

Social Media and News Gathering: Tapping into the Millennial Mindset

Harsha Gangadharbatla, Laura F. Bright & Kelty Logan

Abstract

Social media are transforming the way information travels within and between networks of individuals. Many pundits claim that individuals no longer seek news but instead news finds individuals, particularly on social media websites. The current study is an exploratory look at how one specific group of individuals—Gen Y—gathers news. Data was collected from an online survey and results indicate that Gen Y is increasingly relying on social media for information and news. Interestingly, despite their preference of social media for news gathering, young adults still perceive traditional media sources as more credible than social media sources. Other findings are presented, and both theoretical and practical implications are drawn.

Social media have disrupted the personal and commercial habits of Americans to a degree not seen since the early days of television. Just as television turned a nation of people who listened to media content into watchers of media content, the emergence of social media has created a nation of media content creators. Today

Harsha Gangadharbatla is an Associate Professor at the University of Colorado at Boulder's School of Journalism and Mass Communication. Laura F. Bright is Assistant Professor at the School of Strategic Communication at Texas Christian University's Bob Schieffer College of Communication. Kelty Logan is an Assistant Professor at the University of Colorado at Boulder's School of Journalism and Mass Communication. Correspondence can be directed to gharsha@colorado.edu.

nearly 80% of American adults are online and nearly 60% of them use social networking sites (Pew Research, 2011). In fact, social networking accounts for one out of every six minutes spent online (Lipsman, 2011). People have begun to turn to social media for information regarding a range of goods and services from banking to cell phones (Knowledge Networks, 2009). It is not surprising, therefore, that social media has begun to change the way people access the news.

Although media companies were initially protective of their online content, they had come to terms with the advantages of viral media by the time Facebook opened its software platform to media and application developers. *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, CNN, ABC, CBS, CNET, and PBS all can be found on Facebook. Many of the media companies have sophisticated social media strategies that resemble “saturation bombing in cyberspace” including Facebook pages, RSS feeds, Twitter feeds, instant messaging, and hyperlinks to other social network sites such as LinkedIn (Emmett, 2009, p 41). In its 2010 State of the News Media report, the Pew Research Center suggested that social networking appears to provide legacy media organizations with a means to build their audiences. In fact, Facebook refers a significant amount of traffic to three of the top ten news websites. Specifically, Facebook generates 7% of the CNN traffic, 6% of the *New York Times* traffic, and 7% of the ABC News traffic (Pew, 2010).

According to the 2011 State of the News Media Report (Pew, 2011), all forms of news media suffered audience declines during 2010 with the notable exception of online news. When asked where they got their news “yesterday,” only television was mentioned more frequently than online news sources. Among young adults (aged 18-29), however, online news is the most mentioned source. Sixty-five percent of young adults stated that they get most of their news information online. And, according to a study by Pew Research Center and John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, 30% of U.S. adults consume news on Facebook (Mitchell, Kiley, Gottfried, & Guskin, 2013).

The intersection of social media, Gen Y, and news gathering is currently a crowded research area with many studies focusing primarily on defining the emerging social media landscape and the challenges it presents to journalists in terms of news gathering (Lazaroiu, 2011) and to the public in terms of negotiating information (Her-

mida, 2010). Our study fills a narrow gap in literature by exploring Gen Y's usage and perceptions regarding news sources in general and social media in particular. For purposes of this study, Gen Y is defined as young adults aged 18-34. We also examined Gen Y's perceptions and rating of credibility of various news sources starting from "legacy media" (newspapers, magazines, television, and radio) to "new media" (websites that are sponsored by legacy media and social media websites). Next, we examined the relationship between individuals' need for cognition and their preference of a medium for news gathering. Finally, we investigated whether individuals' perceived level of self-efficacy relating to digital technology has any effect on their choice of news sources or not. In the following section, we provide a review of the current literature regarding social media, need for cognition, self-efficacy, and credibility, which is followed by our research hypotheses, method, results, conclusions, limitations, and the implications for future research.

