

# News on Facebook: How Facebook and Newspapers Build Mutual Brand Loyalty Through Audience Engagement

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## Abstract

Focused on the value of Facebook as a distribution platform for newspapers, this study shows that news which attracts and holds readers' attention on Facebook is positively related to the brand awareness and brand loyalty of newspapers and Facebook. Brand-wise, Facebook and newspapers benefit when news is distributed through Facebook. The study shows that Facebook and major newspapers are somewhat mutually beneficial in helping build the brand loyalty of both. However, audiences who read news from major brands on Facebook rather than going to the news sites may create a certain illusory loyalty toward a news brand.

## Keywords

Facebook, news engagement, brand loyalty, brand competition relationship, newspapers

Despite the exponential growth of news platforms today, news engagement—where news that attracts and holds readers' attention (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012)—is on the decline (Lee & Chyi, 2015; Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel, & Shearer, 2016). News media have struggled to get audiences better engaged with news, especially on the Internet (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Nielsen, 2018).

Although the percentage of audiences getting news from social media is declining, Facebook still leads other social media platforms as a source of news for users because

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of its large user base (Newman et al., 2018; Shearer & Gottfried, 2017). Two thirds of Facebook users get news from Facebook, which equals to 44% of the U.S. general population, whereas Twitter reaches about 16% (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016; Matsa & Shearer, 2018), prompting almost all major news publishers to create Facebook pages (Ju, Jeong, & Chyi, 2014) and encouraging the sharing of links to news articles on Facebook. News referrals make users aware of the existence of news as well as news sites, and give an impression that the social media platform is the first place to find news (Mitchell et al., 2014). Readers are directed back to news publishers' websites when readers click the link provided by news publishers on Facebook and thus adding to news publishers' websites' traffic (Myllylahti, 2018).

For media organizations, this presents two challenges; the first is a loss of control over dissemination of information and the second is about retaining audiences. In this new environment, visitors from social media do not spend much time on news websites (Mitchell et al., 2014). Besides, news publishers produce the news content that conforms to social media needs. For example, the Facebook's News Feed algorithm encourages news publishers to produce news that encourages more interactions among users and enhances user engagement. The News Feed algorithm values news that users are likely to click, spend time on, react to, comment, and share (Facebook Media and Publisher Help Center, n.d.). Besides, news that is more relevant to readers, is updated more frequently, and encourages interactions will appear more often on audience news feeds. New audiences redirected from social media to news media article pages significantly suggests two concerns for news publishers. First, how does this affect the long-term relationships that news media want to create with their audience? The news feed algorithm decides who and how many readers get directed back to newspaper sites. Thus, by putting news on social media platforms, news publishers lose control of audiences visiting their sites and, in the process, advertising dollars, thus affecting profit margins. Yet news media are enthusiastic about partnering with social media such as Facebook (Stassen, 2011), giving rise to whether Facebook replaces the news sites where audiences find news and to what extent Facebook affects the brand of news publishers.

Brand awareness and brand loyalty matter to the business of journalism. News on social media may draw new audiences but might dilute the brand of news publishers. Users who encounter news through Facebook news feeds, rather than by visiting the publishers' sites for news, may create an impression that Facebook is the primary channel for news delivery (Athey & Mobius, 2012) and thus negatively influence levels of perception about the publishers' brand (Athey & Mobius, 2012; Garrahan & Kuchler, 2015; Newman et al., 2018). Facebook's wide range of media choices might make users unable to distinguish articles from news brands and make them believe that the found news was Facebook produced. However, Facebook might help news brands to be visible and more conspicuous as articles, a particularly important exposure for smaller publishers. For example, smaller publishers get almost 80% of their audience traffic from Facebook (Marshall, 2015). Thus, Facebook's utility to news publishers' brands remains unclear, requiring more empirical data to draw stronger conclusions. Studies exploring social media use and its effects on news organizations'

and social media platforms' brands are few, prompting our examination of the effectiveness of using Facebook as a distribution platform by newspaper publishers on brand awareness and brand loyalty and of the resulting brand competition between Facebook and news publishers.

