Article

Journalism & Mass Communication Educator
1–17
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DOI: 10.1177/1077695816687408
journals.sagepub.com/home/jmce
SAGE

A Motivational Perspective on Mass Communication Students' Satisfaction With Their Major: Investigating Antecedents and Consequences

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Abstract

This study used self-determination theory (SDT) to investigate the motivations for selecting a major among mass communication and media majors at 18 colleges and universities across the United States. Specifically, 669 mass communication majors were queried on their intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for choosing a major, their degree of major satisfaction, and positive outcomes related to academic performance and overall well-being. As a whole, the findings suggest that students who select their major on the basis of its perceived ability to satisfy intrinsic needs tend to be more satisfied with their major selection and report higher levels of academic performance, career surety, and overall life satisfaction. These results are discussed in the context of both post-secondary mass communication programs and students' ability to successfully navigate the transition into professional life.

Keywords

self-determination theory, media majors, advertising, journalism, public relations, strategic communication, motivations

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Most college students, by virtue of the fact that they have chosen to attend college, are motivated to accomplish something from the experience. The motivation may ostensibly be to graduate. However, for many students, the motivations are more nuanced: to earn credentials that will lead to better employment, to maintain or improve their quality of life, to satisfy a curiosity, to engage in an enjoyable lifelong activity, to participate in the act of learning, and/or to gain the approval of others.

Equally as important in the decision to attend college, and the accompanying motivation to accomplish something, is what area of specialization to pursue. The long- and short-term ramifications of a person's choice of a college major can hardly be overemphasized; it is often the catalyst by which the first job and subsequent occupations—indeed, a lifelong career—emanates. Although not always the case, a person's choice of major is nevertheless generally meant to reflect his or her intention and ambition years, even decades, into the future.

Part of the calculus that must go into that critical decision by a student is an awareness of what awaits upon graduation, or at least the perception of what is in store. Students deciding upon a major of study must weigh whether their choice will provide them with marketable skills and make them satisfied later in life, and for mass communications students, the decision may be related to personality traits (Crawford, Fudge, Hubbard, & Filak, 2013).

For those considering careers in mass communications fields, there exists a great degree of uncertainty. Whereas the number of public relations and advertising jobs is expected to increase marginally over the next decade, journalism jobs are expected to decline by 9% (Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2015). Audiences for traditional news outlets continue to shrink, with print newspaper readership in steep decline as people become accustomed to accessing online news for free (Barthel, 2016). Although the number of full-time digital journalism positions has increased, this growth compensates for only a small percentage of the traditional print journalism jobs lost since 2003 (Jurkowitz, 2014). Even television news, which has not seen the same drop in advertising dollars as print journalism, is struggling to maintain audiences. Whereas network television news viewership stayed relatively stable in 2015, local TV news lost audience in every timeslot (Mitchell & Holcomb, 2016). Although job prospects in public relations and advertising are not as daunting, they nevertheless remain highly competitive, and starting salaries are usually low when compared with positions in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)–related fields (Langdon, McKittrick, Beede, Khan, & Doms, 2011). Moreover, rapid and dramatic changes to the technological landscape have both revolutionized media practices and resulted in a highly unpredictable climate for professional communicators (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013).

Despite these many challenges, student enrollment in mass communication programs has remained relatively robust (Becker, Vlad, & Simpson, 2013), with some students motivated to choose a career in journalism for the perceived path to a life of writing and fame (Carpenter, Hoag, Grant, & Bowe, 2014). Indeed, although enrollments in mass communication programs have declined slightly in recent years, the number of degrees granted by those institutions has continued to increase (Becker et al., 2013).[1] In light of the foregoing, the overarching goal of this research is to help

mass communication educators and industry professionals better understand the motivational factors that guide mass communication undergraduates' choice of major. This article will also explore the degree to which congruency between students' motivational characteristics and degree coursework facilitates positive outcomes related to student performance and overall well-being. In other words, this research is concerned with assessing both the motivational dynamics that influence mass communication students' choice of major and the degree to which these motivational orientations affect students' ability to successfully navigate their college years. The results of this research will help teachers and administrators develop capable, well-rounded professionals who can meet the challenges of an uncertain future in the communications field. Moreover, greater clarity about student motivation can inform both theory and practice as researchers seek to better understand so-called millennials and their influence within society.

