SNAPPING UP LEGACY MEDIA: USING THEORY OF AFFORDANCES

TO EXPLAIN HOW NEWS OUTLETS BEHAVE ON SNAPCHAT

by

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science
with a Major in Mass Communication
May 2018

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DEDICATION

To my parents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Kelly Kaufhold, and my committee members, Dr. Prisca Ngondo and Dr. Daniel Carter, for their continuous support and guidance throughout the course of this thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

ABSTRACT

Snapchat has become an important tool for media outlets to try to reach younger audience members who are active in the social media space but increasingly absent from traditional media platforms. The Snapchat Discover platform has enabled U.S. media outlets to engage directly with younger media consumers in an effort to develop new relationships. This study uses an affordances approach to explore how U.S. media outlets utilize Snapchat to reach young people, the audience least engaged with traditional media. Using content analysis and interviews, this study found that publishers on Discover adopt Snapchat's affordances and adapt their story topic and presentation of content with an emphasis on the visual. Specifically, they appear to rely on vertical video, immediacy, ephemerality, and creativity to meet the characteristics of the platform and its users. Yet, differences emerge between traditional "legacy" and "new" media outlets, especially in news judgment. From a theoretical perspective, this research expands the literature on affordances and constraints of social media platforms used by U.S. media.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, we have witnessed a significant growth of social media as a new form of digital communication technology. The impact of social media is shown by the growing number of people joining them around the world each year (Chaffey, 2017). New research suggests that about 70% of Americans use social media for a variety of reasons, including to entertain themselves, share information, connect with one another and engage with news content (Pew Research Center, 2018). Among online Americans, 79% use Facebook, 32% use Instagram, 31% use Pinterest, and 29% use LinkedIn, while the majority of SNS (Social Networking Service) users are between 18 and 29 years old (Pew Research Center, 2018). With the explosive growth and success of social media use, many traditional and non-traditional media outlets today are keeping pace with the revolution of digital technology and user preferences around the world (Santana & Hopp, 2016; Wagner, 2017a; Weiss, 2015). They incorporate social media into daily routines as a way to engage with their readers, expand the reach of their content, increase their website traffic and develop relationships (Perez, 2017; Greer & Yan, 2011; Hermida, Lewis, & Zamith, 2014).

Snapchat is a mobile messaging application for sharing disappearing photos and videos, live video chatting, messaging, and saving snaps and stories a private storage area (Moreau, 2017). As of June 2017, an American technology and social media company Snap Inc. ranked 18th largest multi-platform properties in U.S. with 95,298 unique visitors (ComScore, 2017). While over 400 million snaps are shared on a daily basis, and almost 9,000 images are shared every second, research shows Snapchat has 161 million daily active users, who spend an average of 25 to 30 minutes per day on the app

(McLeod, 2017). Snapchat gives the senders some control over their audience by allowing them to choose and privately send snaps to specific audience from one to several friends from the sender's' smartphone and to control how long videos can be viewed, from 1 to 10 seconds (Roberts, 2017). Powered by an algorithm, Snapchat calculates and displays friends whom the user communicates most with as "best friends" (Semenyuk, 2017). Users in the same location can share their photos and videos of an event, such as a football game or graduation, with a broader audience using the "Our story" feature (Moloney, 2017). With these features, Snapchat is the most popular app among the age group between 18 and 29 (York, 2017).

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

Gottfried, 2017). The main reason behind the popularity of Snapchat as a news source can be in part attributed to the Snapchat-friendly vertical format, which enables people to engage with the content longer on mobile devices (Shontell, 2015).

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

Through a content analysis of snaps by U.S. news outlets, the results help scholars better understand how U.S. media outlets use Snapchat to engage young audience members and what it means for journalism in this new channel. From a theoretical perspective, this research expands the study of affordance theory by examining the dynamic relationships between news outlets and the social media landscape. Additionally, recognizing the importance of the nature of affordances helps researchers and practitioners understand social influences on technology use, or vice versa. Lastly, this study contributes to the journalism and social media studies literature by exploring news media's professional use of Snapchat features to reach today's toughest audience--- the young.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

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

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

advantage of (Norman, 1998); Norman's notion of perceived affordances has been highly impactful in areas of interface design and professional user experience design.

In later work from Gibson and others, this was referred to as an interactionist perspective, in deference to the complexity of personal and social interaction around the presentation and consumption of information (Gibson, 1982; Greeno, 1994). Building on Gibson's and Norman's approach of an affordance, William Gaver (1996) suggests affordances are not just fundamental facts about perception, but action and interaction because affordances are there to be actively heard and felt rather than just waiting to be perceived. For example, depending on people's hand size or height, a handle with particular dimensions affords grasping (Gaver, 1991).

Affordances are not only for individual actions, but social interactions because social actions are embedded in and shaped by the possibilities offered by the physical environment (Gaver, 1996). Therefore, different technology affordances may have a variety of influences on the social behaviors and practices, enabling and constraining sociality in certain ways (Gaver, 1996). Wellman defines this notion of social affordances as 'the possibilities that technological changes afford for social relations and social structure' (2001: 228). Social affordances are also "properties of bits... [that] introduce new possibilities for interaction" (boyd, 2011: p. 39).

Lastly, communicative affordances focuses on the impact of objective qualities of the technology for communicative practices (Schrock, 2015; Vitak & Ellison, 2012). They are an interaction between the technology and subjective perceptions of utility that change communicative habits or practices (Schrock, 2015). An "affordance" is broader than simply beyond technological classification features, such as the screens, buttons, and

5

operating systems of mobile devices (Schrock, 2015). Hutchby (2001) suggests that technologies are both socially constructed and materially enabling and constraining. For instance, a built-in camera in smartphone is a featured technology while an affordance is the ability to take photos or video of a subject or place, and an outcome could be documenting the scene.

However, an affordance can be linked to a range of consequences, rather than just one consequence. For example, other than capturing live event videos, the act of taking a video may be associated with other outcomes, such as selfies or interviews. Another example is "comment," the open-ended feedback mechanism, on Facebook. Depending on how the platform is being used or the context of communication among the users, comments can be used to provide either agreement or disagreement about the shared content. These suggest while technological artifacts stay the same, the affordances of those artifacts can vary depending on a different set of users or goals or in different contexts.

Communication and information systems researchers have widely adopted affordances theory in media studies and social media research to describe the dynamic relationship between the object or technology and the user, and how and why that relationship offers possible outcomes through an affordance (Evans et al., 2017; Helles, 2013; Koroleva & Kane, 2017; Leonardi, 2013; Majchrzak et al., 2013; Parchoma, 2014; Sundar, 2009; Treem & Leonardi, 2013). For instance, Gibbs et al. (2013) examined how workers in a technology organization used social communication technologies found that the affordances of social media not only increased open communication and knowledge sharing, but also promoted covert behavior, enabling the workers to achieve multiple

goals. Leonardi (2011) also found out that perceptions of constraint led individuals to change their technologies while perceptions of affordance lead individuals to change their routines. Therefore, affordances emerge through interaction with communication technologies, which often tell users what to do, and which shape the actions people take with capabilities and resources (Gaver, 1991; Leonardi, 2011; Smock et al., 2011). It has been described as "what material artifacts such as media technologies allow people to do" (Bucher & Helmond, 2017, p. 3).

Scholars in this area embrace affordances as a way to explain the concept of conditional responses to stimuli, called conditional constraints; essentially, that some stimuli have some effect among some recipients, some of the time. Greeno (1994) refers to these as "conditions of constraints" – the limits that an environment places on available interactions (p. 340). Other scholars have added discussions of the dynamic nature of interactions – "everything changes" – and the role of space, time and the physical possibility of one to interact with an environment (Turvey, 1992). In applying Affordances Theory to the digital and social media era, the salient variables include the age of the user and itinerant nature of social media use.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Snapchat Interactivity/Engagement

Traditional social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, offer a series of asynchronous and permanent timeline of events where users can access, browse, search, share, and re-experience content from the past at any time (Koroleva & Kane, 2017; Paulussen & Harder, 2014). Such platforms influence user expectations and experiences of online interaction as persistent artifact allow them to decide what content to view (Vitak, 2012; Alhabash & Ma, 2017). On the other hand, ephemeral social media platforms, such as Snapchat, Line, Frankly Chat, and Wickr are based off disappearing, temporary or self-destructing content, which expire upon viewing specified time frame unless it is captured through screenshots (Punyanunt-Carter et al., 2017; Vaterlaus et al., 2016). These platforms offer real-time exchange of text, images, and videos by sharing a "moment" occurring at the act of sharing.

Snapchat is a medium for visual artifacts with few words to quickly engage people. Visual affordances of ephemeral messaging on Snapchat serve to increase the perceived closeness and engagement between the sender and receiver communicating (Bayer, Ellison, Schoenebeck, & Falk, 2016; Waddell, 2016; Katz & Crocker, 2015; Vaterlaus et al., 2016). This platform is considered a form of temporary social media because it facilitates a distinctive sharing practice by creating and erasing 10 seconds (or less) of content after the recipient opens it. The transient and conversational nature of Snapchat is characterized by different forms of engagement, including the sharing of information artifacts in the form of photos, videos, and visual stories. This platform is unique in that users must capture photos and videos, so-called snaps, from within the

Snapchat interface in order to send a message rather than sending archived photos from their phone (Gartenberg, 2017). Besides taking a photo or video, users can also embed 31 characters-long text messages, stickers (emojis), sketches, and filters on the top of the photos they capture (Sargent, 2017).

