

Is Snapchat Discover really a news platform? News snacking from social media and users' knowledge of current affairs

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The role of the media in informing the public has long been a central topic in journalism studies. Given that social media platforms have become today's major source of news, it is important to understand the impact of social media use on citizens' knowledge of current affairs. While people get news from multiple platforms throughout the day, most research treats social media as a single entity or examines only one or two major platforms ignoring newer social media platforms. Drawing on news snacking framework, this study investigates how using some of today's most popular social media platforms predicts users' current affairs knowledge, with particular attention to Snapchat and its news section Discover. A survey conducted in the United States (N=417) demonstrated that each of the platforms is distinct: Twitter is a strongly positive predictor of knowledge, Facebook a marginally significant negative predictor, Reddit a significantly negative predictor and Instagram not a significant predictor. Overall Snapchat use has no significant association with users' knowledge of current affairs, whereas Discover use has a negative relationship. Further analysis revealed that mere exposure to Snapchat is positively related to soft-news knowledge and attention to Discover is negatively related to hard-news knowledge.

Keywords: Snapchat, Reddit, Twitter, Facebook, knowledge, news

In the past few decades, Americans' typical news consumption patterns have undergone rapid and far-reaching change. As the traditional top-down mass communication process led by legacy news media declines, social media accessed via mobile devices have become the major news platforms (Schäfer 2020). In 2019, more than half (55 per cent) of American adults reported consuming news on social media often or sometimes, up from 47 per cent in 2018 (Pew Research Center 2019). While browsing their feeds, social media users notice news links shared by others, even without a particular intention to consume news. In fact, this kind of incidental exposure from social media outlets is now a common way to experience news, particularly for young people (Kim, Chen and Gil de Zúñiga 2013).

In the United States, eight-in-ten (82 per cent) adults get news through a smartphone or a tablet either sometimes or often, while six-in-ten adults do so using a desktop or laptop computer (Walker 2019). Mobile news consumers are different from newspaper readers or TV news audiences in multiple ways. Instead of sitting down for half an hour to carefully read or watch news, they check on news from time to time throughout the day. They visit multiple news platforms such as mobile apps or websites 'whenever and wherever they feel like it' (Sauvageau 2012: 32), but spend shorter time on reading or watching each story (Molyneux 2018). This way of shorter, dispersed news consumption is called 'news snacking' (Molyneux 2017: 1). News snackers quickly check headlines, photos and teasers from multiple platforms (Diehl, Barnidge and Gil de Zúñiga 2019) to get a quick overview of what is going on, and favour content that is easy to digest.

Scholars worry about the implications of news snacking for journalism and democracy as it may encourage news organizations to create short and superficial but attention-grabbing content (Chyi 2009; Schäfer, Sülflow and Müller 2017). Along the line, there are rising concerns that news snacking negatively affects public knowledge (Molyneux 2017; Schäfer 2020). Recent studies have shown that news consumption via social media is positively related to users' perceived knowledge, while it is negatively linked to their actual levels of factual knowledge (Müller, Schneiders and Schäfer 2016; Ran, Yamamoto and Xu 2016; Schäfer 2020). The news snacking framework suggests that by picking up news here and there through varied platform use, citizens may feel well-informed, but this type of news diet is actually detrimental to current affairs knowledge. Given that news snacking through social media has become a common way of consuming news, it is important to investigate how it is related to citizens' political or civic learning.

Social media studies often overlook that social media landscape now encompasses a number of popular platforms, and each of them has distinct characteristics and its own differentiated user base (Hollenbaugh 2019). According to a Pew report (2018), white Americans constitute the majority of Facebook (62 per cent) and Twitter (60 per cent) users in the United States, whereas the majority of Instagram (60 per cent) and Snapchat (55 per cent) users are non-white. On the other hand, Snapchat (63 per cent), Facebook (61 per cent) and Instagram (59 per cent) each have more female than male users whereas the opposite holds for Reddit (72 per cent) and LinkedIn

(64 per cent). A significant portion of Reddit (73 per cent), Twitter (71 per cent) and Facebook (67 per cent) users report obtaining news from those sites whereas only 29 per cent and 32 per cent of users on Snapchat and Instagram, respectively, report obtaining news from each of those sites. Three-quarters (75 per cent) of Snapchat users who consume news on the platform are aged 18 to 29, whereas only a quarter (26 per cent) of Facebook news consumers fall in that age group. Users who consume news on LinkedIn (61 per cent), Twitter (46 per cent) or Reddit (46 per cent) are much more likely to have bachelor's degrees than are users who consume news on Instagram (25 per cent), YouTube (27 per cent) or Snapchat (29 per cent). There are also differences across these platforms in terms of the ways in which news items are presented or shared, such as how visible they are. These differences mean that findings pertaining to any given social media platform may not directly apply to other social media. Thus, it is important for researchers to investigate the role of each platform separately, rather than aggregating and generalizing them under the general banner of social media. However, few studies have included efforts to differentiate between social media platforms or to account for smaller or newer outlets. Most social media studies considered either Facebook or Twitter only, or treated social media platforms as a single entity.

