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U.S. Newspaper Editors' Ratings of Social Media as Influential News Sources

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Social media, as one key platform for citizen journalism, are becoming a useful news-gathering tool for journalists. Based on data from a nationwide probability sample of newspaper editors in the United States, this study investigates the extent to which newspaper editors consider social media an influential news source. Results show that variations in editors' ratings of social media as a news source were related to multiple levels of influence, including professional journalistic experience, organization size, community structural pluralism, and citizen journalism credibility. Implications are discussed for the roles of social media in news production.

Keywords: citizen journalism, credibility, newspaper editors, social media, structural pluralism

A rich body of research has examined the role of user-generated content in professional journalistic practices and the larger society (Carpenter, 2010; Chung, Nah, & Yamamoto, 2017; Fico et al., 2013; Goode, 2009; Kaufhold, Valenzuela, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2010; Lacy, Duffy, Riffe, Thorson, & Fleming, 2010; Nah & Chung, 2016; Nah, Yamamoto, Chung, & Zuercher, 2015; Östman, 2012; Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012). Underlying this notion is the voluntary contributions of citizens to the public sphere. With the growth of interactive social media tools, citizens, who were once passive receivers of content produced and disseminated by professional journalists, now can actively contribute to discussions about issues of public concern by creating unique information and opinions that might not be found elsewhere (Friedland & Kim, 2009). Such citizen contributions can take various forms, such as text, photos, and videos that people post on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (Nah et al., 2015).

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Indeed, existing research indicates that social media are common forms of citizen journalism and, at times, play an important role as sources of information, commentaries, and newsworthiness (e.g., Broersma & Graham, 2012; Carpenter, 2010; Fico et al., 2013; Lacy et al., 2010; Meraz, 2011; Messner & Distaso, 2008; Messner & Garrison, 2011). For instance, Messner and Distaso's (2008) content analysis of news articles published at *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* uncovered increases over time in the newspapers' use of blogs as news sources. Moreover, Meraz's (2011) time series analysis found little evidence of the intermedia agenda-setting role of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* over political blog networks. Rather, independent political blogs shaped the agenda of the newspapers' online news and their newsroom blogs, suggesting that professional journalists may turn to social media for cues of newsworthiness.

Although social media appear to have become a key part of professional news and influence the way it is constructed, the reasons why professional journalists integrate citizen contributions into news production is not entirely clear. To address this limitation, the present study assesses newspaper editors' perceptions of social media as influential news sources. Specifically, based on the hierarchy of influences model (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996), our study focuses on individual-, organizational-, and community-level influences to explain variations in editors' ratings of social media as a news source. Toward this end, we analyze data from a national representative survey of top newspaper editors in the United States. The findings will help us understand the complex nature of journalistic adoption and use of social media.

Citizen Journalism: Social Media as News Sources

The concept of citizen journalism can be understood in contrast to professional journalism. Generally, professional journalism focuses on the production and distribution of news content by journalists who are paid, have received formal journalistic training, work for news organizations, and follow a professional code of ethics (Kaufhold et al., 2010). In contrast, citizen journalism is characterized by voluntary efforts by ordinary citizens who are unpaid, may or may not have received formal journalistic training, and are not bound by professional standards of conduct (Kaufhold et al., 2010). Friedland and Kim (2009) characterize citizen journalism in terms of its reliance on crowdsourcing, audience contribution, amateurism, separation of fact and opinion, a lack of fair and balanced principles, and varied intended audience. At its core, citizen journalism concerns "contribution to discussion in the public sphere, whether in the form of simple information, synthesis, reporting, or opinion" (Friedland & Kim, 2009, p. 297).

Citizen journalism practices are commonly manifested as citizen-generated content in social media, such as social network sites, blogs, and microblogs (Broersma & Graham, 2012; Goode, 2009; Kaufhold et al., 2010; Meraz, 2009, 2011). Citizen-generated content can take many forms (e.g., Gil de Zúñiga, 2009; Kaufhold et al., 2010; Matsa & Mitchell, 2014). For example, citizens frequently express their views on social issues and events in social network sites. Also, citizens who are on the scenes of accidents and crimes use mobile devices to photograph or video-record the events as they are happening and post the photos or videos on their social media accounts. Bloggers also often write commentaries on social, political, and economic issues of concern. These forms of content help stimulate public discussion and align with Friedland and Kim's (2009) definition of citizen journalism.