Social Media

Social media have been defined as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In fact, consumer-generated content – including popular social network sites such as Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Twitter – have recently become one of the foremost online communication channels (Pew Research, 2010; Nielsen Online, 2009). Users of social network sites generate content when they update their status and post photos, links, and comments on others' posts and photos. They can also interact with their friends by "liking" (express approval by clicking on an icon) others' content. The key social interaction on a social network site, however, is inviting friends to join your network (Mayfield, 2010).

Because social media is relatively new, research has sought to define both the medium and the user. The research regarding the use of social media for news is limited. There are, however, indications from the recent research that social media is well positioned to become a news source. For example, when they asked social network site users to identify dimensions of use, Bonds-Raacke and Raacke (2010) found that information gathering and sharing was one of the three

identified dimensions, together with maintaining old friendships and making new connections. The information component, however, related to personal information such as invitations, photographs, and updating posts. Although news was not mentioned, social media users' predisposition to seek and share information indicates an audience that would be receptive to a broad range of information, including news. Similarly, there is some support in recent research to indicate the importance of the following constructs when evaluating the role of social media as a news provider.

Need for Cognition

Need for cognition refers to an "individual's tendency to engage in and enjoy effortful cognitive endeavors" (Cacioppo, Petty, & Kao, 1984, p.1). People exhibit varying levels of this intrinsic characteristic, which can predict how they deal with tasks and social information (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982; Cohen, 1957). Extensive studies of need for cognition (NFC) link it to information-seeking behavior. For example, Carenini (2001) shows that NFC influences people's willingness to use complex interface systems and applications.

In the context of using social media for news and information, the effect of NFC has yet to be investigated. People who are intrinsically interested in analyzing and processing information may be more likely to form attitudes about the news properties of social media through cognition. In contrast, people who are more attracted to the relationship aspects of a social media site might form attitudes regarding social media by linking it with peripheral cues. This study examines the link between NFC and the likelihood that Gen Y will use social media for purposes of news and information.

Technology Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined as "belief in one's capability to organize and execute a particular course of action" (Bandura, 1986). Adoption of Internet technologies, such as social media, depends upon the users' confidence regarding comprehension, navigation, and evaluation of Internet resources. Several studies have investigated the impact of self-efficacy on consumer decision-making and behavior (Bearden, Hardesty, & Rose, 2001; Bettman, Johnson, & Payne, 1991; Fleming & Courtney, 1984) but none directly examines the role of Internet

self-efficacy on behavior intentions. The feeling of confidence in one's own ability has been characterized as essential for any behavior to take place (Dequech, 2000). With regard to using the Internet, personal confidence in an ability to understand, navigate, and evaluate content successfully should alleviate doubts when exploring alternative uses for social media sites.

LaRose and Eastin (2004) confirmed that a positive relationship between self-efficacy and media use exists (Eastin, 2005; LaRose, Lin, & Eastin, 2003). In other words, users who believe they can use the Internet for useful tasks (high self-efficacy) will likely increase their media use. In fact, Internet self-efficacy has been found to positively predict online consumerism, including shopping, banking, and e-service use (LaRose & Eastin, 2002; Eastin, 2002). And, although Althaus and Tewksbury (2000) did not mention self-efficacy per se in their study, they do acknowledge the concept as a potential influence on Internet use.

In addition to the relationship between self-efficacy and Internet use, prior experience is considered a causal antecedent to outcome expectancies of use (LaRose, Mastro, & Eastin, 2001). Task specific self-efficacy, therefore, is positively related to expectations such as enjoyment and social interaction as a consequence of media use. Prior experience with media has also been recorded as a main predictor of use (Ferguson & Perse, 2000). A positive interaction with a certain medium in the past should increase the likelihood of future use. Conversely, a negative experience with a certain medium in the past should decrease the likelihood of future use. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that Gen Y's technology self-efficacy is positively related to broader use of the Internet, including social media, and previous experience with social media will increase the likelihood that an individual will use social media for a range of purposes, including the gathering and processing of news content.

