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# That's News to Me: An Exploratory Study of the Uses and Gratifications of Current Events On Social Media of 18-24 Year-Olds

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THAT'S NEWS TO ME: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE USES AND  
GRATIFICATIONS OF CURRENT EVENTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA  
OF 18-24 YEAR-OLDS

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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## **Abstract**

Social media is a dominant news source among the college-age demographic (18-24). Inherent in news consumption on social media is current events, that is, news that has individual relevance, societal relevance and is time constrained. This study adds to the existing body of uses and gratification literature. This one-shot exploratory study is the first of its kind, examining the “what” or different dimensions of news and the “why” or uses and gratifications that 18-24 year-olds use current events on social media. It also looked at the factors predicting recall of current events on social media. Using a survey of 896 college students using current events on social media, this study found five gratifications (information seeking, surveillance/guidance, voyeurism and social interaction), including one unique to current events on social media, perpetual entertainment. The gratifications of perpetual entertainment and information seeking, along with the psychological antecedent of current affairs, and one’s social media repertoire (the number of different social media accounts one has) predicted overall current events use on social media use. Twenty-two different dimensions of news (sports, entertainment, local, pop culture, political, campus, weather, celebrity, national, lifestyle, crime, hometown, other, health, education, international, business, culture and the arts, science and technology, consumer, religious and legal) were predicted by the five different gratifications found in this study, the psychological antecedents of current affairs, affinity, boredom relief and sensation seeking behavior, overall social media use and social media repertoire.

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>List of Tables.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>List of Figures.....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Chapter 4: Findings.....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Chapter 5: Discussions, Limitations and Conclusion.....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>References Cited.....</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>Appendix A – College Students Social Media Focus Group.....</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>Appendix B – Survey Instrument.....</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>Appendix C – Study Approval.....</b>	<b>120</b>

## List of Tables

<b>Table 1.1: News Values of Entry Level Mass Communication Texts.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Table 6.1: Response Rate of Sample.....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Table 6.2: Gender of Sample.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Table 6.3: Age of Sample.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Table 6.4: Race of Sample.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Table 6.5: Year of Study of Sample.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Table 6.6: Major of Sample.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Table 6.7: State of Origin of Sample.....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Table 6.8: Devices used to Access Social Media.....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Table 6.9: Activities of Current Events on Social Media Use.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Table 6.10: Current Event Use on Social Media by Subject Matter.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Table 6.11: Gratifications of Current Events on Social Media.....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Table 6.12: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Current Events Use on Recall on Social Media .....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Table 6.13: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Current Events Use on Social Media by Subject Matter.....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Table 6.14: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Current Events Use on Social Media by Subject Matter.....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Table 6.15: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Current Events Use on Social Media by Subject Matter.....</b>	<b>65</b>

<b>Table 6.16: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Current Events Use on Social Media by Subject Matter.....</b>	<b>66</b>
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<b>Table 6.17: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Current Events Use on Social Media.....</b>	<b>69</b>
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## **List of Figures**

<b>Figure 1.1: Galtung and Ruge’s “12 News Factors”.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Figure 1.2: The Chain of Mass Communication.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Figure 1.3: Conceptual Operationalization of Current Events.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Figure 4.1: Model of Uses and Gratifications of 18-24 Year-Olds’ Current Events Use on Social Media.....</b>	<b>37</b>



## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

When the first “Occupy Wall Street” protest began on Sept. 17, 2011, it garnered wide coverage by the media and set off a chain reaction in other protests (Adbusters.org, 2012). By the middle of October 2011, Occupy protests had sprung up in 95 cities across 82 countries and more than 600 communities (Thompson, 2011; Adam, 2011). Amid arrests, violence and police confrontations, the attention paid to the related stories of the movement would exponentially grow in the media, both in the United States and worldwide. By January 2012, four months after the very first United States protest, 40 percent of the respondents in a worldwide poll by Reuters were familiar with the movement (Reuters, 2012). A survey conducted by the Center for American Progress found that coverage of the movement helped substantially boost coverage of the enduring job crisis in American media (Garofoli, 2012). Underlying all the media attention, social media helped launch, amplify and maintain the movement (Preston, 2011).

Phrases such as the movement’s slogan, “We are the 99 percent” would become part of the dialogue around lunch tables and open-door office conversations. A saturation of “Occupy”-related material on social media was prevalent. As of February 2012, the movement was still filling up daily news coverage (CNN, 2012). Five months later, just how “current” were stories about the movement?

Was the storyline even worth discussing anymore? Was the “Occupy” news still a current event or was it simply a news cycle that was on its dying embers that lacked any relevance?

Despite the use of events covered by the media to help chronicle history (Dayan & Katz, 1992), there is ambiguity regarding what current events exactly are. Are they simply the news of the day? Do they exist as long as a need for them exists? Is their importance simply looked at through the aperture of the individual? Part of the confusion may be the undeniable fact that the social sciences have failed to operationalize the concept of “current events.” The concept is conflated and melded with other concepts such as “news” and “newsworthiness.”

Further complicating the process is the asynchronous and ubiquitous nature of social media, also known as social network sites due to their linked user networks, such as Facebook and Twitter. Consider the recent research that 72 percent of young adults that are online are using social network sites, or 18-29 year olds, are sporting a rate of social media use that is identical to the rate among teens and significantly higher than the 39% of Internet users aged 30 and up who use social media (Pew Internet, 2010). Couple those numbers with statistics revealing that Americans are spending more time following the news due to digital platforms as evidenced by the 34 percent of Americans who go online for news and the 44 percent who receive their news through a mobile or digital source on a daily basis (Pew, 2010), the amount of online news seekers is hard to deny. The same report by Pew (2010) found 74 percent of social network site users are regularly or sometimes accessing the sites for news, whether it be following a journalist, organization or following a link to a story. From a demographic view, 46 percent of

social media users in the age range of 18-24 are regularly or sometimes getting their news through social media, while 49 percent of users aged 25-29 are regularly or sometimes getting their news through social media (Pew, 2010). Both of these demographics fall within the college age student demographic, an important population to study for social media use and the population of this study. Social media have become distribution channels of the journalistic process (Briggs, 2010) and are expected to continue to be a large part of the “grazing” of news (Pew, 2010) or the consumption of news in a fragmented and less than regular fashion. Social media will serve as those stopping points in the news consumption process.

This exploratory study examines the consumption of current events on social media by the population of interest and the most engaged users of social media, young adults 18-24 years-old. Specifically, this study looks at why that demographic is using social media for current events by tapping into the “inside the head” mechanisms through uses and gratifications theoretical framework (Katz, Blumler and Guretvich, 1974; Rosengren, 1974). Rubin et al. (p. 129, 2003) defines uses and gratifications as “(a) media behavior is purposive, goal-directed and motivated, (b) people select media content to satisfy their needs and desires, (c) social and psychological dispositions mediate that behavior, and (d) media compete with other forms of communication—or functional alternatives—such as interpersonal interaction for selection, attention and use.”

This study will also look at the recall of 18-24 year-olds of current events from social media, a concept found in other studies covering 18-24 year-olds’ (well within that age range) use of different mediums. Recall is a variable that has been explored in traditional studies using current events and 18-24 year-olds (Diddi and LaRose, 2006;

Vincent and Basil, 1997). Due to the importance of the demographic actually remembering and comprehending what they had seen, recall will be a variable measured in this study.

### **Theoretical and Practical Significance of the Study**

This study's theoretical significance is important on a number of levels. Based upon an operational definition of current events derived from prior literature relevant to this study, while other uses and gratifications studies have looked at 18-24 year-olds' use of current events on legacy media and the Internet (Vincent & Basil, 1997; Diddi & LaRose, 2006), this study looks strictly at the medium of social media by measuring motivations, gratifications and recall. Also while there is organic scholarship on uses and gratifications and social media, this study will be the first to look specifically at the news dimensions that an individual finds with current events on social media. The findings presented in this study will not only add to the existing body of uses and gratification literature, but also will provide insight to the journalism world in a rapidly evolving news environment.

### **Outline of the Study**

This study's outline is designed to cover all aspects of current events on social media. The first chapter is a comprehensive literature review explicating the concepts of "news", "news values" and "current events" while looking at the conceptual linkages between the three to provide an operational definition for this study. It also looks at the importance of current events based upon prior literature and how people have consumed current events traditionally. Chapter One also discusses uses and gratifications literature relevant to this study along with the variable of recall. The second chapter discusses the

rationale for the use of focus groups to inform the survey instrument in this study, the survey and sampling methods used in the study and the operationalization of the variables. The third chapter presents the findings of this study. The fourth chapter discusses the results of the study, limitations of the study, suggestions for future research, implications and concluding remarks of this study.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

The concepts of “news”, “newsworthiness” or “news values”, and “current events” are often interchangeably used and conflated with one another. Through journalism and mass communication literature, this study will attempt to narrow down an operational definition of current events for this study that is distinct from its more encompassing counterparts.

#### **What is News?**

Since its first incarnation, when it was passed on orally by community leaders and oral historians from family to family, then tribe to tribe, news has served as a source of fascination and played an integral role in society’s maturation. The first written news account in ancient Rome by Julius Caesar in 59 B.C.E. eventually would evolve into Johannes Gutenberg’s printing press in the 1450s (Campbell, 2011) and move on to provide numerous inked accounts of happenings to humanity. The United States, a nation that was founded and still prides itself on freedom of speech and the press, has benefited from the growth of news in all its forms. Throughout the mass media’s evolution in American society, from the printed word of Colonial times to Web 2.0 in the 21<sup>st</sup>

Century, word of news that was of interest to multiple audiences diffused to the masses. It has served as the topic du jour to inform, entertain, and enlighten people of their immediate surroundings and the larger world around them. The latest stories

appearing in the day's news have served as talking points in conversations around the water cooler, dinners, and social gatherings in less intimate settings.

The process of “making” that news and the inherent routines involved with it have been deconstructed and roundly criticized (Schudson, 1989; Schudson 1978) among journalism and mass communication scholars. While the social (Berkowitz, 1997) and cultural (Berkowitz, 2010) meanings of news have been constructed by an assembly of scholarship, a very opaque consensus still exists in the academic community to narrowly answer, “What is news?”

In the social sciences, firm, finite operational definitions of what exactly “news” and its more constrained offspring “current events” are and have still yet to be found among scholars. News, for the most part, remains undefined (Molotch, 1977). When it comes to a concrete answer on what is news, Gitlin (1980) argued, “A routine, universalizable definition—comes to naught.” It depends on who is asking the question, in what context and what is deemed important news –professionally and socially.

As more news outlets and sources of information become available in the era of social media, the terms “current events” or “news” become more obtuse and difficult to define. As the debate continues whether the media is becoming more biased (Goldberg, 2002; Alterman, 2003), more people may turn to news outlets that identify more with their ideologies and therefore shape their values of news.

No matter whether it has been legacy media or new media, journalism as an industry has faced many generational conflicts before (Schudson, 1978, p.161) and has conformed through the times, even in news value. Ganz (1979) defined a story's importance as its rank on governmental and other hierarchies, its impact on the country

and national interest, its impact on large numbers of people, and its significance on the past and future.

Gitlin (1980), in a permutation of Ganz's explanation in his own words, posited a taxonomy of three theories to explain how stories are chosen as "news." Journalist-centered theories explain that news is simply a product of self-directed professional news standards that serve the public's best interests and reinforce the industry's stated and unstated criteria of objectivity (Gitlin, 1980, p. 249).

Organizational theories focus on "the inertia" or "sheer habit of news organization" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 250). These theories take into account "commercial imperatives" and the "organizational structure of the news operation themselves" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 250). Gitlin (1980, p. 250) also grouped phenomenological approaches, where news is created as a social construct where journalists conform to the informal processes that consolidate large amounts of information into a digestible product for the masses. The third approach Gitlin explained is the event-centered theory, where news is simply a facsimile of the world around it. Gitlin also cites other theories that contribute to what stories make news: technological factors, national culture, economics, the audience, the most powerful news sources, and the ideologies of the dominant social power or hegemony (Gramsci, 1971). Schultz (2011) listed three different categories of news values among journalists: doxic (unspoken and unspoken, i.e. "newsworthiness"), orthodox (outspoken, agreed upon and dominant, i.e. "hard news"), and heterodox (outspoken, disagreed upon, and dominant, i.e. "soft news").

While its production is important to help define what is news, the effects that news places on the public figure into the discussion. The media can have an effect on the



public's opinion, but only when it disseminates information about topics that are new and have not been influenced with previous personal opinions (Tuchman, 1988). Generally, the public "defined and interpreted the event from within the framework provided by the news coverage" (Murdock, 1973, p. 12).

Schudson (1978) argued that journalists championed the notion it was their job to objectively diagnose what ills affected society (politically, economically, and socially) and provide objective reports, including solutions, of those ills. Molotch and Lester (1997, p. 193) stated that "news tells us what we do not experience directly and thus renders otherwise remote happenings observable and meaningful" and "news is the result of this invariant need for accounts of the unobserved, this capacity for filling in others, and the production work of those in the media."

### **"News Values" and "Newsworthiness"**

The definition of news may be a multi-layered amalgamation of different paradigms, but its manifest characteristics, news values may have more distinction than their larger parent. Stuart Hall (1973), arguing from a Marxist perspective, referenced the need for lists to identify the formal elements in the construction of news or news values. While framing literature regarding the newsmaking process has differentiated "news values" or categories of professional journalistic values that journalists use in seeking information in their jobs (Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Price et al., 1997; Valkenburg et al., 1999), it is necessary to trace the lineage of news values to the present day. One such study is the root of modern-day news values.

Most influential was Galtung and Ruge's (1965) seminal and widely referenced study that revealed 12 criteria of news values that were homophilous in story selection of

foreign news by the Norwegian press: frequency, threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite people, reference to persons, and reference to something negative (Figure 1.1).

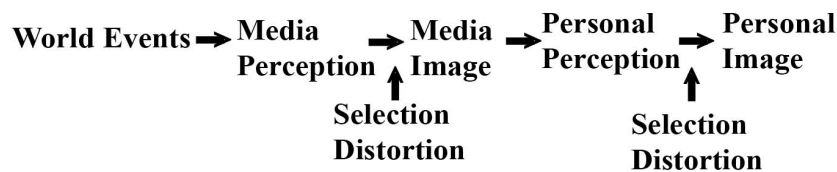
### **Galtung and Ruge's "12 News Factors"\***

- 1. Frequency**
  - A. Event unfolds at the same time as the medium
  - B. Not a longitudinal social trend
- 2. Threshold**
  - A. Events must pass a certain level before being recorded
  - B. More intensity, greater number of deaths, more gruesome the murder
- 3. Unambiguity**
  - A. More clearly an event can be understood
  - B. One definite meaning over multiple ones
- 4. Meaningfulness**
  - A. Relevance to the culture of the audience
- 5. Consonance**
  - A. News selector predicts or wants something to happen, forming mental "pre-image" of event
  - B. Conflict
  - C. Tragedy
- 6. Unexpectedness**
  - A. Unexpected or rare events with relation to culturally familiar events
- 7. Continuity**
  - A. Once event becomes news it remains in the spotlight for finite amount of time
  - B. Amplitude reduced due to familiarity with audience and easier interpretation
  - C. Justifies its place in news to begin with
- 8. Composition**
  - A. Fits into balance of news hole, not intrinsic value
  - B. Balance of positive and negative viewpoints
- 9. Reference to Elite Nations**
  - A. Cultural, political, economically powerful nations have consequential actions to others
- 10. Reference to Elite People**
  - A. Actions of elites have more consequence
  - B. Readers identify more with them
- 11. Reference to Persons**
  - A. Events as the actions of named people rather social forces
  - B. Personification beyond "human interest" stories
- 10. Reference to Something Negative**
  - A. Seen as unambiguous and consensual
  - B. Unexpected to occur over a shorter period of time than positive news

• Source: Galtung, J., & Ruge, M. H. (1965). The Structure of Foreign News. *Journal of Peace Research*, 2(1), 64-91.

**Figure 1.1: Galtung and Ruge's "12 News Factors"**

The study, recognized by scholars as the genesis of a taxonomy of news values (Bell, 1991; Palmer, 1998; Tunstall, 1970; Tumber, 1999; McQuail, 1995; Watson, 1998) offered three significant hypotheses. First, the more events identified with the 12 criteria, the more likely the event will be selected and considered news. Second, after its selection stage, what makes it newsworthy will be accentuated by the same factors in the distortion stage. Finally, in the replication stage, the selection and distortion stages will repeat themselves in all the phases from the event to the reader. The authors constructed a theoretical model based upon their findings entitled “*The Chain of Mass Communication*” (Figure 1.2).



