

Increasing Student Awareness of International News and Events

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Abstract

Today's students live eagerly in information-rich environments, multitasking even more easily than they focus singularly. They text while they talk with friends, surf the Web on their iPads and cell phones while watching television, study while listening to music, and navigate many other environments that previous generations find distracting or confusing. Facilitating an information-rich environment in libraries captures a new opportunity to draw in new generations of students, to engage them critically, and to improve their information literacy, all while capitalizing on a fundamental strength of libraries as information sources. This paper demonstrates how an academic library grew to provide access to news media and in the process, learned how to create an active environment where patrons develop their critical gaze, think more creatively about media, and become increasingly sensitive to and appreciative of the global community. I will discuss how librarians can use international TV news to bring the world into the mainstream library space and in doing so, provide an opportunity for greater exchange and increased cultural awareness. I will present feedback from users on the value they perceive from such a library environment. The paper will show how the media, particularly international TV news, in the academic library environment can be applied with great effect.

Keywords: academic libraries, international television news, library space, media literacy, news engagement

News Consumption

In a 2000 study, researchers found that undergraduate college students prefer a variety of news formats.¹ However, in their endeavor to provide access to news information, libraries have focused more on print news (newspapers and magazines) than on television, radio, and online news. One news format that has been overlooked by libraries is broadcast news, especially TV news. More recently the Internet, through online news sites, has been used to provide this source of information. As is the case with other information sources, each news format has its own strengths and weaknesses and, as such, each is used differently.²

With the increase in online access to library resources, libraries have experienced a decrease in the number of patrons using their physical spaces.³ Libraries have used a variety of methods in an effort to entice users back to the library. The addition of coffee shops, more comfortable furniture and lighting, and extended hours to provide twenty-four hour access are some of the more common approaches.⁴ While these methods are helpful in increasing foot traffic, they don't necessarily contribute to the library's goal of providing access to information nor do they support the educational mission of the college or university.

The Communications Library at the University of Illinois seized the opportunity to use TV news as a means to attract users to its space while simultaneously improving users' media literacy skills. The Illinois Communications Library News Lounge model attracts students to an active environment where they may interact, study, conduct research, and relax while being exposed to 24-hour news from around the world by using a medium that today's students are comfortable with and reliant on. Users "consume" news in an environment that allows them to multitask and interact, consuming information critically and more naturally. The model is consistent with the academic library's goal of providing library users with a choice of information sources while not dictating to users which information source, or news channel, to watch. Users are able to view multiple news sources simultaneously while comparing opinions and information.

University of Illinois Communications Library

The University of Illinois campus is located in Champaign-Urbana and was established in 1867. In 2016, it was ranked by *US News & World Report's America's Best Colleges* as the eleventh public university and the forty-first national university.⁵ According to the *On-Campus Fall 2015 Statistical Abstract of Ten-Day Enrollment*, the University of Illinois campus enrollment is 44,087 students, with 62% of the students from Illinois and 24% non-US residents. Almost half the enrollment (46%) is white, 55% are male and 45% female.⁶ With more than 14 million volumes, the university's library is ranked second for volumes in a library by the Association of Research Libraries.⁷ The University of Illinois Communications Library is one of twenty-plus departmental libraries on campus. Housed in Gregory Hall with the College of Media, the Communications Library serves the students and faculty of the College of Media and the Department of Communication (within the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences). Because the students in the College of Media spend the majority of their time in Gregory Hall for their classes, the Communications Library is a convenient location for them to study between classes, to do library research, to check their email, to work on group projects, to use course reserve materials, and to socialize.

The physical size of the Communications Library is approximately thirty-six hundred square feet on two levels and has a seating capacity of 108, with a variety of seating options. The library houses approximately sixteen thousand volumes in the subject areas of advertising, communication, journalism, media studies, public relations, radio, and television. The remainder of the collection, consisting of older research material (approximately eighty thousand volumes), is located in the Bookstacks of the Main Library and Oak Street Storage Facility. In addition to the books, periodicals, videos, and reference sources, the Communications Library subscribes to a small collection of daily newspapers from approximately twenty-five cities and towns throughout the United States. The University of Illinois Library System also provides access to thousands of periodicals online and on microfilm.

Communications Library International TV News Lounge

The International News Lounge includes eight fifty-two-inch TV monitors, each one broadcasting a different international twenty-four hour news channel. Each TV also has its own FM channel providing the audio. The TVs are mounted on the walls and located throughout the library so that they may be viewed from numerous locations within the library (see photos 1 and 2). News is provided via satellite from Dish Network. The library used the following criteria in its selection of news channels: international news; twenty-four hour news; if possible, news that is broadcast in English; and a selection of news channels encompassing as many countries or continents as possible. The library provides news from the following channels/locations: CCTV and BON (China), Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya (Middle East), ETTV (Taiwan), KBS (Korea), RT (Russia),

EuroNews (Europe), RAI (Italy), TVN24 (Poland), France24 (France), NDTV (India), and Teleformula (Mexico). In order to provide users access to thirteen channels (or perspectives) from eight TVs, the library changes the programming on some TVs midway through the day. This arrangement enables us to provide news from eleven different geographic areas. It is important to point out that while our goal was to provide access to twenty-four hour international news broadcast in English, not all of the international news channels were available in English. In order to provide library users with the ability to include news content in classroom instruction and course assignments, one TV was set up with the capability to allow users to upload news content onto a USB drive. So as to not disturb patrons, the volume for each TV was turned off. Library users could listen to the news by accessing FM radio on their cell phone or a new generation iPod. This arrangement enables library users to watch, to listen, or to watch and listen to the news from anywhere within the Communications Library. More important, the capability to individually manage the audio enables students to consume news while studying, using computers, or interacting with other students. The physical arrangement of the TV monitors enables students to “consume” news in an environment more conducive to how they study and interact.