To address this gap in the literature, this study investigates the implications of a variety of social media sites for users' knowledge of current affairs. Popular platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, Instagram and Snapchat are explored. Extra attention is paid to Snapchat, a popular mobile application, because of its separate news portal Discover where a number of news organizations publish news items. This study examines how the use of this mobile app and its news portal is linked to users' knowledge of current affairs. Overall, the investigation focuses on the ways in which each of various social media platforms are linked to users' knowledge of current affairs. On this basis, the study purpose is to further understanding of the dynamics of Snapchat news consumption and the possible implications of these dynamics for users' current affairs (i.e. both hard and soft news) knowledge.

Political knowledge and social media

Citizens' knowledge of governmental and political mechanisms and the political decisions associated with these is important in democracy. Citizens in a democratic society are expected to understand the basic structure of their government, including in regard to the ways in which certain kinds of power are connected or separated, key decision-making processes, their political leaders and the roles they play and what is happening in society, including both national and international events (Bartels 1996; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Eveland and Scheufele 2000). This is vital knowledge that citizens need if they are to understand the impact of public policies and participate in politics by, for example, making informed and rational decisions about politicians and issues and holding their government accountable (Althaus 1998; Bartels 1996; Zaller 1992). However, research demonstrates that the American public in

general has a poor knowledge of politics, government and current affairs (Bennett 1989; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996).

Scholars have also examined media use as a predictor of civic/political knowledge because the media are the most common means through which citizens obtain news (Graber 2012; Zaller 1992). A large volume of research has demonstrated the contribution of both traditional and newer news media, particularly newspapers and the Internet, to citizens' political knowledge (Dimitrova, Shehata, Strömbäck and Nord 2014; Kenski and Stroud 2006). Recently, studies have focused on the influence of social media on civic or political knowledge, although the extent and nature of such influence remains unclear. About a third (36 per cent) of people who obtain news from social media report that it has helped them better understand current affairs, but more people (48 per cent) say obtaining news in this way has little effect on them (Pew Research Center 2018).

Some research suggests that incidental news exposure on social media sites promotes knowledge by providing more access to political information (Barabas and Jerit 2009; Huckfeldt, Mendez and Osborn 2004). Yet, other studies do not show such a significant connection (Ancu and Cozma 2009; Dimitrova et al. 2014; Gil de Zúñiga, Jung and Valenzuela 2012). These mixed findings may arise from users' selective exposure to certain types of information (Bakshy, Messing and Adamic 2015; Lee, Lindsey and Kim 2017) and/or from different measurements and designs across studies (Barabas and Jerit 2009). For example, Ha (2018) found that college students' engagement with political news but not other kinds of news declined between 2009 and 2012, showing the importance of differentiating types of information.

Another contributing factor to the mixed results may be a tendency in the research designs to average given effects across a number of social media platforms: Social media effects are likely to vary per platform (Boukes 2018) such that aggregating multiple platforms under the broad umbrella of social media could weaken or even cancel out given effects. Treating one platform such as Facebook or Twitter as if it were representative of social media in general is also likely to produce misleading results. Overall, these results suggest that researchers should pay attention to the types of knowledge they measure and to the specific characteristics of each social media platform. Thus, this study explores several popular social media sites – Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, Instagram and Snapchat – as separate entities.

Twitter and Facebook

Nine out of ten US journalists regularly use social media in their work to look for story ideas, to stay up to date on current events and to gauge what other news organizations are doing (Willnat and Weaver 2018). Interacting with users on social media also helps journalists build a strong personal image (Lee 2015). These phenomena have led many journalism scholars to pay attention to social media. Facebook and Twitter are probably the two most commonly studied sites, as the most popular social media site with more than two thirds (69 per cent) of adult Americans using it

(Pew Research Center 2019) and arguably the most ‘news-friendly’ platform (Benton 2020), respectively. Facebook has been a dominant social media news platform in the United States from which more than half (52 per cent) adults obtain news (Pew Research Center 2019). Twitter is regarded as a ‘key medium for news and information about major events’ (Hermida 2010). According to one analysis of Twitter, YouTube and Flickr during the 2010 G20 protests, Twitter was ‘the most promising platform for crowd-sourcing alternative reporting’ given that it provided contributors’ specific accounts of the protests whereas YouTube and Flickr simply showed police activity (Poell and Borra 2012).

In the few studies for which researchers tested the effects of Twitter and Facebook on knowledge separately, very different results were reported for the two platforms. Twitter increased users’ knowledge of politics or current affairs but Facebook did not (Bode 2016; Park 2017). From a three-wave survey analysis, Boukes (2018) found citizens’ knowledge of current affairs to be positively related to Twitter use, but found this kind of knowledge to be negatively related to Facebook use. The idea that Facebook is an inefficient learning tool has already been implied in some studies about partisan sharing (An, Quericia and Crowcroft 2014) and slactivism (Vitak, Crouse and LaRose 2011). When users access Facebook to gain information or to engage politically, the platform has the potential to contribute to learning (Gil de Zúñiga et al. 2012). Yet, Facebook use is primarily driven by the desire to maintain social ties, not by the desire to consume news (Kushin and Yamamoto 2010). As most people’s Facebook friends are real-world friends or colleagues, conflict avoidance is part of Facebook culture and information shared among Facebook friends tends to be rather more homogeneous than heterogeneous (An et al. 2014).

