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Asymmetric Consumptive News Feed Curation? Examining How Perceived News Feed Performance Influences Boosting and Limiting Curation on Facebook

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Abstract

This study examines how perceived news feed performance (i.e., perceived news feed quality and valence) shapes consumptive news feed curation, defined as a type of social media consumption behavior by which users inform algorithms about what they want to see in their news feeds. Results from a survey in the United States ($N = 1{,}525$) show that both perceived quality and valence of news feed were associated with consumptive news feed curation on Facebook. However, an asymmetric pattern emerged in that perceived news feed performance was only related to boosting behavior but not limiting behavior. Furthermore, the level of news feed diversity moderated the identified associations above. We revealed that the associations between perceived news feed quality and boosting curation were statistically stronger when the news feed was more diverse; when the news feed was less diverse, perceived negativity of the news feed was positively related to limiting curation; when the news feed became diverse, perceived negativity was negatively related to boosting curation.

Keywords

consumptive news feed curation, algorithms, Facebook, social media, quality, valence, diversity, social media consumption

Social media platforms such as Facebook have become key avenues through which people obtain news and information. Unlike the traditional gatekeeping processes in which news organizations and journalists curate content for audiences (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009), what people see on social media is determined not only by professional communicators but also by their social networks and news recommendation algorithms (Thorson & Wells, 2016). Scholars coined the term "consumptive news feed curation" to highlight that social media users themselves are active content curators who decide what will show up in their news feeds (Lee et al., 2019). Consumptive news feed curation deserves scholarly attention, as it underscores users' agency in navigating the information flows on algorithmic platforms as well as their input in shaping what these algorithms recommend to them on a daily basis (S. Lu, 2020). News curation also plays an important role in the democratic process as it enhances political knowledge acquisition and political participation both online and offline (Park & Kaye, 2018, 2019). Nevertheless, scholars have concerns over consumptive news feed curation. As a type of selective exposure, consumptive news feed curation involves users' deliberate efforts to filter in more like-minded content, which may exacerbate political polarization (Lee et al., 2019). Indeed, evidence has shown that news feed curation is linked to political extremity (Merten, 2021).

To advance our understanding of consumptive news feed curation, we conducted a representative online survey in the United States ($N = 1{,}525$) to investigate how social media users' evaluation of news feed performance shapes their curation behaviors on Facebook. Given that consumptive news feed curation includes actions that either increase or decrease the likelihood of seeing certain content (Merten, 2021), we distinguish boosting curation from limiting curation and specifically address the roles of perceived news feed quality and valence in shaping curation behavior on Facebook, as both have been found to influence whether

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people approach or avoid media content (Almahamid et al., 2010; S. Lu et al., 2023; Muddiman et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2013). We further incorporate emerging scholarship on diversity-based recommendation algorithms (Bodó et al., 2019; Heitz et al., 2022) to explore how the associations between perceived news feed performance and curation behavior are contingent on the diversity level of the news feeds users encounter.

This study makes several significant contributions. First, it extends previous research that has primarily studied consumptive news feed curation in the news consumption context (Lee et al., 2019; S. Lu, 2020; Merten, 2021) to general social media content consumption. We argue that Facebook users curate all aspects of their news feed, not just content related to news or politics. Second, as most existing research has focused on the psychological and behavioral antecedents of consumptive news feed curation (S. Lu, 2020; Merten, 2021; Wu-Ouyang, 2024), we confirm that users' judgment of news feeds serves as an important criterion for them to undertake different curation strategies. Third, although previous literature has consistently found that users are not interested in diverse content recommended by algorithms (Bodó et al., 2019; Heitz et al., 2022), our findings on news feed diversity are more dynamic, while news feed diversity amplified the positive association between perceived news feed quality and boosting curation, the negative association between perceived news feed valence and boosting curation was exacerbated when news feed diversity increased.

Theoretical Framework

Consumptive News Feed Curation

Consumptive news feed curation refers to a specific type of social media consumption behavior in which users deliberately influence the platforms' algorithmic personalization processes to decide what shows up in their news feeds (Lee et al., 2019; S. Lu, 2020). Unlike the typical personalization processes that primarily rely on platforms and algorithms to curate informational content, consumptive news feed curation involves users' proactive control over the news feed, highlighting users' agency to adjust their information flows. This emerging type of social media consumption behavior is particularly relevant when individuals are embedded in various and intersecting content flows curated by multiple actors. As Thorson and Wells (2016) point out, through curation, individuals can filter the abundance of information into a manageable size, which enables them to fulfill their informational or strategic needs.