Perceived Credibility

Hovland and Weiss (1951 - 1952) suggested that consumers view some communicators as more credible than others. They determined that the "credibility" of a communicator reflects the public perception of the communicator's fairness and factualness. In their early research, Hovland and Weiss (1951-52) were particularly concerned

with the credibility attributed to different sources of information such as specific scholarly journals, popular magazines, gossip columnists, and political analysts. Their findings indicated that the credibility of a source had a significant impact regarding the initial acceptance of information.

Consumers have general beliefs regarding the credibility of various kinds of information sources such as television news, newspaper reports, Internet blogs, and advertising. These beliefs are based on their cumulative experience regarding the fairness and factfulness of specific sources of information. Consistent with the early work of Hovland and Weiss (1951-52), certain types of information sources are viewed as credible, or trustworthy, and other sources are viewed as untrustworthy. Therefore, consumers' acceptance of information is mitigated by the credibility of the source. This study investigates the relative credibility Gen Y attributes to social media as a news source in comparison to other, more traditional sources.

Hypotheses

While the study is designed to investigate the broad question of the role of social media in news gathering, the following hypotheses guide the method and analyses sections.

The social network sites (SNSs) are no longer the exclusive purview of the young. By 2010, 26% of SNS users were between the ages of 36-49 compared to 16% between the ages of 18-22 (Pew, 2011). Importantly, however, a greater percentage of the young adult population (aged 18-29) uses social networks than the older adults. Specifically, 72% of online young adults (aged 18-29) use SNSs while only 30% of online adults (aged 30 and older) use SNSs. The younger SNS users are also the heaviest users. Young adults between the ages of 18-22 are twice as likely to post status updates several times a day than users between the ages of 23-35 and three times more likely than users between the ages of 36-49. They are also more likely to comment on posts and photos and to "like" content. Young adults (aged 18-29) are also more likely to follow news organizations or journalists on a social networking site like Facebook. Specifically, 22% of online young adults follow news on social media compared to 13% of all online adults (Pew, 2010). Because of their heavy usage of social media in general, it is reasonable to assume that Gen Y would use social

media for purposes of news and information.

H1: Young adults are more likely to obtain their news information from social media than from traditional media sources.

In the absence of research regarding the perceived credibility of social media as a news source, it is useful to note a study regarding the relationship between tie strength and word of mouth behavior on social network sites. Chu and Kim (2011) found that tie strength was a determinant in terms of intention to seek information, but tie strength was not related to consumers' intention to give information. The authors suggested that social network users are less trusting – or more selective – when seeking information than when sharing information. Although their study did not pertain to seeking or sharing news, the findings indicate that tie strength is an antecedent to source credibility. Given the relative newness of social media, it is reasonable to assume that Gen Y may regard it as a less trusted source for news and information than traditional, legacy media sources.

H2: Young adults will perceive news content to be more credible when it comes from traditional media sources rather than from social media news sources.

A consumer's need for cognition has been related to various media preferences. Moody (2011) researched the relationship between personal characteristics, such as need for cognition and media skepticism, when seeking political information prior to an election in Australia. She concluded that media sources (overtly mediated content, involving a professional gatekeeper such as an editor) and non-news media sources (reduced likelihood of third party mediation) are used in very different ways. Media sources were used by those with a limited need for information. Non-news media sources, on the other hand, were used by people with a high need for cognition and a distrust of mainstream media. This result suggests that the use of social media for news and information may correspond to a high need for cognition. Furthermore, social media are readily available and easily accessible making them the medium for news for individuals actively on the prowl for information.

H3: Young adults with a high need for cognition are more likely to use social media as a news source than traditional media sources.

