SOCIAL MEDIA AND NEWS CONSUMPTION

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ABSTRACT

Recent studies have provided insights on how the popularity of blogs, social media, and other user-generated content venues have impacted the way in which news is consumed and reported. However, little research has been done specifically related to whether or not individuals believe they are better informed as a result of social media.

The study explored how the popularity of social media and other user generated content venues have impacted the way in which news is consumed and distributed. The study examined the way in which individuals use social media to share and consume news stories and if they feel more informed as a result. The study was conducted using an online survey.

The majority of respondents disclosed that they share news to stay connected with family and friends. The respondents report that they depend on their network of friends to guide them to news articles, as they are a good representation for their own interest. The study found that individuals under the age of 35 rely heavily on their social networks for tips and alerts to news stories. The majority of all respondents are exposed to news stories that they may have otherwise missed or overlooked as a result of Facebook and Twitter.
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Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

Importance of the Study

There is no doubt that the Internet, social media, and smart phones have impacted the way in which individuals consume news. Traditional news outlets now have to compete with independent bloggers and social media websites. This thesis explored how the popularity of social media and other user generated content venues have impacted the way in which news is consumed and distributed. In particular, the thesis attempted to understand how news consumers are becoming the news creators and as a result if individuals feel more or less informed.

According to the Pew Research Center, Americans’ relationship to the news is being transformed in several directions thanks to the new tools and affordances of technology (“Participatory News Consumer”, 2010). This can be observed in that news is becoming more personal as users customize their experience and take charge of the flow of news into their lives. News is becoming a shared social experience as people exchange links to stories and recommend content as a form of cultural currency in their social networks (“Participatory News Consumer”, 2010). Additionally, news is becoming a participatory activity, as people contribute their own stories and experiences and post their reactions to events using websites such as Facebook and Twitter.

The Internet and smart phones are changing people’s relationship to news. According to the Pew Research Center, on a typical day, 61% of Americans get news online, which puts the Internet just behind television as a news source and ahead of newspapers (“State of the News Media”, 2010). Additionally, the center states that more than a quarter of adults now commonly access the Internet on their mobile phones, adding yet another layer of change in consumers’ relationship with news. This thesis
attempted to understand how news consumers are becoming the news creators and news distributors.

Online news consumers receive and send news through social media tools such as Twitter, blogs, Facebook, YouTube, and search engines to name a few venues. These tools elevate the public from news receivers to news contributors. For users, social media websites offer anyone the opportunity to express themselves and to connect with persons of like mind or interests. Social media tools provide an easy, little to no cost, way for members of the public to take part in discussions with larger groups of people and draw attention to issues and topics that traditional news media might have overlooked (Picard, 2009).

With the help of social media tools, the Internet is fast changing the way people consume their news. This activity was previously limited to reading the newspaper or listening to a news bulletin on radio, or watching it on TV. Today audiences can get an "instant helping" of the latest news, literally minutes old, on the Internet, or receive updates on their smart phones, in their email inbox or on their social network pages (Picard, 2009).

In addition to social media tools, blogs are turning individuals into news contributors. For example, blogs make it possible for everyone with basic computer skills and access to the Internet, to publish onto the web. Blogging has also impacted journalism in that regular citizens are increasingly performing ‘random acts of journalism’, having witnessed an event and writing about it on a blog (Stassen, 2010). In addition to blogs, Twitter is used by the everyday citizen to report current events and provide news commentary. This thesis examined the extent to which the public is driving
and consuming the news, and whether or not as a result individuals feel more or less informed.

**Definition of Terms**

*Citizen Journalism:* Citizen Journalism is defined by a number of attributes that make it distinct from professional journalism, including unpaid work, absence of professional training, often unedited publication of content, and distinct story selection and news judgment (Lasica, 2003).

*Traditional News:* Traditional News refers to newspaper (print), network television news, cable television news, and radio.

