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Examining the Effects of Uses and Gratification After Being Involved in Online Activities

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Abstract
A society thrives if organizations function efficiently. The level of employee participation plays a crucial role in an organization's overall success, as employee retention rates will improve if employees feel a sense of belonging or identification with the organization. The current study used the theory of uses and gratifications to examine the extent to which individuals may identify with a group based on their level of participation in organization-related activities. Participants were randomly assigned to a between-subjects experimental design with two independent variables: the amount of organization-related activities (high, moderate, and low) and the level of familiarity (high and low). The results showed that there was a significant main effect of familiarity on users' gratification, the sense of identification, and involvement with the organization. The findings shed light on how people are gratified through the relationship with the media content generator more than the mere use of the media, as the uses and gratifications theory suggests.

Keywords: organization, identification, group participation, uses and gratification, involvement, familiarity, relationship

Introduction
Organizations and institutions either exist for a specific purpose or are made up of people working towards a designated goal (Greenberg & Grover, 1993; Ibrahim et al., 2017). There are some organizations that experience low employee participation because their employees do not personally feel a sense of belonging or identification with the organization (Quagraine & Asiedu-Appiah, 2019). As shown, employee participation is essential to study because the level of participation plays a large part in an organization's overall success. If employees participate more in organizations, this would ensure an atmosphere that is favorable to all members involved, giving each member a sense of trust and belonging (Quagraine & Asiedu-Appiah, 2019). According to Poon (2004), an employee's relationship with an organization will enhance their willingness to work for an organization, in turn improving employee retention rate. However, the relationship between how gratified individuals are when they are involved with activities related to organizations, and how they identify with the organizations, has rarely been explored. In light of this gap, the goal of this study is to utilize the uses and gratification theory to examine the extent to which members' participation and involvement in activities can affect how individuals identify themselves with that organization.

Literature Review
Prior literature has shown evidence that employee participation is beneficial to organizations. According to Chamala (1995), individuals who work together as a group are more efficient in setting and achieving goals (Chamala, 1995). She also pointed out that when many people work towards the same solution, there are better chances of solving organizational problems. Kelly and Van Vlaenderen (1995) identified how participation germinated motivation for solving various problems in ecological sustainability – a very important global issue. Furthermore, when employees participate in organizational activities, individuals could also benefit from realizing their own personal potential. Being able to identify one's personal potential and contribution to a group is a determining factor in whether or not an employee is able to wholly identify with that group (Nelson & Wright, 1995).

In spite of the advantages that arise from encouraging employees to be more involved in an organization's activities, scholars have shown the disadvantages of active employee participation. Devas and Grant (2003) identified how various levels of inclusion or the lack thereof could inhibit a person's willingness to participate. Scholars recommend involving employees in organization-related activities for the right amount of time in order for them to feel included. The inclusion cannot be too little, causing the individual to feel very uninvolved, forming a mindset that they are not making an impact within a group or an organization. On the contrary, if one's involvement requests too much of their time and energy, it can lead to burnout and the feeling of being overworked. Other limitations included with participation can involve various demands on personal resources, the cost of time and finances, and uncertainty that can result from all these personal investments (Golooba-Mutebi, 2004; Smith, 1999).

The Uses and Gratification Theory

The current study uses the theory of uses and gratification to understand the relationship between participation and gratification. The theory of uses and gratification, developed by Katz et al. (1973), is usually associated with media and its consumption. Uses and gratification theory posits that an audience interacts with a specific media with the intention to satisfy a personal need for information. The term "uses" refers to what medium or media is involved in the process of gaining satisfaction. Gratifications are also the sources of satisfaction that meet one's expectations in seeking information (Salubi, 2018).

When applying the theory to the media, the uses and gratification theory assumes that individuals take the initiative to connect their need to a certain type of media which possesses competitive qualities to provide gratification or satisfaction (McQuail, 2015). For instance, Armstrong and Rubin (1989) provided evidence that despite being exposed to the same media, in their case a radio talk show, people rated responding to the questions via calling-in more satisfying than answering the set of questions face-to-face in the studio. The competitive quality that determines the differential effect of the same media in this case might be the sense of identification that arises from more participation – the action of calling-in. Similarly, Baumgartner (2010) also showed that the more an individual engages in politics through using a specific type of web media, the more likely they are to continue using the same media outlet.

Reasoned from above, the first hypothesis is as follows:

H1a: The more that a person participates in media activity, the more likely they are to be gratified.

In fact, Armstrong and Rubin (1989) found that those who favored calling-in believed that the show was more important to them, and they were also the same group of people who listened to the radio talk show for more hours per day than those who participated in-person.

In view of how previous interaction with the radio talk show appears to affect participants' opinions toward the activities they participated in, hypothesis H1B is proposed as follows:

H1b: The more a person is familiar with the organization, the more they are gratified with the activities.

Participating in activities appears to be gratifying because it fulfills people's need to feel a sense of belonging. In the case of the radio talk show, Armstrong and Rubin (1989) found that the people who called in to participate in talk show activities also identified more with the radio talk show. This observation resonates with Katz, Gurevitch and Haas's (1973) claim that the level of gratification is determined by the extent to which the mass media serves to satisfy different psychological needs, depending on the attributes of the media. Similar to traditional media, online media may invoke differential levels of gratification depending on its uses and how they may satisfy various psychological needs. As shown above, a review of U&G-related literature revealed that the relationship between the level of gratification and the fulfillment of psychological need is still not clear. Further, whether or not the sense of gratification that arises from using the media can be translated into identification with the creator of the media remains questionable.

Based on the evidence, the second hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H2a: The more one participates in media activities, the more the person identifies with the organization.

Asadullah et al. (2017) showed that after employees learned more about the organization that they belong to, they are more inclined to identify themselves with that organization. Therefore, it is likely that the more knowledge one has about an organization, they will identify better with an organization.

