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Stephanie Adomavicius
Hofstra University, sadomavicius22@gmail.com

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Putting the Social in Social Media: How Human Connection Triggers Engagement

Stephanie Adomavicius, *Hofstra University*

Conference Paper (Graduate)

Abstract

Social media has become the preferred channel of information and has altered patterns of interaction and connection. As a result, society now revolves around a two-way form of communication with constant dialogue and instant responses. Public relations practitioners have had to adapt and change their strategy in order to keep up with the times, and because of this, engagement is now considered to be a measurement of success.

In terms of social media, engagement is how users interact with content and participate in online conversations. This study will uncover what causes people to engage on social media and identify the characteristics that make a photo and a video interesting.

Keywords: advertising, business communication, communication technology, corporate communication, new mass communication, media, public relations, social media

Introduction

A public forum like no other, social media has transformed the art of emotional connection and has redefined how society develops, maintains and grows relationships. It is a two-way form of communication, and it has become the preferred means of exchange since people enjoy voicing their opinion, sharing content and participating in decision making. Those that engage on social media sites yearn to strengthen and expand their network, along with "seek fulfillment of their relational needs through socializing with others in the community" (Hung, Li & Tse, 2011). The larger their cluster of connections become, the greater the need to interact and intermingle. Within the last few years, social media has become a dominant channel of information and has changed the course of communications, altering social

connection and patterns of interaction. For public relations practitioners, this has meant a shift in ideals and work habits, since social media promotes nonstop conversation with the expectation of instant responses. According to a recent article in the *Financial Times*, "the headlong rush into a digital future has brought anguish as well as enlightenment. It makes people seamlessly connected, better informed and able to achieve things that were unimaginable not long ago" (Gapper, 2017). For example, social media users are considered to be producers and consumers of information.

The book *Media Now: Understanding Media, Culture and Technology* states "the social media craze has reached such heights that it seems every major website is going social. Online newspaper stories invite commentary from readers, while websites connected to popular TV shows solicit real-time user comments to stimulate viewer engagement" (Strabhaar & Davenport, 2016, p. 294). As a result, the public's attention has shifted from traditional media to digital media and the term "going viral" has become the equivalent of a front-page story. These have become common terms for public relations practitioners, as they strive to stay ahead of the changing media landscape and rapidly emerging trends.

Conversely, some might argue this addiction to digital media, specifically social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter, is unhealthy and a waste of time. Dr. Alter, an associate professor at the Stern School of Business at New York University who researches marketing and psychology, recognized this phenomenon of behavioral addiction in a recent interview and how "we've become obsessed with how many "likes" our Instagram photos are getting instead of where we are walking and whom we are talking to" (Dreifus, 2017). Yet, this paper will prove the desire for close relationships still exists and that we are more connected to one another than ever before.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines engagement as "emotional involvement or commitment." In the context of social media, engagement represents "the degree to which people are willing to contribute to online conversations with their friends" (Oliveira, Huertas & Lin, 2016; Wang, Kim, Xiao, & Jung, 2017). Engagement has become a new form of measurement for public relations practitioners, as it is associated with meaningful relationships and positive perceptions, which leads to emotional attachment and feelings of trust. Therefore, it is important to understand what drives and motivates people to engage on social media, so that business objectives can be met. It is also imperative to comprehend the provoking factors since Macey and Schneider (2008) found that people who are engaged exhibit "feelings of persistence, vigor, energy, dedication, absorption and enthusiasm," which are all optimistic outlooks when addressing behavior (Smith & Gallicano, 2015).

Through the implementation of different research methods, this study aims to determine the driving factors that encourage, stimulate and cause people to engage on social media, thereby proving that human connection and personal touch still exists. It examines the reasons and impulses that trigger people to either share or click on certain content, and it uncovers the type of content people enjoy most. In addition, this study will also define the characteristics that make a photo and a video interesting, as both elements are known to increase stimulation and elicit engagement.

Literature Review

"With the direct, spontaneous, interactive and relationship centric features, social media has been advocated as a unique 'social milieu that enables interpersonal communication'" (Zhong, Hardin, & Sun, 2011, p. 1266). Although social media has many purposes, staying in touch, conversing with friends, forming bonds and strengthening connections seem to dominate the list. In a Pew Research report titled, "Why Americans Use Social Media?" online adult users of social media platforms said relationships with friends and family are a main reason for their acceptance of social media. "Roughly two thirds of social media users said that staying in touch with current friends and family members is a major reason they use these sites, while half say that connecting with old friends they've lost touch with is a major reason behind their use of these technologies" (Smith, 2011). Breaking it down even further, roughly seven in 10 users under the age of 50 said keeping in touch with current friends is a key factor that fuels their activity on social media platforms, with Facebook being the most popular. Instagram has grown to more than 500 million users and is the second most popular social media network. Additionally, a study conducted by *The New York Times* Consumer Insight Group, which addressed why people share on social media sites, found that "78 percent of respondents shared information to stay in contact with people who they otherwise might lose track of, or who would slip out of their lives."

Relationships and engagement have two things in common, trust and satisfaction (Kang, 2014; Smith & Gallicano, 2015). Research has indicated that social media engagement serves as a referee between communication behavior and social media usage (Paek, Hove, Jung, & Cole, 2013; Smith & Gallicano, 2015), and that engagement is thought to go deeper, serving more as a symbol of loyalty and fostering relationships. Smith and Gallicano (2015) defined "engagement as a personally-initiated and often spontaneous activity driven by four primary factors: information consumption, sense of presence, interest immersion and social connectivity." Millennial participants of their study said engagement was driven by personal interests tailored to each individual, and that "social media engagement was often tied to respondents' desires to interact with friends," with social approbation and connection serving as primary themes (Smith & Gallicano, 2015). "Most teens aren't

addicted to social media; if anything, they're addicted to each other," says Danah Boyd, author of *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*.

Calder, Malthouse and Schaedel's viewpoint on engagement is also similar, with it being subjective to the user and how closely content is linked and relates to the user's beliefs, experiences, life, personality, and so forth. Interestingly enough, the tailored and intimate approach of posts from CEOs on social media "may allow publics to imagine themselves being addressed by a close and trusted friend rather than a distant public figure" (Men & Tsai, 2016). It can then be said that an interpersonal and sincere tone, creates trust, which gives rise to increased levels of engagement, commitment, emotional attachment and positive perception.

