Navigating the storm
A qualitative study of complementary media usage during natural disasters

Att navigera stormen
En kvalitativ studie av media användning innom naturkatastrofer

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyze the use of different media channels occurred within a natural disaster situation. This research focuses specifically on charting the factors that affect audiences in their choice of media channels and how these factors ultimately lead to the complimentarily use of sources. This study is based on channel complementarity theory and utilizes a qualitative method consisting of semi-structured interviews and has been complemented with a survey that respondents were required to complete prior to the interview. The twelve college students that made up the sample for this study were selected through convenient and purposive means and have personally been involved in natural disaster situations without exception.

Final results and analysis suggest that individuals utilize several media channels combined, at different points in time or simultaneously, and in random order during a natural disaster. The analysis of the results also shows that individuals use this variety of media channels in order to obtain two different perspectives: broad and narrow. Traditional media channels such as radio and television are shown to be used in order to obtain the broader perspective during a natural disaster event. In contrast, social media like Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat are used to gain the narrower perspective.

The findings of this study also suggest that factors affecting media choices are accentuated by a crisis such as a natural disaster and are intrinsically connected to specific needs audiences have at one particular point in time. The most relevant factors contributing to the choice of media type and leading to channel complementarity found in this study are accessibility, compatibility of sources, tailorability, and humor appeal. Controversially, credibility appears to be disregarded as a key factor, even though it is still perceived as an influential characteristic.

Key-words: Media Usage, Channel Complementarity, Crisis Communication, Natural Disaster
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Visca el Barça, visca Catalunya i visca la mare que ens va parir!
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1 Introduction

This introduction will explain the reasoning behind the author’s choice to write specifically about media consumption during a crisis and channel complementarity theory. After a short introductory text a paragraph about the theoretical background of the subject is presented, followed by the aim and scope of the essay and the research questions. Before former research is introduced, a few definitions that will be central throughout the thesis are presented.

Crisis communication had always been attractive to me. Ever since the semester spent during my undergraduate studies learning about crisis communication, I quickly realized the importance of the subject in the field of communications. But it wasn't until later, during the time period spent at the University of West Florida as an exchange student when something struck me as interesting. The well-organized chaos during a natural disaster experienced in the area posed for a very attractive subject of study: Media consumption during a natural disaster event. A quick search on “media consumption” brought me to an article that cited channel complementary theory and exposed a debate about the way individuals consume mediated information. The central concept of channel complementary theory is the idea of individuals utilizing a combination of media channels to acquire the information they need.

Rather than following the path of that debate and the path of previous research which tried to establish media dominance, I chose to partake in the concept presented by Dutta-Bergman (2004) to take a new direction and broaden the discussion. Therefore, with the help of the channel complementary theory framework, I chose to analyze the concept of different media outlets being combined at will to cover the individual’s need for information within a particular topic.

1.1 Theoretical background

In all societies human beings engage in the production and exchange of information and symbolic content. From the earliest forms of gesture and language use to the most recent
developments in computer technology, the production, storage and circulation of information and symbolic content have been central aspects of social life.

(Thompson, 1995, p.12).

A substantial amount of research on the relationship between traditional media and new media builds upon the competition-based displacement theory, which is based on the argument that media types compete with each other for resources. Kanyan and Yelsma (2000) suggested that the function of a certain medium in a community is to satisfy specific needs among the audiences. Kanyan and Yelsma (2000) explain that when the newly introduced medium serves the same functions as the old medium, it can result in either of them becoming irrelevant or secondary in the meeting of those needs.

However, Steve Coffey and Horst Stipp (1997), in their study ‘The Interactions Between Computer and Television Usage’, argue that the discussion about the impact of the new digital media on the use of the traditional media has been dominated by predictions of recession in the usage of the traditional media due to the rapidly spreading Internet usage. They report that new data in their study does not support such predictions, rather showing complementary interactions between media types.

Many of these studies, however, focus quantitatively on media usage and try to determine which media dominates the field within a certain period of time. Fewer studies take a qualitative standpoint in order to better understand the phenomena of these ratios of media dominance.

In 2004, Dutta-Bergman presented the article ‘Complementarity in Consumption of News Types Across Traditional and New Media’, developing the idea of media complementarity in which he explores an alternative to the competition-based framework. Dutta-Bergman (2004a) theorizes a content-based media congruence, meaning that the audiences are going to pursue the available content within one particular topic using all types of media complementarily. He emphasizes the greater likelihood for online users of a particular type of content to consume similar content on
traditional media. Furthermore, Dutta-Bergman (2004a) argues that in order to get a better understanding of the relationship between new and traditional media, studies should focus on the nature of the content, the characteristics of the audience, and the context in which the medium is consumed rather than trying to demonstrate homogenous patterns of media usage across the population.

This study participates in establishing the theory developed by Dutta-Bergman (2004a) that individuals tend to utilize several media channels complementarily, and highlights the factors that contribute to the choice of media and ultimately to such complementarity. Moreover, this essay explores the theory in relationship to information-seeking during natural disasters.

1.2 Aim and Scope

The aim of this study is to, with a set of semi-structured interviews, analyze the use of different media channels within a natural disaster situation. Furthermore, this research focuses specifically in charting the factors and characteristics that affect audiences in their choice of media channels, and lead to the complimentarily use of sources. This essay is based on channel complementarity theory explained below, and should provide insight in the way media audiences navigate the vast array of media platforms in their quest for information during a natural disaster.

A qualitative study with several in-depth interviews has been conducted to find answers to the following research questions:

1.2.1 Core question

a) How do audiences navigate their way around the variety of media sources during a natural disaster?

1.2.2 Research questions

1) How are media channels used in order to gain information during a natural disaster?
2) What factors contribute to the choice of media type and lead to channel complementarity during a natural disaster?

3) What is the succession of media during the course of the natural disaster?

### 1.3 Definitions

*This section will present definitions that are relevant for the study.*

#### 1.3.1 Crisis

Because a natural disaster is a phenomena that classifies as a crisis, it is important to have a basic understanding of the term, its definitions and implications.

As with many fields of study, scholars and practitioners debate on different definitions for the term crisis. These debates are important to point out the principal components of the phenomenon and establish common ground within the field. Definitions are, of course, also central in any theory. (Timothy L. Sellnow, Matthew W. Seeger 2013)

A crisis as defined by Timothy W. Coombs (2014) is a breakdown in a system that creates shared stress. Some sort of negative event, out of the ordinary, that causes a strain in the established routine. Furthermore, crises puts the interests of employees, managers, suppliers, stockholders, victims and community members in danger. Sometimes even lives are at risk. Therefore, crisis episodes affect individuals’ sense of reality, security, and normality. Coombs (2014) also considers a crisis to be perceptual, meaning that the existence of the crisis is based on the perception of the subjects involved in it. The perceptual aspect of a crisis is further explained in his book *Ongoing Crisis Communication* where he describes crisis as a function of perceptions based on a violation of some strongly held expectation. This is exemplified in the book *Theorizing Crisis Communication* by Sellnow and Seeger (2013) as follows:
Food for example, should be safe to eat and free of harmful E. coli contamination. It is generally expected that rivers will remain within defined areas and not spread to inundate residential downtown areas. It’s the violation of these expectations and some level of community and social consensus about the relative level of risk and threat that creates the perception of a crisis. (Sellnow and Seeger, 2013 p.5)

Crisis strike suddenly which gives them an element of surprise or unpredictability, but they usually also carry with them a great number of warnings. However, even though an upcoming crisis may send these signals or warnings it’s a trigger event that marks the beginning of it and the crisis ends when it is considered to be resolved. (Coombs, 2014)

Coombs (2014) insists that generalist definitions of the term crisis can be applied to a wide variety of events. Therefore, he also stresses the importance of clarification and proposes a way of conceptualizing crisis which is here represented in Figure 1.

![Figure 1, Crisis defined by Coombs (2014)](image)

Crises can include natural disasters, industrial accidents, and intentional events. The concept exposed by Coombs (2014) begins with the general notion of crisis as the starting point, up top. Beneath, he differentiates between (a) organizational crises and (b) disasters in order to clarify the way in which the topic of crisis is approached.
A) Organizational Crisis

Organizational crises can be defined as “a specific, unexpected and non-routine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and threaten, or are perceived to threaten an organization’s high priority goals” (Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer, 2003 p.20).

Similar to a general crisis, an organizational crisis is unpredictable but not unexpected. Furthermore, sagacious organizations know they will eventually be involved in a crisis. However, they don’t know when the crisis will occur. Despite the prevailing circumstances, organizational crises can be anticipated and there is plenty of research in the matter of prevention and management undeterred by the fact that the term lacks an ultimate definition. (Coombs, 2014). Difficulties and problems come about within companies every day, but a crisis may be enough to singlehandedly damage or even destroy an organization (Coombs, 2014).

B) Disaster

R. W Perry (2007) argues that disasters are sudden events, such as an accident or natural catastrophe, that cause great damage. These events disrupt routines of systems and require new courses of action to cope with the disruption. He also remarks that these events pose danger to values and social goals. In addition, Coombs (2014) explains that disasters are large in scale and require response from multiple governmental units.

Kapucu and Özerdem (2013) compare crisis and disasters by the source of their nature. They define crisis as a situation where the cause is self-inflicted, meaning that the subject of the crisis is also the cause of it. In contrast, they refer to disasters as situations where an enterprise is confronted with sudden and uncontrollable changes. Furthermore, organizations may need to cope with the effects of a disaster throughout regular operation.
Coombs (2014) argues that disasters can result in organizational crises. An example of a disaster turning into an organizational crisis would be a power plant having to restore power to the city after a tornado. In contrast, it is rare that an organizational crisis can trigger a disaster, but it is plausible nonetheless. A prime example would be the crude oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico after the sinking of the BP-operated Deepwater Horizon oil rig.

In reality, a disaster declaration is required for federal aid to be available to communities in the United States. Assessing the relative magnitude of the disruption and harm created by an event is important to determine the amount and type of assistance a community may need. Therefore Federal Emergency Management Agency uses several criteria to determine when a situation qualifies as a disaster. These criteria are based, among others, on the amount of homes destroyed in the event, the accessibility to necessities such as food and water, and the number of casualties (Kapucu and Özerdem 2013). In contrast to the tangibility of the FEMA criteria, the book *Theorizing Crisis Communication* argues that “from other perspectives, the question of the magnitude of a disaster is best understood as a matter of personal, community and even cultural perception.” (Sellnow and Seeger 2013 p.4)

In this thesis I will approach the declaration of disaster based on the perceptual characteristic idea presented by Sellnow and Seeger (2013) as a qualifying concept without disregarding the FEMA criteria which will serve as a guidance to quantify the magnitude of the event.

### 1.3.2 Social Media

Social media is “a collective term of ‘web.2.0.’ technologies, which are all characterized by participation, openness, conversation, communities and connectedness (Coombs, 2011 p. 21). Generally, these technologies enable conversations and interaction between users and allows them to create, react to and share content with each other. (Strander, 2011). Moreover, Strander argues that social media technologies give users the means to become information sources themselves, and make for the possibility to connect in order to share experiences, perspectives, opinions and insights with each other. In addition, Quelman (2009) explains that social media has
no time or space limits, meaning that users can generate and spread content across borders and time zones instantaneously.

However, L. Austin, B. Liu and Jin (2012) argue for the idea of social media being online based technologies, meaning that they use the internet to function. As opposed to traditional media which functions as a means of communication without the need to be connected to the internet, thus being offline.

Despite the fact that networking social media such as Facebook and Twitter receive more attention, social media include a wide range of types such as blogs, search engines, forums and video sharing sites that are of great importance in this study. (Austin et.al, 2012)

1.4 Structure
The first chapter begins with an introductory text. This short introduction presents the general subject for the thesis and the circumstances preceding the choice of subject. Following the introduction, the theoretical background of the subject, the aim and scope as well as the core questions are presented. At the end of the first chapter, some concepts and definitions are also introduced in order to facilitate further reading.

In the second chapter, theory and previous research on the subject will be presented. This part exposes previous research on topics such as motivations for the use of social media, needs and desires, competing vs collaborating media, channel complementarity theory, information seeking and the relationship between crisis and the media.

