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Drab to Fab: Examining the Effects of Perceived Coolness on News Consumption on Social Media

Mu Wu^a and Steve Bien-Aimé^b

^aCalifornia State University, Los Angeles, CA, USA; ^bNorthern Kentucky University, Highland Heights, KY, USA

Correspondence: mwu33@calstatela.edu

Abstract

This study surveyed college students to gauge whether coolness influences intention to consume news on four social networking platforms: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. Results indicate that news consumption on Twitter and on Facebook are generally rated as more useful and easier to use than on Instagram and Snapchat. However, consuming news on Twitter and Snapchat is perceived as the coolest overall, whereas news use on Facebook is rated as the least cool across all three coolness sub-dimensions. Because coolness, with attractiveness and subculture being two appeals that had unique contribution, explains a significant amount of variance in individuals' behavioural intentions to consume news on each of the platforms, this study suggests that, in addition to utilitarian aspects, coolness motivates news consumption on social networking sites and should be incorporated into future studies on technology adoption.

Keywords: news consumption, social media, Technology Acceptance Model, coolness

Introduction

News companies increasingly rely on social networking sites to connect their stories with audiences (Cox, 2016; Weaver et al., 2019; Weeks & Holbert, 2013). According to the Pew Research Center, 53% of United States adults get news from social media “often” or “sometimes” (Shearer & Mitchell, 2021). Globally, about 23% of people cited social media as their main path to consuming news (Newman et al., 2017). However, consuming news on social media might be hitting a saturation point as growth “is flattening out in some markets” (Newman et al., 2017, p. 9). Interestingly enough, as certain social networking platforms mature, users begin to find them beneficial as news platforms. For instance, the messaging application WhatsApp is increasingly being used as a news platform in some countries (Newman et al., 2017). Overall, traditional journalists and news outlets do well attracting attention on more established social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, but less so compared to “influencers” and entertainers on newer platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram (Newman et al., 2021). According to the Technology Acceptance Model, the relationship between news consumption and social networking sites might then be connected to the perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness of news consumption on social networking sites.

However, it can be limited if we view news consumption on social networking sites simply from a utilitarian perspective (e.g., perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness). This is especially true considering that previously less news-focused social media platforms are also becoming more popular sources of news; for example, only 5% of U.S. adults used Instagram for news consumption in 2018 (Shearer & Matsu, 2018), which doubled in the following two years as 11% of U.S. adults used Instagram as a regular source for news in 2020 (Shearer & Mitchell, 2021). New technologies often offer new affordances (Sundar & Limperos, 2013; Yang & Bailey, 2020). Subsequently, coolness affordance, which consists of attractiveness (i.e., aesthetic appeal of a product), subculture (i.e., the degree to which a digital device allows users to establish an identity that is different from mainstream culture), and originality (i.e., the degree to which a digital device stands apart from other devices of a similar nature), is often associated with new technologies and could provide users with a unique and transformative experience that could directly improve user connections with technology or services (Holtzblatt, 2011; Sundar et al., 2014). Therefore, the current study proposes that coolness afforded by social networking sites could help explain users’ adoption of these platforms for news consumption, in addition to perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness suggested by the

Literature Review

Popularity of SNS and News Consumption

A key feature of social networking sites (SNS) is that users do not have to find content, including news; content, often curated via algorithm, comes to them (e.g., Barnard, 2016; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017). And so, the news media industry has adapted its strategies to align with the popularity of social networking sites. Research indicates that increasing a news media company's SNS activity can help increase readership (Hong, 2012). Additionally, social networking sites have greatly increased news consumers' ability to directly interact with journalists, which can influence whether news consumers share news on social networking sites (Weeks & Holbert, 2013).

However, not all social networking sites are adopted similarly in terms of news consumption. This study explores four popular social networking sites: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are three of the top four "social networks" for news consumption (Newman et al., 2017, p. 11), and Snapchat is increasingly popular as a "mobile news aggregator" (Newman et al., 2017, p. 9). Among Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat, Facebook and Twitter are more closely associated with news consumption than Snapchat and Instagram (Cox, 2016; Newman et al., 2017; Shearer & Matsu, 2018; Shearer & Mitchell, 2021). Globally, 47% of adults consume some news on Facebook, 10% on Twitter, 6% on Instagram, and 2% on Snapchat (Newman et al., 2017). Snapchat and Instagram were designed for enjoyment, not news consumption, and so users might still view these platforms as enjoyment sites in part because of their relative newness (Alhabash & Ma, 2017).

This is especially true for younger users, who are the majority of Snapchat and Instagram users (Smith & Anderson, 2018). In contrast, while the social media pioneer, Facebook, boasts that it has almost 1.5 billion "daily active users" (Facebook, 2018), it is experiencing shift as older users are becoming an increasing portion of Facebook's user base (Hunter, 2010; Lang, 2015; Sutter, 2012). Similarly, Twitter is another "older" social media platform that appears to have broadened its appeal to older users. Six percent of U.S. adults used Twitter in 2011; the number skyrocketed to 21% by 2016 (Greenwood et al., 2016). Twitter is journalists' preferred SNS to post breaking news (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2018). In fact, young people are leaving mainstream social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, leading some media commentators to speculate whether social networking sites have peaked in terms of