On the other hand, Twitter networks usually have more weak ties (i.e. acquaintances or public figures with no close personal connections), richer information and greater diversity that can lead to crosscutting exposure (Park 2017). Twitter’s prompt on the feed is ‘What is happening?’ contrasting with Facebook’s ‘What’s on your mind?’ Twitter users ‘follow’ others through the network, whereas Facebook users ‘friend’ others. Unlike Facebook, Twitter allows its users to keep anonymity and follow other accounts without getting permission. Probably because of these reasons, Twitter is often used to share information and opinions rather than to maintain personal relationships (Kwak, Lee, Park and Moon 2010). Research indicates that the informational use of Twitter is positively related to a need for cognition and negatively related to sociability, whereas the opposite applies to Facebook (Hughes, Rowe, Batey and Lee 2012). That is, people who use Twitter to obtain news may be less sociable but more intellectually curious than Facebook users. These findings demonstrate that social media sites differ from each other in relation to the users they attract and the principal reasons users have for accessing them. Twitter has been found to be positively linked to knowledge of current affairs, whereas Facebook is found to have a weak relationship, no relationship or even a negative relationship with knowledge. Thus, the following hypotheses are posited:

H1: Twitter use positively predicts knowledge of politics and current affairs.

H2: Facebook use negatively predicts knowledge of politics and current affairs.

Reddit

Compared to Twitter and Facebook where more than two thirds of each site's users (71 per cent and 67 per cent, respectively) obtain news on the site, for most of the other social media sites the respective user bases have much less of a news focus (Pew Research Center 2018). For example, 73 per cent of adult Americans use YouTube, yet only 38 per cent of these users obtain news from that site. The only exception is Reddit. This site's proportion of news consumers is even higher (73 per cent) than that of Twitter. Reddit users share content and comments that can then be voted up or down by other users. The most upvoted content is placed at the top of the page. With 430 million monthly active users (Statista 2020), Reddit is currently the sixth most popular website in the United States following Google, YouTube, Amazon, Facebook and Yahoo (Alexa 2020). People join Reddit to share information with unknown others who have the same interests, rather than to manage social relationships. Made up of about two million active communities called 'subreddits', Reddit is heavily text-based. Sometimes, important political figures such as then-President Barack Obama (2012) and then-presidential candidate Donald Trump (2016) started an AMA (Ask me anything) thread, creating viral, interactive political interviews. Because its users can vote news links up or down, Reddit was initially expected to function as a citizens' news-sharing or -critiquing platform. However, most popular subreddits cover rather broad light topics rather than specific or serious ones, and typical Reddit posts deal with simple observations or thoughts about daily experiences (Nicol 2018). As of March 2020, the largest subreddit is a humour community with over 29 million members. Due to anonymity, racist or sexist content, rumours and conspiracy theories are often found on some subreddits (Marantz 2018), causing Reddit to be embroiled in controversy. Compared with other social media platforms, which have stricter rules against hate speech, the company has tended not to take any action on this point (BBC 2012). As a unique platform popular among young (51 per cent of its users are aged 18 to 29), educated (46 per cent have a college degree), white (57 per cent) males (72 per cent) (Pew Research Center 2018), the role of this less-investigated social media platform calls for more scholarly attention. Thus, the following research question is considered:

RQ1: What is the relationship between Reddit use and knowledge of current affairs?

Instagram

Instagram is among the most popular social media outlets with one billion monthly active users worldwide (Statista 2020). Launched as a photo-sharing mobile

app for iPhones in 2010, Instagram is far from a news-sharing platform. In the United States, only 32 per cent of Instagram users reported obtaining news from the site (Pew Research Center 2018). Its users' primary motives pertain to interacting socially and expressing and archiving their day-to-day lives as well as engaging in escapism and peeking (Lee, Lee, Moon and Sung 2015). Perhaps the principal reason Instagram has not emerged as a news platform is that it does not allow hyperlinks on posts and comments. According to its Terms of Use, the app takes this unique approach in order to block spams such as discount codes or self-promotional links to websites and to discourage users from posting content that they do not have the legal right to share. With this difficulty in sharing news links, Instagram has been largely overlooked in journalism studies.

Recently, however, the journalistic potential of Instagram has been increasingly recognized, particularly in regard to multimedia journalism. The image-intensive app is optimal for photo- and video-journalists such as Sonia Narang of Public Radio International and fashion/style reporters such as Matthew Schneier of The New York Times to share their work. The abundant visual images posted by 1,000 million users also help journalists recognize trends and understand events in and to some extent even the cultures of distant places without having to actually visit them. Since Instagram added 'stories', a Snapchat-like feature that allows users to share slideshows of photographs and videos edited with filters, drawings and text, independently of their profiles in 2016, some news organizations including the New York Times and the Huffington Post began experimenting with the visual storytelling tool to attract young users. However, little is known as to whether using the app helps people obtain and learn from news. Thus, the following research question is considered:

RQ2: What is the relationship between Instagram use and knowledge of current affairs?