When it comes to online content there are two types of people, lurkers and active users. Lurkers are those who just read content rather than participate in the discussion, while active users are those who get involved and spark conversation, whether it be through likes, comments or shares (Khan, 2017). Instead of limiting engagement to just commenting, Khan (2017) "extended the understanding of the social interaction motive to include participatory acts such as liking, disliking, and uploading videos in order to socialize." Leaving a comment, liking a post, sharing a link, and retweeting content are all forms of engagement, therefore, it can also be said that "engagement is what publics feel about social media content and then what they do about it" (Smith & Gallicano, 2015; Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011).

For example, one reason users engage with content on Facebook is for "interpersonal connectivity, as they seek the benefits associated with establishing and maintaining friendships" (Mayshak, Sharman, Zinkiewicz, & Hayley, 2017). Facebook communication allows for relationship maintenance and is "associated with increased social capital, increased social self-esteem, and decreased loneliness" (Vogel & Rose, 2016; Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2010; Valkenburg, Peter & Schouten, 2006). On the same note, it has been found that when people concentrate and hone in on their close friends while browsing Facebook, they also experience higher levels of self-esteem (Vogel & Rose, 2016; Wilcox & Stephen, 2013). What's more is that online social media engagement results in a release of the brain's "cuddle chemical," oxytocin. Research has proven that "oxytocin levels can rise as much as 13 percent – a spike equivalent to the spike people get when they are getting married to their love" (Ramasubbu, 2017).

Ironically, Facebook has grown into a platform where users frequently post about life events and milestones. "People tend to disclose positive life events indirectly (i.e., photos with no caption) and disclose negative life events indirectly (i.e., status updates)" (Wang, Kim, Xiao, & Jung, 2017; Bevan et al., 2015). When posting negative content, people who exude a higher level of self-esteem receive more likes and comments from Facebook friends, compared to people with lower levels of self-esteem (Vogel & Rose, 2016).

Content about positive life events generates likes and shares, while negative life events yield more comments (Wang, Kim, Xiao, & Jung, 2017). Also, those with higher levels of empathy tend to receive higher levels of engagement (Mayshak, Sharman, Zinkiewicz, & Hayley, 2017).

In addition, a study that observed engagement on the National Cancer Institute's Facebook page found that cancer-related content posted with photos (rather than with videos or status updates) was the most successful means of sparking engagement (Strekalova & Krieger, 2017). Another study examined the relationship between engagement and the Humans of New York Facebook page in terms of topics, tone and length of narratives. It found that users "were more engaged to the networked narratives related to dreams, education and romantic relationships," which again highlights the significance of human connection and personal touch (Wang, Kim, Xiao, & Jung, 2017).

On the same note, a qualitative content analysis of politician-bloggers, conducted by Coleman and Moss (2008), implies the "interpersonal approach to blogging, characterized by experientially-based and subjective personal accounts, serves to construct a sense of sincerity and to stage a more personal relationship with online readers" (Men & Tsai, 2016). Huberman, Romero and Wu (2008) revealed user activity on Twitter is influenced and shaped by social connectivity, while an alternative study found users who are motivated to share information, rather than be fixated on oneself or who are self-status seeking, "tend to be more conversational, posting mentions and replies to other users, and are more embedded in the social interaction on Twitter, having more social contacts" (Naaman, Boase, & Lai, 2010).

Lastly, Khan (2017) found that social interaction is one reason users upload videos to YouTube. Those with the information seeking motive are more likely to engage with videos on YouTube, which is similar to Naaman, Boase & Lai's research on Twitter, yet the longer a user has been a YouTube visitor, the less likely they will engage.

Methodology

In order to become immersed in the realm of social media and collect data on engagement, quantitative and qualitative research methods were employed. This study administered an online 31 question survey and conducted two interviews to acquire in-depth information, with the purpose of uncovering the factors that encourage, stimulate and cause people to engage on social media, examine the impulses that trigger people to either share or click on certain content, and define the characteristics that make a photo and a video interesting.

The survey (see Appendix A) was distributed to a convenience sample and hosted on Qualtrics for a duration of three weeks. Demographics of the

chosen sample were men and women between the ages of 24 and 70, who are living in or are from the Tristate area, and who have earned at least a bachelor's degree. Upon completion of the three-week period, a sample size of 110 was collected.

In terms of measurement, some questions featured a five-point Likert scale that ranged from "extremely important" to "not at all important" or "very likely" to "very unlikely." The majority of multiple-choice questions included a "check all that apply" option so respondents didn't experience limitations when answering, and several questions contained an "other, please specify" box where participants could type in additional comments or an answer choice that was more relevant and pertinent to them. The survey also included rank order and dichotomous (yes/no) questions to gauge behavior and attitude, in addition to one open ended question asking, "What would entice you to use social media," which pertained to those who selected "never" for the question, "About how often do you use social media?"

In addition, two one-on-one interviews were conducted and recorded using the video conferencing program Zoom with the assistant director of the Adelphi Bridges Program, who holds a master of arts in mental health counseling and a master of arts in general psychology, and the internet news manager at Newsday.com. Questions asked were predetermined based on the interviewees' background and expertise (see Appendix B). These individuals were selected so insight and perspective from the media and higher education would be included in the study.

Results

The 110 participants were 66 percent female and 34 percent male. Caucasian is the dominate ethnicity of this study, the age bracket of 24-39 years old makes up more than half of the respondents, and nearly the entire sample size is employed, as well as single or never married. Just under 60 percent of participants consider themselves to be technically savvy, while 1-2 hours per day is the most common duration of time to be on social media (Figure 1).

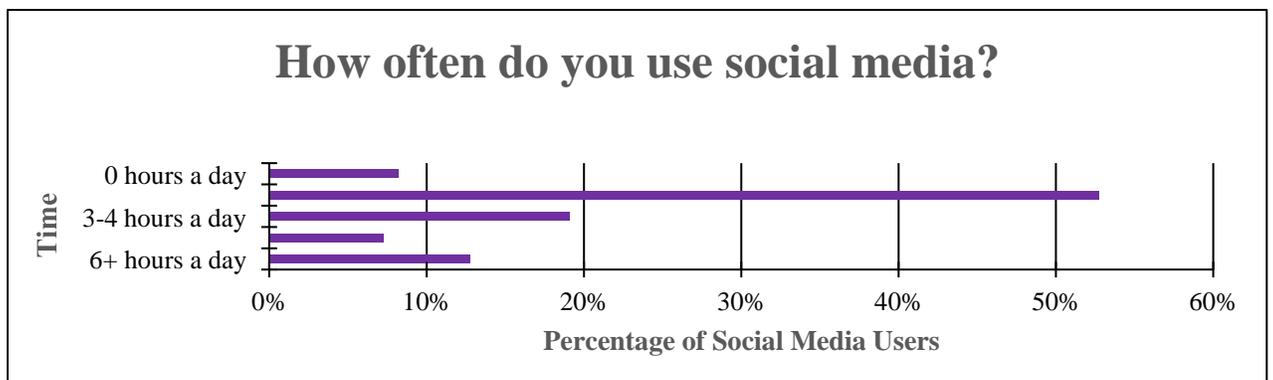


Figure 1. Results depicted from the survey question that addresses how long participants are on social media per day.