The third chapter presents the method chosen for the study justified with methodology literature. This is followed with an explanation of how the aim and scope and core questions were operationalized into the interview form and the interview template. The sample and the population for the study are described. The process to ensure a high degree of validity and
reliability, methodological problems encountered during research, as well as the ethical stance for this thesis are explained at the end of the third chapter.

The fourth chapter contains the results. In this chapter, empirical data from the interviews is presented and distributed into four main headings where the three first are empirical data related to the core questions. The final heading contains remaining information from the interviews with no apparent connection to the core questions, but otherwise interesting for the study such as reactions to the frequency of natural disasters, education and preparedness.

In the fifth chapter, empirical data for the study is analyzed and linked to previous research presented in the theory chapter. Information related to the core questions is presented first, followed by “otherwise interesting” which is also linked to the theory chapter.

The sixth chapter exposes conclusions drawn from the research and presents a discussion moment. Also presented in this section are suggestions for further research, flaws during the research study and implications for society.

The last pages comprise the bibliography, where the sources for the thesis are cited, and finally the appendices such as the interview form and the questionnaire as well as the interview manual.
2 Literature review

2.1 Motivations for the use of social media

The use of social media has increased to significantly higher levels within the majority of the population. Kelly Quinn (2016) argues that individuals use social media for an extensive array of purposes such as passing time, maintaining relationships, meeting new people, keeping up current trends, and gathering social information. As the use of social media has increased dramatically, researchers are trying to understand “how their use intersects with effects, and to identify potential impacts for relationships, social goals and valued outcomes such as privacy and sociality.” (Quinn 2016, p.61)

Most approaches to motivations and uses of social media part from the uses and gratifications theory. The uses and gratifications approach emerges from early mass communication research, and has been used to identify the reasons behind the use of new technologies such as the internet, mobile phones, email, mobile services or social media itself. (S. Lee, C. Hun Lee, 2014). The uses and gratifications approach theorizes that individuals have particular needs to use social media and they are an actively pursuing to meet those needs. Quinn (2016) explains that the term ‘uses and gratifications’ refers to the uses an individual has for utilizing a media platform and the gratifications obtained from such use. In addition, the continued use of certain medium over time, is due to the fact that the gratifications an individual is looking to obtain are strongly boosted by the gratifications produced by the medium. Additionally, Quinn (2016) explains in the study ‘Why We Share’ that media scholars have argued that there is a relationship between “the uses and gratifications that are sought from various media and the activity that takes place before, during, and after the use of such media” (Quinn, 2016 p.66).

Currently, different social media platforms are capable of transmitting several forms of information including but not limited to text, audio, video or multimedia and thus vary in the way they provide individuals with use and function. (Strander, 2011). Social media use is therefore a combination which is partly motivated by the individual’s desire to satisfy a need and
each one of the platforms’ own functionalities that can be used to fulfill that specific need. (Karahanna et.al, 2015).

Despite the constant changes and development within the field of social media, Coombs (2014) argues that a category system within crisis communication is important in order to be able to better identify functionalities, challenges and opportunities provided by the different media platforms. The listing below shows the different platforms and summarizes their characteristics as explained by Coombs (2014) in his book *Ongoing Crisis Communication*:

1. Social networks: Platforms that allow the user to share content and communicate with other users, for instance Facebook and Google plus.

2. Blogs: Blogs are online journals or diaries open for comments.

3. Topic discussion sites: These are platforms where users can share and discuss content, otherwise known as forums.

4. Content communities: Platforms that allow the user to create and comment on content such as YouTube and Instagram.

5. Microblogs: Allow for the sharing of small amounts of information in real-time. These platforms usually have a restricted amount of characters per entry. Twitter is the prime example.

### 2.1.1 Uses and functions for social media

In their research ‘Psychological Ownership: Motivation and Use of Social Media’, Karahanna et.al (2015) explain that the central concept of psychological ownership theory is a human’s inherent need to posses and an impulse to collect objects which seems to be based on true instinct. Karahanna et.al (2015, p.186) mention that “the need ‘to have’ is one of the most important categories of human existence” and despite the facts, in the psychology of possession
it’s not necessary for an individual to actually own anything to be entitled to the feeling of ownership. Psychological ownership is rather the feeling of possession and being somehow tied to an object.

Social media offers users the opportunity to generate their own content, thus “As users of social media create their own content, they devote effort into the production of social media, and in so doing, develop a feeling of ownership, that is, psychological ownership” (Karahanna et.al, 2015 p.186). Moreover, in creating content users feel participant in the expansion of a certain platform and may then develop a sense of ownership not only towards their content but rather toward the social media platform itself. Psychological ownership can then motivate the use of social media in order to satisfy the underlying needs of possession and ownership and produce a positive uplifting effect. (Karahanna et.al, 2015)

Austin et.al (2012) expose several factors that motivate the use of social media. Their research argues that the users creation of their own content is related to social functions such as the desire for relationships, helping to preserve one’s image and validate the individual’s self image to others. Some of their research suggests that motivations for the use of social media are linked to the need of connectedness, the need of self expression, and to gain knowledge to a lesser extent.

In their study ‘Exploring the Social-Mediated Crisis Communication Model’, Austin et.al (2012) conclude that other factors that motivate individuals to the use of social media include information seeking and media checking, convenience, personal fulfillment, political surveillance, social surveillance, and expression and affiliation. Individuals conveniently use social media for personal fulfillment such as gaining knowledge for utilitarian purposes and cross-referencing social or political sources in order achieve the ultimate reliable information.

In addition, Austin et.al (2012) explain the five ways in which consumers utilize social media to share their opinions. Users utilize online platforms as topic-related utilities by making a contribution to add value to the community, consumption utilities by using other members
contributions for own benefits and approval utilities by feeling satisfied when commented by others. Users also utilize online platforms as moderator utilities by helping members in lodging complaints, and homeostasis utilities by utilizing social media to maintain balance in their own lives.

Finally, Erin K. Ruppel and Stephen A. Rains (2012) explain that the Internet and the online platforms make it possible for individuals to gain personally suitable information by browsing the web or posting questions on a topic discussion site, thus offering a high degree of tailorable. In contrast, traditional media sources transmit content that has been previously configured to suit and provide information to general audiences or subgroups of those. Therefore, audiences tend to prefer the use of online based platforms. (Ruppel and Rains, 2012)

2.2 Competing media vs collaborating media

A substantial amount of research on the relationship between traditional media and new media builds upon the competition-based displacement theory, which is based on the argument that media types compete with each other for resources (Dutta-Bergman, 2004a). Functional displacement hypothesis argues that existing media, which share the same functional niche with the new medium, are more likely to experience time-displacement effects, at least among heavy users (Kanyan and Yelsma, 2000).

For instance, the studies of Kanyan and Yelsma (2000) investigated the impact of online media on other media and family communication. The data they collected to support the study indicated that time spent in television viewing, newspaper reading, telephone usage, and family conversations is indeed affected by online use.

Kanyan and Yelsma (2000) suggested that the function of a certain media in a community is to satisfy some needs among the audiences. When a new medium is introduced, it competes in that functional niche of satisfying the needs of the audience. Kanyan and Yelsma (2000) explain that when the new introduced medium serves the same functions as the old media, it can result in
either of them becoming irrelevant or secondary in meeting those needs. They conclude in their study that: “Functional displacement in this context occurs when the new resource displaces the existing resources as the primary means of meeting a need of the population.” (Kenyan and Yelsma, 2000, p.218).

This theme of competition is brought to the economics of the media landscape by McComb (1972) who argues that consumer expenses on media remain the same, resulting in a decrease in the expenses on traditional media due to the growth in new media. What McComb (1972) means is that the new media doesn’t make people spend more, but it takes a share of the resources that the audiences are already spending in media consumption.

Scholars like McComb (1972) and Kenyan and Yelsma (2000) are on one side of the spectrum. They suggest a revolution in the way people consume different media, and this alleged revolution is caused by the development of the new media ultimately leading to the death of the traditional media (Dutta-Bergman 2004a). Other media theorists (Coffey, S, Stipp, H, 1997) position themselves on the opposite side of that spectrum where scholars suggest that the change is not one of displacement, but the rise of complementary ways of viewing and receiving information. Coffey and Stipp (1997), in their paper ‘The Interactions Between Computer and Television Usage’, argue that the discussion about the impact of the new digital media on the use of the traditional media has been dominated by predictions of recession in the usage of the traditional media due to the rapidly spreading Internet usage. They report that new data in their study does not support such predictions, rather showing complementary interactions between media types. Coffey and Stipp (1997) note that there is limited data on the impact of computer usage on television, and argue the lack of good evidence for a measurable decline in television usage as a result of the online activity. The theorists go as far as to state “The research suggests that speculations about the disappearance of television should be dismissed” (p.67) and advise content providers and advertisers to further explore the interactions between the media.
In his article ‘Complementarity in Consumption of News Types Across Traditional and New Media’, Dutta-Bergman (2004a) presents the idea of media complementarity, which explores an alternative to the competition-based framework. He emphasizes the greater likelihood for online users of a particular type of content to consume similar content on traditional media. Dutta-Bergman theorizes a content-based media congruence, meaning that the audiences are going to pursue the available content in one particular area using all types of media complementarily.

This thesis will adopt an approach based on Dutta-Bergman’s (2004a) channel complementarity theory, explained in more detail in section 2.3, below, in order to study the relationship between new and traditional media. In addition, the framework will be used to identify the way in which media audiences navigate the vast array of available content in their quest for information and knowledge which in this particular case is going to be related to crisis, more specifically natural disasters.

2.3 Channel Complementarity Theory

Exploring an alternative to the traditional competition-based framework, this paper proposes the idea of media complementarity, articulating a content-based media congruence because of the greater likelihood of online users of a specific news content to consume similar content on traditional media. (Dutta-Bergman, 2004a)

Channel complementarity was developed in response to displacement-based arguments and theories (i.e Kenyan and Yelma, 2000; McComb, 1972) that advocate for the usage of old media to be overtaken by the introduction of the Internet based new media (Dutta-Bergman, 2004a). Dutta-Bergman’s (2004a) channel complementarity theory is a theoretical framework that studies the use of multiple sources during the information seeking process. The central idea of the theory is that individuals who are eager to gain information about a topic or issue will use any available source that satisfies their need of information. Dutta-Bergman (2004a p.47) noted, “people consuming one particular medium to gather information in one particular area are likely to consume other media that contain information in that specific area”.

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Even though channel complementarity draws from several theories such as niche and involvement theories (Dutta-Bergman, 2006a) it has its roots in key ideas from selective exposure theory (Dutta-Bergman, 2006a; Zillmann and Bryant, 1989) and uses and gratifications (Dutta-Bergman, 2006a; Blumler and Katz, 1974; Rubin, 1986). Selective exposure is founded on the idea that individuals are an active part of the choice of information sources, and orient their attention to specific stimuli in their environment. Dutta-Bergman defines selective exposure as “an act of choice in which an individual selects from a range of possible activities or messages” (Webster and Wakshlag, 1985; Dutta-Bergman, 2004a, p. 46). Through involvement theories, Dutta-Bergman argues that audiences keep seeking information within the subject they previously oriented themselves towards. He exemplifies with a reference to the habits of a sports fan, who is driven to read sport newspapers and perpetuates his fanatic behavior through other medium like radio or television, exposing himself to similar kinds of content.

Channel complementarity theory uses niche and gratifications theories to provide background for the understanding of why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs. Dutta-Bergman (2004a) argues that the relationship between two media forms can be understood in the context of the gratifications and gratification opportunities they offer in respect to each other. Although he argues that when using media to provide gratification for a specific need there is a possibility of overlapping, meaning that both new and old media can provide gratification to the same kind of need. There are different degrees of such overlap. Dutta-Bergman points out that when media forms overlap extensively, it causes competition between the both of them. However, he also stresses that lower levels of overlapping indicate that the media serve different needs, thus allowing them to work complementarily and leading to the central idea of Dutta-Bergman’s (2004a) channel complementarity theory.

2.4 Information seeking

Austin et.al (2012) report that in 2009, for the first time, the Internet was not only the preferred source for news among American adults, but also the one they considered to be the most reliable.
In their study ‘Exploring the Social-Mediated Crisis Communication Model’, Austin et.al (2012, p.190) explain that online sources are “ideal for generating timely communication and interactive, two-way conversations with audiences”. Austin et.al (2012) mean that though social media users have the opportunity to expand their social network, thus quickly gaining on-demand information by connecting with individuals he or she have not met in person.