The next hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H2b: The more a person is familiar with the organization, the more s/he identifies with the organization.

Zhou, Fan and Son (2019) have shown how participation is directly related to an individuals' choice to stay with an organization. When individuals can become a part of activities and initiatives that contribute to overall welfare of the organization, they have a better chance for feeling a sense of belonging to that organization (Zhou et al., 2019). Accordingly, people who feel a stronger sense of belonging to the organization after having participated in more organization-related activities will be more willing to continue to be involved in future activities.

Therefore, the next two hypotheses are proposed as follows:

H3a: The more one participates in media activities that are associated with an organization, the more the person is willing to be involved in future organization-related activities.

H3b: The more familiar one is with the organization, the more the person is willing to be involved in future organization-related activities.

Following suit, the level of participation is predicted to interact with the level of familiarity to affect participants' sense of gratification with the activity, identification, and involvement with an organization.

Hypothesis four is stated as follows:

H4: The level of participation will interact with the level of familiarity to affect one's gratification, identification, and involvement toward an organization.

Method

Design

To test the above hypotheses, participants were randomly assigned to a between-subjects design with two independent variables, namely (1) the amount of organization-related activities, with three levels: high (4 activities), moderate (2 activities), and low (no exposure to any activity); and (2) the level of familiarity, with two levels: high familiarity (operationalized as exposure to participants' school) and low (exposure to an unknown travel agency).

Participants

A total of 105 people participated in the experiment, 26 (24.8%) were males and 79 (75.2%) were females. The sample consisted of 46 (43.8%) self-identifying as African American along with White, 45 (42.9%), 2 participants (1.9%) self-identifying as Asian/Pacific Islander, 1 (1%) indicating Latino/ Hispanic, and 11 (10.6%) selecting the "other" category identified themselves as bi-racial, [5 (4.8%) White/Hispanic Latino; 4 (3.8%) Black/African American/White; 1 (1%) White/Native American; 1 (1%)

Hispanic Latino/Black/African American.] The mean age of the participants was 21.51 (SD = 2.62). IRB Application for the current study was approved by the administrators at Valdosta State University, protocol number: 04022-2020. Approved on April 1, 2020.

Setting

The participants were asked to participate in an online experiment. Once each participant started the online study, depending on the conditions that the participant was randomly assigned to, they were asked to participate in a series of online activities to vote for several organization-related activities in the first part of the questionnaire. Participants were asked questions related to organizations that they were either highly familiar with or unknown before. The organization for high familiarity condition was exposure to a higher education institution in South Georgia, also the school participants attended. The low familiarity organization was Top Tier Travel Co. – a mockup travel company that does not exist in real life. The mockup organization was presented to test how participants would react to organization-related activities, but about an organization with which they had no connection. Participants assigned to the low organizational-related activities would not get to participate in any voting activities; moderate condition would work on two voting questions; and high condition would work on four voting questions. They were randomly assigned to participate in activities that are related to the school with which they are affiliated or an organization about which they have never heard.

All participants, except those who were in the control condition, were assigned to answer two or four questions in a randomized order out of a pool of four questions that prompted them to show their support for the organization overall, identify well-known figures that are affiliated with the organization, prominent locations and destinations associated with the organization, and social media preferences for sharing the organization. The first question was kept the same because that question allows them to know what the organization is. Following the participation activity, the participants completed a questionnaire to assess their levels of satisfaction, identification, and involvement with the organization.

Procedure

The link to the online experiment was distributed to undergraduate students attending Valdosta State University. On clicking the link, following an algorithm already programmed using Qualtrics prior to the study, participants were randomly assigned to one of the six treatment conditions. After participants finished participating in the organization-related activities, in this case voting for the organization-related questions, they were asked to answer Likert scale questions that measured the level of satisfaction, identification, and feelings toward the organization to which they had been exposed.

Measures

Independent Variable:

1) **Familiarity with an organization:** Operationalized as exposure to the participatory activities related to the organization/institution. Participants were randomly assigned to participate in an online voting activity that is related to either one of the two organizations: the school the participants belong to, or a mock-up unknown travel agency.

2) **Amount of activities being exposed to:** This is operationalized as the number of activities that they participated in, ranging from low to moderate to high levels. Participants were randomly assigned to different conditions, and all questions were randomized. For low participation condition, participants did not get to participate in any of the voting activities and were only asked to fill out a questionnaire reflecting their thoughts. For moderate participation condition, they voted in two activities (randomly assigned to two out of the pool of four questions, keeping the first question the same because that question allows them to know what the organization is). For high, they voted in four activities. Participants were asked to vote for similar activities in various conditions. They were asked to do the following: 1) indicate whether or not they supported the organization; 2) identify the president of that organization; 3) identify

buildings (for the school option) and tourist attractions (for the travel agency option); and 4) choose social media preference for promoting the organization.

Dependent Variable:

1) **Level of gratification:** This variable is operationalized as how satisfied participants are with the activity they did. It was measured via a set of statements that allow participants to self-report how satisfied they felt after having done the activity. These are the statements used to measure participants' level of satisfaction: "I am satisfied after completing what I just did'' and "I actually enjoy activities similar to what I just did." The survey used a Likert scale that ranged from 1 to 7, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 7 representing strongly agree.

2) **Identification with an organization/institution:** It is operationalized as how identified they are with the organization after having participated in the organization's activity. How much each participant identified with the institution was measured via a set of statements that allow participants to self-report how they felt and measured their level of identity after having done the activity. These are the statements used to measure participants' level of identification: "I felt as if I am an important asset to the school," "I strongly identified with the university," and "My participation in what I just did was important for the university." The survey used a Likert scale that ranged from 1 to 7, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 7 representing strongly agree.