This research is guided, in large part, by Deci and Ryan's (1985, 2011) self-determination theory (SDT). The SDT perspective holds that two general types of motivations drive people to act: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivations reflect the natural human propensity to learn and refer to doing something because it is enjoyable. Extrinsic motivations arise from external influences and are driven by the desire to obtain rewards. Understanding these two different types of motivations is key to explaining both why students choose mass communications majors, the degree to which they are satisfied with their selection of major, and their ability to derive positive outcomes from their degree work.

Literature Review

SDT

Deci and Ryan (1985) lay the theoretical groundwork for two types of motivations that generally govern a person's motivation for action. They argue that people not only have different amounts of motivation but also have different *kinds* of motivation; in essence, people's motivations vary not only in level but also in orientation. In conceptualizing SDT, Deci and Ryan distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations based on the different goals that give rise to action.

Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation is understood as the natural human tendency to learn and assimilate. It refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable. It emanates from one's sense of self and is defined as doing an activity for the inherent satisfaction it brings rather than for some separable consequence. "When intrinsically motivated, a person is moved to act for the fun or challenge entailed rather than because of external prods, pressures or rewards" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 56). Intrinsic motivation results when innate psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied (Deci & Ryan, 1991, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

For this motivation, behaviors are done for the positive experience associated with exercising and extending one's capacities. Operating on the theory that all behaviors are motivated by rewards, intrinsically motivated activities are said to be ones for which the reward is in the activity itself, providing satisfaction of innate psychological needs (Frederick-Recascino & Schuster-Smith, 2003).

Intrinsic motivation relies on the assumption that humans are innately endowed with intrinsic motivational tendencies. In their healthiest state, humans are active, inquisitive, curious and playful, and thus have a natural motivational inclination toward ubiquitous readiness to learn and explore without requiring extraneous incentives. In this way, intrinsic motivations are catalyzed rather than caused (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivations emanate from external pressures. Specifically, to say an individual is extrinsically motivated is to say that he or she engages in a behavior to obtain some sort of reward. In the classic case of extrinsic motivation, one feels externally propelled into action (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Extrinsic motivations increasingly guide behavioral decisions after early childhood when "the freedom to be intrinsically motivated becomes increasingly curtailed by social demands and roles that require individuals to assume responsibility for non-intrinsically interesting tasks" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 60). It is not uncommon, for example, to see intrinsic motivation grow weaker with each advancing grade (Lepper, Corpus, & Iyengar, 2005). Students become more pragmatic about their school goals and future direction of their careers, and gravitate toward achieving separable, reward-based outcomes.

Extrinsic motivations may be more deeply nuanced than intrinsic motivations. For example, a student may be motivated to do his or her homework not necessarily to receive a good grade but because of fear of failure or parental sanctions; the separable outcome motivation is avoiding reprimand. In this way, students can perform extrinsically motivated actions with resentment, resistance, and disinterest (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

> Because extrinsically motivated behaviors are not inherently interesting and thus initially externally prompted, the primary reason people are likely to be willing to do the behaviors is that they are valued by significant others to whom they feel (or would like to feel) connected, whether that be a family, a peer group, or a society. (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 64)

Major Satisfaction

Researchers have applied the self-determination perspective to education as it pertains to students' motivation for learning and have found that the highest quality of conceptual learning seems to occur under the same motivational conditions that promote personal growth and adjustment (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). Research in this area is concerned with promoting an interest in learning, a valuing of education,

and a confidence in their own capacities. Proponents argue that the central features of optimal learning are conceptual understanding, the flexible use of knowledge, and that the "ideal school systems are ones that succeed in promoting in student's a genuine enthusiasm for learning and accomplishment and a sense of volitional involvement in the educational enterprise" (Deci et al., 1991, p. 325).

