

Social Media and News Consumption Among Canadian Millennials

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## ABSTRACT

The Internet and social media platforms have disrupted consumption, making it evolve from a solid to a liquid state, particularly among younger generations. This disruption deeply impacted news consumption, with consumers moving away from traditional media towards digital media. Digital media turned news into a conversation, allowing consumers to easily read it, share it, and engage with it at any given time and place, based on their personal motives and interests. Through this study, I answer the following question: How has the liquid era and Facebook impacted Millennials' consumer behaviour and engagement when it comes to news consumption? Using a qualitative approach based on in-depth interviews of fourteen participants, it is found that Canadian Millennials are strongly emotionally attached to their smartphones, computers and tablets as they are mediators and access bottlenecks to liquid consumption. It is also revealed that consumers fulfill their news-related needs through assessing worthwhileness, uses and gratification, convenience, as well as their interest in soft or hard news. Moreover, adding on Robinson et al's (2017) typology of Facebook users, I identify a new type of Facebook user, the Self-Aware Apathetic user. The results of this study could benefit marketers, brand managers, and policy makers when developing their social media marketing strategy, allowing them to optimize their communication efforts and engage their audience more effectively.

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## INTRODUCTION

Picture yourself on a bus, sitting between two passengers. Chances are, two out of the three of you consume news on social media, and out of the total of ten passengers on this bus, two of you do so often (Shearer and Gottfried, 2017). The most prominent social media platform of all, Facebook, counts two billion monthly active users (Nowak and Spiller, 2017), including 66% of the American population, 45% of them getting news on the platform (Shearer and Gottfried, 2017). Facebook, like other social media and technological tools recently created, contributed to a major change in consumption, in a liquid form (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017) and greatly impacted how journalism is produced and consumed (Peters, 2012, 2016), especially among a younger audience. Younger generations now favor online sources over traditional media when it comes to news consumption (Matsa and Lu, 2016), changing their decision-making process when accessing and determining which source of news to consume as a result.

In this research, I am investigating how the liquid era and Facebook impacted Millennials' consumer behaviour and engagement when it comes to news consumption by first analyzing how Millennials consume news in the digital era and furthermore by understanding the underlying motivations behind their decision-making process when it comes to selecting and engaging with the news. In order to answer this question, I conducted fourteen in-depth interviews with North American Millennials in Montreal, Canada.

The data allowed me to find that smartphones and computers serve as mediators between solid and liquid consumption; Throughout the interviews, participants depict a strong material relationship and intimate connection with their devices, relating to the extended self (Belk,

1988). This constant connectedness (Baron, 2008) with their devices impacts their consumption habits, including news consumption. The latter can be found on a spectrum from solid consumption through traditional means such as television, radio, and newspapers to liquid consumption online on social media platforms, websites and applications, where both solid and liquid consumption can coexist (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017), permitting more convenience to readers (Peters, 2012). The data also shows that news readers decide which source of information and topic to choose from based on the Uses and Gratification Theory (Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1973), the concepts of worthwhileness determined by Schröder (2015), liquid consumption (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017), convenience (Peters, 2012), but also their interest in soft or hard news (Patterson, 2000; Baum, 2003; Shoemaker and Cohen, 2006). It is also found that different types of Facebook users exist, replicating Robinson et al's (2017) findings that discerns four types of Facebook users. However, in this specific context, I found that Self-Aware Apathetic users, a type that wasn't identified by Robinson et al, also exist on the platform. Those users do not share content as much as other types of users, but also do not engage with content on their newsfeed as they believe Facebook users (including themselves) do not have any real interest in what is being published on the platform.

The findings of this study can substantially benefit news organizations and their marketing teams as obtaining an extensive understanding of consumers' behaviour and decision-making process will allow them to make their content more engaging and attractive to Millennials.

Applying elements from the Uses and Gratification theory (Blumler, 1979) and Worthwhileness concept (Schröder, 2015) will give marketers, brand managers, and policymakers, the tools to optimize their content marketing campaigns and address their message



more effectively, resulting in superior reach and expanding the number of prospects and converted users. This study also allows news consumers and Facebook users to reflect on themselves as consumers and grasp determinant factors in their selection of news stories. The findings of this research apply to Canadian Millennials and can be generalized to the United States, Western Europe, and Australia as they have similar news consumption habits (Newman et al, 2017). Nonetheless, it cannot be generalized to other generations of consumers as further research focusing on other types of users should be conducted to determine its generalizability.

In the following sections, I first summarize the literature then present the context of changing news consumption habits. After presenting the research question and a brief overview of the methods, I elaborate on the findings of my research with first the everyday news consumption in the smartphone age, and second the motives regarding reading and sharing news on Facebook. Finally, I discuss the contributions, practical implications, and limitations of my research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### News consumption in the digital age

#### *From a solid to a liquid form: consumption as a spectrum*

Liquid consumption is defined as “ephemeral, access based and dematerialized,” while solid consumption is described as “enduring, ownership based, and tangible” (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017, p1). As highlighted by Bardhi and Eckhardt, liquid consumption relies on *flexibility, adaptability, speed, and mobility*, among other elements, and perfectly explains consumers’ behaviour in a digital context such as online news consumption through news organizations websites and social media. Modern technologies turned news consumption from solid to liquid consumption by offering the four elements described above to consumers. However, liquid consumption has three main characteristics as described by Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017): *ephemerality, access, and dematerialization*.

Through liquid consumption, products have a much shorter lifespan (ephemerality), but are also accessed by consumers rather than owned (access) by renting, sharing, or even borrowing from the market. Finally, through liquid consumption, products are not material but rather digital, thanks to the advancement of technologies (dematerialization). As a result of the abundance of communication technologies, individuals and consumers are “always on” (Baron, 2008), ready to consume content in a liquid manner. In concordance with Bardhi and Eckhardt’s definition of liquid consumption, Edbring, Lehner, and Mont (2016) found that low (or

inexistent) prices, along with flexibility and the temporary nature of use are the most important motivations for users when engaging in access-based consumption.

The concept of liquid consumption is thus appropriate to digital media and the Web 2.0, especially when it comes to hard news, described as having to be reported right away as it becomes obsolete very quickly (Shoemaker and Cohen, 2006), emphasizing the ephemeral component composing liquid consumption. As highlighted by Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017), the concept of liquid consumption also applies to digital media as it is not only ephemeral and “in the moment”, but accessible to anyone with a click (access-based) and shared in a digitalized and dematerialized manner. Digital media and the Web 2.0 focus on possession through access and intangible objects with said objects freely available for sharing and borrowing, involving consumers on the short term when it comes to news, fitting perfectly with the concept of liquid consumption (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017).

Liquid consumption, through digital media and the Web 2.0, reflects how and where news is consumed, introducing the concepts of space, speed, and convenience established by Lefebvre (1991) and Peters (2012, 2016).

### *Space, speed, and convenience of news consumption in the liquid era*

It is thus essential to conceptualize space when it comes to news audiences, building up from Lefebvre’s (1991) three key concepts regarding space: *spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces*. These three key concepts englobe the physical, mental, and social aspects of space. Lefebvre states that it is essential to consider the interrelation of these

aspects over time to comprehend adequately the concept of space. Here, the *spatial practice* refers to the daily life and movement of individuals and how the latter are able to orient themselves within a society. The representations of space refer to the conception of space by scientists. Finally, the representational spaces refer to the perception and associations of ideas through spaces.

When it comes to news consumption and space, Peters (2016) intertwines the three concepts altogether:

[A] systematic understanding of how a technological development – say the internet – impacts journalism demands assessing not only its impact on how the news is collected and disseminated in a planned manner (representations of space), but also how it changes audiences’ everyday patterns of consumption and situational orientation to news use (spatial practice), and how it alters the possible ways we imagine different locales, regions, and ambient spheres (representational space) (p10)

Peters (2012) claims that “News consumption is not just something we do, it is something we do in a particular space.” (p697). He even takes his statement a step further, mentioning that “moments of media consumption do not take place in space; rather, the spaces of everyday life are produced by these socio-cultural practices”. (Peters, 2012). Struckmann and Karnowski’s (2016) findings confirm these statements through their own research, discovering that, for example, radio is mostly used at home (50%) and in transit (38%), proving that it is the preferred method of news consumption when users are using their car as it fits the context of use.

Bardhi and Eckhardt's work follows the footsteps of Peters (2012)'s research regarding three changing notions of journalism that audiences experience: space, speed, and convenience, that Peters defines as followed:

*"1. Journalism is now produced to facilitate increasingly mobile places of consumption (Space);*

*2. Journalism is now produced to adjust for the faster pace of the information age (Speed); and*

*3. Journalism is now produced to interact with and provide multiple channels of access for audiences (Convenience)."* (Peters, 2012)

Bardhi and Eckhardt's findings (2017) on liquid consumption relate to the concepts of space and speed at the product level when it comes to consumer value, that resides in "being flexible, adaptable, fluid, mobile, light, detached, and fast" (p58), and to the concept of convenience at the consumer practices level in terms of consumer value through the possibility to share, borrow, and easily access digital products such as news.

Contemporary journalism, as mentioned by Peters (2012), offers additional mobile places of consumption. Consumers have the opportunity to choose their media of choice from a plethora of sources such as news organizations websites, blogs, social media relating news such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Snapchat or Instagram, but also mobile applications, and chatbots on online tools such as Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp, allowing news organizations to share their most popular articles on a daily basis. Technologies such as Wi-fi and 3G/4G allows consumers to have access to news with mobile devices, allowing them to access news anytime, anywhere, confirming the concept of space from Peters (2012), especially when traditional media

(newspapers, television, and radio) is unavailable or inconvenient (Dimmick et al, 2011). Traditional media brands with an online presence are known as legacy news organizations using new (online) media as they adapted and experimented online with new strategies for growth (Newman et al, 2017). Having mobile access to news resonates with the concept of liquid consumption and its reliance on mobility and adaptability (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017), but also with the situational fit characteristic of Schröder's (2015) concept of worthwhileness that I will cover later on in this paper.

News production allows users to have access to mobile spaces of consumption (Peters, 2012) and allows them to have access to a broader range of news situations, penetrating users' everyday lives (Struckmann and Karnowski, 2016). It also allows news to be produced and shared at a faster pace, permitting consumers to know about breaking news from all over the world within minutes (Concept of Speed from Peters (2012)). Moreover, it also offers audience convenience, as they have the possibility to access news from multiple channels of access depending on what is most suitable for them in terms of situational fit but also in terms of interests and preferences. Solid consumption would not allow such flexibility as it focuses on attachment, ownership, and security of the ownership (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017). It is essential to comprehend the concepts of liquid consumption, space, speed, and convenience as they are needed to explain consumer behaviour within digital contexts, and more importantly, within digital news consumption as a solid perspective would imply a different research focus.

Being able to be flexible and pick news based on interests and preferences allows consumers to make sense of the news they are reading and focus on which news they wish to read about, which I will focus on in the next section.

## **Sensemaking in digital news consumption**

Pentina and Tarafdar (2014) found that contemporary news consumption is categorized by two aspects of sensemaking: *Screening news stimuli* and *processing and interpreting news information*. They define the first aspect as involving “determination by the news consumer of channels, sources, and content of the news that he or she would consider attending to” (p215) and being affected by a lack of time. Determining which content to choose from can be based on their interest in hard or soft news, but also on the Uses and Gratification theory or the concept of Worthwhileness, which I will focus on next.