**Figure 1.2 : *The Chain of Mass Communication***  
(Galting and Ruge, 1965)

Since all current events must have news values in them, this study is intricately tied to this study in reaching an operationalization. Despite their best attempts, the authors were transparent in the limitations of their study and called for more completeness in their list of news values. Mass communication scholars have dissected the model for many years after, but the basic premise remains the same: the journey of a world event to an individual’s image of an event is diluted by many influences.

In their examination of how events entered the public sphere, Oliver and Myers (1999) compared local newspaper coverage to police records and found that the

newspapers selected events that were large, involved conflict, were sponsored by business groups, and occurred in central locations. In a content analysis of high circulation newspapers in the United Kingdom, Harcup and O'Neill (2001) expanded the work of Galtung and Ruge even further by discovering even more news values. In addition to Galtung's and Ruge's list they also provided a more contemporary set of values found in stories: the power elite, celebrity, entertainment, surprise, bad news, good news, magnitude, relevance, follow-up, and newspaper agenda. Although their study was immersed in a British cultural context, it hatched more specialized news values that were complementary to Galtung and Ruge's and would also expand and modernize the discussion with many tertiary interpretations of the concept.

Journalism and mass communication programs across the United States and internationally circumvent an attempt to define a strict meaning of current events to the next generation of journalists and mass communication professionals, but instead opt for diffusing the tenets of news values as criteria of "newsworthiness", which may or may not differ depending on the text prescribed in the syllabus and the instructor's discretion. A convenience sample of the seven most widely used entry level mass communication texts reveals somewhat convergent pattern in western news values (Table 1.1). Data was collected in the media ethics and news values chapters of each text.

**Table 1.1: News Values of Entry Level Mass Communication Texts**

Text	Media & Culture (Campbell et al., 2012)	Media Now (Straubhaar et al., 2012)	Media Essentials (Campbell et al., 2011)	Principles of Convergent Journalism (Wilkinson et al., 2009)	Media Writing (Whitaker et al., 2009)	Understanding Mass Communication (DeFleur & Dennis, 2002)	Telling The Story (The Missouri Group, 2007)
<i>Proximity</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Timeliness</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Prominence</i>	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Consequence</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Conflict</i>	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Suspense</i>	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
<i>Human Interest</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
<i>Novelty</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Need vs. Want</i>	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
<i>Deviance</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
<i>Critical</i>	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
<i>Useful</i>	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
<i>Currency</i>	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No

Proximity, timeliness, consequence, and novelty were found in all seven of the textbooks. The ideas of prominence and conflict were found in all but one book. Human interest was found in five of the seven texts. Despite the differences in authors, the repetition of news values present some curricular alignment for journalism and mass communications educators, leading to a workforce of mass communication professional that adhere to the same dominant paradigm of importance of stories. An operational definition for each of these communal news values is necessary and listed below.

1. **Timeliness:** News is what is about to happen, what is happening, or has very recently happened. News simply must be new and not a nod to the past.
2. **Proximity:** People are generally more concerned with news that has a connection to their immediate surroundings. They want to know how the world at large will impact community or their homestead.

3. **Consequence:** The stories that affect the greatest number of people will receive the most play. The more people an event affects, the more likely it will be covered.
4. **Novelty:** Events that are so out of the norm that they draw attention to them. They are unusual and bizarre.
5. **Prominence:** The more well-known the name, the more likely that person's actions will make news.
6. **Conflict:** The chronicling of the struggle among people, nations, or nature, itself. It's the fight that draws news consumers to stories with conflict.
7. **Human Interest:** People like to watch other people. Human interest stories are detailed accounts of the interesting stories of people living interestingly enough lives that other people will want to hear about them.

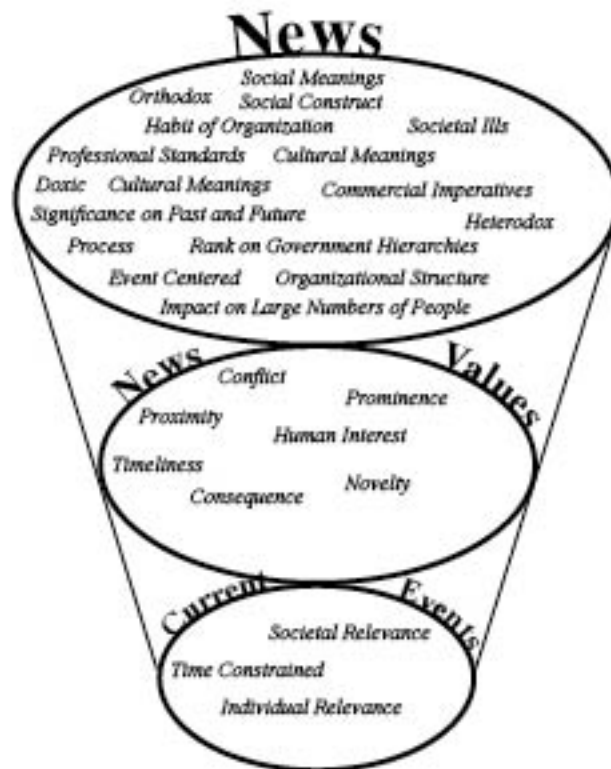
### **"Current Events"**

Current events, a concept that is widely used in mass communication research, is often conflated between itself and its more encompassing parent, news. Current events are a more distinct and constrained product of news and news values. The most comprehensive work to date in defining current events was done in a simpler time. Leon Whipple (1941), in his guide to consuming news for the general public: *"How To Understand Current Events"*, created a taxonomy of ten different types of current events he deemed "The Fields of Events" (p. 15): economics, sex, government, exploration, science and invention, international relations, people, culture, social progress, and religion.

He underscored the importance of current events to daily life by stating (p.1), “To live to the full we must know our times. To understand our own private adventure of living we must understand the world we live in.” Whipple further delved into the very individualistic nature of current events (p. 12), “The best rule for finding a current event is to follow your eyes and ears. Take something you see or hear, something close to home and familiar, and ask questions!” From a broadcast perspective, Frederick Shook (p. 71, 1996) said any news “is sometimes defined as whatever people are interested hearing about.”

It is the importance of the current event to individual, not a news value practiced by the media outlet that supplies them, that makes it distinct from its larger counterparts. That is one vital factor in current events, the element of time; societal relevance is the other.

In a rudimentary sense, the Latin meaning of current is “flowing” and Crabb (1818) defined an event as “what passes in the world that affects nations and communities as well as individuals.” Merriam-Webster’s (2012) take on the phrase offers an explanation of the concept as being “contemporary developments in local, national or world affairs.” Two key characteristics emerge in with the concept of current events: one, they are very finite and fluid in the temporal order, and two, they are relevant on a societal level. Current events, depending on the evolution of the story, are salient one day and archived the next. The evolution from news to news values to current events is best conceptualized by a narrowing cylinder that narrows as time begins to constrain relevance and provides an operationalization of current events for this study (Figure 1.3).



**Figure 1.3: Conceptual Operationalization of Current Events**



In the hierarchy of news, the broad-based area of news filters down and narrows into the news values or “newsworthiness” level. The narrowing continues until the current event level, where the criteria demand a story sustains a shelf life relative to its importance, has social relevance and finally, the source of investigation in this study, has individual relevance. What exactly is the duration that a 18 to 24-year-old would consider a story “current” requires inquiry.

Journalism and mass communication scholarship has failed to operationalize a concrete definition of “current events.” Most research is still in the pilot stage and fragmented. This study is an attempt to investigate those internal motivations that an individual uses to make current events relevant to his or her self in the age of social media and provide an operationalization of current events.

Current events have many uses in everyday life: some personal, some educational, and some social. This study will examine the documented importance of current events in the social sciences relevant to this study.

### **Current Events and their importance in Education and Politics**

Leon Whipple (1941) may have captured the importance of current events to society and the individual from an educational perspective. He wrote (p.8, 1941), “To follow current events is a kind of lifelong education rarely taught in schools. You may read history to discover the origins and principles of events today, say, in international law. New current events are descended from old ones.”

Current events have enjoyed a long and dense history in educational settings, both in Kindergarten through high school curriculum and journalism programs (Atkins, 1985; Ravitch, 1985; Yager, 1988). Newspapers, supplying current events, have been used in

American classrooms as early as 1775 (Perry et al., 1979) and have documented use since the 1890s (Reschke et al., 1951). Since 1957, a formalized program called Newspaper in Education has existed to champion the use of newspapers and current events in classrooms (Diederich & Maskovsky, 1970; [nieonline.com](http://nieonline.com), 2012). From that time forward, current events and newspapers have been studied for their educational impact (Schramm et al., 1960; Benedict et al., 1976; Scantlen, 1980; DeRoche, 1981; Owens, 1982). The benefits are abundant.

Current events can provide lesson context and realism (Yager, 1988). The deep body of educational literature points that the subject area that has the most symmetry with current events is social or global studies in the precollege years. Despite social studies teachers having some apprehension including stories that portray violence or espouse ideologies and stances on issues as part of their lessons (Deveci, 2007), they nonetheless understand the importance of current events in all levels of K-12 social studies pedagogy (Bennett, 1999; Haas & Laughling, 2000; Libresco, 2003). Scheibe (2004) argued that media literacy is an effective pedagogical tool across the core curriculum in K-12 education by promoting critical thinking, communication and technology skills. They also foster a sense of critical literacy in social studies and English classes (Pescatore, 2007). Children with higher literacy levels and more media exposure have more current events knowledge and recall (Hofstetter, 2000).

In times of widespread social and economic duress, current events can help students understand their own situations better than without using current events (Sikes, 2010). In a study of current events use and the Channel One television news program, the research found that students who had greater prior knowledge towards current events

were more likely to report being mastery oriented toward the news (Anderman & Johnston, 1998). In the same study, the same students reported more news-seeking behavior outside of school and displayed more current events than students who did not engage in the behavior. Previous knowledge is a vital factor in what students will learn from the news (Johnston & Brzezinski, 1992; Price & Zaller, 1993). Students who are already versed in current events will stand to gain the most from using them.

Journalism and mass communication educators also routinely use current events as a pedagogical tool (Rhodes & Davies, 2003; Murray, 2003). The rationales for using current events are numerous. One set of researchers, after finding different curricula among journalism and mass communication programs, called for a set of universal competencies that allows for a broad-based subject preference (Blanchard and Christ, 1985). Another scholar found that the attitudes and beliefs of journalism tenets of the faculty differed from journalism and mass communication students and non-majors (Brock, 1996). Cohen (2002) called for not only for curricular reform, but also a revised toolbox of the faculty teaching mass communication. Lepre and Bleske (2005) found that the skills professionals in the mass communications field differed significantly from those of mass communication educators. Even differences in subject area expertise in convergent curricula (different communication majors enrolled in shared courses with other communication majors) can be utilized, as long as the faculty is prepared and well versed in the different subject matter (Pasadeos, 2000). Tangential to this connection, college students, which contain the 18-24 year-old demographic, become socialized to the news media during the course of their studies (Henke, 1985; Rubin, 1985). There is a constant battle between communications curriculum and a liberal arts approach, which

typically is the goal of the university (Iorio and Williamson, 1995). Current events testing can encompass a wide variety of subject matter that is part of a liberal arts education. Whenever possible, it is highly suggested that all college faculty relate course content to current events (Lyons, et al., 2003). This is important because most college journalism students historically have failed to maintain adequate knowledge of important news events and geography (Atkins, 1985). As future media professionals, this indoctrination to the vernacular and study of the news media is critical.

In a study specifically addressing current events in journalism and mass communication education, Karlis and Grant (2010) found a significant disconnect between sexes on topic salience among journalism faculty. They examined a variety of subject areas of news. The subject areas were designed to represent the range of content considered as “news” by traditional and emerging media outlets, and represent different types of salience that might be observed for different groups of news consumers. The subject areas they examined were local news, national news, international news, political news, sports news, business news, crime news, health news, entertainment news, campus news, technology news, legal news, lifestyle news, and pop culture news. Significant differences were found in international, political, health and crime news, with female faculty rating all four of these as more important than male faculty. National, local and political news were perceived to be the most important in the dimensions of current events among journalism faculty. Lifestyle, pop culture, and entertainment news were found to be the least important among journalism faculty. Politics, especially, are a common theme in current events.

While the positive relationship between the amount of conversation about politics and current events has been well documented (Brady, 1995; McClurg, 2003, Verba et al., 1995), Klostad (2007) found that more conversation about current events leads to recruitment in civic activities. Pasek, Kenski, Romer and Jamieson (2006) found that media use is effective in facilitating civic engagement and is especially effective in promoting political awareness among 14- to 22-year-olds. In a study on college students' patriotism and knowledge of political current events, Parker et al. (2009) found that constructive patriots, those that are willing to question whether current government policies and actions are meeting the highest ideals of American society without any regard to which party is in power, had significantly higher knowledge of political current events than blind patriots, which are those individuals who show devout commitment to the current government policies and actions, especially if his or her political party is in power. Political current event knowledge, however, is only one determinant of current event knowledge.

### **Factors determining current events knowledge**

Despite the depth of literature on current events in politics and education, mass communication's contribution remains focused solely on adults' current events knowledge. News knowledge is associated with higher levels of socioeconomic status (Gunter, 1987) and education (Robinson & Levy, 1986; Tichenor, Donohue & Olien, 1970) and the combination of being older and male (Gunter 1987; Rakow & Kranich, 1991).

In a study by Beier and Ackerman (2001), age was again found to be a significant predictor of current events knowledge. More importantly, the study framed current events

in its simplest psychological context. The authors distinguished between two different levels of intelligence. One is possessing the ability to solve novel problems and the other is the retention and application of previously learned material (Carroll, 1993; Hebb, 1942; Horn & Cattell, 1966). The study found that fluid intelligence, the raw processing power of intelligence that is linked to heredity and biology (Horn & Cattell, 1966), was a less effective predictor of current events knowledge than crystallized knowledge or the ability to retain and apply knowledge acquired through cultural exposure and educational experiences (Horn & Cattell, 1966). The authors argued that current events and knowledge of the world around us, for adults, is experienced rather than acquired in an educational setting. The study also found that in addition to age, personality (the openness to experience) and self-concept were positively related to current events knowledge. In a longitudinal study of current events knowledge, Hambrick et al. (2008) found a large positive effect of prior knowledge on new knowledge. The authors also uncovered positive effects on ability and non-ability on prior knowledge.

The importance of current events in the individual, social and educational settings was discussed in the preceding paragraphs to construct a case for their investigation. Current events' importance in the paradigm of social media is a phenomenon that needs closer inquiry.

### **Social Media presents new problems**

While this study deals with a very constrained use of social media, current events use, and deals with a smaller population than the general population, 18-24 year-olds, findings of this study will contribute to an already rich body of uses and gratifications research literature. Before researching the cultural and societal of new media

technologies, the reasons of why and how individuals are using those new technologies (Perse & Dunn, 1998). Loosening of government restrictions in the United States on the communication industry and media convergence between legacy media and new technologies have forced media consumers to change their exposure patterns (Finn, 1997). Social media is simply content on a medium, the Internet, which falls under this classification. It does, however, offer an interpersonal component that other content on the Internet may not. An operational definition of social media is needed to fully understand its uniqueness.

The term social media is one and the same with the term social network, since social media operate in a two-way communication format with the sharing of content and connections to other users. Boyd and Ellison (p. 211, 2007) defined social network sites as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections” within a constrained system. Thomas Ruggiero (2000) argued, in a portent of scholarship to come, new media would offer a lease of new life to uses and gratifications research in examining how people use new communication technologies such as the Internet or social media. More importantly he discussed the need to research the attributes of interactivity, demassification, and asynchronicity. All three of the attributes described by Ruggiero are characteristics of social media.

Interactivity, which is assumed with an active audience that is part of uses and gratifications, is the “degree to which participants in the communication process have control over, and can exchange roles in their mutual discourse” (p. 10, Williams et al.,

1998). Social media is just that: users can participate if they want to or they can choose to just observe the content. It is the prerogative of the user to limit his or her interaction.

