Are Social Media Social? How Platform Essence Shapes Perceived Affordances

Thesis

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Abstract

Social media platforms are characterized by increasingly diverse features and functions over time. This thesis examines how users define their central qualities – or *platform essence* – and how those qualities depend on the surrounding media environment. A pilot study and online survey study were conducted via MTurk to validate original measures of platform essence and investigate how the perceived *socialness* of contemporary platforms shapes key social outcomes tied to popular platforms. Overall, results provide evidence that platform essence – and socialness, in particular – is associated with perceptions of social resources and affordances, bolstering the notion of perceived socialness as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Together, this work makes significant contributions to the existing literature by exploring how individuals navigate their social media ecologies, as well as how lay theories shape the experiences and effects of social media use.

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Are Social Media Social?

The meaning of "social media" is increasingly nebulous. Prior research affirms that many social media are no longer defined solely by their social dimensions, as they are progressively characterized as spaces for diverse activities, including political activities, event organization, and media entertainment (e.g. Kearney, 2017; Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010; Warner, McGowen, & Hawthorne, 2012). The rise of these divergent domains continues to complicate the identity of major platforms, particularly when distinguishing a channel from the surrounding social media ecology (Zhao, Lampe, & Ellison, 2016). To be sure, "social media" is always social to some degree, but the extent to which the identity of adolescent platforms is changing, and how these changes matter, remains unclear. This thesis seeks to examine whether differences in the social essence – or *socialness* – of contemporary platforms influence key outcomes associated with them.

Defining Social Media

Social media researchers have yet to coalesce around a mutually agreed-upon definition of "social media". Over the last two decades, the term *social media* has been used to describe online platforms as varied as blogs and microblogs (e.g. Twitter), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), virtual worlds (e.g. Second Life), collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia), video-sharing sites (e.g. YouTube), and more (Demangeot & Broderick,

2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). As a consequence, there are now a broad set of conceptual frameworks available to define this seemingly amorphous set of communication technologies.

Some extant definitions of social media focus on the nature of message construction in social media (e.g. Russo, Watkins, Kelly, & Chan, 2008), whereas others focus on specific devices or tool affordances (e.g. Agichtein, Castillo, Donato, Gionis, & Mishne, 2008). Additionally, "social media" is often treated as synonymous with social networking sites (SNSs), although not all social media are inherently SNSs (Carr & Hayes, 2015). Boyd & Ellison's (2007) definition of SNSs as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (p.211)", has often been misattributed to characterize social media. Moreover, the established 2007 definition of SNSs has since been updated due to changes in dominant platforms and practices (Ellison & Vitak, 2015). Altogether, definitions of social media remain highly decentralized, perhaps due in part to the dynamic nature of the technologies themselves.

In order to fully explicate the term "social media", it is critical to ask "What makes social media *social*?" as *socialness* (or sociality) is an inevitable element of social media. By definition, the *sociality* of humans is referred to as the extent to which individual is social, or the tendency to associate with or form social interactions (Fiske, 1992; J. Murphy, Hill, & Dean, 2013). According to Fuchs (2017), however, the many possible dimensions of *sociality* mean that individuals can have varying perspectives on the extent to which

social media are *social*. Fuchs (2017) lists information, communication, communities, and collaboration as possible dimensions of sociality. For instance, one could argue that Facebook is social because it provides a lot of information, serves as a tool for communication, and facilitates the development of communities (Fuchs, 2017). However, if one was to employ a collaboration perspective of sociality, one might perceive Facebook as unsocial because the platform does not focus on collaborative work. Thus, as the *sociality* of social media is characterized by various dimensions, there are a wide range of ways to operationalize its distinctive social quality or degree of socialness.

Additionally, although past studies have widely recognized social media as online spaces for facilitating social interactions (e.g. Ellison & Boyd, 2013; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007), recent work has questioned this assumption. Hall (2016) suggested that it is a misconception that all activities on social media are associated with social interaction. According to Hall (2016), social interactions require "(1) mutual acknowledgment by both partners of a shared relationship, (2) conversational exchange, and (3) focused attention by both partners on that exchange." In turn, not all social media activities meet this standard. For instance, broadcasting and browsing, which are two common practices apparent in multiple social platforms (Trottier, 2012), are associated with unfocused attention from one side of the relationship (Hall, 2016). Moreover, not only are such behaviors considered loose approximations of social relationships (Brabham, 2015), but such practices may not be perceived as social interactions by the users themselves (Hall, 2016). Therefore, while features or technologies of social media platforms may be intended for broadly social purposes, users may not *perceive* their underlying usage to be social.

In the pursuit of conceptual clarity, Carr and Hayes (2015) introduced a new definition: "… Internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others". This definition suggests that mere *perception* of "interactivity" is necessary to distinguish a social media (Carr & Hayes, 2015). In other words, for users to consider the medium social, it is vital for users to *perceive* a sense of interactivity, even if there is none (Carr & Hayes, 2015; Li & Li, 2014). This is in agreement with Walther's (1992, 1996, 2011) argument that what makes a platform social is not solely its technological components, but also users' familiarity and experiences with a platform. When combined with the multifaceted nature of sociality and nebulous views of social interaction on the part of both scholars and users, the importance of *perceived* socialness becomes increasingly central. Building on Carr and Hayes' recent definition and the convergent perspectives described in the prior paragraphs, this thesis project examines the potential downstream implications of perceived socialness across key social platforms.

Socialness and Platform Essence

This thesis adopts the term *socialness* to refer to the degree to which online users *perceive* a given communication platform to be distinctively "social" or defined by "social interaction". *Socialness* follows what Carr and Hayes (2015) have identified as *perceived interactivity*, but this work avoids use of this particular term due to multiple conceptualizations and operationalizations associated with it (e.g. Kweon, Cho, & Kim,

2008; Leiner & Quiring, 2008; McMillan & Hwang, 2002; Sohn, 2011; Sundar, Xu, & Bellur, 2010). In addition, what this thesis conceptualizes as *socialness* is comparable to what past studies have investigated as *sociability*. In CMC studies, *sociability* is often referred to as features of the environment that support online social interactions (Gao, Dai, Fan, & Kang, 2010). One of the well-known views of *sociability* is from Preece (2000), who referred to sociability as "both social policies and technical structures that support the community's shared purpose and social interaction among group members". Past studies on *sociability* assessed the extent to which the communication environment mediated by social software is perceived to facilitate social interaction and enhance social connectivity. For instance, Gao et al (2010) identified several factors (e.g. social climate, benefits and purposes, people) that affect the users' perception of the sociability of social software. Thus, previous studies on "sociability" primarily dealt with features or properties of social software that facilitate social interactions.

However, in contrast to these past studies on interactivity and sociability, the current work seeks to examine how users perceive social media platforms to be *defined* by an overall social quality. Despite the extensive literature on interactivity and sociability, the total socialness of platforms tends to be overlooked, particularly when adopting a zero-sum approach to characterizing a given platform. As such, the extent to which users view discrete platforms as *uniquely* "social" has not been deeply interrogated. Here, I probe the shifting identity of social media by exploring how key platforms are uniquely characterized by their total socialness.

Extensive research in the field of marketing has established the value of building *brand essence* in order for firms and enterprises to develop unique brand associations (Murphy & Medin, 1985; van Rekom, Jacobs, & Verlegh, 2006; VanAuken, 2000). VanAuken (2000) defines *brand essence* as "single thought that captures the heart and soul of a brand" and suggests that it is linked to all of the core elements of brand identity. Past studies have illustrated that changes in central feature (or essence) of a brand leads to greater effect on brand image than changes in peripheral features (Murphy & Medin, 1985; van Rekom, Jacobs, & Verlegh, 2006). Furthermore, as consumers co-create the essence of a brand, studies have highlighted the importance of understanding consumers' perception of brand essence (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003). Social media platforms are subject to the same brand forces. As social media platforms continue to diversify to attract large number of users, branding is increasingly important not just for users, but the platform itself (Stoycheff, Liu, Wibowo, & Nanni, 2017).