For the nine participants who do not use social media, replies to what would entice them to join ranged from having more time to use it to stronger privacy settings. Several also pledged that they would never join social media.

Evening is the most popular time of day to use social media, according to 87 percent of respondents, while 57 percent said the morning is the ideal time. Facebook, Instagram and YouTube are the three most widespread platforms as depicted in Figure 2 and as shown in Figure 3 more than 70 percent of respondents have had at least one social media account for seven or more years.

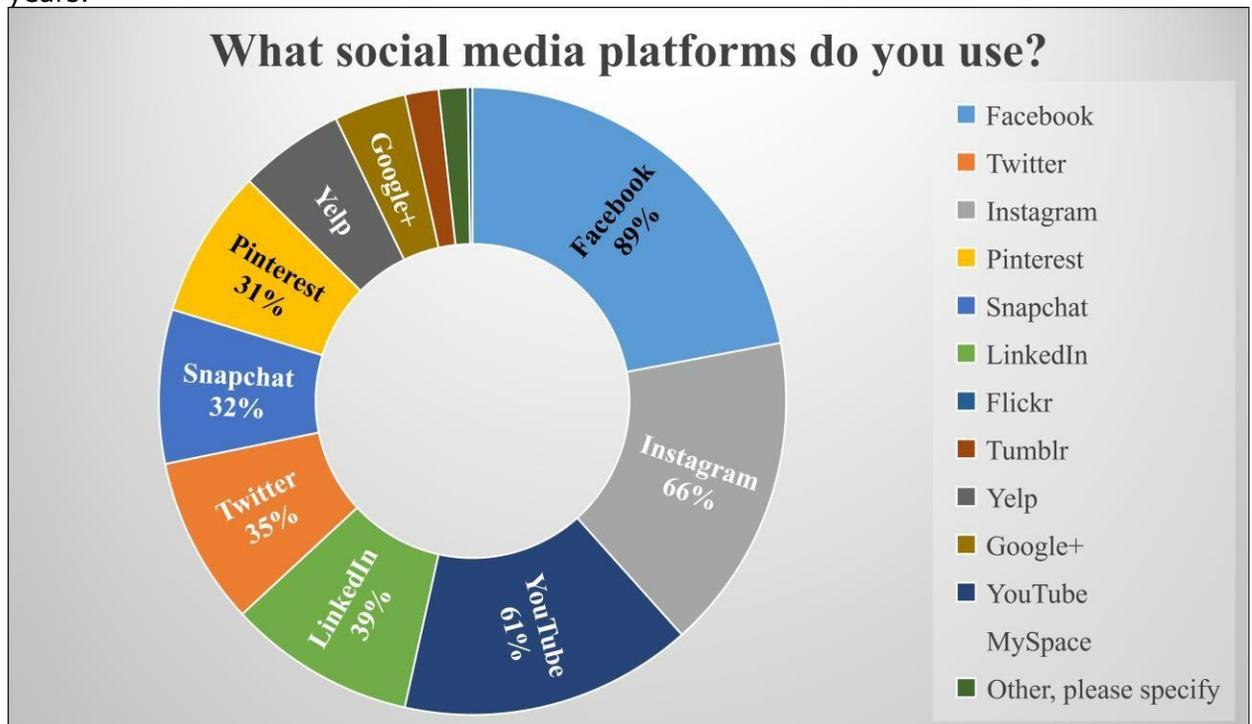


Figure 2. Results depicted from the survey question that addresses which social media platforms are used.

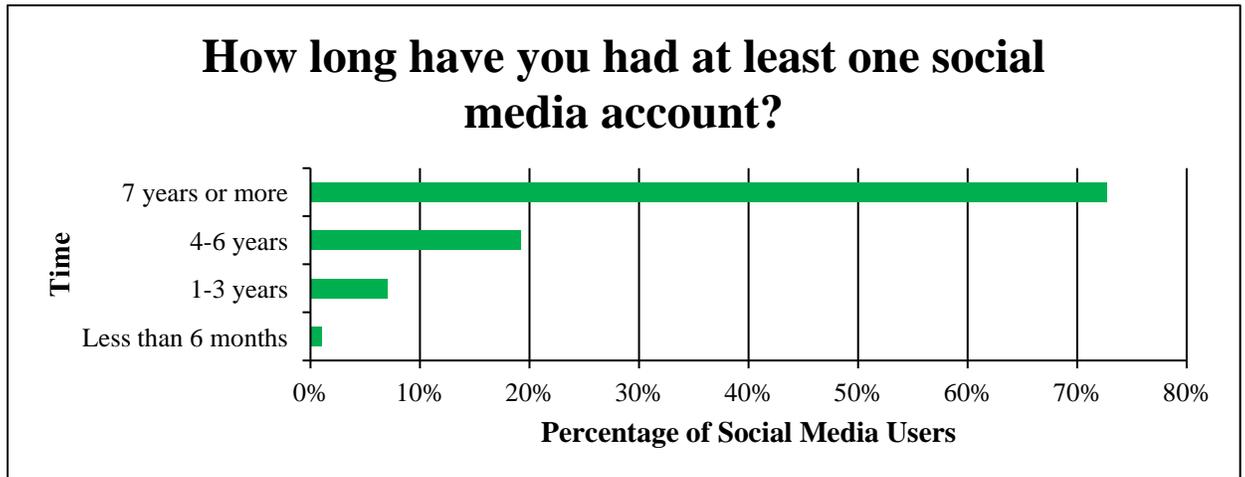


Figure 3. Results depicted from the survey question that addresses longevity of social media.

With regard to sources from which respondents obtained news, Figure 4 demonstrates that 70 percent said television news shows (such as CNN, MSNBC, FOX, etc.), 58 percent said the online versions of newspapers, and 57 percent said social media. Radio ranked higher than the print version of newspapers, with only 26 percent selecting print over digital.

