

High School Social Studies Teachers’ Perceptions of News Media

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Abstract

Many states incorporate some form of media literacy and evaluation in their Social Studies standards. In Common Core, a major standard calls for the understanding and development of the credibility of sources, a higher order thinking skill necessary for the Effective Speaking and Listening standard for 11th and 12th graders. But what are the views of the teachers who develop these strategies and are they aware of media bias and contradiction? This study illustrates the results of a survey sent out to high school social studies teachers about their perceptions of television media. Results suggest that there is a discrepancy between high school social studies teachers’ perceptions of television news for personal viewing as compared to classroom use.

The use of media in regular social studies education, both as a pedagogical process or as an outcome or standard in of itself, is necessary in teaching students how to analyze media and other sources critically. Students are regular consumers of media both in and out of school and students need to critique the quality of news and political media when questioned. The National Social Studies Standards (1994) state (d), “We must encourage [students] to be critical and copious readers of the best media, print, audio and video content. . .” (National Council for Social Studies, 1994, p. 7). Students need to be taught how news media works in preparation, “how sources are identified and used, and who owns the media” (Ross, 2010, p. 92). Although other content areas incorporate media literacy into the curriculum, the social studies curriculum may be one of the best places for capturing students’ interest in contemporary and historical politics and how it ‘plays’ out through the different media platforms.

Researchers have recommended that critical media literacy be included in the teacher education core curriculum as well, in order to prepare future teachers to address media literacy within a variety of content areas (Bush, 2009; Flores-Koulis & Deal, 2008; Torres & Mercado, 2006). Media literacy has been defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and effectively communicate in a variety of forms including print and non-print texts (Considine & Haley, 1999). For a media literacy program to be effective, contemporary public school teachers must focus on critical thinking by teaching students to analyze media as ideological texts; considering the audience(s), information given and power of such statements (Gainer, 2010; Jewett, 2007).

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to survey teachers about their personal perceptions of contemporary news media and their views towards media in educating social studies students. The survey is simple, and predominately leans towards the major cable news outlets. Two general questions guided the survey construction:

1. What media is personally relevant to teachers?
2. What kinds of (news) media do social studies teachers watch and/or use in the classroom?

Although research indicates that social studies teachers value critical media skills (Considine, Horton, & Moorman, 2009; Prikette, 2001; Rodesiler, 2010), the goal of this study was to discover the specific places where social studies teachers obtained personal news, and which media they utilized in the classroom for their students to view and discuss.

Review of Literature: Critical Literacy and Social Studies Standards

Critical literacy is an outgrowth of critical theories, which teaches students to take a critical stance toward official knowledge (Schor, 1999). “Critical literacy is a philosophy that recognizes the connections between power, knowledge, language and ideology, and recognizes the inequalities and injustices surrounding us in order to move toward transformative action and social justice” (Mulcahy, 2008, p. 3). Social studies teachers, who utilize critical media literacy skills, tend to ask students to interrogate the power structures that produce political messages through the internet, television, radio, newspapers and other media. Students who acquire their civic education via discussions of political issues over didactic instruction and rote memorization demonstrate a less authoritarian attitude and can be made aware (or more so) to different views and perceptions (Byford, Lennon, & Russell, 2009; Hahn, 1999). Discussion of critical and public policy issues teaches students to actively participate in local politics and civic action (Hass & Laughlin, 2002; Hahn, 2001).

Somewhat similar ideas can be seen under general definitions or terminology of critical thinking skills regardless of the model one chooses to follow (Huitt, 1998; Kuhn, 1999; Marzano, 2006; Paul & Elder, 2006). Analysis, synthesis and/or evaluation and reflections are similarly looked at in Bloom’s Taxonomy, arguably the most entrenched critical thinking model in education today (Bloom, 1956). Correlated constructs can be found in the new Common Core

Initiative being adopted by a multitude of state agencies across the country. Already formally adopted by 45 states (though this number may shrink) the Common Core, like many standards before it, puts an emphasis on certain critical thinking applications that can be correlated to media literacy.

In the Common Core, a ‘key’ concept or design function was to incorporate “an integrated model of literacy” as well as the development of research and media skills into the generalized development of the standards (Common Core State Initiative, 2014a, p.1). Further delineated under the Comprehension and Understanding sub-thread, standard CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1 states that a student should:

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. (Common Core State Initiative, 2014b, p.1)

Under this, the sub-standard titled CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1d, states that students should:

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task. (Common Core State Initiative, 2014c, p.1)

And finally, the following standard, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.2, under the Comprehension and Understanding sub thread, states that students should:

Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data. (Common Core State Initiative, 2014d, p.1)

Television and other media are an essential part of the teaching of current events, and students need to be taught how to participate actively in the critique and analysis of all texts.

