

COMMUNITY-FOCUSED SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Mass Communication

Sam Houston State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

by

Emily J. Schulze

May, 2019

COMMUNITY-FOCUSED SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

by

Emily J. Schulze

APPROVED:

Nam Young Kim, PhD
Thesis Director

Lee Miller , PhD
Committee Member

Robin Johnson, PhD
Committee Member

Ronald E. Shields, PhD
Dean, College of Fine Arts and Mass
Communication

ABSTRACT

Schulze, Emily J., *Community-focused social media engagement*. Master of Arts (Digital Media), May, 2019, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas.

This study's purpose is to better understand a local community members' use of social media in relation to motivation and perception of connectivity through an online survey capturing information from community members. Research questions in this study explore the relationship between a local community's motivations to use a community newspaper's Facebook page and perceived connection to the community. Employing the uses and gratifications theory approach and four motives (social motivation, information seeking motivation, entertainment motivation, and past-time motivation), the study investigated the uses of a local community newspaper's Facebook page among members of the community – both those that use the social media page and those that do not. In addition, the study examined the relationship between users' intentions to return to the newspaper's Facebook page and their perceptions of connection to community. Findings from the study shows a positive relationship with three motivations (social, information seeking, and entertainment) to use the Facebook page and users' perceived connection to their community. This means those motivated to use the Facebook page for social, information seeking or entertainment motivations may have strong to moderate levels of perceived connections to their community. Additionally, the study found a direct relationship between strong perceptions of connection community and intentions to return to the Huntsville Item's Facebook page, meaning the more perceived connection participants have to their community the more they will use the Facebook page. The practical implications of this study provide insight to community news organizations and community members on how social media can be a valuable tool in community

engagement. The main theoretical implications of this study support the field of U&G theory by demonstrating the initiative of users based on their personal motives to use media.

KEY WORDS: Community newspaper, Social media, Uses and gratification, Motives

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
I INTRODUCTION	1
Literature Review.....	4
Method	12
Data analysis and results.....	17
Conclusion	25
REFERENCES	27
APPENDIX.....	30
VITA	34

CHAPTER I

Introduction

A solitary person staring at a smart phone or digital screen is the typical picture that might come to mind when one visualizes an Internet user. It is the same kind of vision that some critics and scholars likely have in mind as they contend that Americans are progressively losing their sense of local community due to the influence of digital media (Putnam, 1996, 2000). While some perceive digital media as negatively impacting community engagement, is digital media a hope for community engagement? Moreover, if so, could a digital media platform already serving the community, particularly a local newspaper's social media, be the means for local community engagement?

Although the digital age connects individuals on a global level, some argue that there are repercussions on a local level. Internet entrepreneur, Mark Zuckerberg, proposed this idea when he posted on Facebook his views on the future of social media. Zuckerberg suggested that globalization risked leaving some people behind including local communities. He noted, "a striking decline in the important social infrastructure of local communities over the past few decades. Since the 1970s, membership in some local groups has declined by as much as one-quarter, cutting across all segments of the population." In this point, Zuckerberg suggests the need to investigate whether certain media platforms can improve local community engagement in the social media era (Zuckerberg, 2017).

Like Zuckerberg, others have noted the tensions between globalization and local community engagement. A *Huffington Post* contributor describes contemporary digital

media culture as one where people have grown further apart from each other asking, “What sense does it make to turn your back on the thousands, maybe millions, of people living around you in the same city?” Tanaka also sees a bright side that includes the possibility of “a new direction of collaborating, sharing, and togetherness” through the same technology, that powers globalization – the Internet (Tanaka, 2016).

While digital media provides many information resources, local newspapers are still a particularly important source for information about local affairs. (Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001) As technology advancements have made it easier and less expensive to distribute national newspaper content, like *The New York Times* in local markets around the country, local newspapers have had to adapt to the competition. Because of the *Times* expanded distribution, a study indicated local newspapers reduced national and international coverage and increased local content (George & Waldfogel, 2006). The results concluded there is some cause for concern that nonlocal media such as the *Times* foster disengagement from the local community by educated consumers who are reading less local news and more national news.

During the digital age, local newspapers have seen a decline in readership. However, research shows use of newspapers continue to have positive effects on civic participation. For instance, Shah and colleagues show use of a newspaper’s internet content more strongly influenced civic participation among young adults based on the exchange of information offered to users (Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001) This dominant internet effect offers insight into future cultural shifts as they relate to community engagement and news media.

A case study of New Orleans blogs that emerged after hurricane Katrina demonstrates the power of social media to provide a resilient local news resource as well as a powerful means to community connection (Ostertag & Ortiz, 2014). Looking at a group of local bloggers who cultivated social ties and fostered participation, revealed the possibility of repairing a community through the power of social media. Angered by the news reports on the aftermath of Katrina, which were viewed as inaccurate and misleading, several people in New Orleans took to blogging as a way of sharing their own narratives and providing resources for others. Through the process, the bloggers unified their efforts, forming a digital network that provided reliable information to the community. As this blogosphere developed, participants began to meet in person moving the community from online to also offline. These ongoing, in-person gatherings furthered users' motivations for social connections with residents in the region. The study reveals how social media can be a powerful tool to meet users' needs to connect with their local communities not only online, but also offline.

As digital media provides a wide range of options for people to connect globally, how do small communities compete and maintain connectivity on a local level? Understanding how individuals can successfully engage on a local level is important. While globalization strengthens, there is potential for individuals to be less locally connected to their community as the information and people they are exposed to compete with information and people from across the globe. This scenario potentially creates a "socially far-sighted" reality with news, activities, participation and culture becoming "blurry" on a local level in comparison to national and global connectivity.