Several researchers point out the way in which communication technologies play a central roll in how people interact with each other and organizations. For instance Thompson (1995) argues that, traditionally, the core of a person’s acquired knowledge and information comes from his or her own life, experiences, and education among others. Each person also is exposed to knowledge and information through the network of relationships that person has, which Thompson refers to as the periphery. With the development of the new communication technologies such as social media, this network starts becoming part of the core rather than being in the periphery, blurring the lines between knowledge boundaries. Friends in social networking sites then, represent an important and very accessible source of knowledge and experience. “Thus resulting in new alternative ways of information seeking that compete with the more traditional methods” (Thompson, 1995, p. 12-30).

Ruppel and Rains (2012 p.385) state “People seek information to add knowledge they lack or to confirm or disconfirm their current state of beliefs, and they use that information for strategic purposes.” In this day and era, a wide variety of sources such as television, radio, newspapers, friends, family and the Internet provide information during a natural disaster. Despite the amount of evidence that supports the belief that individuals are most likely utilizing several information sources at once, many researchers approach the matter solely studying factors that motivate individuals to select only one particular source from the vast array of information sources (Ruppel and Rains, 2012). Additionally, older research (i.e Coffey and Stipp, 1997; Kanyan and Yelsma, 2000; McComb, 1972) focus quantitatively on media usage and try to determine which media dominates the field within a certain period of time, and fewer studies take a qualitative approach to better understand the phenomenon.
In contrast, Dutta-Bergman (2004a), argues that in order to get a better understanding of the relationship between new and traditional media, studies should focus on the nature of the content, the characteristics of the audience, and the context within which the medium is consumed rather than trying to demonstrate homogenous patterns of media usage across the population. In addition, Dutta-Bergman (2004a) contemplates a broader information seeking process and argues for the use of several sources during this process.

Channel complementarity theory suggests that individuals who use a source for a specific function will likely use other sources that serve that same function, due to the fact that the use of a specific source is determined by the function that source serves. Furthermore, the different sources provide different information about a subject, thus serving different niches (Ruppel and Rains, 2012). Dutta-Bergman (2006a p.90) notes for example that a health-motivated consumer who is intrinsically interested in the issue of health is not only likely to read health magazines, such as Prevention and Health, but is also likely to watch health television, and surf health-related websites to gather health information.’

In his study ‘Media Use Theory and Internet Use for Health Care’, Dutta-Bergman (2006a) argues that content drives the relationship among the utilized media types and notes that “individuals are loyal to the content and use different media that serve this need for content” (Dutta-Bergman, 2006 p.90). However, he adds that the characteristics of the sources such as modality, accessibility, quality and so on may also drive complementarity as well. Ruppel and Rains (2012, p.387) explain for instance that “that the sources from which individuals seek information, and not message content, are sometimes the basis of individuals’ health information seeking decisions”.

Several researchers (i.e Ruppel and Rains, 2012; Austin et.al, 2012,) build on Dutta-Bergman's (2004a) theory of channel complementarity in order to to explain the use of multiple sources during the process of acquiring information and identify common source characteristics that
affect such complementary use. Channel complementarity theory predicts that individuals use sources with similar characteristics during an information search. Ruppel and Rains (2012 p.388) define these source characteristics as relatively constant technical features of a source. In addition, they note that “Sources are conceptualized as having multiple characteristics, with the most important characteristics of a source likely depending on the context in which the source is used.”, thus with different types of crisis, diverse characteristics may be identified for the same source.

Austin et.al (2012) report in their study ‘How Audiences Seek Out Crisis Information’ that almost all participants in their research identified convenience, credibility, personal recommendation and humor appeal among others as a reason to utilize a specific medium during a crisis. Ruppel and Rains (2012) agree that an important characteristic in source selection is convenience, meaning the level of ease in which information can be gained through a specific source (Ruppel and Rains 2012). Moreover, Dutta-Bergman (2006a) argues that the availability and convenience an individual faces while trying to gain information are factors that affect what source is utilized. Therefore, in his study ‘Media Use Theory and Internet Use for Health Care’ Dutta-Bergman (2006a) stresses the relevance of source accessibility as a factor for source complementarity. For instance, research reports evidence that individuals have the preference to seek information using the Internet and online based platforms or friends and family for its relative convenience and accessibility. In contrast, traditional media such as television is regarded as inconvenient due to its ever changing content, the lack of good archiving and the fact that its not readily accessible. In contrast to television, newspapers, books and magazines are appreciated as relatively convenient since they are time consuming sources but also well archived which makes for an easier searching process (Ruppel and Rains, 2012)

Another common characteristic for the complementary use of sources is quality. Dutta-Bergman (2006a) explains that quality can be related to the information gained from the use of the source and the proper functioning of the source itself. For instance, individuals seeking health related information may prefer sources with higher levels of access to medical expertise. Other factors
Finally, given the importance of finding suitable information for an individuals unique situation, Ruppel and Rains (2012) argue that tailorbility is possibly a characteristic that makes for the complementary use of specific sources. Social networks, topic discussion sites, friends and family provide the opportunity for two-way communication offering the possibility to tailor the information to one specific individual, thus being preferred sources. (Ruppel and Rains (2012)

2.4.1 Crisis and the media

In their study ‘Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans?’, Procopio and Procopio (2007) investigated Internet communication and use in a crisis situation such as Hurricane Katrina. The findings revealed that the audience’s use of social media increases substantially during a crisis situation, and the research points out that in certain situations individuals tend to perceive social media as a more credible source than other traditional media. For instance, Austin et.al (2012) argues that blog users perceive blogs as the most reliable source of information.

Research shows that individuals utilize social media during a crisis for several reasons. In their study ‘How Audiences Seek Out Crisis Information’, Austin et.al 2012 explain that audiences turn to social media because “they provide an unfiltered up-to-date line of communication”. Social media offers users the opportunity to generate their own content (Karahanna et.al, 2015), thus providing audiences with the opportunity of getting first hand information they wouldn't be able to get anywhere else (Austin et.al, 2012). Tengku et.al (2015) agree that social media presents an alternative or backchannel tool to share and communicate information about natural disasters.

During events such as floods, tornados or hurricanes maintaining the flow of communication is important to help alleviate stress and provide support. Social media has become an important real-time communication channel during natural disasters and has risen as an opportunity to
share crucial information to help deal with such terrible events (Tengku et al., 2015). Austin et al. (2012) argue that social media represents a new platform for word-of-mouth communication, acting as an informal communication channel that gives audiences the possibility to share information instantaneously.

Prorcopio and Procopio (2007) conclude in their study that the Internet is used during a crisis to make contact with both individuals’ social networks. Furthermore, the study showed that individuals reached out to familial, social, geographic and school related networks regardless of the strength of their ties. Procopio and Procopio (2007 p.77) note that: “half of the respondents used the Internet to contact people they had not contacted for over a year”. Moreover, personal involvement presents itself as another reason for media use during a crisis. Individuals who had friends or family involved in a crisis or were experiencing the crisis themselves were more prone to media consumption (Austin et al., 2012). In addition, Dutta-Bergman (2004a) explains for instance that individuals that called family members after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States were more likely to seek out further interpersonal communication utilizing online platforms.

Part of the reason individuals turn to social media in time of distress is to assess risk and augment the knowledge of the situation, thus minimizing uncertainties surrounding the event (Tengku et al., 2015). In their study ‘Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans?’, Procopio and Procopio (2007) explain that audiences did not only use the internet to reduce uncertainty by gathering information such as property damage and the status of their friends and family, but they also rated it as important to contribute to spreading information themselves to help the community.

Finally, Coombs (2011) argues that some platforms are going to be more relevant than others during a crisis such as a natural disaster event. For instance, during Hurricane Katrina, hometown websites were rated as the most informative online source. Individuals sought information regarding their own neighborhoods on platforms offering related content and
preferred interactive sources of information as opposed to one-way communication sources (Procopio and Procopio (2007)).

2.5 Summary

*Below is a summary of the theory and previous research chapter where theories relevant to this study are highlighted.*

Disasters are sudden events, such as an accident or natural catastrophe, that cause great damage. These events disrupt routines of systems and require new courses of action to cope with the disruption. In addition, disasters are large in scale, require response from multiple governmental units and pose danger to values and social goals.

The majority of modern researchers suggest that the change caused by the introduction of new media is not one of displacement as it was previously proposed. Instead, they advise about the rise of complementary ways of viewing and receiving information. They advocate for the relevance of channel complementarity theory which is a theoretical framework that studies the use of multiple sources during the information seeking process. The central idea of the theory is that individuals who are eager to gain information about a topic or issue will use any available source that satisfies their need of information, thus utilizing different sources complementarily. The theory emphasizes the greater likelihood for online users of a particular type of content to consume similar content on traditional media. Scholars agree, therefore, that content drives the relationship among the utilized media types, and conclude that individuals are loyal to the content and use different media that serve this need for it.

Additionally, the characteristics of the sources such as modality, accessibility, quality and tailorability among others, are considered to drive complementarity as well. Researchers define these characteristics as the technical features of a source, and have tried to identify further common source characteristics that affect such complementarity. Moreover, scholars conclude that sources have multiple characteristics, and the most important characteristic of a source
depends on the context in which the source is used. Thus with different types of crises, diverse characteristics may be identified for the same source.

Finally, previous research reveals that some platforms are going to be more relevant than others during a crisis such as a natural disaster event. Findings in previous research revealed that the audiences use of social media increases substantially during a crisis and showed that individuals utilize social media during a crisis for several reasons. Additional research suggests the audiences turn to social media because it provides an unfiltered up-to-date line of communication and offers users the opportunity to generate their own content. Thus, social media provides audiences with the opportunity of getting first hand information they wouldn't be able to get anywhere else. Scholars agree that social media presents an alternative or backchannel tool to share and communicate information about natural disasters, and point out that in certain situations individuals tend to perceive social media as a more credible source than other traditional media.
3 Methodology

3.1 Method discussion

Most of the studies represented in this thesis (i.e Kanyan and Yelsma, 2000; Coffey and Stipp, 1997; McComb, 1972) focus quantitatively on media usage and try to determine which media dominates the field within a certain period of time. These studies barely scratch the surface of a very deep matter, merely presenting the scores on the leader board. This thesis researches not how crisis communication reaches out to audiences, but how audiences make their way to crisis-related content. Furthermore, this thesis takes an in-depth approach into how audiences navigate the abundant flow of mediated information, and tries to define the patterns in which different kinds of media are used complementarily.

Since this thesis is not trying to gauge medium dominance, but rather mapping and understanding its complimentary use by the audience, it is appropriate to use a qualitative method. Through a set of semi-structured and in-depth interviews, this research will try to determinate how media channels are used complementarily, what factors contribute to the choice of media and to such complementarity, and if possible in what order they are utilized.

The use of interviews as a method ties in with Kvale's (1997) view on qualitative methodology. Kvale (1997) clarifies that research interviews are based on the conversations of everyday life. They are conversations with structure and purpose but predefined and controlled by the researcher. Kvale (1997) means that with qualitative research interviews the researcher tries to understand an idea from the subject’s point of view, intending to uncover the meaning of their experiences. He explains that interviews allow people to convey to others a situation from their own perspective and in their own words. Larsson (2010 p.58) expresses similar opinions in his book Metoder i Kommunikationsvetenskap. He states that, with the use of interviews “We try to reach nuanced descriptions from the different parts of a person’s reality, preferably descriptions of specific situations or actions”.

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Even Trost (2010) points out that interviews are preferable when trying to answer the question "how" rather than "why". He explains that when the purpose is to try to understand people’s reasoning or to distinguish patterns in their mannerisms, interviews are a reasonable method. Therefore, the conclusion of using a qualitative method such as interviews should be appropriate for trying to understand the audiences’ experiences in the subject of this thesis.

