Traditional and New Media:
A Comparative Analysis of News Outlets’ News Feeds on Snapchat

Eun Jeong Lee, Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania, Bloomsburg, USA

ABSTRACT
Using an affordances approach, this study examines how U.S. media outlets use Snapchat to reach young audiences. Results of a content analysis and interviews reveal publishers on Discover adopt Snapchat’s affordances and adapt their media type and story topic using visuals. Findings also suggest media outlets retain their own character in news judgement. Overall results offer a broader understanding of the affordances and constraints of social media platforms used by publishers.

KEYWORDS
Affordances, Constraints, Discover, Journalism, Media Outlets, Snapchat, Visuals, Younger Adults

INTRODUCTION
In recent years, we have witnessed a significant growth of social media as a new form of digital communication technology. The impact of social media is shown by the growing number of people joining them around the world each year (Chaffey, 2017). New research suggests that about 70% of Americans use social media for a variety of reasons, including to entertain themselves, share information, connect with one another and engage with news content (Pew Research Center, 2018). Among online Americans, 79% use Facebook, 32% use Instagram, 31% use Pinterest, and 29% use LinkedIn, while the majority of SNS (Social Networking Service) users are between 18 and 29 years old (Pew Research Center, 2018). With the explosive growth and success of social media use, many traditional and non-traditional media outlets today are keeping pace with the revolution of digital technology and user preferences around the world (Santana & Hopp, 2016; Weiss, 2015). They incorporate social media into daily routines as a way to engage with their readers, expand the reach of their content, increase their website traffic and develop relationships (Perez, 2017).

Snapchat is a mobile messaging application for sharing ephemeral photos and videos, live video chatting, messaging, and saving snaps and stories in a private storage area (Moreau, 2017). As of June 2017, American technology and social media company Snap Inc. was ranked the 18th largest multi-platform property in the U.S. with 95,298 unique visitors (ComScore, 2017). While over 400 million snaps are shared on a daily basis, research shows Snapchat has 161 million daily active users, who spend an average of 25 to 30 minutes per day on the app (McLeod, 2017). Snapchat allows users to choose and privately send snaps to specific audience and control how long videos can be viewed, from 1 to 10 seconds (Roberts, 2017). Users in the same location can share their photos and videos of an event, such as a football game or graduation, with a broader audience using the “Our story”
feature (Moloney, 2017). With these features, Snapchat is the most popular app among the age group between 18 and 29 (York, 2017).

Snapchat Discover, the media section of the popular messaging app, launched in early 2015, provides unique opportunities for visual digital journalism by showcasing short-form content from partnerships with over 60 media publishers (Flynn, 2017). Snapchat Discover is unique as it creates new, dynamic, and collaborative spaces in which news organizations and Snapchat users come together. Many media publishers, from Food Network to BuzzFeed to NBC, incorporate a mix of news, videos, photos, animations, and multimedia story packages into their daily channels to reach and connect with millennials (Bilton, 2015). This feature not only completely changed swipe navigation, but also how the app is used among the younger adults by delivering a fresh visual form of attention from their youthful user base (Vaynerchuk, 2016). Although Facebook is still the dominant platform for news via social media, with 45% of American adults getting news from the site, Snapchat is growing in the share of their users as a social media source for news (Bialik & Matsa, 2017). The latest report shows that about one-third of Snapchat users (29%) have reported getting news on Snapchat alone (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017). The main reason behind the popularity of Snapchat as a news source can be in part attributed to the Snapchat-friendly vertical format, which enables people to engage with the content longer on mobile devices (Shontell, 2015).

A wide array of scholarly studies has examined how social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, influence journalism practices (Cozma & Chen, 2013; Lasorsa et al., 2012; Molyneux, 2014). However, there are few studies on the utilization of Snapchat among traditional and new media outlets, particularly snaps. Guided by affordance theory, this exploratory research aims to fill in the gaps in the literature by analyzing (1) how media outlets reconcile their legacy content on the platform of Snapchat, and (2) how the architecture of Snapchat shapes the news content by legacy media outlets.

This study helps scholars better understand how U.S. media outlets use Snapchat to engage young audience members and what it means for journalism in this new channel. From a theoretical perspective, this research expands the study of affordance theory by examining the dynamic relationships between news outlets and the social media landscape. Lastly, this study contributes to the journalism and social media studies literature by exploring news media’s professional use of Snapchat features to reach today’s toughest audience---the young.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

James Gibson (1966; 1977), a psychology scholar, originally developed the concept of “affordances” in reference to a specific kind of relationship between an animal and the environment, such as animals negotiating with their environment to survive and thrive. Gibson defines it as, “The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill” (1979, p. 127 italics in original). The concept is that an entity will survey, appraise and apply the available resources in an environment to its needs. An affordance is an action possibility available in the physical environment, which exists relative to the action capabilities of an actor (Gibson, 1979; Wirthagen, et al., 2012). People perceive the environment through its affordances, the possibilities for action it may offer (Gibson, 1979). Affordances do not cause behavior, but rather constrain and control it because different layouts afford different behaviors for different individuals (Gibson, 1982). For example, knee-high for children is not the same as knee-high for adults (Gibson, 2015). In brief, an affordance is not a question of its physical property, but its relational property (Gibson, 2015).

Modifying Gibson’s relational model of affordances to accommodate design interests, Donald Norman (1988; 1990) sees affordances as properties of things. An affordance is a perceived and actual property of the thing that determines how a thing could possibly be used (Norman, 1988). He views that the relationship between the design of devices and human cognition is crucial, suggesting that the design of devices should indicate how the users interact with the device (Norman, 1990). For Norman (1988), designers have the power to encourage and constrain specific action possibilities.
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