A "snap" is a photo or video taken and shared through Snapchat (Betters, 2017a). Besides sending snaps directly to individual contacts, users can post their Snapchat experiences on "My story" as a narrative, which is similar to news feeds on other social media. "My story" allows all of a user's Snapchat friends to see content the post for 24 hours and continually update their followers on their activities. Similarly, "Memories" allows the users to edit, search, lock, share, and organize the snap after taking screenshots or saving snaps (Lee, 2017). Another feature that makes Snapchat a unique time-limited instant messaging service is that it is exclusively a smartphone app that is only accessed via smartphones. Unlike Twitter or Facebook Messenger, it is not possible to access this application with a browser. Therefore, despite Snapchat's unique ephemeral features, it is natural that Snapchat depends solely on mobile affordance of portability, which allows users to view and share the artifacts anywhere at any time. This greater attachment to smartphones and communication only inside the application with the approved Snapchat friends and followers makes the platform more powerful as a communication tool.

Some of the affordances allowed by Snapchat's intractable integration with the smartphone fit with what has been described as high- and low-level affordances. High-level affordances are capabilities allowed by a technology, especially hardware, including portability and the ability to capture and share multimedia content like text, still photos and videos (boyd, 2011; Bucher & Hellmond, 2017; Schrock, 2015). Low-level

affordances are the more pedestrian, functional affordances within a tool, like the ability

to swipe to a certain spot in Snapchat to reach Discover, or touch a button to follow a

news outlet there (Bucher & Hellmond, 2017). Another important concept is "imagined

affordance" which describes the intersection between technological opportunities and

how the audience negotiates the use of that technology (Nagy & Neff, 2015; Bucher &

Hellmond, 2017). Imagined affordance accounts for both the available tools within a

given technology and the "perceptions, attitudes and expectations" of members of the

audience in using the tool to mediate communication (Nagy & Neff, 2015, p. 5). And a

third perspective is called "vernacular affordances," which describes how users make

sense of communication in a given platform (McVeigh-Schultz & Baym, 2015). Each of

these concepts inform this study's research questions.

While an affordance is a relationship between the properties of an object and the

capabilities of the individual that determine how the object could possibly be used, a

constraint is a limitation to actions (Norman, 2013). Digital technologies, for example,

constrain implicit usage norms that are internalized by users. In case of Snapchat, the

nature characteristic of the platform's limited timeframe constrains users' practices,

including not able to view content permanently. Therefore, platforms such as Snapchat

can be considered as spaces with affordances and constraints for publishers, because they

tactically reinvent their own way of dealing with disappearing snaps by hiring teams of

designers, artists, video editors and writers to meet the platform's unique formatting

requirements (Benner, 2017b). Moreover, not only digital technologies constrain the

actions, but also Snapchat restricts publishers in order to make the platform more

distinguishable, safe, and informative. In order to do this, Snapchat requests publishers

not to overlap content or topics too much with one another and restricts them from

posting questionable or misleading pictures that do not have editorial or news value

(Heath, 2017). In 2017, Snapchat exercised a large degree of control over *Mashable* by

asking it to be a technology outlet on Discover even though the publication covers a

variety of topics (Benner, 2017a). Lately, publishers report being baffled by Snapchat's

redesign that significantly altered the algorithm and traffic. Many of the publishing

partners do not fully understand how the algorithm works and why their traffic is

changing (Wagner, 2018).

Despite the constraints of the platform, Snapchat has been found to be more

immersive and immediate than other social media, and while it is not the strongest social

media space for following brands, it has been found to be the most engaging in terms of

passing time and the most gratifying for users (Barak, 2015; Phua, Jin & Kim, 2017). In

addition to existing engagement tools already active in Snapchat, the company recently

added a variety of different features, such as filters, geofilters, Bitmojis, stickers, and

animations, in an effort to increase user engagement (Hutchinson, 2017).

One of the popular engagement features in Snapchat is a filter, which users can

change their voice in the video, swap faces, include prominent landmarks from the area

they are in, alter the color balance of their snap, display the time when the snap was

taken, and change up the speed at which their video snaps play with the filters (Bradley,

2018). Another popular engagement feature is a lens which tracks people's faces in the

camera space and applies various animated special effects to record their face (Peckham,

2017). In addition to filters and lenses, users can create a 3D animated Bitmoji avatar, a

custom emoji character users can create to look like themselves. An animated Bitmoji

filters allows users project a three-dimensional animated cartoon of themselves engaged in various activities, from drinking a cup of coffee to riding a skateboard (Newton, 2017). Once the animation is created, users can send the personalized Bitmoji in a chat on Snapchat or insert them in snaps to share with their friends or broadcast via their story (Betters, 2017b).

Media Economics and the Decline in Advertising and Readership

Traditionally, news organizations have obtained income from two main sources: advertising in the legacy platform (print or broadcast) and newspaper sales to readers. However, for several decades, the traditional media industry has massively changed due to economic, technological, and sociocultural changes. Between 2008 and 2009, the newspaper industry entered into an unprecedented period of decline. Several notable U.S. newspapers, including *Chicago Tribune*, *Boston Globe*, and the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, filed for bankruptcy due to a loss of readers, heavy debt load, and decline in advertising revenue (Das, 2008; MacMillan, 2009). Media outlets following a traditional business model are no longer as profitable as they used to be.

The widespread use of the Internet has created new possibilities for "free" online content and changed readership demographics among younger audiences. More readers started to get news online and access large volumes of information at any time and anywhere for free, including the same content online that is available in the paid print edition. This culture of accessing information for free on the web made news content accessible without payment, making people more reluctant to pay for online news content. A study in 2009 showed that only 5% of Internet users said they would pay for

online news, 8% would only read the site's free headlines, and 12% of respondents were not sure what they would do (Andrews, 2009). Another study showed that people were not willing to pay for online news content because news does not have "unique value" (Chyi, 2005, p. 140). People with higher income were more likely to read print newspapers rather than online news (Chyi & Yang, 2009). Even today, despite the maturation into adulthood of Millennials, the typical news subscribers are not millennials. The *New York Times*, for instance, reported in March 2015 that the median age of the newspaper's digital subscriber is 54 while the median age of the print subscriber is 60 (Sullivan, 2015).

Newspaper readership and advertising revenue in U.S. newspapers has continued to drop since the economic downturn of 2008. Chyi & Tenenboim (2017), who examined the online and print readership of 51 newspapers in U.S., found that even though the online versions had been available for about a decade, only a few of the newspapers have shown growth since 2007. In fact, more than half of them have lost online readers since 2011. Even if online advertising increased, the news industry continually lost its newspaper readership among all age groups in the past 10 years because readers who are leaving print newspapers are not migrating to the online editions (Shafer, 2016). While advertising revenue in traditional print media declined from $44.9 billion in 2003 to $16.4 billion in 2014, digital advertising revenue in newspaper industry increased from $3 billion to $3.5 billion from 2010 to 2014 (Shafer, 2016). In fact, while total digital advertising revenue is substantial at around $80 billion – it overwhelmingly flows to only two companies: Google (42%, $35 billion) and Facebook (21%, $15 billion) (eMarketer,

2017). Digital ad revenue still remains insufficient to make up the loss on print ad revenue and digital and social platforms are ascendant (Pew Research Center, 2015).

In response to the decline in newspaper circulation and advertising avenue, the number of employees in the U.S. newsrooms has sharply declined since 2009. News companies continued trimming resources for print editions and laying off staff members. After falling 6% in 2012 and 3% in 2013, overall newsroom employment was down 10% in 2014 (Pew Research Center, 2016). Overall, the profession shrunk by about 20,000 jobs, representing a 39% decline in the last 20 years (Pew Research Center, 2016). As jobs have been cut, publications relied more on news provided by the wires and hired freelancers for content (Moules, 2011).

Furthermore, newspapers shrunk the numbers of pages, home delivery of print editions, features of various kinds, and breadth of news coverage. In 2008, *The New York Times* redesigned the product by sharply reducing the physical size of the newspaper and the number of sections printed in the New York metropolitan area and making the paper narrower by one and a half inches (Perez-Pena, 2008). A year later, *The Dallas Morning News* announced that it raised home delivery rates across the board by 40% to reduce its reliance on print advertising. The price increase was greater for the most geographically distant delivery (Filloux, 2012). While large newspaper companies, such as *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *The Baltimore Sun* adopted the smaller format and combined some sections (Cho, 2008; Hiltzik, 2008), local newspapers like *Kane County Chronicle* switched to a tabloid-size format and no longer published on certain days (Rosenthal, 2009). US newspapers became more determined to complete their transition from print to online as they expanded digital operations by hiring more

multimedia reporters and social media editors and requiring all journalists to have a wide range of skills and knowledge about digital media (Lavrusik, 2009).

Today, 10-second video advertisements on Snapchat that appear in between the time viewing stories in the Discover section play a big role among young adults. Snapchat ads offer users a choice to swipe up after the ad video to view more content, such as an option to download an app, read an article, view a longer video, or give a link to a website.

Social Media and News/Journalism

Social media platforms are a unique form of technology that have had an impact on the news industry. Platforms such as Twitter and Facebook are rapidly changing journalistic routines and communication in newsrooms around the globe (Lasorsa et al., 2012; Paulussen & Harder, 2014; Santana & Hopp, 2016). Researchers have established that journalists increasingly are adopting technology and turning to social media as a form of building and managing relationships with various publics, driving traffic to the news sites, checking for breaking news, monitoring public opinion, updating tweets, generating story ideas, and tracking and analyzing the latest trends as part of the journalistic process (Armstrong & Gao, 2010; Cozma & Chen, 2013; Molyneux, 2014; Willnat & Weaver, 2014).