Although some critical theorists view schools and classrooms as products of politics and economics, Apple (1992) emphasized the potential for teachers and students to become agents of change. In this consequence students need to learn how to engage and properly discourse differing and opposing views in a non-confrontational setting. This is also another positive ‘citizen skill’ or outlier, considered important for a healthy democracy but lacking in much of the public political discourse today. As students analyze, create and experiment with different forms of texts, they are taught to critique television and other forms of media. Critical evaluation of media should be taught so students will understand the purpose, context and audience of news media, and learn not only to make choices, but also to think about how the news may affect their thinking about issues, groups, politics, etc. (Considine, 2009; Considine et al., 2009; Gainer, 2010; Rodesiler, 2010). This is an integral skill for an informed citizenry and, arguably, one of the most important skills for a social studies teacher to impart (Byford et al., 2009).

Methods

Approximately 1,000 social studies teacher email addresses, collected in 2009 and 2010 were used in an attempt to develop a randomized sample frame for the study. The emails were harvested from open district websites (at that time) from 48 states before being catalogued in an Excel spreadsheet. The instrument consisted of eight questions published in *SurveyMonkey* in the fall of 2010; three questions were demographic in nature while the remaining five focused on teacher perceptions to media. Table 1 includes the survey questions. The survey remained online and accessible for a four week period before closing. The authors also made no attempt to follow up on where the respondents lived. By doing so (or not) this developed a randomized, anonymous study of social studies teachers from the contiguous United States, albeit smaller than we would have liked.

Table 1

Survey Questions

Questions	Possible Choices/Answers					
Age	21-30 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	31-45 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	45 or more years	<input type="checkbox"/>
Years of Experience	0-2 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	3- 5 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	6-10 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
	11-15 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	15-20 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	20 + years	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gender	Female	<input type="checkbox"/>	Male	<input type="checkbox"/>		
1.	Through which type of media do you get the majority of your news?	Internet	<input type="checkbox"/>	Television	<input type="checkbox"/>	
		Radio	<input type="checkbox"/>	Newspaper	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2.	Which cable news network do you normally watch, or are more likely to watch at home?	CNN	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fox News	<input type="checkbox"/>	
		MSNBC	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3.	Which cable news network would you consider the least trustworthy or accurate?	CNN	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fox News	<input type="checkbox"/>	
		MSNBC	<input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4.	Which cable news network would you most likely use in your classroom?	CNN	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fox News	<input type="checkbox"/>	
		MSNBC	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	
5.	Which of the following news networks do you believe school administrators would prefer you to use in the classroom?	CNN	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fox News	<input type="checkbox"/>	
		MSNBC	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	

The study was conceptualized through a nomothetic research ‘lens’ and was quantitative in design, as it was hoped to discern measurable variables of difference from a dispersed population of teachers (Larsson, 1993). From conception it was determined for the survey to be simple and short, thus making it fast for respondents to do. The questions were basic classification, no scales or weights existed in the respondent’s choices. Considered as a nominal

measurement scale, this also limited the analysis to descriptive statistics only (Howell, 2004).

Using content validity protocols, several experts in the social studies content area reviewed the nine, non-demographic questions to help determine validity. Basic reliability was developed through an inter-rater analysis using three volunteers to take the survey (Creswell, 2008). All three were of the same age and similar in general political and social stances, as determined through a short interview with the authors. Joint Probability of Agreement analysis illustrated a generally high level of reliability although it must be noted that this is a statistically weak reliability index (Howell, 2004.) All 117 finished surveys were then analyzed through a categorization process using simple percentages broken down by *age*, *years of experience*, and *gender* (See Table 1).

Limitations of the Study

Overall, 117 completed surveys were collected, amounting to a gross return rate of only 12%, a weak number even for online solicitations. The authors did receive numerous ‘bounce backs’ from broken links and several firewall ‘blockage’ notices amounting to 287 possible email addresses affected. This number is relatively opaque as district firewall notices responded as one reply instead of individually by the respondents themselves. Anecdotally, several teachers also responded directly back to the researchers (not through SurveyMonkey) stating they were not able to comply with the request due to stated school or district policies. This subtracted from the 1,000 surveys to 713 successful email requests received by sampled teachers for a net response rate of 16%, still far lower than normally liked.