Accounting for the fact that older adults tend to consume more news than younger adults (Mitchell et al., 2016), more mature social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter might be perceived as more utilitarian for news despite the drop in younger users. One could postulate that once a media platform is *perceived* more mature, it would be more favorable for platform users to consume news content on it (Hermida et al., 2012), and sites' functions might have repurposed over time. For example, Cox (2016) noted that Facebook and Twitter are viewed compatible with news companies' goals of reaching news consumers. But why is that? One theoretical understanding could be drawn from The Technology Acceptance Model.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

TAM was developed by Davis in 1986. As an adaptation of the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), TAM specifically focuses on user acceptance of information systems, which suggests that the actual usage of a system is determined by users' motivations that are a function of the system's perceived features and capabilities (Davis, 1986; Marangunić & Granić, 2015). Two system factors, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, influence users' motivations to adopt a new information system (Davis, 1986; Davis, 1989; Marangunić & Granić, 2015; Taherdoost, 2018). Davis (1989) defined perceived usefulness (PU) as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance [their] job performance" (p. 320) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort" (p. 320). Note that Davis was not measuring whether technology actually eased people's tasks, only whether users *believed* the technology improved their job functions. Since the model was developed, it has been widely used to study the adoption of a wide range of information systems and technologies, such as digital libraries (Hong et al., 2001), mobile media (Conci et al., 2009), education tools (Yu & Yu, 2019), and driverless cars (Koul & Eydgahi, 2019), which have consistently supported the model.

Among the vast body of research, many recent studies have extended TAM into predicting use of social networking sites (e.g., Shin & Kim, 2008; Willis, 2009; Rauniar et al., 2014; Wirtz & Gottel, 2016; Dixit & Prakash, 2018). These studies validated the model and showed positive relationships between the key concepts and their significant impacts on SNS adoption. For example, an earlier study found that along with critical mass, capability, and perceived playfulness, PU and PEOU significantly predicted users' intention to

use Facebook, which subsequently influenced their actual usage (Rauniar et al., 2014). Such results were replicated in a more recent study conducted with an Indian population, which further revealed the validity of the model across different demographic contexts (Dixit & Prakash, 2018).

Different from some of the previous studies, perceived usefulness of news consumption on SNS, in this study, is not particularly about individuals' actual job performances; rather it focuses more on how individuals believe using SNS would enhance their news consumption. Similarly, PEOU would focus more on the perceived ease of news consumption on SNS—the degree to which a user believes that using a particular social networking site for news consumption is effortless. Applying previous TAM-related research to examine SNS adoption for news consumption, it is reasonable to propose that social networking sites can satisfy news consumption through both ease of use and usefulness because SNS users do not need to actively seek news but receive a plethora of news through following peers and organizations (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017). Similar to how digital news services can provide higher levels of PU and PEOU than the traditional newspaper as they offer easier access (through smartphones or computers), search functionality, and hyperlinks to more and related news stories (Panda & Swain, 2011), and subsequently lead to adoption (Chan-Olmsted et al., 2012), news consumption on SNS could offer even higher levels of PU and PEOU as users only need to log on to social networking sites and view a variety of, often more tailored and customized, news without performing any additional labor (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that perceived ease of use and usefulness associated with news consumption on SNS would improve users' intention to adopt SNS for news consumption. The current study proposes:

H1: Perceived usefulness of consuming news on a social networking site is positively associated with individuals' intentions to adopt the site for future news consumption.

H2: Perceived ease of use of news consumption on a social networking site is positively associated with individuals' intentions to adopt the site for future news consumption.

As discussed above, certain social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter are more closely associated with news consumption than others such as Snapchat and Instagram (Cox, 2016; Newman et al., 2017); therefore, it would be interesting to examine if news consumptions on these platforms are different in perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Therefore, the current study asks:

RQ 1: Among Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat, which of them is perceived as a) more useful, and b) easier to use for news consumption?

Coolness in News Consumption

While the framework of TAM could provide the universal variables that can be applied to examining news consumption on social media, it does not fully capture some unique features associated with this new form of news consumption. The MAIN Model (See Sundar, 2008, for a review) argues that it is important to include those factors because new technologies and services could provide new affordances (Gibson, 1977; Norman, 1988) that can yield new user experiences and gratifications (Sundar & Limperos, 2013; Yang & Bailey, 2020). For example, a larger size screen could afford a higher level of perceived realism, which then improve user experiences and enjoyment (Bracken, 2005), and consuming news on a new technology device such as an iPad could also afford novel and cool actions (e.g., multi-finger gesture) that improves user experiences.

Among these new affordances, the coolness concept is commonly associated with new media and technology (Sundar et al., 2014) and is widely employed in the field of communication and human-technology interaction (Holtzblatt, 2011; Sundar et al., 2014; Kim & Park, 2019). Scholars have long argued that the experience of coolness has a profound impact on the way we live our lives (Holtzblatt, 2011), and it can be a transformative experience that could directly improve user experiences and connections with a technology or service (Sundar et al., 2014; Im et al., 2015). Sundar et al. (2014) explicated coolness as “a positive and desirable quality used to describe innovations, be they ideas, technologies or products” (p. 170). They further suggested that coolness can often be captured as individuals’ evaluative perceptions that “are reflective of culturally agreed-upon norms of coolness” (p. 170); therefore, despite the concept of coolness itself as stable, the perception of coolness in a given technology is not a permanent state. After multiple rounds of validation, Sundar et al. (2014) found that coolness consists of three dimensions: attractiveness, subculture, and originality. Each of the three dimensions can operate separately from the other two in improving the perceived coolness of a device or service.