3) **Level of involvement:** It is operationalized as how willing participants are to be involved with the activity they did. It was measured via a set of statements that allowed participants to self-report how involved they felt after having done the activity. These are the statements used to measure participants' level of involvement: "I will take part in more university activities in order to feel more involved," "I would recommend other individuals to take part in university activities in order to feel more involved," and "I would encourage others to choose Valdosta State University for their college education." The survey used a Likert scale that ranged from 1 to 7, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 7 representing strongly agree.

Results

Three items used to measure identification had good internal consistency with Cronbach's α= .86. Two items used to measure satisfaction had good internal consistency with Cronbach's α= .75. Three items measuring involvement had good internal consistency of .89 for Cronbach's α.

Effect on Dependent Variables

A two-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to determine the main effect of familiarity and the amount of participation people have on their feelings. There was a significant main effect of familiarity on gratification with the activities they did, $F(1, 100) = 4.46$, $p < .05$, $\eta p2 = .043$. For high familiarity, $M = 5.56$, $SE = 0.224$; low familiarity, $M = 4.86$, $SE = 0.242$; nontreatment, $M = 5.33$, $SE = 0.398$. A Tukey post hoc test revealed that people exposed to high familiarity was significantly higher in the level of gratification than low familiarity (5.56 ± 0.697, $p = 0.037$).

There was a significant main effect of familiarity on the sense of identification with the organization, $F(1, 100) = 14.22$, $p < .0001$, $\eta p2 = .124$. For high familiarity, $M = 5.53$, $SE = 0.248$; low familiarity, $M = 4.157$, $SE = 0.268$; nontreatment, $M = 5.445$, $SE = 0.440$. A Tukey post hoc test revealed that people exposed to high familiarity was significantly higher in the level of identification than low familiarity (5.53 ± 1.376, $p < 0.001$); nontreatment condition was significantly higher in the level of identification than low familiarity (5.445 ± 1.288, $p < .05$; $p = 0.024$).

There was a significant main effect of familiarity on the sense of involvement with the organization, $F(1, 100) = 14.73$, $p < .0001$, $\eta p2 = .128$. For high familiarity, $M = 5.77$, $SE = 0.214$; low familiarity, $M = 4.56$, $SE = 0.231$; nontreatment, $M = 5.956$, $SE = 0.38$. A Tukey post hoc test revealed that people exposed to high familiarity was significantly higher in the level of involvement than low familiarity (5.77 ± 1.21, $p < 0.001$); nontreatment condition was significantly higher in the level of involvement than low familiarity (5.956 ± 1.396, $p < .005$; $p = 0.002$).

No statistically significant effect is detected for the effect of the amount of participation in organization-related activities on the level of gratification, with $F(4, 100) = 0.311$, $p > 0.05$, identification, with $F(4, 100) = 0.588$, $p > 0.05$ and involvement, with $F(4, 100) = 1.027$, $p > 0.05$. The interaction effect of familiarity and the amount of participation on the feelings people have is not statistically significant.

Discussion

The primary purpose for this research was to examine how an individual's use of media can be transferred to feelings toward an organization. There were multiple hypotheses predicting how individuals would feel based on the amount of activity in which they take part. Results showed that participants' responses to the activities they participated in were affected by how familiar they were with the organization, and not by the levels of activities.

H1a: The more that a person participates in media activity, the more likely they are to be gratified.
The results showed that the level of participation had no effect on participants' gratification. Therefore, hypothesis 1a is not supported.

H1b: The more a person is familiar with the organization, the more they are gratified with the activities.
The results showed that the more people are familiar with the organization, the more they are gratified with the activities they were involved in. Therefore, hypothesis 1b is supported.

H2a: The more one participates in media activities, the more the person identifies with the organization.
Results show that regardless of the amount of participation in media, there was no significant effect for an individual's identification with an organization. Hence, hypothesis 2a is not supported.

H2b: The more a person is familiar with the organization, the more they identify with the organization.
Surprisingly, the results showed that the amount of participation has no effect on people's feelings. Therefore, hypothesis 2(a) is not supported. On the other hand, it is the amount of familiarity with the organization that played an integral part in determining how much one identifies with an organization. As predicted in hypothesis 2(b), results showed that the level of identification was significantly and consistently higher when participants were already familiar with the organization.

H3a: The more one participates in media activities that are associated with an organization, the more the person is willing to be involved in future organization-related activities.
When it comes to participation with an organization's media activity, higher levels of participation did not bring about higher levels for feelings of involvement with the organization. Therefore, hypothesis 3a is not supported.

H3b: The more familiar one is with the organization, the more the person is willing to be involved in future organization-related activities.
Results showed that willingness to become more involved in organizational activities was highly dependent on how much people are familiar with the organization. Therefore, hypothesis 3b is supported.

H4: The level of participation will interact with the level of familiarity to affect one's feeling toward an organization.

The hypotheses for this experiment were based on the levels of participation and familiarity with the organization. As shown in the results, the levels of participation did not result in increased positive feelings toward an organization. The interaction effect is not significant and hypothesis 4 is not supported.

In conclusion, the results obtained in the current study were surprising, because it did not follow the predictions made by the uses and gratifications theory such that higher participation level would induce more positive feelings toward the organizations that hosted the activities. According to McQuail (2015), individuals are motivated to use media based on their needs. In the current study, participants most likely were driven to take part in the online experiment because of the gratification of being awarded with course extra credit points. With all conditions being the same, it appears that participants derive more meaning in the activities they did by connecting their feelings to a subject that they are already familiar with. The findings are interesting because in addition to how people are gratified through the mere use of the media, as is proposed by the uses and gratifications theory, this study showed that people value the relationship with the media content generator more than their instrumental use of the media.