The literature conceptualizes consumptive news feed curation as an emerging news consumption behavior in which social media users proactively influence what news content they will see on social media platforms (Lee et al., 2021; S. Lu, 2020). We argue that the narrow definition of consumptive news feed curation as a type of news consumption behavior may not capture the wide range of content people encounter and curate in their news feeds. From the uses and gratifications perspective, people use social media for social, informational, political, and recreational purposes (Whiting & Williams, 2013). In this sense, people may encounter different types of content in their news feeds. Notably, only a small percentage of the Facebook news feed that people read is news-related (Merten et al., 2022; Reed, 2018). Adding to that, the norms of Facebook emphasize the personal and social nature of information, which inevitably blurs the lines between social, news, and political content in the news feed (Vraga et al., 2016). Given these considerations, we extend consumptive news feed curation to the curation of general social media content composed of both news and social updates among social media users.

Consumptive news feed curation can be categorized into two types: boosting curation that increases the likelihood of exposure to certain content, and limiting curation that decreases the likelihood of seeing certain content in one's news feed (Merten, 2021). Depending on the platform's affordance (Davis, 2017), social media users can adopt a set of strategies to increase or decrease the likelihood that certain content will show up on their homepages. Taking Facebook as an example, users can like, share, and comment on certain content or follow public pages to boost the likelihood of seeing similar content or hide and snooze specific items or unfollow public pages to keep their content from appearing in their news feeds. Recent studies have explored the psychological (e.g., news interest, perceived user control, information overload) and political antecedents (e.g., political extremism) of both types of curation behaviors (Lu, 2020; Merten, 2021; Wu-Ouyang, 2024), but current knowledge about how users' evaluations of their news feeds will impact their curation of social media content is inadequate. As a vast body of research shows that users' judgment of the content quality and valence of online information can shape social media engagement (Muddiman et al., 2020; Shin et al., 2024), we aim to advance the literature by examining how perceived news feed performance affects consumptive news feed curation on Facebook.

Perceived News Feed Quality and Consumptive News Feed Curation

Information quality is a multi-dimensional construct that measures the properties of different types of information, which includes social media news feeds. However, there is no generally accepted definition of information quality. In the field of information systems, Miller (1996) developed a 10-dimensional information quality benchmark, including relevance, accuracy, timeliness, completeness, coherence, format, accessibility, compatibility, security, and validity. For web content, information quality comprises five aspects,

namely, usefulness, goodness, accuracy, currency, and importance (Rieh, 2002). In journalism studies, news quality has been assessed along with both informational dimensions (impartiality, relevance, accuracy) and formal qualities (comprehensibility, compliance with ethical standards; Urban & Schweiger, 2014).

Social media is often criticized for offering unfiltered information that lacks quality. Based on user ratings, scholars have differentiated high- versus low-quality information on social media at both content (i.e., accuracy, Vraga & Tully, 2021) and source levels (i.e., trustworthiness and professionalism, see Bandy & Diakopoulos, 2023; Bradshaw et al., 2020). Regarding the Facebook news feed in particular, DeVito (2017) noted that its early algorithms used to assign low priority to content quality as opposed to other dimensions, such as friendship relationships and engagement metrics. Realizing its users may not always get the right content that is important to them from their news feed, Facebook later emphasized that its goal was to show a high-quality news feed to people and laid out several desired qualities, including timeliness, interestingness, importance, and meaningfulness/relevance to users (Kacholia, 2013).

News feed quality should be understood as a form of people's perception and evaluation. According to Hilligoss and Rieh (2008, p. 1469), "Information quality refers to people's subjective judgment of goodness and usefulness of information in certain information use settings with respect to their own expectations of information or in regard to other information available." Likewise, perceived news feed quality can be defined as people's subjective judgment of the timeliness, accuracy, relevance, and understandability of content presented in their news feeds. Perceived news feed quality among users has been treated as a key parameter for algorithm design. For example, Facebook's Feed Quality Panel administered daily user surveys to gather insights on user preferences, aiming to improve its content offerings through algorithmic (re)ranking (C. Zhang & Chen, 2016).

High-quality online information could lead to desirable outcomes in a wide range of information-seeking contexts. Early research on website use revealed that the perceived information quality on e-government websites was positively related to users' intention to use these sites for gathering information (Almahamid et al., 2010). Likewise, high-quality information in IT-supported virtual space could influence perceived individual benefits and user satisfaction, which, in turn, predict users' continued intention to consume and contribute information (Zheng et al., 2013). A recent study, conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, shows that high-quality information significantly reduced the perceived disruption caused by the pandemic and alleviated social media fatigue (Z. Zhang et al., 2021). In contrast, low-quality online information may engender a series of harmful consequences. For example, exposure to health-related misinformation, a type of low-quality information lacking accuracy, has been linked to negative mental health outcomes and diminished well-being (Haydabrus et al., 2023).

