The Role of the Perceived Quality of Information and of the Risk – taking Propensity for News Sharing on Facebook

Prof. Delia Cristina BALABAN, PhD

Department of Communication, Public Relations and Advertising Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania E-mail: balaban@fspac.ro
ORCID ID https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3509-533X

Sorana CONSTANTINESCU, PhDc

Department of Political Science
Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
E-mail: sorana.constantinescu@fspac.ro

Lorina CULIC, PhD

Department of Communication, Public Relations and Advertising Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania E-mail: culic@fspac.ro

Maria MUSTĂŢEA, PhDc

Department of Communication, Public Relations and Advertising Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania E-mail: mustatea@fspac.ro

Lecturer Anisoara PAVELEA, PhD

Department of Communication, Public Relations and Advertising Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania E-mail: pavelea@fspac.ro

Abstract. News sharing on social network sites is a common nowadays activity with complex implications. Our model combines content charac-



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teristics such as perceived information quality with the intensity of SNS use and risk propensity as predictors for news sharing on Facebook. We conducted a survey (N=586) consists of early stage adults from Romania and Germany. In line with previous research, perceived information enjoyability and perceived information relevance are predictors for news sharing for both groups. Contrary to previous literature, perceived information reliability do not influence news sharing. Risk-taking propensity has also no influence on news sharing for none of our researched group.

Keywords: News sharing; Information quality; Risk; Social media; Facebook.

Introduction

News sharing on social network sites (SNS) plays an important role in the contemporary high-choice media environment, they changed the way people encounter and read the news. They the traditional notion of news audience (Choi, 2016a). News sharing on SNS influence democratic processes (Valeriani & Vaccari, 2015) and has a high impact on journalism (Tucker *et al.*, 2019).

The body of literature on the topic of news sharing on SNS has grown and diversified over the last years (Kümpel, Karnowski, Keyling, 2015; Karnowski, Leonhard, Kümpel, 2018). Previous research has focused on the content of the news that is shared emphasizing the role of elite users with a large number of followers (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, & Matassi, 2018) and on the effects of news recommendations by opinion leaders (Turcotte *et al.*, 2015). Two types of behaviors were identified regarding news sharing: internalizing by those who read news and externalizing by those who offer news to others. Sharing a link of a journalistic product the SNS is a process of decontextualizing and endorsing the news with own posts or comments (Choi, 2016a).

Even if the body of literature on news sharing is consistent, a comparative perspective on news sharing in different countries is under-represented. The innovative aspect of our research is that we focus both on the content characteristics such as perceived information quality that predict news sharing and we analyzed the relevance that intensity of use of SNS and risk propensity have on news sharing intentions on Facebook.

In terms of the number of users, Facebook is the most relevant SNS world-wide. Facebook is the most successful social network platform in Europe; about 50% of the entire population has an account. In terms of share of the population using Facebook in October 2018, there are differences between countries: Ger-

many is at the end of the top with 38.6% and Romania, with a 50.6% share of the population using Facebook is in the middle of the list of EU-28 countries. Facebook (Statista, 2018).

Besides the high number of users, Facebook also has a share button that makes news sharing easy to manage. News sharing is a behavior of social and voluntary nature that is connected with distinctive motivations. Content is shared because it is the easiest way to stay connected (Ham *et al.*, 2018). Sharing has, as a result, the dissemination of information beyond the circle of its intended recipients (Koohikamali & Sidorova, 2017).

Predicting news sharing intentions

News sharing is motivated by *status-seeking* and getting recognition (Ma, Lee, & Goh, 2011), by information seeking (Lee & Ma, 2012), and relationship maintenance, communication with friends and relationship formation. There is a multidimensional motivation for news sharing (Choi, 2016b). In line with previous literature, we assumed that the intensity of Facebook use (Alhabash & Ma, 2017) and the number of Facebook *friends* will have an influence on news sharing.

H1. High intensity of Facebook use will have a positive influence on news sharing on Facebook

H2. A larger network size will have a positive influence on news sharing on Facebook.