Finally, while Gen Y's perceived technology self-efficacy has been related to social media usage, it has not been related to seeking news and information on social media. Richard and Melanie Hall (2010) investigated the relationship between the use of Web 2.0 technologies within a virtual learning environment and the concept of individual self-efficacy. Their findings suggest that technological self-efficacy is related to engagement and performance in a virtual learning environment. Phillips (2008) noted a link between evolving self-efficacy and the ubiquity of social networks. Specifically, he suggested that the accelerating rate of social network adoption was attributable to the increased accessibility of the technology. In other words, the rate of adoption is related to the perceived technological self-efficacy of the potential users. According to his observations, as self-efficacy becomes more widespread, the social networks will become even more pervasive. The importance of self-efficacy was also indicated in a study that attempted to relate personality factors to social media use (Ross, Orr, Sisic, Arseneault, Simmering, & Orr, 2009). Instead, the authors determined that motives and competence were more indicative of social media use. These findings suggest that as self-efficacy increases, Gen Y will seek new ways to use social media, such as seeking news and information.

H4: Young adults with high self-efficacy regarding technology are more likely to seek out news on social media than traditional media sources.

Method

Sample

A total of 500 college students enrolled in a variety of courses at three major universities were sent an email invitation and asked to participate in the study. Data was collected for a brief three-week period. Students were informed that participation in the study was completely voluntary but they were offered extra credit for completing the survey. Respondents were presented with an online informed consent form, which they had to agree to before any responses were collected. They were also promised that all information collected would be kept strictly anonymous and all analyses would be conducted at an aggregate level without any identifying information. The study was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board

(IRB) for compliance with Human Subjects research.

Measures

An online questionnaire was developed to examine the proposed research questions. The questionnaire contained 51 questions and took an average of 15 minutes to complete. The survey instrument included measures related to general media use, social media use, need for cognition, technology self-efficacy, credibility of media sources, news gathering and demographics. Need for cognition was measured using nine items that were rated on seven-point, Likert-type scales (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree). Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements such as "I prefer complex problems rather than simple ones" and "I prefer my life to be filled with puzzles that I must solve" (Cacioppo, J. T. & Petty, R.E., 1982; Cacioppo, J. T., Petty, R. E., & Kao, C.E., 1984). The technology self-efficacy measure was assessed using a 9-item inventory adapted from previously used self-efficacy measures related to general Internet use (Eastin & LaRose, 2000). Respondents indicated their level of agreement with statements such as "I am extremely skilled at using technology," "I usually teach myself how to use the latest technology tools," and "Generally speaking, I love technology." Each item was rated on a seven-point, Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree). To gather feelings on the credibility of news sources, respondents' were asked to rate each medium (Print newspapers, print magazines, radio, broadcast TV, Cable TV, Newspaper websites, Television websites, Social media (Blogs, Twitter, Facebook, StumbleUpon, Delicious, etc.)) on a seven-point, semantic differential scale with "Much Worse" and "Much Better" as the opposing end points of the scale (1 = Much Worse, 7 = Much Better).

To better understand how respondents gather their news, a series of questions were used to assess the gathering of breaking news versus daily news items. Respondents were asked to indicate their likelihood of obtaining daily news from each distinct medium (Print newspapers, print magazines, radio, broadcast TV, Cable TV, Newspaper websites, Television websites, Social media (Blogs, Twitter, Facebook, StumbleUpon, Delicious, etc.)) on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = Very Unlikely, 7 = Very Likely). Specifically, the question read "How likely or unlikely are you to get your daily news

from the following sources?" An identical series of items was used to assess a respondent's likelihood of gathering breaking news information from various media; however the initial question read, "How likely are you to find out about breaking news (e.g. earthquakes, flight crashes, celebrity scandals and deaths, etc.) from the following sources?" Finally, the survey concluded with demographic questions including gender, ethnicity, education, income, and age.

