounted for 14% of the variance, and news subscription motivations accounted for 9% of the variance. This pattern is also found in models predicting subscription retention in the next three, six, and 12 months, with R-squared differences between two blocks of predictors ranging from 0.2% to 1.8%. Similarly,

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Lacy and Fico (1991) also found that the city population accounted for more variance than the index of journalism quality in predicting next year's newspaper circulation. These findings suggest that most of the news paying behaviors have stronger associations with traditional structural variables than with news content or subscription motivations.

  Effect size. I calculated Cohen's f2 to examine the effect sizes of multiple regression models (results in Table 16-18). According to Cohen (1988), the effect size is considered large when f2 is equal to or greater than .35; and the threshold for medium and small effect sizes are .15 and .02, respectively. For the model that predicts how much people pay for news subscriptions, the overall model effect sizes are small with Cohen's f2 ranging from .04 to .06. For the model predicting the number of publications subscribers are paying for, the overall model yielded a medium effect size (Cohen's f2 = .27), and NSM factors had a small effect size (Cohen's f2 =.10). Models for subscriptions retention in the next 3-12 months also demonstrated medium effect sizes (Cohen's f2 ranged from .15 to .17), and NSM factors had small effect sizes as well (Cohen's f2 ranged from .07 to .08). The small effect sizes of NSM factors further indicate that our findings on news subscription motivations are not the panacea to boost subscriptions, but provide more information for news organizations to move forward in this direction.

  Predictor Evaluation. I also calculated odd ratios to examine effect sizes for logistic regression models that predict people's national/local subscriptions (results in Table 19). The odd ratios allowed me to compare the effect sizes among different predictors. According to Cohen's (1988) guidelines, odds ratios below 1.44 are considered very small and odds ratios below 2.48 are considered small.

The biggest driver for people to pay for national news is education (OR=1.62), but the effect size is considered small based on Cohen (1988). Significant NSM predictors all yielded very small effect sizes with OR ranging from .75 to 1.20. Journalism quality and supporting journalism were found to be the stronger motivation for people to get national news subscriptions. The quality factor suggests that people are drawn to national news publications for better content quality in terms of credibility, fairness, and comprehensiveness. The supporting journalism motivation demonstrated people's recognition of journalism's importance and how national news organizations play a part in it.

On the other hand, the strongest motivator for subscribing to local news is community attachment, which indicated a small effect size (OR= 1.62), followed by being Caucasian (OR=1.57). This once again shows the strong relationship between how attached people feel toward their community and the need for them to get local news. In previous studies, researchers also found that people who are highly active in their local community also feel more connected to their local newspaper and consume more news about the development of the local community (Thorson, Chen, & Lacy, 2019; 2020). This finding is particularly important for local news organizations to survive, as more than 2,000 local newspapers closed since 2008, and the loss of local news organizations will pose danger to democratic practices within local governments (The Washington Post Magazine, 2021).

It is interesting to see different motivations for getting national or local news subscriptions, and how community attachment is crucial for local news organizations to perform well financially. Theoretically speaking, competition for local news organizations is fiercer as they face several layers of intercity or "umbrella" competition (Lacy & Simon, 1993). George and Waldfogel (2006) also found that when *The New York Times* entered local markets, the

circulation of local newspapers dropped by 16% for highly-educated readers and 7% for less-educated residents. Thus, for local news organizations to survive, it is essential for them to highlight their connection to the community and local residents.

I used beta weights and the significance of t-statistics to evaluate predictors in the multiple regressions. Higher-income and less desire for affordability are found to be the primary drivers of the total monetary amount people spend on the news. To get people to pay for more publications, triggered by the paywall, supporting journalism showed a positive impact. Being in older age groups showed consistent importance in determining to keep subscriptions in the next 3, 6, and 12 months. For subscriber retention in three months, content utility demonstrated a positive impact, whereas triggered by the paywall and affordability exhibited negative associations. Supporting journalism started to show a positive influence on retention in the next six months, and journalism quality became important to keep subscribers in the next year.

The differences in what predicts retention across time, and differences in explained variance accounted for demographic and NSM, reveal different mechanisms in consumers' short-term and long-term decision-making. Although triggered by the paywall and affordability motivate news audiences to get the subscriptions, they are negatively associated with retention in the future. Instead, my results showed journalism quality is crucial for keeping subscriptions in the long run. This is also supported by previous research at the macro level. Previous studies employed newsroom investment as an index measure for content quality and found that journalism quality positively related to newspaper circulation at year 1 and year 5, but the relationship declined after five years (Lacy & Fico, 1991; St. Cry, Lacy, & Guzman-Ortega, 2005). Thus, it is crucial for newsroom managers to continue investing in journalism quality in the long run.

Theoretical Implications

Before summarizing the contribution of the NSM construct, it is important to clarify what NSM is not. Although both constructs suggest individuals' needs and wants are fundamental to media consumption, the construct of *News Subscription Motivation* is distinct from the traditional model of *Uses and Gratifications* (U&G). U&G explains why people choose certain media sources and how often they use them (Rubin, 2009). But NSM goes beyond media use and explains why people pay for news subscriptions, which involves an additional financial commitment that is not required by free information. The difference between NSM and U&G is also reflected in my scale development process. In the qualitative interviews, multiple participants mentioned their surveillance needs as one of the reasons to pay for news, which is also a consistent dimension in various U&G research (e.g., McDonald & Glynn, 1984; Vincent & Basil, 1997; Diddi & LaRose, 2006). However, the surveillance dimension was not retained in the scale after the reduction process done by EFA. Surveillance is a need that many news audiences value, but does not predict paying for a subscription. People who demonstrate high surveillance needs may still show higher levels of news use, but it is possible for them to satisfy their needs through a free news source.