**Organization of Remaining Chapters**

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter two provides the theoretical basis that forms the framework for this study, reviews the literature on this topic, and forms research questions. Chapter three describes the scope of the study and explains the methodology used for data collection. Chapter four produces the results of the study, demonstrates how the results relate to the previous research, and discusses the implications of findings in relationship to the research questions. Chapter five discusses the limitations of the study, suggests further areas of research, and summarizes the study.
Chapter 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There is no doubt that traditional news outlets have been impacted by the Internet, social media, and smart phones. Traditional news outlets now have to compete with independent bloggers and social media websites. Recent studies have provided insights on how the popularity of blogs, social media, and other user-generated content venues have impacted the way in which news is consumed and reported. However, there has not been literature exploring how news consumers are becoming the news creators and if individuals feel more or less informed as a result.

The following review of literature examined social media and news consumption, in particular: socialization of the news, citizen journalism, responses from traditional journalism, and implications and concerns.

Theoretical Basis

This thesis emerged from the media ecology communication theory. According to McLuhan and Fiore (1989), it is impossible to understand social and cultural change without knowledge of the way media work as environments. Media ecology is the study of different personal and social environments created by the use of different communication technologies (McLuhan, 2003). Changes in technology transform the social construct, which in turn shapes perceptions, experiences, attitudes, and behavior (McLuhan, 1989).

News media has evolved over time to include newspapers, radio, television (TV), and the Internet. The overwhelming majority of Americans (92%) use multiple platforms to get news on a typical day, including national TV, local TV, the Internet, local newspapers, radio, and national newspapers (“Participatory News Consumer,” 2010).
New media refers to news accessed via the Internet. Several newer technology developments are shaping new news media. Social media sites and blogs have helped the news become a social experience in fresh ways for the public. People use their social networks to filter, assess, and react to news (“State of the News Media,” 2010).

Americans access the news in multiple formats on multiple platforms on myriad devices. The ascent of mobile connectivity via smartphones has turned newsgathering and news awareness into an anytime, anywhere affair for a segment of avid news watchers. However, little research has been done specifically related to whether or not individuals believe they are better informed as a result of social media.

**Social Media and News Consumption**

Online news consumers receive and send news through social media tools such as Twitter, blogs, Facebook, YouTube, and search engines. These tools elevate the public from news receivers to news contributors. According to Picard (2009), social media tools provide an easy, affordable way for members of the public to take part in discussions with larger groups of people and draw attention to issues and topics that traditional news media might have overlooked. Social media tools offer users the opportunity to express themselves and to connect with persons of like mind or interests.

Hermida (2010) claims that social media tools created new modes of organizing knowledge that rely on large, loosely organized groups of people working together electronically. Hermida also suggests that social media enables millions of people to communicate instantly, allowing them to share and discuss events that he asserts leads to an expression of collective intelligence.
Socialization of the News

Park (1940) noted that the function of news is to orient man and society in an actual world. Past research has found that news use enables participation by providing mobilizing information (Lemert, 1992), triggering discussions among people's networks (Shah et al., 2005), and allowing people to reflect upon issues (Eveland, 2004). Java et al. (2007) conducted studies that looked at the motivation of online new consumers, concluding that social media fulfills a need for a fast mode of communication that “lowers users’ requirement of time and thought investment for content generation” (Java et al., 2007, p. 2). In their analysis of user intentions, they found that people use Twitter for four reasons: daily chatter, conversation, sharing information and reporting news.

The advent of social media has helped the news become a social experience in fresh ways for consumers. People use their social networks and social networking technology to filter, assess, and react to news. Some 28% of Internet users have customized their home page to include news from their favorite source or topics and 40% of Internet users say an important feature of a news website to them is the ability to customize the news they get from the site (“Participatory News Consumer,” 2010). News consumption is a socially-engaging and socially-driven activity, especially online (Leach, 2009). Leach (2009) claims that a great strength of the Internet is its ability to encourage the formation of community while giving voice to anyone digitally connected. In journalism, recognizing diversity and inviting feedback adds depth and human interest. Those who are overlooked in mainstream media coverage, including people espousing unpopular causes, can use the Internet to gather and share information and use it to stitch online communities together.
To a great extent, people’s experience of news is becoming a shared social experience as people swap links in emails, post news stories on their social networking site feeds, highlight news stories in their tweets, and haggle over the meaning of events in discussion threads. For instance, more than 8 in 10 online news consumers get or share links in emails (“Participatory News Consumer,” 2010). The ascent of mobile connectivity via smart phones has turned newsgathering and news awareness into an anytime, anywhere affair for a segment of avid news watchers.