Demassification, is the control of the individual of the medium and the ability of the media user, creating more “face-to-face interpersonal communication” that Chamberlain (1994) spoke of. Users are able to pick from a larger selection of media and select messages to their needs, especially with social media. Users can select what sites to receive newsfeeds from (Facebook) or “follow” (Twitter) or groups to join. Asynchronicity, the third attribute listed from Ruggiero, is the concept where messages can be retrieved, accessed or view at different points in time, much like email (Williams et al., 1998).

Social media can be accessed through mobile devices such as phones or tablets with a 3G, 4G or Wi-Fi connection, or from a computer with an Internet connection. It can deliver a message much later or sooner than its origination. While social media theoretically fits the idea of the new media technology suggested by Ruggiero, uses and gratifications offers the theoretical framework needed to study social media.

Recall is a tangentially related variable in other current events studies on college students (Diddi and LaRose, 2006; Vincent and Basil, 1997). Current events and the knowledge that come along with them come from one source or another. The next few paragraphs will look at how news consumers have historically recalled information from different mass media throughout the years.

### **How do people recall current events from legacy media?**

What we recall and what we see in the daily media are two different bodies of knowledge. Empirical research has found what media consumers recall from the message that they are saturated with in the media in one form or another. In many of these studies,



the dependent variable is a specific measure of knowledge related to content given to subjects. Other studies use more general measures of “current events knowledge.”

Booth (1970) found that recall of news items by media consumers is based on the location of the item with respect to the order of the presentation and the amount of time and space relative to other elements. More specifically, stories at the beginning or ending of a newscast, or the front or back pages of the newspaper were consumed easier due to less competition from other news stories that were placed inside (Booth, 1970).

It is not only placement, but the medium itself matters in current events. This notion is especially accentuated in legacy media. Mulder (2006) argued that television is too reliant on a situation such a traumatic event such as a plane crash or conflict. In its time, television was not the main source of news for the public (Robinson and Levy, 1986). In a later study, the same authors (Robinson and Levy, 1996) found that both television and print readers were well informed. However, DeFleur (et al., 1992) found that recall of facts from news stories is significantly stronger from a newspaper or computer screen than those from television or radio. In the same study, he found that recall from computer screens was more closely related to newspapers than television. To further exclude television as a source of recalling current events, Neuman (1976), despite looking for the significance of education level in television viewing, found that television has a low impact for the recall of news items. Television provides visuals such as graphics that may help a viewer recall a story’s topics, but not specific details, while non-redundant crawls with newscasters yielded greater recall than videotex stories (Edwardson, Kent & McConnell, 1985). Chaffee and Kanihan (1997) concluded that people will seek political information in print, but uninformed individuals who are not

actively seeking political information learn more from television. In a study of four media systems (public service (Denmark and Finland), a dual market (United Kingdom) and the market model (United States)), Curran (et al., 2009) found that the public service model pays more attention to and creates greater knowledge of public affairs and international news while encouraging higher levels of news consumption.

Culbertson and Stempel (1986) examined the relationship between media reliance and political knowledge based on three consumption variables: reliance, media use, and focused media use. They defined focused media use as reading or viewing local or state political news. They also posited focused television use was correlated higher with political knowledge than general television news. Another significant finding they uncovered was that reliance on the newspaper did not have a correlation with knowledge measures, but for both focused and general use, newspapers had strong correlations with knowledge measures. In a study of activist attitudes toward the media in the framework of third-person effect, Rauch (2010) found that group members reported they were “more informed” about current events than the average person and identified themselves as invulnerable to media influence.

### **The Internet and Current Events**

Recently, scholars have paid special attention to differences in learning between content delivered via the Internet and their print counterparts. In a study of the online and print version of *The New York Times*, Tewksbury and Althaus (2000) found that online consumers read less national, international and political news than consumers of the print version. More importantly, they found that online consumers were less likely to recall events compared to print consumers of news (Tewksbury and Althaus, 2000). Supporting

Booth's (1970) hypothesis that consumers will recall more from stories on the front and back pages, the study found that the difference in layouts, specifically the more control given to the online consumers allows them to choose items of importance to them rather than having a specified news diet set in front of them.

The Internet is interactive and offers advantages over legacy media (Ruggeiro, 2000). It is a source for current events that still needs to be examined in the age of social media. Johnson, Braima and Sothirajah (1999) found that nontraditional media had little influence on political knowledge, but had a greater impact on images of the two candidates than traditional media. Tewksbury (2000) found that the topics readers view will vary by the site they access. Even unintentional exposure, like a newsfeed or Tweet deck in social media relevant to this study, to online content has been shown to have a positive effect upon users' current events knowledge (Tewksbury, et al., 2001).

Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) found that the most salient use for the Internet was information seeking among college students. However, according to Althaus and Tewksbury (2000), the use of print and online media are positively correlated and predicted that the advent of online media is unlikely to diminish the use of traditional media. Social media may refute their findings. The study, conducted in 2000, was before the diffusion of social media. This study attempts to fill the gap in the literature regarding social media use and current events.

There are two studies directly related to this study that look specifically at the population of interest, 18-24 year-olds, or college students and current events. Vincent and Basil (1997) addressed the audience of college students specifically when using the uses and gratifications paradigm. They found that use and surveillance needs increase

with the year in college, with surveillance needs increasing use of all media. Most important, college students' current events knowledge was found to be stronger with use of print and CNN (Vincent and Basil, 1997).

Diddi and LaRose (2006) found that college students consumed media, consistent with uses and gratifications theory, for hometown news, comedy news, Internet news, broadcast news, and diverse sources of in-depth news coverage. Surveillance and escapism were the most consistent predictors of news behavior, but the most powerful predictor of news consumption was habit (Diddi and LaRose, 2006).

With the review of the prior literature, the following research question was proposed:

**RQ1: What subject areas or dimensions of current events do 18-24 year-olds in this study consume on social media?**

The following paragraphs examined what variables are critical, based upon prior uses and gratifications literature, in current events use from social media by 18-24 year-olds.

### **Uses and Gratifications**

Journalism and mass communication scholars have enlisted the theoretical framework of uses and gratifications to examine a number of phenomenon, namely technologies. The use of 18-24 year-olds' use of social media for current events is a phenomenon that elicits the question, "Why are 18-24 year-olds using social media for current events?" It is important to examine relevant uses and gratifications literature that can provide insight exploring the "inside the head" mechanisms that are deeply rooted psychological processes that govern current events use on social media.

When new technologies are diffused widely in society, scholars apply the uses and gratifications paradigm to understand new media use behaviors and motivations behind the uses (Rubin and Bantz, 1987; Rubin, 1983) and how and the new technologies are being used (Rosengren et al., 1985). As the proliferation of new technologies and media emerge, uses and gratifications will continue to be the choice of paradigm for scholars struggling to completely examine new phenomenon in the stochastic method.

### **Uses and Gratifications and Legacy Media**

Uses and gratifications theoretical framework is based on the assumptions that an individual's sociological and psychological makeup will influence an individual's media use and effects from mediated communication (Katz, Blumler and Guretvich, 1974; Rosengren, 1974). It further assumes that (1) in using the chosen media, the audience remains active with "goal-directed media behavior"; and (2) individual predispositions, social interaction, and environmental factors shape audience members' program expectations (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000).

Rubin et al. (p. 129, 2003) defines uses and gratifications as "(a) media behavior is purposive, goal-directed and motivated, (b) people select media content to satisfy their needs and desires, (c) social and psychological dispositions mediate that behavior, and (d) media compete with other forms of communication—or functional alternatives—such as interpersonal interaction for selection, attention and use."

The sizeable mount of prior literature, which derives its theoretical underpinnings from the 1940s (Lowery & DeFleur, 1983; Wimmer & Dominick, 1994; Schramm, 1949; Dozier & Rice, 1984), provides guidance into the exploration of the future.

In a smidgeon of his abundant research of television with uses and gratifications, Rubin (1984) found that media use is either ritualized or instrumental. While this finding is part of the discussion of any uses and gratifications study, the context of the study existed in a much different environment than the social media-laden one of today. He posited ritualized use as the use of media to pass the time or to divert attention from one's reality. The opposite was instrumental use or active and goal-oriented use of the media. A look at reality television programming through the uses and gratifications paradigm (Papacharissi and Mendelson, 2007) found the gratifications of relaxation, habitual use or passing time, companionship, social interaction, and voyeurism. Surveillance and habit have been found to be very significant predictors of news consumption of current events in uses and gratifications literature (Diddi and LaRose, 2006; Vincent and Basil, 1997). Of these motivations, habitual use, surveillance and voyeurism are synonymous with social media use. Users can access, with the aid of mobile or portable devices, current events on social media anytime they want to as a force of habit or simply to pass time waiting for the next task. Surveillance on social media gives them a sense of the world around them and an opportunity to learn about their issues related to them. People can also observe what others are doing, reading, listening to, or talking about with social media as evidenced by the links, photos and statuses posted. In other words, social media offers voyeurism to the user of his or her network partners.

While legacy media can offer some gratifications related to this study, it is also intuitive that the uses and gratifications literature on the Internet, a medium that any social media needs to operate on, can offer some other gratifications.

### **Uses and Gratifications of the Internet**

As a medium, researchers have examined the Internet from the uses and gratifications framework for more than 14 years (Atkin et al., 1998). In an early study of uses and gratifications of the Internet, entertainment, personal relevance, and information involvement were found to be the most significant motives for using the Internet (Eighmey & McCord, 1998).

Kaye (1998) strengthened those findings when entertainment was found to be the strongest motive in Internet use. Later studies (Johnson & Kaye, 2003; Kaye & Johnson, 2002) have validated the Internet being used for entertainment as well. Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) found that interpersonal utility, passing time, information seeking, convenience and entertainment were the most salient motivating factors of why people used the Web.

Another study (Ferguson and Perse, 2000) found more consistent motivations for audiences using the web and television: entertainment, pass time and social information. Kaye and Johnson (2002) found that political information on the Web was used for information seeking/surveillance, entertainment, social utility and guidance. Kinnally et al. (2008) found that college students downloaded music for the motivations of entertainment/pass time, convenience/pass time and information seeking. Kaye (2010) found nine motivational factors: convenient information seeking, anti-traditional media sentiment, expression/affiliation, guidance/opinion seeking, blog ambiance, personal fulfillment, political debate, variety of opinion and specific inquiry.

From these motivations found in prior literature, three appropriate gratifications apply to current events on social media use: entertainment, guidance and information

seeking. Current events can entertain depending on the nature of the information being transferred. Users will also seek information, a primary intended product of current events. Current events can also provide an opinionated point of view on controversial topics and possible guidance.

Social media, as previously stated, with the aid of some form of Internet connection, can be accessed anywhere on mobile devices. Mobile phones provide the most applicable uses and gratifications literature to this facet of social media.

### **Uses and Gratifications of Mobile Phones**

In one of the most cited articles in mass communication literature on mobile phones, Leung and Wei (2000) found that mobility, immediacy, and instrumentality were the strongest motives in predicting mobile phone use. Since social media can be accessed via mobile phones, which can be taken anywhere, mobility will be an important gratification of current event use on social media.

Past literature has helped inform this study, however, the most important research yet to be reviewed is on uses and gratifications and social media itself.

### **Uses and Gratifications of Social Media**

Haridakis and Hanson (2009) examined YouTube users' motives and individual differences such as social activity, interpersonal interaction, locus of control, sensation seeking, innovativeness and affinity to predict viewing and sharing behaviors. Subjects viewed YouTube videos for information sharing, and viewed and shared videos for entertainment, co-viewing and social interaction. In the vein of current events, videos can be viewed as entertainment as they are customized to gratify each user's need for excitement and preferences predicting viewing videos on YouTube and sharing videos.



For example, this could be the “Arab Spring” or Egyptian social media revolution of 2011 or other footage related to current events. Information seeking and entertainment have already been discussed in this study, but social interaction, is an almost innate use of social media. The Internet can supplement and enhance a user’s social circles, a fundamental function of social media (Hampton & Wellman, 2003). You cannot have social media without some form of social interaction. In a study investigating the uses and gratifications of Twitter, Johnson and Yang (2009), found two important motives of users in Twitter use: social and information motives. Counterintuitively, they found that Twitter was primarily an information source, not as a medium for satisfying social needs. This finding obviously has a direct relation to current events. Current events can be shared as sources of conversation online and create a dialogue by posts or retweets.

### **Research Questions**

The preceding review of uses and gratifications of legacy media, the Internet, mobile phones, and social media provide a strong foundation for informed study. Current event uses, a dimension not explicated due to the concentration of study of social media as a whole.

Accordingly, the following research questions were posed to explore the motives of current events use on social media and how the gratifications of current events use predict the behavior of 18-24 year-olds:

**RQ2: What are the strongest predictors of recall on current events use on social media for 18-24 year-olds in this study?**

**RQ3: What kinds of gratifications are most likely to be sought from current events use on social media by 18-24 year-olds in this study?**

**RQ4: Which gratifications are uniquely associated with the different dimensions of current events use on social media by 18-24 year-olds in this study?**

**RQ5: What are the predictors, including the unique gratifications of current event use of 18-14 year-olds on social media in this study, of general current event use on social media by 18-24 year-olds in this study?**

**RQ6: What are the predictors of specific dimensions, including the unique gratifications of current event use of 18-14 year-olds on social media in this study, of current event use on social media by 18-24 year-olds in this study?**

### **Predictors of Media Use**

Prior uses and gratifications literature has revealed a slew of predictors that enhance an individual use of media in addition to gratifications of use: affinity, and preexisting psychological dispositions, such as sensation-seeking behavior.

Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) operationalized Internet use as the total number of hours spent on the Internet each day. For current events on social media use, it is logical to look at number of days and hours a user consumes current events on social media: first, looking at the number of days and hours one accesses social media and then how times during the past week a user consumed individual subject matter in current events specifically from social media.

Social media is also personalized to the user, by the user's volition to control what pictures or newsfeeds are on his or her account. Since it is the user's controlled environment, users will more likely have an affinity toward social media. Rubin and Papacharissi (2000) in their Internet uses scale, adopted the Television Affinity Scale

(Rubin, 1981) to assess users' liking or affinity of the Internet. Rubin (1981) linked affinity for television programming to a number of motives including arousal, habit, pass time, escape, entertainment, companionship, and information seeking. Affinity toward soap operas has been related to entertainment and relaxation (Rubin, 1985) as well as information seeking, escape, and voyeurism (Perse, 1996). Rubin (2002) found that more habitual and less engaged users will exhibit an affinity with the medium of their choice as opposed to more instrumental and active users will have more of an affinity with the content that is selected. Social media users are active users because they have control of the information they see and consume, relatively speaking, due to the idea they construct their own content by selecting their friends or following others or shared interests. This artificially constructed reality will likely lead to an affinity for certain subject matter of current events. There are other control variables relevant to this study. Interest in current affairs would be considered an obvious predictor. Sensation-seeking behavior, a trait that captures an individual's willingness to search for novel, varied and intensive stimuli (Perse, 1996), would be another since it can stimulate arousal (Oliver, 2002) in violent and sexual content (Krcmar & Greene, 1999; Perse, 1996). Current events can provide that type of content. Boredom aversion is another possible predictor of 18-24 year-olds' current events use on social media since that group may be using social media during class or in transit.

Other demographic control variables may help predict use of current events on social media.

There is substantial evidence of demographics as control variables in other research. First, race has played a significant factor in uses and gratifications and the

media. Gerson (1966) first looked at race and found that race and social class predicted how adolescents used the media. Hoffman and Novak (1998) found that race impacts Internet use, a necessity in social media use. Race and social class also predicted informal learning from television by adolescents (Greenberg & Dominick, 1969). In their study of mobile phones, Leung and Wei (2000) found that gender and age were predictors in mobile telephony use. They found that male users were likely to use mobile phones to do business while females were likely to use the technology while on the go and make longer calls. They also found that age was a predictor in gratifications sought. With 18-24 year olds as the specified population of this study, age and gender will be two demographic variables that could be predictors of app use. The final research question will ask which demographics will be able to predict the population of interest's current events social media use. The following research question is proposed:

**RQ7: What are the strongest predictors of general current event use on social media by 18-24 year-olds in this study: demographic variables or gratifications?**

A conceptual model displays the potential models for all of the variables in this study before data analysis: demographics, social media repertoire, overall social media use, motivations for current events use on social media use, current events use on social media use, gratifications of social media use, and recall of current events on social media (Figure 4.1).