Snapchat and Discover

One of the goals of this study is to investigate Snapchat, one of the fastest-growing mobile messaging apps in the United States. Established in 2011, Snapchat already has 382 million monthly active users (Statista 2020). The defining feature of Snapchat is that users can send a 'snap' (i.e. a photograph or video message) that automatically disappears after being opened. While Facebook users are encouraged to archive their photos and stories on the site, Snapchat users are encouraged to 'live in the moment' by sharing spontaneous experiences or silly selfies using the interactive filters the app provides without worrying about leaving a permanent digital footprint. Since its launch, more playful features have been added to the app such as ephemeral videos, captions on photographs, ephemeral chats and 'stories' (i.e. a collection of videos and photographs with the ability to add filters, drawings and text). The app now also allows users to keep their snaps for longer and even to save them on an ongoing basis.

One point that differentiates Snapchat from other social media platforms in regard to news consumption – and the reason this study pays particular attention to the app – is Discover. While other social media platforms treat news publishers in the same way that they treat other account holders, Snapchat offers Discover in a separate page. Incorporated into the Snapchat app in 2015, Discover is not just a feature of Snapchat; it is a news portal through which media companies publish original multimedia stories. Over 60 publishers, ranging from entertainment media (e.g. *E!News*, *People*) to fashion magazines (e.g. *Vogue*, *Bazaar*) to sports media (e.g. ESPN, NFL) to online news media (e.g. BuzzFeed, Mashable, Vice), to legacy media (e.g. CNN, *The New York Times*, *The Economist*) participate in the news portal, investing money and time to create high-quality visual narratives with a vertical orientation that disappear after 24 hours. Discover is like a special news platform inside the platform Snapchat. This special treatment makes it easier for users to access and browse news stories publishers post, raising a scholarly question about its implications.

To appeal to Snapchat's young users, each publisher displays an attention-grabbing image and headline preview, while attempting to sell ads against the videos and stories (Benner 2017). Although Snapchat's user base (24 per cent of US adults) is relatively small compared to those of Facebook (69 per cent) or Instagram (37 per cent), it still has a strong hold on older teenage users: of the US population aged 18–24, 73 per cent use the app (Pew Research Center 2019). Also, three-quarters (75 per cent) of Snapchat users who report obtaining news through the app are in the 18–29 age group, the highest percentage for this age group among social media sites (Pew Research Center 2018). With the Discover section, Snapchat may be functioning as a news platform for the Millennials and Generation Z. This is why this study examines Snapchat with extra attention. If news snacking from social media negatively affects knowledge, what about this platform with a portal that is devoted to news? People can learn from social media if they actually consume news on the platforms and pay the necessary attention to it (Bode 2016). The interactive, visually appealing format of news stories on Snapchat Discover might prompt incidental exposure and attention to news, thereby facilitating learning. If that is the case, Snapchat use will influence users' knowledge differently depending on how much they use Discover. On the other hand, the abundance of entertainment-focused content on Discover might distract its users from reading or reflecting on hard news. Then Discover will impede its users' acquisition of current affairs knowledge. To address these concerns, the following research questions are considered:

RQ3: What is the relationship between Snapchat use and knowledge of current affairs?

RQ4: What is the relationship between Snapchat Discover use and knowledge of current affairs?

Snack news theories suggest that news publishers increasingly create light and easy news stories like bite-size snacks to meet the needs of the news snacking audiences. If

so, users might learn at least about soft news, although they do not gain hard-news knowledge. If that is the case,

RQ5: Do the relationships (RQ3 and RQ4) vary by the type of news (hard news vs. soft news)?

Method

Data collection

Survey data ($N=417$) were collected through the Qualtrics online panel management team, in July and August 2018. Among the panel members, those who accessed the online consent form after reading a recruitment email circulated by Qualtrics and agreed to participate proceeded to the study page. Individual panel members aged 18 or older ($M=32.9$, $SD=11.7$). Only those who reported using Snapchat at least once in response to the first question were included in the sample. The largest age group comprised those aged 26–35 (34.7 per cent), followed by 18–25 (31.7 per cent). The older participant groups were much smaller: 36–45 (19.7), 46–55 (6.9) and 56 and older (7 per cent). This age distribution is roughly similar to that of the US Snapchat users, excluding minors (Statista 2019). The survey sample included more females (73.1 per cent) than males. A majority of respondents were Caucasians (69.5 per cent) followed by African Americans (12 per cent), Hispanics (8.9 per cent), Asian Americans (5.3 per cent), Native Americans (2.2 per cent) and others (2.2 per cent). Their average educational level was between ‘some college’ (27.3 per cent) and ‘bachelor’s degree’ (35.5 per cent). Their average annual income ranged between \$35,000 and \$49,999.