## Understanding Social Media News Engagement

News engagement has been widely studied, but lacks consistent conceptualization as its operationalization varied (Chan-Olmsted & Wolter, 2018; Lim, Hwang, Kim, & Biocca, 2015). Social media audience engagement is measured by retweets and clicks (Meyer & Tang, 2015). In the online video context, engagement refers to the likelihood of visiting the website and the time spent on it (Y. Yang & Coffey, 2014). Engagement may refer to interaction among content, platform, and audiences; users' motivation from cognition and affective behavior; connections between brands and audiences; and the quality of audience attention on websites (Chan-Olmsted & Wolter, 2018). At its heart, engagement is related to audience cognition, psychology, and behaviors. Napoli (2011) has documented this multidimensional aspect, including attentiveness, exposure, loyalty, emotion, appreciation, recall, attitudes, and behavior (Napoli, 2011). Drawing from earlier studies, we see that concepts of engagement encompass common variables, such as attention (exposure duration; Napoli, 2011; O'Brien & Toms, 2008), emotions (Lim et al., 2015; Napoli, 2011), and behavior, such as sharing, commenting, product purchasing, and feedback (Lim et al., 2015). We expand on Lim and colleagues' framework of social media engagement, including functional engagement, emotional engagement, and communal engagement, by adding attention as a variable. Attention is a major dimension of engagement (Napoli, 2011; O'Brien & Toms, 2008) and measures how much readers engage content on social media. Attention is defined as the "focused mental engagement on a particular item of information" (Davenport & Beck, 2002, pp. 20-21). Attention can be measured by a multidimensional model: visibility (audience share per market), popularity (unique audience per site), loyalty (visits per person), depth (pages per visit), and stickiness (time per page) (Zheng, Chyi, & Kaufhold, 2012), as well as time spent per exposure (Napoli, 2011). Emotional attachment to a brand, a product, or an organization results in engagement (Sashi, 2012); that is, readers will engage media that appeal to and engage readers' emotions (Mersey, Malthouse, & Calder, 2012). Emotional responses include positive effects, appreciation, enjoyment, satisfaction, entertainment, and attachments (Lim et al., 2015; Mersey et al., 2012). Emotional engagement also allows the audience to have attachments toward media brands and thus influence audience behavior (Park, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010).

Behavior is the next step of emotional engagement (Napoli, 2011). When audiences emotionally engage with media content, they share that content and interact with and get others get involved (Lim et al., 2015). For example, readers share, comment, and discuss media content on social media platforms. In addition, clicking on advertisements, content creation, online participation, and product purchasing constitute engaging with media (Lim et al., 2015; Napoli, 2011; Ziegele, Breiner, & Quiring, 2014).

Functional engagement and communal engagement are also important user behavior aspects. Functional engagement is defined as “a social media user’s interaction with other users in the process of co-creating, conversing and sharing the content” (Lim et al., 2015, p. 159) and provides the indicator that evaluates the effectiveness of how an organization engages users (Neiger et al., 2012). Communal engagement evaluates users’ level of involvement with a brand. Functional engagement occurs when users share news articles from news publishers, whereas promotional messages (e.g., US\$1 for 12 weeks) are categorized as communal engagement. As this study investigates the effectiveness of social media enhancement of media brand awareness and loyalty, communal engagement becomes a critical variable. Considered together, the concept of social media engagement includes attention, emotional engagement, functional engagement, and communal engagement.

Given that news consumption on social media is rising and news engagement is crucial to the newspaper industry, it is essential to theorize engagement specifically in the context of news consumption on social media, which we call “social media news engagement.” In this light, this study explores the following:

**RQ1:** What are the dimensions of social media news engagement?

**RQ2:** To what extent does news that news publishers share on Facebook engage readers?

## **Social Media News Engagement and Brand Awareness**

This study uses McDowell’s (2006) definition of brand awareness: “The simple familiarity (recall or recognition) of a brand name relative to its product category.” A long line of research has documented the positive effect of social media on brand awareness. Social networking sites (SNS) serve as prominent tools for organizations to enhance their brand awareness (Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair, & Okumus, 2015; Parganas, Anagnostopoulos, & Chadwick, 2015). SNS provide benefits as they enhance customer engagement; build corporate reputations; and generate, increase, and improve brand awareness (Vukanovic, 2013). For example, Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt, and Füller (2013) show that customers who engage with Facebook fan pages have a higher brand awareness toward a car manufacturer than those who do not.

Several reasons explain social media’s positive effect on brand awareness. The first reason relates to brand information exposure. The news from specific news brands extensively shared on social media exposes consumers to the news brands, which contributes to brand awareness (Hutter et al., 2013). Social media provide an opportunity for corporations to more efficiently spread their brand information, such as through fan pages and timely interaction with consumers. A large amount of information on social media serves as an effective advertising tool. As consumers are exposed to information about the brand, they develop brand awareness, which simplifies their brand choices, making them more inclined to choose the brand to which they were repeatedly exposed (Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000). Social media also positively affects brand awareness because of social networks. Information shared among peers creates

word of mouth publicity, which is extremely convincing brand messages that increase awareness of the brand among other users and enhance brand recognition (Erdoğan & Çiçek, 2012; Parganas et al., 2015). In addition, information shared through social networks spreads faster and gets more exposure. Barreda et al. (2015) have shown that the information shared by each user on Facebook is seen by 35% of their social networks on average. Thus, Facebook allows information exchange through social networks that effectively foster brand awareness. Based on previous findings that information shared through social networks is positively associated with consumers' brand awareness, we propose the following hypothesis:

**H1:** Social media news engagement is positively related to newspaper brand awareness.

### *Social Media News Engagement and Newspaper Brand Loyalty*

Previous research has documented the positive effects of social media on brand loyalty. In the media arena, this brand loyalty also means “the likelihood that readers will remain loyal to the newspapers” (Lim et al., 2015). When companies offer popular social media user content and frequently update that content, consumers' brand loyalty is positively affected (Erdoğan & Çiçek, 2012). In addition, emotional engagement predicts brand loyalty—an effect mediated by affective commitment (Sashi, 2012). In other words, when users are emotionally involved in the content, they will have stronger brand loyalty.

Online media engagement, such as participation and behaviors on virtual communities, increases brand loyalty (Krebs & Lischka, 2019; Lin, Chen, & Sung, 2018). The same logic applies to the media industry. Regarding online news outlets, researchers found a positive relationship between engagement and channel loyalty (Lim et al., 2015; Lin et al., 2018). Krebs and Lischka (2019) found that those who share news articles online feel more attached to the news brand. Similarly, Lin et al. (2018) examined the effect of social media television on brand loyalty and suggested that viewers' usage of social media TV increases network loyalty. Viewers who actively share or create content online showed a greater amount of loyalty than those who don't (Lin et al., 2018). Krebs and Lischka (2019) found that the more users share, rate, and like news articles online, the stronger the perceived brand loyalty of the news outlet. Lischka and Messerli (2016) explained that sharing news articles online slightly enhanced satisfaction with the news outlet, which increased brand loyalty. In sum, users' online participation with news increases their brand loyalty with news outlets. So we believe it logical to assume that social media news engagement is positively related to brand loyalty with news publishers. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H2:** Social media news engagement is positively related to newspaper brand loyalty.

## **Competing or Complementing Brands?**

Media complementary theory and time displacement theory help parse the relationship between newspapers and social media. Media complementarity theory posits that consumers use multiple media outlets to gather information on a specific area (Dutta-Bergman, 2004). Complementary theory studies show that complementarity occurs because different media technologies offer different functions to serve reader needs. Mobile news complements traditional news outlets for providing access to news on the go (Westlund & Färdigh, 2011). Besides, different news outlets complement each other in the quality and the quantity of news they provide (Dutta-Bergman, 2004).

Unlike the complementarity theory's focus on content, time displacement theory spotlights the time that people allocate to media. Media decrease the time people spend on other activities; for example, Putnam (1995) showed that television viewing reduced the time people spent on social gatherings, recreation, and community activities. Time displacement effect refers to audiences' declining media usage when they adopt another medium (Westlund & Färdigh, 2015). Different media compete for users' limited time and attention; thus, they encourage and implement "audience-stealing effects" (Kayany & Yelsma, 2000). For example, Facebook users spend 423 min on Facebook but only 12 min on news sites (Mitchell, Rosenstiel, & Christian, 2012). Ha and Fang (2012) found that online news users perceive online news as superior to traditional media, thus decreasing the time spent on traditional news media (Ha and Fang, 2012). A competitive relationship between traditional news media and online news media (Huang, Yang, & Chyi, 2013; Lee & Chyi, 2015) occurs between two news outlets providing substitutable products in the same market. For example, a newspaper competes not only with other newspapers but also with its online counterpart, as the news in a newspaper's print version is almost the same as that in its website (M. J. Yang & Chyi, 2011).

Media scholars have examined the competitive relationship between news aggregators and newspapers—do news aggregators steal newspaper readers by displaying newspaper content (Kaplan, 2012) or do news aggregators help newspapers gain more readers through referral traffic (Chiou & Tucker, 2015)? Most studies have found that by displaying publishers' news content, news aggregators did not steal readers (Lee & Chyi, 2015) but referred more readers to the news publishers (Chiou & Tucker, 2015). For example, the Associated Press (AP) received fewer readers after its content was removed from Google News (Chiou & Tucker, 2015).

In addition, Athey and Mobius (2012) have shown that Google News increased traffic on the home websites of news publishers and positively influenced local news consumption. A 5% increase in direct local news outlets and 13% increase in clicks on local news websites were found after users adopted the localization features of Google. It was assumed that users directly visited the websites, bypassing Google News (Athey & Mobius, 2012). However, newspapers might lose profit when users access articles directly and bypass the homepage. For example, Google News sends

users directly to the article instead of to the newspapers' homepage (Athey & Mobius, 2012).

Similar concerns arise in Facebook's emergence as a major news outlet for nearly half of Americans (Newman et al., 2018; Shearer & Gottfried, 2017). Awareness of publishing brands may decrease because readers might not pay attention to specific brands when their news is provided by a variety of news sources (Garrahan & Kuchler, 2015).