### *Hard versus soft news*

Individuals may have similar or different interests when it comes to news. Some may be interested in hard news, when others may see more appeal in soft news. The concepts of hard and soft news have been widely studied and defined by researchers (Patterson, 2000; Baum, 2003; Shoemaker and Cohen, 2006) while showing slight differences in the meaning. Patterson states that hard news has a direct impact on people’s lives and not only involve top leaders, but also major societal issues that individuals need to comprehend to respond accordingly to each event occurring (Patterson, 2000). On the other hand, Patterson describes soft news as news that doesn’t have to be shared in a timely manner; it has more of a practical impact and is mostly centered on humans, showing less distance with emotions and being more personal (Patterson, 2000). Baum describes hard news as news that are not only impersonal, but also rational and unemotional, aligning with the straight opposite of the definition of soft news given by Patterson.

Hard news should, according to Baum, be within a specific frame and cover politics in-depth (Baum, 2003). Finally, Shoemaker and Cohen describe hard news as “*urgent occurrences that have to be reported right away because they become obsolete very quickly. These items are truly ‘new’*” (Shoemaker and Cohen, 2006), while they describe soft news as “*based on non-scheduled events. The reporter or media organization is under no pressure to publish the news at a certain date or time – soft news stories need not be ‘timely’*” (Shoemaker and Cohen, 2006) (p224). Despite slight differences in their definitions, interest in soft or hard news impacts news consumers’ process when selecting a news source, as some news sources focus on particular topics, and hard news focus on issues in fields such as politics, society, or even economics (Lehman-Wilzig and Seletzky, 2010) while soft news contains more entertaining and sensational elements (Patterson, 2000, p4) that often are more appealing to the public. It is essential to take into account a consumer’s interest in soft or hard news before analyzing their behaviour as they may behave differently when selecting media, sharing and engaging with news in a digital context. More than soft and hard news, their decision-making process can also be based on two concepts researched by scholars: Uses and Gratification Theory and Schröder’s concept of Worthwhileness (2015).

### *Uses and gratification theory and worthwhileness*

News consumers also use the principles of uses and gratification theory highlighted by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973) when it comes to selecting their source of information. This theory states that an audience chooses their media based on personal needs and is aware of which media will satisfy those needs. Blumler (1979) describes the audience as being active and having



*utility, intention, selectivity, and imperviousness to influence* as major characteristics (p13). An active audience will thus, according to Blumler, select their media based on prior motivation, interests, and preferences to meet a need and will not be influenced in any way.

This theory was expanded and applied by scholars to new communications technologies such as the Internet and social media as it was found that Uses and Gratification Theory is the most suitable to explain the interest in new communications technology (Williams et al, 1994) and in engagement in content generation (Lampe et al, 2010). Moreover, social media networks functions, such as sharing and posting content and interacting with other users gratifies users' needs to interact and communicate with others, as well as to stay informed (Chen, 2011; Johnson and Yang, 2009; Kim and Choi, 2012; Raacke and Bonds-Raacke, 2008, 2010) making it relevant in a digital and liquid context through the consumption and contribution aspects of social media (Leiner et al, 2018).

The concept of worthwhileness, a modernized version of the uses and gratifications theory, is described by Schrøder (2015) as what determines how the audience selects their media and possesses seven distinctive characteristics known as *time spent, public connection, normative pressure, participatory potential, price, technological appeal* and *situational fit*. Through these seven dimensions, Schrøder describes a worthwhile news medium as being worth the time spent using it (time spent), as maintaining a relationship with society (public connection), as being chosen based on pressure from peers (normative pressure), as allowing action and interaction with others (participatory potential), as being affordable (price), as being convenient thanks to technology (technological appeal), and, finally, as being appropriate for the setting it is being used in (situational fit).

The uses and gratification theory, along with the concept of worthwhileness, allows us to better understand the logic behind consumer behaviour when it comes to selecting media in the current digital age. Etically, a news medium has to fit defined characteristics from these theories in order for consumers to consider them as a source of information. These theories go hand in hand with the concept of liquid consumption, descriptive of how news consumption habits move on a spectrum from solid to liquid form as consumption becomes more digital and ephemeral than material thanks to new communications technologies. This association will be explored in more depth in the findings, where I will demonstrate how components of worthwhileness, uses and gratification theory and liquid consumption are inter-connected within a social media user's decision-making process when it comes to news consumption.

### *Coping strategies in sensemaking*

Pentina and Tarafdar (2014) affirm that social media contributes to information overload and exposes news consumers to sources being subjective as well as anonymous and unverified. The authors mention coping strategies associated with screening news stimuli: *news avoidance strategy* and *filtering the information based on relevance*. The first coping strategy, involves avoiding the exposure to “sad” and/or to “too political news” but also avoiding exposure to news stories that are perceived as irrelevant to the news consumer.

The second coping strategy implies that news consumers using this strategy are not news seekers, but passive consumers that are selecting news stories based on what is pushed onto them by the media they consume. Those consumers spend no effort to look for news and are not willing to spend money when acquiring their news. Pentina and Tarafdar (2014) define active

news information acquisition as being purposive while passive news information acquisition is known as incidental.

The second aspect of sensemaking defined by Pentina and Tarafdar (2014) is *processing and interpreting news information*, which “involves path-dependent and socially-mediated negotiation of meaning of the acquired news and its conversion into knowledge. It is characterized by a separate set of strategies to overcome information overload” (Pentina and Tarafdar, 2014, p215). To achieve this goal, measuring the trustworthiness and the reliability of the news is essential. However, social media present its users with unverified information despite helping sensemaking, plummeting information overload and providing diverse opinions.

As a result, technologies such as the Internet, mobile phones and social media has a negative impact on users’ level of trust towards the news and news organizations. The level of trust in national news organizations of those who prefer digital news is significantly lower than the level of trust of those who prefer other platforms (67% vs. 81%) (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel, and Shearer, 2016). Moreover, those with low levels of trust usually prefer using social media, blogs or digital-born news outlets as news sources. Furthermore, seeking alternative views and attempting to validate the credibility of news may be among the motivations behind this fact (Fletcher and Park, 2017). Accessing news consumption is different on social media as users both get news and have the opportunity to disseminate it. It is seen as more unconventional, but also more diverse and participatory (Choi and Lee, 2015)

In order to cope with this aspect, news consumers filter their news sources depending on their reputation, look for additional sources of information but also try to resist political bias. Using multiple sources does not only facilitate evaluating the legitimacy of the information but also allows new consumers to be exposed to multiple points of view (Pentina and Tarafdar,

2014), allowing them to grasp more valid conclusions when considering multiple perspectives of information (Arendt, 1968). Participants use multiple sources, local and national, from outlets of different types (Ksiazek, Malthouse and Webster, 2010). News consumers also consume news that follow similar ideologies than theirs, making them more exposed to only one side of the political spectrum (Flaxman, Goel and Rao, 2016). Following Quattrociocchi's (2017) hypotheses, participants have two distinct behaviours when it comes to accessing new information: they either treat all information equally or are influenced by a confirmation bias that may keep them in their own echo chamber. Literature defines confirmation bias as "the seeking or interpreting of evidence in ways that are partial to existing beliefs" (Nickerson, 1998), and will highly influence their news source. Within the scope of this research, I am not only interested in how individuals select, process and interpret their news in a liquid context but also in why they decide to engage with them and share them, which I will focus on in the next section.

### **Why people share and access to news related content**

News consumers have various motivations when it comes to reading and sharing news online; It can have both tangible and intangible returns (McLure Wasko and Faraj, 2005). In the context of reading news, tangible returns include the access to useful information and to the expertise they get from the article in question, as it may answer specific questions and allow the readers to personally gain knowledge from the reading (McLure Wasko and Faraj, 2005). Intangible returns include intrinsic satisfaction and self-actualization (McLure Wasko and Faraj, 2005).

Even though a majority of users does not share any content online, when they do, they have the possibility to educate their peers and refine their own thinking (Kang, Lee, You, Lee, 2013). Sharing content with their network is based on the desire to connect with others and establish a reputation within their network (Kang, Lee, You, Lee, 2013). Having an impact on their connections gives sharers pride, but also self-actualization (McLure Wasko and Faraj, 2000).

Another reason social media users share content with their network relates to the social cognitive theory from Bandura (1986, 1989, 1997). According to Bandura's theory, individuals partially behave depending on specific personal and cognitive factors, but also based on their social environment. The personal and cognitive factors include self-efficacy and expectations for outcomes, while the social environments englobe social systems and networks. Bandura states that self-efficacy is the most influential factors and defines it as "a judgment of one's ability to organize and execute a given type of performance" (p21). Bandura defines individuals with self-efficacy as the ones who believe they can solve issues and improve situations by contributing to their communities (1997), which can be extended in a digital context within online communities on social networking platforms such as Facebook, which I will exclusively focus on for this research.

## **Facebook as a social media platform and news source**

### *A communication platform*

Facebook is used as a means of communication with a users' friends, family and acquaintances, and as a way to get news from them (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007; Choi, Kim, Sung and Sohn, 2011; Yang et al, 2014). Most of its users are highly motivated by social connectivity and communication with peers (Quan-Haase and Young, 2010) and use the site to manage relationships initiated offline (Lampe et al, 2006; Dwyer, Hiltz and Passerini, 2007).

#### *An innovative tool for news organizations*

Over the years, news organizations had to adapt to social media, this new media available to them and thus set up Facebook pages that allow them to publish news stories and share links to articles (Winter, Bruckner, and Kramer, 2015). As a result, accessing news is now a major part of the social media experience (Masip et al, 2015). Thanks to social media, users are able to easily share news stories with other social media users in the network through link posting and sharing functions (Lee and Ma, 2012; Choi et al, 2013), but also through private messages and tagging functions. These functions transformed how users consume news, through more unconventional, diverse and participatory ways (Choi and Lee, 2015) that allow them to like, comment, and share news, making it visible for their entire network.

#### *Homophily and news consumption on Facebook*

As previously stated, this network is composed of friends, family and acquaintances (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007), which relates to the concept of homophily as they associate themselves with others who share similar traits. Two types of homophily have been

defined by Lazarsfeld and Merton in 1954: Status homophily and value homophily. Status homophily is related to the similarity observed in both ascribed status such as race, ethnicity, sex, age, but also acquired status such as education, religion, occupation and behaviour patterns.

Value homophily is based on internal states such as values, attitudes, beliefs, and interests. Kandel (1966) assumed that the patterns of status homophily were the results of value homophily, being the similarity among the values being shared by the people forming the friendship or who are in close social interaction but not necessarily friends.

When it comes to homophily within social media and within the scope of my research regarding news consumption, value homophily has been shown to be more prominent. In order to explain this fact, it is essential to understand the multiple features available to users on social media. Social media platforms provide features like “unfriend”, “hide”, “block” that allow users to get rid of the non-like-minded people from their online network (Rainie and Smith, 2012). Because of these features, Duggan and Smith (2016) found that 31% of users they studied said they have changed their settings in order to see fewer posts from someone in their feed because of content related to politics they didn’t approve of, while 27% of the users studied have blocked or unfriended someone for that reason (Duggan and Smith, 2016).