Studies have shown that students who have more self-determined forms of motivation for doing schoolwork were more likely to stay in school than students who had less self-determined motivation (Daoust, Vallerand, & Blais, 1988). Furthermore, students who reported more autonomous motivation for doing schoolwork, in general, showed signs of great conceptual learning than did students who reported less autonomous motivation (Black & Deci, 2000; Froiland, 2011; Grolnick & Ryan, 1987). Vallerand, Blais, Briere, and Pelletier (1989) found that students who had a greater intrinsic motivation showed more positive emotions in the classroom and more enjoyment of academic work than did students whose motivational profiles were comparatively less autonomous. Deci and colleagues (1991) summarized their position: "In terms of education, it has become ever more apparent that self-determination, in the forms of intrinsic motivation and autonomous internalization, leads to the types of outcomes that are beneficial both to individuals and society" (p. 342). Speaking more broadly, satisfaction with one's major represents congruency between individual values/motivations and the tasks associated with one's working environment (Holland, 1997; Nauta, 2007). Building upon these findings, this study suggests that intrinsic motivation—in contrast to extrinsic motivation—should be a positive driver of student major satisfaction.

For college students, the selection and pursuit of a college major can be resource intensive. Satisfaction with one's major has both short- and long-term implications related to one's performance and overall well-being. Additional research on career satisfaction (e.g., Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001; Judge & Watanabe, 1993) suggests that satisfaction with one's educational environment is a crucial facilitator of positive, student-centric factors such as academic performance, career-decision self-efficacy, and psychological well-being (Graunke & Woosley, 2005; Knoop, 1994; Nauta, 2007).

In line with prior research, this study focuses on three key outcomes related to major satisfaction: career surety, academic performance, and life satisfaction. These constructs are important because they represent core factors related to students' ability to successfully meet the challenges posed by their course of study and, in so doing, mature into early-career professionals with the internal competencies necessary to positively contribute to media industries continually disrupted by change.

As it pertains to career surety, research indicates that students who are unsatisfied with their major often have serious doubts about the degree to which the career associated with their major is "right" for them (Knoop, 1994). This lack of career surety has both immediate and long-term effects on college students' decision making and self-perceptions (Jurgens, 2000). In the short term, low levels of career surety introduce a degree of stasis that inhibits students' ability to dedicate themselves to their studies (Jurgens, 2000). In the longer term, career indecision may harm students' confidence

as they make decisions about their abilities. Nauta (2007), illustrating the importance of college students' major satisfaction relative to career selection and persistence, noted that students who are satisfied with their selection of major feel more efficacious about making career decisions because they have accomplished a challenging task. "On the other hand, those who are dissatisfied with their majors may interpret their dissatisfaction as a performance failure" (p. 457).

In relation to academic performance, prior research indicates that college students' in-class performance is linked to a diverse array of factors, including high school preparation, prior knowledge, abilities, and skills research (Choi, 2005; DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004). Therein, evidence suggests that students who are unsatisfied with their selection of major often fail to marshal the resources necessary to perform at a high level over an extended period (National Postsecondary Education Cooperative, 2006; Tessema, Ready, & Yu, 2012). The explanation behind this presumed effect is straightforward. Major satisfaction is, in large part, an attitudinal factor (Tessema et al., 2012). Drawing upon the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), it is thus reasonable to expect that students who are satisfied with their selection of major will exert greater and more systematic efforts that pertain to academic achievement.

Finally, there is reason to believe that college students' major satisfaction is crucially linked to overall life satisfaction (Lounsbury, Saudargas, Gibson, & Leong, 2005). Life satisfaction, according to Pavot and Diener (1993), can be specifically understood as the "conscious cognitive judgment of one's life" (p. 164) in which the criteria for judgment are made by the individual perceiver. According to Lounsbury et al. (2005), life satisfaction is commonly viewed as the "ultimate outcome of human experience and, variously, as an indicant of personal well-being, happiness, and personal quality of life" (p. 707). Life satisfaction is inextricably linked to the activities that people engage with on daily basis; therein, evidence suggests that satisfaction with high investment activities—such as one's job or college degree work—may exert an especially pronounced influence on overall life satisfaction (Hart, 1999). For many college students, the selection of a college major is an important milestone that defines both the *current* and *future* selves. At the very least, the selection of a college major is a resource-intensive process that influences a student's self-concept (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003) and charts a course for her or his future. Those who are unhappy with their major, therefore, are unlikely to be satisfied with their present life context (Lounsbury et al., 2005).

Hypotheses

SDT describes the basic psychological needs that are inherent in human life (Deci et al., 1991), and suggests that factors such as experiential satisfaction are strongly related to the ability to autonomously engage in activities that are, in and of themselves, rewarding. As such, the current study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Intrinsic motivation will be positively related to major satisfaction.