Photo 1



Photo 2

Objectives of News Lounge

While the primary objective was to attract users into the library space, there were also information-related goals of the project. One important goal was to provide students at the University of Illinois with access to non-US news sources. We believe that if students have access to international news, they will be exposed to other opinions, values, and cultures, enabling them to be more open-minded and better equipped to contribute to a multicultural world. Effective communication—whether it is through advertising, journalism, public relations, or interpersonal communication—requires compassion, understanding, and being better informed. Other goals include providing students with a choice in news sources, providing international students with more familiar news sources, providing communication and media students the ability to compare different news perspectives or coverage, conveying to students and faculty outside of the communication and media disciplines that broadcast news is a valid source of information and not just a means of keeping up with current events, and providing faculty members with the opportunity to integrate broadcast news in their teaching.

Assessment of News Lounge

The News Lounge was established in January 2012. After a year of use, we developed a survey to understand library patrons' perceptions of the News Lounge's value and impact and to provide insight in how users were using the News Lounge or consuming news. The Web-based

survey was administered in the spring of 2013 to any library patron using Communications Library space. The survey comprised twelve questions. Ten questions focused on use, design, and value, and two questions were related to demographics. We wanted to know how users “consume news” in the space, whether the News Lounge environment encourages news consumption, whether the current selection of news channels meets user needs, and what value the News Lounge provides library users. The library promoted the survey with table tents, a pop-up link on Communications Library public computers, announcements posted to the student listserv, and in library instruction sessions.

Demographics of Library Users

Any University of Illinois student, staff, or faculty member was eligible to complete the survey. A total of 187 users participated. The majority of participants (88.8%) were undergraduate students, 9.6% were graduate students, and 1.6% were faculty members. Chart 1 outlines the departmental affiliation of the participants: Advertising, Communication, Institute for Communications Research, Journalism, and Media and Cinema Studies. The majority of the participants were affiliated with the four departments within the College of Media, which, along with the Communications Library, is housed in Gregory Hall. The Department of Communication is located in Lincoln Hall, which is next to Gregory Hall. Many of the classes and laboratories that students in the College of Media use are located within Gregory Hall. The fact that the survey was completed within the space of the Communications Library may have affected the large percentage of participants from within the College of Media. While aware of this fact before the survey was administered, the decision to administer the survey within the Communications Library was important because it contributed to our participants’ familiarity with the News Lounge. It is also important to note that the majority of people who use the Communications Library are undergraduate students, which most likely influenced the high percentage of undergraduates completing the survey.

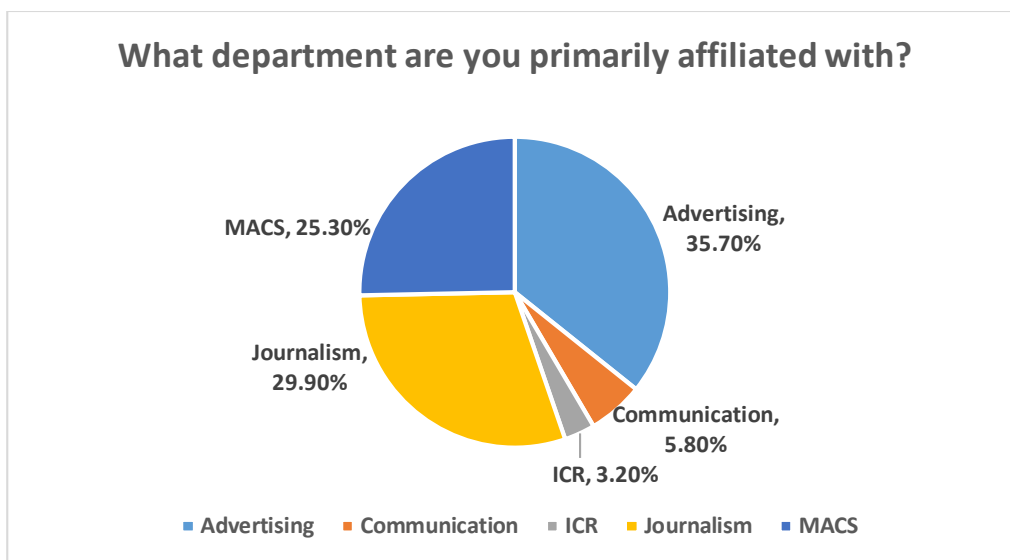


Chart 1

Use of News Lounge

Participants were asked to describe how they use the News Lounge and their preference for news. More than half of participants (56.7%) used the News Lounge more than once a week

(Chart 2). When using the News Lounge, the majority of users (65%) only watched the news. The second most popular way they used the space (26%) was to listen and watch the news (Chart 3). Watching the news was, by far, participants' favorite way to consume news in the library. There may be several reasons for this response. Watching news allows people to also study, work at computers, read, or meet in groups at the same time. It would not be as easy to listen to the news while reading or working with others in a group setting.