Nonetheless, online platforms, and perhaps social platforms especially, differ from traditional companies (and thus corporate brands). One key characteristic of social platforms is the programmability which allows users to go beyond the original design (Dijck & Poell, 2013; Plantin, Lagoze, Edwards, & Sandvig, 2018). As platforms are imagined as spaces where individuals can interact as part of the "product", it can be expected that when people think of the *essence* of a platform, they often think of a communication technology rather than a company. As such, the perceived essence of social media platforms is likely to be tied more closely to the technology that users engage with in daily life, rather than the corporate brand, as compared for traditional companies.

Moreover, as these platforms come to encompass more components, understanding what users perceive as central (or essential) versus peripheral features of a platform is vital to understanding their effects. To do so, this study develops a novel approach to measure platform essence, or the single most defining dimension of a given online platform.

Essence of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat

Given the breadth of activities occurring on social platforms today, users may associate social media with a range of different purposes. Diverse functionality of social media platforms is reflected in how dominant social media platforms today – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat – are categorized in app stores. As of mid-2019, in the iOS app store, for instance, while Facebook is under the social networking category, Twitter is under news, and Instagram and Snapchat are under the photo/video category. Alternatively, in the Google Play app store, while Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram are under the social category, Twitter is under the news/magazine category. As such, even in their official listings among the major online marketplaces, the established social platforms are associated with a range of different *defining* purposes. Of course, the official designations do not capture the wide array of uses and gratifications found among users themselves in extant research (e.g. Hayes, Carr, & Wohn, 2016; Phua, Jin, & Kim, 2017; Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011). Following recent work and perspectives (e.g. Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Phua et al., 2017), this research focuses on four platforms to allow for comparative analysis: Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram.

Past work confirms that Facebook has become a pivotal space for news sharing and consumption. According to a Pew study conducted in July and August 2018, "around four-in-ten U.S. adults (43%) get news from Facebook" (Pew Research Center, 2018). Moreover, previous studies have observed that Facebook is often used for various political actions (e.g. Chan, 2016; Haro-de-Rosario, Sáez-Martín, & del Carmen Caba-Pérez, 2018; Warner et al., 2012). Social media, and Facebook especially, have significantly changed the way political communication occurs, such as changes in political engagement (e.g. Carlisle & Patton, 2013; Kearney, 2017; Yang & DeHart, 2016), social movement and protest in authoritarian regimes (Howard & Parks, 2012). Additionally, the Facebook event page is one of the interactive features used by many users (e.g. companies, special events' organizations, special event planners) to generate awareness about special events, to connect with potential attendees, and to build relationships with their fans (Lee, Xiong, & Hu, 2012). With approximately 700 million people using Facebook events each month (Facebook, 2016), it raises the question of whether Facebook is associated as a platform intended for social interactions.

Along with Facebook, Twitter has been noted as a space for news consumption and political action (Park, 2013; Warner et al., 2012). Some work suggest that Twitter has emerged to function largely as news media – perhaps even more so than a social network – as individuals are largely motivated to use Twitter for information and content, rather than for social interactions (Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Liu, Cheung, & Lee, 2010; Park, 2013). In 2017, about three-quarters (74%) of the Twitter users have reported that they consume news on Twitter (Pew Research Center, 2017). Technological features, such as "RT", "@",

and hashtags, embedded in Twitter allow users to share messages (or tweets) beyond the reach of the original tweet's followers. The *retweet* mechanism, for example, allows information to be diffused at a high rate and shape the news making process itself. Thus, due to such technological features of Twitter, (e.g. RT), it has grown as a powerful medium for widespread information sharing.

By contrast, Snapchat initially emerged with a reputation as a "sexting app" focused on sharing private and controversial photos (Van Ouytsel, Van Gool, Walrave, Ponnet, & Peeters, 2017; Young, 2014). However, research has tracked how Snapchat has evolved to be a site for meaningful social interaction, not simply as a space for distributing or viewing photos and videos (e.g. Bayer, Ellison, Schoenebeck, & Falk, 2016; Utz, Muscanell, & Khalid, 2015; Vaterlaus, Barnett, Roche, & Young, 2016). The ephemerality of Snapchat has been shown to afford greater privacy for the users, allowing them to share content that is personal and representative of the "true" self (Bayer et al., 2016; Choi & Sung, 2018; Larsen & Kofoed, 2016). Furthermore, past research have demonstrated that Snapchat use, especially in romantic relationships, induces high levels of jealousy (e.g. Utz, Muscanell, & Khalid, 2015; Vaterlaus, Barnett, Roche, & Young, 2016). Thus, Snapchat has been largely associated as a space for young adults to build and maintain intimacies with existing relationships (Utz, Muscanell, & Khalid, 2015; Vaterlaus, Barnett, Roche, & Young, 2016). However, as of November 29, 2017, Evan Spiegal (CEO of Snap Inc.), announced a new identity for Snapchat, one that separates the social from the media (Snapchat, 2017). *New* Snapchat identifies itself as a "camera company", rather than as a social media (Snap.com). By separating "social" from media, Snapchat explitly and publicly shifted

away from the social media label, though it is uncertain how this has affected user perceptions. Moreover, Snapchat now features a Discover page, which allows users to not only watch their friends' stories, but also stories from influencers and media partners (e.g. CNN, NBCUniversal, Daily Mail). Given their media integration, it is possible that users are progressively associating Snapchat as a space for entertainment and news, and less as a space for social interactions.

Along with Snapchat, Instagram is also a leading photo-based social media platform. Although both Snapchat and Instagram are largely based on photos and videos, users selectively display different facets of the self—true self, actual self, and ideal self—on each platforms (Choi & Sung, 2018). While Snapchat is more often used to express true self and the actual self, Instagram is more often used to express ideal self (Choi & Sung, 2018). Nonetheless, just as users perceive Snapchat as a meaningful space for social interactions (e.g. Bayer et al., 2016), Instagram is also perceived as a space to establish and maintain social relationships with others (E. Lee, Lee, Moon, & Sung, 2015). However, Instagram is progressively sought not only for communication purposes, but for other reasons such as shopping and entertainment. Instagram has designed a space for businesses to connect and reach out to large audience by introducing features such as business accounts, business analytics, and shopping. For example, in March 2018, Instagram launched a new feature that allows businesses to tag products in their posts, making shopping experience easier and more convenient on Instagram (Instagram, 2018). Therefore, as Instagram concentrates on advancing shopping and brand experience, there are reasons to suspect that its users may perceive the platform as less social than in the past.

Given the arcs of the four big platforms in the US (as of 2018), there are multiplying reasons to question whether social media today are still perceived as distinctly social spaces. Although the established social media are known to serve the above functions (and more), the extent to which users define their *platform essence* in social terms warrants deeper investigation. In turn, the current research seeks to examine potential overlaps (and niches) in platform identity by considering key domains (social/communication, political/news, photo/video, dating/romance, fun/entertainment, groups/events, shopping). Moreover, it is unclear how platform essence – and degree of *socialness* – varies across platform.

RQ1: What is the platform essence of Facebook?

RQ2: What is the platform essence of Twitter?

RQ3: What is the platform essence of Instagram?

RQ4: What is the platform essence of Snapchat?

Perceived Socialness in the Social Media Ecology

Whether or not the four platforms above are defined primarily by social essence, perceived socialness has the potential to matter for how individuals use them. Their perceived socialness, however, may not be independent from one another. Therefore, the current study tests if platform essence also depends on the surrounding media environment, or social media ecology.

Past work has demonstrated that users make decisions about their social media use based on multiple parameters (e.g. audience, norms) across various platforms (Zhao et al.,

2016). Furthermore, Zhao et al (2016) suggest that users evaluate affordances of social media features within the context of *all* available platforms and communication tools. The notion of a social media ecology shares theoretical territory with research on brand positioning and media niches (Feaster, 2009; D. Liu & Yang, 2016; Zhao et al., 2016). By strategically planning how to position its brand, a platform can build a reputation that allows consumers to differentiate it from others in the marketplace (Fuchs & Diamantopoulos, 2010; Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Sujan & Bettman, 1989). Social platforms, for their part, can be seen as commercial enterprises that use brands – or unique characteristic signals (e.g. Facebook, "f" logo) – to differentiate themselves from their competitors (Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012; McDowell, 2004; Rains & Brunner, 2015).