One of the theoretical frameworks used in explaining news sharing behavior is the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). According to TRA (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein, Ajzen, 1975), the first determinant of behavioral intention is the attitude toward the behavior. It represents an individual's psychological evaluation of a certain voluntary action. TRA models emphasized the influence of motives and attitudes on intentions and of intentions on behavior (Karnowski *et al.*, 2018).

Community visibility of publicly open social media such as Facebook continuously allows anonymous users from other social networks to access content; therefore we can call the Facebook audience an *imagined audience* (Litt, Hargittai, 2016; Ham *et al.*, 2018). Due to the *sharing* button, Facebook users have no control over the dissemination of their public posts. They can reach far beyond their network of *friends*. This is why sharing news on Facebook can also be perceived as related to a certain degree of risk. Individuals have different tendencies toward taking or avoiding risks, and risk-taking propensity describes how individuals deal with uncertainties and their readiness to bear the risk (Ahmed, 1985). News sharing is related to decision making and thus can be associated with risk (Koohikamali & Sidorova, 2017). Previous research proved that decision-makers exhibit more risk-taking propensity when pursuing positive opportunities. The risk-taking propen-

sity is a dispositional attribute that can change over time; people tend to be more risk-seeking when pursuing positive opportunities (March & Shapira, 1987).

H3. High perceived risk propensity will have a negative influence on news sharing on Facebook

A further concept that we have addressed in our research is the relation between the quality of information or the perceived information quality and the news sharing behavior. Information quality is a multidimensional construct that was also discussed related to websites and is also related to media credibility (Flanagin, Metzger, 2000; Metzger, Hartsell, Flanagin, 2015). The perceived information quality consists of three dimensions: perceived information relevance (Lee *et al.*, 2002; Nicolaou, McKnight, 2006) perceived information reliability (Lee *et al.*, 2002; Price *et al.*, 2008), and, perceived information enjoyability (Schaal *et al.*, 2012).

H4. High-perceived quality of information (a. perceived relevance, b. perceived reliability, c. perceived enjoyability) will have a positive influence on news sharing on Facebook.

Taking into consideration the comparative nature of our approach we focused on the following research question:

RQ1. Are there relevant differences between the German and the Romanian Facebook usage and news sharing?

Methods

The present research has following objectives: to compare news sharing behavior between two groups of early-stage adults from two European countries (Germany and Romania) and to develop and to test a model that integrates perceived information quality and risk-taking-propensity as predictors for news sharing on Facebook. We conducted a survey on students between the ages of 18 to 25 years from a Romanian and from a German public university. The survey was applied during November 2017 and January 2018. The sample consist in 586 respondents, N=297 Romanians, 65.31% female, 34.68% male, age M=20.15, SD=1.4 and N=289 Germans, 60.89% female, 39.10% male, age M=22.3, SD=1.6 is a non-probability convenience one. We consider the sample appropriate for the aim of our research because this is an active age group on social media.

Measurements

Risk-taking propensity was measured with the help of a three items scale (Chen et al., 2011; Koohikamali & Sidorova, 2017) consisting of the following questions: "I have a propensity to take associated risks", "I have a positive view of risk-taking decisions", and "I feel it is necessary to take risks for successful results". All the item response choices used a 4-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly

agree); (Romanian group M=2.66, SD=.65, α =.709; German group M=2.35, SD=.65, α =.740)

Perceived information relevance (Lee et al., 2002; Nicolaou & McKnight, 2006; Koohikamali & Sidorova, 2017) was measured by asking the participants to assess the following statements: "This information that I share on Facebook is relevant to my goals", "The information that I share on Facebook is appropriate for my goals", and "This information that I share on Facebook is applicable to my goals". All the item response choices used a 4-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree); (Romanian group M=2.86, SD=.83, α =.902; German group M=1.70, SD=.83, α =.933)

Perceived information reliability (Lee et al., 2002; Price, Neiger, & Shanks, 2008; (Koohikamali & Sidorova, 2017) was measured by asking the participants to assess the following statements: "The information that I shared on Facebook is reliable", and "The information that I shared on Facebook can be relied upon". All the item response choices used a 4-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree); (Romanian group M=2.86, SD=.82, α =.916; German group M=1.70, SD=.79, rsb=.923).