Citizen-generated content seems to be becoming influential sources of information for professional journalists. Many news outlets, such as CNN iReport and local newspapers, have dedicated sections in their online editions where citizens can submit content they have produced. An emerging body of research suggests such is the case. As noted earlier, studies have revealed the potential of citizen journalism as a source of information and newsworthiness in professional journalism (Broersma & Graham, 2012; Meraz, 2011; Messner & Distaso, 2008; Messner & Garrison, 2011). Although prior research has examined what influences professional journalists' conceptions of what is newsworthy—such as journalistic training, staff supervisors and peers, and prestige publications (Cassidy, 2008; Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, & Wilhoit, 2006; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991, 1996)—it is not clear whether and to what extent professional journalists view social media as a source of news. We address this limitation with a theoretically motivated set of hypotheses.

A Hierarchy of Influences Model

Our examination of editors' ratings of social media as a news source is grounded in Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) hierarchy of influences model. The premise of the model is that journalistic practices are guided by various constraints and opportunities operating at different levels of influence, including the individual characteristics of journalists, professional routines and standards, organization resources, relationships with news sources, and larger social structural forces. This model suggests that journalistic behavior is not fully autonomous. Rather, understanding editorial decisions and action requires a consideration of both internal and external factors that influence a journalist's choice from among perceived alternative options. A long line of research has indicated that individual-, organizational-, and community-level factors, among others, affect journalistic practices (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Based on the existing literature, the present study focuses on editors' journalistic experience, ownership, organizational size, and structural pluralism. We also channel theoretical attention to citizen journalism credibility—an additional factor that has received little theoretical attention in the hierarchy of influences model.

Journalistic Experience

Research indicates that journalists' professional experience affects how they approach news making. A key explanation for this influence is related to newsroom socialization (e.g., Breed, 1955; Fishman, 1980; Sigal, 1973; Tuchman, 1978). For example, Breed (1955) uncovered a socialization process by which new journalists learned professional norms and values by interacting with and observing fellow and senior journalist colleagues and, by doing so, developed news production routines. Newsrooms are an environment in which journalists learn what is important in their daily operation, including what issues and events are important, what aspects of issues and events should be included and excluded, who are considered credible sources, and how to obtain news information (Breed, 1955; Sigal, 1973).

An editor's professional experience as a journalist therefore would be expected to influence how he or she views social media as a news source. Editors who have been involved in professional journalism for a longer period have likely internalized professional values, norms, and obligations through their newsroom experience. Nah and Chung (2009), for example, examined how professional journalists viewed

citizen journalism based on role conception research. They found that community newspaper editors with longer professional experience were more likely to endorse the role of professional journalists as disseminators and interpreters, whereas they did not positively rate the role of citizen journalists as interpreters, adversaries, and mobilizers. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that newspaper editors with longer professional experience would hold on to news sources they have been familiar with and view with skepticism alternative news sources such as social media. This reasoning leads to the following hypothesis:

H1:   *Newspaper editors with longer professional experience as journalists will be less likely than those with less experience to rate social media as an important news source.*

Organization Ownership

A long line of research in journalism has examined the economic influence of ownership structure on news making (e.g., Demers, 1996; Lacy & Blanchard, 2003; Lacy, Coulson, & Martin, 2004). Evidence suggests that ownership structure can influence the allocation of organizational resources. Research has shown that publicly owned newspapers tend to adopt and use Internet technologies more quickly than private newspapers (Chan-Olmsted & Park, 2000; Lowrey, 2003). For example, Lowrey (2003) found that nationally owned newspapers tended to adopt online editions of newspapers and use more interactive features on their websites.

The literature shows that large, publicly owned newspapers tend to be profit-driven businesses, with an interest in economic gains while limiting newsroom budgets (Blankenburg & Ozanich, 1993; Lacy & Blanchard, 2003). The influence of public ownership is consistent with current trends of integrating user-created content into news production in place of professionally trained staff. As the newspaper industry has seen a series of mergers and acquisitions in recent years, the overall newspaper workforce has continued to fall—for example, about 21% from 2010 to 2014 (Barthel, 2016). A report by the American Society of News Editors pointed to an 18% decline in full-time photographers, artists, and videographers between 2010 and 2012 (Anderson, 2013). The report suggested the emergence of user-generated content, such as photos and videos of breaking events posted by citizens on their social media accounts, as one reason for news organizations' decisions to shrink the newsroom workforce.