However, it was suspected the response would be low from the beginning as the teacher population is not a sample group normally associated with in return rate metrics. It is difficult to ascertain the non-response bias from this specific population and generalized response enhancing techniques, such as email follow-ups were limited or deemed inefficient. However, according to SurveyMonkey only one participant opened the poll and did not finish while two only partially completed the poll (none were used in the analysis and final tally). This may indicate that relevancy and topic salience were not the primary factors for the lowered return rate as all but one finished the survey once seeing it. Regardless, this can lead to a bias in the sample population and is problematic when trying to make inferences back to a larger population. Aware of this, the authors utilized descriptive statistics only and have made note of this limitation. Further research and analysis is needed before any outcomes can be regarded or inferred back to all high school social studies teachers as a generalized outcome or viewpoint. This study is not rigorous enough to make these correlations.

Demographics of Respondents

The largest group in the sample population comprised males with more than 12 years’ experience though women of all ages made up 41% of the overall sample (See Table 2). In terms of age, 59% of the respondents were 40 years old and older. The demographics of the respondents may suggest that less experienced teachers did not have as much time or interest in completing the survey as the more experienced social studies teachers. Tenured teachers felt ‘safer’ in answering the survey. Only 31% of the sample had worked as a teacher for less than seven years. This correlated with age as 68 respondents or 58% of the sample was 41 years old

or older. The sample frame, though randomly selected, was older and more experienced in population.

Table 2

Teacher Demographics

		Female		Male	
		#	%	#	%
Age					
N = 115	21-30 years old	9	8%	11	10%
	31-40 years old	12	10%	15	13%
	41-50 years old	15	13%	19	17%
	51+ years or older	12	10%	22	19%
Experience					
N = 116	0-3 years	0	n/a	2	<2%
	4-7 years	14	12%	15	29%
	8-11 years	9	8%	6	15%
	12+ years or more	25	21%	45	70%

Total sample population by respondent = 117. Respondents were primarily males with senior experience.

Survey Analysis

Question 1: Through Which Type of Media do You Get the Majority of Your News?

The teacher responses could include one of four choices: the internet, television, radio, or newspaper. Descriptive statistics was utilized to delineate the question by the three demographic categories; age, experience and gender, with the results illustrated in Table 3. All the remaining questions were analyzed in the same way.

Table 3

Type of Media from Which One Acquires Their News

		Internet	Television	Radio	Newspaper
Experience					
	0-7 years	83%	10%	4%	3%
	8-11 years	33%	33%	33%	0%
	12 ⁺ years	38%	37%	8%	17%
Age					
	21-30 years	75%	10%	5%	10%
	31-40 years	59%	22%	19%	0%
	41-50 years	41%	38%	9%	12%
	51 ⁺ years	35%	42%	10%	13%
Gender					
	Female	38%	33%	17%	13%
	Male	56%	26%	6%	12%

Overall, the internet was the most widely used median for acquiring news, the highest percentage for seven of the nine demographic categories. The only difference was by respondents identified in the 8-11 year experience range and those in the 51 years and older category. This 'mid-level experience' sample group was intriguing for survey question 1, as they answered equally for the internet (33%), television (33%) and radio (33%) but not at all for newspapers. The lack of newspaper use was also mirrored in the 31-40 year age bracket though it is likely this age corresponds with the 8-11 year experience category (may be many of the same people).

As expected, internet usage is higher with younger adults but lower with the older ones. For television it is the opposite, at least in this sample, as older teachers were more likely to watch television for the news than their younger counterparts. This disparity was greater with younger teachers however, as 75% listed the internet to only 10% for television. For the 51 years and older category, the disparity was not as wide as 42% watched television to 35% looking at the internet. Consequent generations may become more acquainted to newer technology, and may be more apt to use them to supplant traditional ones. Most interesting, however, was the large discrepancy in internet use by gender as men were 22% more likely to use the internet than women for acquiring their news, the largest difference in all four choices in this prompt. Female teachers distributed much of this difference in their choices between television and radio equally, seven to nine points difference respectively. There was negligible difference between the genders towards reading newspapers, less than four percent between them.

Question 2: Which Cable News Network do You Normally Watch, or are More Likely to Watch at Home?

Question 2 focused on the theme of the study. Respondents’ choices were “CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, or Other.” Their choices as delineated by experience, age and gender did illustrate some surprising differences though (See Table 4) Overall, this group picked CNN highest in eight of the nine possibly delineated categories. But CNN was not a clear favorite either, with other choices clearly being identified. It should be noted that there was no real ‘out’ for this question, especially with ‘Other’ being unidentified. For respondents who may not watch any news channels it is possible they made their decision based more on their political preference than over actual viewing practices.