Model of Uses and Gratifications of College Students' Current Events Use on Social Media

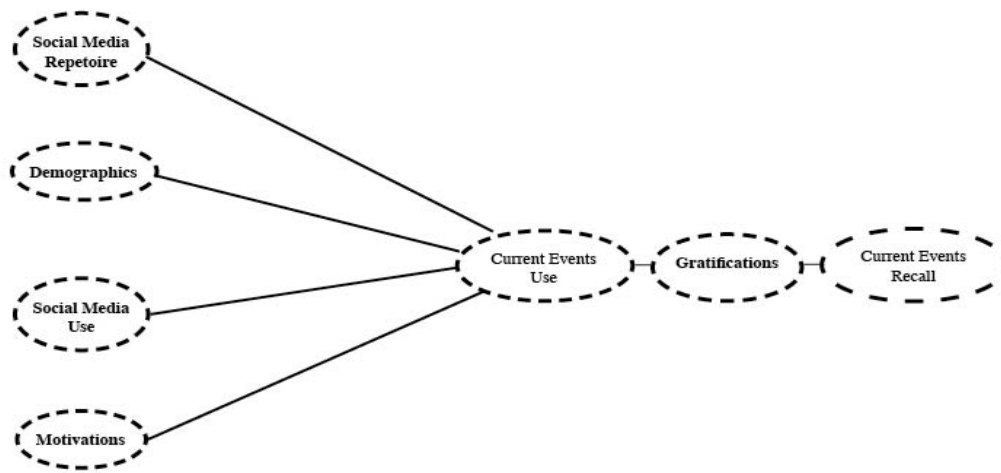


Figure 4.1: Model of U&G of 18-24 Year-Olds' Current Events Use on Social Media

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

This study was a one-shot descriptive study (Campbell and Stanley, 1963; Haskins, 1968) that designed to capture the uses and gratifications, motivations, and recall of 18-24 year-olds who use current events on social media. This chapter explains the logic for using the data collection methods of the study: focus groups and a survey questionnaire. A paper survey was administered to a cluster sample of 18-24 year-olds at a large, public southeastern university for data analysis. The advantages and disadvantages of the survey method used in this study are discussed and the protocol for data collection, sample characteristics and statistical analysis to evaluate the data.

#### **Sampling**

A survey is used to make statistical estimates about a population from which a sample is selected (Babbie, 2007; Keyton, 2010). The questionnaire used in this exploratory study was administered to a clustered sample of students at a large, public university in the southeastern United States (Appendix B) in order to capture the 18-24 year-old demographic. This method is appropriate because most college students, which captures the 18-24 year-old demographic (Pew, 2010), are enrolled at four-year public institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Across section of general core education classes with more than 100 students enrolled to ensure a heterogeneity in age, academic year, major, and race was captured. The sampling method allows for a robust cross section from the student population of 26,000 at the university. 18-24 year-

olds are an appropriate population of inquiry in this study because 46 percent of social media users in the age range of 18-24 are regularly or sometimes getting their news through social media, while 49 percent of users aged 25-29 are regularly or sometimes getting their news through social media (Pew, 2010). Both age groups fit within the parameters of this study and are representative of 18-24 year-olds.

This sampling method produced a total of 1,823 potential respondents, the total number of students enrolled in the classes sampled from, were selected for the sample out of a potential pool of 26,000.

Respondents were selected from a non-random purposive sample of college students from a cross section of 10 general elective classes of more than 100 students enrolled at a large public university in the southeastern United States (sociology, journalism and mass communications, economics, psychology, theatre, geology, geography, and chemistry). Questionnaires were administered in person by the primary investigator during the last week of September 2012 and the first two weeks of October 2012. All students present took the survey. They were then collected for data entry and inputted into SPSS 19.0 for data analysis during the month of October. A pre-test of a pilot survey was run in October 2012 to ensure the validity and normality of the data and questionnaire instrument. All four true-false measures of recall were changed to be more current with the time frame of the data collection.

### **Data Collection Methods**

The following paragraphs discuss in detail the data collection methods used to obtain data for analysis in this one-shot descriptive study. The preliminary method was

focus groups and the primary method was a questionnaire.

### **Focus Groups**

Focus groups have been used in the social sciences as an exploratory technique for developing hypotheses and questionnaire items before survey design (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Wimmer & Dominick, 2000). Because social media is relatively new in comparison to other media content, prior scales may not be applicable as well as other information that is vital to have a strong questionnaire instrument. Focus groups help fill those deficiencies in capturing data with prior instruments.

Six focus groups of college students from a large media literacy class at a large southeastern university (N=44) were conducted in a self-contained room during March 2012. All sessions lasted no longer than 45 minutes and had no more than 10 participants in each. All participants were recruited from the same class and received extra class credit for their input. Twelve males and 32 females participated and the majority (N=42) were white. All were either mass communication majors or undecided.

A single administrator read off the questions (Appendix A) and responses were recorded and transcribed to help inform the survey instrument for missing or new information (Appendix B). Respondents' list of their top social media sites (Sloan, 2011) were used to compile a list of the most used social media sites by college students (Appendix A). The focus groups also augmented the survey instrument by adding different subject matter of current events to existing list from the literature and offered a list of what activities they did with current events on social media. All subjects reported he or she used social media seven days week and described a current event as not being current anymore once they stopped seeing in on social media. Both questions were



subsequently omitted from analysis.

### **Surveys**

The primary methodology for uses and gratifications framework is surveys (Rubin, 1983; Rubin, 1984; Rubin, 1985; Ruggiero, 2000). Survey research is classified as quantitative rather than qualitative and is a dominant method for data collection in the social sciences (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000; Fowler, 2009). Surveys can extrapolate the differences and associations between sociological and psychological variables (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000), a necessity in uses and gratifications.

A pen-and-paper self-administered questionnaire was used for this study for many reasons. First, Wimmer and Dominick (2006) praise surveys for the relative low cost they require and the large amounts of data that can be obtained with relative ease from large amounts of people. Other options than paper could lead to methodological problems. Second, personal interviews can be extremely costly to provide the overhead to rigorously train and send interviewers into the field (Wimmer and Dominick, 2006; Fowler, 2009). Third, mail surveys do not have high response rates unless there is a financial incentive and repeated contact (Fowler, 2009). Although this study is looking specifically at social media use, which requires subjects to use the Internet, there are issues with response rates on Internet surveys (Kaplovitz et al., 2004; Fowler 2009): there are routinely issues with working email addresses and not having an interviewer involved to administer the survey. Finally, telephone surveys are not only expensive, but there is an impact on asking questions without a visual aid.

Although this study used an administrator, its method of paper survey is self-administered. Fowler (2009) listed four advantages to self-administered surveys compared to other survey methods:

1. Presenting questions requiring visual aids is possible (as opposed to telephone interviews).
2. Asking questions with longer or more complex response categories is more conducive to self-administered surveys.
3. Asking clusters of similar questions may be more acceptable to respondents.
4. Respondents do not have to share response with interviewers, which bears more valid answers to sensitive questions.

Fowler (2009) also addressed the limitations of self-administered surveys:

1. Very careful questionnaire design is a necessity.
2. Open questions are not useful.
3. Respondents need proficient reading and writing skills.
4. The absence of the interviewer to provide quality control.
5. It is difficult to control whom answers the questions.

While these concerns are valid, precautions were taken to alleviate these potential pitfalls. First, the scales and questions used on the survey were taken from previous research with valid and reliable measures. Second, the survey only uses one open-ended question (hours of use on social media). Third, the sample is composed of 18-24 year-olds, all of whom who are literate enough to be seeking higher education as a college

student. Fourth, a trained administrator was there to answer any questions. Fifth, an administrator was also present to make sure each individual only completed one survey.

This survey also used the group administration method for three reasons (Fowler, 2009):

1. Cooperation rates are generally high.
2. Respondents can ask questions of the administrator about the survey.
3. The unit costs are low.

### **Survey Instrument**

General demographic questions were asked of respondents regarding gender, age, major, year of study, and race on the survey instrument. A qualifying question asking if subjects used social media at all was asked first. The first section of the questionnaire examined how often subjects used current events on social media and what device they used for to access the content. Subjects were asked an open-ended question on how many hours per week they actively used current events on social media on average, not just plain social media use. The options for devices were tablet computers, smartphones, home computers (laptops and desktops) and music players, all of which require an Internet connection and run social media applications.

### **Use of specific current events subject matter**

To determine what specific current events subject matter was consumed used, respondents were asked how often they used 23 different dimensions of current events in the past week. The comprehensive list was compiled based on prior dimensions used in research (Karlis & Grant, 2010; Diddi & LaRose, 2006; Vincent & Basil, 1997; Pew Research Center, 2008) to ensure no specific subject matter was left out. Focus groups of

18-24 year-old college students from a large media literacy class at a large southeastern university conducted during March of 2012 (N=43) were used to compile a comprehensive list of subject matter. The list included national, international, political, local, sports, business, crime, health, entertainment, campus, science and technology, legal, lifestyle, pop culture, crime, hometown news, religion, consumer news, culture and the arts, weather, education and schools, celebrity news and other (Appendix A). The measures of use were taken on a scale of 0 to 6+ times.

### **Gratifications of Current Events on Social Media**

To discover the gratifications of current events use on social media, this study relied on prior relevant research (Papacharissi and Mendelson, 2007; Johnson & Kaye, 2003; Kaye & Johnson, 2002; Kinnally et al., 2008; Kaye, 2010; Leung and Wei, 2000; Haridakis and Hanson, 2009; Vincent and Basil, 1997; Diddi and LaRose, 2006). A total of 40 measures were taken from prior scales in empirically significant uses and gratifications research. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreements with statements concerning the reasons why they used current events on a Likert scale of 1 “not at all” to 5 “strongly agree (Appendix B). A principle component exploratory factor analysis using Varimax rotation was used to identify the gratifications of app use with Eigenvalues greater than 1.0.

### **Recall of Current Events**

In prior current events and uses and gratifications literature with college students as the population of interest, recall has been measured as true-false (Diddi and LaRose, 2006) or multiple choice (Vincent and Basil, 1997) questions that were summed into recall and knowledge measures. This study used the true-false method to assess current

events recall or knowledge with four questions based on subject matter about a popular entertainer's death, the current status of one of the Republican Party's U.S. Presidential candidates, when the Occupy movement started, and whether or not a foreign nation was in a state of violent unrest. Each correct answer was given one point and the total of correct answers was summed for a recall score. The highest possible score was four, the lowest was zero. The recall score was used as dependent variable in hierarchical regressions with predictors.

### **Motivations and Psychological Dispositions**

Affinity, boredom aversion, sensation seeking, and current affairs were measured using five items to develop a coherent scale for each. Affinity ( $M=2.81$ ,  $SD=.83$ ,  $\alpha=.672$ ) was measured through five questions using a 5-point Likert scale to measure agreement with the following statements: "I would rather use current events on social media than do anything else"; "I could easily do without current events on social media for several days"; "I would feel lost without current events on social media"; "If I didn't have current events on social media, I would not miss them"; "Using current events on social media is one of the most important things I do every day". Boredom aversion ( $M=3.03$ ,  $SD=.77$ ,  $\alpha=.635$ ) was measured in the same manner. Respondents were asked five measures using a five-point Likert scale to capture their agreement with the following five statements: "I hate watching a movie for the second time"; "I get bored seeing the same people"; "I get bored with people who always say the same thing"; "I get restless when I spend too much time at home"; "I prefer friends who are exciting and unpredictable". The motivation of sensation seeking ( $M=3.73$ ,  $SD=.82$ ,  $\alpha=.694$ ) used the same Likert scales to test agreement to five measures: "I would like to explore strange

places”; “I like modern or abstract paintings”; “I like to try new foods”; “People should dress the way they want”; “I would like to take off on a trip with no pre-planned routes or timetables”. Current affairs interest ( $M=3.45$ ,  $SD=.94$ ,  $\alpha=.884$ ) was measured by the following statements: “I keep up with current events daily”; “I am interested in current events”; “I use current events in daily conversation”; “I use current events to keep me informed”; “I feel out of place if I am not informed”. Cronbach’s alpha was calculated for all scales and deemed them acceptable for use.

### **Social Media Repertoire**

From a focus group of 18-24 year-old college students from a large media literacy class at a large southeastern university ( $N=43$ ) and a list of the top social media sites (Sloan, 2011), a list of the following social media sites: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Yahoo! Answers, Tagged, LinkedIn, MySpace, myYearbook, Yelp, Pinterest and other (Appendix A). respondentsThe cumulative total of these sites was summed for a social media repertoire score ( $M=4.269$ ,  $SD=1.87$ ,  $\alpha=.553$ ). The measures were used in multiple hierarchical regressions to predict current events on social media use.

## Chapter 4

### Findings

This chapter details the findings of the study through data analysis and provides answers for the research questions listed in the study.

#### Response Rate

Of the 1,823 potential respondents for the survey, 951 subjects responded, yielding an initial 52% response rate. Of the 951 initial responses, 33 were removed due to non-completion of the instrument or invalid responses, The final number of valid responses was 918. Of the 918 respondents, 896 subjects (97.6% of the sample) used social media while 22 (2.4% of the sample) did not (Table 6.1).

**Table 6.1:**  
**Response Rate of Sample**

Number of Potential Respondents	1,823
Number of Initial Respondents	951 (50%)*
Surveys removed due to incomplete or invalid data	33
Final number in sample	918 (52%)*
Number of Respondents using social media	896
Number of Respondents not using social media	22

\* Response Rates

### **Demographics**

Of the 896 respondents for the survey, 379 were male (42.3% of the sample) while 517 were female (57.7%) (Table 6.2). These results are reflective of the national trend of mostly females comprising the majority of college students in the 18-24 year-old demographic (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

**Table 6.2: Gender of sample**

	Frequency	Percent of Sample	Cumulative Percent
Male	379	42.3	42.3
Female	517	57.7	100.0
Total	896	100.0	

The majority of the sample fell in the 18-23-year-old category (81.8%) or 733 respondents (Table 6.3).

**Table 6.3: Ages of sample**

	Frequency	Percent of Sample	Cumulative Percent
18-20	733	81.8	81.8
21-23	146	16.3	98.1
24 and older	17	1.9	100.0
Total	896	100.0	

Whites (n=739) composed the majority of the sample, followed respectively by Blacks, Asians and Hispanics (Table 6.4).



**Table 6.4: Races of sample**

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
White	739	82.5	82.5
Black	99	11.0	93.5
Asian	38	4.2	97.8
Hispanic	20	2.2	100.0
Total	896	100.0	

With respect to academic classes, sophomores (n=342, 38.2 %) composed most of the sample (Table 6.5).

**Table 6.5: Year of study of sample**

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Sophomore	342	38.2	38.2
Freshman	289	32.3	70.4
Junior	178	19.9	90.3
Senior	86	9.6	99.9
Graduate	1	.1	100.0
Total	896	100.0	

The top ten majors represented were business (n=118, 13.2%), public relations, exercise science, broadcast journalism, undeclared, psychology, public health , sport and entertainment management, visual communications, and advertising (Table 6.6).

**Table 6.6: Majors of sample**

Major	Frequency	Percent of Sample
Business	118	13.2
Public Relations	74	8.3

Exercise Science	66	7.4
Broadcast Journalism	63	7.0
Undeclared	48	5.4
Psychology	35	3.9
Public Health	32	3.6
Sport and Entertainment Management	32	3.6
Visual Communications	31	3.5
Advertising	29	3.2
Accounting	24	2.7
Biology	23	2.6
International Business	23	2.6
Marketing	23	2.6
Retailing	23	2.6
Hospitality Management	20	2.2
Finance	18	2.0
Sociology	18	2.0
Pharmacy	16	1.8
Economics	14	1.6
Political Science	14	1.6
Criminology and Criminal Justice	11	1.2
History	10	1.1
Management	10	1.1
Nursing	10	1.1
Print Journalism	7	.8
Early Childhood Education	6	.7
Engineering Science	6	.7
English	6	.7
Mathematics	6	.7
Chemistry	5	.6
Computer Science	5	.6
Media Arts	5	.6
Elementary Engineering	4	.4
International Studies	4	.4
Management Science	4	.4
Marine Science	4	.4

Physical Education	4	.4
Chemical Engineering	3	.3
Civil and Environ. Engineering	3	.3
Information Science	3	.3
Theatre	3	.3
Anthropology	2	.2
Athletic Training	2	.2
Biochemistry	2	.2
Biomedical Engineering	2	.2
Computer Engineering	2	.2
Computer Information Systems	2	.2
Dance	2	.2
Music	2	.2
Tourism Management	2	.2
African American Studies	1	.1
Art History	1	.1
Art studio	1	.1
Cardiovascular Technology	1	.1
Comparative Literature	1	.1
Environmental Sciences	1	.1
Film and Media Studies	1	.1
French	1	.1
Geography	1	.1
Geological Sciences	1	.1
Mechanical Engineering	1	.1
Middle Level Education	1	.1
Real Estate	1	.1
Social Work	1	.1
Spanish	1	.1
Total	896	100.0

South Carolina (n=445, 49.7%) was by far the largest represented state in the sample followed by North Carolina, Georgia, Maryland, New Jersey, Virginia,

Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio and Texas (Table 6.7). Sixteen (1.8% of the sample) international students were represented in the sample.