Attractiveness. As individuals are often drawn to objects and places that are aesthetically attractive (Dion et al., 1972), scholars in human-computer interaction have suggested that the aesthetic aspects of a device can significantly improve users’ experience and adoption of technological products, such as smartphones and smartwatches (Kim & Sundar, 2014; Kim & Shin, 2015; Kim et al.,

2015), albeit perceived attractiveness is usually a subjective evaluation (Tractinsky et al., 2000). In fact, a significant portion of the success of some iconic products, such as Apple iPods and iMacs, has been attributed to their perceived attractiveness (Levy, 2006). While news consumption on social media is not a physical object like some technology products mentioned above, social media platforms could provide more stylish and appealing user interfaces in contrast to regular newspapers or traditional news websites, which can still elicit a sense of perceived attractiveness and help news users complete their tasks in a “new and more exciting” manner (Sundar et al., 2014, p. 172) and lead to future adoption. For example, Sundar (2000) found that incorporating various audio, video, and photo elements into online news stories influenced users’ perceptions of both the news site and story content. Accordingly, news media companies are implementing more media effects research into their product offerings to make them more attractive to news consumers (Vasudevan, 2020). Therefore, the current study proposes:

H3a: Perceived attractiveness of news consumption on a social networking site is positively associated with individuals’ intentions to adopt the site for future news consumption.

Subculture. As cool devices should help users express their self-identity (Holtzblatt, 2011), subcultural appeal is one of the key and determining features of coolness (Sundar et al., 2014). Moreover, scholars (e.g., McAlister & Pessemier, 1982; Kim & Park, 2019) suggested that users can distinguish themselves from others and emphasize their social particularity, a usually desirable status, by using those unique and non-mainstream technology devices; for example, Kim and Shin (2015) found that the perceived subcultural appeal of smartwatches is positively associated with users’ attitudes toward the device. Applying this line of knowledge to online news consumption, while news consumption on social media is increasing, it would be unreasonable to argue that these social media platforms are also “mainstream” platforms for news consumption (Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Cox, 2016; Newman et al., 2017); and if the positive effect of subcultural appeal is applicable, we can then expect that:

H3b: Perceived subculture of news consumption on a social networking site is positively associated with individuals’ intentions to adopt the site for future news consumption.

Originality. Being novel and different from other products, be it aesthetically such as packaging or functionally such as new affordances and functions, is strongly associated with the coolness of a product (Levy, 2006, Holtzblatt, 2011; Sundar et al., 2014). Studies have shown that possessing and using original devices would allow users to affirm their sense of uniqueness and reduce

potential discomfort caused by apparent similarity to others (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977; Sundar et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2015; Kim & Park, 2019). For example, *The Washington Post* created a TikTok channel in 2019 that has “more than 1 million followers” (WashPost PR, 2021, para. 1). In describing the rationale for expanding the number of staffers devoted to the TikTok channel, *The Post’s* editorial video director Micah Gelman articulated originality’s definition:

When we launched our TikTok channel two years ago, we saw an opportunity to deliver the news in a unique way and reach new audiences. Since then, TikTok has proven to be one of our fastest-growing... These new positions will augment the success we’ve seen, helping us further grow, innovate and continue connecting with more people who may not regularly consume traditional news. (WashPost PR, 2021, para. 2)

Thus, regardless of their cosmetic or functional difference, social media platforms could provide news content and support news consumption in a unique fashion (e.g., Instagram Stories, Snapchat Live Stories, or Discover Stories), the current study expects that:

H3c: Perceived originality of news consumption on a social networking site is positively associated with individuals’ intentions to adopt the site for future news consumption.

In addition, the current study is interested in comparing how news consumption on these social media platforms are different in terms of their perceived coolness, thereby we propose:

RQ2: Among Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat, which of them are perceived as cooler platforms for news consumption?

While it is reasonable to propose that different aspects of coolness associated with consuming news on a social networking site as part of the experience will positively influence future news consumption on the site, this reasoning appears to contradict the previously mentioned idea that when a site is perceived as more utilitarian, then it is ready for more substantive content such as news. According to Sundar et al. (2014), utility, which was initially proposed as one of the dimensions of coolness, showed weak and inconsistent relationships with attractiveness, subculture, and originality; for example, in their study, technology such as Webmail and Desktop PC received very high scores on utility but very low scores on the three dimensions of coolness. These findings seem to suggest that a social networking site that is new and cool does not necessarily need to be perceived as utilitarian to enhance news consumption, i.e., the perceived coolness of a platform could operate individually in improving user adoption of the social media platform for news

consumption. With this set of contradictory rationale, we ask the following research question:

RQ3: After accounting for perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness, will the coolness of news consumption on a social media site influence individuals' intentions to use the site for news consumption?

Methods

Sample

To address these research questions and hypotheses, this study conducted an online survey in Spring and Fall of 2017. A total of 341 participants ($n_{\text{male}} = 60$, $n_{\text{female}} = 280$) completed an online survey by using Qualtrics. All the participants are undergraduate students at a large southern U.S. public university. The majority of the respondents were White (79.8%, $n = 272$), followed by Black (10.3%, $n = 35$), and Hispanic (5.3%, $n = 13$). On average, respondents spent two hours, respectively, during weekdays ($SD = 8.24$) and weekends ($SD = 8.24$) on reading or watching news content. Regarding general media usage (hours/week), TV ($Mdn = 5.00$, $SD = 15.47$) and Snapchat ($Mdn = 5.00$, $SD = 27.61$) are the two media channels they used most each week, followed by Facebook ($Mdn = 4.00$, $SD = 24.00$), Twitter ($Mdn = 4.00$, $SD = 24.19$), Instagram ($Mdn = 4.00$, $SD = 23.64$), newspaper ($Mdn = 2.00$, $SD = 14.18$), and radio ($Mdn = 1.00$, $SD = 12.51$).