Results

A total of (n=340) individuals completed the survey in its entirety. The majority of respondents (95%) were between the ages 18 to 22, which is the age group collectively referred to as Gen Y. In terms of race, the majority of the respondents were Caucasian (81%) with incomes less than \$25,000 a year (about 77%). Forty-two percent of the sample graduated high school, 7% had graduate degrees and the rest were pursuing undergraduate education. Finally, almost 70% of our sample was female, which presents some issues with our study's external validity. While our sample is not representative of Americans in general, given the exploratory nature of this study, a skewed student sample provides a good starting point for understanding the news gathering habits of Gen Y, a population that is made up of current college students.

Two primary individual difference scales were used in this study: need for cognition (NFC) and technology self-efficacy (TSE). Both scales were tested for reliability (NFC, $\alpha = 0.74$; TSE, $\alpha = 0.93$) using Cronbach's Alpha and both of them exceeded the accepted guideline of .70 (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). Table 1 provides the mean scores, standard deviations, and reliability estimates for each of the scales.

Table 1. Mean, Standard Deviation, and Cronbach Alpha Coefficients for All Scales

Scales	Mean	SD	α
Need for Cognition (9 items)	4.29	.52	.74
Technology Self-Efficacy (9 items)	4.37	.55	.93

Hypotheses Testing

The first hypothesis stated that young adults are more likely to obtain their news information from social media more so than from traditional media sources. In order to test this hypothesis, a simple one-sample t-test was conducted to compare the average scores of respondents' likelihood of getting their daily news from a particular medium using a test value of zero for each mean. Table 2 lists the mean values for each medium along with standard deviation and t-value with statistical significance.

Table 2. Mean likelihood of getting daily news from a source (1=very unlikely; 7=very likely), Standard Deviation, and t-values

Medium	Mean	Std. Dev	t-value (df = 334)
Print Newspapers	2.99	1.83	29.95**
Television Websites	3.90	1.93	37.00**
Print Magazines	3.93	1.85	38.86**
Radio	4.12	1.96	38.33**
Broadcast TV	4.68	1.72	49.54**
Newspaper Websites	4.82	1.82	48.46**
Cable TV	4.99	1.75	52.13**
Social Media	6.04	1.39	79.30**

**p < .0001 (test value = 0)

Table 2 indicates that, in order of increasing likelihood, college students select or rely on the following media for daily news: print newspapers, television websites, print magazines, radio, broadcast TV, newspaper websites, cable TV, and social media. Not surprisingly, social media was the most relied upon media for daily news. However, the most important finding is that social media surpasses its closest competitor, cable TV, by a full point on a Likert scale of 1 to 7 points. Furthermore, this difference of 1.05 (SD=1.95; t(df) = 9.87 (334)) is statistically significant at p < .001 level. It is also interesting to note that print newspapers rate the lowest in terms of likelihood as a source of college students' daily news requirements. In fact, print newspapers were over three full-points below, on an average, on a

Likert scale of 1 to 7 points and this difference of 3.04 (SD= 2.4; t(df) = 23.24 (334)) is statistically significant at p <.0001 level. These results confirm hypothesis 1: young adults rely on social media for their daily news and rely upon traditional news sources like newspapers and television far less often.

To see if this news gathering behavior is different when it comes to breaking news, the same analysis was conducted to compare the means of their likelihood to get breaking news from various news sources. Table 3 lists the means, standard deviations, and t-values. Again, social media emerges as the top source for obtaining breaking news. Social media surpasses its closest competitor, cable TV, by a full point. Print media fared the worst among college students, averaging three points less than social media. Hypothesis 1 is supported, therefore, for both daily news and breaking news.

Table 3. Mean likelihood of getting breaking news from a source (1=very unlikely; 7=very likely), Standard Deviation, and t-values

Medium	Mean	Std. Dev	t-value (df = 334)
Print Magazines	3.01	1.83	30.01**
Print Newspapers	3.20	2.00	29.24**
Television Websites	4.30	1.87	41.90**
Radio	4.70	1.86	46.17**
Newspaper Websites	5.10	1.82	51.28**
Broadcast TV	5.13	1.71	54.66**
Cable TV	5.17	1.71	55.30**
Social Media	6.25	1.27	90.06**

** p < .0001 (test value = 0)

Hypothesis 2 stated that young adults are more likely to perceive news content from traditional sources as more credible than news content on social media. To test this hypothesis, a one-sample t-test was conducted to examine the means of “perceived credibility” of the eight news media sources of interest. Table 4 lists the results of that analysis.