Media habit is another important factor that is essential in media consumption but not reflected in the NSM construct. Previous research also noted a positive relationship between news habit strength and the monetary amount people pay for news (Chen & Thorson, 2021). However, habit functions separately from motivation and gratification in affecting human behaviors (Diddi & LaRose, 2006). According to LaRose (2010), habit depicts the unconscious aspect of human behavior, and is automatic and repetitive. Other scholars also contend that habit is a function of conserving cognitive and mental energy, and once the habit is formulated, it

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requires no effort (Verplanken & Orbell, 2003). On the other hand, the development of NSM started by asking subscribers why they decided to pay for news, which investigates consumers' conscious intentions to satisfy their needs through paying for news subscriptions. Thus, although habit is an important determinant for media consumption behavior, it is beyond the scope of this study. A comparison between news habit strength and news subscription motivations can be included in future research.

The construct of *News Subscription Motivation* was presented as a central conceptual framework that unifies the drivers of paying for news subscriptions: motivations for supporting journalism, getting quality news, getting around paywalls, maintaining a strong connection with the local community, paying for a reasonable price, and utilizing the content in some way in one's daily life. By conceptually explicating NSM, I offered a theoretical foundation for understanding the value of news subscriptions from the consumers' perspective, which contributes to the current discussion of news product management in journalism research (e.g., Gordon, 2020; Royal & Kiesow, 2021).

The NSM construct also provided a solid scale for further research on news consumers. This measurement scale is innovative and unique as it is specially designed in the context of news consumption. Rather than the general measures of paying for news and overall audience, NSM made an important distinction between subscription and donation, and solely focused on the existing consumers who are already paying for news subscriptions. Methodologically speaking, this scale was also subjected to an additional, rigorous qualitative study to generate and validate dimensions and items, which is also an advancement compared to existing scales of *Consumer Style Inventory* (Sproles, & Kendall, 1986) and *Consumer Motivation* (Barbopoulos, & Johansson, 2016). In the two following quantitative studies, I also followed best practices of

scale development suggested by communication, marketing, as well as social and behavioral research. Moreover, I also provided strong evidence for content, convergent, discriminant, and nomological validity, and thus I suggest the NSM scale to be a useful measurement tool for future research.

The factors generated from NSM construct also provide useful variables for further examining purchase behaviors and consumers' decision-making process when it comes to paying for news. In Study 3, I demonstrated the ability of NSM to predict news purchase behaviors such as the number of publications people are paying for, types of news subscriptions people are getting, and subscribers' intention to keep the news subscription in different time frames. Moreover, factors of NSM can be also used to examine the mechanism of paying for news in the consumer's decision-making process. It would also be interesting to investigate how different motivations might influence consumers' decisions at each stage of the decision-making process.

Practical Implications

From a practical perspective, this project contributes to the industry in several ways. First, understating NSM is crucial for news organizations to navigate their financial crisis. With news organizations still fighting for their places in digital advertising, more and more news publications adapted to the all-subscription model to secure subscription revenue. In addition, previous research on newspaper revenues also demonstrated the positive associations between advertising sales and circulation revenue (e.g., Chen, Thorson, & Lacy, 2005). Therefore, understanding what motivates people to subscribe is fundamental for the financial outcomes of the news industry.

Second, the final scale provides a useful tool for individual news publications to test among their own subscribers. The results of testing the NSM scale can provide useful insights to

understand their existing consumers and prevent them from canceling their subscriptions. The consumer insights also can provide guidance for news organizations to build business strategies to attract and convert potential consumers. For each individual newsroom, testing the NSM scale is also useful for the marketing departments to figure out strategies to design promotion messages and encourage subscription behaviors.

Third, this project also provides a strong argument for newsrooms to prioritize journalism quality for their sustainability in the long run. As shown in chapter 5, journalism quality is the most important factor for subscribers to keep the subscriptions in the next 12 months. In previous scholarship, Lacy, Stamm, and Martin (2014) also note how short-term oriented decisions reduced the content quality, and then further led to the downfall of financial performance. Thus, it is essential for newsroom managers to adapt to long-term thinking and have a strong commitment to journalism quality.

Finally, the significance of supporting journalism motivation also calls for media literacy training for Americans. Being one of the most important factors in NSM, it indicates people's willingness to financially support news organizations. It is also interesting to note that, in a recent study that employed a sample of the general population, no relationship was found between paying for news and individuals' perception of journalism's contribution to society (Chen & Thorson, 2021). While the specifics of whether supporting journalism is a motivation for personal or public benefits, we might argue that the willingness to support, essentially, stems from people's understanding of why journalism is important work. Therefore, more effort needs to be made to educate the public about the importance of the press.

Limitations

This project, like other research, has limitations. First, the construct of *News Subscriptions Motivation* was developed focusing on existing subscribers and news audiences who had a history of subscribing in the U.S. Thus the scale is not applicable to the general U.S. population, and may not be directly useful to newsrooms in other countries. Given our samples leaned largely toward older people and Caucasians, news subscription motivations may also differ if given a sample with different demographics.

Second, NSM only examined the more salient reasons for paying for news by directly asking participants what are the important factors that motivate them to pay. Some other factors might still have an impact on consumers' decision to purchase the subscription, but their effects may be unconscious and unidentified by individuals. For instance, Chen and Thorson (2021) showed that paying for news is also positively related to people's need to reinforce their social identity. NSM does not include possible underlying factors that news subscribers are not aware of themselves.

Finally, the samples used in the scale development process were vulnerable to sampling bias and the results are thus can be criticized. Although I tried to match the demographics quotas from previous research, the samples are only a rough representation of current news subscribers in the U.S. In a practical sense, the final scale should be more useful while being tested in individual newsrooms, and assumptions of its generalizability should be cautioned.

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