Table 4

Major Cable (News) Networks Most Likely to be Watched

		CNN	FOX	MSNBC	Other
Experience					
	0-7 years	55%	26%	19%	0%
	8-11 years	40%	27%	13%	20%
	12+ years	42%	30%	11%	16%
Age					
	21-30 years	65%	15%	20%	0%
	31-40 years	30%	48%	11%	11%
	41-50 years	44%	32%	6%	18%
	51+ years	48%	17%	20%	14%
Gender					
	Female	52%	23%	15%	10%
	Male	42%	33%	13%	12%

FOX News was first only once, chosen by the 31-40 year age group (48%), and came in second to CNN in four of the nine categories. This difference ranged from 12% in the 12 plus years’ experience group to 50% in the 21 to 30 year age group. MSNBC typically vied for third place though it was second twice, both times ahead of FOX News but still behind CNN. It also came in last three times, always behind the non-identified ‘Other.’ By gender, men were more likely to watch CNN (+10%) though at 42% CNN was also the most popular choice for women. For those watching FOX News, women were more likely than men to turn in (+10%). MSNBC and the ‘Other’ choice illustrated negligible differences by the genders.

Question 3: Which Cable News Network Would You Consider the Least Trustworthy or Accurate?

Respondents were asked to choose from the following choices: “CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, or don’t know.” This continued in the theme of the study as distrust towards a channel may be indicative of political preference. Respondents were not asked if they actually viewed these networks or not (See Table 5). FOX News scored the highest in this prompt for all nine demographic categories. MSNBC was next in least trustworthiness, picked second for all but one category where ‘Other’ claimed this distinction. However the margin of difference between first in ‘least trustworthiness’ to second was a huge 42%, with 70% being the highest in the 21-30 years sub-group. The closest it came to second was to MSNBC (16%) in one demographic bracket, the 31-40 years of age subgroup. CNN was considered the most trustworthy seven times, as distinguished by the lowest scores in this category. Interestingly enough, although there was no discrepancy about FOX News being first in the ‘least trustworthy’ category there appears to be issue for second place as MSNBC received this six times while the unknown ‘other’ was voted second three times. The difference in this perception is most evident in the 31-40 year population bracket which only voted Fox News at 41% least trustworthy, the lowest difference in the sample. This group had MSNBC as a close second and had ‘Other’ as the most trustworthy source. CNN was very closely associated with MSNBC with this group, as the two were only different by 6%. This identified subgroup (31-40 years of age) appears to lean more conservative in nature and will be illustrated in later questions.

Table 5

Major Cable (News) Networks Considered Least Trustworthy or Accurate

		CNN	FOX	MSNBC	Other
Experience					
	0-7 years	3%	68%	16%	13%
	8-11 years	20%	60%	20%	0%
	12+ years	10%	51%	18%	21%
Age					
	21-30 years	5%	75%	5%	15%
	31-40 years	19%	41%	25%	15%
	41-50 years	12%	50%	23%	15%
	51+ years	3%	66%	11%	20%
Gender					
	Female	13%	54%	13%	21%
	Male	7%	57%	22%	13%

Question 4: Which Cable News Network Would You Most Likely Use in Your Classroom?

Question four was the first to ask respondents about using specific news media in the classroom. The choices were the same as in previous questions: CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, and Other. Responses to this question are summarized in Table 6. CNN was first in all nine demographic categories with an average of 57.7% across all categories. 'Other' came in second, either by itself or tied, in eight of the nine categories. 'Fox News and MSNBC vied for last place, with FOX being last, or tied last in five of the nine categories. However, FOX was still within five percentage points (for last place) in eight categories with the sole difference being the 51+ year group. Here, the other choices besides CNN were basically the same; Fox News, MSNBC and Other were 14%, 11% and 12% respectively. This would be the same in the 12+ years category, which most likely reflects many of the same individuals.

Realistically, there was little difference from Fox News to MSNBC for the four of the remaining five categories. There were less than five points between the two, generally meaning both networks vied for being last, or second to last in all but one category. Only twice did FOX News and MSNBC not come generally close to the other, once in the 31-40 years category where respondents had Fox News at 15% to MSNBC at 4%, and the 41-50 years category which basically had a reverse order, Fox News at 3% with MSNBC at 12%.