Limitations and Future Studies

There are limitations in this study. First, when an experiment takes place in a fully controlled setting, especially when it is online, the observations may deviate from real-life scenarios because people are not behaving naturally. Second, research shows that people have the tendency to respond to questions with the intent to be socially desirable, displaying a favorable image of themselves (Van de Mortel, 2008). Therefore, requiring participants to self-report their feelings in the post-test questionnaire may not get participants' intuitive and true answers because they may have already evaluated their answers themselves. Third, all of the participants were students, and there was a lack of diversity in age and other characteristics; therefore the results may not be generalized to populations in the workforce.

There are several recommendations for future studies. The results of the current study showed how much influence the affiliation users have with the media content generator on the level of activity gratification and feelings toward the organization. In view of this observation, future studies could consider examining the relationship element in the uses and gratifications theory. Next, to more accurately assess participant responses, future studies could consider observing participants' behavior in a natural setting and collect the data from working professionals.

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Here's How to Get a Job: An Interview Course Project

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Abstract

While the Digital Age has introduced a new set of state-of-the-art tools to consider when seeking employment, most researchers contend the job-search process has generally remained the same. Whereas the Internet offers considerable information on finding work, too often undergraduates lack a precise and practical understanding of how to get a job. The *Job Interview Assignment* (JIA) was designed for this reason. Developed as a unit activity for the Introduction to Organizational Communication course, the assignment focuses on four steps of the job-search process: (a) find a job, (b) develop a resume, (c) construct a cover letter, and (d) complete an interview. This paper details this assignment, offers a theoretical framework to teach it, explains its steps, and evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the assignment. Ultimately, the paper provides Communication and Media instructors a guide to equip undergraduates with the knowledge and skills to secure an internship or job.

Keywords: *job search, employment, interview, cover letter, resume*

Literature Review

Although the Digital Age has produced a new range of topics and tools to consider when seeking employment (e.g., applicant social-media presence), Adams (2011), Ceniza-Levine and Farrell (2012), and Melnik (2016) contend the steps to securing a job generally remain the same. Current literature identifies these steps as (a) find a job, (b) contact the company, (c) submit an application, cover letter, and resume, (d) secure an interview, (e) complete an interview, and (f) follow up with the employer. While the steps may seem universally understood, research indicates undergraduates often do not know them. Regrettably, too few articles have been written on the topic for Communication and Media majors, as well as other majors. McCorkle, Alexander, Reardon, and Kling (2003) is one exception to this rule. McCorkle et al. found that most Marketing majors do not understand what it takes to obtain a job. Similarly, Gedye, Fender, and Chalkley (2007) determined that Geography majors do not feel sufficiently prepared to secure a job once they leave college. Interestingly, Fadulu (2018) advances that undergrads often neglect to use on-campus resources (i.e., career services departments) and instead haphazardly seek employment on their own.

The lack of understanding of the job-search process first became apparent to me in the late 1990s. Two-thirds of the way through a lower-division Communication course I was teaching, I posed this question to my students: "How do you get a really good job?" At first, they were hesitant to respond. To break the silence, I shared my challenges in seeking a job and highlighted what I lacked in terms of knowledge. Based on my disclosure, one student asked if we could use a class session to address the topic. The request gained instant support from others in the class. Subsequently, I offered a find-a-job workshop a week later. At the conclusion of the workshop, I asked the class for feedback. To my surprise, they voiced overwhelming appreciation for the training. Based on this experience and a scarcity of academic literature on the topic, I developed *The Job Interview Assignment.* The assignment is shared here because there are too few articles that detail how to teach job search content to Communication and Media majors (Browning & Cunningham, 2010), yet the process could not be of greater importance to undergraduates. As Kaul (1992) notes, it is often “not the one who can do the job who gets hired. It’s the one who knows the most about getting hired” (p. 32).

General Overview of the Assignment

The *Job Interview Assignment* (JIA) is explained here as a stepwise unit activity. It has been successfully implemented in face-to-face and hybrid courses. The assignment was designed for the Introduction to Organizational Communication course; however, it can be adapted to other academic levels and disciplines.

Learning Outcomes

The purpose of the assignment is to teach Communication and Media undergraduates the fundamental steps to obtaining a job or internship. Whereas the job search may be explained in six steps (Augustine, 2014), this article reduces the process to four. They include: (a) find a job, (b) develop a resume, (c) develop a cover letter, and (d) complete a mock interview. The steps translate into four learning outcomes:

- Learning Outcome 1: Identify the primary steps of the job-search process.
- Learning Outcome 2: Locate a job or internship using a credible employment website or personal contact.
- Learning Outcome 3: Develop a cover letter and resume for a job or internship.
- Learning Outcome 4: Complete a mock interview for a job or internship.

In that Path-Goal Theory’s (PGT) functions as an effective framework to teach this process to undergraduates, the next section reviews the basics of PGT (House & Mitchell, 1974).

Theoretical Rationale

House and Mitchell’s (1974) Path-Goal Theory advances that a leader’s communication is critical to follower goal-achievement. The theorists conceptualize follower motivation as a product of a well-defined goal, a clear path to goal accomplishment, removal of obstacles, and leader support. Moreover, they prioritize three variables in the theory: leader behavior, subordinate characteristics, and task characteristics. In terms of leader behavior, a goal is achieved when a leader adjusts their communication style to a follower’s needs and the uniqueness of a task. In regard to a subordinate’s characteristics, PGT advances that a follower’s need for affiliation, preference for task structure, desire for control, and perceived task ability vary. Here a leader must consider these factors in order to help a follower succeed. Additionally, a leader must give attention to other factors (e.g., the climate of a work group) for a follower to be successful.

Given the JIA’s focus, PGT offers a framework for ensuring that students achieve the assignment’s learning outcomes. For example, the JIA requires that an instructor gauge what communication style works best (e.g., direct or supportive) given a group’s knowledge of the job-search process. To achieve this, an instructor must determine how students perceive the task (e.g., developing a resume) and its inherent structure (e.g., are the parts of a resume understood by students?). Likewise, an instructor must recognize obstacles that prevent students from mastering the steps of employment. For instance, students often assume their resumes are sufficient when in actuality they have not put in the adequate time to take inventory of their past academic and work experiences. In sum, PGT offers a well-tested lens for helping instructors ascertain what assignment content requires emphasis and clarity on how to deliver that content to students.