Based on these findings, we anticipate that perceived news feed quality serves as an important criterion for social media users to boost and limit content in their news feeds. Considering the idea of instrumental utility, each person chooses certain information based on its perceived usefulness (Atkin, 1973). As high-quality information could help individuals fulfill their desires to be informed and attain the benefits of being able to engage in discussions with friends and family about the information (Messing & Westwood, 2014), people may tend to reinforce or maximize the utility by boosting such information in their news feeds. For low-quality information, Facebook users may experiment with unfollowing and hiding undesirable content to prevent it from showing up and thus reduce their exposure to it (Rader & Gray, 2015; Vraga & Tully, 2021). Taken together, these insights suggest that Facebook users are more likely to engage in boosting curation when they perceive news feeds as high quality and adopt limiting curation when they assess the quality of news feeds as poor. We propose:

> H1: Perceived news feed quality will be (a) positively associated with boosting curation and (b) negatively associated with limiting curation on Facebook.

Perceived News Feed Valence and Consumptive News Feed Curation

In addition to information quality, the emotional valence of online content is an important aspect that shapes people's curation behavior. The psychology literature mainly discusses the characteristics of emotions in terms of valence and intensity: valence refers to the extent to which an emotion is positive or negative; intensity is the strength of the associated emotional state (Russell, 1980). While emotional valence is first considered to be experienced by people, it could also be expressed and conveyed in messages. Especially in the age of social media, the emergence of user-generated content has given rise to emotional ways of storytelling, as people discuss various issues with both positive, negative, and neutral emotional valences (Lu, Chen et al 2018; Merrill et al., 2020). Given that emotional content can attract attention and increase arousal, the emotional valence in social media content has significant implications for user engagement. For example, emotional content is more likely to go viral than non-emotional content (Yi et al., 2022). Emotional content on the Facebook news feed can cause emotional contagion (Kramer et al., 2014).

In this study, we focus on users' evaluation of the valence of their Facebook news feed in shaping their consumptive news feed curation practices on Facebook. News feed valence is theoretically a continuum ranging from extremely positive to extremely negative. According to Russell (1980), positive valence refers to the attractiveness of an object, whereas negative valence describes the averseness of it. Research shows that people, in general, place more weight on negative valenced information than positive information

when forming an evaluation or impression of the content (S. Lu et al., 2023). This biased information processing is known as negativity bias, indicating that the psychological and behavioral effects of negative information outweigh those of positive information (Kanouse & Reid Hanson, 1987).

There are two possibilities of how negatively valenced news feeds could shape consumptive news feed curation. On one hand, news feeds with negative emotional valence may lead people to develop avoidance tendencies. Negative valence, such as unpleasantness, fear or discouragement, could be regarded as an emotional stressor that influences informational behavior. One study shows that social media users tend to hide more negative posts than neutral or positive posts (Mayshak et al., 2017). Research on online incivility, one type of negativity, shows that people tend to avoid uncivil content (S. Lu et al., 2023; Muddiman et al., 2020). Similar findings are also confirmed in the news consumption context (de Hoog & Verboon, 2020). This corresponds with the notion of mood management theory, which suggests that people consume media content to improve their moods (Zillmann, 1988). Taken together, if people wish to stay away from negative valenced content in their news feed to avoid stress, they will tend to engage in more limiting curation and less boosting curation.

On the other hand, negatively valenced news feed content may not always induce avoidance tendencies. According to evolutionary psychology, humans tend to surveil the environment so that they can avoid threats and risks (Plutchik, 1980). In the realm of news consumption, Shoemaker (1996) argues that people are prone to pay more attention to negative news and information than positive ones because they are naturally prone to be alert to potential threats to avoid negative consequences. In addition to negative news, people may also find negatively valenced social updates in their news feed desirable. Social media such as Facebook give off the impression that others are doing better than we are, which is termed as upward social comparison, leading to negative self-perception and emotions (De Vries & Kühne, 2015). However, negative social updates in a Facebook news feed may induce downward social comparison where people compare themselves to others who are in worse situations, which potentially enhances their self-esteem and positive affect (Ouwerkerk & Johnson, 2016). In short, if people wish to keep negative valenced content in their news feed for both surveillance and downward comparison purposes, they would not proactively curate their news feeds.