This thesis doesn’t completely ignore previous researchers’ quantitative methods, but it rather uses them as an inspiration to outline a short survey to complement the interviews (refer to addendum 1, Interview Survey, p.79). Said survey aims towards giving the interviewer an overview of the subjects’ media usage in terms of quantity, and the subjects’ perception of their particular uses for a certain medium. It also determines the subjects’ distance to the crisis and provides areas of interest for further questioning, such as their involvement in different natural disasters during the interview. This contributes to a more controlled environment during the interviews and less intervention from the interviewer to endure the conversation. Also, knowing the relationship of the subject to a crisis in advance, provides the interviewer the opportunity to approach the matter with the highest level of sensitivity (Kvale, 1997).

Some of the questions used in the survey derive from questions Kanyan and Yelsma (2000) and Coffey and Stipp (1997) formulated in their research, in order to determinate media displacement effects. The questions have however been modified to adapt to the purpose of this thesis.

As opposed to Kanyan and Yelsma (2000) comparing the respondents’ quantitative media usage with each other, this thesis will use interviews to study how different media are used by audiences and the roll media plays within the topic of crisis communication.

The interviews are composed of two different parts. The first part consists of general questions regarding family location, current and previous places of residence, occupation and personal interests. These did not only serve as control questions when comparing respondents to each other, but they also provided an overview of the subjects’ immediate network as well as its
location. The information gathered from the general questions was useful further on during the interview process when transportation needs and personal interests were addressed. The second part of the interview started with a brief description of the thesis. It was explained to the respondents that the aim of the study was to determine how audiences use different media channels complementarily to get information about natural disasters and the factors affecting such complementarity. It was then clarified that within the subject of media studies there is a theory called channel complementarity theory, which is the core of the thesis. The concept was then briefly explained and clarified as needed. Following the explanations, the respondent was asked if he could think of a time when he or someone close to him had been involved in a natural disaster, and what was their reaction. The interview went on with questions regarding different ways in which the subject acquired information and stayed in tune with what was going on around him or the people involved (refer to Interview Template, addendum 2).

During the course of the interview, the subjects were asked to rank the succession of the media used during a specific time span to the best of their knowledge. Also, the interview questionnaire was used and referred to throughout the whole process to compare, contrast, and develop the respondents’ explanations.

All interviews without exception were conducted face-to-face at a location of the respondents’ choice. The recording has been conducted with the help of the voice memo function on a mobile phone. Also, whenever interesting material appeared, notes were taken in order to question the respondent later on.

3.2 Operationalizing

For the operationalizing process of the thesis, the aim and scope marked the beginning point with the help of the core questions. It was then followed by a review of what previous research in the field had to say when formatting their interviews and surveys (i.e Kenyan and Yelsma, 2000; Dutta-Bergman, 2004a; Procopio and Procopio, 2007; Austin et.al, 2012 ).

The core questions this study parts from are:
• How are media channels used in order to gain information during a natural disaster?
• What factors contribute to the choice of media type and lead to channel complementarity during a natural disaster?
• What is the succession of information sources during the course of the natural disaster?

The use of some of the previous research as an inspiration source on how to form the survey for this thesis proved to be of little help. Due to the fact that most of the previous research (i.e Kanyan and Yelsma, 2000; Procopio and Procopio, 2007; Ruppel and Rains 2012; Austin et.al, 2012) focused quantitatively on media usage and most of the methods utilized in such studies were surveys used to gauge different statistical data on media usage, source preference and the effects of crisis communication. However, these quantitative studies provided an idea to outline a short interview survey to complement the interviews. Said survey aims towards giving the interviewer an overview of the subjects’ media usage in terms of quantity and the subjects’ perception of their particular uses for a certain medium previous to the disaster. That helped provide some contrast while investigating the factors that motivated individuals to utilize specific channels during a natural disaster. The questionnaire also helped determine the subjects’ distance to the crisis in order to approach the matter with the necessary sensitivity, and it provided areas of interest for further questioning during the interview.

Other researchers such as Austin et.al (2012) and Karahanna et.al (2015) provided a general idea on how to formulate some of the interview questions and served as a guideline on how to conduct the study. The interview guide asked three open-ended questions; each one of the questions posing a different perspective to the crisis. Participants were asked to explain a natural disaster they had personally been involved in, a natural disaster friends or relatives had been involved in, and finally a natural disaster somewhere else in the world they were aware of. Additionally, specific questions related to the research questions were then asked in order to gain specific information such as how they first heard about the crisis, what led them to use specific media outlets, and the order in which they utilized different media sources to gain information.
For example, if interviewees noted using Facebook, they were asked ”What do you think led you to use Facebook?” and “Did you always use that source of information?”.

Finally, in order to determine what factors contribute to the choice of specific media channels and the chronological order of their use, it proved useful to expose interviewees to a set of examples based on possible scenarios during a natural disaster and were encouraged to relate to them. These scenarios were predesigned and meant to fill up gaps in the subjects narrative and keep the conversation on topic after the subject perceived to be done talking.

3.3 Population for the study

Individuals were invited to participate in the study through convenient and purposive means at an area close to the University of West Florida in the city of Pensacola. Personal contacts were utilized to recruit college students aged 18-25 due to demographical characteristics which are relevant for the study. Austin et.al (2012) explains that despite the increasing use of social media by adults, young adults including college students are the demographic that more frequently uses social media. In fact, young adults are trend setters in society, meaning that their social media use affects the way the rest of the population views the use of such technologies.

Some individuals turned the interview down due to the fact that they didn't perceive themselves as having any relevant experience in the matter or simply because they didn't have time, thus causing an uneven distribution of gender. Ruppel and Rains (2012) argue that gender doesn't make for a noticeable difference in the use of social media among the population. In addition, some of the individuals that turned down the interview recommended other prospects whom they considered more suitable for the interviews which is known as the snowball effect. (Larsson 2010)

A total of 12 individuals participated in the in-depth interviews in November 2015. The interviews lasted an average of 51.1 minutes and ranged from 36-59 minutes. The interviewing process stopped when the main themes proposed in the aim and scope were identified and the
information presented depth and variation (Kvale 2010). All interviews were recorded using a phone’s recording application and were later fully transcribed with the exception of long pauses and meaningless filler word repetition. After the interviews, participants were asked if they could think of future prospects for the interviews. In most cases that generated positive responses which also belongs to the snowball effect. Furthermore, Larsson (2010) explains that interviewers shouldn't fear asking their participants for tips on prospects for their studies, but they should instead be encouraged to do so, which in turn can theoretically increase the study’s validity because of the insight interviewees may have in the subject.

3.4 Validity and reliability

When proceeding with any kind of research, it is important to ensure it holds a high degree of validity and reliability. It is crucial for the study to research what it proposes and that the data is processed in the correct way (Larsson 2010). Other researchers like Østbye (2004) argue that a study must be well formulated in order for it to be perceived as valid. This study provides answers to the formulated core questions, that were operationalized into variables, with the help of a survey in-depth interviews thus achieving the necessary standards for validity. The study offers insight on what factors contribute to the choice of specific information sources for a particular use, and presents answers to the way audiences utilize different media channels complementarily to seek information during a natural disaster. Furthermore, the use of the survey to aid complete the interviews is the combination of two research methods that’s considered triangulating which strengthens the study’s validity level (Larsson, 2010).

During the data collection process exhaustive answers were achieved, and a correct amount of information was considered to be obtained when themes, patterns and behaviors reappeared in several respondents. Therefore, a conclusive fact drawn from this study is that the participants selected for the research were in fact, as Larsson (2010) describes, the right people. In contrast, it would have been difficult to obtain a complete saturation of information due to the fact that the natural disasters provided by the participants differed widely between each other, thus constantly bringing new information to the table that was specific to one and each.
However, the study answered the research questions and exposed unexpected and useful information beyond that.

Reliability refers to authenticity and trustworthiness which is the correct way of collecting and managing empirical data (Larsson, 2010). To reach a high degree of reliability all interviews were recorded using a phone’s recording application and were later transcribed word for word. The questionnaires were also collected and archived to be later reviewed together with the rest of the data. This eased the analysis process by having immediate access to both sources and increased the degree of reliability as well.

3.5 Methodological problems

A few shortcomings and issues that can be perceived as problems appeared during the data assembling process, they will be therefore presented in this section.

This essay used a qualitative method consisting of twelve semi-structured interviews. The problem that this method poses is that the results can't be generalized as, for instance, with a quantitative questionnaire-type survey. The results can’t be established as valid for everyone due to the fact that the information extracted from the respondents merely gives a representation of their specific experiences. In spite of this, Kvale (1997) explains the possibility of analytical generalization, meaning that the results from the study can be relatable to people in the same situation.

The location for some of the interviews can also be discussed or considered problematic, as the procedure was to let the prospects chose the location for the meetings. Trost (2010) explains that allowing the respondents to chose where they want to be interviewed can be perceived as a kind gesture towards someone that just agreed to an interview. The respondent has the chance to chose a place where he/she feels comfortable, thus giving the respondent a safe place to talk about dramatic events in his life such as natural disasters. This is congruent with Trost (2010) who in his book Kvalitativa Intervjuer remarks the importance of providing a friendly environment for
the interviewees. However, some respondents choose places that weren't ideal to conduct the interviews. In some cases, the interviews were conducted in places such as public spaces at the university or eateries near by the respondents' home or workplace. This caused issues such as noise in the recordings and distractions that could have been avoided by being somewhere more private. The worst location two of the interviews were conducted in was at the actual workplace of the respondents. A highly trafficked area with loud noises, loudspeakers and constant interruptions that made the transcription as difficult as the interview itself. This could have been avoided by taking the initiative and ask to be moved somewhere else more quiet or postpone the interview until the interviewee had more available time off.

Further problems resulted from one of the interviews at the workplace. Due to the interruptions, technical difficulties with the use of the recording device arose and the end results were less than satisfactory. With less than ten minutes worth of recording, that interview was considered infructuous and the results were therefore discarded. Avoiding this would have been possible by again relocating, postponing the interview or terminating and finding another available prospect.

Interruptions appeared regardless of the location in the form of text messages or phone calls. It is understandable that respondents are busy and have to interrupt their everyday lives to attend the interviews. However, these instances became interruptions to the interview, a distraction for the interviewee and disruptions in the recording. Ideally, this problem should have been avoided by simply asking the respondents to turn their cellphones of prior to the interview.

The sensitivity of the subject made for some minor uncomfortable situations and sometimes prevented the interviewer to obtain complete answers. Respondents were perceived as having a low level of trust, and weren't able to get over the fact that they were talking about emotionally sensitive parts of their lives with a stranger. These issues were eventually overcome with the use of alternative word choices, a different tone of voice and gestures in order to be perceived as approachable and create an atmosphere of trust. However, they could have been avoided altogether by, for instance, scheduling the interviews slightly earlier. Sharing a cup of coffee or
lunch prior to the interview would have offered the chance to learn to know each other and steer clear of mistrust.

Another problem encountered prior to the data assembling process, was the lack of studies within the subject where conducting interviews was used as the research method. Therefore, it wasn't possible to refer to previous research in order to find help when problems occurred during the interviewing process. Despite this, similar research in the subject conducted with surveys and other various quantitative methods provided help in the operationalizing of the research. Furthermore, ideas extracted from older research provided a good foundation for the interview survey previous to the interview (refer to addendum 1, Interview Survey, p.79) and even helped redefine some of the questions asked during the interviews themselves.

A subject that may open for discussion is the different backgrounds of the respondents. It was made obvious that the level of education, self-awareness, financial resources, responsibilities and overall independence of the individuals interviewed greatly affected the answers. It was noticeable for instance that individuals with an overall higher level of responsibility and independence produced better information due to the fact that they perceived natural disasters as a bigger threat to their life styles. As a counterpart, individuals who were financially aided by parents and family, lived with other members of their family or utilized university housing facilities had a lower level of interest and awareness of the situation, and perceived natural disasters in a more anecdotic way rather than life threatening events. Furthermore, the younger individuals with a low level of independence interviewed would mostly rely on the older people they were dependent on to obtain information about the natural disasters. Therefore, even though the requirements for the recruiting of the prospects were correct and strictly applied, the different backgrounds within the population can cause the operationalizing process to be argued. This problem could have been somewhat reduced by narrowing the requirements to students who owned or rented housing outside of the university, had a certain level of financial independence or possessed a specific amount of assets that would make them care intrinsically about the situation.
A problem caused by the different background of the participants was the phrasing of a question during the interviews. This question was aimed to the individuals who had assets that could be endangered by the threat of a natural disaster. This was meant to develop into a conversation regarding the use of media channels to forecast the event, but instead, the question was vaguely answered or totally dismissed by some of the respondents due to the fact that the respondent did not own assets so the question could not be applied to him or her. The question was therefore rephrased to fit the situation of individuals who didn't own relevant assets, didn't have many responsibilities or simply didn't have physical reasons to make them worry about prevention.