Some worry that Facebook and other media might replace news publishers as news sources, such as when users rely on Google News for news instead of news publishers (Athey & Mobius, 2012). However, newspapers can also use Facebook to distribute their product, thus enhancing the newspapers' brand as other companies do in marketing products on social media (Hutter et al., 2013; Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013). Sismeiro and Mahmood (2018) found a complementary effect between Facebook and news sites based on browsing data. The traffic and revenue of news sites decrease in Facebook's absence (Sismeiro & Mahmood, 2018). Readers search for news actively, whereas Facebook users encounter news accidentally and are driven to news sites even when engaged in other social network activities (Sismeiro & Mahmood, 2018). However, Facebook's influence on the brand strength of news publishers is of concern (Sismeiro & Mahmood, 2018).

Both arguments raise important issues concerning brand loyalty. For example, are readers more loyal to Facebook as a news platform instead of to newspaper brands? Do Facebook and newspapers compete with or complement each other as brands? Thus, **RQ3** is as follows:

**RQ3:** Controlling for demographic, news interest, and news motivation, are the relationships between brand loyalty toward Facebook and toward newspapers competitive or complementary?

## Method

This study used an opt-in panel of paid respondents recruited through Survey Sampling International (SSI; [www.surveysampling.com](http://www.surveysampling.com)). In the survey, we asked respondents about their news consumption on Facebook. Data were collected through Qualtrics (<http://qualtrics.com/>).

## Sample

The sample, a nonprobability sample, involved U.S. adults at least 18 years old and who have used Facebook to get news. Quota sampling was used to ensure that the sample represented the population by age. We sampled based on statistics showing the proportion of Facebook users by age (eMarketer & Squarespace, n.d.).

We added three attention-check questions to control for quality. After checking for responses that did not pass the attention-check questions, missing information, and inconsistencies, 588 responses were considered valid for this study.



## Social Media News Engagement Measure

Social media news engagement was measured by four constructs—attention, functional engagement, emotional engagement, and communal engagement—as used in previous studies (Lim et al., 2015; O'Brien & Toms, 2008).

**Attention.** Attention can be measured by the mental effort paid to media and the time spent on media (Napoli, 2011; O'Brien, 2011). The respondents were asked to (a) rate the extent to which they paid attention to news when they are using Facebook on a 5-point scale from 1 (*little attention*) to 5 (*close attention*),  $M = 3.4$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ , and to (b) report the frequency of getting news shared by newspapers or anyone on Facebook on a 5-point scale from 1 (*less often*), 2 (*every few weeks*), 3 (*a few times a week*), 4 (*about once a day*) to 5 (*several times a day*),  $M = 3.25$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ .

**Functional engagement.** From 1 (*for never*) to 5 (*for all the time*), respondents were asked how often did they (a) click on links of the news on Facebook, (b) share the news links of news publishers on Facebook, (c) comment on the news links of news publishers on Facebook, (d) like the news links of news publishers on Facebook ( $M = 3.11$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = .86$ ).

**Emotional engagement.** Respondents were asked how often did they engage in the following on a 5-point scale: (a) enjoy the news reading experience via Facebook, (b) post their feelings about news on Facebook, (c) quote from the news when it was good or witty ( $M = 3.04$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = .79$ ).

**Communal engagement.** Respondents were asked how often they (a) shared their opinion about the newspapers they saw on Facebook with other readers and (b) had shared the news publishers' promotion message ( $M = 2.67$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = .85$ ).

## The Effect of Social Media News Engagement

**Newspaper brand awareness.** Respondents were asked to think about the news from a newspaper brand they often see on Facebook, and then, think about the organization to answer brand awareness questions. This approach was adopted from the Yoo et al. (2000) study and Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt, and Füller' (2013) study, where brand awareness was measured by asking respondents to rate the extent to which they disagree or agree with the following statements on a 5-point scale, from 1 (*for strongly disagree*) to 5 (*for strongly agree*): (a) I remember the name of the newspapers I often see on Facebook ( $M = 3.14$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ), (b) I pay attention to the name of the newspaper that provides the news I get on Facebook ( $M = 3.38$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ), and (c) I click on the news because I recognize the news source's brand ( $M = 3.38$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ). These responses were averaged into an index with acceptable reliability.