As a result, the number of news organizations hiring journalists with social media skills and knowledge continues to grow at a rapid speed. News managers look for journalists who can code interactive features, analyze metrics and create visual storytelling on social media platforms for consistent updates and "real time" reporting.

This growing use of social media and changing expectations in the newsroom makes it necessary for journalists to adopt and be adept at digital technologies for news stories (Holcomb et al., 2011).

A recent report from Pew Research Center showed that two-thirds of Americans get at least some of their news on social media (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017). News use among Snapchat users increased 12 percentage points to 29% in 2017, up from 17% in early 2016 (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017). While news use among YouTube users increased 11 percentage points to 32% in 2017 from the previous year, Twitter users increased 15 percentage points to 74% in 2017 due to the growing proliferation of news outlets on each platform (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017).

With the growth in number of people accessing news through social media, storytelling on social media is becoming more informal and direct, making media brands rethink existing guidelines. Media companies are redesigning the style and layout of the story by fitting a story in one snap or multiple snaps. To drive engagement, media companies are incorporating more informal, direct, and visual storytelling styles, such as using vertical videos, GIFs, and emojis in their own content (Constine, 2017; Southern, 2017). Particularly, Snapchat Discover allows users gain more control of their own user news experience as the platform provides users with better controls over how they offer content. For example, users can tap the snaps in Discover in their own speed and pace to read news and choose to insert text or stickers on snaps when they want to send it to their friends. This trend makes media companies continue to be renewed and reinvented to distinguish themselves by offering higher-quality news experiences to enhance engagement among the young adults by avoiding their traditional news style or layout.

This evolution of style of presentation in news is of particular interest to this study in that it exemplifies the negotiation between news outlets and high-level affordances allowed within the Snapchat platform (Bucher & Helmond, 2017).

Age and Snapchat

Although older adults are increasingly using social media (Anderson & Perrin, 2017), young adults ages between 18 and 29 are still the heaviest user groups of various social media platforms (Pew Research Center, 2018). These digital natives, who are born and have grown up with information communication technologies, use social media for a variety of reasons, including entertainment, romantic relationships, self-expression, passing time, interpersonal connectivity, self-presentation, identity, and information, among others (Alhabash, Chiang, & Huang, 2014; Barker, 2012; Mäntymäki & Islam, 2016; Seidman, 2013; Whiting & Williams, 2013; Quinn, 2016). As individuals who are immersed in technology, the digital natives heavily engage in social media as they place more importance on social connectedness, rely on graphics, and technological engagement than older people (Grieve, 2017). This indicates that user age can have influences on the usage of visual information, such as video clips and photographs on social media.

Today, more than 8 out of 10 Americans own a smartphone (Lella, 2017). As the penetration of mobile phones increases, there is an increasing popularity in the use of mobile phones especially among young adults and youth. Research showed that while older adults (over 65 years) have the lowest smartphone ownership rates (42%), young adults (aged 18–29 years) have the highest smartphone ownership rates (92%), followed

by adults aged between 30 and 49 (88%), and those aged between 50 and 64 (74%) (Pew Research Center, 2017). This social trend is followed by the fast growth in use of mobile social-networking applications.

Snapchat is one of the new forms of social network-oriented communication that have emerged in the past few years. Snapchat use continues to grow and is especially prevalent among young adults. In 2017, the platform reached 28% of all U.S. millennials (Smith, 2017), and is the single most popular social media among teens (Guta, 2017). People under the age of 25 use Snapchat for 40 minutes on average every day (Aslam, 2017), and 58% of them open Snapchat before Instagram and Facebook (Brown, 2017).

Current literature indicates that there is a growing popularity and use of the ephemeral social media platform Snapchat among young adults (Katz & Crocker, 2015; Kofoed & Larsen, 2016; Punyanunt-Carter et al., 2017; Utz et al., 2015). Stanley (2015) examined college students' uses and gratifications of Snapchat and Facebook and found that friendship connections were the most important factors. While students joined Facebook to increase networking, they joined Snapchat because their friends suggested or are on it, which indicates that their personal social network, such as family and friends, influences new and innovative platforms. In addition, college students favored Snapchat over Facebook due to its effective way to express, share, and exchange content (Stanley, 2015). Young adults also used Snapchat for passing time and self-expression as the visual affordances of disappearing personalized messaging have added popularity to photographic communication (Waddell, 2016). College students believed that the photographs, such as 'selfies', let Snapchat users uniquely establish and maintain

connections with family members or friends regardless of the geographical distance (Piwek & Joinson, 2016; Waddell, 2016).

Today, younger people are rapidly migrating from "older" social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, to the world of "newer" ephemeral social media due to a more diverse set of motivations and gratifications (Bayer, Ellison, Schoenbeck, & Falk, 2015; Lomas, 2017; Vaterlaus et al., 2016). Using an affordance approach, Utz et al. (2015) found that young adults use Snapchat more for flirting and finding new love interests than Facebook because it erases messages several seconds after the humorous snaps and selfies have been sent. The study also found that Snapchat use is associated with higher feelings of jealousy compared to Facebook. Alhabash and Ma (2017) explored differences in daily uses and gratifications among Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat found that college students spend the greatest amount of time on Snapchat and Instagram, followed by Facebook and Twitter. Young people use Snapchat for entertainment, passing time, social interaction, self-documentation, self-expression, and information and problem sharing (Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Phua, Jin, & Kim, 2017; Quinn, 2016).

News Outlets Entering New Media "Channels"

The emergence of young people adopting mobile technologies for information has both enabled and necessitated a wider range of innovation opportunities for news companies to create more effective and user-friendly content forms for news. U.S. newspapers started emphasizing multimedia content, such as photos, videos, and slideshows, through a multitude of new media channels like social media to find and

attract "young" readers (Ferne, 2017; Scott, 2017). Therefore, news content, which was previously available only in print, on TV, online, and other traditional social media like Facebook and Twitter, are now available in more diverse and multiple versions, including ephemeral storytelling platforms such as Snapchat Discover.

Snapchat Discover allows audience to easily swipe, tap or scroll to read and watch daily "disappearing" stories compiled by media brands, such as National Geographic, VICE, and People (Crook, 2015). This quick, simple, fun, and engaging page features a Pinterest-style masonry grid of tiles of media channels. Users can tap each channel and watch the combination of videos, photos, text overlays and interactive content (Constine, 2016; Sargent, 2017). Previous studies have established that news publications using other social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, for reaching audiences have captured an increasing amount of digital audiences. However, a recent study found that although Snapchat users may interact with media brands or view snaps by news outlets on Discover, more than half of the users said they do not follow the content being produced by "traditional" media organizations (61%), such as *CNN* and *the New York Times*, followed by entertainment brands (57%) like *E!* and *Daily Mail* and sports (50%) like *ESPN* and *NFL* (Cohen, 2017).

Nonetheless, U.S. media companies have been investing in Snapchat and Discover in order to gain younger readers on the app. For instance, *The Washington Post* built a Snapchat Discover team to produce multiple daily editions and be a source of breaking news content by posting content multiple times a day, every day within the app's Discover channel for users in the U.S., Canada and the U.K. (Heine, 2017; Patel, 2017). The newspaper's Snapchat Discover team, also called as the Emerging News

Products team, includes editors, designers, motion graphics experts and video producers (WashPostPR, 2017). Since its launch on February 13, 2017, the newspaper's Discover stories has seen steady audience growth as it produced important and interesting content that Snapchatters can engage with through fast, visually captivating and experiential storytelling techniques, editing, and design (WashPostPR, 2017). The *Washington Post* plans to publish longer form written features, which users swipe up to read articles, and longer videos (including vertical video) on Snapchat Discover (Patel, 2017).

Since the advent of Web 2.0-enabled interactivity in the early 2000s, widespread social media has enjoyed robust diffusion and evolution (Castells, 2007; Manovich 2009; Scaler, 2016). Interactivity is a defining characteristic of Web 2.0 and, inherently, social media and for purposes of this study, "new media" is defined as Web-first news outlets which originated online with no history of presence in traditional print or broadcast platforms. Legacy media has been defined as news outlets with a history dating to origins in print and the traditional licensed broadcast platforms of radio and television (Ostertag & Tuchman, 2012; O'Neill, et al., 2015; Qin, 2015). Legacy content is a new area which, for purposes of the present study, refers to the traditional preponderance of content type by a news outlet prevalent in the legacy platform – for example, the Washington Post emphasizing coverage of U.S. politics; the Wall Street Journal focusing on the American business environment; the New York Times emphasizing international coverage and in-depth context, exercising its substantial reporting staff.

Research questions

      Numerous studies describe media's adoption of social media platforms, such as

Facebook and Twitter as reporting tools (Armstrong & Gao, 2010; Cozma & Chen, 2013;

Lasorsa et al., 2012; Molyneux, 2014; Willnat & Weaver, 2014), however the use of

Snapchat by U.S. news outlets is largely unexplored. Therefore, this thesis addresses the

following research questions:

    RQ1: How do media outlets reconcile their legacy content on the platform of

    Snapchat?

    RQ2: How does Snapchat influence content from legacy media outlets?

4. METHOD

Content Analysis

Content analysis has been defined as "the systematic, objective, qualitative analysis of message characteristics" (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 1). Content analysis is a reliable research tool used to make replicable and valid inferences by systematically capturing, coding and evaluating data – in the case of Snapchat, data such as texts, images, videos, or graphics. Through coding, a content analysis determines the presence of certain words, photos, videos, graphics, themes or phrases and quantifies this presence in an objective manner. Texts can be defined broadly as newspaper articles, headlines, tweets, interviews, or any occurrence of communicative language. Although content analysis may be time consuming, may not reveal the underlying reasons and motives for the observed pattern, or may not be an accurate reflection of reality due to a limited availability of materials, this research method is one of the most used and powerful research methods because it is a readily-understood, inexpensive research method.