**Table 6.7: State of origin of sample**

State of origin	Frequency	Percent
SC	445	49.7
NC	59	6.6
GA	56	6.3
MD	52	5.8
NJ	41	4.6
VA	39	4.4
PA	35	3.9
NY	26	2.9
ITL	16	1.8
OH	14	1.6
TX	13	1.5
CT	11	1.2
FL	10	1.1
CA	9	1.0
IL	9	1.0
DE	8	.9
TN	8	.9
MA	8	.9
DC	5	.6
MI	4	.4
ME	4	.4
CO	3	.3
NE	3	.3
KS	3	.3
AZ	2	.2
WI	2	.2
IN	2	.2
KY	2	.2
MN	1	.1
MT	1	.1

IA	1	.1
AR	1	.1
LA	1	.1
MO	1	.1
OR	1	.1
Total	896	100.0

The first question asked what are the main devices used by the sample to access social media. The most popular results were smartphone and computer (Table 6.8). Music players and tablets were not used as much to access social media by comparison to those who did.

**Table 6.8: Devices used to access social media**

**Tablet**

	Frequency	Percent of Sample
No	644	71.9
Yes	252	28.1
Total	896	100.0

**Smartphone**

	Frequency	Percent of Sample
Yes	772	86.2
No	124	13.8
Total	896	100.0

**Music Player**

	Frequency	Percent of Sample
No	664	74.1
Yes	232	25.9
Total	896	100.0

<b>Computer</b>		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes	870	97.1
No	26	2.9
Total	896	100.0

The second question on the questionnaire asked what was the average number of hours a user actively used social media. The average number of hours the sample actively used social media in an average week was 17.36 hours ( $M=17.36$ ,  $SD=20.01$ ) and ranged from 0 to 150 hours. The most popular activity with social media among the sample users was simply reading the comments on a current event ( $n=586$ , 65.4%) or “liking” the current event ( $n=565$ , 63.1%) (Table 6.9). There was an even division among those that would follow the link for a current event ( $n=448$ , 50%) and an almost even division among retweeting the current event ( $n=438$ , 48.9). Sharing the link ( $n=344$ , 38.4%), tagging his or herself in the current event ( $n=230$ , 25.7%), commenting on it ( $n=375$ , 41.9%), both activities that would involve active engagement from the user.

**Table 6.9: Activities of current events on social media use**

	No	Yes
<b>Share Link</b>	<b>552</b>	<b>344</b>
<b>Retweet</b>	<b>458</b>	<b>438</b>
<b>Tag</b>	<b>666</b>	<b>230</b>
<b>Like it</b>	<b>331</b>	<b>565</b>
<b>Comment</b>	<b>521</b>	<b>375</b>
<b>Read Comment</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>586</b>

<b>Follow Link</b>	<b>448</b>	<b>448</b>
<b>N=896</b>		

### **Use of Current Events by Subject Matter**

In order to calculate interpretable means of the different types of subject matter, interval date was converted to continuous data. In answering RQ1, all 22 types of subject matter of current events on social media were used at least once by the sample in the past week. Sports (M=1.96, SD=1.07), entertainment (M=1.95, SD=.993), local (M=1.64, SD=.786), pop culture (M=1.63, SD=1.056), political (M=1.61, SD= 1.037), campus (M=1.55, SD=.986), weather (M=1.50, SD=1.073), celebrity (M=1.44, SD=1.085), national (M=1.44, SD=.953), lifestyle (M=1.35, SD=1.036), crime (M=1.27, SD=.926), hometown (M=1.06, SD=1.008), and other (M=1.03, SD=1.101) all displayed means that indicated subjects viewing the different subject matter more than three to five times a week (Table 6.10).

**Table 6.10: Current Event Use on Social Media by Subject Matter**

Subject Matter	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Sports	896	0	3	1.96	1.067
Entertainment	896	0	3	1.95	.993
Local	896	1	3	1.64	.786
Pop Culture	896	0	3	1.63	1.056
Political	896	0	3	1.61	1.037
Campus	896	0	3	1.55	.986
Weather	896	0	3	1.50	1.073
Celebrity	896	0	3	1.44	1.085
National	896	0	3	1.44	.953
Lifestyle	896	0	3	1.35	1.036
Crime	896	0	3	1.27	.926

Hometown	896	0	3	1.06	1.008
Other	896	0	3	1.03	1.101
Health	896	0	3	.98	.898
Education	896	0	3	.97	.906
International	896	0	3	.94	.858
Business	896	0	3	.84	.865
Culture/Arts	896	0	3	.82	.908
Science/Technology	896	0	3	.80	.879
Consumer	896	0	3	.76	.874
Religion	896	0	3	.72	.868
Legal	896	0	3	.61	.776
Valid N (listwise)	896				

### **Gratifications of Current Events on Social Media**

Principal component factor analyses are the apt method for discovering new gratifications on new content and mediums (Johnson & Kaye, 2003; Leung and Wei, 2000; Haridakis and Hanson, 2009; Diddi and LaRose, 2006; Vincent and Basil, 1997). The 40 Uses and Gratifications items were analyzed with a principle component factor analysis with Varimax rotation to answer RQ4 (Which gratifications are uniquely associated from 18-24 year olds' use of current events on social media) and RQ3 (what kinds of gratifications are most likely to be sought from current events use on social media by 18-24 year-olds). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (.948) indicated that the sample was adequate for factor analysis. Bartlett's test of sphericity indicated significant correlations among the items for analysis ( $X^2=15244.83$ ,  $df=496$ ,  $p<.000$ ). A five-factor solution, with Eigenvalues greater than 1.0, accounted for 58.53 % of the total variance being explained (Table 6.11).



**Table 6.11: Gratifications of Current Events on Social Media by 18-24 Year-Olds**

Measures	Mean	SD	Cronbach's Alpha	Eigenvalue of Rotated Factor	Variance Explained	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Perpetual Entertainment</b>	<b>3.86</b>	<b>.875</b>	<b>.86</b>	<b>5.32</b>	<b>16.69</b>					
It's a habit of mine	3.71	1.25				<b>.780</b>	.044	.200	.095	.180
I always do	3.46	1.32				<b>.708</b>	.123	.235	.190	.206
They help me pass time	4.10	1.08				<b>.703</b>	.321	.064	.146	-.066
I can use them on the go	4.08	1.14				<b>.699</b>	.402	.100	.061	.078
It's part of my daily routine	3.64	1.29				<b>.686</b>	.128	-.034	.318	.295
They are with me all the time	3.71	1.28				<b>.614</b>	.285	-.047	.256	.291
They keep me entertained when bored	4.23	1.07				<b>.561</b>	.392	.057	.246	-.150
They are fun	3.85	1.14				<b>.558</b>	.336	.101	.486	.022
They are entertaining	4.01	1.07				<b>.528</b>	.430	.094	.441	-.020
I read others' comments	3.79	1.13				<b>.422</b>	.214	.283	.171	.064
<b>Information Seeking</b>	<b>3.85</b>	<b>.83</b>	<b>.91</b>	<b>4.180</b>	<b>13.06</b>					
I can access them anywhere	4.18	1.13				.371	<b>.657</b>	.012	-.050	.045
They are portable	4.00	1.13				.457	<b>.632</b>	.040	.107	.123
They help me find information	3.69	1.19				.108	<b>.610</b>	.243	.291	.268
They have a wide variety of information	4.00	1.11				.320	<b>.588</b>	.286	.076	.042
I can find what I need or want to know	3.73	1.18				.172	<b>.560</b>	.301	.333	.141
I can find out about daily life	3.91	1.08				.343	<b>.525</b>	.345	.177	.008
They keep me up to date on the news	3.52	1.18				.023	<b>.510</b>	.239	.183	.505
I can talk to other people about them	3.85	1.14				.352	<b>.484</b>	.308	.055	.141
<b>Surveillance/Guidance</b>	<b>3.20</b>	<b>.91</b>	<b>.80</b>	<b>3.27</b>	<b>10.20</b>					
I make up my mind on important issues	3.21	1.28				.123	.188	<b>.721</b>	.122	.123
I can judge personal qualities of politicians	2.77	1.27				.051	-.029	<b>.695</b>	.215	.226
To learn about society	3.50	1.19				.126	.347	<b>.687</b>	.050	.150
I can understand the world	3.16	1.19				.038	.265	<b>.595</b>	.146	.307
I find issues that affect people like myself	3.37	1.22				.306	.249	<b>.422</b>	.251	.325
<b>Voyeurism</b>	<b>3.28</b>	<b>.91</b>	<b>.78</b>	<b>3.13</b>	<b>9.79</b>					
I like reading about famous/others	3.49	1.30				.234	.127	.195	<b>.679</b>	.031
I like to watch events in others' lives	3.35	1.19				.264	.161	.122	<b>.676</b>	.154
It helps me meet new people	2.87	1.35				.194	-.007	.116	<b>.610</b>	.293
It makes me want to learn more	3.34	1.21				.028	.306	.233	<b>.500</b>	.414
I find the people in the stories fascinating	3.37	1.22				.421	.003	.381	<b>.444</b>	.191
<b>Social Interaction</b>	<b>2.91</b>	<b>1.04</b>	<b>.75</b>	<b>2.83</b>	<b>8.85</b>					
I am a news junkie	2.62	1.29				.166	-.056	.170	.066	<b>.785</b>
I can talk to others about the linked sites	2.92	1.28				.113	.110	.265	.198	<b>.736</b>
It helps me participate in discussions	3.19	1.24				.122	.309	.271	.190	<b>.574</b>

Rotation converged in 10 iterations. Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. N=896.

To answer RQ4, The first factor had an Eigenvalue of 5.32 and explained 16.69% of the total variance (Table 6.11). It contained the items “It’s a habit of mine”, “I always do”, “They help me pass time”, “I can use them on the go”, “They are part of my daily routine”, “They are with me all the time”, “They keep me entertained when bored”, “They are fun”, “They are entertaining”, and “I can read others’ comments.” The common underlying gratification of all of these items (built from three items of habit, four from entertainment, two from mobility and one from voyeurism) is the notion that current events on social media offer instantaneous and routinized entertainment. These concepts were used to create a new gratification, “perpetual entertainment.” This concept will be explained in more detail in the discussion section. A composite scale was created from the ten items ( $M=3.86$ ,  $SD=.875$ ,  $\alpha=.863$ ).

The second factor, with an Eigenvalue of 4.180, explained 13.06% of the variance (Table 6.11). The scale included the items “I can access them anywhere”, “They are portable”, “The help me find information”, “They have a wide variety of information”, “I can find what I need or want to know”, “I can find out about daily life”, “They keep me up to date on the news”, and “I can talk to other people about them.” While the factor contained two mobility, one surveillance, and one social interaction item each, four items from the gratification of “information seeking” composed most of the factor. A scale for “information seeking” was created from the eight items ( $M=3.85$ ,  $SD=.83$ ,  $\alpha=.909$ ).

The third factor, composed of five items (three guidance items and two surveillance items) had an Eigenvalue of 3.27 and explained 10.20% of the variance (Table 6.11). “I make up my mind in important issues”, “I can judge the personal qualities of politicians”, “To learn about society”, “I can understand the world”, and “I

find issues that affect people like myself”. This factor tapped into the need for surveillance and guidance, which led to the creation of a news scale, “surveillance/guidance” ( $M=3.20$ ,  $SD=.91$ ,  $\alpha=.80$ ).

The fourth factor contained five items: “I like reading about famous people/others”, “I like to watch events in others’ lives”, “It helps me meet new people”, “It makes me want to learn more” and “I find people in the stories fascinating.” It had an Eigenvalue of 3.13 and explained 9.79% of the variance (Table 6.11). Three of the five items (one was a social interaction item and the other was from surveillance) were voyeurism items, therefore the scale was computed to create the voyeurism scale ( $M=3.28$ ,  $SD=.91$ ,  $\alpha=.78$ ).

The final factor that emerged from analysis was composed of three items: “I am a new junkie”, “I can talk to others about the linked sites”, and “It helps me participate in discussions.” Two of the items were social interaction items, while one was from habit. A new scale “social interaction” was created ( $M=2.91$ ,  $SD=1.04$ ,  $\alpha=.75$ ). The Eigenvalue was 2.83 and it accounted for 8.85% of the variance (Table 6.11).

To answer RQ3, what kinds of gratifications are most likely to be sought from 18-24 year-olds’ use current events on social media, results of the principal component factor analysis were used. Habit was found to be part of the factor of perpetual entertainment and voyeurism was found to be in the fourth factor. The gratification of surveillance was found in three of the five factors found after analysis and helped form the surveillance/guidance factor. Information seeking was found to be the second factor, while entertainment was found to be a large indicator of gratification in the perpetual entertainment. Guidance was found to compose the majority of the third factor. Mobility

was found in both the first and second factors. The gratification of social interaction was found in the second, fourth and fifth factors.

### **Predictors of General Current Events**

#### **Recall, and Specific Dimension Use on Social Media**

To answer RQ2, RQ5 and RQ6, a multiple regression was conducted in the following order of variables: demographics, motivations and psychological dispositions, social media repertoire, social media use, and gratifications. Multiple regressions allows a researcher to test for significant relationships between a single dependent variable and various independent variables as a group (Keyton, 2010). Demographic variables were dummy coded into dichotomous variables appropriate for multiple regression according to the majority of the sample for gender (“1”=female, “0”=male), age (“1”=18-20, “0”=all other ages), year of study (“1”=sophomore, “0”=all other years of study, race (“1”=white, “0”=non-whites). Major was collapsed in to “1” for all journalism or mass communication-related majors (print journalism, broadcast journalism, public relations, visual communication, and advertising) and “0” for all other majors. All regression models were tested for multicollinearity and not one variable scored more than 4.0 in the variance inflation test (VIF) during analysis. Assumptions of linearity, normally distributed errors and uncorrelated errors were checked and met for all regression analyses.

For RQ5, the dependent variable was a sum score of the use of the 22 different types of subject matter or dimensions of current events on social media ( $M=26.85$ ,  $SD=11.55$ ,  $\alpha=.89$ ). While the equation was found to be statistically significant, general

social media use was not found to be a significant predictor of current events use on social media by 18-24 year-olds (Table 6.12).

<b>Table 6.12: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Current Events Use and Recall on Social Media</b>		
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Recall</b>
Gender	-.006	-.004
Major	-.013	<b>.077*</b>
Age	-.041	.020
Year of Study	-.007	<b>-.085*</b>
Race	-.013	.040
Current Affairs	<b>.094*</b>	<b>.098*</b>
Sensation Seeking	-.018	-.014
Boredom	-.061	.011
Affinity	<b>.098**</b>	.016
S.M. Repertoire	<b>.101**</b>	.061
Social Media Use	.041	.014
Perp. Entertainment	<b>.214***</b>	.010
Info. Seeking	<b>.109*</b>	.050
Surv./Guidance	-.015	-.028
Voyeurism	.026	<b>-.130*</b>
Social Interaction	-.003	.023
R <sup>2</sup>	.202	.037
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.187	.020
F	<b>13.907***</b>	<b>2.118***</b>
df	16, 879	16,879
(N=896), Table reports standardized Betas.		
Note: *p,.05, **p<.01, ***, p<.001.		

RQ2 asked what were the strongest predictors of recall of current events use on social media for 18-24 year-olds (Table 6.12). The dependent variable in the regression was a sum score from the four true or false recall questions (M=3.18, SD=.886). The equation accounted for 20% of the variance and the analysis was found to be statistically significant. Major, year of study, current affairs, and voyeurism were significant contributors to the equation (Table 6.12).

RQ6 asked what are predictors of specific dimensions of current event use on social media by 18-24 year-olds. A multiple regression was run for use of each dimension of news as the dependent variable.