While we did not conduct a power analysis to determine our sample size before data collection, the current study used a sample size calculator provided by Qualtrics and derived a suggested sample size at 385. As we received a total of 341 valid responses, post-hoc power analysis using G*Power was conducted for both MANOVA and multiple regression analyses, the result of the power analysis for MANOVA showed that, with a sample size of 341, effect size $f(V)$ at .335 (determined by inputting means for 4 groups x 5 measurement) and α err prob being .05, the actual power was greater than .99; consistently, with effect size f^2 being .0576 (determined based on explained variance and residual variance) and α err prob being .05, the actual power for the multiple regression analysis was .971. These results assured that the current study has a sufficient sample size.

Measurement

In addition to general news consumption and general media usage (reported above), respondents were asked to evaluate the usage of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat for news consumption, respectively, on the following criteria: attractiveness, subculture, originality, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and

Coolness. A total of 11 items were adopted from an established scale developed by Sundar et al. (2014). These items measured three different dimensions, attractiveness, originality, and subculture, by using a 7-point Likert scale with 1 being “strongly disagree” and 7 being “strongly agree.” *Attractiveness* was measured by four items, which are “consuming news on [Snapchat/Instagram/Facebook/Twitter] is 1) stylish, 2) hip, 3) sexy, and 4) hot.” The scale was reliable across all four platforms: Snapchat ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.53$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .90$), Instagram ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 1.43$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .89$), Facebook ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 1.36$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .89$), and Twitter ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 1.45$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .89$). *Subculture* was measured by four items, which are “consuming news on [Snapchat/Instagram/Facebook/Twitter] makes people who use it different from other people;” “If I’m consuming news on [Snapchat/Instagram/Facebook/Twitter], it will make me stand apart from others;” “People who consume news on [Snapchat/Instagram/Facebook/Twitter] are unique;” and “People who consume news on [Snapchat/Instagram/Facebook/Twitter] are considered leaders rather than followers.” This scale was also reliable across Snapchat ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 1.41$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .90$), Instagram ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 1.31$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .87$), Facebook ($M = 2.49$, $SD = 1.32$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .92$), and Twitter ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 1.44$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .93$). Finally, *originality* was measured by three items, which are “consuming news on [Snapchat/Instagram/Facebook/Twitter] is 1) original, 2) unique, and 3) stands apart from other ways of news consumption.” It was also reliable across Snapchat ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.59$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .84$), Instagram ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.44$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .82$), Facebook ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 1.39$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .84$), and Twitter ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.47$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .86$).

Perceived usefulness. A six-item scale was modified from established measures (Davis, 1989; Chin et al., 2008) for perceived usefulness of consuming news on Twitter ($M = 5.04$, $SD = 1.47$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .96$), Facebook ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.62$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .97$), Snapchat ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 1.68$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .96$), and Instagram ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.60$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .96$). Participants were asked to rate Twitter/Facebook/Snapchat/Instagram as a news provider is: inefficient to efficient, performance degrading to performance enhancing, performance decreasing to performance increasing, ineffective to effective, unhelpful to helpful, and quite useless to quite useful, on a 7-point semantic differential scale.

Perceived ease of use. A six-item scale was modified from

established measures (Davis, 1989; Chin et al., 2008) for perceived ease of using Twitter ($M = 5.54$, $SD = 1.41$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .96$), Facebook ($M = 5.46$, $SD = 1.37$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$), Snapchat ($M = 5.13$, $SD = 1.62$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .96$), and Instagram ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 1.57$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$) for news consumption. Participants used a 7-point semantic differential scale to rate news consumption on each platform as: difficult to learn to easy to learn, difficult to manipulate (control) to easy to manipulate (control), difficult to interact with to easy to interact with, rigid to interact with to flexible to interact with, difficult to master to easy to master, and very cumbersome to very usable.

Behavioral intentions. The questionnaire also asked participants about their intentions to use Facebook/Snapchat/Twitter/Instagram for consuming news. The study modified a four-item behavioral intention to use measure from Chin et al. (2008). Questions were: "If the choice of a news provider platform were up to me, it would likely be [Snapchat/Instagram/Facebook/Twitter];" "If I need to consume news, I would expect to use [Snapchat/Instagram/Facebook/Twitter];" "For future news consumption, I would probably use [Snapchat/Instagram/Facebook/Twitter];" and "If asked, I would likely recommend [Snapchat/Instagram/Facebook/Twitter] for news consumption." Participants answered these questions using a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). All four scales were reliable: intentions to consume news on Snapchat ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.80$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .98$), Instagram ($M = 2.23$, $SD = 1.47$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .98$), Facebook ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.86$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .97$), and Twitter ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.91$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .97$).

Demographics and news usage. In addition to collecting typical demographic information (e.g., gender and ethnicity), the survey asked participants how much news they consumed in an average weekend and on an average weekday as well on different platforms, such as TV, newspapers and their websites, radio, Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, and other.

Results

To address RQ1, a one-way repeated measures multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted to compare the news consumptions on the four social media platforms in terms of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Individuals' general media usage and news consumption were entered as covariates. This analysis reveals a significant difference among four platforms in perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, Wilks' $\Lambda = .61$, $F(6, 325) = 34.43$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .39$, which gave us permission to further examine the univariate analyses (see Table 1).