Therefore, this research project aims to examine whether a local newspaper's social media can be the means for community engagement. To understand this issue, this research focuses on the relationship between the motives of social media users and their gratifications from social media use, particularly their feelings of connection with their community. Using the uses and gratification perspective, this project will expand the knowledge of the relationship between local community members' motivations and gratification to use a local newspaper's social media and their actual social media engagements through enhanced feelings and perceptions of engagement on a local-level. This project result will provide information for local newspapers to consider regarding their value as a source of community engagement. Moreover, this study also aims to provide insight for a community to consider for how to foster community engagement through a digital media resource.

Literature Review

The popularity of social media and its role

Social media is primarily utilized as a means of communication. A 2018 Pew Research Center survey of U.S. adults found Facebook and YouTube remain on top in social media popularity, as a majority of U.S. adults use each of these sites. Approximately two-thirds of U.S. adults (68%) identify as Facebook users, and roughly three-quarters of those users access Facebook daily (Pew Research Center Survey, 2018).

Similar to the research of a New Orleans blogosphere as a means to community connection (Ostertag & Ortiz, 2014), there are further examples of utilizing Facebook as a tool for engaging others. A study on why Christians use Facebook for religious purposes found users to be more likely to engage others. Brubaker and Haigh (2017)

found those who are more religious and who frequently use Facebook for posting, liking, commenting, and sharing content are more likely to minister to others.

From a commercial standpoint, companies have identified social media as a valuable tool in customer engagement. Research points to Facebook as one of the most significant social networking sites where company-created fan pages featuring brand-related content, are utilized to connect directly with customers (Rahman, 2016).

In line with the popularity of social media, most media entities like television, radio and news organizations have created branded profiles on social media platforms in an attempt to build a broader public profile. While news media are progressively using Facebook for content distribution and user interaction, research indicates that most news media groups lack a clear strategy on using the social media platform, resulting in low participation and minimal interaction (Hille & Bakker, 2013).

Regarding a newspaper's use of social media for connecting with audiences, research shows that for many who are continually connected through mobile devices, it is social media that directs their news consumption. This happens by clicking news headlines that appear on social media feeds from their friends. Although news was not the most important type of content for young users, the study showed users are partly motivated to read about current events because of their need to interact and be aware of the news shared by others (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, & Matassi, 2017).

While audiences are more connected to digital media, not all news consumers are using social media to get their news information. Research shows that there are differences in media consumption between age groups and points to adults in the Baby

Boomers generation as being a demographic that is consuming the least amount of news from social media platforms (Diehl, Barnidge, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2018).

Local newspaper vs. national newspapers

A 2014 study points to modern journalism as a community-building process. The study argues that part of a journalist's role is to build connections among community members by establishing exchanges through social media. One example cites a small town in Missouri. While the paper serves a community of merely 2,000 citizens, the paper's Facebook page has more than 3000 likes. From the study's perspective, the paper's Facebook page serves as a "town megaphone" and points to building direct exchanges with audiences as key (Lewis, Holton, & Coddington, 2014). Additional research suggests the local media have the ability to improve relations of community members and to encourage solidarity on a local level (Gaile, 2013). This demonstrates the possibility that local media are creators of a community's identity, sharing common values and culture.

In comparison to a small-town newspaper's 3,000 Facebook likes, overall, most Facebook research on a national news level tends to solely focus on the economic impact of social media on the news company. For instance, one of the largest newspapers in the US, *The New York Times*, boasts 2 million Facebook likes (Ju, Jeong, Chyi, 2014). Examining social media on a national news level, a study analyzed the effectiveness of the top 66 US newspapers' Facebook and Twitter news platforms. Although the study indicated a positive relationship between newspapers' Facebook, Twitter, internet content and print readerships, social media subscribers represent a small fraction of print and internet users. The extent of social media contributing positively to web traffic and

advertising revenue for national newspapers was viewed as underwhelming in the study. Additional research from an economics perspective, views the effectiveness of large newspapers' social media strategy as questionable (Ju, Jeong, & Chyi, 2014).

Through examining a number of news media entities – large and small – Hille and Bakker suggest that the media industry must recognize the dissimilarities within the industry to best utilize the benefits Facebook offers (Hille & Bakker, 2013). This means, not all news organizations should have the same social media strategy. Since large and small media organizations serve different audiences, it requires different approaches, and it is important to understand what draws audiences to a local newspaper's social media, particularly Facebook page.

Community engagement

Academic scholars have explored the Internet's effect on social capital in terms of community engagement and perception of community. While a 2012 study of online activity of Internet users showed no single Internet effect on social capital, it did identify that at a time of dispersed community, where individuals have moved from less chatting in the local cafes to more chatting in online communities, the Internet can facilitate social contact, supplementing face-to-face contact. Their analysis also recognized that at a time of declining community engagement, the Internet provides tools to increase engagement (Quan-Haase, Wellman, Witte, Hampton, 2002).

What are today's influential community institutions that are fostering interactions with neighbors? Research suggests that people's habits of modern community engagement "are less formal" compared to the community institutions of the past and "they are more project/task/need-based" (Sanford, 2007, p. 169). Efficacy, emotional and

cognitive states of community engagement are three factors that have been utilized in previous community engagement and media use studies (Obach & Tobin, 2014), (Smith & Gallicano, 2015).

Efficacy in perceived connection to community

In defining and measuring community engagement, Obach and Tobin (2014) utilized survey questions from the US Census and national research organizations designed to track political and civic engagement. In the study, connection to community was measured with survey questions related to efficacy - determining whether or not people felt they had the ability to initiate positive change in their community. Their research suggests a person's self-reporting sense of efficacy in local affairs as key in identifying a greater sense of connection to their community.