Prior research has found that behavior elicited via external regulation can diminish task-related satisfaction and result in a host of negative outcomes ranging from discontentment to anxiety (e.g., Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H2: Extrinsic motivation will be negatively related to major satisfaction.

Existing research indicates that students who are highly satisfied with their choice of college major can be expected to experience greater surety when thinking about their intended careers (Knoop, 1994; Nauta, 2007). Given the correspondence between major satisfaction and self-concept (Allen, 1996; Nauta, 2007), it should also follow that major satisfaction positively predicts life satisfaction. Finally, there exists evidence that students who feel highly satisfied with their major selection are increasingly likely to be high performers (Graunke & Woosley, 2005). Thus, the following hypotheses are posited:

H3: Major satisfaction will be positively related to career surety.
H4: Major satisfaction will be positively related to academic performance.
H5: Major satisfaction will be positively related to overall life satisfaction.

Method

Recruitment and Sample

The research team received institutional review board (IRB) approval and followed the research guidelines stipulated by their respective universities. All protocols were followed as approved. To facilitate participant response, instructors and administrators were contacted at approximately 30 U.S.-based universities and colleges. In all, representatives at 18 institutions agreed to participate in the project. Participating representatives were tasked with providing students a small postcard that described the study and requested their participation. In addition, institutional representatives discussed the project with their colleagues as a means of stimulating broader response. Participating institutions (i.e., those institutions from at least one valid response was acquired) included the following: Cleveland State University, George Washington University, Hampton University, Jackson State University, Marquette University, Louisiana State University, Ohio University, Oklahoma State University, San Francisco State University, University of Akron, University of Alabama, University of Kansas, University of Houston, University of Memphis, University of Nevada, University of Texas, University of Oregon, and San Diego State University.[2]

All potential respondents were informed that they had the opportunity to enter a drawing for a US$100 Amazon.com gift card for completing the survey. The survey instrument was hosted online and contained questions about major status, participant demographics, motivations for choosing a major, career surety, and life satisfaction. The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete.

In all, a total of 876 completed responses were acquired. Given the current study's focus on mass communication majors, students who indicated that their majors were in the areas of communication studies, organizational communication, visual communication, and interpersonal communication were removed from the sample. In addition, students who indicated that they were undecided or majoring in a field outside of mass communication were also removed. Responses retained in the sample were from those students who indicated that they were majoring in advertising, journalism, public relations, strategic communication/integrated marketing communication, or telecommunications. The analytic sample, thus, was comprised of 669 responses. Table 1 provides descriptive information for the sample.

Measures

Intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation was measured using three items, all on 7-point Likert-type scales in which 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*. Each item focused on the degree to which the student was engaged with his or her coursework. Individual items included the following: *I chose my major because the coursework arouses my curiosity; I chose my major because I find the coursework enjoyable*; and *I chose my major because I find the coursework engrossing/stimulating* ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 1.26$; $\alpha = .77$).

Extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation was measured using three items, all on 7-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). These items focused on the degree to which major selection was regulated by career-relevant rewards. The items included in this measure were as follows: *I chose my major because it will help me find a job that gives me the material possessions and lifestyle that I desire; I chose my major because it will help me find a job with good salary and benefits; and I chose my major because it will allow me to find a job with good job security* ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.27$; $\alpha = .77$).

Major satisfaction. Major satisfaction was measured using three items, all taken from Nauta (2007). Each item was anchored to a 7-point scale where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*. Items included the following: *Overall, I am happy with the major I've chosen; I feel good about the major I've selected*; and *I often wish I hadn't gone into this major* (reverse coded; $M = 5.88$, $SD = 1.13$; $\alpha = .87$).

Career surety. To measure the degree that the student believed that the career path associated with his or her major was the "right" one was measured using three items. Using a projective approach, each item asked respondents to make predictions about their career status 10 years from the date they took the survey. Response categories ranged from 1 = *very unsure* to 7 = *very sure*. Scale items included the following: *I see myself working in a career associated with my major in 10 years; In 10 years, I predict that the career associated with my major will be a big part of my life*; and *In 10 years, I predict that the career associated with my major will provide me with much satisfaction* ($M = 5.71$, $SD = 1.16$; $\alpha = .86$).

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Sample.