Table 1

Main Effect of Social Media Platforms on Perceived Usefulness and Perceived Ease of Use of News Consumption on Each Platform

Dependent Variables	Platforms				Statistical Test	Effect Size
	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	Snapchat		
Perceived usefulness	<i>M</i> = 4.46 ^a , <i>SE</i> = .09	<i>M</i> = 5.04 ^b , <i>SE</i> = .08	<i>M</i> = 3.67 ^c , <i>SE</i> = .09	<i>M</i> = 4.31 ^a , <i>SE</i> = .09	<i>F</i> (2.91, 958.82) = 54.62, <i>p</i> < .001	$\eta^2 = .14$
Perceived ease of use	<i>M</i> = 5.46 ^a , <i>SE</i> = .07	<i>M</i> = 5.54 ^a , <i>SE</i> = .08	<i>M</i> = 4.84 ^b , <i>SE</i> = .09	<i>M</i> = 5.13 ^c , <i>SE</i> = .09	<i>F</i> (2.94, 971.23) = 24.24, <i>p</i> < .001	$\eta^2 = .07$

Note. Means with different letters are significantly different

For perceived usefulness, Mauchly’s test indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated $\chi^2(5) = 40.47, p < .001$; therefore, degrees of freedom were corrected using Huynh-Feldt estimates of sphericity. The results indicate that the perceived usefulness of news consumption on different social networking sites are significantly different ($F(2.91, 958.82) = 54.62, p < .001, \eta^2 = .14$), where consuming news on Twitter ($M = 5.04, SE = .08$) is perceived as significantly more useful than Facebook ($M = 4.46, SE = .09$) and Snapchat ($M = 4.31, SE = .09$), which are significantly higher than on Instagram ($M = 3.67, SE = .09$).

Univariate test on perceived ease of use shows a significant difference among news consumptions on four platforms, $F(2.94, 971.23) = 24.24, p < .001, \eta^2 = .07$. Huynh-Feldt correction was administrated as Mauchly’s test indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated, $\chi^2(5) = 33.38, p < .001$. News consumption on both Facebook ($M = 5.46, SE = .07$) and Twitter ($M = 5.54, SE = .08$) is perceived as easier to use than on Snapchat ($M = 5.13, SE = .09$), which is significantly higher than on Instagram ($M = 4.84, SE = .09$).

To address RQ2, a similar one-way repeated measures MANCOVA was conducted to compare news consumption on the four social media platforms in terms of attractiveness, subculture, and originality. A multivariate test reveals a significant difference among the four platforms, Wilks’ $\Lambda = .70, F(9, 322) = 15.02, p < .001, \eta^2 = .30$, which allowed us to further examine the univariate analyses (see Table 2).

Table 2

Main Effect of Social Media Platforms on Perceived Coolness of News Consumption on Each Platform

Dependent Variables	Platforms				Statistical Test	Effect Size
	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	Snapchat		
Attractiveness	$M = 2.57^a$, $SE = .07$	$M = 3.24^b$, $SE = .08$	$M = 2.68^a$, $SE = .08$	$M = 3.18^b$, $SE = .08$	$F(2.99, 984.98) = 34.81$, $p < .001$	$\eta^2 = .10$
Subculture	$M = 2.49^a$, $SE = .07$	$M = 3.0^b$, $SE = .08$	$M = 2.68^c$, $SE = .07$	$M = 2.88^b$, $SE = .08$	$F(2.96, 975.942) = 16.45$, $p < .001$	$\eta^2 = .05$
Originality	$M = 2.72^a$, $SE = .08$	$M = 3.36^b$, $SE = .08$	$M = 3.11^c$, $SE = .08$	$M = 3.58^d$, $SE = .09$	$F(3, 990) = 31.90$, $p < .001$	$\eta^2 = .09$

Note. Means with different letters are significantly different

For perceived attractiveness, Mauchly's test indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated, $\chi^2(5) = 23.80$, $p < .001$; therefore, degrees of freedom were corrected using Huynh-Feldt estimates of sphericity. The results indicate that the perceived attractiveness of news consumption on different social networking sites are significantly different, $F(2.99, 984.98) = 34.81$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .10$, where consuming news on both Twitter ($M = 3.24$, $SE = .08$) and Snapchat ($M = 3.18$, $SE = .08$) are perceived as significantly more attractive than consuming news on Facebook ($M = 2.57$, $SE = .07$) and Instagram ($M = 2.68$, $SE = .08$), whereas there is no significant difference either between Twitter and Snapchat, or between Facebook and Instagram.

The finding also shows that there is significant difference among news consumptions on four platforms in perceived subculture, $F(2.96, 975.942) = 16.45$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .05$. Huynh-Feldt correction was reported as Mauchly's test indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated $\chi^2(5) = 31.32$, $p < .001$. News consumption on Twitter ($M = 3.0$, $SE = .08$) and Snapchat ($M = 3.0$, $SE = .08$) is perceived as having higher levels of subculture than news consumption on Instagram ($M = 2.68$, $SE = .07$), whereas Facebook has the lowest subculture score ($M = 2.49$, $SE = .07$) that is significantly lower than the other three platforms.