Emotional and cognitive states in perceived connection to community

In defining engagement within social media, some research has focused on the emotional and cognitive states of social media users. Through in-depth interviews and focus groups obtaining descriptions of participants' meanings and motivations, Smith and Gallicano (2015) see social media engagement as a mental and emotional immersion of social media. Their research sees a user's cognitive and emotional connections as a more progressed level of engagement compared to usage or activity of social media tools. Although the engagement involves social media actions, the user activities are not what defines the concept; rather it is the cognitive and emotional involvement of using social media that defines social media engagement.

Drawing on the research described, this study integrates three aspects of community engagement into a more comprehensive approach. From an efficacy

approach, understanding if people feel they can initiate positive change; a cognitive approach regarding a person's mental or logical connection to community; and an emotional approach regarding their personal feelings of connection to community. To better understand how these aspects of community engagement relate to social media use, a theory specific to audience decisions in using media - uses and gratification theory - was utilized.

Uses and gratification theory

Why do we use a particular medium like social media or newspaper? This is the key question of uses and gratification theory (U&G). An alternative to the media effects theory, which examines what the media do to the audience, U&G takes the perspective of audiences as active participants. While the effects approach sees audiences as passively doing what the media tells them, U&G aims to understand how and why audiences independently seek out specific media to gratify their needs. (Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1973). Rosengren (1974) views U&G theory as motives derived from basic needs, individual differences and circumstantial factors, which result in seeking gratifications from media use. (De Schutter and Mailliet, 2014). A motive describes something (such as a need or desire) that causes a person to act.

The use of media from this perspective is selective by the psychological and social needs of the user. The U&G theory argues "for the pre-existence of needs and intentions that direct media attendance toward gratifications and uses, respectively" (Anderson, 1996, p. 212).

Early research paved the way for U&G theory with an examination of the motives for watching certain political television programs. Blumler and McQuail's (1969) study

identified connections between audience use of media and basic personal needs such as companionship or self-esteem. By sorting the audience's motives for viewing a program, they classified viewers in relation to their needs in order to understand the media effects.

Identifying motives

U & G research focused on a news information website (Yoo, 2011) offers insight into use of the theory in understanding modern digital media. In the study, four primary gratification-seeking motives were identified – information seeking, socialization, entertainment, and pastime. Similarly, Whiting and Williams (2013) utilized the same motives (socialization, information seeking, entertainment, and pastime) in their research of social media users. An individual with high socialization motivation refers to someone who is using media for exchanging ideas, communicating with friends or interacting with others (Ko, Cho, & Roberts, 2005). Information seeking motivation has been defined as using media in order to receive information or to self-educate (Whitney, & Williams, 2013). Using media to occupy time and relieve boredom describes the pastime motive (Whitney, & Williams, 2013). Entertainment motivation is described as using media for amusement and enjoyment (Whitney, & Williams, 2013).

Studies have demonstrated that people actively choose news media based on their ability to gratify particular motives and how motives contribute to actual use (Yoo, 2011). For example, the four motives (information seeking, socialization, entertainment and pastime) were identified as the primary motives for why people use the Internet. Each motive demonstrated an effect on what the study described as “audience interactivity” and its effects on gratifications obtained by users (Yoo, 2011). Through

survey questions, the study tested the relationships between reviewing motivations and gratifications, audience interactivity, attitudes of the online newspaper and repeat visit intention. The study indicated socialization motivation as having a positive effect on online audience interactivity and human interactivity. The research shows that a news media's ability to meet certain user motives drives decisions to use that media. The study also suggests the news media's ability to successfully meet certain socialization and human interactivity needs. Moreover, Yoo's study (2011) asserts the extent of a user's perceived gratifications obtained contributes to user's attitude and future use of the medium. While motivation is crucial, so is gratification. Whether a need is fulfilled by a particular media or not has a vital outcome on a future use of that media option.

From these perspectives, to understand modern community engagement, social media research (and how it relates to community engagement) is a promising direction of focus. Moreover, understanding the motives and fulfillments behind social media use, in particular, a community newspaper's Facebook page and the relation of those motives with users' perceptions of connectivity to the community could provide valuable insight for a local newspaper's understanding of the role and value they potentially have in improving relations of community members and encouraging community unity.

All this provides converging indications that social media can be a viable source for community engagement. However, it is uncertain that all community members are social media users, this study will aim to be all-encompassing by investigating alternatives to Facebook that could possibly provide further insight. Moreover, utilizing U&G theory to identify the motives of social media users offers a promising approach to

understanding social media capability for community engagement and prompts the following research questions:

RQ1: Do motivations (information seeking, socialization, entertainment, pastime) to use a community newspaper Facebook page (IV) predict user perceived connection to the community (DV)?

RQ2: Do user perceptions of connectivity to community (IV) predict intention to return to a newspaper's Facebook page (DV)?

RQ3: Do newspaper's Facebook non-users have certain reasons for not using the Facebook page and what is their main resource for community news?

Method

In order to answer the research questions, it is necessary to gather information about specific attitudes, behaviors and characteristics of community members. Utilizing an online survey is effective for this, as demonstrated from previous studies of digital media and user engagement (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung & Valenzuela, 2012).

As the objective is to determine if individuals feel strong connectivity to their local community through a community-focused social media platform, a purposive sample from members of Walker County, Texas - the community that the Huntsville Item's Facebook page serves, was assessed through an online survey.

Demographic data for Walker County from the 2017 Census Survey reports a population of 70,818. The largest Walker County racial/ethnic groups are White (56.9%) followed by Black (22.9%) and Hispanic (17.8%). The median household income of Walker County residents is \$41,456, and the median age is 35.2 years. Servicing Walker County as the main print and online news organization for the region is The Huntsville

Item, with an average of 7,560 daily readers. The Huntsville Item is a five-day morning newspaper that publishes in Huntsville, Texas. The Item covers all of Walker County. The organization's website - Itemonline.com averages 76,565 unique monthly visitors, with over 50% of visits from mobile devices. The Huntsville Item's Facebook page has 17,656 followers.