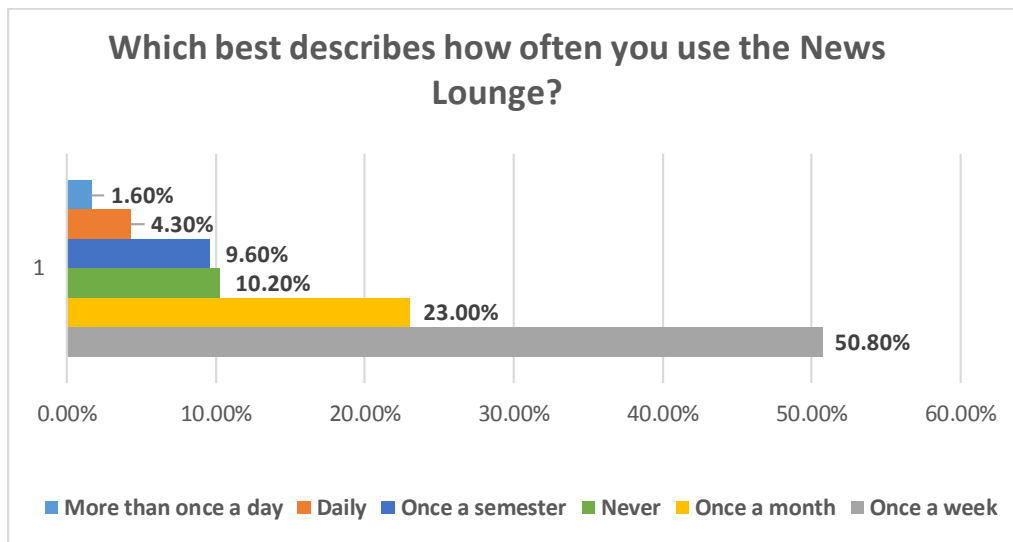


Chart 2

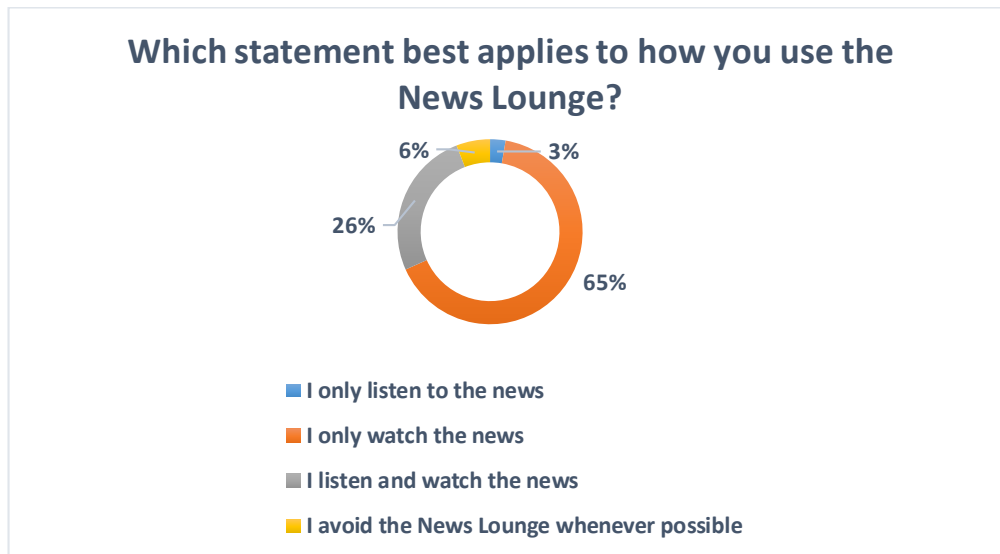


Chart 3

Participants were asked to rank the channels available in the News Lounge from most to least favorite (Chart 4). Because our goal was to provide access to as much news as possible, the library doubled up on news on a few of the TVs. The library has eight TVs available and provides access to thirteen news channels. News is offered from one channel the first half of the day and switched to a second channel for the remainder of the day. The most watched channel was EuroNews/RAI. EuroNews was available the first half of the day and RAI was offered the second half. There could be a variety of reasons the channel selection that included EuroNews

was so popular. First, the audio of EuroNews is in English; second, EuroNews covers US events more than some of the other international news channels; and third, library users may be more familiar with or interested in the events covered by EuroNews (Europe and the UK). The news from RAI, however, is in Italian, not English, but like EuroNews, RAI covers news from many European countries. Because we did not ask participants to include any reasons for their choice, we can only make assumptions. The second most popular choice was the Al-Jazeera/Al-Arabiya channel option, even though both of these channels are broadcast in Arabic. However, with interest in the United States' relationship with countries in the Middle East, it might be safe to assume that News Lounge participants believed it is important to stay connected to events in the Middle East or make an attempt to familiarize themselves with the issues of Middle Eastern countries. Another explanation might be that News Lounge users were more curious about the countries in the Middle East and that watching the news is one way to learn more about particular countries and their cultures. China Central Television (CCTV) and Blue Ocean Network (BON) both broadcast news in English from China. The channel option with these two channels ranked third, very close to Al-Jazeera/Al-Arabiya. The international student enrollment at the University of Illinois is 24% of the total enrollment, and students from China comprise 51% of the international enrollment. CCTV's popularity might be a result of this demographic, with Chinese students preferring a familiar news channel.