Detailed Description of the Assignment

The JIA consists of four parts (i.e., find a job, develop a resume, develop a cover letter, and complete a mock interview). A detailed description of each section clarifies what each part entails.

Find a Job

The first part of the assignment requires that students find an advertised job or internship. In terms of job databases, priority is given to using credible platforms such as CareerBuilder, Glassdoor.com, LinkedIn, and Handshake. Students are also encouraged to seek out positions from family and friends who know of unadvertised jobs. This step benefits students in several ways, most importantly compelling them to separate career aspiration fact from fiction. It also immerses them in the language of the job ad. They learn to read ads with the aim of incorporating job description language into their resume and cover letter.

Once students locate a job, they must identify the contact person. Students have to document the contact person's name, title, phone number, and email address even if it does not appear in the ad. This requires that students put in extra effort to obtain this information, for example, by making a phone call to the company posting the ad. This contact information is important for starting a relationship with a hiring manager. This part of the assignment accounts for 5 of its 50 points.

Resume

Next, students develop a professional resume. For the JIA, a resume must be one page in length and have one-inch margins. It must also reflect business-appropriate font (e.g., New Times Roman). A resume must offer a student's name and contact information at the top of the page. Depending on the amount of information included in the resume, an employment objective may be included. While an applicant's contact information may be displayed in a font as large as 14-point font, the rest of the text must reflect 12-point font.

The body of the resume should include the following headers: *Education, Employment History*, and *Professional Skills*. The headers *Awards and Recognitions, Community Service,* and *Professional Association* headers may also be used. Each header must have well-worded supporting information below it. Examples of past resumes and curriculum vitas are shared with students so they can model a successful resume. (See Appendix A.)

Given the challenges of template-resume software, students must use Microsoft Word or Google Docs when constructing a resume and not ready-made templates. Templates often produce formatting problems, depending on the version of Microsoft Word a hiring manager has. Additionally, templates often work poorly with applicant tracking systems that use key words to identify potential candidates. In brief, students are required to save their resume as a pdf to ensure what they put on paper is what a hiring manager sees. The *Resume* is evaluated for its content and presentation and counts for 20 of the assignment's 50 points.

Cover letter

After students generate a resume, they must develop a cover letter. For the JIA, a cover letter must match the format of one's resume (e.g., one page in length, same type of paper, font type, and font size). A strong cover letter is tailored to the language of the job ad and presented in three sections. (See Appendix B.) A brief description of each section follows.

The first paragraph introduces the applicant to the employer and specifies how the applicant learned of the job. Students must express their eagerness to fill the position and work for the company. Students must also preview three or four qualifications that make clear why they are a good fit for the job.

The second paragraph and body of the letter elaborates on the applicant's qualifications. It is one thing to say an applicant is qualified for a position; it is another to detail one's qualifications (i.e., ten months as a management trainee for Enterprise Car Rental). Strong cover letters back qualifications with educational and work experiences. Students are required to present qualifications in ascending order to ensure a hiring manager is left with a favorable impression.

The third and last paragraph concludes the letter by reiterating the applicant's qualifications and emphasizing interest in the position. A student is required to thank the hiring manager for his or her consideration and propose a timeline for their next contact (e.g., ideally a week). The cover letter accounts for 20 of the 50 points of this assignment. Because a cover letter and resume must be error free, one point is deducted for every two writing errors.

Mock Interview

In addition to the resume and cover letter, the last part of the JIA requires that students complete a mock interview. To do so, students must attend class in business attire and bring four copies of the assignment documents: one copy for submission and three others for mock interviews.

Based on years of facilitating the JIA, students routinely gain the most from the assignment when they function as interviewer and interviewee. To do so, the classroom must be arranged in pairs so that each pairing of desks faces inward. Once a student arrives, I assign the first half of the class to desks facing one direction (e.g., north), and those arriving later to desks facing the other direction (e.g., south). I designate one side of the room as the interviewers and the other as interviewees. The interviewees must hand their materials to the interviewers and exit the room. I provide the interviewers with 25 commonly asked questions to conduct the interview. (These questions are made available to students on the course web page at the start of the assignment.) I offer a primer on how to conduct an interview. Interviewers then finalize preparations for a 10–12-minute interview.

Once the interviewers' questions are answered, I prepare the interviewees outside the classroom. Given that anxiety is often an issue for interviewees, I reassure them this is normal. I make clear that whatever feelings they are experiencing should not prevent them from obtaining the job. Most of the time, an interviewer has no idea what an interviewee is feeling. For this reason, the interviewees can proceed confidently knowing he or she is well prepared for the interaction. At this point, I restate how to begin an interview (i.e., with a warm smile and a firm handshake), what they should be ready for upfront (i.e., an opener like, "Tell me about yourself"), and how to address a challenging question (i.e., "Would you please rephrase the question?"). Once the interviewees are ready, we commence the interviews. After 10-12 minutes, the interviews conclude. At this point, pairs change roles, and we repeat the process. Students are awarded 5 of the assignment's 50 points for participating in the interview.

Debriefing

Lastly, the JIA is debriefed. This occurs by first discussing what impact a high-quality resume and cover letter has on an interviewer's perception of a candidate. Then a discussion is facilitated on what took place during the interviews, what students learned from the interview, and what they might change to interview more effectively in the future. Finally, students submit their JIA documents to me and online.