**Newspaper brand loyalty.** Respondents were asked to think about the news from a newspaper brand they see often on Facebook before measuring their brand loyalty toward the newspaper. As adapted from Lim et al. (2015), newspaper brand loyalty was defined as “the likelihood that readers will remain loyal to the newspapers.” As adapted from the measurements from Delgado-Ballester, Manuera-Aleman, and Yague-Guillen (2003) and Lim et al. (2015), respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statements on a 5-point scale, from 1 (*for strongly disagree*) to 5 (*for strongly agree*): (a) I will continue getting news from this newspaper, (b) I consider myself to be loyal to this brand, and (c) I will recommend this newspapers to others. To compute the index, the three items were averaged ( $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ , Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .88$ ).

**Brand competition relationship.** Based on previous studies of media competition, this variable was defined as the negative correlation between the time spent on one medium and the time spent on the other medium (Huang et al., 2013; Lee & Chyi, 2015). This study operationalized competition between brands as a negative relationship between loyalty to Facebook and newspaper brand loyalty, meaning the likelihood of being loyal to newspapers is negatively associated with loyalty to Facebook as a news platform, other things being equal. To measure loyalty to Facebook, respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statements on a 5-point scale, from 1 (*for strongly disagree*) to 5 (*for strongly agree*): (a) I will continue getting news from Facebook ( $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ), (b) I consider myself to be loyal to Facebook ( $M = 3.44$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ), and (c) I will recommend Facebook as a news source to others ( $M = 3.11$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ). To compute the index, the three items were averaged ( $M = 3.40$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ , Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .82$ ).

## Control Variables

Information on age, gender, and news interest were collected for control purposes. As adapted from a survey, titled “Key News Audiences Now Blend Online and Traditional Sources” by Pew Research Center, news interest was measured by asking respondents “How much do you enjoy keeping up with the news?” on a 5-point scale, from 1 (*for not at all*) to 5 (*for a lot*). News motivation was also tested for control purposes. Respondents also were asked “How do you come across news on Facebook?”

## Results

### Sample

The sample was primarily White (74.1%) and 9.7% was African American. Hispanics comprised 9.4%, whereas 4.3% was Asian. Males comprised 44% of the sample and 56% was female. Participants aged under 34 were 46.5% of the sample (range = 1-5,  $M = 39.91$ ,  $SD = 14.93$ ). People from ages 18 to 24 made up 15.7% of the sample; 30.8% were aged 25 to 34; 7.5% of the sample were aged 65 or older. The sample age

**Table 1.** A Comparison of the Sample and Facebook User Population by Age.

Age groups	% of Facebook users in the United States	SSI participants (N = 588) %
18-24	19.52	15.7
25-34	26.96	30.8
35-44	19.61	19.6
45-54	16.50	13.8
55-64	7.17	12.6
65+	10.21	7.5

Note. U.S. data are drawn from (eMarketer & Squarespace, n.d.). SSI = Survey Sampling International.

groups match the age group of Facebook users in the United States (see Table 1 for comparison). With regard to education, 67.4% of the sample had a college degree or higher. For income, more than half the sample (51.4%) reported a household income of less than US\$50,000.

Participants daily spent 75 min on Facebook. About 71% of the participants got news from Facebook at least a few times a week, whereas 26.1% got news on Facebook several times a week and 34.9% of the respondents came across news on Facebook because they were looking for news. Of the sample, 62% came across news on Facebook when they were otherwise engaged online. On an average, participants spent 27% of their time on Facebook on news. Overall, respondents enjoyed keeping up with news (range = 1-5,  $M = 3.75$ ,  $Mdn = 4$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ) on Facebook.

### Social Media News Engagement

An exploratory principal component analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation was conducted to determine the concept of social media news engagement by analyzing inter-correlations among the 11 engagement measurement items specified. A scree plot and the traditional method for determining the number of factors, which relies on components with eigenvalues greater than 1, were used to determine the attributes. The sample is suitable for PCA because of the significant value for Bartlett's test,  $\chi^2 = 4,086.89$ ,  $df = 55$ ,  $p < .001$  (Bartlett, 1954), and a value of .94 for the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) test. The process extracted two factors, which was 70.9% of the data's total variance. The data suggested two factors, hereafter called Content-Interaction Engagement and Exposure Engagement. Content-Interaction Engagement consisted of seven indicators: (a) share, (b) comment, (c) like the news links on Facebook, (d) post feelings about news on Facebook, (e) quote from the news on Facebook, (f) share opinions about newspapers on Facebook, and (g) share news publishers' promotion messages on Facebook; it accounted for 60.28% of total variance. Exposure Engagement consisted of four indicators (attention paid to news when using Facebook, enjoy the news reading experience on Facebook, clicks on links of the news on