For current event use of the news dimension of sports ( $M=1.96$ ,  $SD=1.067$ ), the equation was found to be statistically significant and the equation accounted for 14.9% of the variance (Table 6.13). Gender, race, current affairs, and surveillance/guidance ) were all statistically significant predictors in the equation. Perpetual entertainment ( $\beta=.313$ ,  $p=.000$ ) was found to be the largest predictor of sports news on social media.

**Table 6.13: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Current Events Use on Social Media by Subject Matter**

Variable	Sports	Entertainment	Local	Pop Culture	Political
Gender	<b>-.234***</b>	.055	.035	<b>.159***</b>	-.022
Major	.004	.038	-.012	.053	-.059
Age	.052	-.003	-.045	.025	-.045
Year of Study	-.032	-.034	-.003	.002	<b>.085*</b>
Race	<b>.103**</b>	-.054	.030	-.060	-.027
Current Affairs	<b>.085*</b>	-.060	.067	.039	<b>.205***</b>
Sensation Seeking	-.039	-.019	-.062	.008	.005
Boredom	.012	<b>-.065*</b>	-.026	-.033	.016
Affinity	.004	.026	<b>.115*</b>	.056	-.003
S.M. Repertoire	.056	<b>.078*</b>	.019	.062	.043
Social Media Use	-.011	<b>.076*</b>	.020	.009	-.005
Perp. Entertainment	<b>.313***</b>	<b>.208***</b>	<b>.209***</b>	<b>.199***</b>	.074
Info. Seeking	.064	<b>.218***</b>	<b>.165**</b>	.005	<b>.152**</b>
Surv./Guidance	<b>-.195***</b>	<b>-.108*</b>	<b>-.141**</b>	.004	-.074
Voyeurism	-.058	<b>.116*</b>	-.068	<b>.119*</b>	<b>-.153**</b>
Social Interaction	-.000	<b>-.089*</b>	-.028	-.053	.041
$R^2$	.164	.204	.111	.178	.094
Adjusted $R^2$	.149	.189	.095	.163	.078
F	<b>10.813***</b>	<b>14.074***</b>	<b>6.861***</b>	<b>11.858***</b>	<b>5.704***</b>
df	16, 879	16, 879	16, 879	16, 879	16, 879

( $N=896$ ), Table reports standardized Betas. Note: \* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$ , \*\*\* $p<.001$ .

The equation for entertainment ( $M=1.95$ ,  $SD=.993$ ) was found to be statistically significant and accounted for 18.9% of the variance (Table 6.13). Boredom, social media repertoire, social media use, social interaction, voyeurism, and surveillance/guidance were significant contributors to the equation. Perpetual entertainment ( $\beta=.208$ ,  $p=.000$ ) and information seeking ( $\beta=.218$ ,  $p=.000$ ) were the strongest predictors of entertainment current events on social media by 18-24 year-olds.

The equation for local explained 9.5% of the variance and was statistically significant. Surveillance/guidance, information seeking, and affinity were all found to be significant predictors of the local current events ( $M=1.64$ ,  $SD=.786$ ) on social media. Perpetual entertainment ( $\beta=.209$ ,  $p=.000$ ) was the strongest predictor of the local news dimension's use (Table 6.13).

The equation for pop culture ( $M= 1.63$ ,  $SD=1.056$ ) was statistically significant and explained 16.3% of the variance. Gender, perpetual entertainment, and voyeurism were all significant predictors in the equation (Table 6.13) .

Year of study, current affairs, information seeking, and voyeurism were the significant predictors in the statistically significant equation for political news ( $M=1.61$ ,  $SD=1.037$ ). The equation to predict 18-24 year olds' use of political current events on social media explained 7.8% of the variance (Table 6.13).

Campus news ( $M=1.55$ ,  $SD=.986$ ) was predicted by gender, affinity, social media repertoire, social media use, perpetual entertainment, information seeking and surveillance/guidance. The equation was statistically significant and explained 11.5% of the variance (Table 6.14).

**Table 6.14: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Current Events Use on Social Media by Subject Matter**

Variable	Campus	Weather	Celebrity	National	Lifestyle
Gender	<b>.067*</b>	<b>.112**</b>	<b>.206***</b>	<b>-.073*</b>	<b>.169***</b>
Major	-.006	-.029	.001	.036	.024
Age	.045	-.012	.034	<b>-.084*</b>	-.009
Year of Study	-.033	.002	<b>-.089*</b>	.033	-.033
Race	.040	.062	-.052	-.012	-.036
Current Affairs	-.028	.023	-.055	<b>.208***</b>	.030
Sensation Seeking	.023	<b>-.073*</b>	-.024	-.004	-.011
Boredom	.002	<b>-.072*</b>	<b>-.076*</b>	-.001	-.018
Affinity	<b>.077*</b>	<b>.127**</b>	.032	.053	<b>.077*</b>
S.M. Repertoire	<b>.079*</b>	.056	<b>.070*</b>	.037	.031
Social Media Use	<b>.076*</b>	.036	.031	-.012	.035
Perp. Entertainment	<b>.208***</b>	<b>.142**</b>	<b>.198***</b>	<b>.119*</b>	.056
Info. Seeking	<b>.116*</b>	<b>.168**</b>	.015	.091	.090
Surv./Guidance	<b>-.092*</b>	.016	-.012	-.046	-.027
Voyeurism	-.012	-.090	<b>.250***</b>	<b>-.174***</b>	<b>.122*</b>
Social Interaction	.022	.026	-.048	.085	-.048
R <sup>2</sup>	.131	.142	.256	.123	.121
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.115	.126	.243	.107	.105
F	<b>8.264***</b>	<b>9.097***</b>	<b>18.947***</b>	<b>7.701***</b>	<b>7.530***</b>
df	16, 879	16, 879	16, 879	16, 879	16, 879

(N=896), Table reports standardized Betas. Note: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001.

The equation for weather (M=1.50, 1.073) was statistically significant and explained 12.6% of the variance (Table 6.14). Gender, sensation seeking, boredom, affinity, perpetual entertainment and information seeking were all significant predictors of weather current events on social media.

Gender, year of study, boredom, social media repertoire, perpetual entertainment and voyeurism were significant predictors of celebrity news (M=1.44, SD=1.085). The equation was statistically significant and explained 24.3% of the variance (Table 6.14).

Gender, age, current affairs, perpetual entertainment, and voyeurism were significant predictors of national current events (M=1.44, SD=.953) on social media (Table 6.14). The equation explained 10.7% of the variance and was statistically significant.



The equation for predicting lifestyle current event use (M=1.35, SD=1.036) on social media was significant and explained 10.5% of the variance. Gender, affinity and voyeurism were significant predictors in the equation (Table 6.14).

Crime current event use (M=1.27, SD=.926) on social media was predicted by affinity and perpetual entertainment (Table 6.15). The equation explained 5.1% of the variance and was statistically significant.

**Table 6.15: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Current Events Use on Social Media by Subject Matter**

Variable	Crime	Hometown	Other	Health	Education
Gender	.013	-.004	<b>-.100**</b>	.054	.008
Major	-.023	-.040	-.036	<b>-.086*</b>	-.037
Age	-.032	.030	-.004	-.017	<b>-.085*</b>
Year of Study	-.022	-.014	.043	-.041	.045
Race	.025	.000	.014	.001	-.007
Current Affairs	.026	.050	-.006	-.011	.064
Sensation Seeking	-.026	<b>-.070*</b>	.012	<b>.075*</b>	<b>-.089*</b>
Boredom	-.011	-.012	-.022	<b>-.106**</b>	-.022
Affinity	<b>.087*</b>	<b>.129**</b>	-.005	<b>.080*</b>	.071
S.M. Repertoire	.041	.041	.035	.052	<b>.075*</b>
Social Media Use	.065	-.003	.049	.035	.056
Perp. Entertainment	<b>.139**</b>	<b>.219***</b>	<b>.125*</b>	.071	<b>.110*</b>
Info. Seeking	.068	<b>-.103*</b>	-.031	.055	.014
Surv./Guidance	-.032	-.014	.093	.049	.068
Voyeurism	-.009	.067	.030	.008	.040
Social Interaction	-.003	.011	-.022	-.012	-.043
R <sup>2</sup>	.068	.091	.046	.074	.085
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.051	.074	.029	.057	.069
F	<b>3.989***</b>	<b>5.486***</b>	<b>2.673***</b>	<b>4.383***</b>	<b>5.129***</b>
df	16, 879	16, 879	16, 879	16, 879	16, 879

(N=896), Table reports standardized Betas. Note: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001.

Hometown current event use (M=1.06, SD=1.008) on social media was predicted by sensation seeking, affinity, perpetual entertainment and information seeking (Table 6.15). The equation explained 7.4% of the variance and was statistically significant.

The equation for predicting “other” current event use or dimensions of news that did not fall into one of the other 21 categories (M=1.03, SD=1.101) on social media was

significant and explained 2.9% of the variance. Gender and perpetual entertainment were the significant predictors in the equation (Table 6.15).

The equation for predicting health current event use ( $M=.98$ ,  $SD=.898$ ) on social media was significant and explained 5.7% of the variance. Major, sensation seeking, boredom and affinity were the significant predictors in the equation (Table 6.15).

Education current event use ( $M=.97$ ,  $SD=.906$ ) was predicted by age, sensation seeking, social media repertoire and perpetual entertainment (Table 6.15). The equation explained 6.9% of the variance and was statistically significant.

International current event use ( $M=.94$ ,  $SD=.906$ ) was predicted by gender, age, current affairs, affinity and voyeurism (Table 6.16). The equation explained 12.3% of the variance and was statistically significant.

**Table 6.16: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Current Events Use on Social Media by Subject Matter**

Variable	International	Business	Culture/Arts	Science/Technology	Consumer	Religion	Legal
Gender	<b>-.209***</b>	<b>-.114**</b>	.052	<b>-.192***</b>	-.033	.006	<b>-.117**</b>
Major	-.018	-.054	<b>.094**</b>	-.038	<b>.072*</b>	-.037	-.007
Age	<b>-.090*</b>	<b>-.086*</b>	-.077	-.042	-.030	-.081	-.005
Year of Study	.026	.007	.026	-.008	-.043	.023	-.026
Race	-.027	-.030	<b>-.107**</b>	-.020	-.041	.014	.022
Current Affairs	<b>.152***</b>	<b>.171***</b>	.017	.065	.054	.063	.020
Sensation Seeking	.048	-.067	<b>.131***</b>	.021	-.011	-.045	.010
Boredom	.008	-.005	<b>-.074*</b>	-.042	<b>-.071*</b>	<b>-.088*</b>	-.044
Affinity	<b>.088*</b>	.033	.048	-.001	.042	-.014	<b>.089*</b>
S.M. Repertoire	.046	<b>.105**</b>	.042	<b>.084*</b>	<b>.085*</b>	.041	.049
Social Media Use	.011	-.026	.004	-.015	.014	.019	.026
Perp. Entertainment	-.030	.046	-.046	.094	.018	.010	.004
Info. Seeking	.069	.002	.064	-.007	.056	.043	.008
Surv./Guidance	.037	.048	.048	<b>.144**</b>	.047	-.012	.052
Voyeurism	<b>-.110*</b>	-.021	.056	-.084	.065	<b>.153**</b>	.018
Social Interaction	.075	.019	.023	.016	.034	<b>-.100*</b>	.081
R <sup>2</sup>	.139	.094	.102	.095	.090	.043	.062
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.123	.077	.086	.079	.073	.026	.045
F	<b>8.870***</b>	<b>5.671***</b>	<b>6.230***</b>	<b>5.771***</b>	<b>5.437***</b>	<b>2.485**</b>	<b>3.647***</b>
df	16, 879	16, 879	16, 879	16, 879	16, 879	16, 879	16, 879

(N=896), Table reports standardized Betas. Note: \* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$ , \*\*\* $p<.001$ .

For current event use of the news dimension of business ( $M=.84$ ,  $SD=.865$ ), the equation was found to be statistically significant. The equation accounted for 7.7% of the variance (Table 6.16). Gender, age, current affairs, and social media repertoire were found to be significant predictors in the equation.

Current event use of culture and the arts ( $M=.82$ ,  $SD=.908$ ) was predicted by major, race, sensation seeking and boredom (Table 6.16). The equation explained 8.6% of the variance and was statistically significant.

Current event use of science and technology ( $M=.80$ ,  $SD=.879$ ) was predicted by gender, social media repertoire and surveillance/guidance (Table 6.16). The equation explained 7.9% of the variance and was statistically significant.

For current event use of consumer news ( $M=.76$ ,  $SD=.874$ ), the equation was found to be statistically significant (Table 6.16). The equation accounted for 7.3% of the variance (Table 6.16). Major, boredom and social media repertoire were found to be significant predictors in the equation.

For current event use of the news dimension of religion ( $M=.72$ ,  $SD=.868$ ), the equation was found to be statistically significant. The equation accounted for 2.6% of the variance (Table 6.16). Boredom, voyeurism, and social interaction were found to be significant predictors in the equation.

Legal current event use ( $M=.61$ ,  $SD=.906$ ) was predicted by gender, and affinity (Table 6.16). The equation explained 4.5% of the variance and was statistically significant.

RQ7, however, asked what are the strongest predictors of current events use on social media for 18-24 year-olds: demographic variables or gratifications (Table 6.17).

Hierarchical regression allows a data analysis method to enter independent variables in the order they are expected to or the literature dictates in order to evaluate their influence on the dependent variable (Keyton, 2010). The dependent variable was the sum score used to answer RQ5 and the equation accounted for 18.7% of the variance and was statistically significant. Current affairs, affinity, social media use, perpetual entertainment and information seeking were significant contributors in the final equation. Not one demographic variable was a significant contributor to predict current events use in the final equation, but the gratifications of perpetual entertainment and information seeking were the two largest significant predictors in the equation.

<b>Variable</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>SEB</b>	<b>β</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>ΔR<sup>2</sup></b>
<b>Step 1</b>					
Constant	23.448	1.950		.013	.013
Gender	.980	.783	.042		
Age	1.145	1.072	.044		
Race	.281	.545	.017		
Year of Study	.042	.503	.003		
Major	.019	.015	.042		
State of Origin	<b>-.125</b>	<b>.052</b>	<b>-.080*</b>		
<b>Step 2</b>					
Constant	7.471	2.890		.117	.105
Gender	1.050	.756	.045		
Age	1.440	1.019	.056		
Race	.170	.518	.010		
Year of Study	.108	.477	.009		
Major	.010	.014	.022		
State of Origin	-.096	.050	-.061		
Current Affairs	<b>2.205</b>	<b>.431</b>	<b>.181***</b>		
Sensation Seeking	.629	.477	.045		
Boredom	-.796	.489	-.053		
Affinity	<b>2.902</b>	<b>.475</b>	<b>.207***</b>		
<b>Step 3</b>					
Constant	6.224	2.874		.137	.019
Gender	.611	.755	.026		
Age	1.780	1.011	.069		
Race	.189	.513	.012		
Year of Study	.054	.472	.004		
Major	.007	.014	.015		
State of Origin	-.094	.049	-.060		
Current Affairs	<b>2.070</b>	<b>.428</b>	<b>.169***</b>		
Sensation Seeking	.477	.474	.034		
Boredom	-.874	.484	-.059		
Affinity	<b>2.620</b>	<b>.474</b>	<b>.187***</b>		
S.M. Repetoire	<b>.891</b>	<b>.201</b>	<b>.144***</b>		
<b>Step 4</b>					
Constant	6.270	2.866		.142	.006
Gender	.407	.757	.017		
Age	1.849	1.009	.071		
Race	.013	.517	.001		
Year of Study	.033	.471	.003		
Major	.007	.014	.015		
State of Origin	-.088	.049	-.057		
Current Affairs	<b>2.097</b>	<b>.427</b>	<b>.172***</b>		
Sensation Seeking	.474	.472	.034		
Boredom	-.802	.484	-.054		
Affinity	<b>2.478</b>	<b>.477</b>	<b>.177***</b>		
S.M. Repetoire	<b>.832</b>	<b>.202</b>	<b>.135***</b>		
Social Media Use	.045	.019	.078*		
<b>Step 5</b>					
Constant	1.167	2.851		.205	.063
Gender	-.171	.742	-.007		
Age	1.287	.983	.050		
Race	-.050	.501	-.003		
Year of Study	.193	.455	.016		
Major	.007	.014	.017		
State of Origin	-.062	.048	-.040		
Current Affairs	<b>1.124</b>	<b>.459</b>	<b>.092*</b>		
Sensation Seeking	-.183	.465	-.013		
Boredom	-.905	.469	-.061		
Affinity	<b>1.327</b>	<b>.491</b>	<b>.095**</b>		
S.M. Repetoire	<b>.619</b>	<b>.197</b>	<b>.100**</b>		
Social Media Use	.025	.018	.043		
Perp. Entertainment	<b>2.804</b>	<b>.618</b>	<b>.212***</b>		
Information Seeking	<b>1.490</b>	<b>.684</b>	<b>.107*</b>		
Surveillance/Guidance	-.240	.564	-.019		
Voyeurism	.354	.579	.028		
Social Interaction	-.027	.459	-.002		

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

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion, Limitations and Conclusion**

This chapter discusses the findings of the study and offers explanations for the results offered in Chapter 3.