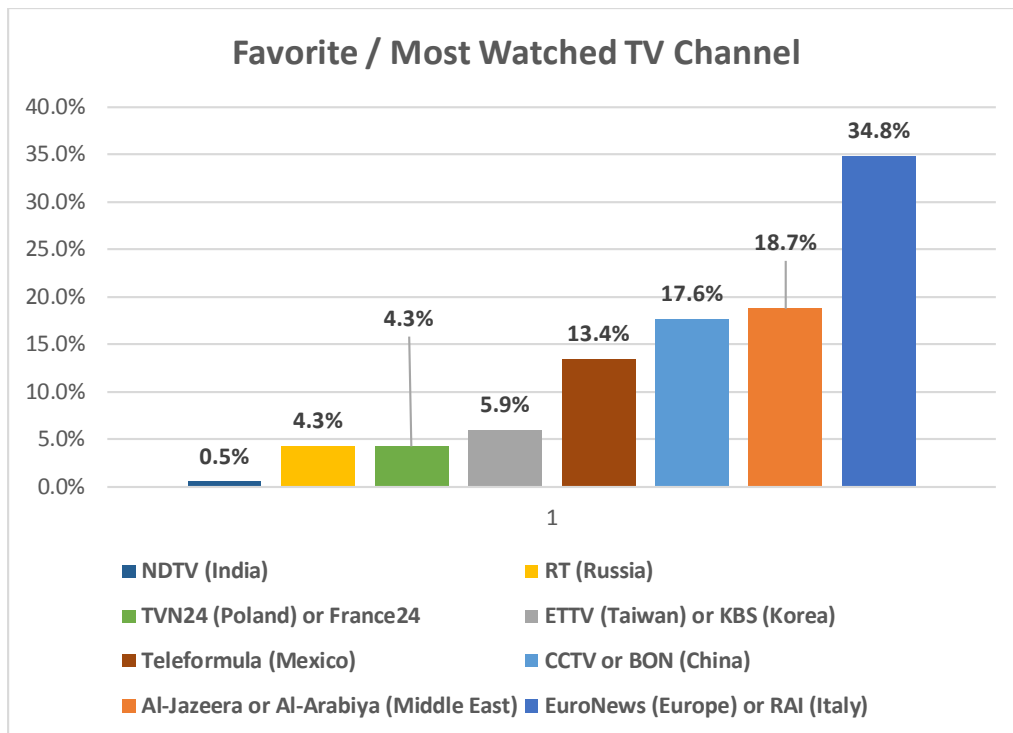


Chart 4

News Lounge Design

The next series of questions focused on design. Several elements went into the design of the News Lounge: the number of TV monitors available, the size of the monitors, environment or atmosphere for viewing and/or listening, the number of news channels available, specific news channels available, and the capability to download content. It was important to ascertain which of these elements were most important to library users. Of all of the design elements, users valued having access to a variety of news channels. They believed that having thirteen news

channels from several geographic areas was the most important aspect of the News Lounge, with 79% of the responses commenting that thirteen news channels was the “perfect number of” news channels (Chart 5), and more than 36% ranking the variety, selection, and number of news channels as the most important aspect of the News Lounge (Chart 6). In addition to having a choice of news, News Lounge users also have the ability to compare the news coverage provided by the different news outlets. On the upper level of the library, they can watch news from the Middle East and China because the two TV monitors are within ten feet of each other. On the lower level, they can watch the remaining six news channels simultaneously or individually. This design option gives them the opportunity to simultaneously observe news coverage from the different countries or media, and it allows them to compare how the different media outlets cover news events. This capability is extremely important for students and instructors. Survey participants also valued the News Lounge’s environment. The News Lounge has a variety of seating options available to students: couches, comfortable chairs, and small and large tables for individual or group study. This environment gives library users the option of focusing all of their attention on watching and/or listening to the news or watching the news while being engaged in other activities (studying, working within groups, using computers/laptops). Having a choice in how and what news they consume may positively influence how often they choose to consume it.