Based on the above discussion, publicly owned newspapers would be expected to consider social media as an efficient source of information. Citizen-generated content in news production can help editors at publicly owned newspapers efficiently find and make news stories, because doing so requires less newsroom investment than traditional journalistic practices that require time-intensive legwork. Following current issues and events and inviting average citizens to the news production process via social media can be viewed as a cost-efficient way for editors to gather and produce news at publicly owned newspapers in the face of increasingly tight newsroom budget. This rationale leads to the following hypothesis.

H2:   *Editors of publicly owned newspapers will be more likely than editors of private newspapers to rate social media as an important news source.*

Organization Size

Research also indicates that the size of newspaper organizations presents different opportunities and constraints for the adoption and use of innovations. Larger newspapers are characterized by more complex forms of organizational structure than smaller ones (Demers, 1996). To coordinate a greater number of staff members, they tend to develop a more complex division of labor that enables reporting of diverse issues and events (Demers, 1996). Research also indicates that larger newspapers tend to have greater financial resources and can afford to become more innovative (Demers, 1996). For example, Lowrey (2003), using circulation as a measure of newspapers' organization size, found a positive relationship between circulation and the number of interactive features used on newspaper websites.

The literature suggests that larger newspaper organizations view social media as a means to efficiently produce news. As larger newspaper organizations tend to report a greater diversity of topics, conventional methods to obtain news such as press releases, press conferences, and calling sources may not be sufficient to keep abreast of a fast-paced news cycle. By following citizens' journalistic contributions in social media, editors at larger newspaper outlets can find issues and events for news and potential breaking stories. In contrast, it is also likely that social media can help editors at smaller newspapers improve the operation of news production in the face of limited human, time, and financial resources. By integrating citizen contributions into news making, editors at smaller newspapers may be able to overcome such resource limitations. Given the competing possibilities, we propose the following research question:

RQ1:   How does newspaper organization size, as measured by circulation, affect editors' ratings of social media as an important news source?

Community Structural Pluralism

Research indicates that community structural characteristics guide newspaper organizations in systematic ways (Nah & Armstrong, 2011). The theoretical model is based on Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien's (1980) community structural pluralism, which is defined as "the degree of differentiation in the social system along institutional and specialized interest group lines, in a way that determines the potential sources of organized social power" (p. 16). Adopting a macrosocial perspective, their work has established that editorial decisions and patterns of coverage are related to community structural variations.

We expect that community structural pluralism is related to variations in editors' perceptions of social media as a news source. Smaller, less structurally pluralistic communities tend to be less differentiated and specialized with a limited number and diversity of interest groups (Demers, 1996; Hindman, 1996). A smaller and homogeneous population in such areas limits the ability of social actors to form special interest groups with influence. Coordination of communication in such communities is relatively simple, because journalists oriented toward those in power can easily recognize and contact influential actors about issues of concern (Demers, 1996; Hindman, 1996). In contrast, larger, more structurally pluralistic areas are more diversified and specialized with a greater number and diversity of

formally organized interest groups with power and legitimacy (Demers, 1996; Hindman, 1996). In such structural settings, conventional means may not be sufficient to effectively communicate with social groups and monitor their activities. Citizen-generated news and commentaries might be a supplementary means to address this challenge.

It is also likely that newspapers in larger, more structurally pluralistic communities employ social media as a source of information to cover a greater range of interests. In such structural settings, conventional methods to gather information such as press conferences, press releases, and calling or talking to sources on an interpersonal basis to collect information may not be sufficient to present varied points of view. Social media would allow journalists to address such needs that they face in pluralistic structural settings.

Previous research has examined newspapers' adoption and use of communication technologies in a community context. Studies have shown that community structural pluralism explains variations in online newspaper interactivity and newspapers' use of citizen journalism features (Lowrey, 2003: Nah et al., 2015). To extend this line of research, the present study examines how structural pluralism affects editors' perceptions of social media as a source of information.

H3:   *Newspaper editors from more structurally pluralistic communities will be more likely than those from less structurally pluralistic communities to rate social media as an important news source.*

Citizen Journalism Credibility

The present study additionally considers citizen journalism credibility as a potential source of editors' views on social media as a news source. Relative to other levels of influence, theoretical attention to journalists' psychological factors in this research tradition has been sparse, particularly with regard to the adoption and use of emerging technologies. The current analysis of journalists' perceived citizen journalism credibility thus extends the existing literature on the hierarchy of influences model.