Appraisal of the Activity

Based on experience, students consistently voice overwhelming favor for the JIA in course evaluations and in follow-up emails, often after they have secured a job or internship. In terms of strengths, the JIA is frequently the first time that students understand the steps of the job-search process. For this reason, it is a useful primer on what it takes to get a job or internship and how to interview well. Moreover, students note they appreciate taking the role of the interviewer because it helps them reframe how they view the interview. Students have stated many times in debriefing the assignment, "I now think of the interviewer as human. I did not do so before the course."

In terms of limitations, a criticism of the JIA is that it takes a month or more to complete. For this reason, instructors must allocate class time to cover the unit-activity's various parts. In short, the parts of the assignment take weeks of attention during a semester; however, the sacrifice of time is well worth the benefit to undergraduates. Additionally, whereas the assignment requires that an instructor have knowledge of a wide range of topics associated with the job search, the instructor can often access on-campus resources, such as the career services center, to augment classroom instruction and reinforce that each step of the job-search protocol is addressed properly. Despite these limitations, the assignment's benefits far outweigh its weaknesses.

Summary

While the Internet has made the steps of securing a job more accessible, the JIA offers a valuable option for Communication and Media instructors who recognize the importance of preparing students for the job market. The assignment is an option for majors in other disciplines whose instructors desire to equip their students with a knowledge of how to obtain a job or internship during college and afterward.

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Appendix A

Name of Applicant
Address of Applicant
Phone number and email address of Applicant

OBJECTIVE
Seeking an internship in the field of medical health, specifically health policy and management

EDUCATION
Name of University
Bachelor of Science, Organizational & Professional Communication Expected December 2021
Cumulative GPA: 4.0

RELEVANT & LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE
Member, American Medical Women's Association, Name of University August 2017-Present

- Participate in educational medical seminars, guest speaking events, and planned trips to medical conferences
- Assist with volunteer work for the AMWA

Traditional Birth Attendant, Any town, State 2015-Present

- Assist mothers and midwifes during home births and at birthing centers
- Provide extra support to laboring mothers

Volunteer, Name of Hospital, Any town, State, 2013-2015

- Volunteered in neonatal intensive care unit for infants born of addictions, holding as part of treatment
- Hospice volunteer for patients who did not have family or friends to contact

OTHER EXPERIENCE
Event Coordinator & Caterer, Name of Business, LLC, Any town, State April 2015- Present

- Consult with prospective clientele on specific events and drafts contracts and invoices for said events
- Manage budgets as large as $12,500 for coordinating and catering events
- Correspond with vendors, and specifically the persons in charge of hosting said events to provide stress free services

Event Coordinator, Name of Business, Any town, State **March** 2011-April 2015

- Directed planning of corporate and personal social events for clients
- Analyzed and finalized data invoices, pushed sales for vendor collaborations
- Developed marketing campaigns
- Managed budgets of up to $200,000 for large scale events
- Directed consultation meetings for clients and served as the primary contact for all vendors

Appendix B

Name of Applicant
Address of Applicant
Phone number and email address of Applicant

September 1, 2021

Hospital ABC
Any town, State, Zip

Dear Ms. Jones,

I am writing to express interest in the medical reception position at Hospital ABC you advertised recently on LinkedIn. I am currently enrolled at (Name of University) completing my Bachelor of Science in Organizational and Professional Communication. My qualifications for your position include administrative assistant experience, knowledge of health and safety procedures, and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) certification.

In terms of administrative assistant experience, I have used Microsoft Office (including Excel, Word, and PowerPoint) and Adobe Suite tools extensively over the past three years. Additionally, I have worked with Vendor Imports and Phoenix System databases. Regarding health and safety procedures, I have worked in two separate health settings, and in each case, I have gone through health and safety training that I then applied on the job. Further, I am certified in cardiopulmonary resuscitation and have been for the last five years as part of my background in lifeguarding.

In sum, my administrative assistant experience, health training, and CPR certification are in line with the qualifications you advertised for this job. Thank you for taking the time to consider me for this position. I look forward to hearing from you soon. My phone number is XXX-XXX-XXXX and my email address is MsNameofApplicant@gmail.com. I will follow up with in the next week, if I do not hear from before that time. I look forward to discussing this position with you in the near future and sharing how I can benefit Hospital ABC going forward.

Sincerely,
Name of Applicant
Name of Applicant

Curriculum Overhaul: Why We Did It and What We Learned!

Georgia College & State University, Department of Communication, Mass Communication Major

Angela Criscoe, M.F.A. is Associate Professor, Film, Television, & Digital Media Production in the Department of Communication at Georgia College & State University. She also serves as Interim Executive Director for the School of Continuing and Professional Studies. She can be contacted at angela.criscoe@gcsu.edu. Here she shares her slides from her presentation.

HISTORY

Department of Mass Communication (up to 2015)

- **Four Concentrations**
  - Print
  - Broadcast Journalism
  - Advertising
  - Public Relations

Chosen Concentration

4 courses taken sequentially (requiring 4 semesters)
Plus two electives (which could be the first two courses in another concentration)

PROS

- Students received specialized skillset in their concentration.
- They were required to take them in the order in which the courses could build upon the learning objectives from previous courses.
- Easy to advise and guide students through the concentration.

CONS

- Students received specialized skillset in ONE concentration at a time we were seeing a significant merge with digital technologies.
- The sequential order stunted students pace and opportunity for early graduation. Also interfered with our internship practices
- Many students wanted to double concentrate to gain additional skills to prepare them for jobs where the media was merging.
- Names of the media concentrations were changing.