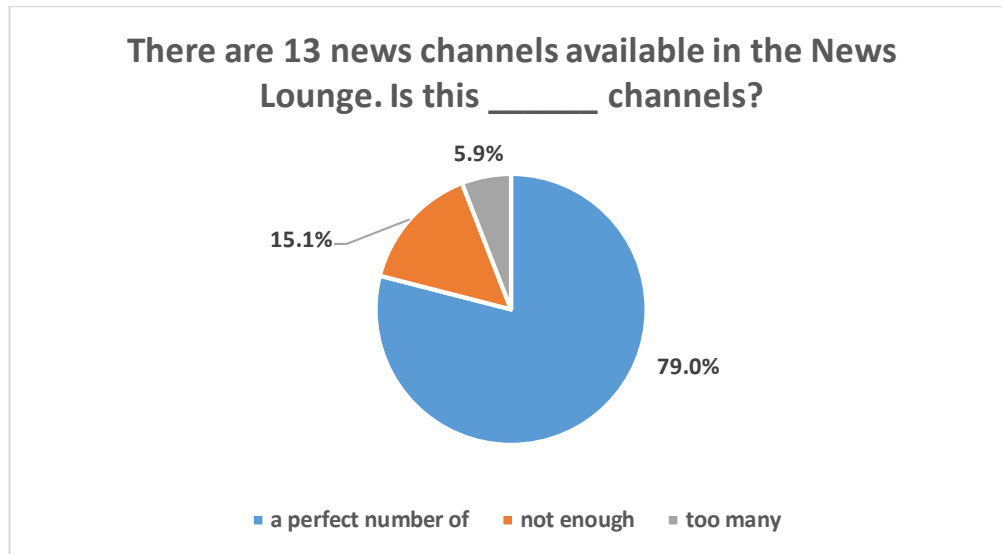


Chart 5

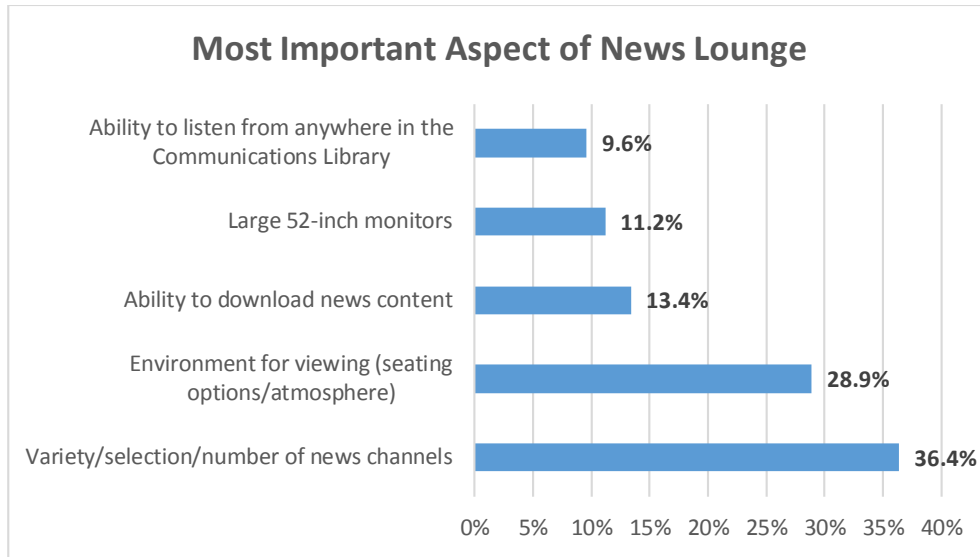


Chart 6

Value of News Lounge for Users

Journalism facilitates communication and helps people, groups, and society stay connected. Some researchers even believe it contributes to or is related to civic engagement, political awareness, and participation in society.⁸ In a 2009 study examining youths' low news consumption, Edgar Huang investigated college and high school students' rationales behind their news consumption. The study found that youths surveyed believed that it is important to stay on top of issues and they trusted big news organizations like CNN, MSNBC, and the *New York Times*. The study also discovered several "objectives" or factors that contribute to the age group's news consumption: because their time for consuming news was limited, they like news to be convenient; they value newsworthy stories, not gossip-type stories; they prefer instant delivery; and they want free access.⁹

The overall goal when planning and designing the News Lounge was to create an environment that encourages library users to consume more news more often. The Communications Library staff believes that by providing library users with a choice of news options in a variety of formats within a comfortable environment, the library can facilitate news consumption. In this effort, we considered several factors in designing the News Lounge. The design and use sections of the survey provided us with feedback from users on the decisions and factors we took into consideration when planning the News Lounge. We also wanted to know from users, in their own words, what value the News Lounge provided them. Our hope was that the value they perceived from the News Lounge would match with the factors we considered when creating the News Lounge. In one survey question, participants were asked to select from a list of possible values that the library viewed as important goals for the News Lounge and to provide feedback on which values they believe the News Lounge provides. In addition, participants were asked to complete a series of four open-ended questions addressing the value of the News Lounge. Chart 7 provides feedback from users regarding the factors the library considered in the creation of the News Lounge. Charts 8–11 provide the result of users' responses to open-ended questions. Answers were grouped by broad themes such as "variety of news channels," "space," "value of news," etc.

Favorable response to having access to non-US news (74.9%), the ability to observe how news events are covered by the different news outlets (50.8%), and the ability to watch and/or listen to the news while studying (47.6%) were valued most by library users (Chart 7). When asked what they valued (in their own words), responses fell into one of four categories: space, value of news, variety of news channels, and access to international news (Chart 8). The physical space ranked highest when asked what they liked most (Chart 8), but also with how the News Lounge could be improved (Chart 9). Users liked the physical News Lounge space with a variety of seating options (64%), but they also thought the space was the factor that needed to be improved the most (40%). They viewed the space as a “comfortable place to study and watch the news” with “a variety of seating options” where they could “relax, study, talk, or just listen.” They commented that the News Lounge could be improved with a “bigger space and more seating,” especially with “newer seating.” While easy access to multiple international news sources is important, the environment for watching the news should also be considered when designing a library space with access to international news. Students want to be able to study while watching the news and have the option of watching the news when not studying.