The ways in which social platforms are defined as distinguishable from one another resonates with past work on *the theory of the niche* (Dimmick, 2002). With its roots in bio-ecology, this perspective asserts that in order for media channels, platforms, or technologies to survive, they must occupy a unique niche that allows them to consume necessary resources to help sustain themselves (Dimmick, 2002). A *niche* refers to pattern or resource utilization for a given media channel, platform, or technology (Hoplamazian, Dimmick, Ramirez, & Feaster, 2018). Niche theory relies on two conceptual measures: niche overlap and competitive superiority (Gaskins & Jerit, 2012). In the context of media research, niche overlap measures the extent to which two or more media are dependent on the same resources (Hoplamazian et al., 2018). When there is little overlap between two media in terms of the resources they consume or exchange, they can co-exist. However,

when two media heavily overlap and are dependent on the same resources, they will compete until one is driven to extinction (Dimmick, 2002). Thus, the media that is "competitively superior" than the other will survive and occupy the niche alone (Dimmick, 2002).

The complexity of the evolving social media ecosystem offers reasons to probe whether the perceived socialness of a given platform is contingent on its competitors. From the earliest days of the social media literature, research has recognized platforms for their abilities to facilitate social resources (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Ellison et al., 2007). In doing so, social media platforms are typically assumed to be defined by their social affordances in a vacuum. The theoretical perspectives above, however, highlight the importance of how brands, platforms, and/or media differentiate themselves from one another. The level of differentiation among social media platforms, in turn, holds implications for their singular perceptions and outcomes. Hence, it is important to clarify what users perceive to be the defining qualities (or lack thereof) of these ostensibly "social" tools in conjunction with one another. Consequently, the present research examines *ecological essence*, or the extent to which a given platform is defined by a given quality (e.g., socialness), *as compared to* other platforms in the media environment.

Socialness as Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

Given the diversifying social media ecosystem, emergent work suggests that more research is needed to examine how people conceptualize platforms, and how these understandings shape the processes and outcomes of social media use (Bayer, Trieu, &

Ellison, 2019). For instance, one recent study explored how users' behaviors within a platform are driven by constellations of meaning that are usually constructed comparatively across social media (Boczkowski, Matassi, & Mitchelstein, 2018). Additionally, other recent studies have assessed how folk theories (Devito, Birnholtz, Hancock, French, & Liu, 2018) and individual expectations (Clark & Green, 2018) influence how users approach social media and perceive online communication. Building on this expanding foundation, this thesis thus considers the potential for socialness to act as a self-fulfilling prophecy: those who view a platform to be for "social interaction" may be more likely to expect certain social results from their platform use. More specifically, this study seeks to explore whether the perceived socialness of platforms guides the ways in which users receive social resources and perceive social affordances. More formally, I propose:

H1: Platform socialness will be associated with increased (1a) perceived social resources and (1b) perceived social affordances.

H2: Ecological socialness will be associated with increased (2a) perceived social resources and (2b) perceived social affordances.

Overview of Studies

In order to explicate how the perceived socialness of platforms shapes previously established social outcomes, the current research included a separate pilot study (n=246) in addition to main study (n=314). As described in detail below, the pilot study was conducted to validate new measures of platform essence, whereas the main study allowed

for testing the main hypotheses (H1, H2) related to the outcomes of platform and ecological socialness.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to better conceptualize the idea of platform essence and to identify any overlooked categories associated with four platforms. The survey asked open-ended questions to grasp respondents' feelings, attitudes, and understanding of social media platforms. I also tested the validity of three different types of essence measures: Likert type, constant sum (or value-type), and rank-type measures. Within the pilot study, there were five groups: Facebook (n=51), Twitter (n=57), Instagram (n=46), Snapchat (n=43), and Combined (n=49). Each of the first four groups only answered questions regarding the platform they were randomly assigned to; for example, Facebook group only responded to questions about Facebook. However, a separate Combined group answered questions about all four platforms to examine whether thinking about the broader ecology influenced perceptions of platform socialness; hence, participants in the Combined condition completed a longer online survey encompassing all four platforms: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat.

Method

Participants and procedure

A total of 246 participants completed an online survey (about 10 minutes in duration) in January 2019. The sample was recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk

(MTurk). Sample participants were adults, who were 18 or older, living in the United States. After consent was obtained, participants took part in the survey study. In recognition of their participation, MTurk workers received $1.30.

Social Media Use. Participants were asked to indicate how often they use the following social media channels: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. Participants responded to the question by choosing an option from a seven-point Likert scale with endpoints ranging from *Never* to *Hourly.*

Open-ended questions. The following open-ended questions were asked: "Provide a list of words that come to your mind when you think about (platform name)?", "What activities do you most associate with (platform name)?", "How would you define (platform name)? Please provide at least 2-3 sentences", and "If you went to the app store (e.g. Apple app store, Google play store) today, what category or categories would you expect to include the (platform name) app?"

Platform Essence. User's perceived essence of social media platforms were assessed through three types of measures. First, the participants were given a five-point Likert scale with endpoints ranging from *not at all* to *completely*. They were asked, "To what extent do you define (platform name) as a tool for...?" The scale included seven items: entertainment, news, photo/video, events, social interaction, shopping, and dating. Next, participants were asked to assign a value for each of the listed categories (entertainment, news, photo/video, events, social interaction, shopping, and dating) based on how much they think each topic *represents* each platform. Participants were required to assign values that add up to 100 points. Finally, participants were instructed to rank the seven categories

in order they think most describes the platform from 1 (most descriptive) to 7 (least descriptive).

Results

For open-ended questions, word clouds and term frequency matrices were generated in order to identify any overlooked topics associated with four platforms. See Figure 1 below for the word cloud visualizations (See Appendix A-1 frequencies for top terms entered by participants).

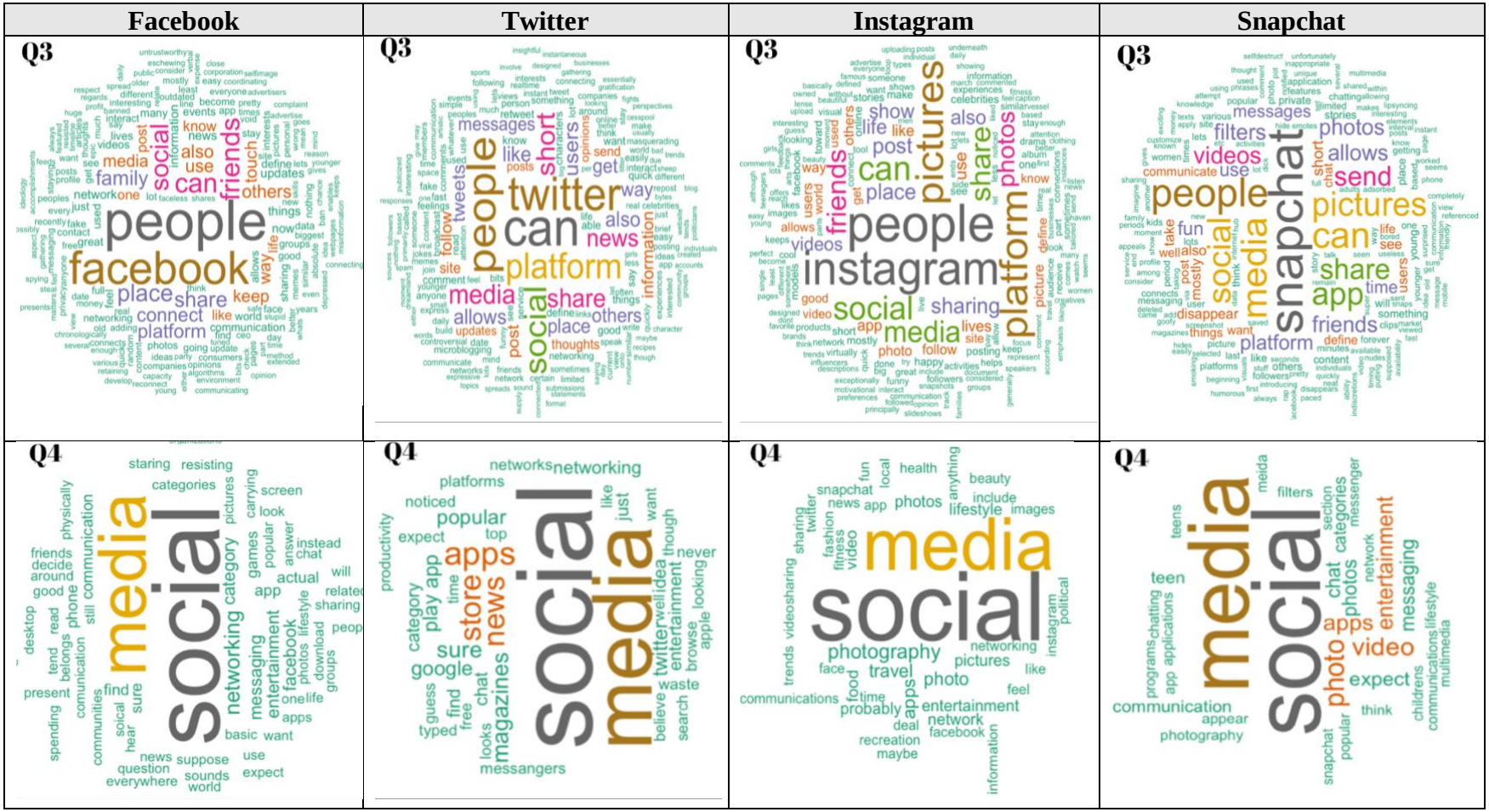

Figure 1. Word clouds by experimental condition in Pilot Study.