In the existing literature, there are no conclusive findings about whether or how the perceived valence of one's news feed is related to boosting or limiting curation behavior on Facebook. Hence, a research question (RQ) is stated:

> RQ1: What is the relationship between perceived news feed valence and (a) boosting curation, and (b) limiting curation on Facebook?

News Feed Diversity and Consumptive News Feed Curation

From the early days, diversity has emerged as a leading topic in online recommendation system research. Some scholars define diversity as the opposite of similarity (Bradley & Smyth, 2001). Diversity, along with serendipity and novelty, is used as a performance measure for designing better recommendation systems (Yadav et al., 2021). Diverse and "unexpected" content recommended by algorithms could increase the quality of user experience (Kunaver & Požrl, 2017). From the communication policy perspective, Helberger et al. (2018) conceptualize a diversity-driven recommendation system as one that contains information from a diverse mix of sources with different viewpoints that people collect and use for balanced and well-considered decisions. This notion can be traced to the bulk of scholarship in journalism and political communication, which normatively expects that exposure to diversity can enhance social and cultural inclusion, make people reflect on their own ideas, and breed tolerance (Dunn & Singh, 2014; Mutz, 2006).

One major concern related to the lack of diversity in an online recommendation system is the so-called "filter bubble." This refers to a self-reinforcing pattern that limits people's exposure to a diverse range of content or viewpoints. Taking the Facebook news feed as an example, the algorithms used by its recommendation systems prioritize content that is related to users' prior behavior, expressed interests, and social networks over diversity (DeVito, 2017). This concern has led scholars to test the extent to which current recommendation systems could adhere to the diversity principles. The evidence is, at best, mixed. Möller et al. (2018) found that news recommendation systems in general can lead to a rather diverse set of recommended news articles. YouTube's channel recommendation algorithm tends to create highly homophilous communities in both the United States and Germany (Kaiser & Rauchfleisch, 2020). Regarding Facebook, while Bakshy et al. (2015) found that its algorithmic recommendations have the least impact on content diversity as compared with individuals' choices, González-Bailón et al. (2023) has recently identified a high level of ideological segregation in political news consumption among Facebook users brought by algorithmic recommendation, suggesting a lack of exposure diversity.

Worries about filter bubbles are also based on the notion that people are diversity-averse. A collection of studies shows that users do not appreciate diversity-based algorithms that primarily curate content, which does not align with their interests or opinions; instead, they prefer content-based similarity algorithms (Bodó et al., 2019; Heitz et al., 2022). This tendency can be explained by the cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), which suggests that people generally feel uncomfortable when seeing something they dislike or are not familiar with. According to the selective

exposure literature, people tend to select like-minded media content and avoid discrepant ones (Guo et al., 2024; Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2020). When encountering counter-attitudinal content incidentally online, people are likely to engage in passive scanning behavior (Chen et al., 2022). In this sense, diverse content that includes challenging viewpoints and unfamiliar topics may elicit cognitive dissonance and lead people to avoid it. Another plausible reason for people to be diversity-averse is information overload caused by their exposure to a large supply of information from different sources in a given period of time (Schmitt et al., 2018). On social media such as Twitter, Liang and Fu (2017) show that under the impact of information overload, the tendency to follow users posting similar content is reinforced.

In this study, we treat the diversity level of the news feed as an immediate information environment that may shape the relationships between people's judgment of news feed quality and their curation behavior. As the literature suggests that people are not in favor of diversity-based recommendation systems, we expect that news feed diversity will mitigate the positive association between perceived news feed quality and boosting curation and exacerbate the negative association between perceived news quality and limiting curation. As we do not predict a directional hypothesis for the association between perceived news feed valence and curation behavior, we attempt to probe into the moderation mechanism. In sum, we propose:

H2: News feed diversity will (a) mitigate the positive association between perceived news feed quality and boosting curation, and (b) exacerbate the negative association between news feed quality and limiting curation on Facebook.

RQ2: How will news feed diversity moderate (a) the association between perceived news feed valence and boosting curation and (b) the one between perceived news feed valence and limiting curation on Facebook?

Method

Data

The data for this study come from a survey conducted from 20 to 28 June 2022. Participants who were at least 18 years old and currently residing in the United States were recruited from Dynata, an online survey panel company that has a diverse sample of participants. Following previous research (Chen et al., 2022), we used quota sampling to make sure that our sample is representative of US adult Facebook users in terms of age and gender.