#### **Overview of Discussion**

This exploratory study examined the consumption of current events on social media by 18-24 year-olds and the psychological underpinnings why they are using social media for current events through uses-and-gratifications theoretical framework (Katz, Blumler and Guretvich, 1974; Rosengren, 1974). This study adds to the existing body of uses and gratification literature and can provide insights to the journalism world in a rapidly evolving news environment. This study also examined the factors on recall by 18-24 year-olds of current events from social media. Each hypothesis and research question will be discussed in numerical order.

RQ1 asked what subject areas or dimensions of news do 18-24 year-olds consume on social media (Table 6.10). Thirteen of the 22 different dimensions of news were consumed by the sample at least once a week on average with the leisurely dimensions of sports and entertainment having the largest means. Local, pop culture, political, campus, weather, celebrity, national, lifestyle, crime, hometown and other all displayed means of more 1.0 as well, representing a wide variety of subject matter as well. While Diddi and LaRose (2006) found that 18-24 year-olds consumed hometown newspapers, comedy news, cable news, Internet news and broadcast news from a variety of legacy, email and

Internet sources, the study did not take into account the selective process that is innate to social media that limits and controls exposure. Social media provides more selection and choice delivered directly to a user's account.

RQ3 asked what types of gratifications are most likely to be sought from 18-24 year-olds' use of current events on social media (Table 6.11).

The concept of perpetual entertainment, discovered as a result of the factor analysis in the findings, is unique to current events on social media by 18-24 year-olds. They want to have entertaining content all the time from their social media accounts. It is routine and an avenue to inform his or her self of what is going on in their world and their network's. The new gratification is an escape from reality in a self-constructed world of the user's choosing, filtering what content he or she sees or wants to access. The gratification can help inform the news-making process when news producers are creating content that is social media specific for 18-24 year-olds or similar demographic groups.

Entertainment was prevalent throughout the first factor and the most important finding of this study, perpetual entertainment, in this study. Entertainment is a dominant gratification in uses and gratifications studies (Eighmey & McCord, 1998; Kaye, 1998; Johnson & Kaye, 2003; Kaye & Johnson, 2002) of the Internet and intrinsically would be associated with social media. While current events may not all be hard news, social media offers users to let entertaining news, individualized to each user and complemented by those of his or her fellow users in their networks, into their newsfeeds. Coupled with the findings of RQ1, with sports and entertainment having the largest average means, the concept of entertainment is dominant in social media, whether it is current events or other types of content. In this study, respondents are primarily looking

to be entertained when they routinely log onto their social media accounts and find information or guidance in their own constructed and constrained networks.

This finding is important for a number of reasons. First, it is unique from Rubin's (1984) concepts of ritualized and instrumental use of media. The activity is routine, meaning it is not done subconsciously or with a guided intent, it is, rather, part of a college student's daily activity. Social media accounts can be accessed anywhere and at any time, further easing any difficulty a college student would have to make current events part of their daily routine. Second, this gratification is unique to current events on social media, content not studied before. It is an indication of what satisfaction 18-24 year-olds are looking for from current events in today's social media-informed age.

Habit was part of the newly found perpetual entertainment scale as social media use is not necessarily habitual, but more of a routinized activity. Voyeurism was a factor on its own and would intuitively be expected to be as social media gives the users glimpses into others' lives. Surveillance was combined with guidance representing the monitoring of users to help shape choices he or she is seeking some guidance on. While the factors were not as correlated before being entered into the principal component factor analysis, all were represented fairly well in the five factors. The results of this study suggest that even the medium may have changed, the legacy gratifications (Papacharissi and Mendelson, 2007; Diddi and LaRose, 2006; Vincent and Basil, 1997) of users may have not, but rather evolved into something more unique in the ubiquitous and personalized world of social media use.

Since social media by and large runs on an Internet connection, it would be inherent that gratifications of the Internet would be also be present for current events on



social media. All three (information seeking, entertainment and guidance) were represented strongly in the principal component factor analysis. Social media offers a blend of information, entertainment and opinions for its users. Guidance was a primary component of the surveillance/guidance factor offering users the ability to observe and make choices based upon the opinions of others, consistent with the findings of Kaye (2010). Current events on social media can provide an opinionated point of view on controversial topics depending on the source, leading to guidance on making up one's minds on complicated matters. Information seeking emerged as a gratification on its own in previous studies (Kinnally et al., 2008; Kaye & Johnson, 2002; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000) and in this study as well. Users, especially 18-24 year-olds, are turning towards social media to inform themselves of current events.

Social media can be used on a variety of devices, most easily on mobile devices such as mobile phones and tablets. Mobility would then likely be a gratification of current use on social media by 18-24 year-olds. The findings of this study found support as the notion that mobility was a construct in both the first and second factors, but it did not emerge as a factor on its own. Users want their current events wherever they can get access to them echoing the work of Leung and Wei (2000) on mobile phones.

Social interaction is a main attribute of social media. Users interact with their selected circles of fellow users whether it is current events or other content. Eighteen-year-old through 24-year-olds are no different as social interaction was found as a construct in the second, fourth and fifth factors. This study's findings supplement the findings on other social media of Johnson and Yang (2009) and Haridakis and Hanson (2009).

Overall, the majority of gratifications of legacy and social media, mobile phones and the Internet appeared in the factor analysis. Perhaps the most important finding was the creation of a new gratification that is specific to current events on social media—perpetual entertainment. RQ3 precipitated this finding by asking what kinds of unique gratifications are most likely to be sought from current event use on social media by 18-24 year-olds.

In addition to perpetual entertainment, information seeking, surveillance/guidance, voyeurism and social interaction all emerged as gratifications of current event use on social media by 18-24 year-olds. They are actively seeking to inform themselves of the news in their social media world and of the world around them through their accounts. They also are surveying their social media landscape in order to make decision or form opinions on complex or controversial issues. Through all of the first four factors, they are offering the gratification of social interaction by allowing them to interact with their selected networks on the latest news that has gone viral.

RQ5 asked what were the predictors of general current event use (Table 6.12) on social media by 18-24 year-olds while RQ7 specifically questioned whether demographic variables or gratifications were stronger predictors of current events use on social media (Table 6.17). No demographic variables significantly figured into the final prediction equation, but perpetual entertainment and information seeking has the largest beta coefficients in predicting current events use. This finding indicates that gratifications are the strongest predictor in explaining why 18-24 year-olds are using social media for current events. They are seeking to be constantly entertained and want to seek out information to inform themselves. General social media use and the psychological

antecedents of current affairs and affinity were also significant predictors in answering RQ5 and RQ7. The psychological motivation of current affairs or keeping up with the latest news would be an intuitive behavior of the sample who used current events on social media. Affinity is another psychological disposition that is intuitive as the population of interest need and have a strong affection for their current events on social media since they have basically constructed their news diet by themselves. It also inherent that the more time one spends on actively using social media, the more current events use would be expected. Current event use on social media by 18-24 year-olds is motivated, even if an entertainment gratification is dominant.

RQ2 asked what were the predictors of recall and current events use (Table 6.12).

RQ2's predictors of recall from current event use on social media, however, explain that while the use of current events may be motivated, demographic variables play an important role in predicting recall. Major and year of study were significant predictors. Taking into account the dummy coded variables, these results explain two things. One, that journalism associated majors (print journalism, broadcast journalism, public relations, advertising, visual communication) will likely have higher recall, possibly from curricular requirements of their respective courses or programs that require them to pay closer attention to current events. This may lead to the formation of habit and its predictive power posited by Diddi and LaRose (2006) of current events by 18-24 year-olds on legacy media. The year of study was coded to make college sophomores the majority or "1" and all other majors a "0." This negative beta coefficient can be interpreted as other years of study besides sophomores were more receptive to recalling current events. While seniors ( $M=3.32$ ,  $SD=.710$ ) and juniors ( $M=3.24$ ,  $SD=.910$ )

displayed higher means of recall than sophomores ( $M=3.18$ ,  $SD=.873$ ) and freshman ( $M=3.11$ ,  $SD=.929$ ), a one-way ANOVA was run in post-hoc analysis and was found not to be statistically significant. It is likely other spurious variables, possibly other media sources, existed in predicting recall. A recall test of more than four questions may help explain this finding in future research since the means were so close.

Intuitively, current affairs would be expected to predict recall. If one is predisposed to keeping up with the latest news, then he or she would likely remember what he or she read or saw. Voyeurism, however, had a negative beta coefficient, a finding that can be explained as if the more one likes to just watch others, it is not an engaged and activity that will promote recall. It is a passive activity and the less one was gratified by voyeurism, the more he or she would pay attention and be able to attain higher recall.

RQ6 asked what are the predictors of different dimensions of current events use on social media by 18-24 year-olds. Each dimension of news presented different gratifications and predictors of their use.

The dimension of sports (Table 6.13), the most consumed type of current events on social media by 18-24 year-olds, was predicted by gender, race, current affairs, surveillance/guidance and perpetual entertainment. The predictive power of gender was skewed towards the male demographic after dummy coding, a reasonable expectation given males need for sports news. Race was geared toward whites. A possible explanation for this may be other races may be finding their sports news on other sources or just not have as much an interest as whites do of sports. The psychological antecedent of current affairs can easily include the need to keep up with sports news.

Surveillance/guidance's predictive influence can be explained by the notion that users already have their mind made up on sports issues, news and allegiances, so they do not need to take others' opinion or activity into consideration to make choices related to sports. Sports, while it does have news value is by and large used for entertainment, so the gratification of perpetual entertainment was not a surprising finding. It has the largest predictive effect of any of the variables on sports. Eighteen through 24-year-olds want their sports news to be entertained and they want it all the time.

Perpetual entertainment was a large predictor of entertainment (Table 6.12), the second most consumed dimension of news. The gratification of perpetual entertainment would be expected to be correlated with entertainment news. Information seeking was the largest predictor, followed by perpetual entertainment, voyeurism, social media repertoire, social media use, surveillance/guidance, social interaction and boredom. Information seeking behavior for entertainment news tells us an important finding about 18-24 year-olds' use of current events on social media: they are consuming and actively seeking entertainment news. The more social media accounts one owns, social media repertoire, and the more social media they generally use would expose them to more entertainment current events on social media. 18-24 year-olds like to observe what is going on or what others are looking at in the entertainment world or voyeurism on their accounts.

The negative predictive power of surveillance/guidance, boredom and social interaction explains a couple of things. 18-24 year-olds are consuming entertainment current events for their own reasons, not to be relieved of being boredom as they are actively seeking this dimension of news. They are not looking to interact with others about entertainment, but rather use it intrinsically. They are not looking to see what

others are feeling or thinking about entertainment news, but instead they already have or are forming their own opinions.

Current events of local news was predicted by perpetual entertainment, information seeking, affinity, and surveillance/guidance (Table 6.13). The notion of being constantly entertained is found in predicting other dimension of news as well, so it would be expected that 18-24 year-olds would want to know about the community they live in, even if it is slanted towards entertaining them. Information seeking behavior is along those lines as well, explained by the need for 18-24 year-olds to read about their immediate surroundings off of campus. They also have a affinity towards local current events on social media, perhaps from a sense of familiarity. The only negative predictor, surveillance/guidance, can be inferred as 18-24 year-olds like their local news, but don't feed an overwhelming need to just watch it or seek guidance from them. They internally will decide whether the news is important to them and make their own evaluations based on their own ponderings.

Current events of pop culture news was predicted by perpetual entertainment, gender and voyeurism (Table 6.13). The subject matter of pop culture is a constant source of entertainment, an attribute tied very heavily to perpetual entertainment. With dummy coding, the variable of gender was skewed towards the female demographic displaying an inclination of college female students towards pop culture news or the latest fad. Voyeurism, or seeing what others are doing on social media, allows 18-24 year-olds to keep up on the latest in vogue news by learning from others.

Consumption of political news, however, was a negatively predicted by voyeurism (Table 6.13). Eighteen through 24-year-olds are simply not just watching

others are doing for political news, they are actively seeking or have a propensity to pay attention to the latest happenings in politics as evidenced by the predictors of current affairs and information seeking. Year of study was also a predictor. With the dummy coding used, it appears more college sophomores are seeking political news. When they are freshman, they may not be as engaged politically. When they are upperclassmen, they may be using different news sources.

Use of campus news was largely predicted by perpetual entertainment ( $\beta=.208$ ) and information seeking ( $\beta=.116$ ). 18-24 year-olds want to be constantly amused by their immediate surroundings and will actively seek out any information about their academic community to attain it. Surveillance/guidance ( $\beta=-.092$ ) was a negative predictor of campus news. This finding indicates that the less 18-24 year-olds are using campus news for the gratifications of surveillance/guidance, the more they are actively seeking information and entertainment, not passively watching or seeking any type of guidance.

Campus news was also predicted by gender, affinity, social media repertoire and social media use (Table 6.14). With the dummy coding, females were more likely to use campus news. 18-24 year-olds overall have an affinity towards campus news. Also, the more accounts they have and the more they use social media, the more likely they are to consume campus news.

Perpetual entertainment and information seeking were the two largest predictors of weather news (Table 6.14). The constant need to be entertained and informed about an impending or current weather situation would make sense to 18-24 year-olds who need to travel from building to building. Gender, sensation seeking, boredom and affinity were also predictors of weather current events on social media. As indicated by gender being a

predictor, the female demographic was a larger predictor of weather use. Females likely care more about how the weather may or may not affect their physical appearance in going from class to class or even out of it. Eighteen through 24 year-olds also were looking for some excitement whether it was good or bad news about weather. Affinity being a predictor is likely explained by social media being a likable source of weather news, rather than legacy media. Finally, the negative predictive influence of boredom indicates that the use of weather news is an active and engaged process, not simply something to pass the time or relieve boredom.

Celebrity news was predicted by perpetual entertainment and voyeurism (Table 6.14). It is logical that celebrities that are tied to entertainment and letting others look in on their lives. 18-24 year-olds need to be constantly entertained by the lavish and sometimes troubled lives of celebrities and they will just watch them if the news is there. The sample also used celebrity news for boredom relief or break from the monotony of their studies. Gender was also skewed towards the female demographic as females will likely show more of an interest in celebrity news. Year of study was also a predictor, indicating that more than college sophomores are looking for this type of news. The more accounts one has, the more likely they are to use celebrity news as evidenced by the predictive influence of social media repertoire.

Gender, age, current affairs, perpetual entertainment, and voyeurism were all predictors of national news (Table 6.14). Current affairs, or the need to keep up with the latest news, would be rationally tied to consumption of national news as would perpetual entertainment. Gender, which was skewed towards males, and age, which was skewed towards those 20 and older, indicate older males will consume more national news than



others. The negative predictive power of voyeurism shows that 18-24 year-olds are not just watching the actions of others on national news, but more of a need to keep up actively with the latest news in current affairs.

Gender, affinity and voyeurism were all predictors of lifestyle news (Table 6.14). Females were more likely to be consumers of lifestyle news. Eighteen through 24-year-olds also liked their lifestyle news on social media and also like to watch the lives and actions of others, traits inherent with lifestyle news.

Crime current event use on social media was predicted by affinity and perpetual entertainment (Table 6.15). Eighteen through 24-year-olds develop a liking to consuming their crime news on social media and they like to be constantly entertained by reading about criminal follies, arrests or details of crime.

Hometown current event use on social media was predicted by sensation seeking, affinity, perpetual entertainment and information seeking (Table 6.15) . The negative predictive influence of information seeking and sensation seeking behaviors display the notion that 18-24 year-olds are not actively looking for information on their hometown and or any excitement from it. They do, however, enjoy being constantly entertained by news on their hometown and have a liking towards it.

Gender, skewed towards the male demographic, and perpetual entertainment were the significant predictors for “other” types of news that did not fit into the other types of categories (Table 6.15). Perpetual entertainment again has predictive influence on current events on social media and males are consuming another dimension on news not explored in this study.