Users who get news online say they specifically get news from news organizations and individual journalists they follow in the social networking space (“Participatory News Consumer,” 2010). In other words, they have friended or become a fan of a journalist or news organization and they catch up on news through this relatively new channel of news dissemination. Internet users have the option to get news from friends, journalists or news organizations they follow on social networking websites.

Citizen Journalism

Professional journalism is defined by Kaufhold et al. (2010) as news content produced by paid, trained, and supervised journalists delivered via media outlets, including newspapers, television, radio, and the Internet, who work within established editorial norms. Citizen journalism is defined by a number of attributes that make it distinct from professional journalism, including unpaid work, absence of professional training, often unedited publication of content, and distinct story selection and news judgment (Lasica, 2003). When the people formerly known as the audience employ the
press tools they have in their possession to inform one another, that's citizen journalism (Rosen, 2008).

Murthy (2011) explores the question of whether Twitter has transformed ordinary individuals into citizen journalists whom the news reading public follows or whether their voices are merely subsumed by traditional media. In other words, has Twitter really produced a new space in which ordinary people meaningfully interact with ordinary people around the world who have rich insider accounts pertaining to diverse forms of socioeconomic life. Murthy (2011) argues that ordinary people on Twitter are producing news and consuming news (especially “breaking news”) produced by other ordinary people.

Micro-blogging on websites like Twitter has been considered in the context of citizen journalism, where individuals perform some of the institutionalized communication functions of the professional journalist, often providing the first accounts, images or video of a news event (Ingram, 2008). Since the retweets are not restricted by physical space, time or a delineated group, this creates what Boyd et al. (2010) argues is a distributed conversation that allows others to be aware of the content, without being actively part of it. They suggest that Twitter messages allow individuals to be peripherally aware of discussions without being contributors.

The impact of these social media endorsements on news consumption can be clearly measured through online records of user traffic and behavior. According to a recent study of top online news outlets in the U.S., social media is emerging as a powerful news referral service (“Participatory News Consumer,” 2010).
Traditional News Embracing Social Media

Twitter is now used as a collaborative research tool by editors and journalists working on stories and blogs, both for ideas and to provide evidence for all branches of news including breaking, foreign, entertainment, and others (Ahmad, 2010). In 2009 Twitter and other social media emerged as powerful tools for disseminating information and mobilizing citizens such as evading the censors in Iran and communicating from the earthquake disaster zone in Haiti. The majority of Internet users (59%) now use some kind of social media, including Twitter, blogging and networking sites ("State of the News Media," 2010). Leach (2009) claims that when journalists were banished or silenced by the Iranian government after the post-election protests in Iran, news organizations and Web sites relied on showing random snippets of video, text messages or tweets sent from people witnessing the protests on the streets of Tehran.

Studies have suggested that bloggers play the roles of commentators, fact checkers, event shapers, and even grass-root reporters for the news media. Moreover, Bui and Ma (2009) assert that blog content is not only consumed by the public but also by media professionals who want to quickly react to cues from bloggers in order to create more news for the traditional media.

Implications and Concerns

Media scholars are concerned about the self-selective nature of online news consumption, which could accelerate audience fragmentation (Willnat, 2006). Murthy (2011) claims in terms of audiences, terse updates on social media and social networking websites have produced new audience configurations. Specifically, individuals have a constellation of friends or followers who can see these updates, but this audience is
continually changing minute by minute. This is well illustrated by status updates, short one- or two-line messages on the popular social networking website Facebook. Though these short messages are often trivial, these messages are circulated as news, which Facebook automatically distributes to the user’s group of friends on the website. Once the update percolates to the user’s friends, the user has the opportunity to comment on their friend’s updates, sometimes generating a rash of discussion regarding whatever one has posted about. However, this type of speaker-listener configuration, as Goffman (1959) puts it, can be an ‘asymmetric’ mode of expression in that the unintended audience has an incongruous understanding of what the speaker may have actually intended. Tweets regarding breaking news, disasters, and public health epidemics can be misleading, incorrect, or even fraudulent (Goolsby, 2009). In the case of the 2009 swine flu pandemic, tweets tagged with “#swineflu” often contained false or misleading information (Murthy, 2011).