For Instagram, *travel* (or *vacation*), *food*, and *beauty* were few of the terms that frequently appeared in participants' responses. *Lifestyle* and *eating* were sample key terms for Snapchat, *entertainment* and *networking* for Facebook, and *news* and *magazines* for Twitter. Based on the word clouds and term frequency matrices, *lifestyle* was one topic that was associated with at least two of the four platforms.

Next, I investigated the extent to which each of the seven categories characterizes the four platforms (See Appendix A-2 for associated bar graphs), identifying the three categories that most represented each platform. These categories were (in no specific order) social interaction, photo/video, and entertainment for Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. The top three categories for Twitter were social interaction, entertainment, and news.

Additionally, bivariate correlation analyses were conducted to examine convergent and divergent validity of three essence measures. Results indicated that value-type and rank-type measures were moderately correlated (r=0.44-0.66), while Likert-type was weak to moderately correlated with value-type (r=0.22-0.51) and rank-type (r=0.23-0.53) measures. See Table 1 below for the correlation matrix specifying the correlations for each of the five groups. As such, results showed that the original zero-sum essence measures exhibited convergent validity, suggesting that they are evaluating a related construct. Meanwhile, the lower correlations observed between zero-sum measures and Likert-type indicated they were related, but different constructs.

Types of Measurement	Facebook Condition (n=51)	Twitter Condition (n=57)	Instagram Condition (n=46)	Snapchat Condition (n=43)
Likert-type and Value-type	0.22	0.38**	0.51**	0.33**
Likert-type and Rank-type	0.28	0.23	0.53**	0.26
Value-type and Rank-type	0.56**	0.60**	0.66**	0.44**
Types of Measurement	**Combined Group (n=49)**			
	Facebook	**Twitter**	**Instagram**	**Snapchat**
Likert-type and Value-type	0.46**	0.56**	0.33**	0.46**
Likert-type and Rank-type	0.50**	0.46**	0.31**	0.44**
Value-type and Rank-type	0.72**	0.66**	0.56**	0.61**

Note. ** = $p<0.05$

Table 1. Bivariate Correlation Table for 3 Types of Essence Measurement by Pilot Group

Last, I assessed whether presence or absence of text "social" in participants' responses correlated with their social score for three essence measures. The results did not demonstrate any significant correlation between open-ended use of the word "social" and essence measures for Facebook ($r = -0.016$ - 0.031, $p > 0.05$), Twitter ($r = 0.082 – 0.172$, $p > 0.05$), Instagram ($r = -0.116$-0.019, $p > 0.05$), and Snapchat ($r = -0.201$ - 0.081, $p > 0.05$).

Discussion

The pilot study sought to address the research question of how users understand and define essence of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. Results of the qualitative analysis demonstrated that platforms are not defined solely by social dimensions but are characterized as spaces for diverse activities. For example, supporting prior work, Twitter is more often perceived as a news channel rather than as a channel for social interactions. Likewise, Instagram is more often characterized as a photo/video channel rather as a channel for social interactions. Furthermore, qualitative analysis illustrated that besides the seven categories that I have previously identified, "lifestyle" is an overlooked topic that is associated with Snapchat and Instagram.

Through the pilot study, I also established convergent and divergent validity in relation to original measures of platform essence. Based on the results, the zero-sum measures (value-based and rank-based items) seem to capture different aspects of platform essence from the classic Likert-type measures. A possible explanation to this observation is an acquiescence response bias, a general tendency for survey respondents to provide

affirmative response to questionnaire items, regardless of their content (Kuru & Pasek, 2016). Acquiescence response bias is a common form of measurement error, particularly for Likert-type measures, as these often ask respondents to report on their level of agreement to general, generic statements without accounting for their importance relative to one another. Therefore, the findings here provide initial evidence that the traditional method of asking participants to respond in agreement to dimensions of a given social medium does not fully capture the complexities of platform essence.

Main Study

The results from the pilot study illustrated that the three essence measures capture different, but related views of platform essence, and that "lifestyle" is an overlooked category associated with certain social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, Snapchat). In turn, essence measures of the main study were adjusted to include an eighth Lifestyle category and clarify potential confusions among survey takers. The main study also focused on the zero-sum measures of platform essence to circumvent acquiescence bias and satisficing effects due to repeated items.

The main survey study sought to investigate whether perceived and ecological socialness are associated with social affordances and social resources (i.e., social support and social capital). *Perceived affordances* can be understood as functional "attributes" of communication channels based on user's experience rather than the inherent features or properties (Fox & McEwan, 2017; Norman, 1990). Recent perspectives have argued that examining *perceived affordances* will provide lasting insights into uses and effects of

communication channels (e.g., Feaster, 2010; Rains, 2007; Schouten, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2007; Tao & Bucy, 2007). For example, research has indicated that affordances of digital media (e.g. social media) help shape the identities of these platforms and determine the contexts that users distribute and create on these platforms (Halpern & Gibbs, 2013). Moreover, an extensive number of studies have examined social support and social capital as important effects associated with the use of social media (e.g. Ellison et al., 2007; Oh, Ozkaya, & Larose, 2014; Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008). Therefore, following past work, this study focused on social affordances and resources as key outcomes.

Method

Participants and procedure

A total of 314 participants completed an online survey (about 10 minutes in duration) in June 2019. The sample was recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Sample participants were adults, who were 18 or older, living in the United States. After consent was obtained, participants completed the survey study. In recognition of their participation, MTurk workers received $1.30. Aside from the original essence instruments, measures used in the survey questionnaire were adapted or adopted from previous studies. In the beginning of the survey, all participants were presented with platform essence questions for all four platforms. However, for questions assessing social outcomes, each participant only responded to one of the four platforms. In order to evaluate social outcomes related to users' past behaviors and experiences on social media, participants had to have used the channels before. Therefore, out of the four platforms that

participants indicated that they had previously used, they were randomly presented with social outcomes questions for a single platform. Beyond questions measuring key variables, further questions were provided to the respondents in order to control for broader attitudes toward the platform brands that could influence the effect of perceived platform essence on various social outcomes (see Appendix B for a complete list of measures collected).

Platform Essence. Perceived essence of social media platforms was evaluated using value-type and rank-type measures. For the value-type measure, participants were provided with the following instruction: "To the best of your knowledge, assign a value for each of the categories below based on how much you think each topic represents (platform name). Please note that the combined value of ALL categories must add up to 100 points in total. For example, if you think a category represents half of (platform name), you would assign it a value of 50, and make all other categories add up to 50. You are free to adjust the category values repeatedly before your official response is recorded." A total of eight categories were provided: entertainment, news, photo/video, events, social interaction, shopping, dating, and lifestyle. For the rank-type measure, participants were asked to rank the categories in the order they think most describes each platform from 1 (most descriptive) to 8 (least descriptive). See Appendix B-1 for the value-type and rank-type measures used in the survey. Order of the two measures and four platforms were randomized.