**Table 2.** Exploratory Factor Results for Social Media News Engagement.

Social media news engagement	Item	Standard loading
Content-Interaction Engagement (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$ )		
	I have shared my opinion about the newspapers I saw on Facebook with other readers.	.853
	I have shared the news publishers' promotion message.	.838
	I comment on the news links of news publishers on Facebook	.837
	I quote from the news when it was good or witty.	.837
	I post my feelings about news on Facebook	.787
	I share the news links of news publishers on Facebook	.782
	I like the news links of news publishers on Facebook	.723
Exposure Engagement (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$ )		
	I pay attention to news when I am using Facebook.	.769
	I enjoy the news reading experience via Facebook	.765
	I click on links of the news on Facebook	.745
	I get news shared by newspapers or anyone on Facebook	.693

Facebook, the frequency of getting news on Facebook), accounting for 10.66% of the data's total variance. Content-Interaction Engagement had high reliability ( $M = 2.8$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = .94$ ), whereas Exposure Engagement ( $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = .80$ ) had acceptable reliability, that is, .7 or higher (Kline, 2005).

**RQ1** asked about the dimensions of social media news engagement. Content-Interaction Engagement is a major dimension and Exposure Engagement is the second dimension of social media news engagement.

**RQ2** explored to what extent the news shared by publishers on Facebook engaged readers and this was answered by a frequency analysis. To compute the social media news engagement index, 11 engagement items (shown in Table 2) were averaged ( $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = .93$ ), from 1 (*not at all engaged*) to 5 (*completely engaged*). Only 1% of respondents were not engaged with news on Facebook, whereas 49.2% of respondents rated their engagement higher than the mean, 3.02, suggesting that nearly half the respondents considered themselves highly engaged with news on Facebook.

**Table 3.** The Frequency of Newspaper Brands Respondents Often See on Facebook.

Newspaper brands	Frequency	Percentage
<i>The Huffington Post</i>	191	32.5
<i>USA Today</i>	182	31.0
<i>The New York Times</i>	177	30.1
<i>The Washington Post</i>	119	20.2
<i>Los Angeles Times</i>	65	11.1
<i>The Guardian</i>	52	8.8
<i>Chicago Tribune</i>	35	6
<i>Newsday</i>	29	4.9
<i>BreitBart</i>	24	4.1

### *The Effects of Social Media News Engagement*

The study examined the effects of social media news engagement on brand awareness and newspaper brand loyalty of the newspapers on Facebook. Hierarchical ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was conducted with age, gender, news motivation, and news interest as control variables.

**Newspaper brand awareness.** **H1** predicted “Social media news engagement is positively related to newspapers brand awareness.” The newspaper brands that respondents recall is concentrated on popular brands. The top three news brands were *The Huffington Post* (32.5%), *USA Today* (31.0%), and *The New York Times* (30.1%). Some respondents reported local news brands that they often viewed on Facebook (Table 3).

When all the variables were entered, they accounted for 41.8% of the variance in brand awareness of newspapers on Facebook. The overall model was significant,  $R^2 = .43$ ,  $F(4, 472) = 6.32$ ,  $p < .01$ . Exposure Engagement ( $\beta = .31$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was the strongest predictor and uniquely accounted for 3.4% of the variance in brand awareness ( $sr = .185$ ). Content-Interaction Engagement ( $\beta = .23$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was the second strongest predictor and uniquely accounted for 2.2% of the variance in brand awareness ( $sr = .149$ ). News interest ( $\beta = .20$ ,  $p < .05$ ) was the third strongest significant predictor of brand awareness, and uniquely accounted for 2.49% of the variance in brand awareness ( $sr = .158$ ). These findings suggest that Exposure Engagement was the main driving force for brand awareness although Content-Interaction Engagement and news interest also played a role. Thus, **H1** is supported (Table 4).

**Newspaper brand loyalty.** **H2** posited that “Social media news engagement is positively related to newspapers brand loyalty.” When all the variables were entered, they accounted for 42.5% of the variance in newspaper brand loyalty on Facebook. The overall model was significant,  $R^2 = .432$ ,  $F(4, 470) = 8.07$ ,  $p < .01$ . Exposure Engagement ( $\beta = .27$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was the strongest predictor and uniquely accounted for 2.5% of the variance in newspaper brand loyalty ( $sr = .16$ ). Content-Interaction

**Table 4.** Hierarchical OLS Regression of Social Media News Engagement for Brand Awareness and Control Variables on Brand Awareness,  $N = 588$ .

Variables	$\beta$	SE
Social media engagement		
Exposure Engagement	.31***	.07
Content-Interaction Engagement	.23***	.05
Control variables		
Gender	.007	.08
Age	.018	.003
News interest	.20***	.05
News motivation	-.04	.09
$F(4, 472)$		6.32
$R^2$		.425
Adjusted $R^2$		.418

Note. OLS = ordinary least squares.

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Table 5.** Hierarchical OLS Regression of Social Media News Engagement for Brand Loyalty and Control Variables on Brand Loyalty,  $N = 588$ .