Due to this social filtering, exposure to alternative and challenging views can be limited. Users are mostly exposed to information that confirms their pre-existing views (Pariser, 2011), and interact with like-minded others (Aiello et al, 2012). Moreover, the newsfeed algorithms presented on social media such as Facebook create a customized environment of information that triggers the creation of a “filter bubble” exposing social media users to information being increasingly more homogeneous through time (Zhang, Zheng, and Peng, 2017). Homophily, social filtering, and the newsfeed algorithms directly influence Facebook users and their

consumption of content and news on the platform, which can affect their engagement and the type of users they become on the platform.

### *Social media engagement styles and privacy*

More than a simple social media platform, Facebook is a meta-media (Mathieu et al, 2017), since it “reproduce[s] and integrate[s] other types of media, old and new” (Jensen, 2013). It allows its members to be exposed to a wide variety of news sources offering various content under different formats, as it can be used as a news aggregator, with a cross-media approach. However, not all users use Facebook the same way.

Though social media is now widely used by news consumers to get news, only a minority of users use them to engage with it, by liking, commenting or even sharing (Nielsen and Schroder, 2014). Robinson et al (2017) found four types of Facebook users throughout their research, describing them as *Relationship Builders*, *Window Shoppers*, *Town Criers*, and *Selfies*. They describe *Relationship Builders* as users using the platform as an extension of their offline life. The *Window Shoppers* are users that use Facebook because they have to, it's a social obligation for them. *Town Criers* are described as users sharing content but who do not seek anything in return; they do not seek likes or shares from the content they post, they simply share content with their network. Finally, Robinson et al describe the *Selfies* as users who call attention to themselves, those seeking likes to flatter their ego (Robinson et al, 2017). Robinson et al's findings directly relate to the concept of worthwhileness and Uses and Gratification Theory previously mentioned in the literature review, as the Window Shoppers use Facebook for public connection, and normative pressure (Schröder, 2015), while the Relationship Builders and



Selfies use it for public connection, participatory potential, time spent, price, technological appeal, and situational fit (Schröder, 2015). However, when it comes to the consumption of news on social media, some consumers do not engage with the content.

One of the reasons explaining the lack of engagement from news consumers towards news is privacy. Waters and Ackerman found that user's ability to manage their own privacy after assessing positive and negative consequences of information disclosure affects their user experiences on Facebook (Waters and Ackerman, 2011). Moreover, Dwyer et al (2007) showed that when the privacy concerns are high, users are less likely to share or disclose their private information (Dwyer et al, 2007), including their personal opinion about sensitive topics that may spark debate. Privacy is not only a concern in today's society but also an attribute users feel like they lost control over. Indeed, a study from the Pew Research Center from January 2015 conducted by Gao and Madden found that 91% of American adults say that consumers have lost control over how personal information is collected and used by companies (Gao and Madden, 2015).

Another reason for news readers to avoid sharing content online or engaging with it has to do with their wish to avoid conflict with their network. Users avoid conflict and prefer to post neutral content to ensure it won't have a negative impact on relationships and to avoid personal attacks (Ardichvili, Page and Wentling, 2003). Mentioning or sharing political news has the most negative impact among a network. As a result of such fact, most social media users avoid acting upon content they disagree with. A study from the Pew Research Center conducted by Duggan and Smith in 2016 found that 83% of users say that when their friends post something that they disagree with, they simply ignore it. Only 15% of those users usually respond to the posts they saw or make a post of their own (Duggan and Smith, 2016). Moreover, political discussions on

Facebook have been proved to be seen as less respectful, less likely to come to a resolution, less civil, less politically correct, and angrier than if it were to happen any other place (Duggan and Smith, 2016). A form of social influence, Compliance (Kelman, 1958) is used by individuals to avoid conflict. As a general concept, Compliance occurs when people seem to agree with others but are keeping their dissenting opinions private (Kelman, 1958), and is widely used among Facebook users.

With the concepts introduced in the literature review and in order to better comprehend the significance of this research, it is crucial to grasp the context surrounding online news consumption before stating the research question I will answer in this thesis.

## RESEARCH CONTEXT

### **The rise of online news consumption**

News consumption has evolved significantly over time, going from more traditional media like television, radio, and newspapers to online and digital sources including news websites, applications and social media. Newspapers' popularity has been on a declining trend since its peak in 1984, seeing the total circulation for US daily newspapers decrease by 45.28% from 1984 to 2016 (Barthel, 2017). The number of newsroom employees at US newspapers decreased as well by 39.66% from 2006 to 2016 (Barthel, 2017). Moreover, the advertising revenue for US newspapers decreased by 62.91% over the same period, while the revenue for the total circulation of newspapers has been steady since 2000, generating between \$10 Billion and \$11 Billion every year. Network TV news' viewership has however been stable over the last decade. Its evening viewership averaged 21.5 to 23.9 million viewers for NBC Nightly News, ABS's World News Tonight and CBS Evening News every year (Matsa, 2017). The same trend applies to morning network news viewership and Sunday morning network political talk show viewership, showing that television still regularly attracts viewers despite a changing media landscape. However, younger generations do not consume news on TV as much as older generations.

Matsa and Lu (2016) found that half of 18 to 29-year-old US adults often get news from online sources when the proportion is only 27% for television, 14% for radio and 5% for print newspapers. The popularity of television increases with age, with 45% and 72% of 30 to 49-year-old and 50 to 64-year-old US adults respectively often getting news from it. The same trend applies when it comes to getting news from radio or the newspapers (Matsa and Lu, 2016). In

Canada, among all generations, 76% of the population accesses news online (including social media), while this proportion drops to 48% for social media only, and 70% for TV (Newman et al, 2017). Mitchell et al (2018) found that 59% of the 18 to 29-years old Canadian adults get news daily from social networking sites, while 74% of them get news daily from the Internet (Michell et al, 2018). The popularity of online sources is due to the influence of Facebook and social media in general that has increased over the last decade. Its rise has a disruptive impact on the way information is consumed, but also in the way opinion is formed (Schmidt et al, 2017). Social media's primary use, limited to communicating with friends and building and maintaining relationships, does not apply anymore. News organizations had to adapt to this new medium available to them and thus set up Facebook pages that allow them to publish news stories and share links to articles (Winter, Bruckner, and Kramer, 2015). As a result, accessing news is now a major part of the social media experience (Masip et al, 2015).

Modern technologies like the Internet allowed the host of both legacy news outlets and news outlets born on the web, allowing users to have easy access to news through digital means. As a result, 93% of US adults already got news online through mobile or desktop means<sup>1</sup>, increasing the number of monthly unique visitors for the highest traffic digital native news outlets by 20.16% from 2014 to 2016 (Stocking, 2017). Stocking also discovered that roughly six out of ten digital native news outlets have applications on either iOS or Android, allowing mobile news seekers to have access to news on the go with their smartphones. Furthermore, Stocking found that 100% of the digital-native news outlets observed had a Facebook and Twitter account, while 97% and 92% of them had a YouTube and Instagram account

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<sup>1</sup> Data for the same age group is not available for Canadian adults. However, data for US news consumers is similar to data for Canadian news consumers (Newman et al, 2017). I will thus assume those figures to be representative of the Canadian population within the 18 to 29-year-old age group

respectively. Because of those practices, 62% of US adults get news on social media, 18% of them often getting news from it, while 26% sometimes do (Gottfried and Shearer, 2016). In Canada, 76% of news consumers report they use online sources to get their news, while 48% of Canadian news consumers get their news on social media (Newman et al, 2017). This trend is increasing through time: Facebook has encountered the most important increase in terms of its user base getting news from the platform, going from 47% of its users in 2013 to 66% in 2016 (Gottfried and Shearer, 2016). However, it is essential to state that news consumers rarely only use one source of information; they use a plethora of sources, from print to broadcast and online media (Pentina et al, 2014). 39% of Facebook users also get news from Local TV, versus 33% from news websites and applications, 23% from radio and 15% from newspapers (Gottfried and Shearer, 2016).

Access to news did not only become digital but also mobile, with 85% of US adults getting news on a mobile device in 2017, against 72% of them in 2016 and 54% in 2013 (Lu, 2017). This proportion gets even more impressive for 18 to 29-year-old US adults as 94% of them get news on a mobile device in 2017 when this number was 92% in 2016 and 75% in 2013 (Lu, 2017). Getting news on mobile also is the preferred way to get news for 77% of the 18 to 29-year-old US adults (Lu, 2017).

### **Negative implications of online news consumption**

However, this digital and mobile consumption comes with a downside. Indeed, the level of trust in national news organizations of those who prefer digital news is significantly lower than the level of trust of those who prefer other platforms (67% vs. 81%) (Mitchell, Gottfried,

Barthel, and Shearer, 2016). Mitchell et al discovered that only 10% of 18 to 29-year-old US adults trust the information from national media a lot (Mitchell et al, 2016). This low level of trust can be linked to made-up news, or more generally called “Fake News”. Based on a report by Barthel et al (2016), 64% of US adults say made-up news has caused a great deal of confusion about the basic facts of current events, this number going up to 67% for the 18 to 29-year-old US adults. Not only does a majority of US adults say they often come across not fully accurate political news online (51%), but 32% of them say they often come across completely made-up political news online (Barthel et al, 2016). Despite trust issues towards news organizations, users still see journalists and news organizations as the most accurate sources of information, while also receiving news from their friends (Masip et al, 2015). However, evaluating reliability and trustworthiness of the news is becoming a prominent factor when seeking news (Pentina et al, 2014).

As a result, news consumers will use multiple sources, but also local and national sources, from outlets of different types (Ksiazek, Malthouse, and Webster, 2010). However, as shown in the Homophily section of the literature review, news consumers will stick to the news that follows similar ideologies than theirs, making them more exposed to only one side of the political spectrum (Flaxman, Goel and Rao, 2016).

Based on the literature review and research context, it is essential to further empirically investigate how Millennials select, make sense of, share, and engage with the news in the digital and liquid era via the Internet and social media platforms like Facebook. Such investigation will contribute to a better understanding of consumer behaviour in this specific context and will be highly valuable to social scientists, marketers, and their peers alike.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

The literature review and research context highlighted three main themes that need to be studied in more depth: the change in nature of news consumption in the digital age, the selection and sensemaking of news, and the use of social media platforms like Facebook as tools to consume, distribute, and engage with news, interconnecting the first two themes. In the previous sections, I discussed the context surrounding news consumption in the digital and liquid era and provided a review of the relevant literature associated with liquid consumption, sensemaking, uses and gratification theory, the concept of worthwhileness, engagement towards news, and the social network Facebook.

The following question emerges from the past sections of this thesis: How has the liquid era and Facebook impacted Millennials' consumer behaviour and engagement when it comes to news consumption? This research question is composed of related sub-questions, including: What is the impact of liquid consumption on Millennials' everyday lives? How do Millennials get news in the digital era? What factors affect Millennials' news consumption? What role does social media platforms like Facebook hold in Millennials' consumer behaviour and how has this role changed over time? How does one's network impact the way they consume news?