Hermida (2010) defines new para-journalism forms such as micro-blogging as awareness systems that provide journalists with more-complex ways of understanding and reporting on the subtleties of public communication. Traditional journalism defines fact as information and quotes from official sources, which have been identified as forming the vast majority of news and information content. This model of news is in flux, however, as new social media technologies such as Twitter facilitate the instant, online dissemination of short fragments of information from a variety of official and unofficial sources (Hermida, 2010). Hermida (2010) suggests that these broad, asynchronous, lightweight and always-on systems are enabling citizens to maintain a mental model of news and events around them, giving rise to awareness systems that he describes as
ambient journalism. The emergence of ambient journalism brought about by the use of these new digital delivery systems and evolving communications protocols raises significant research questions for journalism scholars and professionals. Hermida (2010) states that some journalists are concerned that many of the messages on Twitter amount to unsubstantiated rumors, wild inaccuracies, and unverified information.

Copeland (2011) claims that by following friends, journalists and celebrities whose opinions and judgment you respect and trust, it is possible to maintain a steady supply of links to interesting news stories that you may not have otherwise found. By 'retweeting' a link on Twitter or 'sharing' an article on Facebook, a social media user is able to efficiently recommend a news item to their network. In this way it is not just news organizations that are able to disseminate news through social media but also networks of friends and online communities.

**Rationale and Summary**

This literature review examined social media and news consumption, in particular: socialization of the news, media ecology of social environments and social media, changes in perceptions and behavior, and implications and concerns.

New media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and smartphones have enabled news consumers to be informed in real time about major events and topics of interest. People depend on family members, close friends, and those who are part of their digital networks to act as reporters, alerting them when something they feel is important has happened or is happening. The arguments and data presented in this literature review demonstrates that social media has an important role to play in the future of journalism. Within our chosen digital community, we are always connected, always informed (Tremblay, 2010).
By conducting a survey of online news consumers, the research intended to answer the following questions:

RQ1: How has the use of websites such as Facebook and Twitter affected the way in which people consume the news?

RQ2: What reasons do people give for ‘retweeting’ a link on Twitter or ‘sharing’ an article on Facebook?

RQ3: How likely are users to click on a link recommended (i.e., retweeted or shared) by a friend or follower?

RQ4: Do people feel more or less informed on issues as a result of social media tools?
Chapter 3. SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

Scope

To a great extent, people’s experience of news, especially on the Internet, is becoming a shared social experience as people swap links in emails, post news stories on their social networking website feeds, highlight news stories in their tweets, and converse on the meaning of events in discussion threads. This study aimed to understand how news consumers are becoming the news creators and as a result if individuals feel more or less informed because of it. More than 8 in 10 online news consumers get or share links in emails (“Participatory News Consumer,” 2010). The ascent of mobile connectivity via smart phones has turned newsgathering and news awareness into an anytime, anywhere affair for a segment of avid news watchers. However, little research has been done specifically related to whether or not individuals believe they are better informed as a result of social media.

The scope of this study is how individuals acquire and share news through their online social networks, and if the individuals perceive that they are more or less informed as a result. Through purposive sampling, three criteria were required of each sample member: (1) must be at least 18 years old, (2) must consume news online or via a mobile device at least once a week, and (3) must have at least one social media account.

Methodology

Overview

Empirical survey research and secondary research results were included in the study. The empirical research consisted of a web-based survey focusing on news consumption and social media usage. Demographic questions were included in the
survey in order to identify any demographic trends. The survey aimed to demonstrate how individuals source the majority of their news.

A web-based survey was used that asked participants to report information on the way in which they consume news. A nonrandom theoretical sampling was used in which the researcher selected specific individuals in order to evaluate theoretical ideas (Neuman, 2006). The survey examined participants’ news consumption habits and preferences. The survey asked participants Likert scale and open-ended questions regarding their news consuming habits and whether they believe they are better informed as a result of social media. Survey participation was voluntary and all participants were social media users and online news consumers. Survey invitations were sent to the researcher’s network of Facebook friends, colleagues, and classmates.