Variables	$\beta$	SE
Social media engagement		
Exposure Engagement	.27***	.07
Content-Interaction Engagement	.24***	.05
Control variables		
Gender	.000	.08
Age	-.01	.003
News interest	.20***	.04
News motivation	-.11**	.09
$F(4, 470)$		8.07
$R^2$		.432
Adjusted $R^2$		.425

Note. OLS = ordinary least squares.

\*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Engagement ( $\beta = .24, p < .001$ ) was the second strongest predictor and uniquely accounted for 2.2% of the variance in newspaper brand loyalty ( $sr = .15$ ). News interest ( $\beta = .20, p < .01$ ) was the third strongest significant predictor of newspaper brand loyalty and uniquely accounted for 2.5% of the variance in brand awareness ( $sr = .16$ ). News motivation also was significant ( $\beta = -.11, p < .01$ ) and accounted for .10% of the variance in newspaper brand loyalty ( $sr = -.099$ ). Similar to brand awareness, these findings suggest that Exposure Engagement was the main driving force for newspaper brand loyalty although Content-Interaction Engagement, news interest, and news motivation also played a role. Thus, **H2** is supported (Table 5).

**RQ3** asked about competing relationships between Facebook and newspaper brands. Partial correlation, controlling for age, gender, news interest, and news motivation, indicated a complimentary relationship between brand loyalty toward Facebook and newspapers ( $r = .55, p < .001$ ). A follow-up analysis showed that respondents were somewhat likely to visit the home sites of newspapers when they received news on Facebook (range = 1-5,  $M = 3.4, SD = 1.2$ ). The data suggest that Facebook was not taking away newspaper readers, but Facebook and newspapers were certainly enhancing each other's brands.

## **Discussion**

This article examined the relationships between social media news engagement and brand awareness as well as social media news engagement and loyalty toward media brands. In addition, this article also explored if, as brands, Facebook and media organizations, have a complementary or hostile relationship. The empirical results provide a different view from the popular beliefs about the negative influence of Facebook on the business of journalism. However, as our news brand awareness did not measure specific news brands, we shall interpret the results with care. We found the following:

### Facebook and Major Newspapers Moderately Help Build Loyalty Toward Each Other

A variance of 42.5% of the users' brand loyalty to news publishers' brand can be predicted by their social media news engagement, the findings contradict beliefs that Facebook might dilute the brands for newspapers (Athey & Mobius, 2012; Garrahan & Kuchler, 2015; Garrahan & Kuchler, 2015) and that Facebook and newspapers are moderately mutually beneficial in enhancing brand values for each other. News publishers bring their readers to Facebook and contribute their news articles to Facebook. Facebook helps news publishers expose their articles to readers and build newspapers' brand awareness (Bilton, 2017). Exposure, brand awareness, and interactions with news content online enhance brand loyalty (Barnes, 2014; Krebs & Lischka, 2019; Lischka & Messerli, 2016). Our findings are similar to a previous study which demonstrated noncompetitive relationships between news portals and newspaper sites (Huang et al., 2013) and showed that user engagement is related to brand loyalty toward online news brands (Krebs & Lischka, 2019). We found that those loyal to Facebook as a news source are, in most cases, more likely to be loyal to the newspapers they see on Facebook and more likely to directly visit newspapers sites.

However, as our results show, newspaper brands that users get news from on Facebook are concentrated on major or elite brands. The results indicate that Facebook strengthens brand loyalty to major news brands and brands of which users are already aware. Smaller or unknown brands are not benefited significantly.

For major news brands, Facebook turns readers already aware of news brands into loyal readers. The next step is to cultivate the loyalty of readers toward the home sites

of newspapers. However, readers are used to getting news on Facebook. They are not used to getting the news from the newspapers' sites as publishers post news links on the social media platform. This enhances the loyalty of readers to the different pages that major news brands have on Facebook but not toward the home sites of the newspapers. Audiences will read news from major brands on Facebook as shared by publishers on Facebook rather than going to the news sites and getting news themselves. This creates a certain illusory loyalty toward a news brand when, in short, all audiences are doing is reading the news served on Facebook by publishers. Media practitioners should leverage Facebook to attract readers to visit their sites by posting teasers or headlines of news that audiences find attractive but can only read and experience fully on the newspapers' homesite. By drawing audience attention to news on Facebook but ensuring that articles can only be read on their home sites, newspaper brands can protect against this illusory loyalty and turn loyal readers on Facebook into loyal readers on the newspapers' home sites. For lesser known brands, Facebook is helpful for reaching more readers and being known (Marshall, 2015). Thus, small brands are encouraged to target niche readers and distribute content through Facebook.

Overall, the extent of brand loyalty and brand awareness that Facebook increases for news publishers is different for popular and lesser known news brands. Facebook turns brand awareness into brand loyalty (moderately) for major news brands, but not necessarily for lesser known brands.