Measures

Snapchat and Discover use. Traditionally, media use was operationalized by measuring levels of exposure to a specific medium. However, scholars have called attention to the importance of moving ‘beyond simple exposure’ (McLeod and McDonald 1985) to consider individuals’ motivations and cognitive activity (Eveland 2001; Gil de Zúñiga et al. 2017). Media studies also support the importance of considering whether or not a medium is used to keep up with information. In this study, two aspects of media use were combined through a media use index with two items: (1) exposure: the number of days respondents use the specific platform during a typical week (1: almost never–8: every day) and (2) news attention: how much attention they pay to national or international news on the medium or platform, not including sports, entertainment or local news (1: none–7: a great deal). The scores from the two items were rescaled on a 0 to 1 range and averaged. Snapchat (messaging app) use and Snapchat Discover use were measured separately. On average, the respondents used Snapchat for three to four days a week ($M=4.71$, $SD=2.11$) and paid quite

a lot of attention to the app ($M=5.28$, $SD=1.56$). Of the 417 respondents, 14.4 per cent reported that they ‘(almost) never’ used Discover. The average attention level to news on Discover was slightly higher than the middle point of the 7-point scale ($M=4.47$, $SD=2.08$).

Media use. The same exposure and attention questions were asked about other media outlets and the scores were averaged: newspapers including their online versions ($M=.53$, $SD=.31$), TV ($M=.76$, $SD=.22$), radio ($M=.64$, $SD=.26$), Internet excluding social media or newspapers’ online versions ($M=.83$, $SD=.16$), Facebook ($M=.73$, $SD=.24$), Twitter ($M=.52$, $SD=.34$), Instagram ($M=.62$, $SD=.29$) and Reddit ($M=.36$, $SD=.31$). For TV use, for example, the respondents were asked the number of days they watched TV and the extent to which they paid attention to TV news, and their answers were combined into the TV use index.

Knowledge of current affairs. To measure the respondents’ knowledge of current affairs, fourteen multiple-choice questions were used. Four questions covered basic civic knowledge, six covered hard news and four covered soft news. The four civic knowledge questions were about politics and the government as frequently used in national surveys such as American National Election Studies (i.e. the party that controls the current 115th US Congress and the Senate; the proportion of votes required for the US Senate and the House to override the president’s veto; the position the person in the photograph (Mike Pence) holds; the position Jeff Sessions holds). The six hard-news questions were created based on people and events that had been featured frequently in the news before the time of the survey (i.e. the employment rate; the position Sarah Sanders holds; the country Xi Jinping leads; the country that does not belong to G7 among five countries on the list). The soft-news questions focused on entertainment, sports and information technology (i.e. the big winner of the 2018 Billboard Music Awards who received six awards; the company of which Mark Zuckerberg is CEO, the country hosting the 2018 FIFA World Cup; the name of Apple’s latest mobile phone model). All questions were text only except for the Mike Pence question in which his simple headshot photo with no background was included. The number of correct answers divided by 14 served as the respondent’s current affairs knowledge score. On average, the respondents answered six and a half questions correctly, which was slightly less than 50 per cent ($M=.47$, $SD=.24$). Nine out of ten respondents (90 per cent) recognized Zuckerberg as the CEO of Facebook, the question that gained the highest percentage of correct answers. Far fewer people (60 per cent) recognized Mike Pence as the vice president of the United States. The lowest percentage of correct answers was for the G7 question, which only two out of ten (19 per cent) respondents gave a correct answer (Spain).

Political interest. The extent to which the respondents were interested in politics and government can influence political knowledge (Bode 2016; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996) and, therefore, was measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (a great deal) and controlled. On average, the respondents were moderately interested in politics ($M=4.51$, $SD=2.07$).

Political ideology. Political ideology, another factor that influences political behaviour, was measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (extremely liberal) to 7 (extremely conservative). With the middle point being most selected (29 per cent), 36 per cent of respondents were on the liberal side and 35 per cent on the conservative side ($M=3.95$, $SD=1.82$).

Results

To investigate the relationships between the use of various media outlets and current affairs knowledge with demographic and political variables controlled for, correlations between the variables were examined (Table 1). Next, two sets of hierarchical multiple regression analyses were performed (Table 2). First, demographic variables were entered in the first block, followed by political variables in the second block. Then, the media use variables were entered in the third block. Finally, Snapchat variables were entered in the fourth block.

H1 and H2 predicted Twitter's positive relationship and Facebook's negative relationship with current affairs knowledge. According to the hierarchical regression analysis, Twitter use was a strongly positive, significant predictor of current affairs knowledge ($b=.144$, $t=2.975$, $p=.003$). The relationship between Facebook use and current affairs knowledge was negative, although only marginally significant ($b=-.094$, $t=-1.806$, $p=.072$). Thus, H1 was supported and H2 was not supported.

RQ1 and RQ2 were about Reddit and Instagram. The analysis of the four-block model indicated that Reddit use was significantly linked to current affairs knowledge, but the direction was negative ($b=-.137$, $t=-2.703$, $p=.007$). Instagram use was not a significant predictor of current affairs knowledge.

RQ3 and RQ4 focused on Snapchat and Discover, respectively. For these questions, the final block of the regression model was examined. According to the analysis, Snapchat use had no significant association with current affairs knowledge (RQ3). A significant relationship was found only between Discover use and current affairs knowledge, but interestingly, the direction was negative ($b=-.118$, $t=-1.994$, $p=.047$). This result indicates that the more people use and pay attention to Discover, the less current affairs knowledge they are likely to have (RQ4). This final model accounted for 24 per cent of the variance in current affairs knowledge.