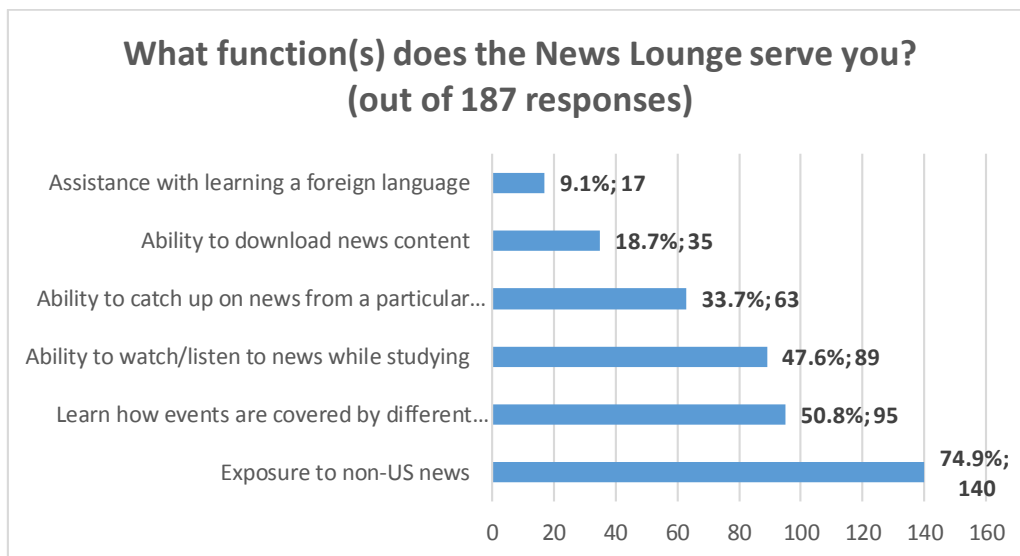


Chart 7

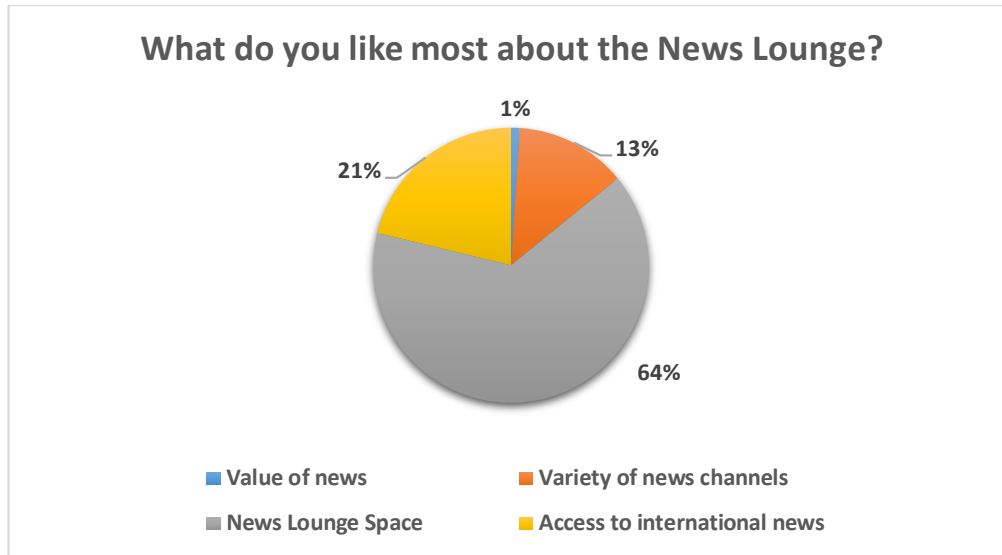


Chart 8

The library staff was interested in the other responses regarding possible improvement because these insights might contribute to public service and our main goal of attracting more users to the library. The majority of the comments on how to improve the News Lounge ranked at 10% or less, with the exception of 20% of user comments that the News Lounge was “ok as is” (Chart 9). Several comments provided us with insight on ways to improve the News Lounge. Users commented that the News Lounge should be promoted more, headphones and FM radios should be provided, and information on how to listen to the news should be easily available. It was easy to remedy these concerns: we purchased several inexpensive, pocket-sized FM radios and pairs of earbuds that could be loaned to library users for free, we posted signs below each TV monitor with information regarding the respective FM channel, and we promoted the ability to listen to the news and the availability of loanable FM radios and earbuds throughout the library space and on the library website. We also took the opportunity to promote the News Lounge and inform patrons of how to listen to the news through the library tours we provide to all incoming undergraduate and graduate students. Since our tour groups are relatively small (ten or fewer students), library tours are an excellent opportunity to discuss and answer questions on how to access the international news.