Sample

A content analysis of the snaps in Snapchat Discover and interviews with a digital strategy producer at the *Today Show* and a digital features editor at the *Wall Street Journal* were conducted to examine how U.S. media use Snapchat Discover to reach their young audiences. Snaps in Snapchat Discover were collected from December 18, 2017 to January 2, 2018, while interviews were conducted on February 12, 2018 and March 13, 2018.

The unit of analysis for a content analysis was a single snap or story in news feeds by two types of new and traditional media representing each trend. All snaps were collected for two weeks from December 18, 2017 to January 2, 2018, which included all seven days from Monday to Sunday.

New media included *BuzzFeed*, *Mashable*, and *VICE*, and traditional media included *the New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *the Washington Post*. These six media outlets were selected for a couple of reasons. First, according to the latest rankings provided by ComScore in June 2017, New York Times Digital ranked 27th largest multi-platform properties in U.S. with 85,056 unique visitors, followed by WashingtonPost.com which ranked 32nd with 76,401 unique visitors, BuzzFeed.com which ranked 33rd with 75,154 unique visitors, and VICE media which ranked 35th with 72,314 unique visitors (ComScore, 2017). Second, the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Washington Post* were selected as traditional media because they have been and continue to be the most influential print media outlet in the country – in the case of the *Times* and *Journal*, the most widely circulated. *BuzzFeed*, *Mashable*, and *VICE* were selected because of high recognition of one of the most emerging media companies in the digital space. Overall, these six media companies were chosen because of their prestige, and national and international reputations and because they ranked most highly among news media companies with a presence on Snapchat on ComScore.

For the purposes of this study, snaps are referred to as photos and videos taken with the app. A Snapchat story is referred to as a collection of snaps put together to create a narrative with a combination of photos, videos, graphics and illustrations.

Coding and reliability

The sampling was achieved by selecting all snaps in Snapchat Discover at a given time from the six media outlets each day. Two trained coders (mass communication Master's students) analyzed snaps on the given days. The coders coded only the "live" snaps and stories on Snapchat Discover because "screen captured" snaps lack a large amount of interactivity and information. Therefore, rather than screen grabbing snaps, the researcher set a time each day for the coders to sit at the same time and capture the live snaps. After the training, both coders first coded 10% of the total snaps upon the researcher's observation for intercoder reliability (K = .917). Next, one person coded the *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *BuzzFeed* and the other person coded *the New York Times*, *Vice*, and *Mashable* in week 1, and then the coders swapped the media in week 2. The coders were asked to not check these six media outlets outside of the coding times. Doing this process for 14 days (2 weeks) from six media, a total of 726 snaps were analyzed. For reference, the researcher retrieved and recorded all samples from Snapchat on a smartphone to a computer using a cable. Incentives were provided to the two coders. For coding reliability and consistency, the coders were provided with detailed coding guidelines and were trained on a test sample.

Interviews

Qualitative research seeks answers to questions by exploring the individuals who inhabit various social settings (Berg, 2009). In-depth interviews are one of the most powerful research methods in qualitative research because they explore the mind of people's personal understandings and experiences for their actions (Arksey & Knight,

1999; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). A qualitative approach helps

disclose the depth and details of a yet little-known phenomenon, specifically how U.S.

media view and use social media to reach the younger audience. Therefore, this study

conducted a semi-structured interview with a digital strategy producer at NBC's Today

Show. NBC was chosen purposively because they are one of the forerunners in U.S.

media that utilizes social media to correspond with young publics (Wagner, 2017b). In

2017, NBC partnered with BuzzFeed to make videos on Snapchat to reach millennials

(Arbel, 2018). NBC news has the Snapchat show called 'Stay Tuned'. A semi-structured

interview was also conducted with a digital features editor at the *Wall Street Journal*,

which was one of the legacy media outlets included in the content analysis.

The interview with a digital strategy producer at the *Today Show* took place face-

to-face in a quiet room that was agreed upon by both the researcher and the participant in

the NBC office during 2018 PyeongChang Olympics in South Korea on February 12,

2018. Due to the editor's lack of time, an interview with a digital features editor at the

Wall Street Journal was conducted through a phone on March 13, 2018. Semi-structured

interviews were used to gather data because it offers the opportunity to gain insight into

the way in what motivates people and why they do things, and what anxieties they have

(Berger, 2011). The interview was digitally recorded with an audio recording device to

maintain accurate transcripts of the conversations. Each participant was given a consent

form, which included permission to digitally record the interview, and asked to sign it

prior to the interview.

The participants were given a brief description of the study for the purpose of

informed consent and were then was asked for permission to record the interviews. Semi-

structured interviews included a range of open-ended questions about the media's

attitudes towards and use of social media. These questions targeted why and how the

media is active in social media. In particular, the participant was asked to describe

whether the media is after the same audience as they are on other websites or a different

audience; how they pursue younger people as their audience; how they view social media

as a place to reach that audience; how they use the content in social media as they are on

other platforms; what they think is unique or different about social media compared to the

media's other platforms; what are all social media space they are in (e.g. Facebook,

Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, or WeChat); and why there are opportunities or limits with

any of these social media. As is common with semi-structured interviews, these questions

not only served to guide casual conversations, but also often resulted in unexpected

insights and interesting themes in more detail. Guided by the research questions, both

interviews lasted about 15 minutes.

5. RESULTS

Research Question 1

Snaps

Research question one is focused on how media outlets reconcile their legacy content on the platform of Snapchat. There were significant differences between how active the six news outlets are on Snapchat. Two of the new media digital outlets, *BuzzFeed* (N=243; 33.5% of all snaps) and *Vice* (N=127; 17.5% of all snaps), snapped the most while the legacy outlet *Washington Post* (N=123; 16.9% of all snaps) was close behind in third place. The *New York Times* used 89 snaps (12.3% of all snaps) and the *Wall Street Journal* used 86 snaps (11.8% of all snaps). The outlet least active on Snapchat was also digital, *Mashable* (N=58; 8.0% of all snaps). Overall, the results showed the new media (58.5%; N=428) utilized Snapchat Discover more than the traditional media (41.5%; N=298).

Furthermore, news outlets were overwhelmingly likely to have a single snap in a given story, with one snap accounting for nearly four out of five snapchat stories (79.7%) with the number of stories with multiple snaps dropping off rapidly after that. Among the six news outlets, *BuzzFeed* accounted for the largest number of single-snap stories (N=232; 41.2%) while the *Washington Post* posted the second highest number of single-snap stories (N=101; 17.9%). The outlet least used single-snap stories was *Mashable* (N=30; 5.3%). Again, there was a significant difference (χ^2 = 280.85, df = 105, p=<.001).

Nearly nine out of 10 snaps (N=624; 88.4%; M=8.92) displayed for 10 seconds, the longest available time within Snapchat. While less than 2% of all snaps displayed between 1 to 9 seconds, almost 10% of all snaps displayed snaps without time limitation.

28

Types of Media

The frequency and percentages of media type used in snaps of six media in
Snapchat Discover are displayed in Table 1. As shown, six media offered the largest
percentage of their snaps depicting texts (97.9%), while it used audios (69.3%), followed
by still images (66.9%) and videos (11.8%).

Table 1. Frequency and Percentages of Media Types Used in Media Outlets on Snapchat
Discover

Content	NYT	WaPo	WSJ	Vice	BuzzFeed	Mashable	Total
Texts	85 (95.5)	120 (97.6)	83 (96.5)	127 (100)	240 (98.8)	56 (96.6)	711 (97.9)
Audios[***]	82 (92.1)	109 (88.6)	78 (90.7)	120 (94.5)	57 (23.5)	57 (98.3)	503 (69.3)
Still Images[***]	39 (43.8)	89 (72.4)	66 (76.7)	83 (65.4)	161 (66.3)	48 (82.8)	486 (66.9)
Videos[*]	6 (6.7)	21 (17.1)	12 (14.0)	21 (16.5)	19 (7.8)	7 (12.1)	86 (11.8)
Animations[***]	78 (87.6)	99 (80.5)	77 (89.5)	120 (94.5)	171 (70.4)	48 (82.8)	593 (81.7)
GIFs	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (1.6%)	2 (0.8)	0.0 (0)	4 (0.6)
Screenshots[***]	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	15 (6.2)	1 (1.7)	16 (2.2)
Puzzles[***]	20 (22.5)	0 (0.0)	2 (2.3)	2 (1.6)	17 (7.0)	17 (29.3)	58 (8.0)

*p=<.05; **p=<.01; ***p=<.001

Texts accounted for the most frequently used type of media in snaps (97.9%)
across all news outlets, with little variance and no significant differences. GIFs accounted
for the least frequently used type of media in snaps (0.6%), with no significant
differences. However, there were cases where one outlet was a dramatic outlier. For
example, in usage of audio, all three legacy outlets and two of the new media outlets used
audio in more than 90% of their posts; however *BuzzFeed* used audio in only one post in
five (23.5%, χ^2= 585.772, df=5, p=<.001) a significantly lower incidence.

Significant differences were also found in using still images (χ^2 = 33.62, df = 5,
p=<.001). This was one case where differences emerged not by "legacy" versus "new"
media but among individual news outlets. *Mashable* significantly had the greatest
percentages of using still images (82.8%), followed by the *Wall Street Journal* (76.7%),

the *Washington Post* (72.4%), *BuzzFeed* (66.3%), and *Vice* (65.4%). The *New York Times* only used 43.8% of their content using still images. Overall, while 13.4% of stories had still images with texts, 5.6% had an image(s) separately below the text, 2.4% had an image(s) separately under the text, 11.8% had an image(s) as a background, and 1.0% had an image(s) wrapping text.