Moreover, even though leading questions were actively avoided, several examples about natural disaster situations were provided during the interview. These examples may have slightly affected the respondents answers due to the fact that they were provided in order to focus the interview on relevant topics. It was shown that when questions were too open and lacked exemplification, the respondents were prone to misunderstandings and would therefore ask questions back or they would simply provide information excessively unrelated to the topic. A further problem regarding interview questions was the fact that some questions were strongly interrelated, meaning that the same things were asked over and over again in several different ways in order to get related information. That might have caused the respondents to somewhat produce answers directed to satisfy the repetitive questions asked by the interviewer.

Finally, additional problems resulted from the attitude of several respondents towards the natural disaster situations experienced. Most of the respondents happen to have been involved in several natural disaster episodes, due to the fact that they live in areas that are constantly subjected to them. It was evident during the interviews that living in an area exposed to a specific kind of weather patterns causes individuals to adjust their priorities and get used to the fact that, every now and then, they'll encounter an incoming natural disaster. This was shown through nonchalant answers that contained almost no relevant information and were merely anecdotal stories about the way the respondent didn't fear the events. Gaining depth on the relevant use of media was
therefore made extremely difficult due to the fact that most of the answers would dismiss
questions regarding preventive actions, reactive actions, and consequences of the disaster in
general. Surpassing this stage during the interviews became time consuming and left the
interviewer with less time to focus on important factors for the study. However, these incidents
were approached by simply explaining the fact that the study is meant to make use of
experienced individuals’ information, thus implying the need of humbleness in order to provide
help to others.

3.6 Research ethics

Upon the first contact with the respondents and after a proper introduction, regardless of it being
over the phone or through an email, the prospects were informed about the subject of the study
and the relationship of the same to the course MKV III as a C-Uppsats.

A letter of intent was attached to the survey questionnaire that was sent to each participant in
advance to the interview (refer to addendum 1, Interview Survey, p.79). This letter of intent
presented myself and the study, informed the prospect that the interview would be recorded and
noted that all respondents would be kept anonymous in addition to any other individuals named
during the process. All these facts were then reviewed right before the interview and the
prospects had the chance to accept or refuse participating in the study.

Leading questions were actively avoided during the interviews in order to minimize the impact
of the interviewer on the answers given by the interviewees. In addition, maintaining an
emotionally neutral approach was key in order to establish a comforting relationship and avoid
emotionally loaded answers. The importance of a comfort zone for the interviewee, regardless of
its importance for the study, was especially relevant because of the sensitivity of the subject
which usually brought up topics such as family, health, destruction of propriety or even death.
Respondents were therefore informed that they could pause the interview and leave the room at
any point of time to later be resumed, or simply conclude the process completely and
definitively. Despite all the previous concerns, interviewees didn't perceive the anonymity factor as an issue and all interviews were conducted without any major incidents.
4 Results

After all the interviews were conducted and transcribed, they were then color-coded by dividing the responses of the interviewees in different colors, each one representing a recurring topic. First and foremost the research questions were given a color each. Secondly, recurrent topics within the category were given a color each. In addition, other frequent topics of interest were color-coded as well and later placed in the category otherwise of interest. Finally, after the material categorization, the respondents’ answers were compared to each other and with previous research. The results of the process are presented below category by category.

4. 1 How are media channels used in order to get information during a natural disaster?

During the interviews the respondents were asked to explain their personal experiences with different kinds of natural disasters and different related examples. They were then asked to go in depth about the ways they used different media channels to get the specific information they were seeking. From the responses, six different categories with recurrent subjects that somehow had been important for the respondents and linked the use of several media channel were created. These six categories are presented below together with purposely chosen extracts from the interviews. The focus lies on presenting how media channels were used together during the circumstances of a natural disaster of any kind.

4.1.1 Channel complementarity

The data collected during the interviews made clear that all respondents without exception utilized several media channels combined at different points in time or simultaneously. Respondent 3 expressed that when in need of information during the natural disaster he would use multiple media channels in order to obtain a variety of perspectives on the same topic. Additionally, Respondent 5 made clear that she was driven by her interest on the content to expand the information obtained from the radio about the BP oil spill disaster. She utilized several platforms such as official websites and social networking sites as soon as she had the opportunity to get Internet connection.
Well I first heard about it through NPR (National Public Radio) because they had a special about it. Then I read it on the app. I read the article. Because it’s proving to be a serious environmental issue. And because I studied environmental stuff and I’m looking to get an environmental job, I um had a special interest in that.

(Respondent 5)

Focusing on the information needed instead of the information offered was also emphasized by Respondent 11 who stresses that he used several sources of information and then picks the best from each one of them.

You obviously hear about what’s going on a little bit everywhere. That’s like what everybody is talking about of course. To be honest though sometimes people need to do some research and that’s what I do. You can’t go believing everything you hear so I read different like news sites and stuff and I look at what people say on the Internet, then I just pick what interests me.

(Respondent 11)

Another aspect was shown by Respondent 5 regarding the preference for a specific source regardless of the channel. She explained that the characteristics of the source were appealing to her and the way the content is transmitted didn't matter too much. Respondent 5 answered the following when questioned about her exclusive use of a certain source through different media channels:

National Public Radio. But yea it’s nice because you can go to the app. You hear it on the radio and then you can go onto the app and look up more articles about it. You can do more research, and I can just stay in my NPR world and never leave.

(Respondent 5)
4.1.2 Broad and narrow perspectives

Most of the respondents explained their actions when navigating different media by emphasizing how, the more media channels they combined, the better and more complete picture they got of the situation. The results from the interviews suggest that traditional media channels such as radio and television are used in order to obtain the broader perspective during a natural disaster event. As a contrast, most respondents would use social media like Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat to gather a more in-depth view of the situation or a narrow perspective.

Respondent 4 explained how during the floods she was gathering small bits and pieces from her personal network through different kinds of social media. That gave her an idea of how bad the situation was and decided to turn on the TV and go online to get the bigger picture.

I mean we were using it (Snapchat) to see what other people were doing. Just because at the time it was just like entertainment. That was basically like when we started finding out that the roads were starting to get washed out […] It made me realize how bad the storm was, because at first I didn’t realize it was that bad. Then I went to watch the Weather Channel on tv and I saw that it was like one of the worst storms in Pensacola that ever happened.

(Respondent 4)

However, Respondent 5 and 3 went the other way around. They first came in contact with the situation through radio and television respectively, giving them a broad perspective on the situation. Both of them moved on thereafter to social media to get more details and specifics about the natural disasters.

Respondent 5 stated:

And then really it was all over Facebook. You would see a bunch of pictures of local people. They would post pictures of stuff that was happening. It was crazy, a lot of
people’s houses and apartments were getting flooded and a lot of cars getting stuck in the middle of the road with water up to the doors. So Facebook was is where I saw a lot of the details of what was actually happening.

(Respondent 5)

Regardless of the way respondents came into contact with the information, they all felt the need of gathering information from different sources to complete the full story. Respondents that gained a general view through traditional media outlets at first, wanted the details later on through social media. On the other hand, respondents that had accessed the issue through specific details with the use of social media wanted to access the general point of view through other media outlets as well. By combining all possible media outlets which introduced different perspectives, they gathered an idea of the natural disaster as a whole.

4.1.3 Medium transitioning and compatibility

The data collected during the interviews made clear that all respondents without exception utilized several media channels combined at different points in time or simultaneously. The results from the interviews suggest that the use of different media channels simultaneously or continuously depends on the compatibility and the transitioning capacities respectively. In other words, Respondent 3 made obvious the compatibility between listening to the Radio and browsing social media as opposed to how physical difficult it would be to watch Television and watch a video on Youtube.

Respondent 6 explained how the user interfaces in social media made for seamless transitions between media channels.

The one thing I like is when I’m reading a post on Facebook and it has a link to an article. Sometimes even articles have links to articles. And then Facebook. And it goes round. You can just keep clicking and see different information but it’s still related i guess. (Respondent 6)
4.1.4 Sharing and connecting

Data collected through the survey pre-interview showed that participants share content, connect and interact with friends, family and the world on a daily basis using mostly, but not exclusively, social media. The results of the interviews suggested that respondents connect with their network in different ways. Some interactions are direct while some others are more vague. For instance, Respondent 5 admitted calling her mother sporadically while Respondent 7 stated:

I usually just post like a picture of me on the beach and everybody knows I'm fine, they know I'm living the life.

(Respondent 5)

All respondents admitted that during a natural disaster it’s even more important for them to stay connected as much as possible. The data collected showed that respondents would prefer to directly contact their closest part of the network using typically their cellphones, but as a contrast, they were prone to utilize social media to update the more distant parts of the network.

Another way respondents stayed connected during a natural disaster was sharing content through social media. Some respondents reported to share content as a direct type of connection with someone in their network. Respondent 7 noted:

A friend of mine shared my status on somebody else's like profile […] well I know who she is, I mean I know I've seen her but we are not friends on Facebook so I don't really know her. […] I guess - - - - - was just trying to let her know how bad it looked out there.

(Respondent 7)
As a contrast, other respondents would use social media to share content on their own profiles for different reasons. Respondent 9 explained that she shared content through Instagram with no specific recipient. She argued that she uses the platform to share content with the world, her followers and herself. Respondent 9 stated:

I use my Instagram to post all kinds of pictures. I use it as a photography album for myself, it’s my little corner on Insta but also I want people to say ‘did you see that picture on Instagram?’ and then I can be like ‘yeah, thats me, it’s my album!’

(Respondent 9)

Finally, commenting on social media content was proven to be a way of staying connected while the natural disaster was going on. Some respondents like Respondent 6 would comment on friends content to start a brief conversation and check on them. However, other respondents like for instance Respondent 3 felt the need to comment on content he possessed first-hand knowledge about and he perceived to be erroneous.

I comment all the time, to explain the situation from your point of view. […] it depends, if people are saying stupid stuff or stuff thats just wrong, or being , you know, getting on my nerves, then I comment to make things straight.

(Respondent 3)

4.2 What factors contribute to the choice of media type and lead to channel complementarity during a natural disaster?

This second question plays onto the first question explained above. After the respondents explained how different media were used, we tried together to get some more depth to the matter. The respondents either freely explained what factors pushed them to use a specific medium or they were asked to do so. Again, the results of the interviews called for six different categories with recurrent subjects or similar topics.
4.2.1 Accessibility

Accessibility became quickly a recurring subject during the interviews. Most participants made clear that factors such as how accessible, easy to use, convenient or inconvenient information sources were had a big impact on the preferred choice of media. Another more obvious reason for choosing a specific kind of media instead of another during the course of a natural disaster is the availability of the medium itself. In several occasions, respondents referred to times when certain media wouldn’t be available due to the disaster.

Respondent 3 explains a situation where the only accessible kind of media were the radio and media outlets accessible through his cellphone:

I was out back then and me and my family was on the road because we was coming from church that night. We couldn’t get to the house […] so we had to just sit at a CVS (store) parking lot and wait. […] In that particular case it was all social media like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and websites. But mostly internet based because I wasn’t at home to watch TV or nothing like that, because I was stranded.

(Respondent 3)

Respondent 1 also relates to the situation of having limited sources of information and explains that:

Luckily your cell phone it’s not hooked up to a landline you know what I mean so if the power does go out you still have your cell phone you still have access to the Internet.

(Respondent 1)

Respondent 3 added that the radio in the car was also used in that particular instance and explains that he only used online media for a short period of time due to the cellphone’s battery
life. The situation left him and his family with the radio as the only information source which he didn’t consider too convenient.

It was on the background kind of, but you know, they won’t say nothing new. you are seeing it. You wait and wait and then they say something about the flood and then it’s gone and they be talking about other stuff or play music instead.

(Respondent 3)

The inconvenience of not being able to get the information needed at the exact time that it was needed was also noted by respondent 5. She explains that:

I really didn’t want to waste any time on tv because it would have taken forever to learn anything about it, the radio wouldn’t have anything, so I would probably try and do a quick online search before I left.