The topic selected for this research eases readers' engagement, as it is timely and touching current issues which we all witness. Facebook is the most widely used social media, and, as a result, makes it easy to relate to and for readers to identify with. Finally, consuming news is part of our everyday life, and seeing how social media networks such as Facebook have influenced consumer behaviour and news consumption establishes the topic as interesting.

Recent quantitative study from Newman et al in 2016 showed that using social media as a news source is most relevant for young users (Newman et al, 2016); they will thus be the focus of this study, as Millennials are the largest population present on Facebook but also the main target market news organizations are prioritizing when it comes to sharing news online.

Throughout this research, I seek to investigate and understand concepts and issues that only recently emerged and have not been widely explored yet within past research. Finally, focusing on Millennials and news consumption on social media allows researchers and other stakeholders to better understand the role of news media in the democratic development of individuals as citizens.



## METHODS

### Data

Qualitative interviews have been conducted for the purpose of this research as it “seeks an in-depth understanding of a topic that the research informant is able to speak about” (Belk, Fischer and Kozinets, 2013). Maccoby and Maccoby (1954) defined an interview as “a face-to-face verbal exchange, in which one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information or expressions of opinion or belief from another person or persons” (p449). Weiss (2004) distinguishes qualitative interviews from survey interviews, describing qualitative interviews as the “details of what really happened: what was done and said, what the respondent thought and felt. The aim is to come as close as possible to capturing in full the processes that led to an event or experience” (p44). In the present study, the goal is to get a deeper understanding of how liquid consumption and Facebook impacted Millennials’ consumer behaviour and engagement when it comes to news consumption.

### Interviews and participants profile

#### *Recruitment of the participants*

In order to collect data for this research, I conducted in-depth interviews with a total of fourteen participants (seven men and seven women), between June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2017 and August 31<sup>st</sup>,

2017. All interviewees were from the Millennials generation, grew up in North America and have a Facebook account. The level of interest in reading news diverged among participants. The latter have been recruited via public messages shared on Facebook groups of the city of Montreal and through the snowball effect once the first participants have been recruited.

### *Description of the participants*

All participants were between the age of twenty years old and thirty-five years old, with an average age of twenty-five years old and a median age of twenty-four years old. All participants are high school and CEGEP educated. Three of them hold a diploma from CEGEP, while two of them hold a Bachelor's degree, seven of them are currently in the process of getting their bachelor's degree, two of them are in the process of getting their master's degree and one of them is in the process of getting their Ph.D. Five participants are currently full-time workers, while nine of them are currently full-time students, with three of them working part-time. Thirteen of them are from Canada, while one of them is from France but lived in Montreal for four years. Six of the fourteen participants are children of Asian immigrants who fled their country of origin for various reasons (economic immigrants or refugees). Table 1 below summarizes the participants.

Table 1: Description of the participants of the study

Alias	Gender	Age	Occupation	Education	Country	Parents' Country of Origin	Length Interview (min)	Social media used*	Use
Jack	M	25	Worker	Bachelor	Canada	Cambodia	56	FB, YT, SC, IG	Medium
Emma	F	22	Worker	CEGEP	Canada	Canada	46	FB, YT, SC, IG	Heavy
Olivia	F	20	Student	Bachelor in progress	Canada	China	117	FB, YT, SC, IG, TB	Heavy
Michael	M	27	Worker	CEGEP	Canada	Canada	63	FB, IG, RD	Medium
Sophia	F	26	Worker	Bachelor	Canada	Canada	66	FB, IG, TW	Heavy
Emily	F	21	Student	Bachelor in progress	Canada	Vietnam	62	FB, IG, SC	Medium
John	M	21	Student	Bachelor in progress	Canada	Canada	65	FB, SC, RD	Medium
Charlotte	F	24	Student	Master in progress	Canada	Canada	75	FB, YT, SC, IG, PT, RD, LK	Heavy
James	M	31	Worker	CEGEP	Canada	Canada	79	FB, SC, RD	Light
Nick	M	23	Student	Master in progress	France	France	59	FB, YT, SC, IG, RD, LK, TW	Heavy
Anna	F	35	Student	PHD in progress	Canada	China	67	FB, IG	Light
Kyle	M	21	Student	Bachelor in progress	Canada	China	57	FB, YT, SC, IG	Heavy
Sarah	F	21	Student	Bachelor in progress	Canada	China	66	FB, YT, SC, IG	Heavy
William	M	23	Student	Bachelor in progress	Canada	Canada	69	FB, SC	Light

The Social media used are the following: FB = Facebook, YT = YouTube, SC = Snapchat, IG = Instagram, TB = Tumblr, RD = Reddit, TW = Twitter, PT = Pinterest, LK = LinkedIn

### *Interview setup*

All interviews were conducted in a comfortable and quiet environment such as a coffee shop or a study room at Concordia University, allowing both the interviewee and the interviewer to focus on the research topic in a friendly and warm manner. Two of the interviews were conducted in a coffee shop, while the other twelve interviews occurred in a study room at Concordia University. The shortest interview was forty-six minutes long, while the longest lasted one hour and fifty-seven minutes, with an average interview length of one hour and seven minutes, and a median length of one hour and five minutes. All interviews were digitally recorded.

### *Topics addressed*

Every interview started with questions related to the interviewee's personal background, to get more context regarding their answers, to know more about them and to get them more comfortable. Two main topics have been addressed over the course of each interview: the use of social media and news consumption. In regards to social media, interviewees were asked the purpose they made of social media, the time they allocate to the use of it, and their interaction with news on social media. When it comes to news consumption, they have been asked about their previous and actual news consumption habits, their interaction with news, and more.

## *Ethics*

Each interviewee was given a consent form at the beginning of the interview, giving them additional information about the purpose, the procedures, the risks, and the benefits of the interview, as well as the confidentiality of the information they will divulge over the course of the meeting. The consent form can be found in Appendix 1. The form also mentioned that the data will remain confidential, as the information gathered is coded and protected, and it is not possible to identify them in the published results in order to prevent ethical issues. Moreover, each interviewee was told prior to the interview that the latter was recorded for future transcription and analysis. Furthermore, participants were notified that it is their decision to participate in this research and that they could stop the interview at any time. Besides, participants could ask the researchers at any time during the interview to stop the recording if they did not feel comfortable discussing a particular topic.

## **Analysis of the Data**

During the transcription and analysis stages, clear procedural guidelines were set up and followed for every interview conducted. The audio recording of the interviews allowed the author to transcribe each interview verbatim as the quality of the recordings was satisfactory. Every interview was first transcribed in Microsoft Word and analyzed individually. Data was then coded within and across interviews and data reduction was used to analyze the content of

the interviews: noteworthy statements were carefully coded, organized into spreadsheets, and categorized per themes that were developed in the data.

The fourteen interviews were sufficient in providing a rich insight into the participants' behaviour and motives when using social media and accessing news. The first round of interviews resulted in a wealth of new themes that were enriched and developed over the course of the following interviews until thematic saturation was reached around the 10<sup>th</sup> interview, as new themes did not appear above this point. This approach follows Kvale's (1996) methodology of using  $15 \pm 10$  participants when conducting a study.

The following section of the paper elaborates on the findings resulting from the interviews: The findings discuss liquid consumption in the everyday life, news consumption in the liquid era, how people access and share news on Facebook, as well as user behaviour and engagement styles on Facebook.

## FINDINGS

### **Liquid consumption in the everyday life**

The interviews conducted revealed that smartphones serve much more than communication purposes as they are used for liquid consumption, notably through social media as expressed by Charlotte:

That's how I communicate with people... also for entertainment purposes... like music, videos, and like Instagram, Pinterest, all those things. Podcasts... - Charlotte

Emily elaborates, focusing also on the fact that she uses it to communicate through social media and for additional use than simply communicating:

Interviewer: What's your relationship with your phone? Is it more than a way to communicate?

Emily: Yes, definitely. Definitely more than that. It's still there, it's still to communicate with people mostly but yeah social media. It's also my calculator [chuckles], weather... I have a watch, but I use my phone most of the time for that. It's just there for weight because I'm used to it. I can't think of other things that I use it for.

Participants described their smartphone as a digital Swiss knife or a one-stop shop that fulfills their every need. It is used as a communication tool via calls, texts, and social media but also a watch, an alarm clock, a map, a calculator, an entertainment center, a weather channel, a bus schedule, a source of news, and more. The countless functions that a smartphone achieves

can nonetheless, despite its usefulness, have negative impacts on its users' life and lead to an unhealthy relationship, as expressed by Olivia's statement:

Let's say before I had an alarm clock, I don't have one anymore, it's always on my phone. There's something about our age, where we're always on our phone nowadays so... my phone isn't only my phone, it's also my alarm, it's also a means of communicating with people. Let's say yesterday I went to my practice, I went outside the house, I thought I had my phone but I didn't, I didn't have a watch on me, I didn't know what time it was, I couldn't see if I missed the bus or not, I couldn't know what time it was, I couldn't text my friends so I couldn't know when the next bus was coming. That didn't happen in a really long time, so I was like "oh, I'm a little bit co-dependent" –  
Olivia

Smartphones are the first and last thing some consumers use during the day, showcasing a strong material relationship due to liquid consumption, as highlights Nick:

I usually check my phone first thing in the morning since I have to use it to turn off my alarm. Then I'll spend time in bed... checking my notifications and whatnot. It's kind of a morning routine you know... and evening routine too actually. It's hard to go to sleep without doing that first either [...] It's a bit of an addiction - Nick

More than that, they allow for constant connectedness that Baron (2008) described, as smartphones and other communication technologies now allow consumption on the go.

My findings confirm Schmidt et al's (2017) findings that technology has had a disruptive impact on consumers' everyday lives but also that consumers now use digital and mobile sources of consumption as previously shown by Peters (2012) and Struckmann and Karnowski (2016)



thanks to their smartphone and the opportunity it gives individuals to consume products in a liquid state. It also shows that technology expanded consumption's spectrum from a solid to a liquid state (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017), as participants admit using tools on their phones, such as a calculator, watches, alarm clocks, that used to be a physical product of their own. The interviews conducted show that phones, despite being material products, are used as mediators for liquid consumption. Participants have a strong attachment to their phones and, in the example of Olivia, even call themselves co-dependent to it. Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017) refer to this as the coexistence of liquid and solid consumption, depending on the relevance to the self, the nature of social relationships, access to mobility systems and precarity, but do not put much emphasis on it throughout their research. In the context of news consumption and the use of smartphones, it becomes clear that the participants demonstrated that their smartphones are meaningful to them, as nine out of the fourteen participants chose their smartphone when being asked which object they would not be able to live without. This relates to the relevance to the self described by Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017), where users create an intimate connection with their device, as it becomes part of their extended self (Belk, 1988). The ephemerality, digital consumption and dematerialization characteristics described by Bardhi & Eckhardt (2017) are paradoxical in this situation, where my findings show that liquefaction leads to a stronger personal attachment to a physical product like the smartphone. This paradox illustrates that attachment "may be higher to particular products if they provide access" (p. 8) (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017) to liquid consumption as it is the case with smartphones and computers. Smartphones, computers and even tablets, serve as portable "Access bottlenecks" to liquid consumption, with the Internet and Wi-Fi being the Access means. Without Access as a characteristic of the "bottleneck" product,

we can assume that the attachment to smartphones, computers or tablets would be weak and limited.