Although significant differences were found in using videos (χ^2 = 12.26, df = 5, p=<.050), news media outlets used only 11.8% of their content using videos which was much lower than still images. For example, while the *Washington Post* had the highest number of using videos reaching 17.1%, the *New York Times* had the lowest number reaching 6.7%. Overall, 91% of videos used in six media outlets were vertical videos, 12% of all videos played automatically, 40% had a sound in the video, and only one video offering an option of a mute button. Almost half of the music tone was neutral (45.1%), followed by positive (17.8%) and negative (45.1%).

Animations were one of the most popular media type used in news outlets. The results revealed significant differences in animation use (χ^2 = 40.52, df = 5, p=<.001), with *Vice* (94.5%) using animations most frequently, followed by the *Wall Street Journal* (89.5%), the *New York Times* (87.6%), *Mashable* (82.8%), and the *Washington Post* (80.5%). The outlet least used animations was *BuzzFeed* (70.4%). The results also showed significant differences in using puzzles (χ^2 = 83.13, df = 5, p=<.001), with *Mashable* (29.3%) using puzzles most frequently, followed by the *New York Times* (22.5%), *BuzzFeed* (7.0%), the *Wall Street Journal* (2.3%), and *Vice* (1.6%). The *Washington Post* did not use puzzles in their content.

Overall, t-tests were conducted to compare type of media used in legacy and new media in regard to Snapchat Discover (Table 2). The results showed that new media outlets were significantly more likely to use text and screenshots in stories whereas legacy media outlets were significantly more likely to use still photos and audio in stories.

Table 2. T-tests for Media Type and News Outlets

Content Type	Sample	M	SD	t-statistic	df	Sig.
Texts in a story	Legacy	.97	.18	-2.041	724	.042
	New Media	.99	.11			
Audios in a story	Legacy	.90	.30	11.039	724	.000
	New Media	.55	.50			
Still Images in a story	Legacy	.65	.48	-.879	724	.379
	New Media	.68	.47			
Videos in a story	Legacy	.13	.34	.863	724	.388
	New Media	.11	.31			
Animations in a story	Legacy	.85	.36	2.069	724	.039
	New Media	.79	.41			
GIFs in a story	Legacy	.00	.00	-1.674	724	.094
	New Media	.01	.10			
Screenshots in a story	Legacy	.00	.00	-3.397	724	.000
	New Media	.04	.20			
Puzzles in a story	Legacy	.07	.26	-.502	724	.314
	New Media	.08	.28			

*p=<.05; **p=<.01; ***p=<.001

Types of Stories

All six media outlets focused 54.6% (N=401) of their snaps on entertainment news in Snapchat Discover. Technology had the second highest percentage (12.9%, N=95), followed by culture/arts (11.3%, N=83), health (10.5%, N=77), politics (9.1%, N=67), economy (8.7%, N=64), science/education (5.3%, N=39), other (4.1%, N=30), and sports (0.8%, N=6). Opinion had the lowest percentage (0.7%, N=5). As shown in Figure 1, the new media outlets were significantly more likely to feature entertainment,

technology, health and culture/arts while the legacy media outlets were significantly more likely to feature politics, economy, sports, science/education and opinion. Importantly, though, entertainment and technology were the most common posts in both legacy and new media.
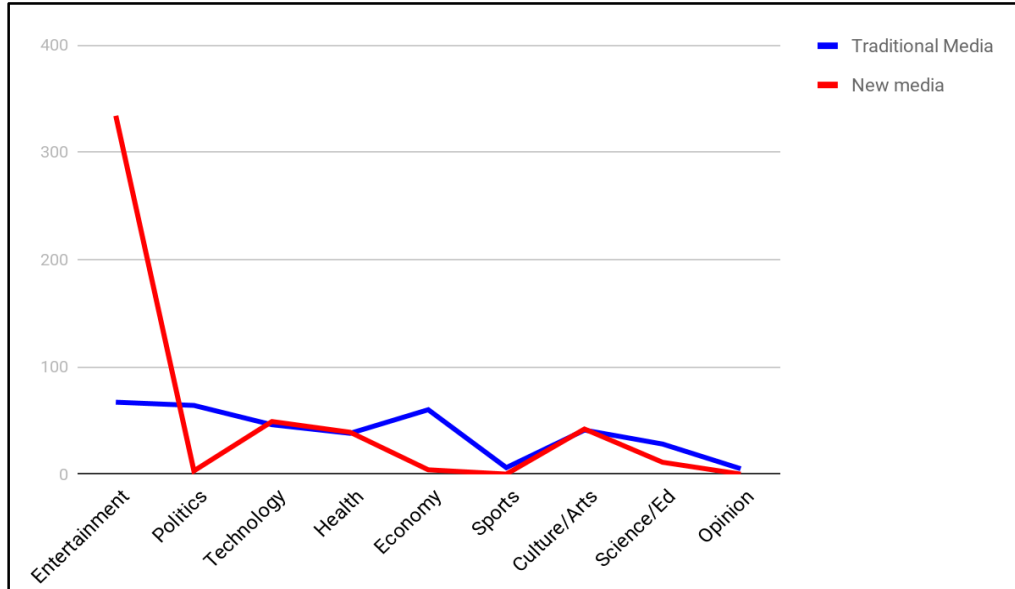

Figure 1. Frequency by Story Types and News Outlets

The frequency and percentages of story types used in snaps of six media in Snapchat Discover are displayed in Table 3 and Table 4. Although there were significant differences in types of stories between legacy and new media, significant differences were more prominent among specific outlets. For example, *BuzzFeed* was most likely to focus on entertainment in almost every post while the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* were most likely to have political snaps. Examples of the article headlines for entertainment among new media outlets include, 'Everyday things that are actually f**king genius', 'Self-Deprecating Jokes that Are Too F**king Real', 'Hilarious holiday cards you'll be sad you didn't receive', 'Meme that will never not be funny to women',

and 'Breakout TV characters that made us gasp, cry, and say "WTF?" in 2017'.

Moreover, examples of the article headlines for politics among new media outlets

include, 'North Korea is expected in Bitcoin heist' and 'The forged Chuck Schumer

harassment claim was fake news at its worst' while that of legacy media outlets include,

'What does 2018 hold for the North Korean leader?' and 'The Republican tax bill will

soon become law. Here's what you need to know'.

Table 3. Frequency and Percentages of Story Types Used in Media Outlets on Snapchat Discover

Story Type	Mean	NYT	WaPo	WSJ	Vice	BuzzFeed	Mashable
Entertainment[***]	.55	32	16	19	61	237	36
Technology[***]	.13	7	14	25	12	4	33
Culture/Arts[***]	.11	16	13	12	36	5	1
Health[***]	.10	6	21	11	33	3	3
Politics[***]	.09	23	37	4	3	0	0
Economy[***]	.08	4	17	39	1	0	3
Science/Education[***]	.05	15	11	2	11	0	0
Other[***]	.04	6	14	7	0	2	1
Sports[***]	.01	2	4	0	0	0	0
Opinion[***]	.01	3	2	0	0	0	0

*p=<.05; **p=<.01; ***p=<.001

Table 4. T-tests for Story Types and News Outlets

Story Type	Sample	M / SD	Sample	M / SD	T-statistic	df	Sig.
Entertainment	Legacy Media	.22 / .42	New Media	.78 / .41	-17.701	724	.741
Technology	Legacy Media	.15 / .36	New Media	.11 / .32	1.568	724	.002
Culture/Arts	Legacy Media	.14 / .35	New Media	.10 / .30	1.644	724	.001
Health	Legacy Media	.13 / .33	New Media	.09 / .29	1.567	724	.002
Politics	Legacy Media	.21 / .41	New Media	.01 / .08	10.155	724	.000
Economy	Legacy Media	.20 / .40	New Media	.01 / .10	9.506	724	.000
Science/Education	Legacy Media	.09 / .29	New Media	.03 / .16	4.052	724	.000
Other	Legacy Media	.09 / .29	New Media	.01 / .08	5.682	724	.000
Sports	Legacy Media	.02 / .14	New Media	.00 / .00	2.961	724	.000
Opinion	Legacy Media	.02 / .13	New Media	.00 / .00	2.699	724	.000

Research Question 2

Research question two is focused on how Snapchat influences content from legacy media outlets. It became apparent that the availability of accessing Snapchat through mobile phone use among young people has a major impact on how media outlets make content for younger audiences. A digital strategy producer at the *Today Show* explained:

> Young people are always on their phones and devices. They are constantly glued to their phones. So if that's how young people are getting news and communicating with their friends and family, we need to get in social media like Snapchat to give the younger audience our content. That's the best way to get to them because they are not looking at TV anymore. Providing content only on TV is certainly not the best way.

Digital producers and editors at the U.S. media outlets see Snapchat as an essential go-to place for communicating, reaching, growing, keeping in touch, and building relationships with younger audiences for content. A digital features editor at the *Wall Street Journal* stated:

> We definitely thought Snapchat as a great opportunity to reach a demographic we couldn't otherwise reaching. We are pretty encouraged by the amount of engagement we've gotten in our Snapchat platform so far. We are cultivating our next generation as our subscribers, and it's been a great way to package content that young audiences might be interested in. But young people don't really go to wsj.com, so we try to bring the content to them where they are. That place is Snapchat.