(Respondent 5)

Another respondent explains a situation where she had to replace a more convenient medium due to the failure of a device.

During the hurricane the TV wasn’t working so we couldn’t see the images from the news… so we had to listen to the radio to figure out what was going on and make a mental image.

(Respondent 4)

Respondent 4 expressed the importance of visual references in order to better understand the situation qualifying the lack of such as inconvenient. She noted that:

Well, the time when the storm stopped, cable was able to come back on. Then we could really see what was going on. It was quite inconvenient not being able to just glare at the
television and not have to really imagine what was happening so it was nice when it did come back.

(Respondent 4)

Convenience was brought up in several other ways such as the automatic messages sent by certain applications, emails sent by third parties or the use of media channels that require a low level of involvement. Respondent 7 and Respondent 5 for instance, both reported to have gotten warnings from applications previously installed on their cellphones. Respondent 5 talked about the importance of being able to multitask while getting important information.

I got notifications on my phone from the weather channel app and the other radar app that I have... and it was like ‘flash flooding!’… and then I looked on the radar and it was just all red.

(Respondent 7)

The questionnaire previous to the interview revealed that Respondent 7 was an avid user of email communications in relation to her school. Additionally, she answered as follows when asked to explain how she got to know that school was canceled:

*I got emails from school telling me that it was canceled. It was nice because I didn't have to worry about looking it up. I just woke up, saw the emails and went back to bed.*

(Respondent 7)

Respondent 5 explained her multitasking experience while driving back from school and trying to figure out what roads were available for her to drive on. She made clear the importance of this characteristic, remarking how unsafe it is to use a cellular device while driving.

I was actually coming home from school to our apartment and it was raining like crazy. And on the radio I was hearing where different roads and bridges were being closed.
The Pace Bridge was actually closed, and I was hearing that on the radio. And you know you can't be using your phone and driving.

(Respondent 5)

Easiness of use and accessibility was also mentioned by several of the interviewees. Having the ability to continue consuming information with as little effort as a click of a mouse, or having access to multiple media outlets with the use of one specific platform were also determinant factors for many respondents.

I mean headlines pop up majority of time, I will kind of click to see what is going on... because I don't want to be in the dark. Specially when people are going to be talking about it. But I definitively click on it because it's there, it's easy. I can follow the trending topic and it will keep showing me related news.

(Respondent 3)

As opposed, other media platforms lacking easiness of use, accessibility or the overall ease to control the information acquired were regarded as less convenient by most of the respondents and, therefore, were used to a lesser extent.

I also saw it on the news papers because it was big. but I didn't read it... I just saw the first page... I don't have patience to read the newspaper it literally takes me so much time.... so I would you know see it on Facebook. My family would post pics there and so on.

(Respondent 7)

Finally, the ability to not only acquire information but to contact friends and family through one and the same platform seemed to be relevant for many of the interviewees. The ease with which an individual can create a generic message, and the amount of people that can be reached out in their network played an important roll in their platform choice. Additionally, social media
surveillance provided information about the status of friends and family without the need to interact.

I didn’t call everybody and make sure they were okay. I guess that shows something about my level of friendship (laugh). But I did check on Facebook to see if everybody was ok. It wasn't too nice but it was convenient.

(Respondent 5)

4.2.2 Quality
In regards to quality of information, Respondent 8 explains his experience while trying to determine if it was necessary to evacuate for an incoming hurricane or if it could be avoided. He details the frustration created by the overload of information in certain media channels and explains that the amount of information provided doesn't equate to the quality he is looking for. He finally found some quality information in websites such as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and his residing county’s official site. Respondent 8 answered as follows when he was questioned about the source that provided the best information during what ended up being tropical storm Karen.

You would think that social media would be the place to go, but in reality it was a cluster f**k. People don't care about helping none, they just want to post pictures and look cool. […] Television and radio were also all over the place. I remember watching the news at the dive shop and thinking ‘can someone just tell me if I have to take off or not?’ […] in the end the best place to check on stuff like that was NOAA’s website and Escambia County’s website.

(Respondent 8)

Respondent 7 disagreed with the qualities of the NOAA website as a source and preferred the Weather Channel in any of its platforms. However she ultimately sought information from an application on her cellphone called Storm.
I don't go to NOAA for the weather I use it more for like the tides stuff. But for my weather I use the Weather Channel either cable-wise or on my phone and I also use this app called Storm on my cell phone which is way more accurate than the Weather Channel.

(Respondent 7)

In addition to the matter, Respondent 3 explained his thoughts about television and radio content, and his preference for the internet in general as a platform.

I mean tv they may or may not even talk about it you know, something going on in my area you know, like I feel like you get a lot better information off the internet for that.

(Respondent 3)

There is more topic to discuss on the internet. Cause on tv they control what we want to talk about. They may not even want to talk about it, but on the internet… something is going on then you can find some kind of information like some kind of blog or something or somebody is talking about it. More people talk about more diverse parts of the same thing, it's just better.

(Respondent 3)

Besides the quality of the information, interviewees showed appreciation for the quality of the platform itself. For instance, Respondent 7 enjoys hearing her parents voice over the phone and prioritizes multimedia platforms over plain text messaging because she explains an image is worth more than a thousand words. Meaning that some of the respondents perceive certain platforms as of better quality due to their multimedia capacities.
I guess because it’s more of a visual type thing, and you can actually visualize the things. If someone texts you ‘this is happening’ and then you are like ‘oh ok I can kind of picture it’, but if you are on fb you are like ‘holy crap that really did happened’. That’s proof that that did happened.

(Respondent 7)

Respondent 7 also states that while in a natural disaster she feels comforted by the voices of her family members.

I like to talk to my parents on the phone and I like to hear their voice.

(Respondent 7)

The survey previous to the interviews also showed that Respondent 2 consumes a high amount of news through television and that pattern didn't change during the natural disaster event because of her screen size preferences.

[… because I do like the tv because it's a lot bigger screen than a computer screen, so if I can I like to watch it on the TV.

(Respondent 2)

Finally the last recurrent subject when talking about quality is timely communication. The timely report of information and the speed contrast between different media platforms was emphasized by the respondents. For instance, Respondent 2 perceived televised information as better quality due to the fact that it was the most current information she could get.

The newspaper you know might predict something but you know a tornado just happens, it's really hard to predict so when you hear about the bad weather coming and the possibility of tornadoes the most up-to-date is the TV. The weather channel it’s where you go because they have live feed with the radar.
However, respondent Respondent 1 perceived social media information as of better quality because its ability to constantly update, thus providing a more up-to-date source of information.

Facebook is probably the best way of getting inside information because people are constantly updating their Facebook as they’re there in the moment you know.

(Respondent 1)

**4.2.3 Tailorability**

Tailorability is the ability of a source to adjust the content to the specific situation of the user. In other words, individuals involved in a natural disaster may be seeking information about the situation in their neighborhood such as Respondent 3 or about the initialized roads such as Respondent 5. Therefore, information sources that can provide information for those specific situations will be prioritized. Respondent 3 admitted that utilizing the radio to localize accidents in the area where he was was frustrating, but at the end gave him what he needed.

You wait and wait and then they say something about the flood and then it’s gone and they be talking about stuff or play music, but they'll tell you where the accidents are though and that is really what I want to know at that point of time.

(Respondent 3)

Respondent 8 works as a diving instructor at a dive shop and explains that after the storm he was supposed to teach a diving class in the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The need for information specific to his situation made it preferable for him to use social media and geographically specific websites due to the fact that the general information transmitted through television didn't give him enough facts to make an informed decision.
Finally, Respondent 5 had a very particular story related to the use of tailorable media. She explained that during big storms and high surf her partner heads out to the beach to practice surfing. That makes for a worrisome experience for her as it's very difficult to get timely updates in such a specific area, but as she found out there are information sources that provide information tailored to her needs.

So I get on the radar and I check how it’s going and make sure there aren't any major thunderstorms or anything, and I just try to find information out about it. I mean they do have the webcam online facing the beach, so you can see pictures of the surf. And they do give updates about how things are going. There are certain surf pages you can go to Pensacola Surf, Magic Seaweed to find out if anything bad has happened in the water where he is at.

(Respondent 5)

4.2.4 Credibility

Despite the importance credibility is presumed to have, it didn't seem to be a major concern within the respondents of the study. The variety of sources available presented the opportunity to cross-reference and the use of multiple sources ensured the contrasting of information, thus making it relatively easy to avoid being misguided. However, they found reliability and credibility a relevant factor when deciding what media channel to use and favoritized certain media channels which they perceive as the most credible.

Here are some examples of what respondents Respondent 3, Respondent 2 and Respondent 7 said about contrasting information:

A lot of the stuff you hear is hard to believe so you kind of gotta like, you do kind of have to research the source. Make sure it's a credible source. Make sure it's coming from link that has like an actual account and not like a parody account or something that was just created, that's not real. Then I can also see, you know, depending on where that is
happening I can see if any of my contacts are posting anything, then I know it's really happening. But you have to be careful because people put stories out there for no reason sometimes.

(Respondent 3)

I would just cross-reference, so if it says it in multiple places and they didn't cite the other one, then it's good. [...] Like there's all kinds, like random stuff. You know, like when you click into Yahoo, there is a bunch of news, and not even news, just articles in general. And so I just click on a bunch.

(Respondent 2)

I would see that (news) on TV and then I went and see what my friends were saying about it on Facebook because they are the ones that live there. I called my mom. I did ... I really looked it up online... or they come up with these memes or whatever on Facebook. [...] Then you know… It's proof that that happened.

(Respondent 7)

In addition, Respondent 5 has National Public Radio on top of the list of sources she perceives as credible.

Well NPR was talking about it. Oh I’m not sure. I heard that story. In the morning on NPR. And I use NPR a lot just because I trust it, and I trust CNN. Because I know I keep saying NPR, but that’s why. It’s because I tend not to trust a lot of stuff that I see on Facebook or just a lot of news casts in general. The entertainment news, I don’t like to watch. Like FOX news of course, and some of the more liberal ones or whatever. NPR is the one that I really trust the most and CNN also, but that’s why.

(Respondent 5)
The data collected during the survey prior to the interviews concluded that all the respondents are avid users of social media, blogs, micro blogs, search engines and content communities. However, a common denominator for most interviewees, like for instance Respondent 5, Respondent 2, Respondent 1, Respondent 11, and Respondent 3 was the fact that they trusted radio and television more than what they trusted social media, blogs and micro blogs. For instance, Respondent 3 answered the following after being asked if he considered what he found out on Facebook to be more reliable.

I wouldn't say it was reliable but I kind of just gave me a reason to go look it up on the TV. but of course I'm going to believe the TV will be the most reliable source because I know that I'm actually going to the official Weather Channel, so not like this is you know… it's not a parody channel or I don't know. It's like legit, it's real as opposed to the Internet sometimes. You don't know what blogs these things come from. I would definitely say the TV was a more reliable source in this case.

(Respondent 3)

As opposed to that, Respondent 7 explained that she trusts social media more than tv due to the fact that she has a personal relationship to the sources.

Well I don't know anybody on tv (laugh) or you know what are the chances I see my friends on tv... When i see it on Facebook it seems real because I know the people most of the time, and they post stuff so I know it's true. And then if I want to see whats going on i can just follow the links to the news sites or go watch tv and be like... man I just saw on tv what happened in your town. Then i could be in the loop and comment or something.

(Respondent 7)
Despite the fact, respondents in general tended to trust television and the professionalism of the individuals participating in the broadcast. Respondent 5 answered as follows when asked why she would trust the television rather than her friend son Facebook.

I would trust that because the meteorologists there are educated and they have their degrees and I don’t think they lie to people just to get viewers. And they have a reputation they have to maintain about knowing the weather. They can’t just go lying about it because then the views would drop. I do trust it, you know, not just for that. They do have an education in meteorology.

(Respondent 5)

Respondent 1 agreed on trusting the newscast.

I mean it's something in the news, I mean it's like a hurricane so you feel like you know you should be able to trust that information coming from them (news reporters).

(Respondent 1)

In addition, Respondent 2 added that she trusts the actual professional regardless of the medium.