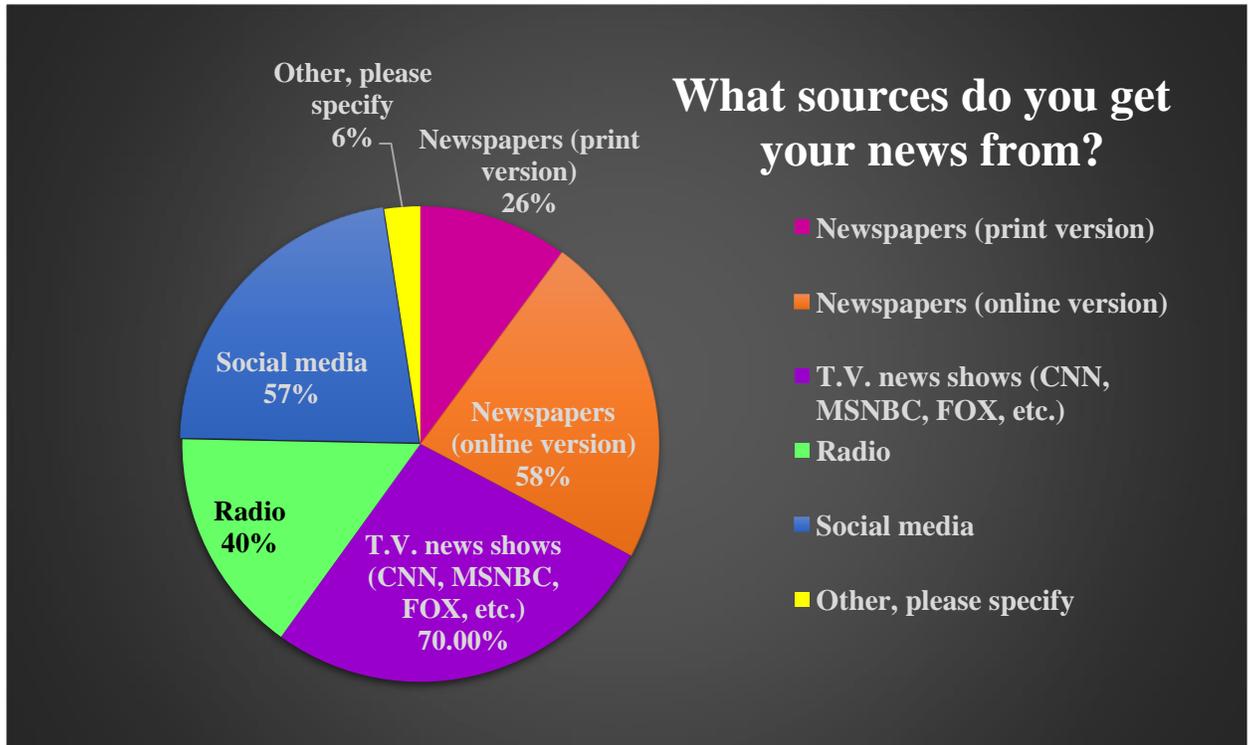


Figure 4. Results depicted from the survey question that addresses news sources

Overwhelmingly, 83 percent of participants said the primary reason they joined social media was to interact and keep in touch with friends and family members, while only four percent said to follow news/trends or to receive recommendations (about a restaurant, book movie, hotel, etc.). Public opinion, meaning that friends and family members are talking about it, proved to be the most influential factor in joining a new social media platform. In addition, 73 percent said that increasing the number of followers on their social media accounts is not at all important to them, 61 percent do not request to follow individuals they do not know, and half of the respondents do not allow other people to follow them if they do not know them.

Surprisingly 45 percent of participants said their level of engagement on social media does not increase on the weekend. Content quality (information from a reputable source) is extremely important to 56 percent of respondents, and 83 percent said they are more likely to engage (click on a link, like, comment or share) with content shared by someone with whom they consider to be a friend. The majority are either neutral or somewhat unlikely to share, like, or comment on a photo posted by an organization, yet

52 percent said they are very likely to share, like or comment on a photo that contains a friend or family member. Likewise, 26 percent, said they are very unlikely to share, like, or comment on a video posted by an organization percent, while 41 percent said they are very likely to share, like or comment on a video that contains a friend or family member. Activities to do with friends is the most popular type of content to post about (see Figure 5), as status updates (what are you doing, how are you feeling, etc.) and travel locations round out the top three most common forms of content to post. By far the number one influencer of social media engagement is the status of a friend of family member, followed by politics and news articles, specifically national or international news. Only seven percent feel that social media has had a very negative impact on society in terms of access to information, connections/relationships, etc.

Lastly, the factor that makes a photo and a video the most interesting and intriguing is people in it who you know. For a photo, as shown in Figure 6, a unique location and conveying a message/story are the second and third highest ranking factors, while teaching you something new and conveying a message are the second and third highest ranking factors for a video, as shown in Figure 7.



Figure 5. Results depicted from the survey question that addresses the type of content respondents typically post about.