The editor at the *Wall Street Journal* explained that the disappearing content on Snapchat is "pretty much like a newspaper" because "a new newspaper comes out every morning, and 24 hours later that is an old news. Next day, people get a new newspaper." She continued, "it's actually very traditional news cycle if you think about it." However, U.S. news media outlets frequently face challenges in approaching the younger audiences who do not read news. The *Today Show* is not an exception:

Social media is where the world is right now, so we are represented on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, and Snapchat. We break news and share our content in Snapchat because that's where we find younger audience. But it's a challenge too because they are not necessarily interested in what the Today Show is putting out -- Hard news.

Therefore, both interviewees pointed out the importance of adapting different styles, characteristics, uses and purposes each social media platform offers. In order to accomplish this, they noted that it is crucial to use different content with different styles in each social media platform. As the producer at the *Today Show* noted:

When we have a story that aired on the TV show, we have different ways of sharing that content on social media sites. For example, if there is an interesting photo about the story, we use Instagram. If it is all about texts and quotes, we use them for Facebook. If it is a main quote or quick photo, we use Twitter. If it is something that the younger audiences are interested in, we use Snapchat. We change the content and style because all audiences in each platform are different. They have different expectations and commands.

Putting content on Snapchat requires different strategies from how it is done on other social media platforms. Because the 10-second snap disappears quickly and the content disappears after 24 hours on Snapchat Discover, the editor at the *Wall Street Journal* tries to use "beautiful videos and images and animate many of the stories on Snapchat". Actively using a variety of animated visual formats, the editor expressed, "we definitely don't do this on any other platform that we are on at the moment. It's only on Snapchat." The *Today Show* producer, too, chooses to use specific content types that are more appealing to younger audiences to make the content attractive within a given timeframe:

We try to throw the noodle to get younger audience specifically. We appetize to them by making the content into little chunks, short and flashy with more light, fun, happy and exciting style because that is the way to get into that. We make sure that our disappearing content on Snapchat has some sort of younger flavor or silly or just more fun because we want to tell the story from different styles, angles and sources. Viewing content on

Snapchat needs to be fast, so we try to produce the content the most engaging and efficient way.

The nature characteristic of Snapchat platform's limited time and space and time force the media team to continuously change their content in innovative ways to meet the requirements of Snapchat's unique platform. The *Today Show* producer stated:

> I can't post everything on Snapchat. You need to be strategic and selective on how you are going to use the platform. We are on a broadcast that have four hours of TV. If we put everything on Snapchat, everything would be sink and won't work. So you always need to figure out what's the best and most effective way to distribute those videos on the platform. You need to adapt, customize and change the content based on how the platform works.

A digital features editor at the *Wall Street Journal* uses similar approach in creating the content for Snapchat, making it more user- and mobile-friendly:

> When we want to use content we ran on our website or other social media sites on Snapchat, we always change it around so it looks more native to Snapchat stories. We also cut horizontal videos vertically so it is easy for young people who are on their phones to watch our videos. We also try to use as many vertical photos as possible so they can easily see and digest our content. If we don't have vertical photos for what we want to illustrate, then we would crop them as vertical images.

The producer not only adjust the content to meet the nature characteristic of Snapchat's platform, but also to fit the taste of Snapchat users. The digital features editor at the *Wall Street Journal* explained that it is important to "re-package the stories on Snapchat" because "young people are interested in all sorts of topics" including entertainment. The *Today Show* producer also expressed the importance of understanding and reacting to young people on Snapchat:

> Because all the younger audiences are on Snapchat, it is important to give the content that they are interested in. So if there is a breaking news, we don't post a breaking news on our Snapchat account the same way we do on other social media because that audience isn't expecting it. So we stay away from that. When our show is on the air, we also see what young people are saying in real time and we adjust our Snapchat content based on how the younger audiences react. Sometimes it is okay to fail which is nice. It's not the

end of the world if something does not perform well. We can always try another way and I am not afraid to fail.

Despite media professionals' attempt to adjust content for Snapchat, the restrictions of Snapchat experience certainly remain an issue. The *Wall Street Journal* editor points out the limitation of Snapchat's nature of one-dimensional content. While other social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter allows users to communicate and share different types of information with each other in various ways, Snapchat does not "drive anything greater than engagement or short conversations." Media professionals also face barriers of utilizing Snapchat Discover to an extent due to the unfamiliarity of the complex and constant changing platform and different interests and tastes than that of its users. The *Today Show* producer stated:

> I think Snapchat is less user-friendly than other platforms like Instagram stories. It's not user-friendly for someone like me who is 35. So I found Snapchat a little bit daunting when it first came out. I felt I am sort of old when I was using it. I think the concept still doesn't make sense to me and the interface is kind of confusing in a way. I was having trouble getting into what was so special about Snapchat. But Snapchat is where all younger people are getting all the information and content. So we use Snapchat to give content to them.

Although there are limitations of using Snapchat, both interviewees were optimistic about using Snapchat as a place to reach younger audience. For example, the *Wall Street Journal* editor finds snaps an excellent source for great content for young people. She said, "we have 10 seconds per snap to tell stories in interesting ways. 10 seconds give us enough time to put the content as much as we want on snaps. This is definitely something we don't do on any other platform that we are on at the moment. Snapchat is special for us and for young audience." The *Today Show* producer hopes that using the platform would increase the number of younger audiences who are currently the least audience group of the *Today Show*:

When there is a breaking news situation, people out in the world don't need to be fancy people on TV giving the news. You can have someone in the middle of nowhere saying, "Hey! I saw this and here is my photo!" And all of a sudden, we get this view that we would have never gotten otherwise. So it's really important to get the news from the audience and give it to your audience through social media. If we were not, we will be not smart. If someone retweets one of our tweets on Twitter, then that person's audiences see all of it too. So if someone can share our content and make it more visible on Snapchat too, then that's always helpful to get more younger audiences to see our content.

6. DISCUSSION

This study provides an initial insight into how U.S. media outlets utilize Snapchat to reach younger audiences using affordances approach. The findings illustrate the U.S. media outlets are adopting Snapchat's affordances in terms of media and content type. Because Snapchat has been shown to attract a mostly younger audience, media outlets continuously change their strategies and tactics to meet the needs of the platform and reach the audience group least likely to consume media legacy platforms, especially print.

High-level affordances might be expected to apply more to individual users than professional media outlets, as they consider and negotiate "shareable" opportunities, filters, geolocation tools and photographic opportunities. However, the *Today Show* social media content producer acknowledged that their target audience – young people – are "always on their phones" so content must be adapted to accommodate that space. For that reason, the *Today Show* "throw(s) the noodle' by making content into bite-sized little segments intended to attract and hold attention and avoids sharing breaking news through the app.

The *Wall Street Journal* digital features editor noted that Snapchat is the outlet's only avenue for publishing creative, vertical videos. In each case, the "channel" of Snapchat and fact that it is produced and shared via mobile phones and is primarily a channel through which to reach young consumers, influences the story topic and presentation of content using the tools at hand: vertical video, immediacy, ephemerality, creativity with an emphasis on the visual. However, despite the complexity of posting to Snapchat, these results are in line with Norman (1990)'s idea on perceived and actual property of affordances that the design of device indicate how the users should interact

with the device as vertical mobile devices tell the publishers on Discover what to do on the platform. In both cases – NBC News and the Wall Street Journal – the producers expect users to react to and share their content, with an eye toward posts that will garner high engagement. For that reason, entertaining, immersive posts are a priority, with engaging music, eye-catching images and content that invites engagement, like celebrity news. These posts are designed to contribute to high-level affordances among users.

While users were not questioned or surveyed for the present study, which would be the best way to capture imagined affordances and vernacular affordances, producers' intentional application of Snapchat offers some guide to interpret how snaps are expected to be perceived by audience members. The frequent use of audio across all outlets, especially music, and overwhelming number of posts about entertainment suggest that users view Snapchat more as an entertainment venue than as a news venue. A powerful example of high-level, imagined and vernacular affordances was noted by the *Today Show* producer in noting how Snapchat users employ the app when they find themselves in close proximity to breaking news. Users employ the affordances of the app – capturing and sharing images, video and text – in a way that both serves the needs and motivations of users – both followers and those posting – and lets them negotiate an individualized application of both the technology (the internet-enabled smartphone, camera and Snapchat app) and the sharing of their personal experience, in their own words and images.

One constraint attributed to the platform is the difficulty in posting. The *Today Show* producer noted that crafting a creative post which embraced the affordances of Snapchat and the expectations of the audience required much more time and effort than it

took to consume the post. The *Wall Street Journal* editor also expressed that Snapchat forces her to "re-pack the stories" to be more user- and mobile-friendly which requires specific skills and knowledge. This redesign process due to the constraint of the platform supports Leonardi (2011)'s claim that "perceptions of constraint lead people to change their technologies" and achieve their goals.

Another constraint was Snapchat's fast growth and continuous innovation which often led publishers into confusion about and misunderstanding of the platform. This can reduce the effectiveness of creating content because often publishers' skills and tools are not being applied to their fullest extent. However, this barrier of not having enough to understand the platform calls for an important need for media professionals be more adaptable to fully utilize Snapchat's ever-changing application as Snapchat is still one of the fastest-growing applications in the world (Hartmanns, 2017). This adoption and adaptation promises to improve relationships between media outlets and young people – and negotiated affordances - faster and deeper as media companies increasingly utilize and navigate Snapchat Discover.

Indeed, "snaps" have become a significant part of the daily tools and strategies employed to try to connect with and maintain future audiences for U.S media outlets. The media professionals are fond of using a single snap in nearly four out of five snapchat stories, indicating that even a single phone-sized screen of information can play an important vehicle for representing the best quality content and connecting to young audiences who are not watching TV or reading newspapers.

