

Approved by Heidi Stevenson on June 09 2025

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The Future of Journalism is Interactive

UO undergraduate Heidi Stevenson researches how people interact with and make sense of interactive newsgames.

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Heidi Stevenson, an undergraduate [media studies](#) student, is researching a recent take on long-form journalism: one that allows readers to immerse themselves in the world of the subjects through interactive newsgames.

Her research project, *Newsgames: How Interactive Digital Games About News Affect Comprehension, Trust, Empathy, and Persuasion*, explores how newsgames affect audiences compared to traditional news article. Her research recently won a top paper award at the [95th Annual Western States Communication Association Conference](#).

“This topic is definitely something that we need to be focusing on,” Stevenson said. “I was honored to have all of that hard work recognized.”

So, what exactly is a newsgame? Newsgames aren’t like Wordle or a crossword, nor are they like the “Oregon Trail” game kids play to learn about history. Instead, newsgames are interactive digital journalism rooted in real-world events and are designed to inform and engage audiences.

Primarily existing in long-form journalism, newsgames help translate complex issues into relevant, timely, and accessible experiences.

“It’s just another way of communicating the news,” Stevenson said. “Right now, they’re supplementary to traditional journalism.”

Like the nonlinear format of immersive newsgames, Stevenson’s academic path was not straightforward either. When she first transferred to Oregon, she initially started as a pre-journalism major. It wasn’t until her sophomore year in her “Gateway to Media” class that she was introduced to media studies and research.

Her interest in research deepened when a graduate student introduced her to [the Catalyst Journalism Project](#), an organization focused on investigative reporting and solutions journalism.

After she joined the Catalyst Journalism Project as an undergraduate research assistant, Stevenson ultimately changed her major to media studies.

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She first met [Maxwell Foxman](#), assistant professor of media studies and director of the [game studies minor](#), during her first term at UO in Fall 2021 in her Media and Society class. It wasn't until a later course she took with him, however, that he pointed her toward researching newsgames. Foxman also co-authored her award-winning paper, along with [Alex Segrè Cohen](#), assistant professor of science and risk communication.

Seeing interactivity as a key part of the future of long-form journalism, Stevenson examined how newsgames influence reader comprehension, trust, empathy, and opinion change.

In her project, Stevenson compared [The Financial Times' *The Uber Game*](#), a newsgame challenging players to make tough decisions as an Uber driver, with [the accompanying traditional article](#) based on the same source material, comparing participants' comprehension and empathy.

How do you measure something as abstract as empathy? To gauge participants' emotional response, Stevenson used a survey asking how their opinions of Uber changed after interacting with either the game or the article. Specifically, she looked at "state empathy."

"In this context, state empathy is exhibited particularly through engagement with a mediated message," Stevenson said. "So, whether it's from the TV, a video game, or an advertisement, state empathy is the empathy that you can pinpoint as being elicited by the mediated message."

The study found that newsgame participants demonstrated comprehension of the actual news issue compared to the news article group. However, when integrated with long-form journalism, comprehension and empathy increased. What does this mean for the future of journalism?

According to Stevenson, for now, integration is the way to go. For example, players of [The Uber Game](#) confront the economic pressures Uber drivers face firsthand, and the article adds further context and data to create a bigger picture.

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Already, some instances of the integration of newsgames and long-form journalism emerge today. For example, [Cozy Comfort, released this year by Reuters](#), integrates Stardew Valley-style gameplay with pieces of the larger article in between. This model not only helps audiences understand the facts but also emotionally engage with the content.

What's next for Stevenson's project? Stevenson is now working on phase two of her research on newsgames. This time, she is focused on revisiting her initial research questions, additionally comparing how the newsgame and article affected audience perception and trust of the news organization.

Stevenson will travel to Denver in June 2025 to present her findings at the [International Communication Association conference](#).

“A lot of this has just been mind-blowing,” Stevenson said. “It’s been wild.”

Stevenson plans to attend graduate school to earn her PhD, where she hopes to further study how emerging media technologies, like newsgames and digital storytelling, affect public understanding of complex issues like climate change and public policy.

Stevenson encourages any student interested in research and media studies to take full advantage of the opportunities that Oregon and the [School of Journalism and Communication](#) offer to students.

“Use every opportunity as a chance to develop your skills and tie together what you’re learning in different classes,” Stevenson said.

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LinkedIn Post:

Heidi Stevenson, undergraduate media studies student at the University of Oregon, won the Top Paper Award at the Western States Communication Association conference, presenting her research on the benefits of a new take on immersive newsgames.

Alongside her mentors and co-authors, Maxwell Foxman, director of the game studies minor and assistant professor of media studies, and Alex Segrè Cohen, assistant professor of science and risk communication, Stevenson plans to take the next step in researching how integrated newsgames enhance comprehension and empathy.

What does this mean for the future of long-form journalism? Read more to find out.

#newsgames #interactivejournalism #gamestudies

Instagram Post:

Interactive newsgames, like [Cozy Comfort](#), released this year by Reuters, turn readers into the subject of the article, and it could be the key to the future of journalism.

UO undergraduate media studies student Heidi Stevenson is researching how newsgames can impact empathy and comprehension. She even won an award for it.

Link to story in bio 

#newsgames #interactivejournalism #research

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