

# Consumers using more media, new and old, study says

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Jay Newell, an ISU mass media professor in the Greenlee School of Journalism and Communication, found in a new study that people haven't stopped using their old forms of media in favor of new. Photo by Bob Elbert

(PhysOrg.com) -- Reports of traditional media's demise -- in favor of newer, high-tech forms -- have been greatly exaggerated. That's according to a four-year study led by an Iowa State University mass media professor, who found large gains in the use of new media (like the Internet and e-mail), but also a slight increase in the use of traditional media (newspapers, magazines, radio and television). The result? Overall media saturation.

"The way media saturation works is that people don't actually drop their old habits -- or if they do, they do very slowly over a long period of time -- but they create new habits very quickly," said Jay Newell, an assistant

professor in ISU's Greenlee School of Journalism and Communication and lead author of the study.

Newell joined prominent media researcher Joseph Pilotta, vice president of research for the consumer intelligence firm BIGresearch and a former communication professor for The Ohio State University; and John Thomas, a graduate student in ISU's Greenlee School, on the study. They analyzed data collected in a four-year (2003-06) biannual online media consumption survey of between 12,000 and 15,000 people, conducted by BIGresearch. Their results are summarized in a paper titled "Mass Media Displacement and Saturation," which will be published in an upcoming issue of the International Journal on Media Management.

The study identified these significant trends:

- The overall consumption of advertiser-supported mass media increased over the four-year period, although the magnitude of that change tended to be small
- Increased use of new media occurred at a more rapid pace than decreases in the use of traditional media.
- Traditional media maintained or increased usage during key revenue-making dayparts, such as morning drive for broadcast radio and prime time for television.

The research contradicts reports about the sharp decline in newspaper readership, finding that newspapers showed significant readership increases in four dayparts (6-10 a.m., 10 a.m.-noon, 7:30-11 p.m. and 11 p.m.-1 a.m.), while the other three (noon-4:30 p.m., 4:30-7:30 p.m. and 1-6 a.m.) didn't significantly change.

"Why? It could be that newspaper declines are being overstated," Newell

said. "Many of the circulation drops are due to newspapers cutting back on editions that are distributed far from the city and surrounding suburbs. The people who don't get those papers could be reading local papers. Remember, too, that my study looks at newspaper readership, while newspapers report on circulation.

"These numbers showed that the percentage of people who said they typically read a newspaper -- in the times that you'd expect them to be reading a newspaper -- has remained quite stable over the last five years," he said.

The study was also good news for other forms of traditional media. Magazine use increased in all dayparts over the four-year period, while television increased in the afternoon, primetime, late fringe (11 p.m. to 1 a.m.) and overnight. Radio listenership, however, declined in late morning and primetime dayparts, although morning drive (6-10 a.m.) increased and afternoon drive (4:30-7:30 p.m.) showed no statistically significant change.

But Newell says the main point of his study is that new media aren't displacing old.

"The contribution of this particular paper is that it shows these traditional media haven't dropped and ad agencies are starting to pick up on that," Newell said. "Ad agencies are beginning to see that changes in media use aren't as simple as dropping old habits such as reading the newspaper and starting new ones."

The authors wrote that media buyers who forsake traditional media such as television, radio, newspapers and magazines risk losing a substantial portion of potential communication with key audiences, since their data did not indicate losses in consumer usage of incumbent media in their traditional high-use time periods.

Provided by Iowa State University

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