Characteristics	%
Biological sex	
Male	26.6
Female	73.4
Age	21.90 years (*SD* = 10.03 years)
Race/ethnicity	
African American/Black	12.4
Asian/Pacific Islander	5.7
Caucasian/White	64.6
Hispanic	8.3
Native American/Alaskan	0.2
Identify with more than one race	5.7
Other	3.2
Annual family household income (Est.)	
≤US$24,999	12.9
$US25,000-US$49,999	22.6
US$50,000-US$99,999	32.0
≥US$100,000	32.6
Academic major	
Advertising	18.8
Journalism	34.1
Public relations	37.8
Strategic communication/Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC)	11.7
Telecommunications	16.4
Total % with strategic focus	59.0
Class standing	
Freshman	8.7
Sophomore	20.5
Junior	37.4
Senior	33.3

Note. For academic major, respondents were told to select all that apply; as such, the total percentage is greater than 100%.

Student performance. Student performance was measured using a single item that asked the respondent to provide their major-relevant grade point average (GPA). Eight response categories were provided. Response categories ranged from 1 = 0.00 to 0.50 to 8 = 3.50 to 4.00 ($M = 6.17$, $SD = 0.94$).

Life satisfaction. Life satisfaction was measured using five items, all taken from Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985). Each item was placed on a 7-point scale where higher scores were indicative of higher degrees of agreement. Items included

the following: *In most ways, my life is close to ideal*; *The conditions of my life are excellent*; *I am satisfied with my life*; *So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life*; and *If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing* ($M = 4.94$, $SD = 1.29$; $\alpha = .89$).

Results

Latent variable analyses were conducted using Mplus 7.3. The model testing was a two-step process (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988), in which hypothesis testing was preceded by estimation of a measurement model. The estimated measurement model had acceptable fit, $\chi^2 = 264.52$, $df = 109$, $p < .01$; $\chi^2/df = 2.43$; comparative fit index (CFI) = .98; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .05; 90% CI = [0.039, 0.053]; standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .04. Convergent validity was examined for each latent item. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), convergent validity is demonstrated when all item indicators possess a significant *t* value, demonstrate reasonably robust standardized factor loadings (i.e., > .50), show an average variance extracted (AVE) coefficient in excess of .50, and have a composite reliability (CR) coefficient in excess of .70. As shown in Table 2, the data exhibited convergent validity. Next, discriminant validity was assessed. Discriminant validity is demonstrated when the square root of the AVE is larger than the correlation between each of the other measures included in the model (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). As seen in Table 3, this criterion was met.

Model Testing

The second step in the analysis involved testing the specified structural model. Initial estimation suggested the data fit the model acceptably well, $\chi^2 = 329.64$, $df = 130$, $p < .01$; $\chi^2/df = 2.54$; CFI = .97; RMSEA = .05; 90% CI = [0.042, 0.054]; SRMR = .05.

Examination of parameter estimates associated with the final model suggested that intrinsic motivation was positively and strongly related to major satisfaction. Conversely, external motivational factors did not significantly predict major satisfaction. For its part, major satisfaction was positively and significantly related to student performance, career surety, and life satisfaction. Figure 1 shows these results in detail. The findings support **H1** (positive relationship between extrinsic motivation and major satisfaction), **H3** (positive relationship between major satisfaction and career surety), **H4** (positive relationship between major satisfaction and academic performance), and **H5** (positive relationship between major satisfaction and life satisfaction). Notably, **H2**, which suggested a negative relationship between extrinsic motivation and major satisfaction, was not supported.

Indirect Effects

As a final step, the model-implied indirect effects were explored. Significance of all indirect effects was examined using the 95% confidence intervals obtained through the

Table 2. Loading Ranges, Commonalities, CRs, and AVE for Each Latent Item.

Measure	Loading range	h^2 range	CR	AVE
Intrinsic motivation	.63-.84	.39-.71	.78	.55
Extrinsic motivation	.57-.88	.33-.77	.79	.56
Major satisfaction	.69-.94	.48-.87	.89	.74
Career surety	.71-.87	.51-.76	.86	.67
Life satisfaction	.66-.88	.44-.77	.90	.64

Note. All factor loadings significant at $p < .01$; CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted.

Table 3. Correlations Between Latent Items.