Perceived information enjoyability (Schaal et al., 2012; Koohikamali & Sidorova, 2017) was measured by asking the participants to assess the following statements: "The information that I shared on Facebook includes lots of fun", "The information that I shared on Facebook is enjoyable", and "The information that I shared on Facebook includes is interesting". All the item response choices used a 4-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree); (Romanian group M=2.12, SD=.74, α =.799; German group M=2.12, SD=.74, α =.707).

News sharing (Koehorst, 2013; Schoebachler & Gordon, 2002; Koohikamali & Sidorova, 2017). Participants were asked to answer a single item measure using a 4-point Likert scale (1= $strongly\ disagree$, 4= $strongly\ agree$) to indicate the extent on which they agree to the following sentence "I use to share information on Facebook". (Romanian group M=2.3, SD=.73; German group M=1.94, SD=.80)

The intensity of Facebook use (Alhabash & Ma, 2017) was also measured using a single item and a 4-point Likert scale (1= $strongly\ disagree$, 4= $strongly\ agree$); to indicate the extent on which they agree to the following sentence "Facebook is part of my everyday life". (Romanian group M=3.13, SD=.84; German group M=2.17, SD=.98)

Facebook network size was measured by a single question: "Approximately how many friends do you have on Facebook." We applied a 6-point Likert scale with following answer possibility: $under\ 100$, $between\ 101\ and\ 500$, $between\ 501\ and\ 1000$, $between\ 1001\ and\ 2000$ and $more\ than\ 2000$. (Romanian group M=3.690, SD=1.15; German group M=2.297, SD=.72).

Both social media (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest, WhatsApp, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube) and traditional media (newspapers, radio, TV, and books) use were measured asking the participants about how often do they use the particular media. All the item response choices used a 5-point Likert scale (1=never, disagree, 2=not often 3=once a week, 4= once a day, 5=several times a day). Descriptive statistics are presented in table 4 and 5.

Results

The social media use of the two groups of early stage adults differs. Romanian tends to use more often Facebook than the Germans ($\chi 2(3)$ =61.75, p<.001, Φ =.324). With respect to the use of Instagram, there are more Germans that do not have an account than Romanians from our group of respondents ($\chi 2(4)$ =13.89, p=.008, Φ =.154). Snapchat usage is relatively similar, there are no significant differences ($\chi 2(4)$ =7.843, p=.097, Φ =.116). Pinterest is not that popular among the early stage adults we talked to, but still, there are more Romanians that use this type of social media than Germans ($\chi 2(4)$ =26.83, p<.001, Φ =.214). WhatsApp is intensively used by the German group and Romanians ($\chi 2(3)$ =179.18, p<.001, Φ =.552). Romanians use intensively YouTube ($\chi 2(4)$ =222.44, p<.001, Φ =.616). Twitter and LinkedIn are not popular among both group of participants, but still, there are significant differences between the two groups regarding the use of Twitter ($\chi 2(3)$ =15.59, p=.004, Φ =.163) and no significant differences between the two groups regarding the use of LinkedIn ($\chi 2(4)$ =3.602, p=.463, Φ =.078).

Table 1. The use of social media

	Romania		Germany		
	М	SD	М	SD	
Facebook	4.92	.35	4.52	.82	
Instagram	4.61	1.05	4.23	1.48	
Snapchat	3.28	1.79	3.58	1.71	
Pinterest	3.40	1.31	1.73	1.10	
WhatsApp	3.90	1.31	4.92	.53	
Twitter	1.33	.79	1.55	1.09	
LinkedIn	1.35	.77	1.42	.83	
YouTube	4.75	.64	3.41	1.22	

There are differences between the two groups also regarding the use of traditional media. Germans read more newspapers than Romanians (χ 2(3)=62.24, p<.001, Φ =.343), watch more TV (χ 2 (4)=18.99, p=.001, Φ =.185) and listen more to Radio (χ 2 (4)=15.724, p=.001, Φ =.228). The Romanian group read more often books (χ 2 (3)=52.59, p<.001, Φ =.317).