In terms of research method, an inexpensive way to quickly gather a great deal of information about many people are advantages to using a survey method. The survey method also has disadvantages. While it can contribute to an overall understanding and show correlation, surveys cannot show a causation. This means, the study cannot show that one variable causes another. Participants failing to fully complete the survey is also a disadvantage of using a survey.

Regarding the sampling techniques, the advantage to using a convenience sample is that it can be effective when it is unrealistic to conduct probability sampling. Additionally, it can be cost-effective and time-effective compared to probability sampling. As a disadvantage, the use of a non-probability, convenience sampling is not systematic process; therefore, the data cannot be generalized to all populations or situations.

Pilot test

Following IRB approval, a pilot test was conducted over eight days with a total sample of 17 Walker County community members. A consent cover letter, and a paper copy of the survey were distributed to each participant who completed the survey by hand. This step insured that respondents understood the questions and instructions, and whether the meaning of questions were the same for all respondents. Internal consistency

was checked using Cronbach's alpha for variables with three survey questions and Pearson correlation for variables with two survey questions. Pilot survey results comprising the information motivation item (Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$), the entertainment motivation item (Pearson's $r = .87$), and pastime motivation item (Pearson's $r = .92$) elicited a high degree of internal consistency. The social motivation item (Cronbach's $\alpha = .44$) elicited a low degree of internal consistency, and thus required rewording of the social questions to better support clarity and consistency. The measures comprising the emotional item (Cronbach's $\alpha = .97$), the cognitive item (Pearson's $r = .93$), and efficacy item (Pearson's $r = .89$) elicited a high degree of internal consistency.

Main survey

Following the pilot study, the main survey study was launched in 2019. A self-administered online survey was conducted through *Qualtrics* for a total of three days. To attract local area participants, a web link to the survey along with a brief description, was posted to several personal Facebook pages from members of the community. Links to the survey were also posted on the Huntsville Item Facebook page (17,656 followers) and a community Facebook group page called *Huntsville, TX The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly* (6,600 followers). Respondents were able to access the main survey from the web link. After first selecting "yes" to indicate consent to be a part of the survey research, all participants were asked questions to confirm their residency in Walker County, followed by questions rating feelings of community.

Next in the survey, participants who indicated "yes" they did visit the Huntsville Item's Facebook page were asked questions rating their intention to return to the Facebook page. To understand Facebook users' emotional, cognitive, and efficacy

perceptions towards their community, seven questions rating emotional, cognitive and efficacy were posed. To understand participants' motivations for using the Facebook page, questions rating social motivation, entertainment motivation, information seeking motivation, and pastime motivation were posed. After participants completed the survey, the survey concluded with demographic questions from participants including gender, age, race, and level of education.

Participants in the survey who indicated that they had not visited the Huntsville Item's Facebook page, were moved ahead in the survey to skip over questions related to the Facebook page and were presented different questions. Two open-ended questions were posed to non-users of the Facebook page: "Do you have certain reasons that you don't use the Huntsville Item Facebook page?" and "What media sources do you use to find information on local community events/issues?" The survey concluded with demographic questions from participants including gender, age, race and level of education.

Survey participants

A total of 249 individuals participated in the survey who indicated they visited the Huntsville Item Facebook page. Of those, three incomplete surveys were removed. Thus, 246 participants were included in the data analysis of Facebook users. A total of 50 survey participants indicated they had not visited the Huntsville Item Facebook page. From the total of non-users, 20 completed surveys were included in the data analysis of non-users, after removing all incomplete surveys.

Participants were aged 18-78 with an average age of 44.5. The group consisted of 88 % females, 12 % males. 86% of participants identified as Caucasian, 8.1%

Latino/Hispanic, 2.4% African-American and 1% Asian. Participants' highest degree level consisted of 29% Bachelor's, 22% some college, 20% Master's and 12% High School or High School equivalency certificate.

Measurement of four motivations

Previous research on motives, demonstrated an effect on audience interactivity and its effects on gratifications obtained by users (Yoo, 2011). To measure the motivation variables (i.e., social motivation, information seeking motivation, entertainment motivation, pastime motivation), participants were asked to rate their reasons for visiting the Huntsville Item Facebook page on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree). The measures comprising the social motivation item (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$), the information motivation item (Cronbach's $\alpha = .72$), the entertainment motivation item (Pearson's $r = .56$), and pastime motivation item (Pearson's $r = .77$) elicited a high degree of internal consistency.

Measurement of perceived connection to community

Three dimensions were included in the survey to measure participants' perceived connection to community – emotional, cognitive and efficacy. Previous research has measured social media engagement as both a cognitive and emotional immersion (Smith, & Gallicano, 2015). Also, the recent research proposes to measure community engagement through efficacy, by asking if people felt they could initiate positive change in their community (Obach, & Tobin, 2014). Therefore, questions from previous researches was modified for this study.

An emotional approach of connection to community was measured with survey questions such as: "When I use the Huntsville Item's Facebook page, I feel closer to

others in my community.” A cognitive approach of participant’s connection to community was measured with questions such as: “When I use the Huntsville Item’s Facebook page, it gives me a positive view about being active in my community.” Efficacy (whether or not people felt they could initiate positive change) was measured with questions such as: “When I use the Huntsville Item’s Facebook page, I think I can have a good impact in making my community a better place to live.” The measures comprising the emotional item (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .94$), the cognitive item (Pearson’s $r = .85$), and efficacy item (Pearson’s $r = .91$) elicited a high degree of internal consistency.