In the next section, I will focus on how liquid consumption and its characteristics impacted consumption, with a focus on news consumption.

### **News consumption in the liquid era**

The same conclusions can be inferred for news consumption specifically. All participants interviewed declared consuming news digitally, via their smartphones or computers, while none admitted getting news through traditional media on a regular basis anymore, confirming Newman et al's findings (2016). Jack, one of the interviewees, stated that the way he consumes news changed over time; he now relies on the Internet for his news-related needs rather than on television:

I used to watch a lot of television channels more than the computer. Nowadays, I only depend on the Internet for that [...] I do read some articles on my phone, but mostly on the computer. – Jack

Liquid news consumption is made easy via the internet, computers, and smartphones, giving the opportunity to news consumers like Jack to find alternatives to news consumption in a solid form through digital media. Using smartphones also allows users to consume news during their commute, perfectly fitting to their day, reflecting the situational fit described by Schroder (2015) and the mobility characteristic of liquid consumption defined by Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017), as points out John:

A lot on the computer. The only time I would be on the phone, it would be during public transit. 30 minutes to an hour a day on my phone. Mostly on the metro, or the bus. – John

A potential implication of this is that news organizations need to adapt to this new reality that liquid consumption created. News consumption must be made possible on the go when consumers have limited time and attention to give. More than only on the go, consumers' attention is limited at all time. As a 2015 study from Microsoft regarding Canadian consumers points out, the average human attention span in 2013 was eight seconds, dropping from twelve seconds in 2000; This drop is explained by a shift in their digital lifestyles (through web browsing, multi-screening while online, social media usage, and tech adoption), having a direct impact on their brain, and “decreasing the ability for prolonged focus and increasing their appetite for more stimuli” (p.4) (Microsoft, 2015). This results in the production of shorter pieces of content to be read everywhere and anywhere within a few minutes by news organizations and brands, making the best of consumers' sustained, selective, and alternating attentions (Microsoft, 2015).

Participants interviewed also stated that news consumption was now made easy and offering flexibility and adaptability, illustrating two characteristics of liquid consumption described by Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017), as Jack states below:

Mostly the easiness to access news. I can be much more selective. The Internet gives me the option to seek what I want, to seek out the information I want to know, that's why I think it's more flexible, and easy to access at any time of the day or night – Jack

The simplicity and selectivity offered by the Internet and new communication technologies in general provide easy access to consumers like Jack to a broad selection of news,

covering a multitude of interests and allowing them to use it as they please, anywhere, anytime, on demand, by the simple push of a button. Consumers having access to multiple sources of news at the tip of their fingers also implies that competition for consumers' attention is growing, leading to the use of vague headlines to "lure readers into clicking on the headline" (p1303), also known as clickbait (Kuiken et al, 2017).

The interviews conducted throughout this study also emphasize findings from Peters (2012) regarding two of the changing notions of journalism audiences experience: space and convenience. Liquid news consumption permits flexibility in time and space of consumption, through multiple channels of access, where consumers do not have to be present at a specific time of the day in front of their TV or on the radio to have access to news, as illustrated by Charlotte's quote below:

I would say I mostly increased the number of sources I use to get my news from. [...] I guess the time of the day... like when you got news from TV, you had to sit down at 7pm to watch the news. But this is like I'm bored, it's midnight, I'm eating a snack in my kitchen and you know I'm scrolling Facebook or I'm scrolling Reddit – Charlotte

This quote reflects a more unconventional way to access news as it can be aggregated throughout multiple sources rather than focusing on only one like traditional media users would do when watching one channel or listening to one radio channel at a time. Having access to multiple sources of news would assume users are more reflexive and critical citizens as a result. This is however contradictory with the interviews conducted; liquid consumption has a pernicious effect on users' role as citizens, emphasizing echo chambers and filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011; Flaxman et al, 2016), where consumers are exposed to confirming opinions like Sunstein (2009) predicted, illustrated by the following quote:

I stay within whatever I believe in. I typically go to the more liberal side so... not a big like Fox News person, and I don't try to actively seek out the holistic view. I really go more towards my beliefs. – Charlotte

The statement above challenges how Bardhi and Eckhardt define the nature of the attachment when it comes to liquid consumption; The authors evoke a lack of loyalty and ephemerality in engagement in a liquid context that contradicts the essence of echo chambers and filter bubbles we observe on social media, principally when it comes to strongly ideologically driven topics such as news organizations and their association with politics.

Convenience in news consumption also allows for interactivity, with the examples of social media platforms and websites. Traditional media doesn't offer the same experience as new media, as points out Emma in the quote below:

I tried watching the news but to me it's such a different experience 'cause it's less interactive, you don't have people to chat with when you watch TV. With TV, it's a box, you're sitting in front of a box and you can't do anything about it. Whereas, if you're on social media, you can write comments, read other people's opinions on it. If you just have the news, it's not as fun, you can't get as involved, so I kinda prefer to just literally get all of my news on Facebook. It's much more entertaining. It's kinda what I do now - Emma

As Emma shows, social media gives consumers a platform to voice their opinion, where information sharing is not only a one-way discussion (from the news organization to the news consumer) but provides opportunity for discussion, where social media platforms users can comment, share, and post links (Lee and Ma, 2012; Choi et al, 2013). This quote also shows news consumers' will to collaborate with each other, share opinions, bring value to not only

them but to others as well, while keeping themselves entertained. It highly relates to the term “Prosumer” introduced by Toffler in 1980, where individuals operate as both consumers and producers. On social media, they can take part of the creation of content by sharing news links and interacting with news organizations and their networks through statuses and comments, leading to higher engagement to the news. Liquid consumption and social media give news organizations the opportunity to make news a co-creation experience. This co-creation experience involves making content more easily shareable and engaging. News organizations can benefit from emotional engagement related to news to reach such purpose; Guerini and Staiano (2015) found that the virality of a piece of news depended on how the emotion it generates fits within the VAD model (Valence, Arousal, and Dominance). In terms of implications, sharing articles triggering feelings of anger and happiness will allow news organizations to generate discussion among their readers, while articles fostering inspiration and happiness will be shared more widely (Guerini and Staiano, 2015), which will result in higher engagement and interaction with and between users referred to by Emma.

Being able to establish a public connection in what Schroder (2015) described as “everyday worthwhileness” also determines individuals’ choice of news consumption. News consumers like Emma wish to provide value to their personal networks, as expressed below:

I would use my phone more when I have free time throughout the day. I am more likely to see an article and discuss it with people around me when I’m on my phone ‘cause it’s mobile, it’s just more like when I’m out in public, whereas when I’m at home, that’s when I properly look into things. I’m not likely to do that out in public. It’s almost more of a way to discuss with people around me. - Emma

This quote also expresses a desire to connect with others through news consumption, aligning with Kang, Lee, You, and Lee's findings (2013). It does not only apply to consumption on a smartphone as may be suggested by Emma's quote but also to the mobility of the news. Emma has, through her phone, the opportunity to bring the news into the office and discuss it with her colleagues. She could have the opportunity to follow the same steps with a newspaper, the only difference observed is the timing, since breaking news can be shared live through digital media. Once again, in this context, smartphones serve as a mediator between solid and liquid consumption.

As stated above, technology made it possible for news to travel faster through space and time. Consumers are aware of breaking news within minutes from an extensive number of sources, including news consumers themselves. They can also access online live feeds on social media like Reddit like they would do in front of the TV, as Nick points out:

I just need the internet and that's all. I can use my phone, or my computer and know what happens. For example, when there was that terrorist attack in Manchester. I saw it at home, and could get updates on that all night long by going on Reddit or 20minutes and even on Facebook. I was using my phone but also my laptop and I could research a bit more. 'Cause like for example on Reddit, they had that live feed and we could see updates that only approved and legit users could post. It was the best way to stay informed and make sure it wasn't all fake. - Nick

This statement refers to the Speed factor mentioned by Peters (2012) and Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017), descriptive of liquid consumption and modern journalism, that is not possible on the same scale with traditional media, unless consumers jump in all-news channels and 24-hour news cycles.

News consumption, as well as consumption in general, has been greatly impacted by the possibilities offered by new communication technologies. Findings show that news can be consumed digitally via smartphones and computers, on top of traditional media, providing flexibility, adaptability, convenience, and speed, replicating findings from Peters (2012), Schroder (2015) and Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017). Moreover, liquid consumption also impacts user experience and engagement and can be used by news organizations and their consumers to co-create value through a two-way dialogue.

As previously mentioned, consumption can be experienced through a broad spectrum, from a solid to a liquid form. When it comes to news and its consumption on the go, the interviews revealed that participants decided which sources of news to read from based on characteristics from the concept of Worthwhileness (Schroder, 2015), leading them to consume traditional media in specific situations:

I do listen to the radio, now more than I did before, but not because I want to, because I'm in the car and don't have anything else to listen to. I used to read the newspaper when I was taking public transportation like the bus or the metro, but nowadays I don't mostly because I use the car, and I won't go out of my way for it, it doesn't peak my interest. –  
Jack

This quote is representative of the characteristic of Time Spent, not in the sense that news consumers like Jack will take the necessary time to use a source over another, but because they evaluate this news source as “worthwhile” by default, as it is the most convenient way for them to consume news in that specific context. This statement is also characteristic of the Situational Fit described by Schroder (2015) as the use of the radio is the most appropriate when driving a



car and as reading the newspaper is appropriate when commuting on the bus or metro. As Emily states, “it fits in your day better, ‘cause you never have anything to do on the metro [...] you have time to read the articles”

Price and availability were also stated as crucial factors by participants using traditional media when commuting. It is a critical attribute that consumers consider when evaluating their source of news: a medium must be affordable and worth the price in the eyes of the consumers. The newspaper provided for free when entering or exiting a metro station fits Emily’s requirements:

Emily: It’s there. It’s available. It’s free, convenient.

Interviewer: Would you go out of your way to get it?

Emily: No. I wish I had a subscription to a magazine or something like a newspaper, but I wouldn’t go out of my way to buy it.

Once again, when commuting, the newspaper is seen as a viable option as it is free, convenient and fits in with the context individuals are using it. It is safe to assume that if news organizations were offering a digital version of the exact same newspaper via QR code or other communications technology inside metro stations, individuals would be as inclined to consume it in a liquid form as it would be convenient, free, fit the context, but would also be technologically appealing to them, meeting the Technological Appeal dimension of Worthwhileness described by Schroder (2015). Since free and easy access to news is made possible, news consumers favor a free source over a paid one, but also apply this way of thinking with streaming services such as Spotify, or any product that can be consumed in a liquid form. Not a single participant admitted paying for news since they can have access to it for free, as expressed by Nick below:

Well, you can get anything for free online. Why would I pay for something I can get for free? [...] If you can give me the name of a news outlet that's trustworthy and unbiased, sure I may give it a try, but until then... I doubt I'd ever pay to get news. Media need to get much better at it, to present facts over opinions, and then, I may be willing to pay for that. [...] I don't pay for Spotify, I listen to my music for free on it and on YouTube. Everything is digital and free now. - Nick

As illustrated above, paying to have access to news is not even considered, due to the quality of the news presented, but also because of perceived untrustworthiness and potential bias associated with some sources. Another participant even considers access to news a necessity, as it provides knowledge and educates the readers, serving the utility characteristic described by Blumler (1979). Through Nick's and most interviewees' statements, it becomes clear that the added value brought by news organizations does not reach their willingness to pay since similar value can be found for free online. This added value is based on the quality of the news received and is determined by specialization, differentiation, exclusivity, and accessibility as stated by Marta-Lazo et al (2017). Despite offering accessibility, paid models of news consumption fail to match differentiation as participants perceive them as biased and untrustworthy, negatively impacting their quality while they also fail to be exclusive since, in customers' perspective, the same news can be obtained through a free channel.