Measure	1	2	3	4	5
Intrinsic motivation (1)	**.74**	.21	.67	.48	.35
Extrinsic motivation (2)		**.75**	.20	.25	.17
Major satisfaction (3)			**.86**	.64	.39
Career surety (4)				**.82**	.27
Life satisfaction (5)					**.80**

Note. All correlations significant at $p < .01$; discriminant validity is bolded and placed on the diagonal.

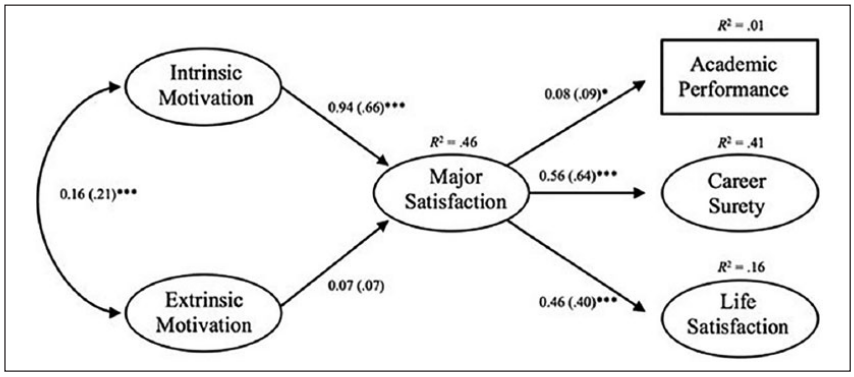

Figure 1. Structural equation model results.
Note. Unstandardized coefficients are reported outside of parentheses, standardized coefficients are reported inside parentheses.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

use of 10,000 bias-corrected bootstrapped re-samples of the data (Hayes, 2013). Following convention, if the confidence intervals do not include 0, evidence of significance is obtained. The results suggested that major satisfaction facilitated positive and significant indirect relationships between intrinsic motivation and academic

performance (b = 0.08, 95% CI = [0.01, 0.15]), career surety (b = 0.53, 95% CI = [0.41, 0.68]), and life satisfaction (b = 0.43, 95% CI = [0.33, 0.56]).

Discussion

This research explored both why students select mass communication majors and the degree to which alignment between students' motivational orientations and coursework requirements is associated with crucial factors related to personal and professional development. As predicted by **H1**, the results suggested that major satisfaction was positively influenced by students' intrinsic motivations. However, evidence that extrinsic motivations were associated with students' satisfaction with their major was not found. In addition, major satisfaction was positively associated with career surety (**H3**), academic performance (**H4**), and life satisfaction (**H5**). Moreover, underscoring the crucial importance of major satisfaction, additional tests of the model-implied indirect effects suggested that major satisfaction effectively facilitated positive relationships between intrinsic motivation and student performance, career surety, and life satisfaction.

Several implications stem from the findings. First, the results suggest that students' satisfaction with their major is strongly related to the selected major's ability to satisfy intrinsic needs. This finding is consistent with previous studies, which have consistently shown that the fulfillment of intrinsic needs plays an influential role in facilitating key learning outcomes (Deci et al., 1991; Froiland & Worrell, 2016). Considered specifically in relation to the current research context, this finding may help explain why student enrollment in mass communication majors—particularly in journalism and related subfields—has remained largely unaffected by market realities. Although external pressures or desires likely influence students to some degree, the data suggest that the ability of a major to fulfill intrinsic needs plays a dominant role in the selection of mass communication as an area of study.

Relatedly, the data can be interpreted to suggest that outreach efforts taken to recruit *future* mass communication majors may be most effective if emphasis is placed on the types of activities practiced in mass communication fields. By emphasizing the type of work that mass communication practitioners do, degree programs are more likely to attract students whose intrinsic motivations and aptitudes align with course content. This, in turn, encourages satisfaction with one's degree work, depth learning, and, ultimately, may help forge hardy, beneficial relationships between academic departments and individual students that last beyond graduation. Moreover, by emphasizing the intrinsic value of a career in mass communication, degree programs are establishing the preconditions necessary for the recruitment of students who will obtain optimal benefit (personal, professional, and otherwise) from this area of study.

Consistent with prior research (Allen, 1996; Nauta, 2007), the current results further highlight the importance of college students' satisfaction with their major. Specifically, data suggested that students who were satisfied with their major choice indicated higher levels of overall life satisfaction, career surety, and academic performance. Conversely, those unsatisfied by their major selection may find it difficult to achieve either high levels of academic performance or personal growth (Ryff & Keyes,

1995). Students who are unhappy with their major may develop into less resilient professionals who, ultimately, decide to pursue interests in career fields outside of mass communication upon graduation.