Question four becomes more interesting when compared back to question two: "Which cable news network do you watch, or are more likely to watch?" This comparison is displayed in Table 7. CNN, except for the 8-11 years' experience category, saw an increase in personal use to classroom use. In this demographic CNN didn't drop as it stayed the same between the two choices at 40%. Fox News fell in all demographic categories for personal viewing as compared to classroom viewing with MSNBC falling in seven of the nine categories. The difference for CNN was a net gain of 9.75% while Fox News had a net loss of 18.8% and MSNBC had a loss of 5.5%.

Table 6

Major Cable News Networks Most Likely Used in the Classroom

	CNN	FOX	MSNBC	Other
Experience				
0-7 years	61%	0%	3%	37%
8-11 years	40%	13%	13%	34%
12 ⁺ years	65%	12%	12%	11%
Age				
21-30 years	70%	0%	5%	25%
31-40 years	44%	15%	4%	27%
41-50 years	48%	3%	12%	37%
51 ⁺ years	63%	14%	11%	12%
Gender				
Female	57%	4%	9%	30%
Male	54%	10%	9%	27%

Table 7

Comparison of Viewing Habits to Classroom Viewing

		CNN		FOX		MSNBC	
		1	2	1	2	1	2
Experience	0-7 years	55%	61%	26%	0%	19%	3%
	8-11 years	40%	40%	27%	13%	13%	13%
	12+ years	42%	65%	30%	12%	11%	12%
Age	21-30 years	65%	70%	15%	0%	20%	5%
	31-40 years	30%	44%	48%	15%	11%	4%
	41-50 years	44%	48%	32%	3%	6%	12%
	51+ years	48%	63%	17%	14%	20%	11%
Gender	Female	52%	57%	23%	4%	15%	9%
	Male	42%	54%	33%	10%	13%	9%

1-Major Cable (News) Networks most likely to be watched

2-Major Cable (News) Networks most likely used in the classroom

Question 5: Which of the Following News Networks do You Believe School Administrators Would Prefer You to Use in the Classroom?

CNN averaged the highest response with 53.44%, also being the highest in the eight of the nine demographic categories. CNN averaged a 14.88% difference between ‘Other’ which came in second in eight of the nine categories. The 31-40 years age bracket, the possibly conservative subgroup mentioned earlier, was the sole outlier as they picked ‘Other’ at 48% to CNN at 44%. Fox News averaged just a 3.88%, while MSNBC just a 4.11% (See Table 8).

Table 8

Networks Teachers Believed School Administrators Would Prefer Them to Use in Class

		CNN	FOX	MSNBC	Other
Experience					
	0-7 years	65%	0%	0%	35%
	8-11 years	43%	7%	7%	43%
	12 ⁺ years	50%	6%	6%	38%
Age					
	21-30 years	70%	0%	0%	30%
	31-40 years	44%	4%	4%	48%
	41-50 years	47%	6%	6%	41%
	51 ⁺ years	57%	3%	6%	34%
Gender					
	Female	47%	6%	2%	45%
	Male	58%	3%	6%	33%

It should also be noted that both networks received zero votes several times, with the two categories of '0-7 years' experience' and '21 -30 years of age' doing so with both FOX News and MSNBC. Without any votes, these two networks may have contributed to the wide margin between the first choice and the second, which from this demographic was CNN and 'Other.' They averaged a 30% and 40% difference respectively, much higher than the overall sample average of 14.88%. They also had the highest percentage rate for CNN than all other groups. This is interesting as these two categories strongly represent the new teacher demographic of the study sample. In question five, which asked if MSNBC would be viewed in the classroom, 3% and 5% in this demographic still responded as most likely to do so despite what the majority of their peers responded as doing. Fox was at zero in the demographic in this question. However, MSNBC by question six is also at 0% when factoring administrative wishes.

Overall Question Analysis

In summary, a trend of support for CNN dominated responses in questions two, three, and five. The survey's overall framework first contained questions asking respondents about their personal choices in news before moving on to professional views and preference. CNN, the most widely chosen for personal viewing, saw a generalized increase when classroom and administrator values were added. This direction, or choice in CNN, may reflect career 'safety' in that this network may be seen as less controversial and thus may be viewed as more safe in terms of possible repercussions from other stakeholders (Byford et al., 2009). This choice of CNN may also indicate, to some degree, the media literacy of the teachers and their knowledge of the public's beliefs about news channels and perceived conservative or liberal political leanings.