Table 4. Mean credibility of news source (1=least credible; 7=most credible), Standard Deviation, and t-values

Medium	Mean	Std. Dev	t-value (df = 334)
Social Media	3.88	1.55	45.80**
Print Magazines	4.78	1.43	60.89**
Television Websites	4.85	1.27	69.66**
Radio	4.90	1.19	75.12**
Cable TV	5.04	1.39	66.28**
Broadcast TV	5.28	1.26	76.47**
Newspaper Websites	5.75	1.12	93.83**
Print Newspapers	5.83	1.21	87.55**

** p < .0001 (test value = 0)

The order in which participants rated the media in terms of credibility as news sources is almost the inverse of the assigned ratings for likelihood of usage. The least credible source for news is social media ($M = 3.88$), which is almost two points less than print newspapers ($M = 5.83$). Newspapers were rated as the most credible news source, a statistically significant difference ($t(df) = -17.33(334)$, $p<0.0001$). These results indicate that while Gen Y is increasingly turning to social media for their daily and breaking news, they still consider print and broadcast media as more credible news sources than social media. This provides strong support for hypothesis 2.

Empirical evidence points to Gen Y relying primarily on social media for news gathering but rating print newspapers as a more credible source of news. Given the seemingly contradictory nature of these findings, it would be useful to determine why Gen Y prefers social media for news gathering. In the literature review, two factors were identified that could potentially influence news gathering behavior: need for cognition and technology self-efficacy. Hypothesis 3 states that young adults with a high need for cognition are more likely to use social media as a news source than traditional media sources and hypothesis 4 proposes that young adults with high technology self-efficacy level are more likely to seek out news on social media than traditional media sources. In order to test both hypotheses, a

series of regression analyses were conducted in SPSS 20.0 with need for cognition (NFC) and technology self-efficacy (TSE) as independent variables and the “mean likelihood of choosing the medium for daily news” as the dependent variable for all eight media. Table 5 summarizes the R-squares, f-ratios, unstandardized coefficients, and collinearity statistics for each model. As indicated by the high tolerance levels (.98) and low variance inflation factors (VIF=1.01) for all models, collinearity is not an issue for these multiple regression analyses.

Table 5. Regression Analyses

Model	Dependent Variable	R ²	F-ratio (df =2)	Unstandardized Coefficients	
1	Print Newspapers	.01	1.46	NFC	.10
				TSE	-.12
2	Print Magazines	.05	8.02**	NFC	-.40**
				TSE	-.14
3	Radio	.00	.66	NFC	.14
				TSE	-.04
4	Broadcast TV	.00	.25	TSE	-.02
				NFC	.05
5	Cable TV	.01	1.56	TSE	-.21
				NFC	.02
6	Newspaper Websites	.06	10.04***	TSE	.46***
				NFC	.13*
7	Television Websites	.00	.63	NFC	-.10
				TSE	.07
8	Social Media	.05	8.23***	NFC	-.13
				TSE	.23***

***p< .001 **p<.05 *p<.10; tolerance levels for all models were .98 and variance inflation factors were 1.01

The regression models were significant for only three of the

eight media: print magazines, newspaper websites, and social media. Need for cognition was statistically significant for two of the eight media. Specifically, need for cognition was negatively related to the choice of print magazines ($B = -.401$, $p < .001$), but positively related to newspaper websites ($B = -.463$, $p < .001$). These results suggest that individuals with a high need for cognition are likely to choose newspaper websites and individuals with low need for cognition are likely to choose print magazines. Since the regression model was not significant for social media, it failed to find substantial support for hypothesis 3. However, need for cognition was negatively related to one of the print media, print magazines suggesting a partial support for hypothesis 3.