Table 2. The use of traditional media

	Romania		Germany		
	М	SD	М	SD	
Newspapers	2.72	.76	3.28	.67	
Radio	3.79	1.09	4.21	.92	
TV	3.77	1.05	4.13	.93	
Read books	3.94	.85	3.40	.93	

Our regression model (Table 3) fits for both groups: for German (N=289) respondents R^2 = .360, R^2 (adj.)=.346, F= 26.508***and not for the Romanian (N= 297) respondents R^2 = .220, R^2 (adj.)=.204, F= 13.654***

The intensity of Facebook use is a predictor for news sharing on Facebook for both Romanian and German group, so H1 was confirmed. The network size is a predictor for news sharing only for the German group that reported to have smaller network sizes. So H2 was partially confirmed. The risk-taking propensity factor is not significant for the Romanian group nor for the German group, H3 was not confirmed. Regarding the role of perceived information quality as a predictor, only two components: perceived information relevance and perceived information enjoyability proved to be predictors for news sharing for both groups. Perceived information reliability is not a predictor for news sharing. H4 and H4c were confirmed and H4b was not.

Table 3. Regression model

Country		Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		
			В	SE	β
Romania 1	1	(Constant)	-1.240	.226	
		Relevance	.209	.053	.236***
		Reliability	.040	.054	.045
		Enjoyability	.215	.067	.202***
	Intensity of FB use	.103	.048	.118*	
	Network Size	.062	.034	.098	
		Risk-taking propensity	008	.060	007
Germany 1	1	(Constant)	-1.045	.191	
		Relevance	.250	.056	.254***
		Reliability	.037	.059	.036
		Enjoyability	.266	.063	.247***
		Intensity of FB use	.167	.043	.203***
		Network Size	.165	.054	.147**
		Risk-taking propensity	.005	.061	.004

Romanian *N*=297, Germany *N*=289, **p*<.05, ** *p*<.01, ****p*<.001

Discussion

Contrary to previous research (Koohikamali & Sidorova, 2017) risk-taking propensity has no influence on news sharing on Facebook. An explanation can be related to our sample consisting of students, digital natives that are using Facebook for some time and are used to this type of social media and with the implications of news sharing. News sharing is a common activity on SNS that is no longer related to risk.

In line with previous research (Koohikamali & Sidorova, 2017), perceived information enjoyability and perceived information relevance are predictors for news sharing for both groups. The early stage adults that we interviewed share information is they are perceived to be funny and relevant for their friends but do not share information if they are only reliable. Perceived information reliability do not influence news sharing. There must be more than the reliability to make information shareable. The intensity of Facebook use is also a predictor for both groups, but not the network size. Only for the Germans that had a smaller number of *friends*, this proves to be a predictor for news sharing. We assume that the number of *friends* or the network size as we call this variable might act as a moderator in the relationship between the intensity of use as an independent variable and news sharing as a dependent variable.

Conclusion

Two out of the three elements of perceived information quality (relevance and enjoyability) contribute to the news sharing on Facebook. Young adults share information that is funny, pleasant and enjoyable. This is related to the idea that news sharing is part of networking (Choi, 2016b). They share information that they consider to be useful for their friends. News sharing on Facebook is not predicted by risk-taking propensity. This is nowadays probably a common activity on social media. Their relationship to Facebook in terms of intensity of use, the perception of being close to the Facebook community, encourages them to share news. For early-stage adults, news sharing is a social activity that contributes to their image in their community. They share funny information, so they appear to be pleasant persons. They share relevant information, so they appear to be caring persons.

The results of the present study are interesting from a comparative perspective, even if there are no significant differences regarding the predictors for news sharing. Differences were observed primarily at the level of social media use, where Romanians proved to be much more active on this network than Germans.

Limitations

The presented data are not representative for the entire population of Facebook users in the studied countries. Moreover, the sample is non-probabilistic.

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