For perceived originality, the findings show significant differences among the four platforms, $F(3, 990) = 31.90$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .09$, where consuming news on Snapchat ($M = 3.58$, $SE = .09$) is perceived as more original than on Twitter ($M = 3.36$, $SE = .08$), Instagram ($M = 3.11$, $SE = .08$), and Facebook ($M = 2.72$, $SE = .08$). The differences between every other two platforms are also significant.

To address RQ3 as well as H1, H2, H3a, H3b, and H3c, multiple regression analysis was used. General media usage and news consumption were entered as control variables at the first step, two TAM variables, perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness, were entered at the second step; and the three dimensions of coolness, attractiveness, subculture, and originality, were entered on the last step in the hierarchical regression analysis. Results indicate that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness together explained a significant amount of variance in behavioral intention to use each site for news consumption, Facebook: $\Delta R^2 = .32$, $F_{\text{change}}(2, 328) = 93.58$, $p < .001$, Twitter: $\Delta R^2 = .32$, $F_{\text{change}}(2, 328) = 89.73$, $p < .001$, Instagram: $\Delta R^2 = .33$, $F_{\text{change}}(2, 328) = 89.76$, $p < .001$, and Snapchat: $\Delta R^2 = .34$, $F_{\text{change}}(2, 328) = 93.79$, $p < .001$. Specifically, H1 proposes that perceived usefulness of consuming news on a social networking site will be positively associated with individuals' intentions to use the site for future news consumption. The results consistently show that perceived usefulness has significant impact on individuals' intentions to consume news on Facebook ($\beta = .49$, $p < .001$), Twitter ($\beta = .57$, $p < .001$), Instagram ($\beta = .54$, $p < .001$), and Snapchat ($\beta = .59$, $p < .001$), which support H1. However, perceived ease of use, which was predicted to be positively associated with individuals' intentions to adopt a social networking site for news consumption, is not significantly associated with users' intentions to consume news on any of the platforms except for having a negative relationship with Twitter ($\beta = -.13$, $p < .05$); therefore, H2 is rejected (see Tables 3 to 6).

RQ3 explores whether coolness has influence on users' intentions to use the site for news consumption after accounting for two TAM-related variables. Results indicate that, after controlling for general media usage and news consumption variables as well as perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, the three sub-dimensions of coolness together explained a significant amount of variance in behavioral intentions to use each site for news consumption, Facebook: $\Delta R^2 = .035$, $F_{\text{change}}(3, 325) = 7.40$, $p < .001$, Twitter: $\Delta R^2 = .043$, $F_{\text{change}}(3, 325) = 8.72$, $p < .001$, Instagram: $\Delta R^2 = .055$, $F_{\text{change}}(3, 325) = 11.04$, $p < .001$, and Snapchat: $\Delta R^2 = .030$, $F_{\text{change}}(3, 325) = 5.86$, $p < .01$. To address H3, however, coolness-related variables are only significantly associated with user intentions to consume news on Instagram and Snapchat. Specifically, attractiveness ($\beta = .13$, $p < .05$) and subculture ($\beta = .19$, $p < .05$) are positively associated with intention to use Instagram for news consumption, whereas originality does not have significant impact. For intention to consume news on Snapchat, only attractiveness ($\beta = .13$, $p < .05$) has significant positive influence on it, whereas subculture and originality have no impact (see Tables 3 to 6). Together, the results only provide partial support for H3a, while both

Table 3

Summary of Results when Regress Behavioral Intention of Consuming News on Facebook on Perceived Coolness of Facebook

Predictors	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Control Variables			
Weekday news consumption	-.068	-.018	-.014
Weekend news consumption	.26**	.148*	.126
TV usage	-.006	-.037	-.049
Newspaper usage	-.185*	-.122*	-.105
Radio usage	.007	.007	.008
Twitter usage	-.237**	-.139*	-.13
Facebook usage	.411***	.253**	.225**
Instagram usage	-.091	-.037	-.033
Snapchat usage	.133	.059	.057
Other media usage	-.032	.041	.046
TAM			
Perceived usefulness		.559***	.492***
Ease of use		.043	.047
Coolness			
Attractiveness			.066
Subculture			.074
Originality			.085
<i>F</i> Total	4.90***	21.97***	20.09***
<i>R</i> ²	.13	.45	.48
ΔF	4.90***	93.58***	7.40***
ΔR^2	.13	.32	.04

Note. N = 341. Degree of freedom for the three regression models are *F*(10,330) for mode 1, *F*(12,328) for model 2, and *F*(15,325) for model 3.

p* < .05, *p* < .01, ****p* < .001.

Table 4

Summary of Results when Regress Behavioral Intention of Consuming News on Twitter on Perceived Coolness of Twitter

Predictors	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Control Variables			
Weekday news consumption	-.074	-.046	-.04
Weekend news consumption	.024	-.009	-.002
TV usage	.058	.039	.003
Newspaper usage	-.064	-.086	-.074

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Radio usage	.056	.093	.097
Twitter usage	.49***	.356***	.321***
Facebook usage	-.08	-.001	-.006
Instagram usage	-.163	-.054	-.027
Snapchat usage	-.169	-.228*	-.23*
Other media usage	-.095	-.07	-.047
TAM			
Perceived usefulness		.677***	.571***
Ease of use		-.148*	-.127*
Coolness			
Attractiveness			.115
Subculture			.075
Originality			.068
<i>F</i> Total	3.54***	19.50***	18.44***
<i>R</i> ²	.10	.42	.46
ΔF	3.54***	89.72***	8.72***
ΔR^2	.10	.32	.04

Note. N = 341. Degree of freedom for the three regression models are *F*(10,330) for mode 1, *F*(12,328) for model 2, and *F*(15,325) for model 3.

p* < .05, *p* < .01, ****p* < .001.