Pursuing a college degree requires a substantial outlay of financial and personal resources on the part of students and their families. As a result, students' future selves—both professional and personal—are linked to and intertwined with the collegiate environments that facilitate their transition from youth to adulthood. For some, this transition can be wrought with pitfalls. Findings presented in this study suggest that mass communication degree programs that cultivate learning environments centered on the fulfillment of intrinsic interests may help produce well-trained professionals and, in so doing, help students navigate the developmentally challenging period interrelating youth and adulthood (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010).

Finally, results suggest that students' in-major satisfaction may be an important indicator for mass communication colleges/departments seeking to monitor the vitality of both their academic offerings and their overall learning environment. Therein, in an academic environment that increasingly prioritizes mass communication degree programs' ability to assess student-learning outcomes (e.g., Farwell, Alligood, Fitzgerald, & Blake, 2016; Henderson & Christ, 2014), measuring students' major satisfaction may be one valid tool for comprehensively understanding the overall effectiveness of a degree program.

Some factors limit this study's findings. First, the design of the currently presented study constricts our ability to connect the sample-specific findings with the general population of mass communication majors or generate causal inferences. Second, this study relied solely on self-report measures. In some cases, such as the student performance measure (self-reported GPA), this reliance may limit the findings. Third, the present work measured motivational orientations in two somewhat stark terms: intrinsic and extrinsic. More nuanced approaches (i.e., exploration of extrinsic factors on a regulation–autonomy continuum) may have yielded more precise results.

Despite its limitations, the results of this study help explain why mass communication programs continue to experience robust enrollment despite strong employment competition and an ever-evolving and turbulent media industry. Future research could explore a number of different areas touched upon by this research. As briefly discussed, organismic integration theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000) holds that extrinsic motivation exists in a variety of forms that vary in terms of internal/external regulation. Future research could more specifically explore the degree to which different types of extrinsic motivation either promote or hinder mass communication students' success. Second, previous research suggests that intrinsic motivation is the product of an activity or task's ability to satisfy innate needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Future research models could more deliberately investigate these antecedents to intrinsic motivation to gain a better understanding of the structural dynamics underlying major satisfaction. Third, future research could comparatively explore the motivational orientations of the various majors encompassed by mass communication. In addition, such research could be expanded to explore the degree to which mass communication majors' motivations diverge from the motivations of students in other areas

of communication (i.e., communication studies, organizational communication, visual communication). Fourth, the field would benefit from additional study examining how student views on the rise of online publishing and the changing media landscape affects major choice and satisfaction. Finally, a longitudinal study investigating the degree to which major satisfaction and surety perceptions actually translate into career satisfaction and persistence would be of interest to both teachers and scholars.

In conclusion, the purpose of this study was to both better understand the factors that influence mass communication students' selection of, and satisfaction with, their major, and to investigate the degree to which satisfaction with one's major helps facilitate key student-centric outcomes related to career surety, academic performance, and general life satisfaction. The results illustrate the fundamental importance of aligning mass communication students' intrinsic motivations with course content. Specifically, students who indicated that their degree-relevant coursework was personally rewarding were increasingly likely to positively evaluate their degree program. Students who were satisfied by their choice of major indicated a greater degree of certainty that the career associated with their major was "right" for them, higher levels of academic performance, and greater levels of satisfaction with their lives. Considered jointly, these findings provide indication that matching students' intrinsic motivations with their degree coursework may help mass communication programs provide optimal benefit to both students and professional practice.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received research funding from a Petrone Family Fellowship, awarded by the Universtiy of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication.

Notes

1. The most recent enrollment survey results were reported in 2013. The Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) has commissioned a new research team whose findings were not released at the time of this article's publication.
2. The list of participating universities includes only those institutions from which we obtained at least one response included in the analytic sample ($n = 669$). In all, we obtained at least one complete response from students at 20 universities. In addition, given our request that institutional representatives discuss the project with their colleagues, the final sample included a small percentage respondents (5.7%, $n = 38$) who were located at universities not included in the dropdown list of universities provided in survey instrument.

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