Ecological Essence. Ecological essence of platforms was measured via the items used to measure platform essence (see above). This was done by comparing the essence

score of one platform to the average essence score of the other three platforms. For instance, for the "social interaction" category assessed using value-type measure, if a respondent assigned 20 points to Facebook and 40, 50, and 45 points to Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram, respectively, Facebook social score (20) was compared to the average social score ((40+50+45)/3= 45) of other three platforms. Thus, the final social score for Facebook was -25 (20 - 45), which illustrates perceived socialness of Facebook *in comparison* to that of other three competitive platforms. For the rank-based item, if a respondent placed social interactions category as 7 for Facebook and 4, 8, 2 for Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat, respectively, the assigned number was first reverse-coded. After reverse-coding, new rank scores were 2, 5, 1, 6 for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat, in the respective order. Then, the average social score ((5+1+7)/3 = 4.333) was subtracted from the Facebook social score (2). Thus, the final ecological score was -2.333 (2 - 4.333), which represents perceived socialness of Facebook *in comparison to* the other three platforms.

Social Media Use. In order to assess how often respondents use each of the four platforms, they were asked to indicate how often they use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat in their everyday lives. For the channels they indicated that they have used before, participants were asked questions regarding their behaviors on those channels. They were instructed to indicate how often they perform each behavior on average, on a seven-point scale with endpoints ranging from *never* to *hourly*. Sample statements were, "share pictures/videos on (platform name)" and "send instant messages on (platform name)". See Appendix B-2 for the full items.

Personality. Next, in order to create a buffer task and thus minimize artificial method variance between the key predictors (platform essence) and outcomes (social resources, affordances), personality was also assessed via the Big Five Inventory-10 scale (Rammstedt & John, 2007). Participants were provided with the following instruction: "Please evaluate the extent to which each statement is accurate. Please answer honestly with regard to how you see yourself in the present moment, not how you would like to be in the future. There are no incorrect answers nor any answer that is inherently more desirable than another." The respondents evaluated themselves on 10 dimensions, on a five-point scale with endpoints ranging from *very accurate* to *very inaccurate*. See Appendix B-3 for the full items.

Social Support. For the platform assigned to each participant, social support was measured by adapting the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988). Items from "family" subscale were adapted, with wordings changed to assess social support in the context of social media platforms. For instance, a sample item is, "There are people on (platform name) who really try to help me". Items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$) were assessed on a five-point Likert scale, with endpoints ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree.* See Appendix B-4 for the perceived social support scale.

Social Capital. Social capital was measured by adapting a validated scale, with the number of items adjusted to manage the length of the survey (Williams, 2006). Items were determined based on the factor loadings. Total of six items, three for "bridging" (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$) and another three for "bonding" social capital (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$),

were assessed on a five-point Likert scale, with endpoints ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. A sample item is, "Interacting with people in my (platform name) network makes me feel connected to the bigger picture". See Appendix B-5 for the social capital scale used in the study.

Social Affordances. Social affordances were assessed by adapting The Perceived Social Affordances of Communication Channels Scale from Fox & McEwan's (2017) study. Items were assessed on a five-point Likert scale, with endpoints ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Out of 10 social affordances measured in the existing scale, five affordances that are most relevant to the four social media platforms were used. These five affordances were: accessibility (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$), bandwidth (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$), social presence (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$), personalization (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$), and conversation control (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$). See Appendix B-6 for perceived social affordances of communication channels scale used in the study.

Mediators. **Perceived Reality of Online Interactions.** Perceived reality of online interactions was assessed via the Perceived Reality Scale (Clark & Green, 2013). Participants indicated to what extent they agree with given statements on a five-point Likert scale, with endpoints ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. A sample item included "I don't think you can have a meaningful and deep conversation over the Internet". See Appendix B-8 for the full scale used in the study. **Projected Socialness**. In order to assess the projected socialness of the platforms, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they think the four channels have become less or more social than in the past, as well as the extent to which the four channels will become less or more social

in the future. These questions were asked on a five-point Likert scale, with endpoints ranging from *much less social* to *much more social*.

Demographics. Demographic items were measured at the end of the survey. Age of the participants was collected and sex of the participants was asked in three categories: male, female, and other or prefer not to answer. Ethnicity of participants was measured by providing six race groups to identify from, African American or Black, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Caucasian or European American, Latino(a) or Hispanic, and other. If participants chose "other", they were provided with a text box to specify. Education was assessed by providing five categories: some high school, high school graduate, some college, 4-year college graduate (B.A. or B.S.), and graduate or professional school (M.D., J.D., Ph.D.). Lastly, participants' annual income was measured by providing nine categories to choose from: below $40,000, $40,000-59,999, $60,000-79,999, $80,000-99,999, $100,000-119,999, $120,000-139,999, $140,000-159,999, $160,000 and above, and don't know.

Results

Among the 333 participants who participated in the survey study, 19 participants had a completion rate of 91% or less. Because their responses were considered incomplete, 19 participants were excluded in the analysis. Additionally, 11 participants who scored less than 0.5 for reCAPTCHA score were also excluded because a score of less than 0.5 suggests that a given respondent is likely a bot. Thus, the main study analyses were based on the remaining 303 participants.

The bivariate correlations between rank-type, value-type, and ecological social essence measures for all participants are presented in Table 2 below.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. FB Value	--											
2. FB Rank	0.50**	--										
3. FB Ecological	0.30**	0.72**	--									
4. TW Value	0.42**	0.20**	0.04	--								
5. TW Rank	0.27**	0.33**	-0.08	0.46**	--							
6. TW Ecological	-0.04	-0.25**	-0.30**	0.29**	0.73**	--						
7. IG Value	0.22**	0.21**	0.04	0.15**	0.16**	-0.11*	--					
8. IG Rank	0.24**	0.35**	-0.06	0.20**	0.27**	-0.25**	0.47**	--				
9. IG Ecological	-0.13*	-0.26**	-0.27**	-0.09	-0.29**	-0.36**	0.29**	0.70**	--			
10. SN Value	0.25**	0.21**	0.02	0.09#	0.10#	-0.14*	0.11#	0.12*	-0.13*	--		
11. SN Rank	0.27**	0.45**	-0.04	0.16**	0.34**	-0.22**	0.17**	0.30**	-0.28**	0.43**	--	
12. SN Ecological	-0.09	-0.17**	-0.27**	-0.15*	-0.27**	-0.34**	-0.13*	-0.29*	-0.36**	0.30**	0.66**	--

# $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table 2. Bivariate Correlations of Social Essence Variables

Results table demonstrated that value-type and rank-type measures within platforms were significantly correlated (r=-0.36-0.73). I also separately conducted bivariate correlations for the social outcome variables, which are displayed in Table 3.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Social Support	--							
2. Bonding Capital	**0.78****	--						
3. Bridging Capital	**0.75****	0.69**	--					
4. Bandwidth	0.65**	0.53**	0.65**	--				
5. Social Presence	0.62**	0.58**	0.64**	0.68**	--			
6. Conversation Control	0.35**	0.33**	0.44**	0.56**	0.45**	--		
7. Personalization	0.38**	0.32**	0.46**	0.55**	0.46**	**0.71****	--	
8. Accessibility	0.45**	0.41**	0.56**	0.58**	0.47**	**0.75****	**0.80****	--

# $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table 3. Bivariate Correlations of Key Social Outcomes

As might be expected, results showed that the social outcome variables investigated in the main study tended to be moderately or highly correlated with one another. In particular, social support and social capital were highly correlated (r=0.69-0.78) and conversation control, personalization, and accessibility were also significantly correlated (r=0.71-0.80). Among the five affordances, social presence (r=0.58-0.64) and bandwidth (r=0.53-0.65) were most closely correlated with social resources.

Next, separate ordinary least square (OLS) regressions were conducted to test whether socialness (i.e., social essence) predicted perceived social resources (i.e., social support, bonding capital, bridging capital) within the platform to which participants were randomly assigned to, while controlling for platform assignment, age, gender, and average platform use. Results revealed that socialness, measured via rank-based instrument, was significantly related to all three resource outcomes (See Table 4 below).