Specifically, media outlets adopt Snapchat's affordances by actively using "animated" snaps specifically for Discover. As the *Today Show* producer explained,

Discover platform pushes the media to make their traditional non-animated, long form content into "little chunks" and "short and flashy" animated features because the content should be "light, fun, happy and exciting style" enough to survive for 10 seconds or less, the maximum duration a snap is displayed on the platform. Particularly, media outlets use animated snaps, a series of animated stills, audios, videos or graphics that are visually compelling, informative, and attractive to younger audiences who live and communicate on Snapchat. For instance, Snapchat's vertical format platform is unique and, rather than serving as a constraint, offers a variety of unique displays of still or moving images with texts which can look similar to a magazine style or format but with animated features. These vertical visual stories have become shorter, taller and automated as they become tailored to Discover platform and mobile phones. The *Wall Street Journal* editor and the *Today Show* producer both pointed out this is all because media companies want to tell stories in more interactive and interesting ways to spark interest among young people and retain their engagement on Snapchat – content originated with high-level, imagined and vernacular user affordances in mind.

In terms of story types, the high usage of entertainment stories on Discover suggests that Snapchat has a huge impact on content creation as publishers selectively choose and customize their story type to meet the needs of young people. For instance, this study found that legacy outlets (the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *Wall Street Journal*) emphasized politics, economy, sports, science/education and opinion while the new media outlets (*BuzzFeed*, *Mashable*, and *Vice*) provided more snaps about entertainment, technology, health and culture/arts. These show that media outlets still retain much of their own character, especially their news judgement - with a paean to the

dominance of snaps about entertainment and technology dominating both media types. A central question of this study was which would be a more dominant influence on content in Snapchat stories – the historical inertia of the legacy outlets or the "nature" of the most popular content on Snapchat. In other words, would *Washington Post* snaps more emphasize American politics, or would they be more entertainment oriented? The answer, in this case, is – both. The *Wall Street Journal* and Mashable were, by far, the most likely sources for technology-oriented snaps – one legacy and one new media. On the other hand, the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* were, by far, the most likely to cover politics in Snapchat; the *Wall Street Journal* the most likely, by far, to snap about the economy. And while entertainment was, by far, the most common topic, Buzzfeed's immensely lopsided use of entertainment snaps skewed the results for all. In the end, legacy news outlets retained much of their legacy content in migrating to Snapchat.

Compared to consumption on traditional platforms like print and broadcast TV, social media is robustly an important medium for reaching younger audiences, a finding that is well-supported in the literature. However, the unique characteristic of each social media platform, such as Facebook, Twitter or Snapchat, pushes publishers to develop different strategies to fit the content on its platform. The *Today Show* producer and *Wall Street Journal* editor both explained that they strategically change their content to fit the characteristic of each platform. This supports earlier literature (Gibson, 1982; Gibson, 2015) that affordances constrain and control behavior as different environments or designs afford different behaviors for different individuals (Gibson, 1982). This is also consistent with the claims pointed out in previous studies that different technology affordances have various influences on the social and communicative practices, including

enabling and constraining sociality in certain ways (Gaver, 1996; Hutchby, 2001; Schrock, 2015).

Limitations and Future Research

Though the findings may be important in a theoretical and practical sense, there are limitations that need to be considered. First, even though six U.S. media outlets chosen for this study are good examples of publishers actively and successfully using Snapchat Discover, this study cannot be generalized to other types of publishers due to purposive selection based on the national influence and circulation. Therefore, this study does not represent an overall view of all snaps used by publishers on Snapchat Discover. Future studies could broaden the sample to the general population by incorporating more media outlets to explore how snaps are used by publishers on Discover.

Moreover, although this study confirmed that the distribution of snaps on Discover depends to a certain extent on the news judgements of media professionals, this study focused only on the production of content, through content analysis and interviews with professionals from legacy media outlets. In-depth interviews with professionals from new media outlets would help elaborate on the complete picture of how and why U.S media companies use the Snapchat platform for their future audiences. Investigating the extent to which individuals' professional practices and values shape "snap" decision making would also add a depth to the future research. A study of receiver use of Snapchat would be essential to a better understanding of how users negotiate the affordances and constraints of this ephemeral tool.

Lastly, exploring the constraint of effort versus reward for news outlets in Snapchat Discover would be an interesting area for future research. Such research could contribute to the existing body of literature on affordances and constraints in regard to digital technologies and social media.

Despite some limitations, this study is one of the first to explore the usage of Snapchat Discover in U.S. media outlets using an affordances approach. This research could help news publishers who are already in or are considering entering Snapchat Discover better understand the current trends and characteristics of snaps published on the platform today. Most importantly, the current study makes important theoretical and practical contributions to understanding the relationship between Snapchat and U.S. media outlets.

Codebook

[V1]. Coders
1. Sean Smith
2. Logan Self

Part 1. Basic Information

[V2]. News outlet identification
1. Washington post
2. New York Times
3. Wall Street Journal
4. Vice
5. BuzzFeed
6. Mashable

[V3]. Date of the publication
1. December 18, 2017
2. December 19, 2017
3. December 20, 2017
4. December 21, 2017
5. December 22, 2017
6. December 23, 2017
7. December 24, 2017
8. December 25, 2017
9. December 26, 2017
10. December 27, 2017
11. December 28, 2017
12. December 29, 2017
13. December 30, 2017
14. December 31, 2017
15. January 1, 2018
16. January 2, 2018

[V4]. What time of the day (Ex. 6:00 pm)

Enter time: _____

[V5]. Does this media appear on Discover today?

1. Yes
2. No

Part 2. Story

[V6]. What is the headline of the Snapchat story? (This usually appears on the first snap of the story. If there is no headline, write the first sentence appear on the first snap).

   Enter text: _____

[V7]. What is the subhead of the Snapchat story? This text usually appears somewhere between a headline and a paragraph, but stands differently than emphasized text and pull quotes. (Skip this question if none).
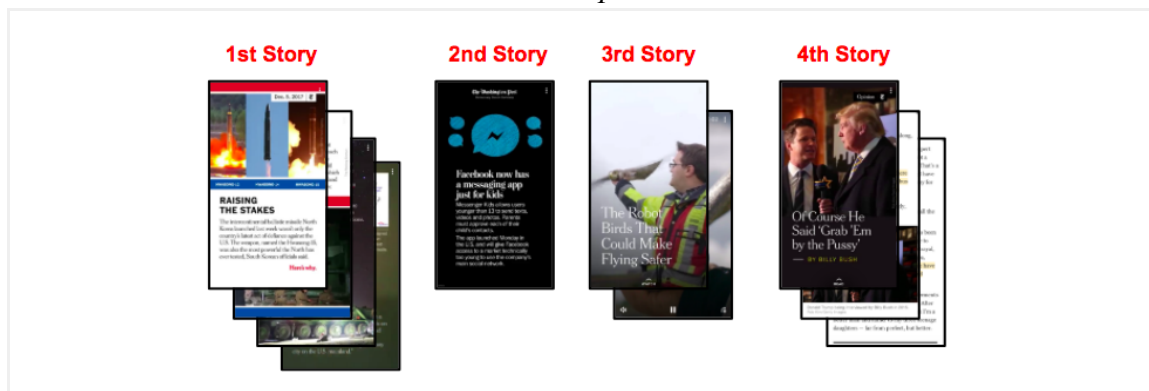
   Enter text: _____

Example
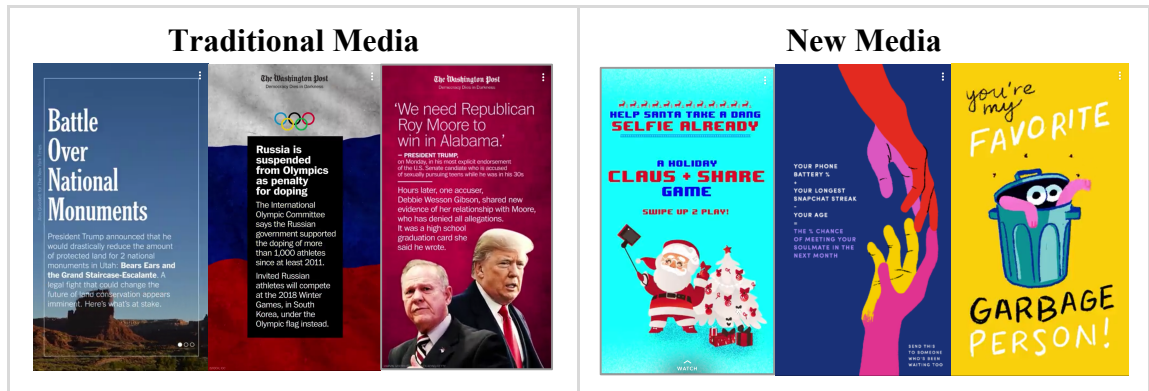
[V8]. Which story is it? (e.g. 1st story = 1, 2nd story = 2, 3rd story = 3, etc)
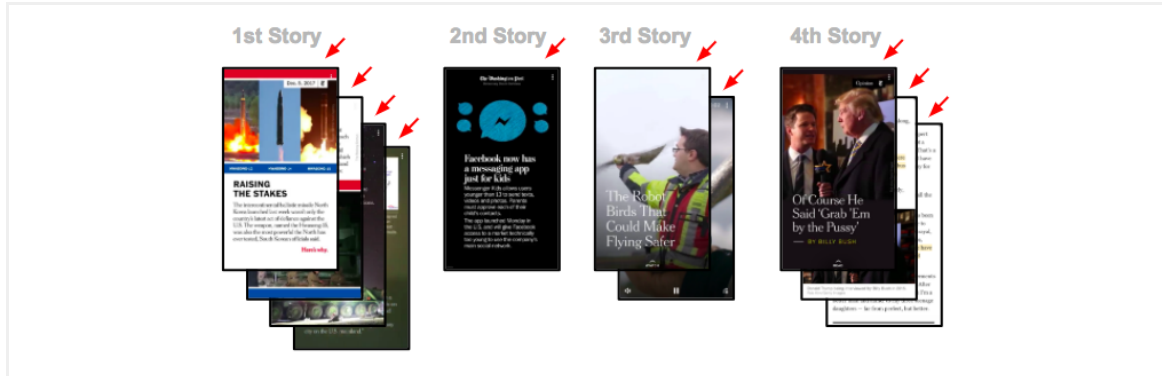
   Enter number: _____

Example

[V9]. How many snaps are in the story? (This includes 'Article' page when clicked 'Read' button or 'Video' page when clicked 'Watch' button at the bottom in snap, if there is any).