In general, credibility can be defined as a message receiver's perception of, or attitude toward, a communicator (McCroskey, 1997). Credibility, when applied to journalistic practices, has been studied in three domains—message, source, and medium—in terms of such dimensions as accuracy, fairness, believability, and lack of bias (Sundar, 1999). Credibility can be considered a subphenomenon of trust. Trust, or the belief that social actors act according to normative expectations (Putnam, 2000), enables different actors to function smoothly in a mutually beneficial way. Much like trust in everyday life, perceived credibility of news sources will influence journalists' source use. In all likelihood, journalists who perceive a certain source as not credible are unlikely to rely on the source for information. In contrast, they would likely use sources that they consider credible in terms of conventional journalistic standards— such as accuracy, a lack of bias, and depth of information—because such sources help meet journalists' information needs.

From a more practice-based perspective, research suggests that evaluation of news sources is part of routinized practices. In daily news making, journalists must ensure that a sufficient number of

news stories in different categories—such as hard news, soft news, and continuing news—are produced, packaged, and delivered on time (Tuchman, 1978). To help journalists efficiently achieve this goal, the bureaucratization and routinization of news production practices—such as news beats, news values, writing, and gathering of trustworthy information—are developed (Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978). As a result, journalists rely on certain sources that provide information that is considered credible, such as elected officials and press conferences (Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978). When applied to the current context, professional journalists who value citizens' journalistic contributions and their credibility would be likely to positively rate the role of social media as a news source. Based on the above discussions, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H4:   *Newspaper editors with higher levels of perceived citizen journalism credibility will be more likely than those with lower levels to rate social media as an important news source.*

Method

Sample

Data for this study came from a nationally representative sample of top editors at newspapers in the United States. Top editors were defined as those with "titles of executive editor, editor, managing editor, editor in chief, and vice president for news" (Gade, 2008, p. 377). All 1,457 daily U.S. newspapers listed in the 2012 *Editor & Publisher* DataBook were divided into strata by circulation size: less than 25,000 (n = 1,101), 25,000 to 49,999 (n = 159), 50,000 to 99,999 (n = 82), and 100,000 and higher (n = 78). Newspapers that did not report circulation figures in the DataBook (n = 37) were not included in the sampling frame. Three-quarters (75%) of the newspapers from the less than 25,000 category (n = 826) and from the 25,000 and higher category (n = 240) were randomly drawn, with a total of 1,065 papers entered in the final sample. Using the website URL listed in the DataBook, the e-mail address of the top editor of each sampled paper was identified. In the absence of the top editor's e-mail address, the newspaper's general e-mail address was recorded. This procedure yielded a total of 1,019 unique e-mail addresses.

Web Survey

A Web-based survey was conducted from May to July 2013. Editors were invited via e-mail to participate in the survey. A prenotice e-mail about the survey was first sent out to the sampled 1,019 e-mail addresses. Three days later, an invitation e-mail was sent to the same 1,019 e-mail addresses with a hyperlink to the survey. Six e-mail addresses turned out to be inactive. Two editors, who were referred to by others, were added to the sample. Hence, the survey was distributed to 1,015 valid e-mail addresses. A thank-you/reminder e-mail was sent one week later, with further follow-up e-mails two and four weeks after the thank you/reminder e-mail. We followed the same procedure for a second round to address an initial low response rate. Of 226 editors who started the survey, 142 editors completed the survey, for a final response rate of 13.9%. The response rate was lower than expected, which is consistent with a declining trend of response rates for Internet and e-mail surveys (Baruch & Holtom, 2008; Sax, Gilmartin, & Bryant, 2003).

Measures

Editors' Rating of Social Media as a News Source

Based on prior research (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991), two items were used to measure newspaper editors' rating of social media as a news source. Respondents were asked to rate, on a 7-point Likert-type scale (from 1 = *not at all influential* to 7 = *extremely influential*), how influential (1) social network sites (e.g., Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn) and (2) blogs or microblogs (e.g., Twitter) were on their concept of what is newsworthy. Responses were summed to form an additive index (M = 7.45, SD = 2.88, Spearman-Brown coefficient = .76). The items focused on these social media platforms as a whole and did not ask about the authors of a specific blog, microblog, or social network site page. We consider this issue further in the discussion section.