I would say I trust the meteorologist. So like in the Weather Channel, which you can get online or on the TV, so yes I trust the meteorologist. So whichever way you can find one either on the TV the radio or the Internet.

(Respondent 2)

Finally, respondents attributed a higher level of credibility to media sources that offer visual transmission of content such as images and videos. The possibility of having an image accompanying the explanation of the event increased the feeling of ‘reality’ among most of the interviewees. In addition, several respondents pointed out that social media offers access to backstage information and is experienced as uncensored in contrast to media such as television.
Basically for me it starts with the TV, the news, and then I actually go towards more Facebook or Instagram almost because I want to see if people that are living there have anything to say or they posting because usually people does he live in the area are constantly posting things on Facebook and nobody tells them what to post. I mean, they post what they think it's important or concerns them. Even if it’s a little bit inappropriate.

(Respondent 1)

4.2.5 Entertainment and humor appeal

The results from the interviews showed that an extremely relevant factor affecting the choice of a medium was indeed entertainment. Entertainment was referred to several times during the interviews in different types of contexts and in a variety of situations. For instance, Respondent 2 explained that at one point of time she was refuging from a tornado in her basement together with her family members browsing YouTube, watching television, and enjoying movies. The reason for this was to keep the family distracted from the thoughts of what might be going on outside, such as the dangers of the storm and the destruction caused by the tornado. In that instance, Respondent 2 and her family prioritized media channels offering high levels of entertainment and low levels of information. Respondent 4 and Respondent 7 also reported using media high in entertainment content in order to pass time and distract themselves while waiting for their respective natural disasters to come to an end.

Entertainment was also put in a different context by respondent Respondent 1 and Respondent 3 who explained that they both tend to choose media sources based on the level of entertainment and information provided within the medium. In other words, respondent Respondent 1 preferred to utilize Facebook and Twitter as information sources because of the humor appeal they both pose with content such as images about the natural disaster with witty and humorous comments, referred to as ‘memes’.
Respondent 3 was asked why he preferred Facebook content instead of the news cast. He noted the more serious character of the news cast on television stating that humorous content also provided him with the information he needed.

It's funny and it tells me what is going on basically.... the news are too dramatic. If I'm in a stressful situation I can always use a laugh or whatever.

(Respondent 3)

4.2.6 Personal recommendation

All respondents without exception reported that one of the factors that motivated them for the use of one or more media channels was personal recommendation. In some situations like the ones of Respondent 7 and Respondent 2, parents would advise the respondents to turn on the television or check news sites online in order to be safe.

Because my dad watches TV more than I do. I'm like Dad what's going on? And he always tells me where I can hear about it. He calls me, he's usually the first person telling me things are going on and I'll be like, because I'm just space cadet most the time. He's like you know there's going to be a storm? turn the TV on and pay attention. So i did.

(Respondent 7)

She (mother) called me. She literally told me what was going on where I live and, she was the one, she said, she told me to check on the news websites so I wouldn't be clueless.

(Respondent 2)

In other cases such as Respondent 5, people with more experience recommended her specific information sources she could use to keep herself informed during hurricane season.
I’m a control freak. I need to know what is going on at all times. And when I don’t, I stress about it and it doesn't help. So i asked my friend, I asked — — — who owns a dive shop in town and he texted me a bunch of legit places I could check.

(Respondent 5)

4.3 What is the succession of media during the course of the natural disaster?

Despite the efforts to map the succession of media utilized during the course of a natural disaster, only Respondent 5 could report with certain accuracy the order in which she used different media. Most of the respondents such as Respondent 3 and Respondent 1 among others noted being able to point out where they first came in contact with disaster-related information. However, as Respondent 8 points out the complementary use of media outlets was for the most part simultaneous.

I can tell you I heard it on the TV at work first. I can tell you this much. Because I remember picking up my phone and I know that at that time I'm immediately gonna check Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and probably going to look it up on Google. But you want to know in what order? I don't know.

(Respondent 8)

Some of the respondents like for instance Respondent 3 pointed out that when he started using the television and later moved on to the internet, he did in fact leave the television on in the background. Furthermore, as he had the television on and sat by his personal computer Respondent 3 was also holding his cellphone in an effort to multitask.

4.4 Of Interest

4.4.1 Frequency of the natural disasters

Almost all of the participants in the study showed similar cues during the interviews. Some of the times, their reactions would be nonchalant and their words would reinforce the expression.
Some other times they would just try to mitigate my genuine concern for the situation. It didn’t matter what kind of natural disaster we were talking about, be it tornadoes, hurricanes or floods, because the common denominator in all cases was the frequency in which they are involved in similar situations throughout their lives.

This is how Respondent 2 answered the question “Do you remember any time you were involved in a hurricane?”

There was a couple. They weren’t serious hurricanes. They weren't Sandy or anything like that.

(Respondent 2)

Yes, it’s still a hurricane, but if you live in a place that deals with them a lot you don’t think much about it until it gets to a certain level. Specially if you get tropical storms and stuff. I know I just played around.

(Respondent 2)

Respondent 4 had the following to say about the floods that killed three people in Pensacola, FL.

I didn’t really think anything of it at first. I thought it was a regular storm. I was kind of watching it […] and I could see the Student Union (building) flooding.

(Respondent 4)

There was however some contrast between people with different backgrounds. Respondents that came from an area used to tornados would have some more concern about hurricanes and vice-versa.

4.4.2 Education and preparedness.
Due to the specific backgrounds of the participant, they carried with them a fair share of knowledge and education about certain natural disasters. This education was made obvious and pointed to in several occasions during many of the interviews.

Respondent 2 points out that she had previous knowledge about the natural disaster she had recently been involved with:

> With the sirens going off you know there is a tornado at least near. And you know, with tornadoes they teach you, you have to go to lower ground so that you don’t get blown away. You want to be away from the windows. That’s how I always knew. My mom used to live in Iowa and they always had a bunch of tornadoes there. She just taught us to go to lower ground, away from windows and just hang out.

(Respondent 2)
5 Analysis

This is the analysis chapter in which the results of the study will be analyzed and the respondents’ statements will be connected to the theory chapter to either corroborate or contradict previous research. The main focus of this chapter is to analyze the results that answer the research questions. In addition, other relevant data found to be important for the subject will be briefly highlighted. To ease the reading, the first and third research questions have been consolidated in this chapter.

5.1 How are media channels used in order to get information during a natural disaster, and in what succession?

Based on the results obtained it was made clear that individuals utilize several media channels combined, at different points in time or simultaneously during a natural disaster. It was important for the respondents to have the ability to use multiple media channels when looking for information in order to obtain a variety of perspectives on the same topic. This fact directly correlates with the reasonings of Ruppel and Rains (2012) and Dutta-Bergman (2004a; 2006b) who explain that different information sources provide the user with different content. Therefore each channel used serves a different niche of the information sought. This was shown in the results when most of the respondents emphasized how the more media channels they combined, the better and more complete picture they got of the natural disaster event.

The results from the interviews also suggest that traditional media channels such as radio and television are used in order to obtain a broader perspective during a natural disaster event. As a contrast, most respondents would use social media like Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat to gather a more in-depth view of the situation or a narrower perspective. These results are in opposition to Thompson (1995) who argues that the rise of social media provides new alternative ways to seek information but that these channels compete with the traditional media. The results corroborate instead with Dutta-Bergman's (2006a) idea that individuals are loyal to the content and use different media that serve their need for it. This was made clear in the data, where it was shown that regardless of the way respondents came in contact with the information, they all felt the need
of gathering information from different sources to complete the full story. Respondents that gained a general view through traditional media outlets at first, wanted the details later on through social media. On the other hand, respondents that had accessed the issue through specific details with the use of social media wanted to access the general point of view through other media outlets as well. By combining all possible media outlets which introduced different perspectives, they gathered a full perception of the natural disaster as a whole.

Additionally, respondents showed an interesting pattern in which they would consume natural disaster information from one source and utilize several media platforms to do so. This contradicts what Quinn (2016) explains about the continued use of a medium. Through uses and gratifications, she explains that the use of a certain medium over time is due to the fact that the gratifications an individual is looking to obtain are strongly boosted by the gratifications produced by the medium. However, the data collected shows that respondents consider the content to be more important than the media platform it’s transmitted within. They would rather follow up the content using different media platforms. Furthermore, data extracted from the respondents pointed out that the qualities that influence the complementarily use of media are compatibility and the platform’s capacity to transition to the next platform.

Connecting with friends and family during a natural disaster event proved to be a use respondents gave to several kinds of media in many ways as suggested by Tengku et.al (2015). All respondents admitted that during a natural disaster it’s even most important for them to stay connected as much as possible. Prorcopio and Procopio (2007) conclude in their study that the Internet is used during a crisis to make contact with all individuals’ social networks regardless of the strength of their ties, but the results of the interviews proved to differ slightly. The data collected showed that respondents would prefer to directly contact the closest part of their network by typically using their cellphones to call or text. In contrast, they were prone to utilize social media to update the more distant parts of their network.
An interesting part of the results exposed another way in which the respondents connected with their networks during a natural disaster event. This is the phenomena of ‘sharing’ content through social media, which allows them to quickly interact in a vague manner with an audience . This is consistent with the study conducted by Austin et.al (2012) in which they argue that social media represents a new platform for word-of-mouth communication and gives audiences the possibility to share information almost instantaneously.

Data from the respondents suggests that sharing gives them the opportunity to contribute to the reduction of other peoples uncertainty and contribute to the well being of friends and relatives without engaging in a full-on conversation. That also ties in with Procopio and Procopio (2007) who explain that audiences do not only use the Internet to reduce uncertainty by gathering information such as property damage and the status of their friends and family, but they also contribute by spreading information themselves to help the community. Nonetheless, other respondents shared information, but with the purpose of creating a content gallery within a media platform showcasing their own product. The opportunity to create content and feeling ownership over that content ties in with Karahanna et.al's (2015) idea of psychological ownership, which is in other words the human species innate need to posses.

Additionally, the results showed that sharing content with social media amplified the use of the platform by giving the users the opportunity ‘like’ or comment on the mediated content. This proved to be an alternative way of staying connected during the natural disaster, with lower levels of engagement.

5.2 What factors contribute to the choice of media type and lead to channel complementarity during a natural disaster?

Based on the results, it was shown that respondents consider several factors that contribute to the choice of media type. This ties in with Strander (2011) who explains that the different media platforms allow to transmit various forms of information, thus discerning in the way they provide individuals with use and function. The analysis of the results is also consistent with the idea that
media use is a combination partly motivated by the individual’s desire to satisfy a need, and each one of the platforms’ own functionalities presented by Karahanna et.al (2015).

One of the factors that out stood the most based on all respondents mentions was accessibility and convenience. This corroborates Austin et.al (2012) who conclude that convenience is one of the main factors that affects the choice of medium. Most participants made clear that factors such as how accessible, easy to use, convenient or inconvenient information sources were had a big impact on the preferred choice of media. Moreover, this ties in with Ruppel and Rains (2012) theory that all those factors which they englobed within ‘accessibility’ key factors for the choice of a media platform. Having the ability to continue consuming information with as little effort as a click of a mouse and the easiness of access to multiple media outlets with the use of one specific platform were shown by the data to be factors that directly affected the complementarily use of media sources.

Moreover, another factor related to accessibility, brought up by Karahanna et.al (2015) and corroborated with the data, for choosing a specific kind of media instead of another during the course of a natural disaster was proved to be the availability of the medium itself. This was consistent with the results provided by the interviews, which made clear that the only way of choosing a medium is by having the choice to do so in the first place.

Another factor that stood out within the data collection was quality. The results showed that respondents considered the amount of information available doesn’t always equate to the quality they are looking for. Quality being a deciding factor is consistent with the research of Ruppel and Rains (2012) and Dutta-Bergman (2004a).

Besides the quality of the information, interviewees showed appreciation for the quality of the platform itself. Some of the respondents perceive certain platforms as of better quality due to their multimedia capacities and the timely report of information. The results are consistent with
Dutta-Bergman's (2006b) idea that the characteristics of the sources such as modality, accessibility, quality and so on may also drive complementarity.