Technology self-efficacy (TSE) was also statistically significant for two of the eight media. Specifically, technology self-efficacy was positively related to both newspaper websites ($B = .129$, $p < .10$) and social media ($B = .226$, $p < .001$). The data was inconclusive regarding the effect of technology self-efficacy on any of the traditional media sources, however. Since technology self-efficacy has a positive effect on the choice of social media as a news source, it can be concluded that the social media portion of hypothesis 4 is supported.

Conclusions

Social media have changed the way information travels within and between networks of consumers. Individuals are no longer restricted to a one-way search for information online. Instead, social media allows information to find the users as well (Qualman, 2009). Because social media gives users more control than traditional media, it allows for greater flexibility in their news gathering behavior. Furthermore, the interconnectedness of social media users causes information to travel faster and in more relevant ways compared to traditional media (Gangadharbatla, 2012). With this as background, this study investigated the news gathering behavior of young adults. Specifically, it examined the factors that influence their choice of a medium for news.

This study confirmed the popular notions in trade press that young adults are increasingly turning to social media for news rather than using traditional media such as print newspapers, magazines, and radio. Interestingly, however, despite their preference for using

social media for news gathering, young adults still perceive traditional media as more credible news sources than social media. This apparent disconnect between perceived credibility and actual choice of a medium for news is indicative of the complex nature of news gathering. In order to better understand the factors that affect the ultimate choice of a medium for news, a series of regressions were conducted to find evidence for the following links: (a) technology self-efficacy had a positive effect on the choice of social media as a news source whereas (b) need for cognition had a positive effect on the choice of newspaper websites.

The following are some theoretical and practical implications that can be drawn from our findings. First, theoretically, it would seem intuitive that the level of perceived credibility of a medium would predict its choice for newsgathering. This was not the case with our sample. One explanation for this would be that individuals may be hearing about news from social media sources but may be relying on traditional sources for confirmation. The ease with which information travels on social media facilitates the rapid propagation of news, but ultimately, individuals may still be turning to traditional news sources for credibility and confirmation. So, traditional media serve a very practical and important purpose in newsgathering, which should be turned into a strength and factored into their evolving business models. In other words, credibility is the strongest suite of traditional news sources and they need to capitalize on it for long-term sustenance.

One of the factors driving social media use in news gathering is an individual's level of technology self-efficacy. This suggests that social media usage in news gathering may not be because they are perceived as credible sources—from hypothesis 2—but because of the technological factors associated. The implication for journalists and news organizations is that they need to capitalize on the credibility associated with traditional media but at the same time bring their organizations into the social media realm or create a social component to their existing business models. Overall, our results suggest that traditional media are still perceived as most credible so given that advantage it is in the best interest of the traditional organizations to add a social/technology component to the process of news gathering.

Limitations and Future Research

This study presents numerous limitations that translate to future research opportunities. First, the sample—even though the population of interest is young adults in college—is not a representative one. It consisted of far greater number of females than is typical of student samples, which limits the generalizability of the findings. While there were no theoretical reasons to expect gender differences in news gathering future research should incorporate a higher percentage of males and/or include gender as a covariate when investigating the news gathering habits of Gen Y. Second, the regression models that tested hypotheses three and four had a low R-square (less than 10%), which suggests that the variance explained by the independent variables is very small. This indicates the exclusion of several other factors such as demographic variables, socio-economic conditions, and other individual-level and environmental factors in this study that could potential influence an individual's choice of medium for news gathering. Future research should incorporate these variables and model their combined effect via structural equation modeling (SEM). Only then will a better understanding of the complex process of news gathering of young adults begin. Even with these limitations, we believe this study, which is exploratory in nature, provides a good starting point to further understand how technology is changing news gathering and consumption behaviors.

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