A total of 1,525 participants completed the survey, 58.2% of whom were females. Respondents' average age is 51.8 years old (SD = 16.0, range = 18 ~ 100, median = 52.0). The majority of the sample is White (86.3%), followed by Black or African American (5.3%), Asian (3.9%), Hispanic or Latino/a (3.0%), Native American (0.8%), and others (0.6%). The median education is bachelor's degree. The median annual income ranges from US$75,000 to US$99,999. Regarding partisanship, 29.6% were Republicans, 48.1% were Democrats, and 22.3% were Independents.

Dependent Variables

Consumptive news feed curation was measured by asking on a 7-point scale (1 = *never* to 7 = *very frequently*) the extent to which participants engaged in the following behaviors on Facebook in the past 6 months (Lee et al., 2019; S. Lu, 2020): "friended or followed a certain user or organization to see more relevant content," "unfriended or unfollowed a certain user or organization to see less content," "deleted or blocked another user or organization to avoid content," "liked, shared or commented on certain types of content," "changed your settings or ad preferences to see more content from a user or organization," "changed your settings or ad preferences to see less content from a user or organization," and "hid or snoozed a certain user or organization." The items were averaged into an index with high reliability (α = .91, M = 3.19, SD = 1.59). An exploratory factor analysis with varimax was conducted (see Table 1), which extracted two factors explaining a total of 59.0% of the variance for the entire set of items. These factors formed the indices for *boosting curation* (α = .85, M = 3.72, SD = 1.81) and *limiting curation* (α = .91, M = 3.69, SD = 1.84), respectively.

Independent Variables

To assess perceived news feed quality, we adapted items from Rieh (2002) to ask participants how much they agree or disagree (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) with the following descriptors about the news feed they read on Facebook: "informative," "helpful," "relevant," "useful," "accurate," "understandable," "predictable," and "up-to-date." The eight items were averaged into a composite index (α = .96, M = 4.15, SD = 1.63).

We followed de Hoog and Verboon (2020) by asking participants about perceived news feed valence on Facebook using a 7-point semantic differential scale. The items include "cynical/hopeful," "disgusting/pleasant," "discouraging/inspiring," and "fearful/comforting." We reverse-coded the items to form an index wherein a higher score indicates more perceived negativity of news feeds (α = .93, M = 4.04, SD = 1.65).

Using items adapted from the study by Voakes et al. (1996), we asked participants to indicate the extent of news feed diversity on Facebook (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). The items include "Facebook news feed has various opinions," "Facebook news feed has various perspectives," "Facebook news feed has various sources," and "Facebook news feed has various topics." (α = .96, M = 4.30, SD = 1.76).

Table 1. Factor Loadings for Consumptive News Feed Curation.

Item	Factor loading		Communality
	Boosting curation	Limiting curation	
1. Friended or followed a certain user or organization to see more relevant content	**0.74**	0.49	1.7
2. Unfriended or unfollowed a certain user or organization to see less content	0.38	**0.79**	1.4
3. Deleted or blocked another user or organization to avoid content	0.31	**0.81**	1.3
4. Liked, shared or commented on certain types of content	**0.89**	0.23	1.1
5. Changed your settings or ad preferences to see more content from a user or organization	**0.64**	0.60	2.0
6. Changed your settings or ad preferences to see less content from a user or organization	0.47	**0.73**	1.7
7. Hid or snoozed a certain user or organization	0.27	**0.85**	1.2
Percentage variance explained	41.0	59.0	

Note. Item 5 seemed to cross-load on both factors. We followed Comrey and Lee (1992) and used 0.63 (*very good*) as a cut-off point. To ensure the robustness of our findings, we further conducted a series of regression analyses by removing Item 5 in the index of boosting curation. The analyses yielded similar results. Results are available upon request.

Controls

In addition to social demographics, the study included several behavioral and psychological factors that may impact consumptive news feed curation as the control variables. "Facebook news use" was measured by a single item (1 = *never* to 7 = *everyday; M* = 3.89, *SD* = 2.45). "News interest" was measured by asking participants to indicate their interest in news about politics and government, economics, science and technology, entertainment, sports, and culture (1 = *not at all interested* to 7 = *very interested*, $\alpha = .86$, *M* = 4.47, *SD* = 1.53). "Perceived user control" was measured with four items (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*): "I find it easy to control what I want to see in my news feed," "I find it easy to remove/hide what I do not want to see in my news feed," "I know the operational logic of Facebook's news feed," and "I can explain why some posts show up and others do not in my news feed" ($\alpha = .88$, *M* = 4.24, *SD* = 1.50).