This fact has serious implications on multiple levels for news organizations. First of all, news aggregators like Facebook and Reddit easily supply the digital news market by serving as conveniently centralized platforms of news consumption, which poses a threat to news organizations in terms of revenue generation. News organizations need to diversify their sources of revenue through digital advertising, but also through paid subscriptions with added value that

would meet most factors defined by Marta-Lazo et al (2017) in order to successfully attract, convert and transform its visitors into consumers and customers (Hyder and Brogan, 2010). Finally, despite losing potential revenue to digital media, news organizations have to adapt and use digital media and social media as a strength; it is essential for news organizations to be technology-savvy and track and analyze consumer behaviour data in order to provide relevant content tailored to each individual based on their news consumption habits, thus providing “exclusive” content and added value they would not be able to get through other means.

For the rest of this thesis, I will focus on the social media Facebook, as it is the main social media our participants use, but also because it is the social media most participants get news from, as it is where a variety of news organizations share their content, allowing for participatory news consumption through the media. Building upon Schröder’s (2015) worthwhileness concept, using Facebook fits most of the seven distinctive characteristics: News can be consumed while communicating with friends, family, and acquaintances, making its use worth the time spent on it (time spent). It allows connection with others regarding the topics discussed (public connection) and allows its users to act upon the news and interact with each other (with likes, comments, shares, and more) (participatory potential). Getting news through Facebook is convenient thanks to the Internet (technological appeal) as it can be used anywhere anytime (situational fit) and is free (price). In the next sections, I will first set context regarding the platform and its users by depicting the different types of user behaviour depicted through the interviews, along with their engagement styles. I will then share my findings concerning how individuals access and share news on Facebook.

## User behaviour and engagement styles on Facebook

In order to get a better understand of how users consume news on Facebook and how they engage with them, it is crucial to understand how Facebook users behave on the platform and how this behaviour may have changed over time, which I will determine in this section.

As Robinson et al (2017) found four distinct types of Facebook users in their study, it seemed imperative to evaluate if these findings could be replicated within my sample of participants. Despite showing similarities with their findings, the participants only fit in two of the four categories described by Robinson et al (2017): Relationship builders and Window Shoppers, which are sometimes inter-related. Relationship builders composed a major part of the sample interviewed. Participants who are part of that category of users actively use Facebook as an extension of their offline life. Throughout the years, keeping in touch with family and friends gets complicated, and participants find in Facebook the perfect platform to serve such purpose, as explained by Emma:

I use it a lot to just see what everyone is up to, cause where I'm from, everyone gets separated so it's kinda like to keep in contact with friends, with family, and I'm mostly just looking at pictures, or looking at articles, or literally just scrolling through the newsfeed to see what's on that day – Emma

Facebook's ever-growing range of features made communication easier and more convenient through the Messenger application (that allows users to direct message each other), favoring the prominence of Relationship builders on the platform, as illustrated by the following quote:

Before, Facebook was kinda more like MySpace. It's a lot like this is me, that's what's going on in my life. It's still that but [...] Facebook evolved... the messenger component came on and that was I think, a game changer for a lot of people cause... like when I started Facebook, I used to use a lot more MSN Messenger to communicate with people but ever since that was on Facebook, the MSN kinda died down. – Olivia

However, interviewees described that public behaviour on the platform changed within their network; User engagement and interaction decreased throughout the years as personal information, including status and pictures, is not shared as much as it used to be due to the advertising-oriented approach. The number of Relationship Builders significantly decreased as a result, according to the following participant:

It was a lot more user interactions... People were actually posting a lot more. They would post statuses. I never have people on my newsfeed posting statuses anymore. More and more recently, I see... marketing things, it's all brands posting their stuff. I see it from miles away. You can see Facebook is making so many attempts to get more user interactions. They're doing their memory things, all those videos where there's you and this person you've been friends with for so many years. It's all stuff that's meant to get users to post more, to engage with their friends on their timelines... Facebook never had to do that before, because people were posting. – John

This change in Facebook core drove Relationship Builders away from publicly interacting on the platform and forced the latter to take initiatives to continue to foster interactions and engagement among its users. Facebook introduced Memories with the “On This Day” feature in March 2015 (Gheller, 2015), Live Video (Lavrusik, 2015; Simo, 2016), Group Video Chat in Messenger (Taine, 2016), Message Reactions and Mentions (Moxon, 2017) but

also Live Location in Messenger in March 2017 (Wang, 2017), and the introduction of Messenger M in April 2017 (Landowski and El Moujahid, 2017) among other features as a result. However, users believe the social media platform lost its “social” component, which directly affected engagement and social interactions on the platform. Participants see Facebook as a “pop culture” tool, where users share memes and articles with each other rather than sharing content about themselves through statuses and pictures:

I felt maybe Facebook was more like a social networking tool than a pop culture thing. I mean now everyone is posting memes and there are all those pages dedicated to that and tagging each other and stuff. Back then, it was really just like writing on your friends’ walls, or commenting on their pictures or posting pictures, updating your status. Now it’s like sharing things that celebrities are posting, sharing links from like news sites or satire news sites or fake news sites. – Anna

Other participants expressed similar feelings, but with much harsher words, blaming Facebook newsfeed for prominently showing brands and meme pages over user-related content. They believe Facebook users now share limited information with their network as it gets lost in a clutter of random pages, but also because they express privacy concerns or believe that what they share is not be appreciated by their network:

Well, like I said, I used to post statuses, pictures and all. Now, not so much. I feel like whatever I would post would get lost in all this clutter you know. It would get lost in this sea of bulls\*\*t posts that you see on your newsfeed, between the meme pages and buzzfeed nonsense. I do from time to time update a profile picture but that’s pretty much it. Oh and I RSVP to shows, I think that’s like my main activity on Facebook [chuckles]... I also feel like I’m not the only one who doesn’t share stuff to be honest. I

feel like it was a trend that got lost through time. Now people share a limited amount of information. I don't know if people got paranoid with all that privacy bulls\*\*t , since you know, everything belongs to Facebook... or if it's just that like we have bigger circles now on Facebook and we barely know people we have on there so like, we don't really want people we barely know to know that much about our lives. I also don't really have the time for that stuff, and I'm sure people don't give a c\*\*p anyway [chuckles]. - Nick

By losing its user-centric focus, the platform lost its core purpose: communication and social interaction between users. Users lost interest in sharing and interacting with personal content posted on Facebook due to the mass marketing they are the target of on the platform. As a result, some users transitioned from being Relationship Builders to Window Shoppers or are both Relationship Builders and Window Shoppers, as using Facebook is a social obligation for them:

It's a bit of both, I mean... I always go for it, so I mean there's a part of me that wants it there. It's also so accessible because all my friends are on it. It's easy... even when, nowadays... you'll be friends with someone on Facebook before getting their phone number. Classmates, for example, it's easier to contact them through Facebook than... like, even if you don't have them, you can just add them. It's easier that than getting their phone number to text them. I think it makes it easier in that sense, and it's hard to not have that. There's no way around it anymore, I feel. I guess I'm not really on it by choice... – Emily

Window Shoppers are described by Robinson et al (2017) as not being on the platform by choice and are perfectly illustrated by the quote above. Facebook is a must-have to communicate with acquaintances, family, and friends, as the participant even admits that there is “no way

around it anymore”, emphasizing the social obligation factor of the social media. The participant above is not the only one feeling this way as Nick, another interviewee, admits he would delete his account if he “could”. Even though he technically can delete his account in a few clicks, he is unable to as it is the only network that allows him to contact most individuals he knows and to fulfill a Relationship Builder role:

I’d get rid of it if I could. But like I said, it’s useful for team projects for school, and it’s pretty much the only way I have to talk to everyone. If I were to delete it, I’d lose touch with all of my friends. It would be too complicated to try to get them on every other social media or to like try to skype them or it would be super costly to call them. I have friends in France, in Canada, in the US and probably all over the world too thanks to university. Facebook is the only place where I can find over 90% of them I think. – Nick

Window Shoppers represent a significant portion of my sample; all participants claimed to need Facebook to keep in touch with friends and family, while students and full-time workers indicated needing it for university and their profession, while some admitted dealing with Hobson’s choice. For example, one of the interviewees declared he always came back on the platform because of his occupation, but also because of peer pressure, since his friends thought they were not “virtual friends” anymore when he deleted his account. However, Town Criers users described by Robinson et al (2017), who share content without expecting anything in return, were not found in my sample. The total opposite was observed, as all participants avoided to share too much information with their Facebook network:

There’s still stuff about me that I prefer to keep to myself or to people that I know about. [...] there’s a part of me that doesn’t want to be so open about myself on the Internet [...] we’re at a certain age where you can document your life on the internet and that can be



dangerous, it can come bite you in the ass later on. For example, employers actually look you up online [...] I think it's kinda like a precaution. I'm scared about the negative impact it can have on my life in the future. - Olivia

This lack of engagement on the platform is partly the result of the potential negative impact that online activity can have on the future, notably when it comes to job hunting, showing that the sample interviewed is aware that their actions may have negative consequences they would rather prevent by abstaining from sharing personal information or opinion online; This fact also explains why the Selfies described by Robinson et al (2017) were also not represented in my sample. This category of users was even despised and highly criticized by a few interviewees. One interviewee compares them to vegetables, not able to think for themselves, and without goals or ambition. They are also labeled as “narcissistic”, matching Robinson et al's definition as users willing to comfort their ego. The participant below describes the essence of that definition through the notions of likes and retweets, which are terms associated to social media popularity on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, and relates to what Choi defines as “getting recognition” (Choi, 2016) (p.250):

It's a bad habit, it turned people into vegetables. All they want is to be insta famous, to get likes, retweets or whatever. If that's your biggest aspiration in life, you got a problem man! You have such low life goals, you gotta rethink your life choices you know. So yeah, even if it's cool to use it to keep in touch with people, I feel like the negative aspects of it are much more important. It turned people into narcissistic a\*\*holes with no goals in their lives, it's sad. – Nick

Not only do participants negatively judged Selfies, but they called them out as being “fake”, depicting themselves as someone they aren't. Some interviewees believe that social

media platforms like Facebook have had negative impacts on individuals, the perception of themselves and the expectations they believe others have of them:

Well my mentality changed... and also, people put way too much emphasis on Facebook. You can see people trying way too hard, to post like... very fake stuff. You can see people... I don't know, it's not a good mentality to get into. I would say that it really had a bad impact on how people portray themselves or even how people are in general. People are very very fake on Facebook. Oh well, most of my friends not so much... people that are super fake, I always block so I don't really get too much of that right now, but if I were to unblock everyone, I would just get the pure unaltered Facebook feed with no blocking... then, a lot of people in there would be really cringy clearly, the way that they act on Facebook and the way that they are in real life is very different. – Kyle

The interviews did not only reveal that Town Criers and Selfies (Robinson et al, 2017) were not represented within the sample, but also that social media networks negatively impacted its users' behaviour, promoting inauthenticity as well as virtual popularity contests, on the basis of likes, retweets, shares, and thumbs up. It could be interesting to see if similar findings can be found with members from the Generation Z, or if Town Criers and Selfies would be more prominent in this category. Relationship Builders and Window Shoppers (Robinson et al, 2017) were heavily represented in this study and inter-related within my sample, but none of these types of Facebook users accurately depicted what was truly observed from the interviews conducted. A new category of users has been uncovered: The Self-Aware Apathetic Users.