	Social Support			Bonding Capital			Bridging Capital		
	β		***t* Value**	**β**		***t* Value**	**β**		***t* Value**
Socialness	0.05	**	2.66	0.05	**	2.62	0.04	*	2.04
Covariates									
Group: TW	-0.30	#	-1.90	-0.85	***	-4.76	0.01		0.04
Group: IG	-0.18	*	-2.31	-0.70	***	--3.63	-0.24		-1.36
Group: SN	-2.25		-1.17	-0.46	*	-2.10	-0.35	#	-1.70
Gender	-0.07		-0.50	-0.01		-0.06	0.06		0.45
Age	-0.01		-1.10	-0.01		-1.31	0.00		0.36
Platform Use	0.23	***	4.21	0.28	***	4.56	0.27	***	4.69
R^2	0.12*** (df=288)			0.17*** (df=288)			0.10*** (df=288)		

Estimates are standardized regression coefficients.
# $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4. Perceived Socialness (Rank) Associated with Social Support and Social Capital

Nonetheless, perceived socialness, when measured via value-based instrument, did not significantly predict any of the resources variables (p's > 0.05). However, ecological socialness was significantly associated with social support and bonding social capital, but not bridging social capital (See Table 5 below).

	Social Support			Bonding Capital			Bridging Capital		
	β		*t* Value	β		*t* Value	β		*t* Value
Ecological Socialness	0.05	*	2.96	0.05	**	2.62	0.03		1.56
Covariates									
Group: TW	-0.20		-1.25	-0.64	***	-4.76	0.05		0.28
Group: IG	-0.14	#	-1.73	-0.24	**	--3.63	-0.10		-1.21
Group: SN	-1.69		-0.85	-3.39	#	-2.10	-3.27		-1.62
Gender	-0.08		-0.62	-0.02		-0.06	0.06		0.44
Age	-0.01		-0.69	-0.01		-1.31	0.01		0.67
Platform Use	0.24	***	4.39	0.25	***	4.56	0.27	***	4.83
$\mathbf{R^2}$	0.12*** (df=286)			0.17*** (df=286)			0.09*** (df=286)		

Estimates are standardized regression coefficients.
# $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table 5. Ecological Socialness (Rank) Associated with Social Support and Social Capital

Finally, I ran additional OLS regressions to test whether the socialness of platform to which participants were assigned to also predicted perceived social affordances. These analyses revealed that rank-type perceived socialness significantly predicted all five affordances (See Table 6 below), mirroring the results above. Likewise, when perceived socialness was measured using value-based instrument, it did not significantly predict any of the five affordances (p's > 0.05). Furthermore, I tested whether ecological socialness predicted perceived affordances of platforms. Ecological socialness was significantly associated with social presence, but not with bandwidth, conversation control, personalization, and accessibility (See Table 7 below).

	Bandwidth		Social Presence		Conversation Control		Personalization		Accessibility	
	β	*t* Value	β	*t* Value	β	*t* Value	β	*t* Value	β	*t* Value
Socialness	0.06 **	3.33	0.05 **	2.65	0.04 *	2.19	0.06 ***	3.36	0.07 ***	3.59
Covariates										
Group: TW	0.17	1.07	-0.15	-0.93	-0.04	-0.22	-0.26	-1.62	-0.03	-0.16
Group: IG	0.06	0.77	-0.11	-1.40	0.02	0.24	-0.17 *	-2.24	-0.17 *	-2.24
Group: SN	2.24	1.16	2.01	1.06	-2.35	-1.19	-2.47	-1.28	-3.71 #	-1.93
Gender	-0.01	-0.07	-0.08	-0.60	-0.15 **	-1.09	0.05	0.40	-0.13	-0.95
Age	0.22	1.26	-0.01	-0.84	0.02 **	2.82	0.01	1.41	0.01	1.23
Platform Use	0.06 ***	3.86	0.26 ***	4.86	0.15 *	2.57	0.18 **	3.16	0.17 **	3.00
$\mathbf{R^2}$	0.10*** (df =288)		0.14*** (df =288)		0.07** (df=288)		0.11*** (df=288)		0.12*** (df=288)	

Estimates are standardized regression coefficients.
# $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table 6. Perceived Socialness (Rank) Associated with 5 Social Affordances

	Bandwidth		Social Presence		Conversation Control		Personalization		Accessibility	
	β	*t* Value	β	*t* Value	β	*t* Value	β	*t* Value	β	*t* Value
Ecological Socialness	0.02	1.12	0.03 *	2.00	-0.02	2.19	0.01	0.67	0.00	0.18
Covariates										
Group: TW	0.16	0.97	-0.10	-0.59	-0.13	-0.22	-0.29 #	-1.70	-0.08	-0.50
Group: IG	0.02	0.25	-0.10	-1.24	-0.07	0.24	-0.23 **	-2.73	-0.25 **	-2.96
Group: SN	1.66	0.81	2.25	1.14	-3.86 #	-1.19	-3.29	-1.62	-4.92 *	-2.42
Gender	0.01	0.10	-0.07	-0.54	-0.11	-1.09	0.08	0.62	-0.09	-0.63
Age	0.02 #	1.70	-0.00	-0.47	0.03 **	2.82	0.02 #	1.83	0.02 #	1.67
Platform Use	0.24 ***	4.19	0.28 ***	5.16	0.16 **	2.57	0.20 ***	3.53	0.19 ***	3.39
$\mathbf{R^2}$	0.07** (df =286)		0.13*** (df =286)		0.06*(df=286)		0.08# (df=286)		0.08** (df=286)	

Estimates are standardized regression coefficients.
# $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table 7. Ecological Socialness (Rank) Associated with 5 Social Affordances

General Discussion

The purpose of this research was to test whether individual differences in perceived socialness of contemporary platforms shape their social affordances and resources. Overall, findings from the main study generally supported my proposed hypotheses that platform essence – and socialness, in particular – is associated with perceptions of social affordances and resources. Importantly, these results strengthened the notion of perceived socialness as a self-fulfilling prophecy. In other words, those who perceive a platform to be "social" are more likely to receive social rewards from its use. In doing so, this work shows that how people comprehend the defining quality of a given platform may shape its associated social psychological effects.

Given the complex identities of social media platforms, this study facilitates a better understanding of the central features that represent four of the big platforms in the USA: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. As seen in both the pilot and main study, the findings demonstrated that although the platforms are increasingly characterized as spaces for diverse activities, they are still perceived as "social" to some degree. "Social interaction" was perceived to be one of the most defining qualities for all four platforms, particularly for Facebook. Nonetheless, the results also showed that social essence was not the most central quality for Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. Twitter was more characterized as a news or entertainment channel than as a social interaction channel. Likewise, Instagram and Snapchat were more defined by photo/video or entertainment than social interaction.

The current study also makes a meaningful contribution from a methdological standpoint, highlighting the potential of zero-sum measures of platform perceptions. The results illustrated that value-type and rank-type measures within platforms were significantly correlated across all studies, groups, and platforms – and distinct from a standard Likert-type measure in the pilot study. Still, the correlation between value-type and rank-type measures was higher for the pilot study than for the main study. This may be due to the survey flow of two studies, where participants for the main study were asked about platform essence in the beginning of the study, while participants for the pilot study were asked at the end of the study. These variations in correlation strength observered between these measures may also reflect the pliable nature of platform essence.

Although the results from both studies illustrated similarities between value-type and rank-type measures, findings also suggested that they are significantly different from each other, as evidenced by the different outcomes across the regression models. When socialness was assessed using the value-type measure, no significant association was discovered; however, when socialness was assessed using the rank-type measure, it was a significant predictor for all social outcome variables. As such, although the two measures were significantly correlated, each technique captured different aspects of platform essence, suggesting the importance of measurement when conceptualizing platform essence. Future work is thus needed to clarify how and why these two measurement approaches are tapping into different understandings of social media platforms.

Moreover, this study adds to a growing body of work investigating the effects of social media platforms while accounting for their complex ecosystem. The direct and

ecological forms of socialness demonstrated different patterns when they were assessed as predictors of social outcomes. Generally, the effects were weaker when socialness of a platform was evaluated in comparison to other competitive platforms in the media environment. This suggests that examining ecological socialness is valuable, but follow-up analyses and studies are required to clearly delineate single-platform socialness from ecological socialness. At the same time, I also observed that perceived socialness was more predictive of affordances than ecological socialness. This may be because when people make implicit comparisons between platforms, global resources provided by the platforms are more salient than the specific affordances embedded within channels. In other words, platform comparisons may matter less for how users think about the specific utilities of the platform. Furthermore, findings suggested that ecological socialness was more closely related to social resources than affordances, and among the five affordances, it only predicted social presence. This is in line with the results from the correlation analysis, which illustrated that social presence is highly correlated with social resources.