201
From Concentrations to Pools

Strategic
Communication

Enterprise
Journalism

Digital Media
Production

Choose FOUR Skills Courses

Media Management Publication Editing Feature
Writing
Media Interviewing Media Design Multimedia
Storytelling
Electronic Editing Radio Operations Message
Creation

Advanced Strategic Writing Strategic Planning
Issues in Strat Comm Strategic Media Planning

Community Journalism Narrative Journalism

Shooting for News

From Concentrations to Pools

Enterprise
Journalism

Student A
Skill 1 – Media Interviewing & Listening (Journalism)
Skill 2 – Message Creation (Strat Comm)
Skill 3 – Electronic Editing (Digital Media)
Skill 4 – Shooting for news (Journalism/Digital Media) **Capstone – Enterprise Journalism**

Strategic
Communication

Student B
Skill 1 – Electronic Editing (Digital Media)
Skill 2 – Message Creation (Strat Comm)
Skill 3 – Advanced Strategic Writing (Strat Com)
Skill 4 – Media Design (Strat Comm/Digital Media) **Capstone: Strat Comm Capstone**

Digital
Media
Production

Student C
Skill 1 – Media Interviewing & Listening (Journalism)
Skill 2 – Message Creation (Strat Comm)
Skill 3 – Electronic Editing (Digital Media)
Skill 4 – Shooting for news (Journalism/Digital Media)
Capstone – Digital Media Production

Students weren't properly skilled to be successful in their capstone course

Department of Communication (2020)

Three Concentrations
- Strategic Communication (path in PR / path Advertising)
- Multimedia Journalism
- Film, Television, Digital Media Production

Chosen Concentration

4 required courses – First two can be taken together
Plus two electives
The first course determines capstone course

Appropriate Electives for Strat Comm
- Publication Editing
- Feature Writing
- Film & Television Production
- Preproduction
- Branding in Digital Media
- Campaign Principles
- Crisis Communication
- Critical Analysis of the Media
- Propaganda
- Media Around the World

STRAT COMM- Public Relations Skills
- Writing for Advertising & Public Relations
- Principles of PR & Advertising OR Media Design
- Public Relations Planning
- Campaign Principles

STRAT COMM- Advertising Skills
- Writing for Advertising & Public Relations
- Principles of PR & Advertising OR Media Design
- Current Issues in Advertising
- Advertising Planning and Buying

Appropriate Electives for Multimedia Journalism
- Media Interviewing & Listening
- Media Design
- Non-Fiction Storytelling
- Advocacy Journalism
- Feature Writing
- History of American Journalism
- Media Management
- Branding in Digital Media
- History of Broadcasting & Digital Media
- Critical Analysis of the Media
- The FCC/Broadcast & Digital Media Regulation
- Media Around the World

Multimedia Journalism Skills
- Journalistic Writing and Reporting
- Publication Editing
- Multimedia Broadcast Journalism OR Media Design
- Investigative Journalism

Appropriate Electives for Film, Television and Digital Media Production

- Preproduction
- Media Design
- Radio Operations
- Documentary Filmmaking
- Pitching for Multiple Screens
- History of Documentary
- University Media Service
- Branding in Digital Media
- History of Broadcasting & Digital Media
- Critical Analysis of the Media
- Propaganda
- The FCC/Broadcast & Digital Media Regulation
- Media Around the World

Film, Television, Digital Media Production Skills

- Writing for Film & Television
- Film & Television Production
- Multi-Camera Studio Production OR Audio Production
- Advanced Film & Television Production

Double Concentration is Permitted

- Must take all four skills courses in both each concentration
- May take an additional semester or two to graduate

1 Year Reflection

1. Students are prepared for their capstone course
2. Students can produce a project from concept (writing) to distribution
3. They are aware of all phases and can work well within a team
4. The student evaluations in capstone suggest they recognize how the culmination of knowledge has prepared them for the workforce.

Using Artwork to Introduce the Objective and Interpretive Approaches in the Communication Theory Course

Pamela A. Hayward, Augusta University

> Teaching complex concepts can feel like an uphill battle. It can also be discouraging for both teachers and students. If students find the…material hard to understand, they can resort to surface-learning techniques. (*Foreign Policy*, 2021)

In teaching the communication theory course, one will frequently come up against complex concepts to convey. Prior to taking this course, students typically have not had to dive deep into theory. Up to this point, they have been taught communication concepts and definitions but not the theory development behind these concepts.

One of the bigger challenges in the theory course is explaining to students the premise behind different schools of thought in terms of developing communication theory. Laying this ground work is essential though. As Griffin, Ledbetter, and Sparks (2019) emphasize, "You can't fully understand a theory if you aren't familiar with its underlying assumptions about truth, human nature, the purpose of the theory, and its values" (p. 20).

In teaching communication theory, it is important to help students learn to differentiate between objective and interpretive schools of thought when it comes to communication scholarship. Frequently, theory textbooks will include an introductory section that attempts to define and illustrate the difference in these types of research approaches.

For example, in their book *A First Look at Communication Theory*, Griffin, Ledbetter, and Sparks (2019) explain that the objective approach works under the assumption that "truth is singular and is accessible through unbiased sensory observation; committed to uncovering cause-and-effect relationships" (p. 14). On the other hand, they offer that the interpretive approach is "the linguistic work of assigning meaning or value to communicative texts; assumes that multiple meanings or truths are possible" (p. 15).

Given that "most people think in pictures" (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2019), it seems beneficial to launch into the unit on objective versus interpretive theory by utilizing visuals. A creative way to do this is to use photorealistic and abstract art to get students to start to think about different ways ideas can be explored and conveyed.

Activity Step 1: Photorealistic Art

Leading In to the course segment on research methodologies, start by showing students images of photorealistic art. *Photorealism* is an art movement that originated in the late 1960s, according to Winter (2020). It is characterized by paintings that closely resemble photographs, in part because these works are based on photographs rather than on scenes from real life (Winter, 2020). You can locate examples of photorealistic art through a simple internet image search and present the images one at a time (via PowerPoint slides, for example). What is important in this first part of the activity is to have the students react to an image without explaining in advance that it is photorealistic. You may present the first image and ask students to tell you what they see. They will usually respond by saying what they see is a photograph. You then want to let them know that what they see is not a photograph, but an example of photorealistic art. You can then show additional images so they get the sense of this type of creative work.