Professional Experience as Journalist

Professional experience as a journalist was measured by asking respondents how many years they had been working as a journalist (M = 28.23, SD = 11.28). This variable was strongly correlated with an editor's age (r = .88, p < .001). Given the strong correlation, the theoretically salient professional experience is used in our model.

Ownership

Respondents were asked about their newspaper's ownership: privately owned (individual or family), local or regional public ownership, national public ownership, or others. Responses were recoded so that publicly owned newspapers were coded as the high value and privately owned newspapers and others were coded as the low value (M = 0.37, SD = 0.48).

Newspaper Size

Newspapers' organizational size was measured using circulation figures from the 2012 *Editor & Publisher* DataBook (M = 24,216.21, SD = 36,256.82). The distribution of the final sample was about the same as the initial sample in terms of circulation size, with 76.8% of the papers below 25,000 circulation (M = 10,186.31, SD = 5,991.12) and the remaining 23.2% with circulation higher than 25,000 (M = 70,557.39, SD = 52,782.87). To correct for the skewed distribution of the variable, a natural log transformation was applied to this variable (M = 9.50, SD = 1.02).

Community Structural Pluralism

Five county-level indicators were adapted to measure community structural pluralism: county population; percentage of the population not engaged in agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining; percentage of the population with a bachelor's degree or higher; percentage of the non-White population; and per capita income (e.g., Demers, 1996; Hindman, 1996; Hindman, Ernst, & Richardson, 2001; Nah et al., 2015). These items were standardized and combined to form an additive scale

(M = 0.00, SD = 3.41, range = −6.08 to 11.25, ɑ = .71). The measure was constructed at the county level, because the county is considered the basic geographic coverage of most daily newspapers.

Perceived Citizen Journalism Credibility

Four items were employed to measure editors' perceptions of citizen journalism credibility (e.g., Sundar, 1999). Respondents were asked to indicate how much they agree or disagree with each of the following four statements (from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*): Citizen news media provide fair information on issues affecting my community; citizen news media provide accurate information on issues affecting my community; citizen news media provide believable information on issues affecting my community; and citizen news media provide comprehensive information on issues affecting my community. These items were combined to form an additive scale (M = 10.77, SD = 4.52, ɑ = .92).

Analytical Strategy

The hypotheses and research question were examined using an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model. The dependent variable—editors' perceptions of social media as a news source—was regressed on five theoretically salient variables: professional experience as a journalist, ownership, circulation size, structural pluralism, and citizen journalism credibility. Given the limited sample size, the model focused on the variables of theoretical interest.

Results

Before testing the hypotheses, we examined zero-order correlations between each independent variable and editors' ratings of social media as a news source. Results (shown in Table 1) indicate that editors' ratings of social media as a news source were negatively correlated with their professional experience as a journalist (r = −.171, p < .05) and was positively correlated with public ownership (r = .188, p < .05), structural pluralism (r = .188, p < .05), and citizen journalism credibility (r = .191, p < .05). All the correlations were in hypothesized directions. Circulation size also was correlated positively with editors' ratings of social media as a news source (r = .149, p < .05).

We next performed an OLS regression to examine the unique contribution of the independent variables to editors' ratings of social media as a news source. As shown in Table 2, the model as a whole significantly accounted for 15.7% of the variance in the dependent variable.

Table 1. Zero-Order Correlations Among Variables.

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Social media as a news source	—				
2. Experience as journalist	−.171[*]	—			
3. Ownership (1 = *public*)	.193[*]	−.123[+]	—		
4. Circulation size (logged)	.149[*]	.319[***]	.128[+]	—	
5. Community structural pluralism	.188[*]	.252[**]	.049	.577[***]	—
6. Citizen journalism credibility	.191[*]	−.136[+]	−.033	−.131[+]	−.125[+]

[+] p < .10. [*] p < .05. [**] p < .01. [***] p <.001.

Table 2. Predicting Editors' Perceptions of Social Media as a News Source.

