Chapter 33

Journalistic Professionalism and User Motivations for Snapchat Video

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ABSTRACT

This article applied uses and gratifications to investigate motivations for posting Snapchat videos to identify whether journalistic norms inform Snapchat behavior. This study revealed that information sharing, entertainment, recognition, and self-expression motives were related to Snapchat video use; professional journalistic practices were not. Findings suggest that Snapchat video is used primarily for entertainment, rather than journalism among users. Given the robust increase by legacy news outlets in Snapchat Discover, the findings are timely and relevant.

INTRODUCTION

Instant messaging (IM) apps are increasingly ubiquitous in today's world and are an increasingly salient media source for some 200 million users but also for legacy news outlets interested in reaching those users. Particularly, Snapchat has become an important feature of instant communication offering real-time exchange of images and videos between users. As of September 2016, Snapchat reached 200 million users, placing it among the most active social network sites such as Facebook (1.7 billion users) and WhatsApp (1 billion users) (Statista, 2016). In the previous year, a report by Pew Research Center announced that nearly half of smartphone owners aged between 18 and 29 use messaging apps such as WhatsApp, while 41% use apps that automatically delete sent messages such as Snapchat (Duggan, 2015). The youth orientation of Snapchat makes it an especially, and increasingly, desirable platform for legacy news outlets interested in reaching young consumers (Lichterman, 2015; Spangler, 2017).

The generational disparity in traditional news consumption, which first appeared in the 1960s, continues apace, with the oldest Americans six times more likely to watch TV news, for example, as those under age 30 (Pew, 2018). Yet, the generational gap in online news consumption, including news via social media, is closing rapidly, with the Internet set to replace television as the dominant source for news (Bialik & Eva Matsa, 2017; Gottfried & Shearer, 2017; Lomas, 2017). More Americans of all ages are using social media but the youngest adults, 18 to 24, are, by far, the least likely to read newspapers or watch TV news and most likely to use Snapchat (Smith & Anderson, 2018). With this in mind, many legacy news outlets are increasing their presence in Snapchat Discover (Lichterman, 2015; Southern, 2016).

Media companies including The Wall Street Journal, The Verge, The Huffington Post, NPR, BuzzFeed, CNN, and Mashable are now turning to Snapchat as a form of promoting their work as well as engaging and reaching more and new audiences (Lichterman, 2015). In 2015, The Verge announced that the company receives more than 700 million snaps daily and gets approximately 10,000 views from the Snapchat users (Lichterman, 2015). Recently, Snapchat decided to bring two more media partners, Entertainment Weekly and Essence, to its Discover service to cover topics spanning entertainment, lifestyle and politics (Spangler, 2017). Today, video is not only the dominant type of media in terms of content generation and sharing, but also one of the fastest-growing components to the Internet (Molla, 2017). News media organizations are adopting non-professional journalism practices and are encouraging the audiences to share their work, such as videos, through social media to incorporate user-generated content in their news presentation and dissemination processes (Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2009).

In light of the growth of instant messaging apps and the media companies' attempts to incorporate their interactions with the Snapchat users, this study aims to provide theoretical explanations for why young adults use Snapchat, what type of interest predicts Snapchat video, and how their motivations are associated with journalistic professionalism. This study surveyed students at a large public university (N=120) in March of 2017 about their use of Snapchat. Average age of respondents was 21.9; 50.8% were white, 26.7% were Hispanic; three in four (75.8%) report using Snapchat daily. The present study was interested in identifying what benefits (gratifications) users identified for using Snapchat, and whether the increase in the presence of legacy new outlets on Snapchat influenced the journalistic mores of Snapchat video. This study applied uses and gratifications theory (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974) to examine Snapchat users' use of videos and their association with journalistic professionalism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Instant Video

The proliferation of Internet-connected, camera-equipped "smart" mobile devices is reshaping the way video content is generated, searched, consumed, and shared. It also influences how frequently people consume video content. Technological development of wireless networking and mobile devices has made data readily accessible to users anytime, anywhere. Mobile video has quickly become a mass consumer phenomenon. More and more people are using their mobile devices to create, watch, and share video content (Jarboe, 2016).

Previous scholars have identified three stages of Internet video, describing unique characteristics in each time dimension over the past two decades (Li, et al., 2013; Zhang, Wang, & Liu, 2014). The users of the first-generation video sharing services simply uploaded, searched, and watched video content directly

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