Tailorability is the ability of a source to adjust the content to the specific situation of the user and is also regarded by the respondents as an influential factor in choosing media channels. Respondents sought information about the situation in their neighborhood through channels that provide accurate results for their particular situation. This ties into the study of Ruppel and Rains (2012) which explains that the Internet and the online platforms make it possible for individuals to gain personally suitable information by browsing the web or posting questions on topic discussion sites.

Another factor that according to the results was perceived as relevant was credibility. The fact that individuals used sources with a high level of expertise within their natural disaster complementarily is consistent with Dutta-Bergman’s (2006a) claim that information quality is a potentially influential factor in complementary use of sources. Despite the importance quality is presumed to have, it didn't seem to be a major concern within the respondents of the study. The variety of sources available presented the opportunity as noted by Austin et.al (2015) to cross-reference and the use of multiple sources ensured the contrasting of information, thus making it relatively easy to avoid being misinformed. Moreover, the results match the studies of Ruppel and Rains (2012) and Procopio and Procopio (2007) that found reliability and credibility are relevant factors when deciding what media channels to use and explained that individuals favoritize certain media channels which they perceive as the most credible.

However, part of the results contradicted Procopio and Procopio (2007) and Austin et.al's (2015) research in which they explain that during a crisis situation individuals tend to perceive social media as a more credible source than other traditional media. The results consistently showed that respondents trusted radio and television more than what they trusted social media, blogs and micro blogs.
Lastly, other factors that affected the choice of media according to the results are personal recommendation, entertainment and humor appeal. This is consistent with the study of Ruppel and Rains (2012) who conclude that personal recommendation is a factor that influences certain media choices, and the study of Austin et.al (2015) reporting that almost all participants in their research identified convenience, credibility, personal recommendation and humor appeal among others as a reason to utilize a specific medium during a crisis. Surprisingly, in such a sensitive situation respondents assured that the ability to obtain information with a high degree of entertainment and humor appeal is one of the key factors to the choice of certain media channels over others.

5.4 Of Interest

The results showed that respondents that had previous experiences with natural disasters where more knowledgable of the situations and less frightened about the event. This accentuates the results posted by Laframboise and Loko (2012) in their book Natural Disasters: Mitigating Impact, Managing Risks, in which they expose that in communities with well-known flood risks, new residents find information regarding flood risks difficult to comprehend. By contrast, Laframboise and Loko (2012) explain that long-time residents may be less concerned about experiencing a flood because they believe as a result of their experience that it will never happen to them since it never has. This ties in with the results where several respondents don't seem too concerned about the possibility that a natural disaster may affect them.
6 Conclusion

This chapter presents and explains the obtained answers for the three research questions. In addition, this chapter will propose suggestions for further research within the field and it will finally present a few shortcomings experienced during the investigation.

At the beginning of this essay, chapter one introduced three research questions to which this study has tried to provide answer. The three research questions were:

• How are media channels used in order to gain information during a natural disaster?
• What factors contribute to the choice of media type and lead to channel complementarity during a natural disaster?
• What is the succession of media during the course of the natural disaster?

For simplicity and since they are interrelated, the first and the third question will be merged.

Based on the analysis of the results obtained, it was made clear that individuals utilize several media channels combined and at different points in time, simultaneously and in random order during a natural disaster. During such events it’s also considered important to have the ability to use multiple media channels when looking for information in order to obtain a variety of perspectives on the same topic. The different information sources provide the user with different content, therefore it’s clear that each channel used serves a different niche of the information.

The analysis of the results shows that individuals use different mediums in order to gain two different points of view: a broad perspective and a narrow perspective. Traditional media channels such as radio and television are used in order to obtain a broad perspective during a natural disaster event. Social media like Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat are used to gain a more detailed information about the situation or, a narrower perspective.
Connecting with friends and family during a natural disaster event was a use given to several kinds of media. The analysis shows that individuals prefer direct contact with the closest part of their network by using their cellphones to call or text. Social media is utilized to update the more distant parts of their network. Additionally, sharing content with social media amplified the use of the platform by giving the users the opportunity to ‘like’ or comment on the mediated content. This proved to be an alternative way of staying connected during the natural disaster, with lower levels of engagement.

Based on the analysis of the results it’s conclusive that, during a natural disaster, factors affecting media choices are accentuated by the crisis. New factors appear to satisfy needs arisen from the natural disaster. Therefore, these factors are intrinsically connected to specific needs individuals have at one particular point in time. The most relevant factors contributing to the choice of media type and leading to channel complementarity are accessibility, compatibility of sources, tailorability, and humor appeal.

Controversially, credibility is disregarded as a key factor due to the fact that the amount of existing sources provide enough cross-reference opportunities to test the validity of the information. Despite this, credibility is still somewhat influential to the choice of media sources. Finally, the analysis consistently shows that radio and television are trusted to a higher degree when compared to social media, blogs and microblogs.

6.1 Further research

In this study, six factors that influence the choice of media source in relationship to channel complementarity during a natural disaster were identified. In spite of this, it seems possible that several other factors and characteristics may have similar effects and should be taken into consideration. Further research should aim to identify other factors that could be relevant and possibly lead to channel complementarity. Moreover, it’s not known the extent to which the characteristics found in this study apply to situations other than natural disasters. For instance,
tailorability might be a less important factor in cases less personal than a natural disaster life disruption. Other characteristics such as anonymity would probably impact the way audiences go about seeking information about more sensitive subject (Ruppel and Rains, 2012).

In addition, this essay merely exposes the way in which media sources are utilized during a natural disaster for various proposes. However, it would be of great interest to analyze the correlation between the amount of channels used and the quality of the end result.

6.2 Flaws in the research

During the results and analysis process a few possible flaws were encountered. The factors that possibly affect the way media channels are chosen and how they lead to channel complementarity have been mainly decided based on the respondents opinion and own experiences. Therefore, the results could be affected since opinions can be involuntarily affected by way a person wants to be portrayed in front of others, as for instance trying to seem knowledgable.

Some of the questions would be more appropriate for respondents with higher levels of self-awareness, financial resources, responsibilities and overall independence rather than lower levels of such attributes. Finally, there is a possibility that respondents exaggerated the way in which they use media channels combined since the subject of the study itself is channel complementarity even though efforts were made to clarify that all and any uses of media are relevant for this essay.

6.3 Implications for society

The intent of this essay is to provide the reader with insight on the way audiences utilize media channels and provide some clarification on the way information is consumed during a natural disaster. Furthermore, this study participates in establishing the fact that individuals tend to utilize several media channels complementarily, and highlights the factors that contribute to the
choice of media and ultimately to such complementarity. Therefore, this essay should contribute
to enhance the knowledge on media-consumption patterns, and help authorities comprehend how
individuals seek-out disaster-related information.
7 Sources

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From: eBook Collection (EBSCOhost). Web. 3 May 2016.


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Scientific articles


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doi:10.1177/146144804047086


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Link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00909882.2012.654498

doi:10.1207/s15347027hc1701_8


8 Addendum

8.1 Addendum 1

Interview Survey

This interview form is be sent out to the prospects before the interview. The purpose with the survey giving the interviewer an overview of the subjects’ media usage in terms of quantity, and the subjects’ perception of their particular uses for a certain medium. It also determines the subjects’ distance to the crisis and provides areas of interest for further questioning such as their involvement in different natural disasters during the interview. This contributes to a more controlled environment during the interviews and less intervention from the interviewer to endure the conversation. Also, knowing the relationship of the subject towards a crisis in advanced, provides the interviewer the opportunity to approach the matter with the highest level of sensitivity. The form starts with a statement of purposes and continues with ten questions.

Hello,

My name is Francesc Sanabria Roca and I am a Communications and PR undergraduate student attending Karlstad University.

This semester we are encouraged to write our C-Uppsats essay, which in my case is about the way people utilize different kinds of media during a natural disaster. The target group for this study is students over the age of 18 that have been somehow involved with a natural disaster, and I have chosen to conduct interviews to get answers to the research questions.

The purpose of this form is to create a basis for the interview by creating an overview of your location as well as the location of important people around you, your everyday media usage, and your involvement in a natural disaster. The interview will be recorded to facilitate the analyze procedure and get through to the results. Of course you will remain anonymous and no names mentioned during the interview will appear in the essay.

If you find any part of this quick survey confusing or you have any questions, please don't refrain from contacting me. I am sincerely grateful that you want to participate and help me to carry out our study.

Regards,

Francesc Sanabria Roca
1- We all have busy lives and therefore, can’t spent the time we would like to with friends and family. **If you look back over the passed six months, who have you maintained an active relationship with in your family?**

*This question tries to set the ground for the respondents close part of the network. This is later developed in the control questions during the interview. This provides the opportunity to also locate the respondents family and additionally check if they were somehow involved in the natural disaster event.*

2- There are many ways to maintain contact with people close to you. **What kind of media do you use in order to contact them? Provide as many examples as you feel necessary. In case you physically speak to them, consider that as ‘word-of-mouth’.*

*This maps the media usage to maintain contact with the nearest part of the network.*

3- Not everything in life has to be work but most of the time it probably is. **What kind of media do you usually take part of on an everyday basis?**

*Question number three tries to establish a basic media usage when the individual is not in distress.*

4- Great part of our lives happens online nowadays. **From 1 being the least to 10 being the most, how involved are you with online media?**

*This question goes in a little into the previous one. The purpose is to identify how aware the individual is of his or her online media consumption.*

6- In a case of extreme distress you would probably want to contact people important to you to get solid advice. **Who would give you the best advice?**

*This question is further developed during the interview by trying to figure out who influences part of their decision making.*

7- Not all the fun things happen online, a lot of people still enjoys a good book or an interesting TV show. As opposed to new media, traditional media functions without the need to be connected to the Internet. **What kind of traditional media do you use on a daily basis?**

*Idem on question number three.*
We all share interesting facts on Facebook every now and then with long forgotten friends in an attempt to keep in touch. **How do you keep in touch with people you don't connect in a regular basis?**

*This question tries to get an insight in the way the respondent tends to his outmost part of the network*

This is more of a direct question and there is no getting around. **Have you ever been involved in a natural disaster or know anybody close to you that has?**

*This question tries to establish a distance to the natural disaster.*

Due to the sensitivity of the subject it is imperative for me that you feel comfortable at all times. In addition, if there is ever a question you don't want to answer, you are free not to. **Is it acceptable for me to ask personal questions during the interview?**

---

**8.2 Addendum 2**

**Interview template**

This is a template which will be used during the interviews for the study. It explains at first the way in which the aim of the research is explained to the respondent, and the difference between new media and traditional media. Thereafter it outlines a question guideline and it explains the way in which the answer sheet can be used. The questions aren't meant to be necessarily asked in such order; this is basically an guideline to get the information necessary to answer the research questions.

**Part 1**

**Proper introduction**

Ethical and anonymity procedures explained

**Respondent informed he is free to leave at any time.**

- Where are you originally from?
- What university or college do you attend to?
- What are your occupations and interests?
- How often do you usually talk to your family and long distance friends?
- What kind of media do you usually take advantage of in doing so?
- Where do you usually get your news and information?
- What do you think of when I say “new media” or “old media”?

Channel Complementarity Theory, new media and traditional media are explained and exemplified as necessary.
Part 2

1. First, I would like you to think about a recent time that you were personally involved in a natural disaster. Could you please retell the story about what happened?

   - What kind of media did you use during the natural disaster?
     * What pushed you utilize such medium or media combination?
       • Did anybody recommend you any specific media?
   - How did you communicate with family and friends?
     * What was important for you to communicate out?
       • Did you rely on anybody to help you out?

2. Have you ever worried about a family member, friends or relatives, living in area affected by a natural disaster?

   - What kind of media did you use during that period?
     * How did you use all the available media channels?
       • Did you always obtained the desirable results?
   - How did you communicate with them, or they communicated with you?
     * How much effort did you put in communicating with them?
       • What kind of media did you use to communicate with specific people and why?

Answer sheet

Questions on part one:
These questions are designed to get a sense for how the respondent thinks about his own uses of the media, and define his communication needs. Also, this information will help to provide a context for understanding and analyzing their experiences further on. The answers to this section were also further questioned comparing them to the ones in the interview survey.

Part two, question 1: This question is designed to provide a context. The questions in this section try to identify the what media channels are used and why.

Part two, question 2: This question is to add perspective. The questions in this section try to identify the way in which different media channels are used.

8.3 Addendum 3

Respondents

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