Overall, this thesis facilitates better understanding of how processes and outcomes of social media use depend on individual differences in ecology perceptions. Moreover, these findings also hold implications for technology designers and the social media platforms themselves. If the perceived essence of a platform influences social resources and affordances, it may be important for designers to deeply consider the breadth of functionalities offered, and how changes to the essential nature of a given platform produce unintentional effects on user perceptions. As social media platforms become increasingly diversified and adopted in combination with one another, future research should explore

social media effects (and essences) across more platforms. In doing so, we can better understand how individuals navigate their social media ecologies and how lay theories shape the experiences and effects of social media use.

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Appendix A. Pilot Study Analysis

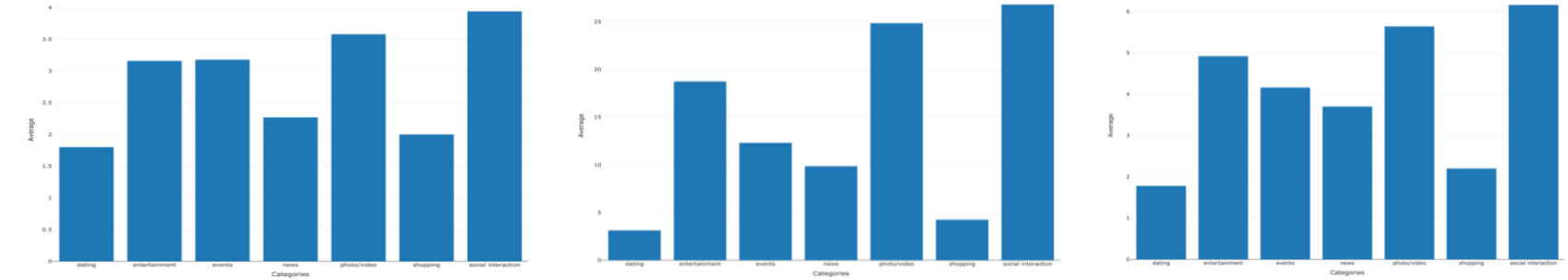
Facebook				**Twitter**			
Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Friends	Friends	People	Social	News	News	Can	Social
Family	People	Facebook	Media	Short	People	Twitter	Media
Data	Posting	Friends	Networking	Tweets	Reading	People	Apps
Photos	Messaging	Can	Category	Politics	Sharing	Platform	Store
Sharing	Looking	Social	Messaging	Memes	Political	Social	News
Fake	Events	Place	Entertainment	Quick	Getting	Short	Sure
Privacy	Sharing	Share	Facebook	Trump	Posting	Media	Magazines
Social	Pictures	Family	App	Information	Tweeting	Share	Popular
Pictures	Updates	Connect	Sure	Hashtag	Commenting	News	App
Politics	Videos	Platform	Find	Celebrities	Posts	Users	Google

Appendix A-1. A continued table. Term frequency matrices by experimental condition in pilot study.

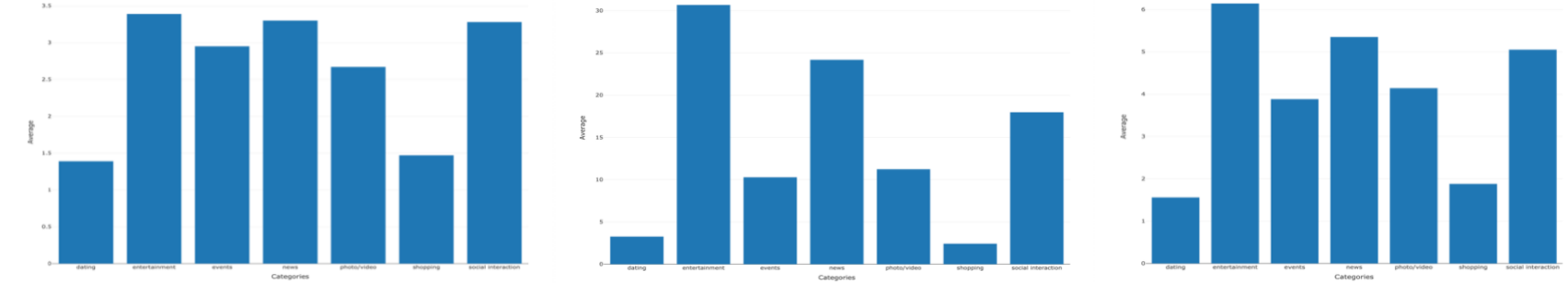
Instagram				**Snapchat**			
Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Pictures	Pictures	People	Social	Pictures	Photos	Snapchat	Social
Friends	Food	Instagram	Media	Filters	Pictures	People	Media
Videos	Posting	Pictures	Photography	Fun	Taking	Can	Photo
Fun	Pics	Platform	Travel	Quick	Filters	Media	Video
Photos	Selfies	Can	Apps	Photos	Friends	Pictures	Apps
Selfies	Vacations	Social	Photo	Trendy	Sharing	Social	Entertainment
Models	Followers	Share	Entertainment	Snaps	Videos	App	Photos
Pretty	Photography	Media	Pictures	Easy	Chatting	Share	Expect
Food	Sharing	Friends	Lifestyle	Snapchat	Pics	Send	Chat
Social	Traveling	Photos	Video	Disappear	Picture	Videos	Messaging

Appendix A-1. continued

Facebook (n=50): Likert – Value – Rank

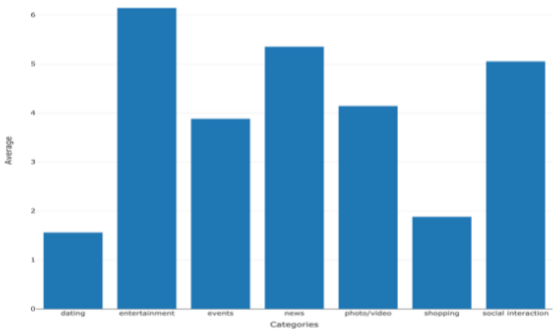


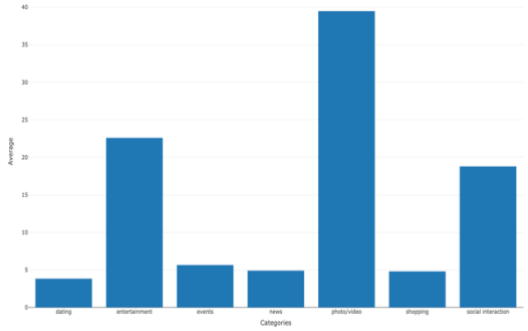
Twitter (n=57): Likert – Value – Rank

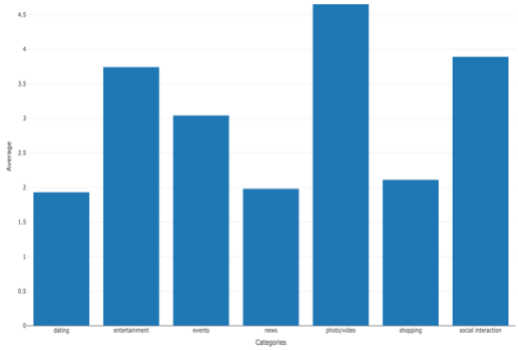


Appendix A-2. A continued graph. Bar graphs of seven categories associated with platforms. Each columns represent one category: Dating, Entertainment, Events, News, Photo/Video, Shopping, Social Interaction (from left to right)