CNN was clearly seen as the 'safest' choice, albeit in a very limited, designed set of choices. It saw an increase of 9.33% in viewing from personal choice to classroom choice. It did see a small drop off with administrator wishes with an average of 53.44%, a difference of 2.33%. However, due to the small sample size this is probably statistically insignificant. The largest difference came from Fox News and MSNBC, arguably the most visible partisan news networks (Kohut, 2004; Coe et al., 2008; Fico, Zeldes, Carpenter, & Diddi, 2008; Baum & Groeling, 2008). For Fox News, 27.88% of respondents picked this network as their primary choice for home viewing, as compared to 14.22% for MSNBC. The unspecified 'Other' was last at 11.22%. However when asked if used in a classroom, Fox News dropped 20.0% while MSNBC dropped 5.56%. Interestingly enough, this left them at a somewhat similar (overall) response rate to this question with 7.88% and 8.66 respectively for classroom viewing. Although both networks were different by a wide margin in respondents' personal choices, both lowered to similar percentages when asked if used in the classroom. Although difficult to pinpoint, experienced teachers may be using different news networks to illustrate media literacy. Less experienced teachers may feel less comfortable about choosing specific networks for classroom analysis, which would explain the low levels of these networks being shown in classrooms by the beginning teachers. Number of teachers using networks in question six about administrator views or wishes. Fox News and MSNB were both at the 4% mark at this question, and once again very similar in choice, with 0.23% difference between the two of them.

The unidentified choice, 'Other', moved in the positive direction with a 16.47% jump in response rate from question five to six (See Table 6). Personal viewing for this undefined source was over a quarter of respondents in the classroom category. Possible reasons could be how CNN is viewed as either neutral or liberal leaning. Depending upon respondent views towards this, and other networks, this can be an issue and possibly move votes to the 'Other' category. The conservative subgroup discussed earlier may have illustrated this in question four with such a narrow majority picked for CNN. By question six, with the direction moving to classroom choice and administrator wishes, the response rate for 'other' had increased another 10% to 38.57% of the respondent vote. Lower than CNN, this unnamed "other" category saw an overall increase of 27.35% between all three questions. Clearly there were concerns about the other three choices (CNN, FOX News and MSNBC) for a sizeable minority of the sample group.

Outcomes

The teachers polled indicated preference for the internet over other media platforms, which is no surprise. The internet, being an open, accessible source allows users a more personal and tailored experience for their news. The amount of choice available allows for the viewing of programs tailored to specific and individual tastes and views. These differences include political and personal views and/or bias. Some studies indicate that a plurality of Americans prefer in their news (Eveland & Shah, 2003; Morris, 2005; ComScore Data Mine, 2011). These preferences can be satisfied with the myriad of different news sources available on the internet.

With the 24 hour cable news networks this difference in views is developed as a form of 'soft' news and entertainment which both Fox News and MSNBC publicly tailor towards (Krane, 2006). CNN is seen as by some viewers to be equally biased though the network does not publically acknowledge any preference. It is common for viewers to associate with likeminded

political coverage of non-crisis related news. However, in an emergency, or crisis news situation, this polarization disappears as viewers will instead choose media platforms more trustworthy, in essence moving towards their perceived 'hard' news source (Reineman, Stanyer, Scher, & Legnante, 2011; Prior, 2003; Althaus, 2002). This same 'shift' may be occurring in the classroom where teachers' preferences are overruled by other variables, causing them to use the most trusted source available. Although descriptive in nature, the analysis of the respondents' choices seem relatively clear. Teachers in this study seem to be aware of media bias and/or distortion as evidenced by their choices in personal viewing over classroom viewing. This is also mirrored in their responses to administrators' choices. Some still show networks seen as 'biased' or possibly misleading but this is a significant minority in the study. It is also unknown as to why but the demographics may hold the answer, as overall the population in the study leaned older and with more experience. The teachers most likely to use either MSNBC or Fox News were older professionals with more experience.

Implications for Further Research

Critical analysis of media and its influence on a population or demographic is extremely important in social studies education and could be argued as one of the most important skills an informed citizen needs to have in a modern society. The importance of critical media analysis is illustrated in the new standards, and with the continued 'wired-in' populations; critical media literacy will remain an intrinsic and necessary skill set for all citizens to possess. It is also imperative that teachers know where they stand on controversial issues and correlating topics. They will need to teach through, and about, controversy in a neutral and informed way to be successful. This impartiality can be very difficult, and for some teachers, extra help or training may be necessary. Further research is necessary to determine how social studies teachers view news media and its importance in helping their students develop critical literacy in the classroom.

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