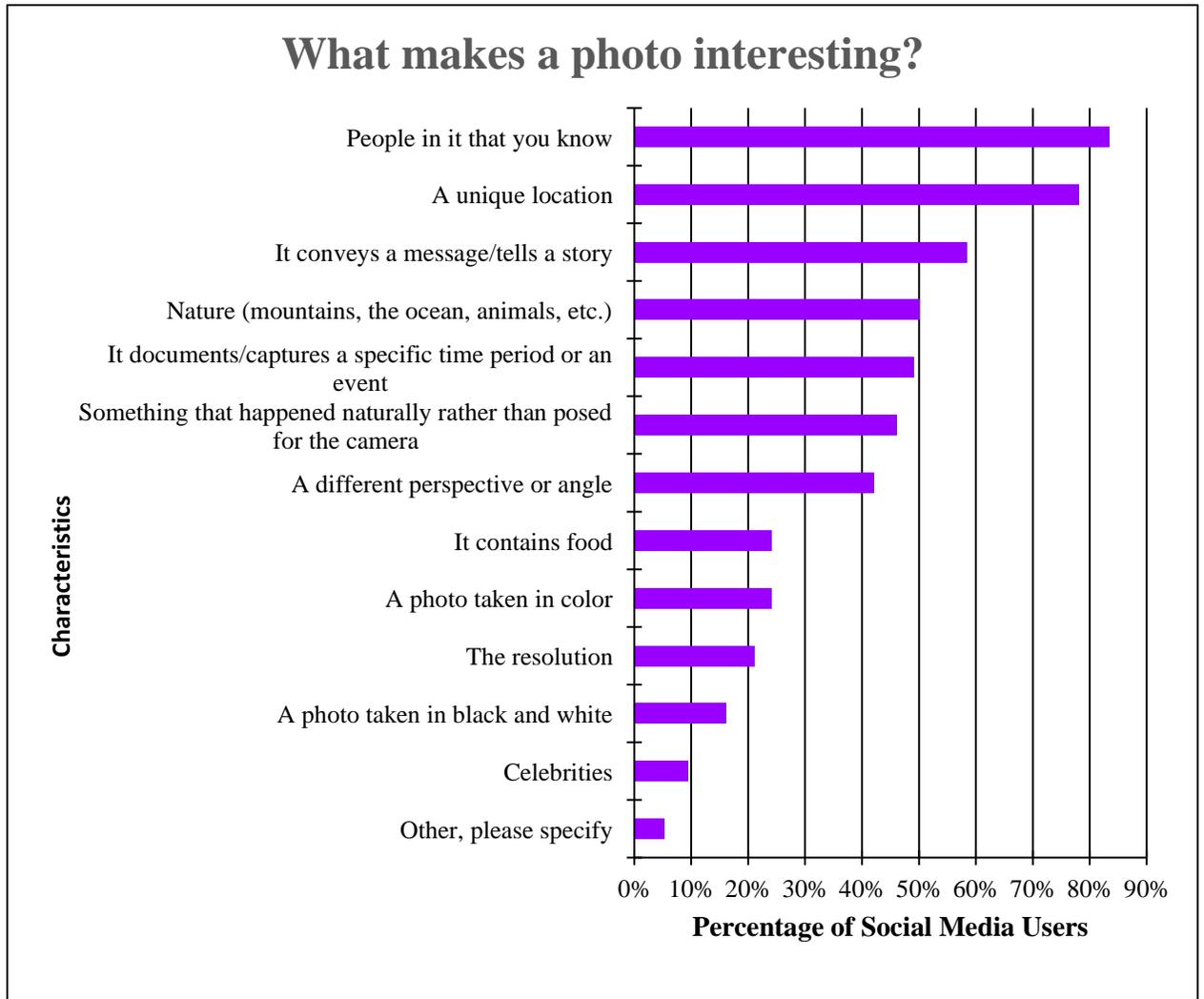


Figure 6. Results depicted from the survey question that addresses characteristics of photos.

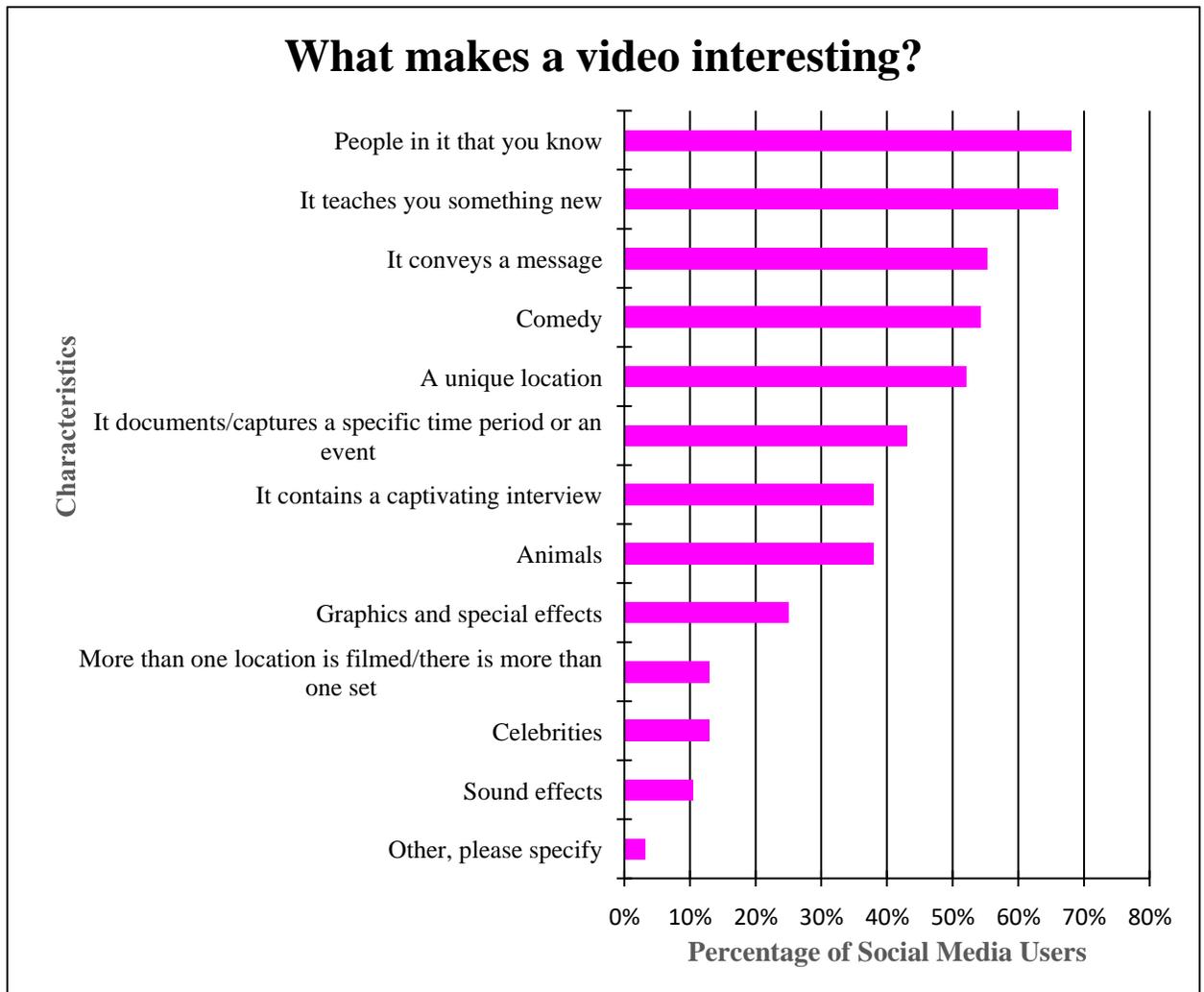


Figure 7. Results depicted from the survey question that addresses characteristics of videos.

Discussion

Dr. Jonah Berger, a social psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania is quoted as saying, "In most oral conversations, we don't have time to think about exactly the right thing to say...We fill conversational spaces by saying what's top of mind. But when you write something, you have the time to construct and refine what you say, so it involves more self-presentation." (Tierney, 2013). Written communication can then be perceived as a strategically crafted form of expression that is an honest reflection of

emotion. It is permanent and it is an extension of individuality and reputation. Written words on social media hold even more weight, as they set the tone of the dialogue, spark a reaction in others, and create a conversational playground for users to interact, bond and unite.