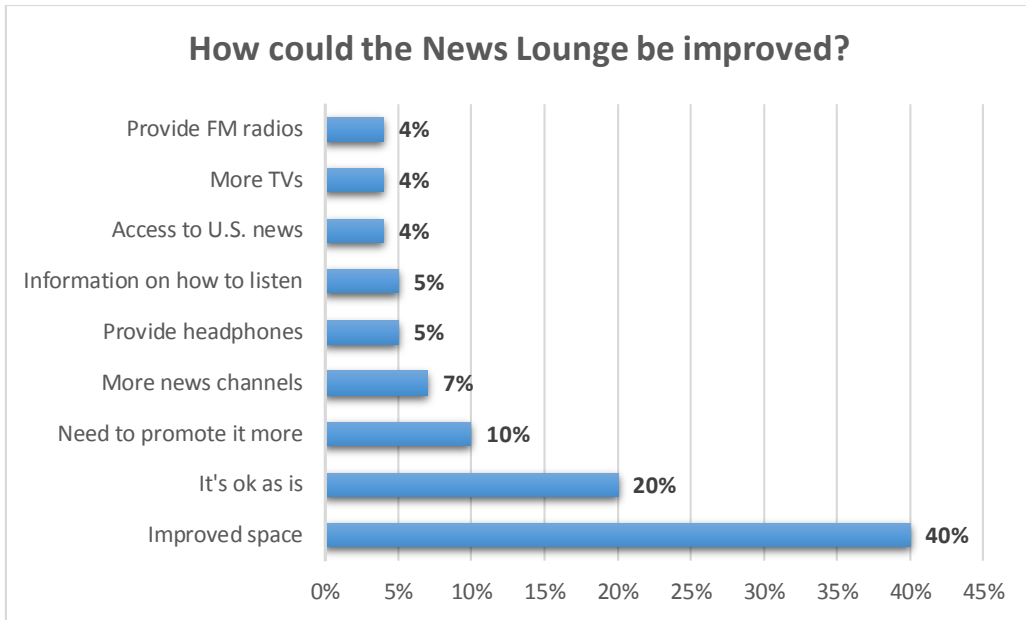


Chart 9

It was also important to ascertain if the News Lounge had made a lasting impression or impact on library users and if it had the ability to attract and motivate patrons to use the Communications Library on a regular basis (Chart 10). The biggest value the News Lounge provided users was providing access to international news (68%). The survey comments indicated that library patrons appreciated seeing “how different countries have different ways of sharing news, but with some similarities,” “how other nations report and portray America in their news,” and “how other countries focus on world issues, while the US is focused more on what is happening at home.” Library users also appreciated that international news provided information on current events (21%). They commented that they’ve “gained more insight by simply paying attention to what is happening in other parts of the world” and “I’ve learned more about what is happening in other countries.” From comments like these, we ascertained that the News Lounge has made it more convenient and enjoyable for library users to be more knowledgeable and passionate regarding world issues.

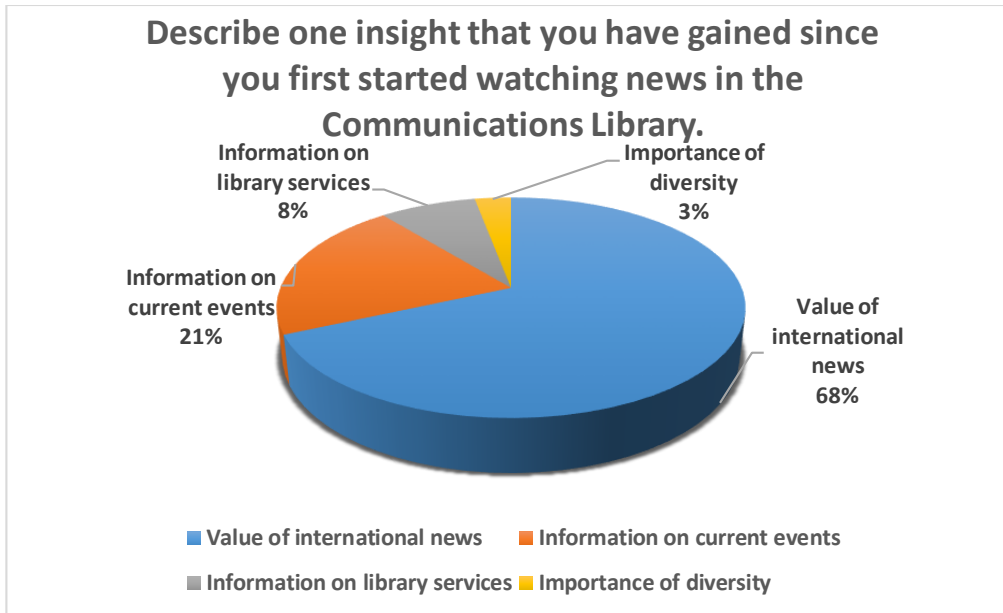


Chart 10

The final question provided us insight in how library users valued the News Lounge or valued having access to international news in comparison to other services or resources the library provides. Patrons were asked to respond to a recommendation to remove the News Lounge and replace it with additional collections or seating (Chart 11). Patrons responded overwhelmingly (95%) against removing the News Lounge. In addition to responding “no,” they provided reasons why it would be a bad decision and how it could negatively affect library users: “Bad decision. We really need an international perspective,” “the news lounge is a great addition to the Communications Library and that it opens up a great opportunity to become more involved in the world through the media,” and “not necessary to remove it because the news lounge provides just as much, if not more, information and valuable content.”