Measurement of intention to return to Facebook page

Intention questions in previous research (Goel, Johnson, Junglas, & Ives, 2013) were modified for this study. Intention to return refers to the idea that a visitor will come back to the Huntsville Item Facebook page. To measure intention to return to the Facebook page, participants were asked to rate how much they agree or disagree with returning to the Facebook page on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree). Statements posed: “I will probably return to the Huntsville Item’s Facebook page, I am likely to return to the Huntsville Item’s Facebook page, and I will definitely return to the Huntsville Item’s Facebook page.” The measures comprising the perceived relevance item (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .96$) elicited a high degree of internal consistency.

Data analysis and results

RQ1: A Pearson correlation was run to determine the relationship between four motivations (social, information seeking, entertainment, and pastime) and user perceived connection to community (cognitive, emotional, and efficacy). Results indicate a strong,

positive correlation between social motivation to use the Huntsville Item's Facebook page and user perceived connection to the community.

In terms of cognitive perception of connection to community, the measures comprising the social motivation item ($r = .659$, $n = 245$, $p = 000$) demonstrated strong correlation. Measures comprising information seeking motivation ($r = .446$, $n = 242$, $p = 000$) showed moderate correlation. Measures comprising entertainment motivation ($r = .501$, $n = 244$, $p = 000$) showed moderate correlation. Pastime motivation ($r = .191$, $n = 244$, $p = 003$) showed a very weak correlation.

In terms of emotional perception of connection to community, the measures comprising the social motivation ($r = .693$, $n = 245$, $p = 000$) shows strong correlation. Measures comprising information seeking motivation ($r = .439$, $n = 242$, $p = 000$) show moderate correlation. Measures comprising entertainment motivation ($r = .576$, $n = 244$, $p = 000$) show moderate correlation. Pastime motivation ($r = .201$, $n = 245$, $p = 002$) showed a very weak correlation.

In terms of efficacy perception of connection to community, the measures comprising the social motivation ($r = .639$, $n = 256$, $p = 000$) show strong correlation. Measures comprising information seeking motivation ($r = .412$, $n = 243$, $p = 000$) show moderate correlation. Measures comprising entertainment motivation ($r = .456$, $n = 245$, $p = 000$) show moderate correlation. Pastime motivation ($r = .110$, $n = 245$, $p = .087$) showed a very weak correlation.

In sum, findings suggests that users visiting the Facebook page for social motivation may have a stronger perceived connection to their community, and those

visiting the page for pastime motivations have little perceived connection to their community.

RQ2: A Pearson correlation was run to determine the relationship between Facebook users' individual perceptions of connectivity to community (using emotional, cognitive, and efficacy variables) and intention to return to the Facebook page. The measures comprising the emotional variable ($r = .547$, $n = 245$, $p = .000$), the cognitive variable ($r = .513$, $n = 245$, $p = .000$), and efficacy variable ($r = .490$, $n = 266$, $p = .000$) indicated a moderate correlation. This suggests that the more perceived community connection participants have, the more likely those participants will visit the Facebook page. Oppositely, a less perceived community connection would mean the user being less likely to visit the newspaper's Facebook page.

RQ3: A content analysis of responses to two open-ended questions was conducted to determine if non-users of the Huntsville Item Facebook page had reasons for not using the page and also what resources non-users use for community news.

To the question, "Do you have certain reasons that you don't use the Huntsville Item newspaper Facebook page?" 24 participants answered "no", 12 indicated they did not know about the page, 8 indicated they do not use Facebook, 2 stated they prefer the Huntsville Item online.

To the question, "If you don't use the Huntsville Item newspaper Facebook page, what media sources do you use to find information on local community events/issues?" 13 participants indicated they use other social media resources, 9 indicated they use the Huntsville Item print newspaper, 5 use the Huntsville Item online, 5 use KSAM radio, 4

use the City of Huntsville's website, 2 indicated friends and church, 4 indicated other media.

While the response population was limited to 20 responses, the information suggests some members of the community have found other resources for community information and do not use the Huntsville Item newspaper Facebook page. The information also suggests that some may not be using the Huntsville Item's Facebook page because they are not aware of it as a resource.

Discussion

This study explores the relationship between a local community's motivations to use a community newspaper's Facebook page and perceived connection to the community. Moreover, the study examines whether users' intentions to return to the newspaper's Facebook page is related to perceptions of connection to community.

One of the main findings is users visiting the Huntsville Item's Facebook page for social motivation may have a stronger perceived connection to their community. While not as strong as social motivation, those motivated to visit the Facebook page for information seeking or entertainment motivations may have a moderate level of perceived connections to their community. In other words, this study found a positive relationship with three motivations to use the Facebook page and users' perceived connection to their community. Additionally, this study found a positive relationship between strong perceptions of connection community and intention to visit the Huntsville Item's Facebook page. The results suggest the more perceived connection participants have to their community the more they will visit the Facebook page.

A key contribution to the study is that it focuses on a local community and those community member's use of the local newspaper's Facebook digital media platform. While to date, little research has focused on local community member's use of social media in relation to motivation and perception of connectivity, this project suggests conducting the survey in other communities. Comparison studies can help clarify if results are specific to this community or are generalizable across communities. This study also aims to provide small-town media organizations with a greater understanding of how to connect with their community audience through digital media and why their audiences may be motivated to connect with them. For community members, the research offers considerations for how a local news organization can facilitate community engagement and options for how to reach those in the region who have strong perceptions of connection to community.