Survey Instrument

The method for this study was a web-based survey designed using the website SurveyMonkey. Advantages of using a web-based survey include speed, low cost, and flexibility (Neuman, 2006). The disadvantages of a web-based survey include lack of coverage due to unequal access to the Internet, privacy concerns, and design issues (Neuman, 2006). Coverage and sampling concerns were not an issue for this study because only individuals who have access to the Internet and use the Internet on a regular basis were asked to participate in the survey. Privacy concerns were addressed by having the survey results be anonymous. Lastly, design issues such as compatibility with various Internet browsers were considered in the selection of a web-based survey tool that is compatible with multiple browsers.
Survey Design

This study used a cross-sectional, quantitative data collection and analysis survey approach. The study sought to examine news sharing using social media and to discover if online news consumers believed they were better informed as a result of social media. According to Neuman (2006), surveys are appropriate for research questions about self-reported beliefs or behaviors. The survey consisted of a combination of open-ended questions, closed-ended questions, and scaled questions.

Measurement

Scales are used commonly in situations in which a researcher wants to measure how individuals feel or think about something (Neuman, 2006). This determines the hardness or potency of feelings and produces quantitative measures to test hypotheses (Neuman, 2006). This study used Likert scale questions to measure participants’ attitudes towards their online news consumption. Likert scales are often used in survey research in which people express attitudes or other responses in terms of ordinal-level categories that are ranked along a continuum (Neuman, 2006).

The survey sought to establish a number of measures, first establishing if the participants qualified for the survey. Participants were initially asked if they consumed news online using the Internet or via a mobile device, and if so, how often. Depending on the response, participants were then either asked to continue on with the survey or were disqualified. Once participants continued on with the survey, they were asked questions such as how often they shared links via social media and how often they clicked on links shared by others through social media.
The study’s research questions were addressed by asking the following survey questions.

**RQ1:** *How has the use of websites such as Facebook and Twitter affected the way in which people consume the news?* Participants were asked how often do they share online news articles with others on social media websites. Participants were also asked what motivates them to click on articles referred by others.

**RQ2:** *What reasons do people give for 'retweeting' a link on Twitter or 'sharing' an article on Facebook?* Participants were asked what motivates them to share news articles.

**RQ3:** *How likely are users to click on a link recommended (i.e., retweeted or shared) by a friend or follower?* Participants were asked how often do they click on news articles shared by others.

**RQ4:** *Do people feel more or less informed on issues as a result of social media tools?* Participants were asked if as a result of links shared by individuals in their social network, do they feel that they are exposed to news stories they may have otherwise missed or overlooked. Participants were also asked if as a result of links shared by individuals in their social network, do they feel significantly more informed slightly more informed, about the same, slightly less informed, or significantly less informed.

*Validity and Reliability*

Validity suggests truthfulness and refers to how well an idea fits with actual reality (Neuman, 2006). Validity addresses the question of how well the social reality being measured through research matches with the constructs researchers use to understand it (Neuman, 2006).
Reliability refers to a study’s dependability or consistency (Neuman, 2006). It suggests that the same thing is repeated or recurs under similar conditions (Neuman, 2006). The study used representative reliability that measures reliability across groups, a measure that yields consistent results for various social groups. The social group measured in this study is comprised of individuals who consume news as a result of social media.
Chapter 4. THE STUDY

The study examined the way in which individuals use social media to share and consume news stories and if they feel more informed as a result. The study (Appendix A) was conducted using the online survey website SurveyMonkey. The study was comprised of 13 questions, two of which were open-ended questions, and 10 were closed questions. The link to the survey was posted on the researcher’s Facebook page. Additionally, the link was sent to the message inboxes of the researcher’s Facebook friends. 138 individuals completed the survey.

Results

Sharing Motivators

The study asked participants what motivated them to share news articles with individuals in their social networks, more than one response was allowed. 92% indicated that they share news to stay connected with family and friends. 35% indicated that they share news to be provocative and to start dialogue or debate issues with others. 68% indicated that they like to share news that will be useful or helpful to others. 24% indicated that they like to share news to impress others or to demonstrate that they read articles that they perceive to be substantial.