Consumption of health news was predicted by major, sensation seeking, boredom, and affinity (Table 6.15). This finding explains that majors other than those in journalism and mass communication are consuming health news. They are also not looking to relieve the boredom they may experience, but are looking for excitement and have a affinity towards health news on social media.

Education current event use was predicted by age, sensation seeking, social media repertoire and perpetual entertainment (Table 6.15). Demographically, 18-24 year-olds older than 20 years of age are using educational current events on social media. Eighteen through 24-year-olds are not looking to seek excitement from education news, but rather be constantly entertained through the variety of accounts they have.

Gender, age, current affairs, affinity and voyeurism all predicted international news (Table 6.16). Gender was skewed towards the male demographic and 18-24 year-olds older than 20, in the age demographic, were likely to consume news outside the borders of the United States. The need to keep current and in the know about global affairs, current affairs behavior, along with a liking for this type of news, and watching the world through social media would be likely explanations for behaviors and gratifications of international news.

Business news was predicted by gender, age, current affairs and social media repertoire (Table 6.16). Males and 18-24 year-olds outside of the 18-20 demographic used business news more than others. The need to stay current in the latest economic or financial news is a likely predictor of business news. Also, the more accounts one has, the more likely they were to use business news.

Major, race, sensation seeking and boredom predicted culture and the arts on current events (Table 6.16). 18-24 year-olds of races other than white were more likely to consume this type of news. Eighteen through 24-year-olds in general actively seek out this type of news, but did not use it for boredom relief. Majors presented an interesting finding that journalism and mass communication majors were more likely to consume this dimension of news compared to other majors. A possible explanation for this finding is that journalism and mass communication majors have a need to know a lot of things about the world around them and culture and the arts is a dimension of news they may have to report on, design graphics for, or develop a campaign for.

Current event use of science and technology was predicted by gender, social media repertoire and surveillance/guidance (Table 6.16). Males were more likely to use this dimension of news more than females. The more social media accounts one has, the more likely they will run across and use science/technology current events. The sample also like to keep a tab on and seek guidance from scientific and technological news with current events on social media.

Major, boredom and social media repertoire were predictors of consumer news on social media by 18-24 year-olds (Table 6.16). Just as in predicting science and technology, the more accounts one has, the more likely they are to come across and use consumer news. Journalism and mass communication affiliated majors were more likely to use consumer news as well. In general, the sample did not use consumer news for boredom relief.

The sample also did not use religious news for boredom relief or to interact socially (Table 6.16). The dimension of religious news could be selected by the user by

his or her newsfeeds or affiliations with various organizations. It is a filtering mechanism that limits the exposure to other types of religious views different from the users' and makes the consumption of religious news an activity that is internalized and not conducive for debate. The gratification of voyeurism in predicting religious news is supported by the idea that 18-24 year-olds like to watch what others are doing or what they believe.

Legal current event use was predicted by gender and skewed towards males. Affinity was also a negative predictor, indicating students did not feel a fondness for what sometimes is not an enjoyable form of news (Table 6.16).

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study, while as comprehensive as possible, does have its limitations due to it being an exploratory study. Limitations of this study are discussed in order to clarify this study's contribution to uses and gratifications literature and offer suggestions for future research.

This study only examined psychologically why 18-24 year-olds use current events on social media. It builds upon previous studies that looked at legacy and new media, but not social media. It is not a study examining general social media use, but rather a specified type of content, current events. It is also exploratory in nature, as it is a one-shot study during a constrained time frame.

The sampling method for this study was appropriate as was the sample size, but did not take into account cultural differences as this was study conducted at a large, southeastern university. Cluster sampling of different geographic regions may be able to

explicate any differences. Also, this study, cannot generalize to students at four-year public institutions. A study to examine any possible differences between students at two-year institutions and private institutions is another logical step in examining this phenomenon to study the population of college students.

Sometimes capturing truly cognitive responses without any other confounding variables can be a less than perfect science in uses and gratifications research. Some researchers have argued that routine uses and gratifications methodologies rely too much on self-interpretation rather than observable behavior (Rosenstein & Grant, 1997). Subjects may not be aware of the higher order cognitive processes that control their behavior (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977) and self-report based on whatever stimuli, including some effect of social desirability (Catania et al., 1990; Sudman & Bradburn, 1982) even if the survey is administered on paper (Aquilino, 1994; Aquilino & Losciuto, 1990; Dillman & Tarnai, 1991; Fowler et al., 1998, Hochstim, 1967), may be present (Rosenstein & Grant, 1997).

Recall was measured by four true or false questions that were salient at the time. A test of more than four questions may be a more accurate measurement of recall. A longitudinal study or and experimental design may yield different results since spurious variables such as other news sources were not measured or taken into account. It would be beneficial to see if recall improved over time with different subject matter.

“Other” current events were used and it would be beneficial to identify and operationalize those dimensions of news that were not presented in the 21 other dimensions of news in this study for further analysis.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Since this study attempted to identify the “why” 18-24 year-olds are using current events on social media and a very preliminary “what” they are doing, more research would call for more of the “what” and the “how.”

The depth of information they are consuming and deeper measurements of recall of those current events are important variables for professional and academics going forward studying the news consumption process. Are 18-24 year-olds simply reading the hyperlinks or just the first paragraph of stories?

As suggested in the limitations of the study, a longitudinal study of recall or an experiment would explicate the long-term effects of current events consumption on social media by 18-24 year-olds. It would contain pedagogical merit in forming habit and creating a more informed and media literate public.

An online ethnography would also help examine 18-24 year-olds’ consumption patterns of current events on social media. This method would allow for more rich data to be collected and preserve the form of online interaction. This would also account for any lack of validity in self-reported responses.

### **Conclusion**

With the growth of social media as information sources for undergraduates (Kim et al., 2014), this study adds to the existing body of literature of uses and gratifications, but with a burgeoning form of content for a specific audience: the uses and gratifications of current events on social media.

Five gratifications were found for 18-24 year-olds’ use of current events on social media, four of which were found to be gratifications for other tangentially related mediums in legacy (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007; Diddi & LaRose, 2006; Vincent

and Basil, 1997), Internet (Kinnally et al., 2008; Kaye & Johnson, 2002; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000), and social media (Johnson & Yang, 2009; Haridakis & Hanson, 2009).

Most importantly, this study found a new gratification unique to current event use on social media—perpetual entertainment. It was the largest predictor in overall use of current events on social media and was a dominant factor throughout the findings and discussion.

While a variety of different factors predicted the use of different types of current events on social media, perpetual entertainment was found to be a predictor on 12 out of 22 of those different types of news. 18-24 year-olds are routinely getting their news on social media with the caveat that it be entertaining. It is shared from people within his or her constructed network. It is the inherent nature of current events use on social media to be entertaining, be constantly producing new content and from sources of one's own choosing. This notion is also different from general mass communication. Users are sharing and consuming information from trusted and known sources in an interpersonal sense. It is a social activity that is predicated on what others may see as being important or deemed as “current events,” It is this social construction of “current events” that make 18-24 year-olds' use of current events on social media unique. While this study examines one specific form of content on social media, the concept of perpetual entertainment may hold everlasting merit as older social media will be usurped by news ones. There will always be something more interactive and user-friendly that will replace the current crop of social media.

As society becomes more and more dependent of online sources in the digital age for information, current event use on social media will only continue to grow, especially

with the current crop of 18-24 year-olds becoming the next wave of news consumers that will drive the platforms and content of tomorrow's news decisions. 18-24 year-olds are using different types of current events on social media for different things psychologically, but most salient is the notion that current events on social media are there to perpetually entertain them. The group of 18-24 year-olds may be missing out on important information vital to the world around them. Perhaps, certain dimensions of news will be linked with certain mediums. Those with an entertainment-based focus would be linked with social media.

For the newsmakers and outlets, this study sends a clear and direct message for the attention of the next wave of news consumers. They must make their content enjoyable and up to date as soon as possible to compete with other sources of news.

Recall of what they see or read can be explained by antecedent current affairs behavior or the need to keep up with the latest news. The likelihood of being a journalism and mass communication major would entail one keeping up with the news as well.

This study provided an operational definition of framework of current events based upon prior literature: they have social relevance, individual relevance and are time constrained. This study was the first of its type to look specifically at the underlying motivations and gratifications of different dimensions of news that an individual finds with current events on social media.

As the news production process and news consumption patterns move towards a more personalized approach with social media, the potential impact of this study will only continue to grow in scope. A new form of social media will arise to usurp its older predecessors.



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## **Appendix A:**

### **Social Media-Focus Group Guide**

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#### **Introduction and discussion of format**

- a. Introduction of interviewer again, reason for study
- b. Need to feel free to talk; basic rules of etiquette apply
- c. Reiterate that responses and respondents are anonymous
- d. Do not make a case for or against social media use. NO JUDGEMENTS
- e. Thank them again for their time.

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#### **Social Media Use**

For the purposes of this study, we define social media as a networked online experience where you can control who is linked to you or not and you have a personal account on. What social media sites do you use?

How do you access social media?

How many days a week do you actively use social media?

Approximately, how many hours a week in an average week do you actively use social media?

When I say current events, what does a current event mean to you?

When is a current event not a current event anymore?

What types of current events do you see on social media?

Where do you regularly get your news from?

What do you once you see a current event on social media that interests you?

Why do you use current events on social media?

Anything else you would like to add?

“It has a been a great pleasure to speak with you today and I really want to thank you for your time today.”

## Appendix B:

### Survey Questionnaire

Serial No. \_\_\_\_\_

#### Survey of current events use on social media

I am a Ph.D. candidate at the School of Journalism and Mass Communications at USC, and I am conducting a survey about current event use on social media by college students. This survey is anonymous. No questions will identify you and your answers will be kept confidential and used only for statistical analysis. Thank you for your participation.

**Background:** We define “current events or CE” as news that is relevant to you, but only if it is not out of date to you. We also define “social media or SM” as sites you access through an Internet connection that allows you to create your own profile and control interaction with a selected list of others. Ex. Facebook, Twitter. This survey is asking primarily about **current event use on social media, not general use of social media.**

**1. Do you use social media?**

☐ Yes ☐ No (If “yes” continue; if “no,” stop)

**2. What do you use to access social media? (Check all that apply)**

- ☐ Tablet computer (iPad, Xoom, Dash, etc.)  
☐ Smartphone (iPhone, Blackberry, Android, etc.)  
☐ Music player (iPod Touch, etc.)  
☐ Computer (Desktop, Laptop, Net Browser)

**3. How many hours in an average week do you actively use social media? \_\_\_\_\_ hours/week**

**4. When you see current events on social media, what do you with it (Check all that apply)?**

- ☐ Share a link with others  
☐ Retweet them  
☐ Tag yourself in a post or picture  
☐ Like it  
☐ Comment on it  
☐ Just read the comments  
☐ Follow the source of the link

**5. How many times did you read about these different subject matters of current events on social media in the past week?**

	0	1-2	3-5	6+
National	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
International	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Political	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sports	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Crime	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Campus	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Science and Technology	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Legal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lifestyle	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pop culture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
News on your hometown	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Religion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consumer news	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Culture and the arts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Weather	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education and schools	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Celebrity news	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**6. On a scale from 1 to 5 with “1” meaning “strongly disagree” and “5” meaning “strongly agree” how much do you agree with the following statements?**

I use social media for current events because...

	1	2	3	4	5
I can access them anywhere	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
They have a wide variety of information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I make up my mind on important issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To learn about society	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can talk to other people about them	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can find out about daily life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
They keep me entertained when bored	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can judge personal qualities of politicians	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can understand the world	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I read others' comments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It's a habit of mine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I find the people in the stories fascinating	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
They help me pass time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can use them on the go	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I always do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I find issues that affect people like myself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It helps me participate in discussions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am a news junkie	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can talk to others about the linked sites	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
They keep me up to date on news	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
They help me find information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
They are portable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can compare my opinions to others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can find what I need or want to know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like to watch events in others' lives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It helps me meet new people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It's part of my daily routine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
They are with me all the time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It makes me want to learn more	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
They are entertaining	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
They are fun	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like reading about famous people/others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please continue the survey  
on the back of this sheet



7. On a scale from 1 to 5 with "1" meaning "strongly disagree" and "5" meaning "strongly agree," how much do you agree with the following statements regarding current events use on social media?

	1	2	3	4	5
I'd rather use CE on SM than anything else.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I could easily do without CE on SM for several days.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would feel lost without CE on SM.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If I didn't have my CE on SM, I would not miss it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Using CE on SM is one of the most important things I do every day.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. On a scale from 1 to 5 with "1" meaning "strongly disagree" and "5" meaning "strongly agree," how much do you agree with the following statements regarding current events in general and not necessarily on social media?

	1	2	3	4	5
I keep up with current events daily.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am interested in current events.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I use current events in daily conversation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I use current events to keep me informed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel out of place if I am not informed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. On a scale from 1 to 5 with "1" meaning "strongly disagree" and "5" meaning "strongly agree," how much do you agree with the following statements?

	1	2	3	4	5
I would like to explore unfamiliar places	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like modern or abstract paintings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like to try new foods	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
People should dress any way they want	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would like to take off on a trip with no pre-planned routes or timetables	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. On a scale from 1 to 5 with "1" meaning "strongly disagree" and "5" meaning "strongly agree," how much do you agree with the following statements?

	1	2	3	4	5
I hate watching a movie for the second time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I get bored seeing the same people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I get bored with people who always say the same thing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I get restless when I spend too much time at home.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I prefer friends who are excitingly unpredictable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

11. On a scale from 1 to 5 with "1" meaning "strongly disagree" and "5" meaning "strongly agree," how much do you agree with the following statement?

	1	2	3	4	5
I don't use social media as much as others do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. How many of these social media do you use or have an account on? (Check all that apply)

<input type="checkbox"/> Facebook
<input type="checkbox"/> YouTube
<input type="checkbox"/> Twitter
<input type="checkbox"/> Yahoo!Answers
<input type="checkbox"/> Tumblr
<input type="checkbox"/> LinkedIn
<input type="checkbox"/> MySpace
<input type="checkbox"/> Stumbleupon
<input type="checkbox"/> FourSquare
<input type="checkbox"/> Pinterest
<input type="checkbox"/> Other

13. Please answer the following questions as either true or false to the best of your knowledge:

A YouTube trailer of an anti-Islam film sparked an attack on the U.S. embassy in Libya in September :

☐ True ☐ False

Mitt Romney is not a candidate for the Republican Party in the 2012 U.S. Presidential Election:

☐ True ☐ False

Michael Clarke Duncan did not die in September :

☐ True ☐ False

The 2012 Summer Olympics were held in London:

☐ True ☐ False

Please answer some questions about yourself below:

14. What is your gender? ☐ Male ☐ Female

15. What is your age? ☐ 18-20 ☐ 21-23 ☐ 24 and older

16. What is your major?

17. What is your year of study?

☐ Freshman ☐ Sophomore ☐ Junior ☐ Senior ☐ Grad

18. What is your race?

☐ White ☐ Black ☐ Hispanic ☐ Asian

19. What is your state of origin?

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Thank you for completing my survey.  
Any questions, please e-mail  
karlis@email.sc.edu

"Strongly disagree"

"Strongly agree"

## Appendix C:

### Study Approval



OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE

July 23, 2012

Mr. John Karlis  
Mass Communications & Information Studies  
Journalism and Mass Communications  
Coliseum 4010C  
Columbia, SC 29208

Re: **Pro00016928**

Study Title: *That's News to Me: Current Event use on Social Media by College Students*

FYI: University of South Carolina Assurance number: FWA 00000404 / IRB Registration number: 00000240

Dear Mr. Karlis:

In accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2), the referenced study received an exemption from Human Research Subject Regulations on . No further action or Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight is required, as long as the project remains the same. However, you must inform this office of any changes in procedures involving human subjects. Changes to the current research protocol could result in a reclassification of the study and further review by the IRB.

Because this project was determined to be exempt from further IRB oversight, consent document(s), if applicable, are not stamped with an expiration date.

Research related records should be retained for a minimum of three years after termination of the study.

The Office of Research Compliance is an administrative office that supports the USC Institutional Review Board. If you have questions, please contact Arlene McWhorter at [arlenem@sc.edu](mailto:arlenem@sc.edu) or (803) 777-7095.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "T. Coggins".

Thomas A. Coggins  
Director

cc: Ran Wei