Self-Aware Apathetic Users are Facebook users who do not show or feel any interest, enthusiasm nor concern about what their Facebook friends share on Facebook. They are not even slightly interested in what their network has to post and do not believe that sharing opinion nor

private information is relevant on Facebook. Moreover, they are self-aware and are firm believers that other people in their network feel the same as they do; as a result, they do not share any content publicly with their network, as expressed by William below:

I don't feel the need to tell people my opinion. Same thing with I don't post on Facebook because I don't really care what people think... I don't need to make my opinion heard because I don't care about how people perceive my opinion. Same reason why I don't post on Reddit. People will put their opinion out there just to have it heard, and I just really couldn't care less... It doesn't appeal to me. It's not beneficial to me to spend my time posting stuff like that. – William

The participant above can be referred to as a Self-Aware apathetic Facebook user. As expressed in his quote, not only does he not feel the need to call attention to himself, but he also does not draw much attention to others. There is an important perception factor (or lack of interest in perception in this context) regarding others or regarding themselves. This type of social media user does not believe that Facebook is a platform where personal content or opinion should be shared as it wouldn't be valuable for the person sharing the content nor the person receiving it on their newsfeed. The interviewee below presents analogous characteristics:

Interviewer: Why don't you share content on Facebook?

John: I don't think people really care. It's not really the place for me to share. [...] when other people post stuff, I'm like "I don't care about this". I see you on vacation, at Disney World, you're going out for lunch at Disney World, okay. I don't care, so why would people want to see you do that? That's how I feel. It's not really their business what I'm doing or anything.

They present similar apathy regarding the content being shared on social media. Their network's personal information does not matter to them and they are fully aware that individuals in their network would feel the same way about their own content, which prevents them from sharing any personal information on social media. Self-aware apathetic users do consume content but focus on content consumption rather than content production as they do not perceive it as being an essential part of the social media usage. They do not wish to draw attention to themselves, they consume content quietly:

I don't know. I've just never been a big web content creator. I don't really think that people care about what I have to say to be quite honest [chuckles]. Yeah, I don't know, I'm not like... I don't have a big online personality. Like I use the Internet a lot and I consume a lot but I don't have a big presence so I don't really share, it's not necessary. I don't feel like it's necessary. – Charlotte

This study did not only replicate findings from Robinson et al (2017) regarding Relationship Builders and Window Shoppers but also allowed to discover a new type of Facebook users: Self-Aware Apathetic users, with distinct characteristics mentioned above, adding a new and original perspective to studies related to social media previously conducted. This new type of users implies that news organizations, but also marketers and social scientists, need to be aware of their existence and of the factors characterizing these users. Acknowledging their existence, but also further investigating their behaviour will allow them to target them more efficiently and to make them consume their content despite a lack of public engagement on the platform. Since most participants declared using the platform to communicate through Facebook Messenger for one-on-one interaction, news organizations need to use this tool to their advantage. As previously mentioned throughout this paper, news organizations need to adapt to

new communications technology and be savvy; The use of chatbots, a practice increasingly common on social media, would allow organizations to share their content in a one-on-one interaction with each consumer, preventing the “public” aspect feared by users while meeting their news consumption needs.

### **How individuals access and share news on Facebook**

As Facebook’s main purpose is to keep in touch and communicate with friends and family, it is coherent to assume that similar motives apply to accessing and sharing news on the platform. Throughout the interviews, participants revealed that their main motive behind reading news is to ease exchange with people around them and to be connected, falling in line with McLure Wasko and Faraj’s findings (2005) and with the assumption provided above. Consuming news on Facebook is a way for them to access useful information and gain knowledge (McLure Wasko and Faraj, 2005), as highlighted in the quote below, where the participant is seeking information regarding the location they live in:

Exchange with people, also kind of get used to the city, see what’s going in the city, see what’s going on in the rest of Canada, and then, as it went on, I got more and more interested in more things elsewhere, but it was more as a way to kind of get connected to what’s happening around here, or know more about here. It was also a way to educate myself I’d say - Emma

Tangible returns (such as gaining knowledge) are not the sole motives responsible for reading news; Intangible returns such as intrinsic satisfaction and self-actualization are also reasons instigating the consumption of news, confirming findings from McLure Wasko and Faraj

(2005). Participants wish to educate themselves on diverse topics to fulfill their thirst for knowledge and to stay up-to-date on any issue, as illustrated by Sophia:

Well, when it comes to news... Interested and the need to be informed I think are two different things, but I just feel like I don't want to be out of the loop on anything. Just because.... I wouldn't say I have a fear of missing out, but I want to have a foundation on everything that's going on but that's absolutely impossible. I'm always interested in things that are going on... - Sophia

Motives initiating sharing news follow the same desire to connect with others (Kang, Lee, You, Lee, 2013). The participants interviewed have this desire, but also wish to establish a reputation within their network, by educating their friends and acquaintances about social issues, as expressed in the quote below:

I did a few times on the Pitbull ban. I think it's the only time in my life I really got down to it. I felt like the people in New foundland didn't know what was going on in Montreal, and I wanted them to learn that this is actually happening... and I just want to make sure it doesn't happen there, you know, things like that. - Sophia

Participants like Sophia also share news-related information with their Facebook friends to achieve self-efficacy, following Bandura's theory that individuals will behave based on specific personal and cognitive factors. In this context, news consumers strongly believe that sharing news on the platform has the power to solve social issues and improve situations (Bandura, 1997). More than that, it also relates to the uses and gratifications theory as individuals like Sophia are seeking to satisfy their social and psychological needs on Facebook (Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch, 1974). It is easily made possible online through social media networks

functions, such as sharing and posting content (Lee and Ma, 2012; Choi et al, 2013), and interacting with others via comments and private messaging, ultimately gratifying their needs (Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch, 1974).

These findings imply that digital media did not significantly impact the motives underlying news consumption as they still revolve around the uses and gratification theory (Katz, Blumer and Gurevitch, 1974) as well as tangible and intangible motives illustrated by McLure Wasko and Faraj (2005). However, social media networks allow a stronger emphasis on social utility and socializing as a motivator as it easily permits to read, post and endorse views (Choi, 2016), on personal identity as it reinforces beliefs and values through homophily, but also on surveillance as it eases acquirement of knowledge regarding events and communities near a user (Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch, 1974).

The interviews revealed that the type of news participants are interested in greatly impacts their news consumption. However, the interest in soft (that do not need to be shared in a timely manner (Shoemaker and Cohen, 2006) and have entertaining and sensational elements (Patterson, 2000)) or hard (that need to be shared in a timely manner and focus on issues related to politics, society, and economics (Lehman-Wilzig and Seletzky, 2010)) news is solely a personal choice, based on individual interests. Some of the younger participants show more interest in what researchers call soft news, related to entertainment and celebrities: "Definitely more celebrity news / gossip stuff, I don't know if it is just my age range, but really the entertainment world I find more interesting to me." – Emma

In the example above, the participant decides to consume celebrity and "gossip" news, that she describes as entertaining and which sensational elements make attractive, relating to Patterson's (2000) definition of soft news. This is another motivation for news consumers like

Emma, as they wish to be entertained and amused, illustrating findings from Quan-Haase and Young (2010), Ku et al (2013), and Choi (2016). Whether it is celebrity-, sport- or TV show-related, these types of news relate more to personal interests and entertainment than a desire to stay informed, making it more appealing to some of our participants, as expressed by Emily:

I guess I'm more into entertainment... like stuff like I don't know... new season of whatever is coming out. I don't really watch sports, I don't really follow... but sometimes it's fun to like know when for example it's the playoffs of the Stanley Cup, it's fun to know that today this team is against this team and this happened. It's not like I click on it and actually read the article. I'm more likely to read about TV shows 'cause it really matches my interests. – Emily

Other consumers, on the other hand, have a strong interest in hard news as it serves a civic purpose for citizens. They do not have any interest in soft news and are even judgmental of such news as it is not newsworthy nor interesting in their opinion, as expressed below by Olivia:

I agree with the fact that politics, economics, and the stuff that are “useful” for us as citizens, to like know what's going on in the country. Like let's say, when we go to the grocery store and there's magazines on the side and it's just gossip rats, I don't find that interesting [...] every day when they show what's happening: it's always Kardashian number 5 is doing this thing, Kardashian number 6 is doing this thing and I'm like “I don't care about them!” It's as ridiculous as X is going to the gym to prepare for her wedding and like every day we see a picture of her getting out of the gym [chuckles] Like, sure, there's like people who are interested in that, but I don't find that essential to how I'm living my life and what's going in the world [...] when you look at them in their everyday life and they document that, I don't find it newsworthy 'cause it's not



interesting for anyone, unless you have nothing to do and you really want to know what they're doing every day - Olivia

By comparing magazines to “gossip rats”, the participant above does not believe that following celebrities around and documenting their lives serves a purpose for anyone, except for entertainment and content to access to pass the time. News consumers like Olivia do not see value nor consider this type of content as worthwhile or gratifying and will thus avoid it. They will however perceive hard news such as politics, science and education as valuable since it matches their personal preferences, aligning with Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch's (1973) Uses and Gratification theory. These findings imply that news organizations need to be aware of the type of content they offer to consumers and that every consumer is entitled to have their own personal preferences, making it difficult to target a specific group of individuals as their interest in soft and hard news may vary. Whether this content is related to soft or hard news, it has to serve a distinct purpose for consumers to be willing to read it: it should achieve social utility, reinforce personal identity, be a diversion, or serve surveillance (Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1973) for it to be considered. Once again, news organizations with an online presence could benefit from being technology-savvy as consumer behaviour data tracking could be used to better understand consumers and their news consumption habits, allowing organizations to offer customized news consumption experienced based on personal interests rather than mass consumption.

## **CONTRIBUTIONS, PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS**

The purpose of this study has been to investigate how has the liquid era and Facebook impact Millennials' consumer behaviour and engagement when it comes to news consumption, by analyzing how liquid consumption has been more prominent in the everyday life and news consumption, but also by understanding the motives behind consumers' news selection, consumption and engagement with the news in the digital era.