In terms of theoretical implications, this study supports the field of U&G theory by demonstrating the initiative of users based on their personal motives to use media. The theory suggests that people seek different motives from media to satisfy different needs. This research contributes to the concept of U&G theory by identifying three positive motives for using a particular local newspaper's Facebook page that are successfully obtained by users. This is significant to the expansion of social media research in understanding and identifying motivations for using social media in a local-level, and how those motivations relate to social media traffic and community engagement.

U&G theory sees audiences as active participants in choosing their own media to achieve gratifications. Applying this theory, the Huntsville Item's Facebook page is doing its role in satisfying users' specific motivations. In examining user intentions to

return to the page, the positive relationship between intention to visit and strong perceptions of connection to their community, suggests that Facebook is a successful means to social gratification. As the data indicates, people with strong perceptions of community connection are more likely to visit the page, this suggests that Facebook can be a good social media platform to community engagement.

With audiences making their own active choices for the media they use, U&G theory implies that media platforms compete with other sources for user gratification. A practical implication of this study is that it provides a better understanding of user motives and gratifications achieved, and offers valuable insight for social media designers and strategists aiming to improve their product to more successfully compete in the social media market. For instance, while Facebook offers tools to foster connectivity within virtual communities, this finding suggests, Facebook should consider providing more digital features to foster connectivity specifically within geographic communities – allowing users more enhanced options to engage with others on a local level.

Not surprisingly, this research also found that not all community members are Facebook users. While the majority of participants were users of the Facebook page, 50 participants indicated they were not. As this survey was online-based, the finding is not surprising but suggests that providing paper surveys or in-depth interviews for community members who are not typically using social media maybe be helpful to further understand how others are getting community news or why they are not using Facebook. Moreover, further research may compare the results of this study (focused specifically on the Huntsville Item) by conducting surveys in the same community focused on other local resources most frequently mentioned by the non-users' open-

ended responses - KSAM radio and the local Facebook group page, *Huntsville, TX The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly*.

While research suggests many media organizations are still struggling to develop effective social media strategies, a 2018 Pew Research Center poll shows social media sites have surpassed print newspapers as a news source in America (Shearer, 2018). As more people consume news through social media – the necessity to develop strategies and new ways to connect with audiences through social media and understanding more about those audiences (like motives) will become even greater. From the findings of this study, the Huntsville Item Facebook audiences are motivated by social, information seeking, and entertainment reasons. Developing strategies that successfully gratify those motivations is a suggestion to consider such as utilizing the platform as a means to citizen reporting - allowing community members to participate in a greater capacity in the exchange of content, information, and ideas. Additionally, as the research suggests, visitors to the Facebook page are typically community-focused and likely have feelings of wanting to make effective, positive change in their community. The Huntsville Item should look at this demographic as a valuable public resource for feedback. Since they are an online audience, this makes gathering their feedback easy. From online polls rating story topics of most importance to comments, photos or videos from citizens that can be used in future stories, using Facebook as a means to ascertain topics the community wants to know and talk about is an important social media strategy to consider. As small town newsrooms continue to see a decline in internal resources, this strategy may provide opportunities from new external resources. The results also put forward that it is possible for a community newspaper's Facebook page to encourage perceptions of community

engagement, and in turn demonstrate the newspaper's role in facilitating and strengthening community, adding to its value to local communities.

Limitations and future study suggestions

The use of a non-probability, convenience sample is not a systematic process; therefore, the data cannot be generalized to all populations or situations. Another limitation is that survey research is not conducted in a controlled environment therefore; it is possible that other variables could play a role in the findings. In addition to the motives researched in this study, other variables such as characteristics (like competitor activity, culture trends, etc.) can be involved in a user's decision to use social media. This means the study cannot provide evidence of a cause-effect relationship. Trying to capture information from non-users of the Facebook page resulted in limited findings, as many non-users participants failed to fully complete the survey. Another factor to consider from the results is that many survey participants accessed or found the survey from social media pages. This mean that it is likely most participants reached for this survey were active social media users.

As little research has explored a local community's use of social media in relation to motivation and perception of connectivity, this project suggests expanding the findings by conducting the survey in other communities. This broadening of the survey population could provide more data and offer a generalized result. Important to the growth of social media research, is further research on user motivations for using social media, including extensive research on other motivations and how those motivations relate to social media traffic and community engagement. While this research explored four specific motives for using Facebook, future studies need to further expand on other motivation

possibilities, to provide a deeper understanding of additional motivations that may have not yet been considered. As efficacy is not a traditional U&G category, this study contributes to a new factor consideration in future U&G research. While this research explored only one social media platform, future studies may further expand on other platforms such as Twitter or Instagram to compare results. As new types of social media platforms continue to emerge, new research should be conducted to give a deeper insight into complex relations between social media use, motivations and perceptions to connection to community.

Conclusion

This study was developed to better understand a local community members' use of social media in relation to motivation and perception of connectivity. Concerning practical implications, this study offers insight for community news organizations and community members regarding social media's potential for local community engagement and also a newspaper's potential role as a facilitator of community engagement. Theoretical implications of this study support the field of U&G theory by demonstrating the initiative of users based on their personal motives to use media. This research also contributes to the concept of U&G theory by identifying three positive motives for using a local newspaper's Facebook page. While much research has focused on user activities as way to measure engagement, this research has identified the benefit of capturing emotional, cognitive and efficacy as important factors in U&G research as it relates to community engagement. Future research recommendations include, additional social media and community engagement exploration utilizing the efficacy approach and also