Of the demographic variables, age ($b=.003$, $t=3.129$, $p=.002$) and income ($b=.013$, $t=2.103$, $p=.036$) each positively predicted current affairs knowledge whereas education was marginally significant ($b=.020$, $t=1.946$, $p=.052$). Political interest was a strong predictor of current affairs knowledge ($b=.035$, $t=5.322$, $p<.001$). None of the traditional media use variables was significantly related to current affairs knowledge, with the exception of the radio, which was significantly but negatively associated with current affairs knowledge. Internet use was significant in predicting knowledge ($b=.190$, $t=2.110$, $p=.035$).

Table 1: Zero-order correlations among all variables.

	Age	Gender	Edu	Income	Pol Int	Ideol	Internet	TV	NP	Rad	FB	TW	Insta	Reddit	Snap	Discover
Age	1	-.146**	.114*	.164**	.223**	.107*	.168**	.308**	.250**	.095	.147**	.096	-.046	.074	-.084	.061
Gender	1		-.131**	-.218**	-.257**	-.183**	-.185**	-.203**	-.343**	-.163**	-.047	-.294**	-.164**	-.310**	-.154**	-.253**
Education		1		.244**	.191**	.005	.126*	.163**	.199**	.203*	.171**	.217**	.171**	.189**	.087	.109*
Income			1		.283**	.093	.152**	.169**	.289**	.243**	.137**	.247**	.197**	.246**	.112*	.201**
Pol Interest				1		.067	.560**	.473**	.546**	.388**	.320**	.464**	.311**	.466**	.292**	.387**
Ideology					1		.073	.137**	.163**	.199**	.122*	.092	.075	.164**	.162**	.183**
Internet						1		.496**	.439**	.331**	.313**	.370**	.256**	.251**	.232**	.290**
TV							1		.546**	.477**	.380**	.396**	.319**	.315**	.236**	.400**
Newspaper								1		.515**	.341**	.548**	.475**	.559**	.361**	.554**
Radio									1		.318**	.376**	.346**	.459**	.249**	.344**
Facebook										1		.311**	.403**	.285**	.227**	.305**
Twitter											1		.563**	.639**	.399**	.555**
Instagram												1		.474**	.392**	.479**
Reddit													1		.372**	.514**
Snapchat														1		.666**
Discover															1	

N=413. Cell entries are two-tailed zero-order correlation coefficients. **p*<.05, ***p*<.01 and ****p*<.001.

Table 2: Effects of Snapchat and Snapchat Discover use on knowledge of current affairs.

	News knowledge (hard news + soft news)			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	<i>b</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>b</i>
Demographics				
Age	.003**	.003**	.003*	.002*
Gender	-.028	-.015	-.009	-.009
Education	.028*	.021*	.025*	.024*
Income	.019**	.014*	.015*	.016**
Political orientation				
Political interest		.030***	.030***	.030***
Ideology		-.017**	-.012†	-.011†
Media use				
Newspaper			.018	.037
TV			-.043	-.025
Radio			-.105*	-.109*
Internet			.197*	.190*
Facebook			-.100†	-.094†
Twitter			.129**	.144**
Instagram			.005†	.015
Reddit			-.144**	-.137**
Snapchat use				
Snapchat				-.062
Snapchat Discover				-.118*
<i>R</i> ²	.092***	.162***	.220***	.239***
<i>R</i> ² change	.092***	.070***	.058***	.019**

Note: Gender (0=Male, 1=Female); Ideology (1=Extremely liberal, 7=Extremely conservative) *N*=413. †*p*<.10, **p*<.05, ***p*<.01 and ****p*<.001.

To further explore whether there is a difference between hard-news knowledge and soft-news knowledge in the ways those are related to Snapchat and Discover (RQ5), the fourteen knowledge questions were divided into two groups: hard-news knowledge and soft-news knowledge. Hierarchical regression analyses were performed with these two kinds of knowledge as separate dependent variables. To investigate the relationships more closely, the exposure item and the attention item were separated out. Thus, the four variables – Snapchat exposure, Snapchat attention, Discover exposure and Discover attention – were entered into the last block (Table 3).

First, the model predicting hard-news knowledge was tested. The overall result was similar to that of the model predicting total current affairs knowledge. Twitter

Table 3: Effects of Snapchat and Snapchat Discover exposure and attention on hard-news knowledge and soft-news knowledge.

	Hard news	Soft news
	<i>b</i>	<i>b</i>
Demographics		
Age	.005***	-.002
Gender	-.003	-.014
Education	.023*	.021†
Income	.015*	.010
Political orientation		
Political interest	.044***	.003
Ideology	-.011	-.011†
Media use		
Newspaper	.064	.025
TV	-.062	.133†
Radio	-.106†	-.130*
Internet	.207*	.107
Facebook	-.111†	-.015
Twitter	.170**	.154**
Instagram	-.029	.087
Reddit	-.140*	-.148**
Snapchat use		
Snapchat exposure	.052	.156**
Snapchat attention	-.098	-.084
Discover exposure	.066	-.027
Discover attention	-.169**	-.087
<i>R</i> ²	.278***	.373***

Note: Gender (0=Male, 1=Female); Ideology (1=Extremely liberal, 7=Extremely conservative) *N*=413. †*p*<.10, **p*<.05, ***p*<.01 and ****p*<.001.