The study also asked participants what motivated them to click on news articles shared by others on social networking websites, more than one response was allowed. 33% indicated that they click on articles that they believed contain entertainment value. 68% indicated that they click on articles to “be a part of the conversation” and stay connected to others. 71% indicated that they click on linked articles because they place high value on the recommendations of the people in their social networks.
Sharing Frequency

The study asked participants how often they shared news articles on social media websites. 4% responding by saying they share multiple news articles multiple times a day. 12% responding by saying they share a news article daily. 19% responding by saying they share news articles a few times a week. 27% responding by saying they share news articles once a week. 38% responding by saying they only share news articles a few times a month.

Figure 1

The study also asked participants how often they clicked on news articles shared by others on social networking websites. 22% responded by saying they click on multiple shared news articles multiple times a day. 39% responded by saying they click on at least one shared article daily. 21% responded by saying they click on shared news articles a few times a week. 13% responded by saying they click on shared news articles
once a week. 5% responded by saying they only click on shared news articles a few times a month.

Figure 2

Discussion

As stated in Chapter 2, this thesis emerged from the media ecology communication theory. According to McLuhan (1989), changes in technology transform social constructs, which in turn shapes perceptions, experiences, attitudes, and behaviors. The findings in the study shed light on the personal and social environment created by the use of social media.

The study found that individuals are primarily motivated to share news stories with their social networks because they wanted to stay connected with others and to maintain relationships. Those who share news articles through social media say they enjoy discussing current and trending topics with people in their social networks. These
findings support previous research that suggest that news consumption has become an important social act (“Participatory News Consumer,” 2010). Respondents appear to let their network of friends guide them to news articles as they are a good representation for one’s tastes and interest.

Rhodes (2010) stated that a small number of users are responsible for the majority of content produced and shared online. This study found that 16% of respondents share at least one news article daily. The frequent sharers were responsible for sharing 87% of all news shared.

The study found that 61% of the respondents clicked on at least one shared news article daily. Of that percentage, 76% were between the ages of 18-34. This suggests that that age group relies heavily on their social networks for tips and alerts to news stories. Individuals aged 18-34 source the majority of their news from their social networks, sharing, recommending, and retweeting news articles. However, this could lead to a fragmentation from mainstream news. For example, previous research indicates that the news stories and issues that draw the most attention on Twitter differ substantially from the mainstream press (“State of the News Media,” 2010). Those findings coupled with the findings of this study suggest that individuals who use social media and Twitter as their primary news sources may have a skewed view of the news.

Respondents indicated that they like the ease of sharing news via social media and Twitter versus other forms of sharing the news. Many news websites allow users to simply share an article by clicking on a Tweet, +1, or Like icon. These findings bolster previous studies that state social media is the most frequent way that online news consumers share stories online (Rhodes, 2010). Social media was found to be shared in
43% instances, email was the second most-frequent method of sharing with 30% instances, SMS was third with 15% of instances, and instant messenger 4th with 12% instances (Rhodes, 2010).

Figure 3

69% of the respondents indicated that as a result of links shared by individuals in their social network, they are exposed to news stories that they may have otherwise missed or overlooked. 55% of the respondents indicated that they feel more informed as a result of links shared by individuals in their social network. While the majority of the respondents claim to feel more informed, they may not actually be because trending news stories on social media websites and Twitter differ substantially from the mainstream news.
Chapter 5. SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS

Study Limitations

As with any study, there are limitations to concluding results and interpreting data. Furthermore, the survey questionnaire was an online and anonymous, depending on honest responses from the participants. It is difficult to guarantee the truth of their responses.