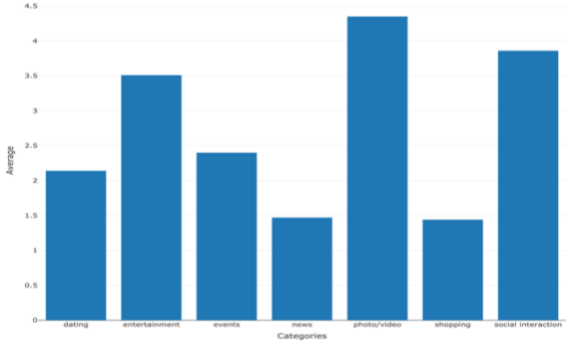
Instagram (n=46): Likert – Value – Rank

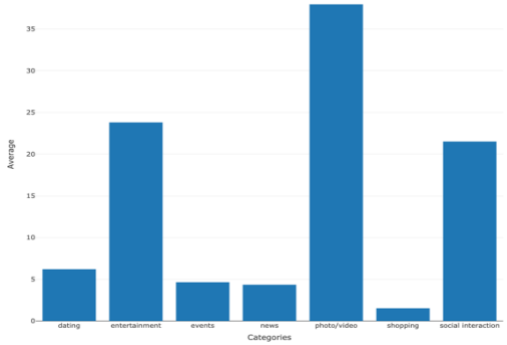


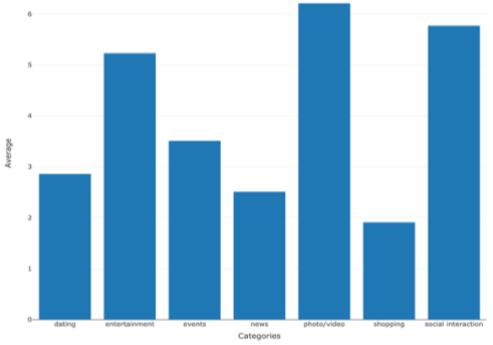




Snapchat (n=43): Likert – Value – Rank

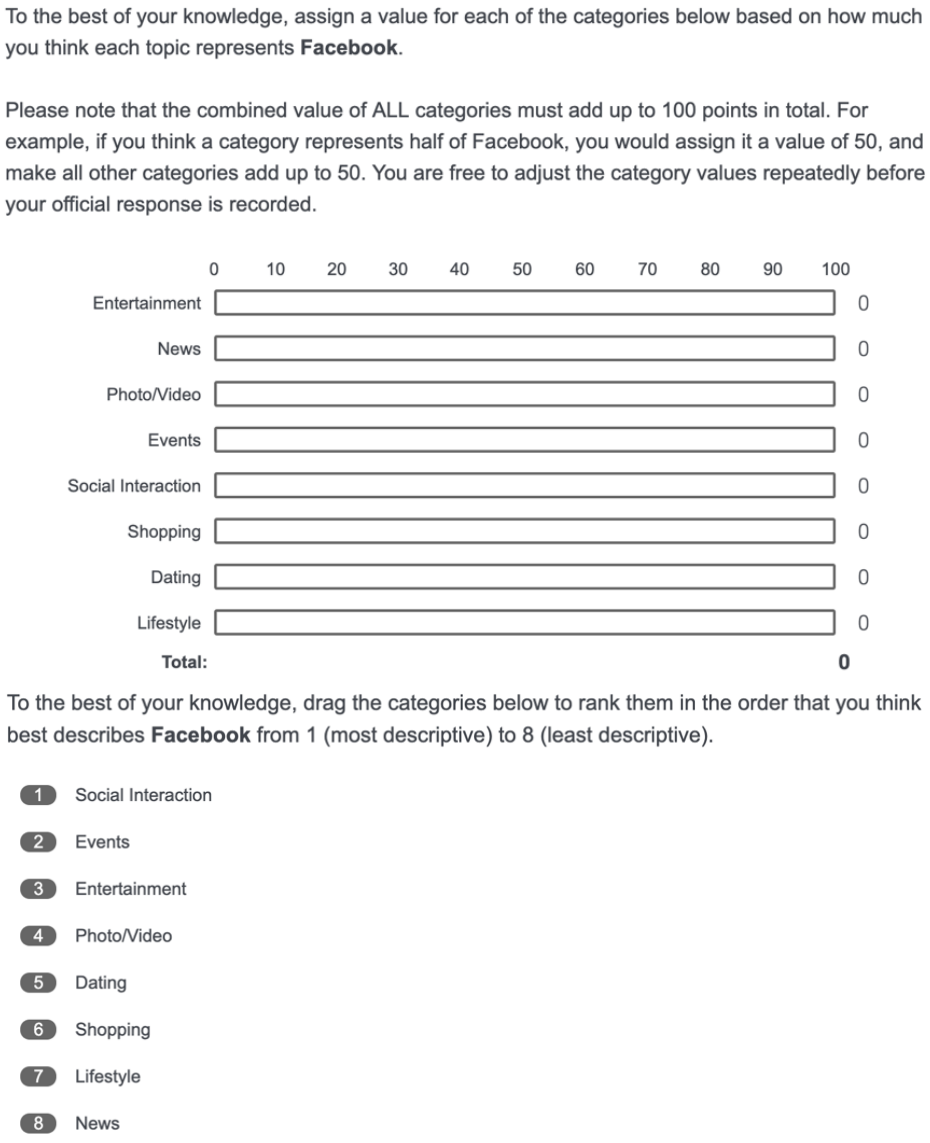






Appendix A-2. continued

Appendix B. Main Study Instruments



Appendix B-1. Value-type measure (top) and rank-type measure (bottom) assessing platform essence.

1. Share a status/story on Facebook
2. Share pictures/videos on Facebook
3. Send direct messages on Facebook
4. Browse Facebook
5. Share a status/story on Snapchat
6. Send pictures/videos on Snapchat
7. Send direct messages on Snapchat
8. Browse Snapchat
9. Share a status/story on Twitter
10. Share pictures/videos on Twitter
11. Send direct messages on Twitter
12. Browse Twitter
13. Share a status/story on Instagram
14. Share pictures/videos on Instagram
15. Send direct messages on Instagram
16. Browse Instagram

Appendix B-2. Social Media Use

1. I am reserved.
2. I am generally trusting.
3. I tend to be lazy.
4. I am relaxed, handle stress well.
5. I have few artistic interests.
6. I am outgoing, sociable.
7. I tend to find fault with others.
8. I do a thorough job.
9. I get nervous easily.
10. I have an active imagination.

Appendix B-3. Personality

1. There are people on _____ who really try to help me.
2. I can share joys and sorrows with others on _____.
3. I can count on others on _____ when things go wrong.
4. I can talk about my problems with others on _____.

Appendix B-4. Social Support

1. There are several people in my _____ network I trust to help solve my problems.
2. There is someone in my _____ network I can turn to for advice about making very important decisions.
3. The people I interact with in my _____ network would put their reputation on the line for me.
4. Interacting with people in my _____ network makes me feel connected to the bigger picture.
5. Talking with people in my _____ network makes me curious about other places in the world.
6. Interacting with people in my _____ network makes me want to try new things.

Appendix B-5. Social Capital

Bandwidth

1. This channel allows me to convey emotion.
2. This channel allows me to express emotion.
3. This channel allows me to receive cues about how the other person is feeling.
4. In this channel, I can say not just what I want to say, but how I want to say it.

Social Presence

1. This channel makes it seem like the other person is present.
2. This channel makes it feel like the person I'm communicating with is close by.
3. This channel makes it feel like other people are really with me when we communicate.
4. This channel allows me to determine if someone is really "there" when communicating.

Conversation Control

1. This channel allows me to control the duration of the conversation.
2. I can control the amount of time I invest in a conversation through this channel.
3. This channel allows me to end an interaction if I need to do so.
4. This channel allows me to regulate the flow of communication with others.

Personalization

1. This channel allows me to focus my message on a specific person.
2. This channel allows me to address my communication only to certain people.
3. This channel allows me to personalize my message.

Accessibility

1. This channel is convenient.
2. It is easy for me to access this channel.
3. This channel makes it easy to get a message to someone.

Appendix B-6. Social Affordances

Warmth/Competence

1. Warm
2. Friendly
3. Competent
4. Capable

Top-dog/Underdog

1. Topdog
2. Underdog

Social Responsibility

1. Aware
2. Caring
3. Human
4. Loyal
5. Pro-active
6. Responsible
7. Trustworthy

Other Control Variables

1. _____ focuses on maximizing ad revenue.
2. _____ cares about protecting user privacy.
3. _____ facilitates the spread of false information.
4. _____ collects too much information about its users.
5. _____ does more harm than good for society.

Appendix B-7. Brand Covariates

1. I feel that online relationships can be as meaningful as relationships conducted face-to-face.
2. I don't think that online relationships can be an important part of someone's social network.
3. I don’t think that I could consider somebody I knew only over the Internet a close friend.
4. I think online relationships can be just as "real" as face-to-face relationships.
5. I don’t think you can have a meaningful and deep conversation over the Internet.

Appendix B- 8. Perceived Reality of Online Interactions Scale