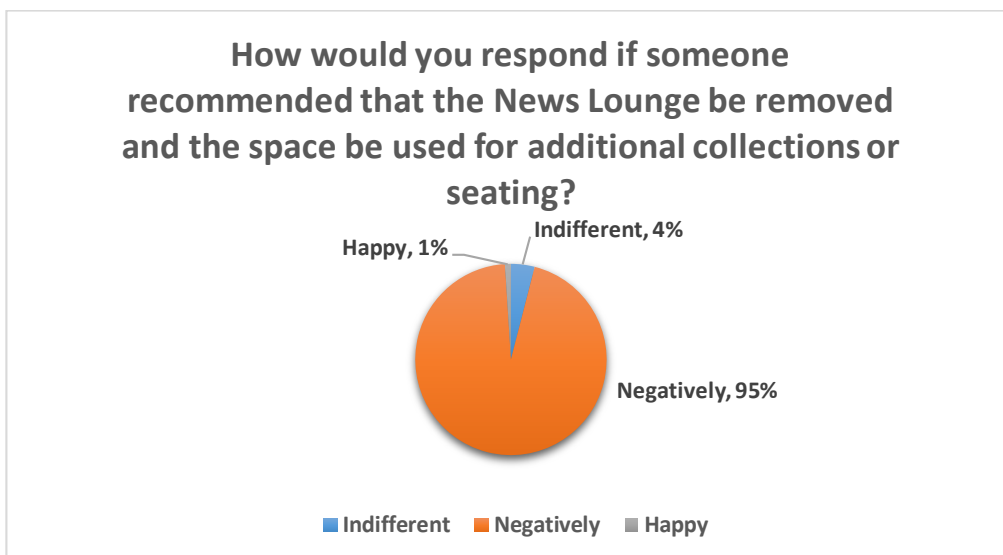


Chart 11

Conclusion

An international news lounge gives libraries a unique opportunity to provide its users with access to international media and improve their knowledge of international events and perspectives. It attracts students to library space while creating an opportunity for students to become more culturally aware and media literate. It stimulates interaction within the library and provides instructors with the ability to integrate broadcast media into the classroom. Students learn about media in the classroom and through their assignments. With its diverse selection of international news, the News Lounge provides them the unique opportunity to learn about news in a real-world setting, enabling them to compare the various perspectives and media outlets. They are able to consume news in an environment more conducive to how they work and interact, enabling them to easily integrate it into their busy lives. Capitalizing on innovative opportunities to provide users with access to international media enables libraries to engage students critically and passionately and to increase student awareness and appreciation of other cultures and values.

¹ Scott L. Althaus and David Tewksbury, "Patterns of Internet and Traditional News Media Use in a Networked Community," *Political Communication* 17 (2000): 21–45.

² The different news formats and their strengths and weaknesses are discussed in more detail elsewhere. Most notably: "Sex, News and Statistics," *Economist* 8191 (October 7, 2000): 11–12; James Fallows, "But Is It Journalism?," *American Prospect* 11, no. 1 (1999): 58–60; Ronald Bailey, "News Shows Open Gateways to the Internet," *American Enterprise* 10, no. 2 (1999): 63; The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, *Internet News Takes Off: Event-Driven News Audiences*, Washington, D.C.: The Pew Research Center for People and the Press, 1998, 1-26; The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, *News Attracts Most Internet Users: One-in-Ten Voters Online for Campaign '96*, Washington, D.C.: The Pew Research Center for People and the Press, 1996, accessed March 1, 2016, <http://www.people-press.org/1996/12/16/news-attracts-most-internet-users/>; Steven Chaffee and Stacey Frank, "How Americans Get Political Information: Print Versus Broadcast News," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 546 (1996): 48–58; Luis Buceta Facorro and Melvin L. DeFleur, "A Cross-Cultural Experiment on How Well Audiences Remember News Stories From Newspaper, Computer, Television, and Radio Sources," *Journalism Quarterly* 70 (1993): 585–601; John P. Robinson and Dennis K. Davis, "Television News and the Informed Public: An Information-Processing Approach," *Journal of Communication* 40, no. 3 (1990): 106–19; Robert D. McClure and Thomas E. Patterson, "Print vs. Network News," *Journal of Communication* 26, no. 2 (1976): 23–28.

³ Scott Carlson, "The Deserted Library," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 16, 2001, accessed March 1, 2016.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Website of the University of Illinois, "About: Rankings," accessed February 23, 2016, <http://illinois.edu/about/rankings.html>.

⁶ Website of the University of Illinois, Division of Management Information, "On-Campus Fall 2015 Statistical Abstract of Ten-Day Enrollment," September 5, 2015, accessed February 23, 2016, http://www.dmi.illinois.edu/stuenr/abstracts/FA15_ten.htm

⁷ Martha Kyrillidou, Shaneka Morris, and Gary Roebuck, eds., *ARL Statistics 2013–2014* (Washington, D.C.: Association of Research Libraries, 2015), 51.

⁸ Josh Pasek, Kate Kenski, Daniel Romer, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, "America's Youth and Community Engagement: How Use of Mass Media is Related to Civic Activity and Political Awareness in 14- to 22-Year-Olds," *Communication Research* 33 (2006): 115–35; William P. Eveland Jr. and Dietram A. Scheufele, "Connecting News Media Use with Gaps in Knowledge and Participation," *Political Communication* 17 (2000): 215–37.

⁹ Edgar Huang, "The Causes of Youths' Low News Consumption and Strategies for Making Youths Happy News Consumers," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into News Media Technologies* 15 (2009): 105–22.