Additional research is necessary to validate the findings of this study and to further understand the social experience of sharing news. While the study established key motivators for sharing and viewing news articles using social media websites and Twitter, it did not find a significant correlation between the frequency of social media news consumption and the perception of being more or less informed. The online survey allowed participants to identify their news sharing behaviors and report their perception of their level of awareness of overall news. Further testing is needed to address the validity of these results.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Future research should continue and duplicate this study examining the frequency of social media news consumption and whether or not individuals are more or less informed. Previous research indicates that the news stories and issues that draw the most attention on Twitter differ substantially from the mainstream press (“State of the News Media,” 2010). Future research should attempt to ascertain if individuals who rely heavily on social media for their news consumption are informed on current events reported in the mainstream press. In addition, real-time direct comparisons between
trending news topics on social media websites and what traditional news outlets are reporting should be studied.

Conclusion

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research and statistics on online news consumption behaviors. The majority of respondents disclosed that they share news to stay connected with family and friends. The respondents report that they depend on their network of friends to guide them to news articles, as they are a good representation for their own interest. These results support previous research that suggests that news consumption has become a social act ("Participatory News Consumer," 2010). The study found that individuals under the age of 35 rely heavily on their social networks for tips and alerts to news stories. The majority of all respondents are exposed to news stories that they may have otherwise missed or overlooked as a result of Facebook and Twitter. While slightly more than half of the respondents feel more informed as a result of links shared by individuals in their social network.

Social media websites allow individuals to easily take part in discussions with their friends, family, and larger networks. With the help of social media tools, the Internet is fast changing the way people consume their news. The study determined that individuals are primarily motivated to share news stories with their social networks because they wanted to stay connected with others and to maintain relationships. Those who share news articles through social media enjoy doing so to discuss current events and trending topics with people in their social networks. In particular, young adults depend on their network of friends guide them to news articles. There is concern that this could lead to a fragmentation from mainstream news as news stories and issues that draw
the most attention from social media websites are substantially different from traditional news outlets. This issue should be explored further in future studies.
References


Appendix A

1. What is your age?
   a. 18 - 24
   b. 25 - 34
   c. 35 - 44
   d. 45 - 54
   e. 55 and up

   *If you are less than 18 years of age, thank you for your time but you do not qualify for the survey.*

2. Do you consume news online using the Internet or via a mobile device?
   a. Yes
   b. No

   *If your answer is no, thank you for your time but you do not qualify for the survey.*
   *If your answer is yes, please continue on with the survey.*

3. Do you have an account with any of the following? (Select all that apply)
   a. Twitter
   b. Facebook
   c. MySpace
   d. LinkedIn
   e. Google+ (+1)
   f. Other ______________________________

   *If you do not have an account with any of the following websites or a similar social media website, thank you for your time but you do not qualify for the survey.*

4. How often do you consume news online or via a mobile device?
   a. Multiple times throughout the day
   b. Daily
   c. A few times a week
   d. Once a week
   e. A few times a month

5. How often do you share (i.e., “retweet”, “like”, “+1”, etc.) online news articles with others on social media websites?
   a. Multiple times throughout the day
   b. Daily
   c. A few times a week
   d. Once a week
   e. A few times a month
6. What motivates you to share news articles?

_________________________________________________________________

7. What subject matter/topics do you typical share (select all that apply)?
   a. Business
   b. Entertainment (i.e., Movies, Television)
   c. Health
   d. Politics
   e. Pop Culture (Celebrity news, gossip)
   f. Science
   g. Sports
   h. Technology

8. How often do you click on news articles shared by others?
   a. Multiple times throughout the day
   b. Daily
   c. A few times a week
   d. Once a week
   e. A few times a month

9. What subject matter/topics shared by others do you typical click on (select all that apply)?
   a. Business
   b. Entertainment (i.e., Movies, Television)
   c. Health
   d. Politics
   e. Pop Culture (Celebrity news, gossip)
   f. Science
   g. Sports
   h. Technology

10. What motivates you to click on articles referred by others?

_________________________________________________________________

11. As a result of links shared by individuals in your social network, do you feel that you are exposed to news stories you may have otherwise missed/overlooked?
   a. Yes
   b. No

12. As a result of links shared by individuals in your social network, do you feel
   a. Significantly More Informed
   b. Slightly More Informed
   c. About the Same
   d. Slightly Less Informed
e. Significantly Less Informed

13. Please indicate your gender for classification purposes.
   a. Male
   b. Female

Thank you for your time!