Analytical Strategies

To address H1 and RQ1, we conducted a series of multiple regression analyses. Given the high correlation between perceived news feed quality and perceived news feed valence ($r = -.66$, $p < .001$), even though the issue of multicollinearity is not a severe concern, there might be a possibility of confounding. In other words, the relationship between perceived news feed quality and curation behavior might be confounded by the inclusion of perceived news feed valence, or the relationship between perceived news feed valence and curation behavior might be confounded by the inclusion of perceived news feed quality. Following the suggestion by Johnston et al. (2018), we fit separate regression models by including either perceived news feed quality or perceived news feed valence to tease out the independent contribution of the two variables to the two types of curation behavior.

To test H2 and RQ2, we added interaction terms into the regression models described above and performed simple slope analyses to give a clear picture of the associations between perceived news feed quality/valence and curation behavior at varying levels of perceived news feed diversity as marked by ±1 standard deviation from the mean.

Results

Table 2 presents the regression results with visualization in Figure 1. As Model 1a shows, perceived news feed quality, along with control variables, explained 54.4% of the variance of boosting curation ($R^2 = .54$, $F(9, 1515) = 166.4$, $p < .001$). Perceived news feed quality was positively associated with boosting curation ($B = 0.24$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$). As seen in Model 1b, perceived news feed quality, along with control variables, explained 31.8% of the variance of limiting curation ($R^2 = .32$, $F(9, 1515) = 65.7$, $p < .001$) and the association between perceived news feed quality and limiting curation was not statistically significant ($B = 0.04$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .34$). Therefore, H1 was partially supported.

Concerning RQ1, perceived news valence and control variables explained 53.2% of the variance of boosting curation (Model 2a, $R^2 = .53$, $F(9, 1515) = 158.3$, $p < .001$) and 31.8% of the variance of limiting curation (Model 2b, $R^2 = .32$, $F(9, 1515) = 65.6$, $p < .001$). Perceived news feed valence had a negative association with boosting curation ($B = -0.11$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$), but did not have a statistically significant relationship with limiting curation ($B = 0.02$, $SE = 0.03$, $p = .56$).

Regarding H2, the results show a significant interaction between perceived news feed quality and news feed diversity on boosting curation ($B = 0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = .04$). Simple slope analyses in Table 3 illustrate that the positive association between perceived news feed quality and boosting curation increased from 0.15 to 0.23 when the news feed was more diverse. However, the interaction for limiting curation was not significant ($B = 0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = .11$).

The tests for RQ2 revealed a significant interaction between perceived news feed valence and news feed

Table 2. Regression Models Predicting Consumptive News Feed Curation.

Predictors	Model 1a boosting		Model 1b limiting		Model 2a boosting		Model 2b limiting	
	B	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*
(Intercept)	0.95***	0.23	2.14***	0.28	2.09***	0.28	2.08***	0.34
Sex (male = 1)	−0.02	0.07	−0.04	0.08	−0.01	0.07	−0.04	0.08
Age	−0.02***	0.00	−0.02***	0.00	−0.02***	0.00	−0.02***	0.00
Income	−0.01	0.02	−0.01	0.03	−0.02	0.02	−0.01	0.03
Education	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.03
Race (White = 1)	−0.05	0.09	0.10	0.12	−0.04	0.09	0.10	0.12
Democrat	0.10	0.08	0.13	0.10	0.12	0.08	0.13	0.10
Republican	0.22*	0.09	0.03	0.11	0.25**	0.09	0.03	0.10
Facebook news use	0.12***	0.02	0.12***	0.02	0.16***	0.02	0.13***	0.02
Perceived user control	0.33***	0.03	0.31***	0.04	0.38***	0.03	0.33***	0.03
News interest	0.18***	0.03	0.11***	0.03	0.18***	0.03	0.12***	0.03
Perceived news feed quality	0.24***	0.03	0.04	0.04				
Perceived news feed valence					−0.11***	0.03	0.02	0.03
R^2 adjusted	.544		.318		.532		.318	

Note. Unstandardized coefficients (*B*) were reported with standard errors (*SE*). Model 1a and Model 2a regressed boosting curation on the independent variables. Model 1b and Model 2b regressed limiting curation on the independent variables. Independents were the reference group for partisanship.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