Table 5

Summary of Results when Regress Behavioral Intention of Consuming News on Instagram on Perceived Coolness of Instagram

Predictors	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Control Variables			
Weekday news consumption	.033	.031	.032
Weekend news consumption	.073	-.006	-.031
TV usage	.095	.064	.045
Newspaper usage	-.026	.012	.001
Radio usage	.08	.016	.04
Twitter usage	-.121	.011	-.007
Facebook usage	-.096	-.092	-.067
Instagram usage	.335**	.256**	.298**
Snapchat usage	-.113	-.176	-.234*
Other media usage	.018	.039	.058
TAM			
Perceived usefulness		.654***	.542***
Ease of use		-.105	-.091
Coolness			
Attractiveness			.132*

Subculture			.188*
Originality			-.042

<i>F</i> Total	2.57**	18.25***	18.15***
<i>R</i> ²	.04	.38	.43
ΔF	2.57**	89.76***	11.04***
ΔR^2	.07	.33	.06

Note. N = 341. Degree of freedom for the three regression models are *F*(10,330) for mode 1, *F*(12,328) for model 2, and *F*(15,325) for model 3.

p* < .05, *p* < .01, ****p* < .001.

Table 6

Summary of Results when Regress Behavioral Intention of Consuming News on Snapchat on Perceived Coolness of Snapchat

Predictors	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Control Variables			
Weekday news consumption	-.042	-.022	-.034
Weekend news consumption	.051	-.037	-.022
TV usage	.032	-.034	-.059
Newspaper usage	.03	.055	.046
Radio usage	.052	.089	.087
Twitter usage	.053	.072	.048
Facebook usage	-.075	-.008	.005
Instagram usage	-.241*	-.089	-.041
Snapchat usage	.417**	.081	.053
Other media usage	-.098	-.044	-.019
TAM			
Perceived usefulness		.674***	.593***
Ease of use		-.105	-.109
Coolness			
Attractiveness			.129*
Subculture			.00
Originality			.088
<i>F</i> Total	2.70**	19.15***	17.17***
<i>R</i> ²	.05	.39	.42
ΔF	2.70**	93.79***	5.86**
ΔR^2	.07	.34	.03

Note. N = 341. Degree of freedom for the three regression models are *F*(10,330) for mode 1, *F*(12,328) for model 2, and *F*(15,325) for model 3.

p* < .05, *p* < .01, ****p* < .001.

Discussion

Theoretical Implications

News consumption on the four social networking sites is very different in terms of its levels of perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, as well as coolness. Consuming news on Twitter and Facebook is generally rated as more useful and easier to use, whereas Instagram is consistently the least useful and least easy to use in terms of news consumption. This could be because the features on both Facebook and Twitter are more amenable to journalism, such as having better search capabilities (Bossetta, 2018) and timelines that might be more hospitable for journalism content (Romano, 2018). Additionally, the current findings echo the previous discussion, Facebook and Twitter are older social networking sites, therefore, how users engage with them might be quite different from early uses for Facebook and Twitter, which focused primarily on entertainment and convenience (Alhabash & Ma, 2017); however, Snapchat and Instagram users might still utilize the sites more closely for their entertainment, personal sharing, and social connection purposes (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). Therefore, the perceived usefulness and ease of consuming news on these new platforms are perceived as lower.

On the other hand, for coolness, consuming news on Facebook is consistently rated as the least cool across all three coolness sub-dimensions, whereas consumption on Twitter and Snapchat is perceived as the coolest overall. Instagram, while slightly better than Facebook, is also considered less cool. Facebook appears to have been deemed uncool as it grew in popularity, especially with older people (e.g., Hunter, 2010; Lang, 2015; Sutter, 2012). Intuitively then, when a SNS has reached mass saturation, subcultural appeal and originality will likely be negatively affected. The current study found that Facebook's subculture and originality aspects are significantly lower than all other three platforms. However, it is very interesting that Twitter is still rated as the coolest SNS platform even though it has been adopted by many users. It is also rated as most useful and easy to use. The unique combination of its news specialty and its social media functionality might make the platform stand out in the evaluations of attractiveness and originality. Also, Twitter should still have high subcultural appeal. Even though journalists are significant Twitter users (Cox, 2016; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2018), only 25% of U.S. adults (Shearer & Mitchell, 2021) use Twitter, which is much less than the 68% of adults who use Facebook (Shearer & Mitchell, 2021). Perhaps journalists' targeted efforts to distribute news on a cool platform resulted in news consumption. News companies then should embrace — not ignore — cool, newer social networking sites as platforms for news distribution.

The TAM variable, perceived usefulness, remains to be the strongest predictor of news consumption, which supports the Technology Acceptance Model. Returning to Twitter, journalists find it highly useful for news dissemination (Cox, 2016; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2018), and so perceived usefulness appears to be a match for both journalists' dissemination needs and news consumers' consumption needs. However, surprisingly, perceived ease of use in this study has pretty much no significant influence on intention to consume news. Based on the current study, it seems that utility trumps ease of use for college students' intentions to consume news. News is not a monolithic product (Cox, 2016; Harp, 2008). It could be that students care more about the "type" of news on a SNS than the ease of consuming news on a SNS.