Based on this study's results, it can be stated that human connection still exists and that interaction and relationships are what drive people to engage on social media. This study forms a parallel link to the Pew Research report, titled "Why Americans Use Social Media?" as well as the research conducted by *The New York Times* Consumer Insight Group, in that all three uphold and confirm the notion that the primary reason people join social media is to interact and keep in touch with friends and family members. Since people are glued to their technological devices and are self-absorbed in their own silos, the Baby Boomer generation and even the media at times vocalize how personal touch and human contact are nonexistent. However, the reason people cannot separate themselves from technology is the insatiable desire to be so closely linked to one another and to feel included. The yearning to share life events and everyday details in virtual communities, coupled with the craving for validation and the urge to be a part of something, not only propel and steer the type of content that is posted on social media, but also the type of interaction that transpires. This relates back to the findings of the this study in that activities to do with friends is the most popular type of content to post, the status of a friend or family member is the number one influencer of social media engagement, and people are more likely to engage (click on a link, like, comment or share) with content shared by someone they know.

These findings also correlate to research done by neuroscientists and psychologists, where they scanned people's brains, as well as tracked their e-mails and online posts, "to find that good news can spread faster and farther than disasters and sob stories" (Tierney, 2013). Dr. Jonah Berger also mentions how articles are more likely to be shared if they are positive and that "readers need to be aroused one way or the other, and they preferred good news to bad," in his book, *Contagious: Why Things Catch On* (Tierney, 2013).

In this regard, people need optimistic stories. They are a form of escape and help spread kindness, compassion and generosity. This can be applied to social media in that users seek stimulation and find fulfillment by the nature of the content posted. Since the status of a friend or family member is most often comprised of positive content, this adds validity to the finding that the status of a friend or family member is the number one influencer of social media engagement. The same concept applies to content going viral. For example, as the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge spread and users of social media saw their friends participating, they wanted to get involved and unite for the cause.

The assistant director of the Adelphi University Bridges Program, who holds a master of arts in mental health counseling and a master of arts in general psychology, associates social media engagement with "how people are connected to one another and how they are partaking and sharing other people's experiences." During our one-on-one interview, she went on to equate how the new psychological phenomenon FOMO, which is the fear of missing out, causes people to be attached to social media and their technological devices because "they want to stay connected to their friends as much as possible, and they want to make sure they're not missing out on any life events or any status updates."

Furthermore, this study found most people are either neutral or somewhat unlikely to share, like, or comment on a photo posted by an organization, yet the majority are very likely to share, like or comment on a photo that contains a friend or family member. This is a significant finding in that it proves engagement is tied to personalization and connection, as well as the desire to communicate with friends and family, which supports Smith & Gallicano's (2015) research. The internet news manager at Newsday.com, revealed during our interview that stories with hot button issues, such as politics, or those where people have a personal connection to something receive the most engagement on social media. Similarly, In the other interview it was noted that the Adelphi University Bridges Facebook page receives more likes when photos and videos are posted of students, and that posting content every day causes more people to view a page, which boosts engagement.

Additionally, as with previous research, this study uncovered that Facebook is still the most preferred social media platform. Instagram and YouTube ranked second and third in this study, and the time allotment of 1-2 hours per day on social media coincides with Facebook's statement of 50 minutes being the average amount of time users spend on social media a day (Stewart 2016).

Although it has been proven that photos and videos generate more engagement, what is different about this study is that it defines the characteristics that make a photo and a video interesting. The number one factor that makes a photo and a video appealing and attention grabbing is people in it who you know. Again, that personal connection lures and draws users in, creating the urge to engage and be a part of a particular moment or activity. People in it who you know can also be perceived as relatable. For photos, a unique location and the transmission of a message or story is also significant, while learning something new is the second most important factor for videos. This is noteworthy and meaningful because it provides public relations practitioners the tools they need to create interesting photos and videos. The more interesting a photo or video is to users, the more engagement it will yield.

For example, Northwell Health posts daily photos and videos of employees (doctors, nurses, administrators, etc.) on its Facebook and Instagram pages and receives high levels of engagement. Some users may know the people photographed, others may have friends or family members in the medical field, while additional users may learn something new. Following these guides about what constructs an interesting photo or video will help public relations practitioners generate higher levels of engagement.

With that being said, this study indicates that public relations practitioners need to be more mindful when developing and executing campaigns. Although a certain demographic may be the target audience for an initiative, it doesn't mean everyone in this group will perceive, interpret and process a message the same way. Also, the fact that people are bombarded by messages all day long on multiple platforms creates a small threshold for content that will resonate and make an impact.

In order to stand out and break away from the clutter, public relations practitioners need to focus on the individual so that he or she feels like you are speaking directly to them. People miss the old-fashioned mystique of the simple, yet tailored approach, and as time passes, the generalized, big announcement, megaphone means of communications will not work. Content needs to be more relatable, simplistic and emotionally driven. This means that new technology and diverse methods of reaching people will not necessarily translate into a successful campaign or well-crafted message. Take the Clydesdale horses that Anheuser Busch uses, the "Thank You, Mom" campaign by Proctor & Gamble, and Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign. What do all these have in common? They tug at the heart strings, play on emotion, and they are relatable. An optimistic outlook coupled with relatability generates trust.

Specifically pertaining to social media content, this study indicates that people primarily use social media to interact with family and friends, and that the status of a friend or family is the number one influencer of engagement. As a result, public relations practitioners need to treat social media users/consumers more like a friend or family member. This can be done by altering the tone of messages to be more sincere, interpersonal and transparent, and making content more light-hearted and relatable. Trust will then develop and an emotional attachment will form. Emotional attachment and connection are the two triggers that drive engagement. If consumers felt they had "friendships" with organizations and industry executives, such as chief executive officers, business objectives would be more attainable due to human connection and personalization, society would be more transparent and trust would be held in higher regard.

In terms of limitations, a convenience sampling is the biggest weakness of the study. Future researchers should strive to obtain participants from different parts of the country, rather than just the Tri-state area, to identify and

understand if and why there is a pattern or trend with engagement depending on which part of the country one resides in. Although a convenience sampling worked for this study, it may not be the most effective means of measuring engagement. Also, a larger sample size would strengthen the research.

Another limitation is the lack of male perspective in the one-on-one interviews. The two individuals were selected to include outlooks from higher education and the media. In studying social media engagement, future researches should include more of a male perspective to increase the generalization of the results.