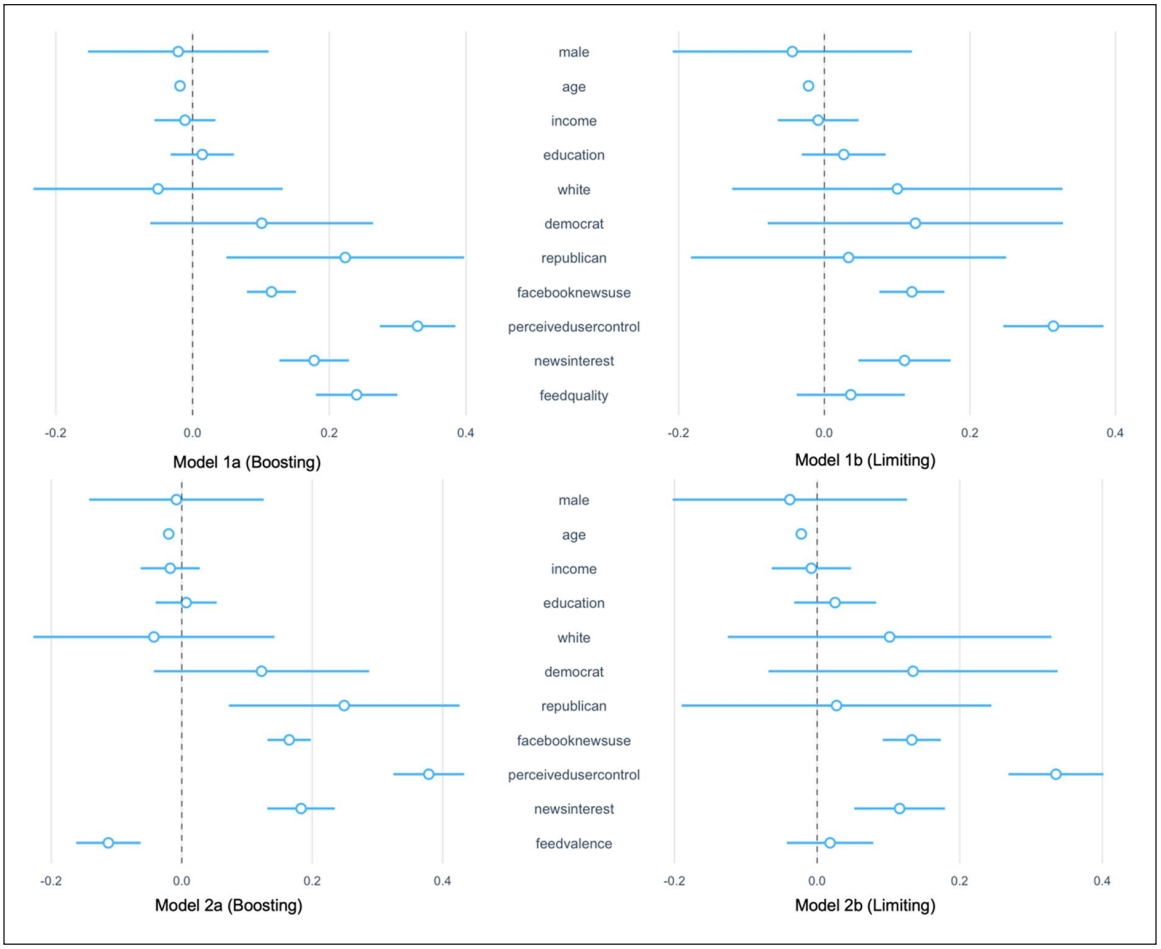

Figure 1. Regressions predicting consumptive news feed curation.

Table 3. Simple Slope Analyses of Two-Way Interactions.

IV	Perceived news feed quality		Perceived news feed valence	
News diversity	Boosting	Limiting	Boosting	Limiting
−1 *SD*	0.15***	n.s.	n.s.	0.16***
Mean	0.19***	n.s.	−0.07*	n.s.
+1 *SD*	0.23***	n.s.	−0.13***	n.s.

Note. IV = independent variables; *SD* = standard deviation; n.s. = non-significant coefficients.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

