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Examining the Impact of Information-Gap on News Reading in Social Media

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News reading on social media is an important activity for news providers. With increasing digitization news consumption has shifted from newspapers to digital platforms. Despite controversies, 53% of US adults follow news on social media platforms that generate the highest proportion of digital advertising revenues (Barthel 2019, Shearer and Mitchell 2021). Social media platforms act as information intermediaries and allow news providers to post news headlines on social media. News providers face a lot of competition on social media. To get users from social media platforms to their news websites they compete not only with other news providers but also with user activities on social media (e.g., chats, post reactions, online reviews). Therefore, many news providers create news headlines with information-gap, defined as the gap between what one knows and what one needs to know (Hardy III et al. 2019). This gap can generate curiosity and increase social media users' propensity to read the full article on the news providers website. However, salience of information-gap can also increase inferences of manipulative intent and reduce news reading.

This research examines the dominant assumption held by practitioners and academics that information-gap always increases news reading (Loewenstein 1994, Golman et al. 2021). Our proposed theoretical model can provide a nuanced understanding of the competing mechanisms of curiosity and perceptions of manipulative intent that influence news reading on social media. Findings from this research speak to the emerging literature on news consumption on social media and will provide important implications for news providers who rely on untested strategies to increase news reading.

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