

The impact of social media

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Janey Lee, a new faculty addition to Lehigh's Department of Journalism & Communication, is combining her interest in media psychology and political communication with her past career as a Korean journalist into a prolific body of social media research.

Lee, who studies crucial aspects of [social networking sites](#) such as Facebook and Twitter, recently completed three separate studies on how [social media](#) and social networking influence perception, attitudes and behaviors.

Social networking sites have become a source of daily consumption for Internet users. As more people begin to embrace these sites as extended [news](#) outlets, Lee explores social media as a primary avenue for gathering news and political information and for formulating perceptions.

In the study *Who Says What About Whom: Young Voters' Impression Formation of Political Candidates on Social Networking Sites*, published in the latest issue of *Mass Communications and Society*, Lee looked at how young voters' impressions of political candidates were formed by other people's Facebook posts.

Using photos of both young and older candidates, Lee measured the impact of Facebook user comments on young voters. While some suggest that young Internet users are more influenced by other young people online, Lee discovered that, at least when it comes to politics, young voters seem to trust older users' evaluations more. And they are most impacted by older commenters' evaluations when the candidates are young.

The takeaway, according to the study, is that there are many factors that influence political impressions in social media, including the type of comment, the age of the commenter and the age of the candidate. The study could point the way towards more sophisticated uses of social media for political parties.

Influencing Opinions

Because many young adults rely on social networking for political news, politicians are finding that they need to be active on social media for political success. In her forthcoming study, *Are some people less influenced by others' opinions? The role of internal political self-efficacy and need for cognition in impression formation on SNS*, Lee

attempts to explain why politicians who gain success through [social networking](#) might be able to succeed in elections. In specific, she tested whether people with low political self-efficacy and low need for cognition were more influenced by others' comments when they evaluated an unknown political candidate.

The paper will be published in the [journal](#) *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, Social Networking*.

In this study, Lee analyzed the responses from her previous Facebook experiment. Participants were randomly exposed to a fictitious political candidate's Facebook profile page, accompanied by either positive or negative comments and then asked to rate the candidate's perceived trustworthiness and expertise. The results indicated that, although others' opinions were powerful cues, any influence was moderated by the participant's belief in their own ability to make informed decisions as well as by their tendency to think deeply about politics. Put plainly, individuals with lower self-efficacy and lower need for cognition were more influenced by others' opinions, so they tended to rely more on others' political evaluations.

In a third, web-based experiment, "The double-edged sword: The effects of journalists' social media activities on audience perceptions of journalists and their news products," currently under review, she examines the influence that journalists' social media activities have on audience perceptions of them and the news they report.

Taking into consideration that social media sites have become a major news source for Americans, Lee wanted to raise awareness that journalists' social media activities have significant implications for them and their news products. The study viewed journalists' social media activity as both a mix of interpersonal and mass communication.

Few experimental studies have examined the implications of journalists' social media activities for the journalists themselves. Given the growing number of journalists using social media to connect, the study is key to understanding the impact of social media activities.

In the online experiment, a mock Facebook page for fictitious journalist David Miller was shown to participants. Participants could see two news links Miller had posted on his wall and their lead sentences, followed by two readers' visible comments underneath each post. While the basic settings of the Facebook profile were kept the same, only the second news article and Miller's self-disclosure and interaction levels were manipulated depending on experimental conditions. In one condition, Miller added his personal experiences and thoughts when he posted news links. In the other, he provided feedback to all reader comments below his posts.

Lee found that participants perceived Miller more positively in personal dimensions when his Facebook page was self-disclosing and interactive, whereas their professional evaluations of Miller were negative when his page was interactive. The results also indicated that the personal and professional perceptions transferred to the perceptions of their news, showing that journalists' social media activities indirectly influenced the evaluations of their news products.

Provided by Lehigh University

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