	β	t-ratio
Experience as journalist	−.209*	−2.46
Ownership (1 = *public*)	.150+	1.86
Circulation size (logged)	.111	1.11
Community structural pluralism	.195*	2.01
Citizen journalism credibility	.206*	2.58
R^2 (%)	15.7%***	

Note. Cell entries are standardized regression coefficients. $N = 142$.
+ $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

H1 stated that editors with longer professional experience as journalists would be less likely than those with less experience to rate social media as an important news source. This hypothesis received support. As presented in Table 1, experience as a journalist was negatively related to editors' ratings of social media as a news source (β = −.209, $p < .05$), while all other variables in the model were taken into account. Stated differently, newspaper editors who had longer years of experience as a journalist were less likely than editors with less experience to rate social media as an important news source.

With an emphasis on organization-level factors, H2 proposed that editors of publicly owned newspapers would be more likely than editors of private newspapers to rate social media as an important news source. H2 was not supported at the conventional 95% confidence level. Public ownership was only marginally related to the dependent variable (β = .150, $p = .065$). However, the relationship was in the hypothesized direction. RQ1 asked how organizational size, as measured by circulation, would affect editors' ratings of social media as an important news source. As shown in Table 2, the relationship between circulation and editors' conception of social media as a news source was not statistically significant.

Turning to community structural characteristics, H3 stated that editors from more structurally pluralistic communities would be more likely to rate social media as an important news source. This hypothesis was supported. Independent of all other variables in the model, community structural pluralism had a positive relationship with the dependent variable (β = .195, $p < .05$), suggesting that editors in larger, more structurally pluralistic communities were more likely than those in smaller, less structurally pluralistic communities to consider social media as important sources of news.

Finally, H4 posited that editors with higher levels of citizen journalism credibility would be more likely to rate social media as an important news source. This hypothesis received support. As shown in Table 1, citizen journalism credibility had an independent positive link with the dependent variable (β = .206, $p < .05$). In line with the expectation, editors who considered citizen journalism credible were more likely to think social media are important news sources.[1]

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[1] We conducted an additional analysis to examine editors' ratings of social media by platform. Specifically, we estimated two OLS regression models predicting editors' ratings of social network sites and blogs/microblogs, respectively, as a news source. The model predicting editors' ratings of social network

Discussion

Research with a focus on the intersection of traditional and citizen journalism has examined how professional journalists view and integrate citizen journalism features into the news production process (e.g., Broersma & Graham, 2012; Goode, 2009; Knight, 2012; Nah & Chung, 2009, 2016; Nah et al., 2015; Thurman, 2008). To extend this stream of work, this study investigates how newspaper editors view social media as a source of news. Specifically, we tested a set of hypotheses grounded in the hierarchy of influences model (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). The central premise is that editorial decisions, including the selection of news sources, are conditioned by multiple intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

A few conclusions can be offered from the present results based on a representative sample of U.S. newspaper editors. First, editors' journalistic experience was negatively related to their perception of social media as a news source. A plausible reason for this relationship is that editors with longer professional experience have formed a fixed idea of what is news and what sources they rely on to make news through their journalistic practices. This finding appears consistent with the work of Nah and Chung (2009), who found that editors with more professional experience perceived that citizen journalism was not important in terms of conventional journalistic roles. Moreover, research shows that younger age groups tend to be more open to newer, more innovative ideas than older age groups (Rogers, 1995). This age influence may be at work, considering the high correlation between professional experience as a journalist and age, as noted earlier. Therefore, editors with less professional experience as journalists are more willing to consider a newer, emergent tool as a viable news-gathering tool.

Second, we found a positive (though marginal) relationship between public ownership of newspapers and editors' perceptions of social media as a news source, implying that editors at publicly owned newspapers see social media as a useful news-gathering tool relative to those at privately owned newspapers. This finding can be interpreted in multiple ways. On one hand, newspapers with public ownership tend to look for cost-efficient means to gather and generate news articles (Hermida & Thurman, 2008). Social media can be a useful tool to meet deadlines and daily news quotas to feed their news sites constantly. On the other hand, newspapers with public ownership may embrace more diverse voices and opinions, and thus they may be more keen to real-time information and news coming from user-generated content in social media.

Third, editors in larger, more structurally pluralistic communities rated social media as an influential source of news more highly than did editors in smaller, less structurally pluralistic communities.