Activity Step 2: Abstract Art

Next, you want to show students images of abstract art**.** Abstract artists do not deal with the representational interpretation of a subject (Pereira, 2015)**.** Pereira (2015) points out that, the idea is to only communicate with the viewers in an attempt to understand "reality." In abstract art, "reality is subjective and not concrete – it is up to the viewer to define it (Pereira, 2015)." You will want to ask the students what they see when they see a particular piece of abstract art. Getting feedback from more than one student will show that impressions of the same work can be varied. Ideally, you will want to show abstract art that is not well-known. That way students are not relying on what they have been taught about that piece in the past to color their interpretations.

Activity Step 3: Putting it All Together

Once students have seen and discussed the two types of artwork (photorealism and abstract), you now want to introduce the concepts of objective and interpretive theory. As you review each of these concepts, you can harken back to their discussion of the art. Why would an artist choose photorealism? Why would an artist prefer to work with abstract forms? You can compare the art with theory development by highlighting how objective theorists are trying to find "singular truth" in the same way a photorealistic artist is trying to create a work that is as close to the reality of the object as possible. On the other hand, an interpretive theorist is acknowledging the fact that multiple meanings or truths can be possible. This is the same as how an abstract artist may approach their work. This discussion can then lead into a more detailed explanation of the tenets of both objective and interpretive theory.

Variations

To increase student engagement with the concepts, you could ask students at the start of class to find examples of photorealistic and abstract art and then share their findings with the rest of the class. You could also work these ideas into a reflection paper as opposed to a class discussion.

Although this activity was originally designed for a communication theory course, it can easily be adapted for other types of courses. For example, in the research methods course, you could use this activity to introduce the concepts of quantitative and qualitative research methods.

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Great Ideas for Teaching Students: Intercultural Awareness Virtual Reality (VR) Experiential Learning Design of the In-Classroom Activity

Chia-Ling Lynn Ho and Mark Borzi, Department of Communication Arts, Valdosta State University

Integrating virtual reality (VR) educational games into intercultural communication courses offered students experiential-learning opportunities by immersing them virtually in a foreign culture. Drawing on the Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction (ARCS) Model of Motivational Design (Keller, 1987), this in-class VR game activity fulfills all of the steps recommended by the ARCS model. First, students were motivated to learn more about a different culture after the VR educational game had successfully aroused their curiosity. Learners were able to give undivided attention to learning about a different culture when they were playing the VR game.

The next step in the ARCS model is to build learners' confidence in the process of learning. This step was easily achieved because the VR game that students were invited to play were intertwined with the course material that students were already taught in the class. In addition, most students already have experience playing video games in arcades, at home, or on their smartphones. Thus, there was little overhead in boosting their user-efficacy to feel confident in operating the VR machine – students were already the captivated users of the VR game. Students' motivation to learn about a different culture via the VR game was reinforced by the incentive provided to them – each student was awarded 20 participation points for playing the VR game that lasted no longer than five to seven minutes. (The course is out of 1,000 points).

Finally, to assess students' levels of satisfaction with learning, also the last step in accordance with the ARCS model, students were asked to rate their levels of satisfaction, and their willingness to play it again. All of the students (out of a total of 10) gave it a rating of 7 out of 7 on a 7-point Likert scale (with 1 being Very Dissatisfied/ Very Unwilling and 7 being Extremely Satisfied/ Very willing) and they were all willing to play it in the future. All of the students gave positive feedback about the virtual intercultural experience they had when they reflected on it. Some of the actual quotations from students are as follows: "Walking on the streets of Tokyo is just like in New York," "I learned a lot about those buildings in Jerusalem;" "This is crazy, that was insane, I have never done that before, that was so cool," and "I want to visit Japan."

In conclusion, the VR cultural immersion in-classroom activity has met the learning objectives for learners, including to virtually expose students to a culture different from their own; to help students develop a keen awareness of cultural differences, and to familiarize students with tourist attractions of another country. Students have enjoyed the near-authentic experiential learning experience.

Rationale

What students hear or expose to online in day-to-day life or in regular classroom settings about intercultural communication can be limiting. There is bound to be a gap between what students "perceived" to be real and the "reality." Immersing students in a virtual reality educational game that revolves around a culture completely foreign to them allows them to examine a foreign culture from an insider's perspective. As a result, cross-cultural communication becomes more relevant to them. This activity invites students to examine their own cultural values, reflect on their existing stereotypes about different cultures, and explore the potential impact of cultural differences.

Activity Execution Details

Key Learning Objectives	• To virtually expose students to a culture different from their own. • To help students develop a keen awareness of cultural differences. • To familiarize students with tourist attractions of another country.
Time	10 minutes
Material	**Hardware:** VR equipment (HTC Vive) that is connected to a VR compatible computer, and a monitor **Software:** **1)** Bygone Worlds: Jerusalem **2)** The Great Wall (China) **3)** Beyond Tokyo
Incentive	20 participation points

Procedure

Preparation: As part of the course curriculum, students are already familiar with cross-cultural communication before they are invited to participate in the VR in-classroom activity. Students have some basic understanding about other cultures through regular teaching styles – lectures that are delivered with presentation slides, videos and pictures.

On the day itself:

1. Setup the VR machine, with software downloaded, and ready.
2. Invite students into the classroom, one at a time (in this case, only one VR machine is available).
3. Ask the student about his/her prior traveling abroad experience and VR experience.
4. Put the VR headset on for the student, and instruct the student how to use VR remote controllers.
5. The student gets to explore all they wanted, and do whatever they would like to do within the five to seven minutes time allotted for him/her.
6. When the allotted time for the student runs out, the student is asked about his/her experience with VR, and what he/she has learned about cross-cultural experience.

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