use ($b=.170$, $t=3.127$, $p=.002$) and Internet use ($b=.207$, $t=2.055$, $p=.041$) were each significant and positive predictors of hard-news knowledge. As in the total current affairs knowledge model, Reddit ($b=-.140$, $t=2.465$, $p=.014$) was negatively related to hard-news knowledge. Facebook was again a negative and marginally significant predictor. Thus, for hard-news knowledge, H1 was supported whereas H2 was not supported as in the total current affairs knowledge model. Of the Snapchat variables, attention to Discover negatively predicted hard-news knowledge ($b=-.169$, $t=-2.631$, $p=.009$). Neither the other exposure variables nor the Snapchat attention variable had a significant relationship with hard-news knowledge, indicating that the

Discover attention variable was a driver of the negative relationship. Age ($b=.005$, $t=3.975$, $p<.001$) and income ($b=.015$, $t=2.187$, $p=.029$) were significant predictors whereas education was marginally significant ($b=.023$, $t=1.966$, $p=.050$). Political interest was strongly significant ($b=.044$, $t=5.346$, $p<.001$). This model explained 28 per cent of the variance in hard-news knowledge.

When soft-news knowledge, instead of hard-news knowledge, was entered as the dependent variable, a different pattern emerged. Political interest lost its power and showed no significant relationship. Ideology was a marginally significant, negative predictor ($b=-.011$, $t=-1.703$, $p=.089$). Internet use was no longer a significant predictor. Twitter use was still a positive and strongly significant predictor of soft-news knowledge ($b=.154$, $t=2.938$, $p=.003$) whereas Facebook use was not a predictor. Thus, even for soft news, H2 was supported and H1 was not supported. Reddit use ($b=-.148$, $t=-2.714$, $p=.007$) and radio use ($b=-.130$, $t=-2.299$, $p=.022$) each negatively predicted soft-news knowledge. Of the Snapchat variables, Snapchat exposure was the only significant predictor and the direction was positive ($b=.156$, $t=2.915$, $p=.004$), showing that the greater the use of Snapchat, the higher the soft-news knowledge score. Attention to Discover, a significant negative predictor of hard-news knowledge, did not have any significant connection to soft-news knowledge. This model explained 37 per cent of the variance in soft-news knowledge. These findings demonstrate that the relationships between the Snapchat use variables and current affairs knowledge vary depending on the type of current affairs considered (RQ5).

Discussion

The ubiquity of communication technology and the ease of access to information have raised hope that the new media environment will help inform citizens and invigorate their political engagement (Harrison and Falvey 2001). However, even with the 24/7 news cycle and the abundance of information at our fingertips, citizens have limited political knowledge (Mindich 2005; Pew Research Center 2015). The results of this study suggest that citizens' media choices may account to some extent for whether they become informed about the news. It is worth noting that individual social media sites differ from each other in relation to knowledge of politics and current affairs.

Of the social media platforms tested, Twitter stood out as the strongest predictor for both hard-news and soft-news knowledge. Use of Twitter and attention to news on the platform were positively connected to knowledge, even after controlling for political interest, ideology, other media use and demographic variables. Whether Twitter use makes people knowledgeable or knowledgeable people tend to join Twitter, it is clear that the microblogging site functions as a digital public sphere where users can become well-informed about current affairs.

On the other hand, Facebook's role as a news platform remains unclear. This study failed to find the hypothesized significant, negative relationship between Facebook

use and knowledge. Nevertheless, the marginally significant association in the negative direction implies that Facebook may not be an effective platform for learning. At least, Facebook appears to differ from Twitter in the way it cognitively influences users. It is vital for scholars to illuminate the impact of Facebook on citizens because it is by far the most common social media platform people obtain news. Issues that have come to the fore in public discussion in regard to Facebook, such as filter bubbles, echo chambers and fake news, should be investigated further in scholarly work.

Snapchat use also turned out to have no significant connection to users' knowledge of current affairs. Most noteworthy, Discover use was negatively related to knowledge, even with age, education and political interest controlled. Although the news portal on Snapchat hosts over 60 publishers, heavy users of Discover seem to have less knowledge than do light users of Discover. It is unclear why those who visit the news portal often know less than those who visit it less often. This result may be attributable to the types of news that publishers select for Discover and the way they present their news items. Stories on Discover are short and attention-grabbing, entertaining rather than serious news and tend to highlight colourful audio-visual content over text, the latter of which deters users from reading the text. Publishers, including legacy news media, may follow suit and select similar kinds of bite-size 'snack news' (Schafer et al. 2017).

It is possible that those who are relatively less knowledgeable use Discover as their primary news platform. Then, as the news-find-me perception hypothesis (Gil de Zunigar et al. 2017) suggests, Discover users might consume whatever items are of interest to them on the platform without seeking out other sources of news, thinking they are informed enough, even though the collection of information on the platform may not be the most important news for the day. According to Putnam's (2000) time replacement hypothesis, time spent on one – less serious – medium may replace time that could have been spent on another – more serious – news medium. As Discover users can access even legacy media on the platform, they may not feel the need to consume news using other media platforms. Moreover, Snapchat is a mobile-only app. Browsing news on a small phone screen on the go, users are less likely to reflect on the news stories than on laptop computer. Research also shows that those who passively consume digital media, without expressive and communicative engagement, are less likely to benefit from media use (Gil de Zuniga et al. 2012; Pingree 2007). The way typical users consume news on Discover is not as expressive or communicative as the way users do so on Twitter. This point might partially explain the low return in terms of knowledge acquisition for Discover users. Though informative, the results of this study open up more questions about how people use individual social media platforms and the factors associated with why people might tend to gain more or less knowledge. To further investigate the role of Discover in influencing the acquisition of knowledge, future researchers are encouraged to use experimental designs to establish causal relationships.