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sites as a news source explained 10.1% of the variance, with experience as journalist as a negative predictor ($\beta = -.243$, $p < .01$). Citizen journalism credibility was negatively related to editors' ratings of social network sites as a news source, but the effect was not statistically significant at $p < .05$ ($\beta = .160$, $p = .055$). No other independent variables in the model were near statistical significance at $p < .05$. The model predicting editors' ratings of blogs/microblogs explained 17.7% of the variance. Public ownership, structural pluralism, and citizen journalism credibility had a positive association with editors' ratings of blogs/microblogs as a news source ($\beta = .207$, $p < .05$; $\beta = .215$, $p < .05$; and $\beta = .209$, $p < .01$, respectively). No other variables in the model were near statistical significance at $p < .05$.

As noted, structurally pluralistic communities contain a greater number and diversity of special interest groups. In such structural settings, news gathering needs to be innovative. Unlike homogeneous community settings, where power is concentrated among a limited number of actors and journalists have ties with key influentials, monitoring the activity of those in differentiated power structure requires more coordination beyond traditional means of news gathering. Alternatively, editors in structurally heterogeneous communities serve a greater diversity of community residents and their voices. In either case, social media can be a valuable tool for sourcing news and gathering information for editors serving structurally pluralistic areas. The result is consistent with our expectation and adds evidence to the proposition that editors in different communities face different constraints and opportunities for technology use, with those in larger, more structurally pluralistic communities more innovative to adapt to heterogeneous settings than those in smaller, less structurally pluralistic communities (Hindman et al., 2001, Lowrey, 2003; Nah et al., 2015).

Finally, editors' perceptions of citizen journalism credibility were found to be an antecedent of their rating of social media as an influential news source. Although previous research has extensively investigated individual audiences' media credibility, how journalists perceive the credibility of citizen journalism has not been satisfactorily examined, with even limited attention to the role of citizen journalism credibility as a psychological source of journalistic practices in the literature on the hierarchy of influences model (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Much like the credibility of a speaker leading to greater message receptivity in a persuasion context, citizen journalism credibility is a key to considering social media as an influential news source. That is, editors who consider social media credible in terms of traditional journalistic standards are more likely to incorporate them into a repertoire of news-gathering tools and be able to benefit from user-generated news and insights. This finding extends prior research that has focused on a linkage of source and media credibility and individual audiences' choice of news sources and channels (e.g., Kiousis, 2001), and it adds a unique psychological dimension to the hierarchy of influences model (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996).

Despite these insights, this study suffers a few important limitations. First, the response rate of the survey was less than ideal, despite our efforts to elicit editors' participation with carefully tailored advance and follow-up contacts. Although the low response rate does not necessarily point to the presence of bias in our results, and our data approximated the population parameter in terms of circulation, it still limits population-level inferences. Second, the limited statistical power that stemmed from the low response rate restricted our analysis to the variables of theoretical interest and might have led to unstable coefficient estimates. Third, the measure of editors' perceptions of social media as a news source can be refined with a focus on how editors use social media in actual sourcing behavior. Fourth, it is plausible that editors' ratings of social media as a news source can be affected by the authors of blog or social network site content. For example, editors would likely view the blog of a professional journalist differently than the blog of a regular citizen. Thus, it is important to differentially investigate how editors evaluate social media sources updated by ordinary citizens and those updated by professional journalists and other elite actors such as elected officials and political candidates.

Finally, while our research focused on editors' perceptions of social media as a news source, future work should take into account the actual practices that newsroom professionals make in their

selection of social media sources. Observing editors' daily practices and routines regarding how they integrate social media into news making might illuminate behavior comparable or contradictory to the one documented in the existing literature on news production routines, such as journalists' reliance on institutional sources to seek credibility and legitimacy (Berkowitz, 2009; Gans, 2011; Tuchman, 1978). We suggest that future research adopt methods, such as ethnography of newsrooms and in-depth interviews with newspaper editors, to provide a more detailed and nuanced understanding of how editors think about the roles of social media in their conception of newsworthiness and how such conception is enacted in daily news-making practices.

These limitations and concerns notwithstanding, the evidence presented in this article offers several unique insights. The results, based on a nationwide probability-based sample, suggest that variations in the extent to which social media are considered important sources of news are guided by journalistic experience, community structural characteristics, and citizen journalism credibility. Although social media are a growing trend in the newspaper industry and becoming popular news-gathering tools, there is still a systematic variation across newspapers. Why certain newspapers integrate social media into news gathering while others do not is a more complex question than it seems, and we have shown that this variation is related to multiple factors intrinsic and extrinsic to gatekeepers.

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