### *Understanding Social Media News Engagement*

The analysis reveals that social media news engagement consists of two constructs: Exposure Engagement (attention paid to news when using Facebook, the frequency of getting news on Facebook, enjoy news reading experience on Facebook) and Content-Interaction Engagement (sharing, commenting, quoting the news, and posting feelings about news). Exposure Engagement encompasses attention and positive emotion. Attention is the most important part of social media news engagement. Clicking on news links does not mean that users spend time reading; rather, it implies that the link drew the attention of audiences. Clicking is a measurable sign of attention. Exposure Engagement includes positive emotions, such as enjoyment, which provides satisfactory news reading experiences and encourages users to get news on social media. News on social media also includes news referred to, or shared by, friends (Matsa & Shearer, 2018). Within intimate circles involving friends, news sharing enables users to know what friends care about and create common experiences, thus encouraging positive feelings and engaging users emotionally (Matsa & Shearer, 2018). Social networks create a positive news reading environment.

The next step is Content-Interaction Engagement, which refers to different degrees of interaction with content. Quoting news indicates that users may have read the content. Commenting and sharing feelings about news represent a deeper involvement indicating that users' have read the news and have feedback about it. Sharing alone does not indicate involvement for less involved audiences can share news, intrigued by the title, without having actually read it. But users can read and share news as well.



*Content-Interaction Engagement has implications in engaging other users and the news brands.* Interaction with content gets other people more involved with the content (Lim et al., 2015). Users are functionally engaged in the news content; sharing or discussing news articles with other users (Krebs & Lischka, 2019; Matsa & Shearer, 2018). Interaction with content also enhances the brand of news publishers. Users are inclined to share news on social media from major news publishers, which indicates the extent to which users engage with a brand. Sharing the news with others can be seen as an endorsement of the news brand, and thus help engage other users assess the brand (Chan-Olmsted & Wolter, 2018; Krebs & Lischka, 2019).

### ***Social Media News Engagement Is Positively Associated With Newspapers' Brand Loyalty***

The data suggest that readers' social media news engagement is positively related to brand loyalty toward newspapers. Specifically, the model's investigation of brand loyalty toward newspapers reveals that this is driven by Exposure Engagement (i.e., attention paid to news on Facebook) and Content-Interaction Engagement (i.e., share, react to, or comment on news on Facebook). In other words, on Facebook, news content that caught readers' attention is more effective than the news content that incites readers to share, react, and comment enhance loyalty to newspaper brands. This is not suggesting that Content-Interaction Engagement is ineffective, but Exposure Engagement is more strongly related to enhancing brand loyalty. Overall, this finding is in line with previous studies indicating positive associations between user engagement and media brand loyalty (Lim et al., 2015; Sashi, 2012).

### ***Contribution to Newspapers' Brand Awareness***

The data showed that Facebook as a news platform engages readers and this engagement enhances brand awareness toward newspapers—confirming the finding in marketing research that companies use social media to generate brand awareness (Erdoğan & Çiçek, 2012; Hutter et al., 2013). The results show that the generation of brand awareness on Facebook applies in the case of news, although news content differs from other commodities in general.

Social media generate brand awareness because of how users share information. This sharing behavior serves as a kind of advertising that enhances brand awareness (Barreda et al., 2015; Yoo et al., 2000). This finding contradicts the concern that as Facebook provides news from a wide range of news outlets, the awareness of newspapers brands decreases, as shown in the case of Google News (Athey & Mobius, 2012; Garrahan & Kuchler, 2015). The findings showed that attention is a prerequisite of brand awareness and that Facebook has a positive influence on enhancing the news organizations brand value. Adopting Facebook as a news distribution platform to engage readers likely increases readers' newspapers' brand awareness to a certain extent because the attention paid to news enhances readers' recognition of the brand.

We suggest that while Facebook as an advertising tool may promote the news brand, publishers must be cautious about sharing all types of articles on Facebook.

### *Limitation and Future Studies*

As in any study, limitations merit attention. First, although the study used proportion sampling to match the demographics of Facebook users, online panel surveys are ultimately based on nonprobability sampling. Therefore, results should be generalized with caution. Researchers are encouraged to replicate this study with probability samples.

Second, this study aimed at general news brands. We asked respondents to think of news brands they often view on Facebook before answering brand awareness/loyalty questions, but the results might not be as valid as the result of using specific news brand awareness/loyalty measures. Besides, the news brands our respondents recalled concentrated on a few top news brands (see Table 3). Few local newspapers were recalled.

Third, surveys are limited when claiming causality and have typical self-reporting limitations. This study only shows a positive relationship between social media news engagement and brand loyalty but fails to identify which causes which.

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