Overall, coolness influences intention to consume news. However, only attractiveness and subculture had positive unique contributions to the intention to consume news on Instagram and Snapchat — two newer social networking sites. These findings confirm the intuitive notion that novelty often enhances coolness and indicate that coolness could boost news consumption for newer media, specifically through aesthetic and subcultural appeals.

More importantly, after controlling for perceived ease of use and usefulness, coolness as a holistic concept, offers a consistent significant impact on explaining individuals' intentions to consuming news on social networking sites. It is possible that coolness—holistically as an affordance associated with new forms of news consumption—cultivates new expectations and gratifications (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). With repeated consumption of news on social media, content gratification (i.e., information seeking) associated with news reading and processing might not be the only satisfaction they obtain; a sense of coolness, a more process-related gratification, could be another layer of gratification they seek (Cutler & Danowski, 1980; Song et al., 2004; Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Perhaps then coolness should be considered as an extension of TAM in explaining new technology use and adoption.

Practical Implications

Twitter is the best SNS for college students' news consumption, according to the current study. It seems that journalists' investment in placing news on Twitter, coupled with Twitter's enduring coolness, make for a strong news consumption platform as users perceive Twitter to have high usefulness in terms of news consumption. Compared to Facebook, Twitter also has a more exclusive user base, i.e., it is much smaller (Newman et al., 2017) or has a higher subcultural appeal. Perhaps a portion of the Twitter subculture are heavy news consumers. For the two newer social networking

sites, Snapchat appears to have more potential to be a platform for news consumption. It might be especially effective for younger users. Snapchat's strength in video (Alhabash & Ma, 2017) might make it an appealing site. For example, to attract a younger audience, ESPN has a Snapchat version of its signature SportsCenter program, which reportedly has a daily audience of 2 million people (Marchand, 2018). The segments, which are often only a few minutes long, are markedly shorter than the traditional one-hour SportsCenter.

This study finds that focusing on attractiveness and subcultural appeal might be counterintuitive, but it could be very effective in enticing news consumption. However, promoting content on social networking sites might not be an effective strategy for all media types (hard news vs. soft news; local vs. national; urban vs. rural, etc.). Additionally, not all media companies have the staffing to implement and carry out a social media strategy.

Limitations and Future Directions

One of the major limitations of the current study is the overlap between our data collection and news coverage on foreign interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election through social media. While all major social media sites were covered in the news, Facebook's influence was one of the most widely reported. It is possible that these news reports influenced the participants' perceptions of Facebook and resulted in the generally negative evaluation of the usefulness and coolness of news consumption on Facebook. We were not able to alter the questionnaire during the data collection; future studies should be aware of the possibility and control the factors when it is necessary. Moreover, the authors expected that Facebook would be rated low on subcultural appeal and originality as mass saturation tends to reduce such appeals. However, it could also be true that, with more tailored content, Facebook users could easily join or establish certain interest groups that would provide spaces for users who share similar traits, ideas, or attitudes, which could be viewed as subcultural groups. The current study was not able to refine our instrument to capture users' perceptions and news consumptions within these groups; however, we suggest that future studies should investigate how coolness perceptions are influenced by news consumptions within these subcultural groups. Another limitation is that the sample consists of more female than male participants, even though previous social media studies also skewed more female (e.g., Alhabash & Ma, 2017). While social media platforms tend to have more female users than male users (Auxier & Anderson, 2021), a future study should strive to recruit a more representative sample, not just in terms of gender identity, but also more representative for age demographics, especially considering college students are not major news

consumers (Mitchell et al., 2016). College students also view and use social media differently. While it is meaningful to focus on younger users, other demographic groups such as older adults were not represented. A future study should recruit a more diverse sample to increase the external validity of the study. In addition, the current study did not consider the consumption of different types of news. It would be beneficial to examine how different social media platforms match different types of news content. Such knowledge would further extend the theoretical understanding and practical application of experience of coolness associated with news consumptions on SNS. Finally, a recent article (Oeldorf-Hirsch & Srinivasan, 2021) found that over 71% of participants identified social media as primary source of news even though they also understood that the news content on their social media platforms was personalized and tailored to them. Such results indicate that the definition of news has also been evolving and the boundary between traditional journalistic news and personalized news has become less clear. It would be interesting and important for future studies to integrate these new perspectives and develop a more refined understanding on news consumption and engagement on social media platforms.

Conclusion

The current study explores whether coolness is connected to news consumption intentions on four major social networking platforms: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. Findings indicate that coolness explains a significant amount of variance in individuals' behavioural intentions to consume news on each of the four platforms. Moreover, the intention to consume news on different social networking platforms is influenced by different aspects of coolness, where subculture and attractiveness tend to be major influential factors. The findings suggest that along with utilitarian aspects, coolness motivates news consumption on social media platforms. Theoretically, coolness expands TAM with its unique contributions, and it should be incorporated into future studies on technology adoption.

Mu Wu (Ph.D., Pennsylvania State University) is Associate Professor in the Department of Communication Studies at California State University, Los Angeles. His research focuses on the social and psychological effects of new media and technology. In particular, he examines how newer social and mobile media interfaces can interact with media content, and how such interactions shape individuals' perceptions and engagement with messages as well as interfaces via underlying psychological mechanisms.

Steve Bien-Aimé is an Assistant Professor in the School of Media and Communication at Northern Kentucky University's College of Informatics. His research interests include race and gender portrayals in sports and news media. His work has been published in *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *Communication and Sport*, *Newspaper Research Journal* and the *International Journal of Sport Communication*.

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