Conclusion

Although it is often said that human connection is hard to find these days, it is the desire to interact and strengthen relationships that drive social media usage and engagement. This study found activities to do with friends is the most popular type of content to post about, while the number one influencer of social media engagement is the status of a friend or family member. Furthermore, the factor that makes both a photo and a video the most interesting and intriguing is people in it who you know.

These findings, depicted in Appendix C, are significant for the field of public relations in that it puts relationships and relatability at the forefront of social media. Human connection and personalization are essential when it comes to crafting messages, and understanding this will not only help public relations practitioners increase engagement, but also be better equipped at educating the public and altering perceptions and behavior. Additionally, public relations practitioners now have a guideline to follow about what constitutes an interesting photo or video, since both generate greater levels of engagement on social media. Findings of this study can also benefit advertisers and marketers in their quest for consumers' attention in a cluttered space.

Appendix A - Survey

Distribution platform: Qualtrics

Audience: College educated men and women between the ages of 24-70, living in or from the Tristate area.

This anonymous survey pertains to social media and consumer behavior. It will only take a few minutes to complete. Thank you for your time and for your participation.

- 1) Please indicate your gender.
 Male
 Female
- 2) What is your age?
 24-29 years old
 30-39 years old
 40-49 years old
 50-59 years old
 60-69 years old
 70 years and over
- 3) Please indicate your ethnicity.
 White
 Hispanic or Latino
 Black or African American
 Native American or American Indian
 Asian/Pacific Islander
 Other
- 4) What is the highest level of education you have completed?
 Associate degree
 Bachelor's degree
 Completed some postgraduate
 Master's degree
 Ph.D., law or medical degree
 Other advanced degree beyond a Master's degree
- 5) What is your current employment status?
 Employed
 Out of work and looking for work
 Out of work but not currently looking for work
 A homemaker
 A student

- Military
- Retired
- Unable to work

6) What is your marital status?

- Single, never married
- Domestic partnership
- Married
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated

7) Do you consider yourself to be technologically savvy?

- Yes
- Neutral
- No

8) About how often do you use social media?

- 6+ hours a day (skip to question #10)
- 5-6 hours a day (skip to question #10)
- 3-4 hours a day (skip to question #10)
- 1-2 hours a day (skip to question #10)
- 0 hours a day

9) If never, what would entice you to use social media? (skip to questions #28)

10) When are you most likely to use social media? Check all that apply.

- Morning
- Afternoon
- Evening

11) What social media platforms do you use? Check all that apply.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Facebook | <input type="checkbox"/> Flickr |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Twitter | <input type="checkbox"/> Tumblr |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Instagram | <input type="checkbox"/> Yelp |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pinterest | <input type="checkbox"/> Google+ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Snapchat | <input type="checkbox"/> YouTube |
| <input type="checkbox"/> LinkedIn | <input type="checkbox"/> MySpace |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Other, please specify |

12) How long have you had at least one social media account?

- Less than 6 months
- 1 - 3 years

- 4 - 6 years
- 7 years or more

13) What is the primary reason you joined social media? Please select one.

- To interact and keep in touch with friends and family members
- To follow news and trends
- To follow celebrities
- To follow companies/learn more about a brand
- To discover new music
- To network
- To receive recommendations (about a restaurant, book movie, hotel, etc.)
- To get ideas for an event such a wedding, birthday party, etc. (decorations, favors, themes, etc.)
- Other, please specify

14) What are the factors that would influence you to join a new social media platform? Check all that apply.

- Public opinion (everyone is talking about it and joining it)
- It would assist in your career/finding a new job
- It has a new sharing feature that applies to pictures and videos
- Other, please specify

15) How important to you is increasing the number of followers on your social media accounts?

- Extremely important
- Quite important
- Moderately important
- Slightly important
- Not at all important

16) Do you request to follow individuals that you don't actually know in real life?

- Yes
- Neutral
- No

17) Do you have followers that you don't actually know in real life?

- Yes
- Neutral
- No

18) Do you find that your level of engagement on social media increases on the weekend?

- Yes
- Neutral
- No

19) What kind of content do you typically post about? Check all that apply.

- Status updates (what you are doing, how you are feeling, etc.)
- Politics
- Animals
- Travel locations
- Activities to do with friends
- Recipes
- Other, please specify

20) Please rank from 1-11 the following factors that you feel best influences and encourages you to engage (click on a link, like, comment or share) on social media. Place a 1 next to the factor that you think most influences you, a 2 next to the factor in second place, and so on up to 11.

- Cute animals
- Politics
- Celebrity news/gossip
- Entertainment news (T.V. show spoilers, movie trailers, concert release dates, etc.)
- Exotic locations/travel destinations
- Sports
- News articles (national and international news)
- Local news
- Recipes
- Positive or negative reviews (about restaurants, hotels, etc.)
- The status of a friend or family member

21) How important is content quality (information from a reputable source) to you when deciding whether to engage (click on a link, like, comment or share)?

- Extremely important
- Quite important
- Moderately important
- Slightly important
- Not at all important

22) Are you more likely to engage (click on a link, like, comment or share) with content shared by someone you are actually friends with and know in real life compared to an unknown follower?

- Yes
- Neutral
- No

23) How likely are you to share, like or comment on a photo posted by an organization or company?

- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Neutral
- Somewhat unlikely
- Very unlikely

24) How likely are you to share, like or comment on a photo that has a friend or family member in it?

- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Neutral
- Somewhat unlikely
- Very unlikely

25) How likely are you to share, like or comment on a video posted by and organization or company?

- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Neutral
- Somewhat unlikely
- Very unlikely

26) How likely are you to share, like or comment on a video that has a friend or family member in it?

- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Neutral
- Somewhat unlikely
- Very unlikely

27) How much is privacy a concern when using social media?

- Extremely important
- Quite important
- Moderately important
- Slightly important
- Not at all important

28) In your opinion, what makes a photo interesting? Check all that apply.

- A unique location
- Celebrities
- People in it that you know

- A different perspective or angle
- The resolution
- Something that happened naturally rather than posed for the camera
- A photo taken in black and white
- A photo taken in color
- Nature (mountains, the ocean, animals, etc.)
- It documents/captures a specific time period or an event
- It contains food
- It conveys a message/tells a story
- Other, please specify

29) In your opinion, what makes a video interesting? Check all that apply.

- A unique location
- Celebrities
- Animals
- Sound effects
- Comedy
- Graphics and special effects
- More than one location is filmed/there is more than one set
- People in it that you know
- It documents/captures a specific time period or an event
- It conveys a message
- It teaches you something new
- It contains a captivating interview
- Other, please specify

30) What sources do you get your news from? Check all that apply.