identifying other motivations related to social media behavior and community engagement.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, J. *Communication Theory*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 1996. Print.
- Boczkowski, P., Mitchelstein, E., & Matassi, M. (2017, January). Incidental news: How young people consume news on social media. In *Proceedings of the 50th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*.
- Brubaker, P. J., & Haigh, M. M. (2017). The Religious Facebook Experience: Uses and Gratifications of Faith-Based Content. *Social Media+ Society*, 3(2), 2056305117703723.
- De Schutter, B., & Mailliet, S. (2014). The older player of digital games: A classification based on perceived need satisfaction. *Communications: The European Journal of Communication Research*, 39(1), 67-88.
- Diehl, T., Barnidge, M., & Gil de Zúñiga, H. (2018). Multi-platform news use and political participation across age groups: toward a valid metric of platform diversity and its effects. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 1077699018783960.
- Gaile, S. M. (2013) The role and functions of social media in modern society. Is social media worthwhile for local media?. *Žurnalistikos Tyrimai*, 43-62.
- George, L. M., & Waldfogel, J. (2006). The New York Times and the market for local newspapers. *American Economic Review*, 96(1), 435-447.
- Gil de Zúñiga, H., Jung, N., & Valenzuela, S. (2012). Social media use for news and individuals' social capital, civic engagement and political participation. *Journal Computer-Mediated Communication*, 17(3), 319-336.
- Goel, L., Johnson, N., Junglas, I., & Ives, B. (2013). Predicting users' return to virtual worlds: a social perspective. *Information Systems Journal*, 23(1), 35-63.
- Hille, S., & Bakker, P. (2013). I like news. Searching for the 'Holy Grail' of social media: The use of Facebook by Dutch news media and their audiences. *European Journal of Communication*, 28(6), 663-680.
- Jiang, H., Luo, Y., & Kulemeka, O. (2016). Social media engagement as an evaluation barometer: Insights from communication executives. *Public Relations Review*, 42(4), 679-691.
- Ju, A., Jeong, S. H., & Chyi, H. I. (2014). Will social media save newspapers? Examining the effectiveness of Facebook, Twitter as news platforms. *Journalism Practice*, 8(1), 1-17.

- Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and gratifications research. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(4), 509-523.
- Khan, M. L. (2017). Social media engagement: What motivates user participation and consumption on YouTube? *Computers in Human Behavior*, 66, 236-247.
- Ko, H., Cho, C. H., & Roberts, M. S. (2005). Internet uses and gratifications: A structural equation model of interactive advertising. *Journal of advertising*, 34(2), 57-70.
- Lewis, S. C., Holton, A. E., & Coddington, M. (2014). Reciprocal journalism: A concept of mutual exchange between journalists and audiences. *Journalism Practice*, 8(2), 229-241.
- Lim, J. S., Hwang, Y., Kim, S., & Biocca, F. A. (2015). How social media engagement leads to sports channel loyalty: Mediating roles of social presence and channel commitment. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 46, 158-167.
- Paine, K. D. (2011). *Measure what matters: Online tools for understanding customers, social media, engagement, and key relationships*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Panagiotopoulos, P. (2012). Towards unions 2.0: rethinking the audience of social media engagement. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 27(3), 178-192.
- Obach, B. K., & Tobin, K. (2014). Civic agriculture and community engagement. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 31(2), 307-322.
- Ostertag, S. F., & Ortiz, D. G. (2015). "Katrina bloggers activate!": the long-term effects of digital media on civic participation. *Sociological Inquiry*, 85(1), 28-54.
- Putnam, R. *Bowling Alone*. Simon & Schuster, 1996, 2000. Print.
- Quan-Haase, A., Wellman, B., Witte, J. C. & Hampton, K. N. *Capitalizing on the Net: Social Contact, Civic Engagement, and Sense of Community, in the Internet in Everyday Life*. Blackwell Publishers Ltd, Oxford, UK, 2002. Print.
- Rahman, Z., Suberamanian, K., Zauddin, H., Moghavvemi, S., & Nasir, M. H. N. M. (2016). Social media engagement metric analysis- study on fan page content. *Journal of Telecommunication, Electronic and Computer Engineering*, 8(8), 71-76.
- Sanford, S., *Civic Life in the Information Age: Policy, Technology and Generational Change*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Print.
- Shah, D. V., McLeod, J. M., & Yoon, S. H. (2001). Communication, context, and community: An exploration of print, broadcast, and internet influences. *Communication Research*, 28(4), 464-506.

- Shearer, E. *Social media outpaces print newspapers in the U.S. as a news source*. Dec. 10, 2018. Web.
- Smith, B. G., & Gallicano, T. D. (2015). Full Length Article: Terms of engagement: analyzing public engagement with organizations through social media. *Computers In Human Behavior*, 5382-90.
- Tanaka, G. *Something Extraordinary Is Happening in the World, And Most People Haven't Noticed*. Huffington Post, Dec. 16, 2016. Web. Retrieved from <https://www.huffingtonpost.com>.
- Whiting, A., Williams, D. (2013). Why people use social media: A uses and gratifications approach. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 16, 362–369.
- Yoo, C. Y. (2011). Modeling audience interactivity as the gratification-seeking process in online newspapers. *Communication Theory*, 21(1), 67-89.
- Zuckerberg, M. *Building Global Community*. Feb. 16, 2017. Web.