The analysis of the qualitative data collected showed that the theoretical framework used successfully answered the research question, through concepts such as Uses and Gratification Theory, Worthwhileness, and Space, as they complement each other. Worthwhileness and the Uses and Gratification Theory determine how an audience selects their media via characteristics such as technological appeal and situational fit. They are intertwined with the concept of space as digital journalism makes easier to a greater extent mobile places of consumption, through technologies like smartphones and the Internet, allowing consumers to access information wherever they are, whenever they wish. The findings revealed that Millennials' activities on Facebook changed drastically through time as they are more aware and experienced with news organizations' and brands' presence on the social medium. This study successfully replicated Schröder's concept of Worthwhileness by proving that the concepts of time spent, public connection, normative pressure, participatory potential, price, technological appeal, and situational fit perfectly apply to the use of Facebook as a social media, but also helps us understand the logic behind consumer behaviour when it comes to selecting media in the current digital age. It has also been found that smartphones serve as mediators and access bottlenecks

from solid to liquid consumption, causing a strong personal attachment to this particular physical product as a result.

In terms of practical implications, news organizations would greatly benefit from such findings. This study provides valuable insights regarding Millennials' habits of media consumption, but also regarding the motivations behind their choices of media, based on verified theories. News organizations need to take characteristics from worthwhileness and uses and gratification theory into account when sharing content. Their content has to be available anywhere and anytime, grab the readers' attention in a limited time, but also needs to be worth the time and money invested by their readers, while allowing them to connect and participate. They can use multiple online platforms to share their content: their website, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, or even mobile applications to increase their chances of being in their readers' field of vision. Their content must be easy to read and short, while being valuable to their readers and straight to the point. Their content should elicit a conversation, engage the readers and give them the opportunity to discuss and connect with the organization. News organizations need to be aware that their readers are not only consumers but Prosumers (Toffler, 1980), meaning that they operate as both consumers and producers. Prosumers create content and share their opinions and comments on social media and the Internet by interacting with organizations but are also able to co-create value with them. As shown through the findings, some consumers see news consumption on social media as an entertainment giving them the opportunity to participate and have their voice being heard in a two-way discussion through comments and likes. Accordingly, brands and organizations should use this fact to collaborate with consumers to co-create value and share stories and experiences as highlighted by Deuze (2005) in *Towards Professional Participatory Storytelling in Journalism and Advertising*:

“Advertisers and journalists should be trained to think about the stories they tell as co-created with those once they identified and thus effectively excluded as audiences, users, consumers, or citizens” (p4). News organizations will fully benefit from these findings once presumption will be a much greater part of their core.

Understanding the consequences of the theory of how users behave on social media platforms will allow them to adapt and improve significantly their marketing strategies with more engaging and attractive content that may convert social media users similar to the participants interviewed to loyal news readers and customers.

Moreover, taking advantage of Facebook’s features and tools such as liking, commenting, sharing, and one-on-one interaction through chat bots allowing co-creation of value and a two-way discussion, as well as its low cost to reach in a targeted manner a news audience will allow brand managers to enlarge their audience and attract more views, traffic and engagement to their website via the use of links shared on their Facebook page. This will be a direct application of Schröder’s Worthwhileness concept as it will be affordable (price), convenient to the user (technological appeal), appropriate for the setting (situational fit), but will also allow news organizations to create and maintain a relationship with their readers (public connection), and allow action and interaction with them by allowing them to click on an article linking to their website, or to allow them to leave a comment and to react to their content (participatory potential).

Brand managers and community managers could also benefit from the findings of this study, taking advantage of social influence and homophily to optimize their content marketing campaigns by using Facebook’s sharing and commenting features. For example, engaging consumers through sharing and tagging friends would significantly increase their reach,

engagement and would allow them to be known within multiple personal networks. Even though brand managers and marketers will have limited control over the consumers' behaviours and their brand image, it will give the opportunity to consumers' thoughts and opinions to be given the same voice (Chang, 2014) as today's consumers expect to be involved and are extremely committed to the process (Williams and Chinn, 2010).

Policymakers can also benefit from the findings of this study as they actively use social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter to reach their constituents on major policy issues. Understanding the motives behind news consumption on Facebook offers them knowledge and guidelines to better reach their constituents and address policy issues online more effectively. Getting more insights on how information is consumed and how citizens engage with it on Facebook will also allow them to communicate more efficiently with their constituents and will permit them to come up with more effective public affair campaigns. Policy makers do not seem to be taking advantage of what the Web 2.0 as to offer to enhance participation of their citizens, as they only use it as a unidirectional tool of communication, limiting citizen engagement in public policies (Rodriguez Bolivar, 2018). Policymakers can use social media to monitor their citizen's opinions and capture stakeholders' mobilization through comments, likes, shares and other forms of participatory behaviours from social media, as it provides a rapid and cost-effective stream of information that can add to other types of data available to them (public opinion surveys among others) (Ceron and Negri, 2016), while using new technologies to adapt to new means of communication to reach their constituents. Taking into account their constituents' opinion freely available on social media and using social media as a two-way communication tool will allow them to engage with citizens, enhance their responsiveness and modify policies accordingly (Ceron and Negri, 2016).

Finally, this research benefits Facebook users and allows them to reflect on themselves on how to effectively consume news on the social media. This study gives them insights regarding trustworthiness and privacy issues that other consumers feel towards consuming news online. They may also recognize themselves in the new type of Facebook users that this study defines.

This study builds on Robinson et al's (2017) study regarding the types of Facebook users. Robinson et al found that four types of Facebook users existed: Relationship Builders, Window Shoppers, Town Criers, and Selfies. However, this research revealed that most Millennials interviewed were part of another category that I describe as Self-Aware Apathetic Users, who are users who do not show any interest, enthusiasm nor concern about what their Facebook friends share on Facebook and believe that their Facebook friends think the same way, leading them to avoid sharing information on the platform. By knowing about this new category of users, brand managers can use additional information and communication channels provided by social media platforms to privately reach their target audience, without requiring public exposure to one's Facebook network. The newest social media tools for such purpose are Chatbots: software triggering one-on-one conversations with consumers that are available on messenger apps such as Facebook, WeChat, Kik, and Whatsapp and allow brands to communicate with consumers 24/7 without human staff involvement, while also allowing transactions to be processed (Zumstein and Hundertmark, 2017). Chatbots can be used for market research as a new method of data collection and direct customer contact point through the use of surveys within users' messaging app or service, while being trackable and scalable, offering insightful information to organizations (Duhadway, 2017). The use of Chatbots by brand managers also gives organizations the opportunity to customize and personally target each customer and prospect by

sending messages regarding new products or offers, based on personal usage data through one-on-one interaction, which Self-Aware Apathetic Users are likely to be open to as the interaction would remain private (Zumstein and Hundertmark, 2017; Duhadway, 2017).

In terms of limitations, it is important to point out that this study focuses solely on one social media platform: Facebook. This social media has been chosen as it is the largest and most widely used social media platform in the world. However, findings might be different for a social media like Twitter or Snapchat, and it could be relevant to compare these platforms when it comes to Millennials' news consumption habits. While I did point out the difference between soft and hard news, I did not compare how the interest in hard versus soft news impacts the access and share of news. Future research could be done on this matter, as individuals may be differently motivated depending on the type of news they are interested in.

Additional research could also include the association of both traditional media and social media for a complete overview and to get the full spectrum surrounding news consumption. Sample selection through snowball effect may cause methodological limitations as some participants knew each other, and therefore may have shared similar points of view on the core topics of the study. Moreover, the flexibility offered by open-ended questions may lessen reliability of the results and prevent thorough analysis as cause and effect can't be inferred.

The interviewees being mostly from Canada or being affected by Canadian culture, it is essential to note that my findings may not be generalizable to the whole Millennials' generation. Thus, it could be valuable to apply this research to wider settings, including specific cultures. Future research could also be conducted by comparing the behaviour of Facebook users with small networks (less than 100 friends) with Facebook users with a greater number of friends (over 500 friends) would permit to investigate the impact of homophily and social influence on

both networks, and allow us to see if it impacts users' news consumption. Finally, since this study only focuses on Millennials, it seems essential to indicate that it could be extended to other age groups as well, which may yield different insights. Based on a study from the Pew Research Center (2018), 59% of the 18 to 29-years-old in Canada get news daily from Social networking sites (74% from the Internet) while this proportion drops to 25% of the 50+ years-old Canadian population (45% from the Internet) (Mitchell et al, 2018). This is a discrepancy of 34% between those two age groups. Understanding why Canadians over 50 years old do not consume news daily on social networking platforms or the Internet, but also the motives behind this decision would bring additional insights on the topic. Observing different age groups among Facebook users would make it possible for brand managers and policymakers to better understand their target audience, but also allow them to segment their message based on age to reach them more easily and more successfully, making it easier for them to achieve their goals.



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## APPENDIX 1 – CONSENT FORM



### INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

**Study Title: Mobile News Consumption and Social Media**

**Researcher: Maxime Lehuidoux**

**Researcher's Contact Information: maxime.le.huidoux@live.fr**

**Faculty Supervisor: Zeynep Arsel**

**Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information: zeynep.arsel@concordia.ca**

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

#### A. PURPOSE

The purpose of the research is to get a deeper understanding of how social media networks and new technologies have impacted and still impact news consumption nowadays. The researchers are interested in the experience of Millennials consuming news online.

#### B. PROCEDURES

If you participate, you will be asked to volunteer for a semi-structured in-depth interview at a convenient location, preferably a coffee shop. You will be asked basic background questions first, and then the researchers will continue with specific questions about your experiences with

social media, news consumption and your attitudes towards both topics. You can discontinue any time, or decline to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable about.

In total, participating in this study will take between 45 minutes and two hours. The total length will depend on your actual experiences and to what extent you are willing to share them but on average, the process should not take over 75 minutes, including reading and signing this form.

### **C. RISKS AND BENEFITS**

There are no risks in participating in this research.

This research is not intended to benefit you personally.

### **D. CONFIDENTIALITY**

We will gather the following information as part of this research: Your name and contact information (it will be anonymized in any written publication), audio recordings of the interview, and any other information you may share during the interview.

We will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

The information gathered will be coded. That means that the information will be identified by a code. The researcher will have a list that links the code to your name

We will protect the information by setting security code and access permission to the network drive on which the data will be stored. Only researchers will have access to the data. We intend to publish the results of the research. However, it will not be possible to identify you in the published results since we will only use excerpts and remove or change all identifying information.

We will archive in a single hard drive the information five years after the end of the study.

In certain situations we might be legally required to disclose the information that you provide. This includes situations where the information provided involves an illegal situation or is harmful to society. If this kind of situation arises, we will disclose the information as required by law, despite what is written in this form.

## **F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION**

You do not have to participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If you do participate, you can stop at any time. You can also ask that the information you provided not be used, and your choice will be respected. If you decide that you don't want us to use your information, please contact us as soon as possible, and before October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017. Please note that once the results are published, it is not possible to retract any information.

*If participants are being offered compensation:*

As a compensatory indemnity for participating in this research, you will receive \$20.00. If you withdraw before the end of the research, you will still receive this amount.

To make sure that research money is being spent properly, auditors from Concordia or outside will have access to a coded list of participants. It will not be possible to identify you from this list.

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your information.

## **G. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION**

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described.

NAME (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_



DATE \_\_\_\_\_

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or [oor.ethics@concordia.ca](mailto:oor.ethics@concordia.ca).