- Newspapers (print version)
- Newspapers (online version)
- T.V. news shows (CNN, MSNBC, FOX, etc.)
- Radio
- Social media
- Other, please specify

31) What kind of an impact (access to information, connections/relationships, etc.) do you think social media has had on society?

- Very positive
- Somewhat positive
- Neutral
- Somewhat negative
- Very negative

Thank you for your participation.

Appendix B - Interview Questions

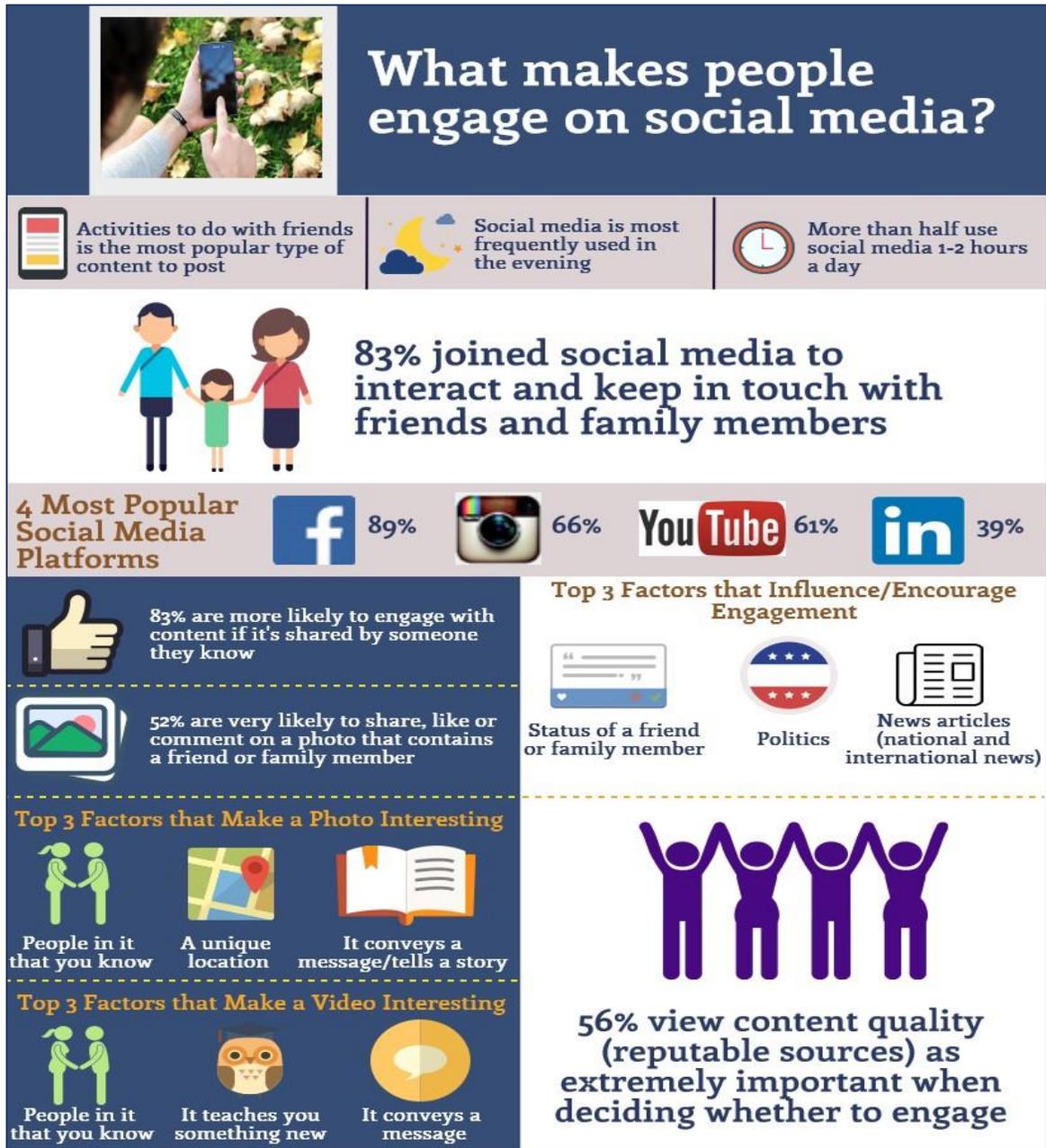
1) Assistant Director, Adelphi University Bridges to Adelphi Program (holds a Master of Arts in Mental Health Counseling and a Master of Arts in General Psychology)

- How does social media fit into your current role?
- How would you define engagement?
- Based on your expertise in psychology and counseling, what do you think drives people to engage on social media?
- Do you view this as a healthy desire/addiction?
- A recent *Huffington Post* article, titled "Biological & Psychological Reasons for Social Media Addiction," mentions that we devote 30-40% of speech talking about ourselves. This jumps to 80% on social media. As a result, do you think engagement is an impulsive act?
- Dr. Alter, an associate professor at the Stern School of Business at NYU, who researches psychology and marketing, recently stated in an interview that behavioral addictions are now widespread and most likely have risen with the continual introduction of new technology and social media platforms. What are your thoughts about this in relation to social media?
- What factors do you think contribute to certain content going viral?
- How long has Adelphi Bridges been using social media?
- Specifically referring to the Adelphi Bridges Facebook page, what kind of content generates the most engagement?
- Does Adelphi Bridges use other social media platforms?

2) Internet News Manager, *Newsday.com*

- How does social media fit into your current role at *Newsday*?
- As a journalist, what kind of an impact do you think social media has had on the art of storytelling and the dissemination of news stories?
- The issue of fake news is certainly becoming more prevalent. Since social media sparks a two-way conversation and fuels urgency, do you think now more than ever the desire to break a story affects the quality of content? Please explain.
- Reflecting on your current role, please explain the differentiating factors that distinguish the website version of a story versus the social media version of that same story. How do you package/market them differently? (Example: length, headline, etc.)
- How would you define engagement?
- From your experience, what kind of stories generate the most engagement on social media?
- Have you noticed any patterns in the type of engagement that certain stories receive? For example, do certain types of stories/story topics generate more shares than comments? Do certain types of stories/story topics exude a certain tone in the comments received or contain keywords?
- Could you share some practices that *Newsday* uses to encourage/increase engagement on social media?
- How do you think media outlets can increase engagement levels on content moving forward?
- Based upon your expertise and in your opinion, what makes a photo interesting? What makes a video interesting?

Appendix C - Infographic



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