APPENDIX

Online Survey Questions

1. Consent Y or N
2. What is your zip code? ()
3. How long have you lived in Walker County? () years
- We are interested in your feelings of your Huntsville community.*
4. I think my community of Huntsville as a good place to live.
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
5. I think I am satisfied with living in Huntsville.
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
6. Do you read the Huntsville Item newspaper? 1. Yes; 2. No
7. Have you ever visited the Huntsville Item's Facebook page? 1. Yes; 2. No

*If answer is "No" you have not visited the Facebook page, skip to **page 5**.
If answer is 'Yes' you have visited, continue with questions below.*

*We are interested in your use and feelings of The Huntsville Item Facebook page
(<https://www.facebook.com/TheHuntsvilleItem>).*

8. Approximately, how many times have you visited the Huntsville Item's Facebook page?
() times per week
9. Approximately, how often do you leave comments in the Huntsville Item's Facebook page?
() times per week
10. Approximately, how often do you "like" content on the Huntsville Item's Facebook page?
() times per week
11. Approximately, how often do you "share" content on the Huntsville Item's Facebook page?
() times per week
12. Approximately, how often do you attend local events that you discovered from the Huntsville Item's Facebook page?
() times per month

*(Below, please select number that applies to your answer.)
Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following sentences:*

13. I will probably return to the Huntsville Item's Facebook page.
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
14. I am likely to return to the Huntsville Item's Facebook page.
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
15. I will definitely return to the Huntsville Item's Facebook page.
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

We are interested in your feelings of your Huntsville community.

16. When I use the Huntsville Item's Facebook page, I feel closer to others in my community. (*Emotional FB*) Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
17. The Huntsville Item's Facebook page gives me a sense of togetherness with my community. (*Emotional FB*) Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
18. The Huntsville Item's Facebook page gives me a sense of being a part of my community. (*Emotional FB*) Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
19. When I use the Huntsville Item's Facebook page, it gives me a positive view about being active in my community.
(*Cognitive FB*) Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
20. When I use the Huntsville Item's Facebook page, it gives me a positive view about participating in community activities.
(*Cognitive FB*) Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
21. When I use the Huntsville Item's Facebook page, I think I can have a good impact in making my community a better place to live.
(*Efficacy*) Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
22. When I use the Huntsville Item's Facebook page, I think I can positively contribute to my community.
(*Efficacy*) Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

We are interested in why you visit The Huntsville Item Facebook page (www.facebook.com/TheHuntsvilleItem). The following are the reasons other people have given. Please indicate how much that reason applies to you by clicking a corresponding button. (Please circle number that applies to your answer.)

I visit the Huntsville Items Facebook page:

23. To communicate with others (*social*)
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
24. To feel more connected to my community (*social*)
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
25. To interact with others (*social*)
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
26. Because I just like to use it (*entertainment*)
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

27. Because it's my habit (*entertainment*)
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
28. To get national news information (*information seeking*)
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
29. To get state news information (*information seeking*)
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
30. To get community news information (*information seeking*)
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
31. Because it passes time when bored (*pastime*)
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
32. When I have nothing better to do (*pastime*)
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

Demographic information: Please tell us which of the following best describes you.

33. Your gender: 1. Male / 2. Female / 3. prefer not to answer
34. Your age: () years old
35. Your race: 1. Caucasian / 2. African-American / 3. Hispanic or Latino / 4. Asian / 5. other / 6. prefer not to answer
36. Your highest degree or level of school you have completed: 1. Some high school, no diploma / 2. High school graduate or GED / 3. Some college credit, no degree / 4. Trade/technical/vocational training / 5. Associate degree / 6. Bachelor's degree / 7. Master's degree / 8. Doctorate degree

Survey Complete. Thank you for your time.

(Questions below for those that choose 'No' they have not visited the FB page)

37. Do you have certain reasons that you don't use Huntsville Item newspaper Facebook page?
38. If you don't use the Huntsville Item newspaper Facebook page, what media sources you use to find information on local community events/issues?
39. Do you read the Huntsville Item newspaper? 1. Yes 2. No

If you answered "NO" – Survey Complete. Thank you for your time.

If you answered "YES" – you read the Huntsville Item newspaper, please continue below.

40. Approximately, how often PER MONTH do you attend local events that you discovered from the Huntsville Item's newspaper?
() times per month
41. When I read the Huntsville Item newspaper, I feel closer to others in my community. (*Emotional Non-FB*) Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
42. The Huntsville Item newspaper, gives me a sense of togetherness with my community. (*Emotional Non-FB*) Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
43. The Huntsville Item newspaper, page gives me a sense of being a part of my community. (*Emotional Non-FB*) Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

44. When I read the Huntsville Item newspaper it gives me a positive view about being active in my community. (*Cognitive Non-FB*)
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
45. When I read the Huntsville Item newspaper, it gives me a positive view about participating in community activities. (*Cognitive Non-FB*)
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
46. When I read the Huntsville Item newspaper, I think I can have a good impact in making my community a better place to live. (*Efficacy Non-FB*)
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
47. When I read the Huntsville Item newspaper, I think I can positively contribute to my community. (*Efficacy Non-FB*)
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

Demographic information: Please tell us which of the following best describes you.

32. Your gender: 1. Male / 2. Female / 3. prefer not to answer
33. Your age: () years old
34. Your race: 1. Caucasian / 2. African-American / 3. Hispanic or Latino / 4. Asian / 5. other / 6. prefer not to answer
35. Your highest degree or level of school you have completed: 1. Some high school, no diploma / 2. High school graduate or GED / 3. Some college credit, no degree / 4. Trade/technical/vocational training / 5. Associate degree / 6. Bachelor's degree / 7. Master's degree / 8. Doctorate degree

Survey Complete. Thank you for your time.

VITA**Emily J. Schulze****EDUCATION**

Master of Arts student in Digital Media at Sam Houston State University, August 2015 – present.

Bachelor of Arts in Art History, Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, NY

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Instructor, Department of Mass Communication, Sam Houston State University, January 2019 - present. Responsibilities: teaching ungraduated mass communication writing class

PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT

Associate Director of Communications, Sam Houston State University, September 2017 - present.

Marketing Coordinator, Sam Houston State University, August 2013 – September 2017.

Director of Communications, Houston Public Media, March 2007 – July 2013.

Public Relations Associate, Alley Theatre, February 2003 – June 2005 .