Enter number: _____

Example

[V10]. How many seconds is each snap in the story? (Ex. If the first snap has 5 seconds, you write 1-5. If the second snap has 4 seconds, you write 2-4. You need to put comma between the snaps. Therefore, your answer should look like 1-5, 2-4, etc..)

[V11]. What type of content do the news outlet use in the story? (Select all that apply)
1. Texts
2. Audios (This includes audio played as a background of the snap, including audio in an automatically played video. In other words, if you need to manually press a button such as 'play' to view the video, you don't need to code audio in that video)
3. Still images (This includes photos, illustrations, graphics, and drawings)
4. Videos
5. Animations (This includes any moving 'still images')
6. GIFs
7. Screenshots
8. Puzzle
9. Other (_____)

[V12]. What is the story topic? (Select all that apply)
1. Entertainment
2. Politics
3. Technology
4. Health
5. Economy
6. Sports

7. Culture/Arts
8. Science/Education
9. Opinion
10. Other (_____)

Part 3. Video in the Story

- Skip this section if there is no video in the story.
- This section is only for a video(s) in the story. This section is *not* for a video(s) in the "Article" page.

[V13]. Is there a video in the story?
1. Yes
2. No

[V14]. How many videos are in the story?

Enter number: _____

[V15]. How long is the video in the story? (If there is more than one video, write how many seconds each video is. For example, if the first video is 3 seconds, you write 1-3. If the second video is 7 seconds, you write 2-7. You need to put comma between the snaps. Therefore, you answer should look like 1-3, 2-7, etc..)

[V16]. What is the video type in the story? (If there is more than one video, select that all apply). You need to hold your phone vertically (not horizontally) when you code this question.
1. Vertical (Vertical videos usually cover most of your vertical phone screen)
2. Horizontal (Horizontal videos will leave some spaces on the screen)
3. Cropped (This is when the video dimension is not usual, such as square from cropping)

[V17]. Does the video play automatically? (If there is more than one video, select that all apply).
1. Yes
2. No

[V18]. What choice does the video offer? (Select all that apply)
1. Vertical, Horizontal button
2. Stop, Play button
3. Subtitle button
4. Mute button

5. None of above
6. Other (_____)

[V19]. Is there a sound in the video?
1. Yes
2. No

Part 4. Photo in the Story
- Skip this section if there is no photo in the story.
- This section is only for a photo(s) in the story. This section is *not* for a photo(s) in the "Article" page.

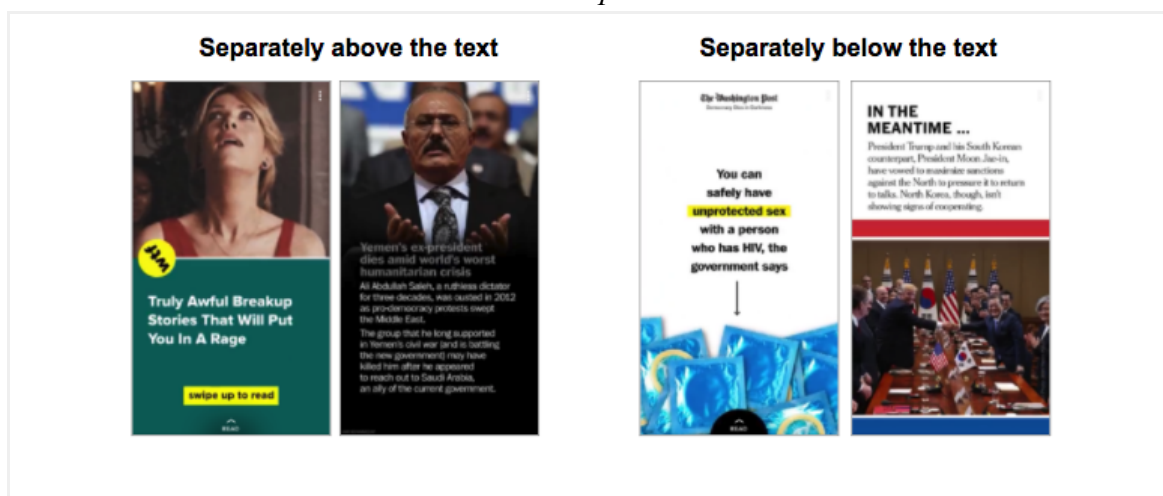**[V20]. Is there a photo in the story?**
1. Yes
2. No

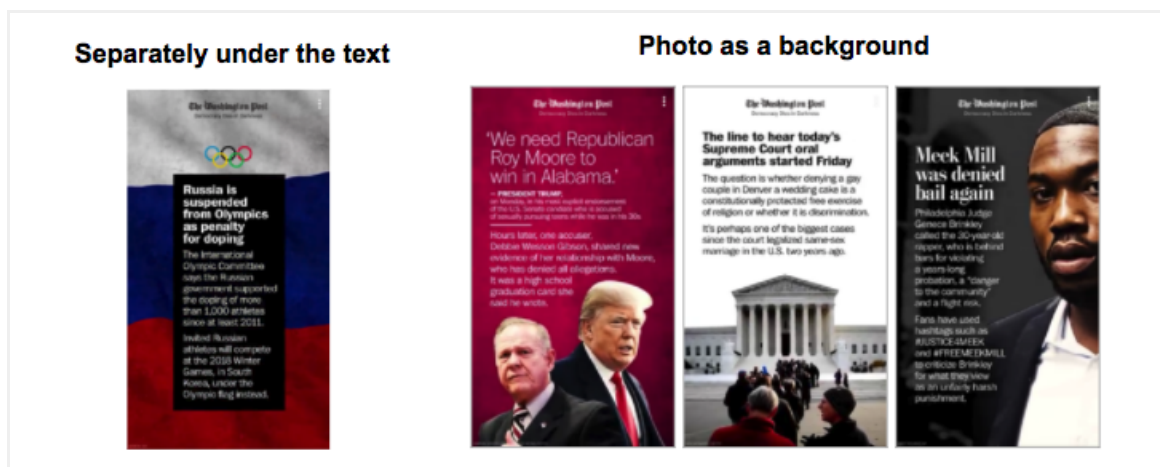**[V21]. How many photos are in the story?**
Enter number: _____

[V22]. Where is a photo(s) with texts in the story? (Select all that apply)
1. Separately above the text
2. Separately below the text
3. Separately under the text
4. As a background
5. Wrapped text

Example

Separately under the text   **Photo as a background**

Part 5. Music/Song/Audio in the Story

- Skip this section if there is no music in the story.
- This section is only for music in the story. This section is *not* for music in the "Article" page.

[V23]. Is there music/song/audio(s) in the story?
1. Yes
2. No

[V24]. How many music/song/audio(s) as a background is in the story?

    Enter number: _____

[V25]. What is the tone of the music/song/audio(s)? (Select all that apply).
1. Positive (Happy, bright tone)
2. Neutral
3. Negative (Sad, depressed tone)
4. Doesn't Apply

Part 6. Advertisement

[V26]. How many advertisements are there in the news outlet you are looking at right now on Snapchat?

    Enter number: _____
    1.

Part 7. Article in the Story

- Skip this section if there is no article in the story.

- This section is only for the "Article" page, which shows after you click the 'Read' button at the bottom on the previous snap.

[V27]. Is there an article in the story?
1. Yes
2. No

[V28]. What is the headline of the article? (Skip this question if none).
      Enter text: _____

[V29]. What is the subhead of the article? This text usually appears somewhere between a headline and a paragraph, but stands differently than emphasized text and pull quotes. (Skip this question if none).
      Enter text: _____

[V30]. How many types of content are used in the article? (Write down the number next to the choice. Write 0 if there is none. Select all that apply).
1. Paragraphs (This includes everything except titles, captions, source/credits/bylines)
   (Enter number: _____)
2. Subheads
   (Enter number: _____)
3. Audios (This includes audio only as a background of the article page. This does ***not*** include audio in the video) (Enter number: _____)
4. Still images (This includes pull quotes)
   (Enter number: _____)
5. Videos   (Enter number: _____)
6. Graphics   (Enter number: _____)
7. Illustrations (Enter number: _____)
8. Animations (Enter number: _____)
9. GIFs   (Enter number: _____)
10. Drawing   (Enter number: _____)
11. Screenshots (Enter number: _____)
12. Puzzle   (Enter number: _____)
13. Text emphasis (This includes highlights, underlines, bold, italics)
    (Enter number: _____)
14. Other (_____)

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