Reddit use was negatively linked to current affairs knowledge – an unexpected finding given that the platform is an interactive community where people share and consume other-provided information. Although the results of this study do not indicate an explanation of why the relationship is negative, they do raise a question about the uses and gratifications of the main user base of Reddit – the main purpose for which they use the platform – because learning is facilitated when there are needs for surveillance or information seeking. What users read on the site can differ greatly by the subreddits they join and the other users with whom they interact. The results of this study may support the speculation that most subreddits are created to provide entertainment rather than information. The time replacement hypothesis might apply to this situation; most user time spent on Reddit might be spent on personal-interest content unrelated news, thereby replacing time for news consumption. Another possibility is that compared with users of other social media, Reddit users are more exposed to fake news or misinformation that keeps them from gaining factual knowledge. More investigation is needed to clarify the negative relationship.

Unlike other popular social media platforms, which were found to have at least marginal relationships with current affairs knowledge, Instagram was found not to have a significant association. This lack of a significant relationship between Instagram use and current affairs knowledge may be because most of the photographs and videos posted on the app are not news-related. Although some news organizations do use Instagram, it is still relatively less newsy compared with other social media sites. The ban on hyperlinks within the app might be crucial in preventing users from sharing and learning about the news.

The findings include that time spent on the Internet and attention paid to it have positive associations with hard-news knowledge. Although there is rising concern that non-newsworthy infotainment or fake news pollute the Internet (Baym 2009), the results of this study show that the more days people use the Internet the more current affairs knowledge they are likely to have. Traditional news media – newspapers, TV and radio – turned out to be less influential in informing the public than they used to be. The use of newspapers – a strongly significant predictor of knowledge for many decades – was not found to be significant in this study. Even though the question about newspaper use asked the respondents to include online versions of newspapers and to exclude sports, entertainment and local news stories, it did not predict knowledge of politics or current affairs, regardless of the type of current affairs. It is not clear why the use of newspapers was not found to be significant, however, this result might speak to the shift in the user base of newspapers and other media outlets. That is, it is possible that many of those who used to read newspapers now obtain news from other online sources. In Boukes's study (2018), newspaper reading was only marginally significant in predicting current affairs knowledge whereas online news use and Twitter use were strongly significant. These findings suggest, in today's media environment, that Twitter users may be behaving like yesterday's newspaper readers.

As with all research, this study has several notable limitations that should be considered in relation to the results reported. First, given the study's reliance on cross-sectional survey data, no causal claims can be made based on the results obtained. For example, it may be that neither Twitter nor Snapchat has any impact on the knowledge of users in any regard to any given subject area. Instead, it may be that very knowledgeable people tend to use Twitter and relatively unknowledgeable people tend to obtain news from Snapchat Discover. In addition, the questions selected in this study might not be an accurate measure of current affair knowledge. Second, only those who were Snapchat users were included in the sample. Given the focus on users of Snapchat and Snapchat Discover, a relatively new mobile app feature at the time of data collection, it was necessary to use a non-representative sample. Even in relation to Snapchat users, the sample is older and more highly educated than average Snapchat users because minors were not recruited. It should be well noted, therefore, that the use of different samples may produce different results. Despite these limitations, the relatively large sample size and the variety of control variables included in the final model strengthen the validity of the findings. It is remarkable that even with the older and more educated sample, the overall knowledge of current affairs is not very high. It might have been even lower had teens been included in the sample. Finally, it should be noted that interpreting the results of statistical tests based on p -values has limitations. The p -value for RQ3, for example, barely met the significance threshold. Care should be taken not to draw a big claim from this result before integrating it with follow-up studies or other data.

Overall, the study findings contribute to the field's understanding of the complex dynamics of social media news consumption and its implications for democratic processes. By exploring popular, but relatively newer platforms that have met with less research interest to date, this study offers insights into the differing roles individual social media outlets may play in the era of news snacking. As a messaging app for sharing self-deleting photographs and videos, Snapchat may seem irrelevant to the production and acquisition of knowledge. However, the results of this study show that the use of Snapchat including Discover does have implications for citizens' knowledge of current affairs. Compared with media use, basic political interest and socio-economic factors are more influential in the acquisition of knowledge of current affairs. Media choices also often reflect users' interests and socio-economic factors. Yet, citizens generally have more control over their media use than over those factors. Considering the final models account for a significant amount of the variance of hard-news knowledge and soft-news knowledge (28 per cent and 37 per cent, respectively), more scholarly attention should be paid to investigating individual social media platforms in light of their roles in informing the public. Because, as Mindich (2005) stated, there is no democracy without an informed citizenry.

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