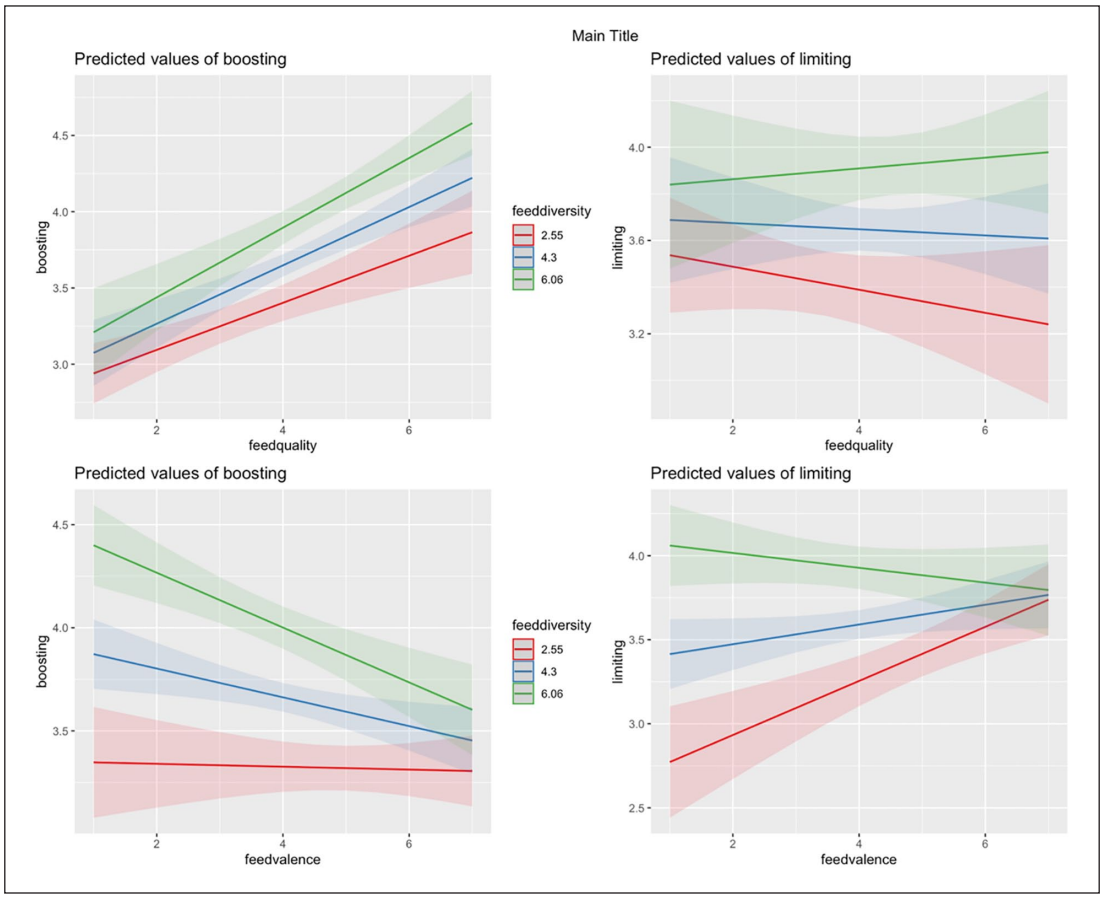

Figure 2. Interaction plots predicting consumptive news feed curation.

diversity on boosting curation ($B = –0.04$, $SE = 0.01$, $p < .001$) and limiting curation ($B = –0.06$, $SE = 0.01$, $p < .001$), respectively. Simple slope analyses show that for boosting curation, the association was only statistically significant when news feed diversity was at the mean ($B = –0.07$, $SE = 0.03$, $p = .01$) and high level ($B = –0.13$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$), but not at the low level ($B = –0.01$, $SE = 0.03$, $p = .83$). The association between perceived news feed valence and limiting curation was only significant when news feed diversity was low ($B = 0.16$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$). Figure 2 visualizes the interaction plots.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, we sought to understand how perceived news feed performance shapes users' consumptive news feed curation on Facebook. Specifically, we differentiated between informational and emotional dimensions of news feed performance to investigate how the perceived quality and valence of one's news feed are associated with boosting and limiting curation. Furthermore, we incorporated news feed diversity and examined the extent to which the association between perceived news feed performance and consumptive

news feed curation varies by different levels of perceived news feed diversity. Below, we discuss the theoretical and practical implications of the findings and suggest several directions for future research.

Discussion of Major Findings

First, our findings revealed that perceived news feed quality is positively associated with boosting curation but is not related to limiting curation. This finding is in line with the bulk of research showing that high-quality information is positively related to user engagement (Almahamid et al., 2010; Zheng et al., 2013). Given that news feeds on Facebook contain a variety of content from personal to professional (DeVito, 2017), our study extends prior research by showing that people's desire for high-quality information spans from professional news offerings to a wide range of content in their news feeds. From the instrumental utility perspective, high-quality information not only keeps one informed, but also allows one to engage in discussions about the information with others (Messing & Westwood, 2014). As such, boosting high-quality information in one's news feed creates a virtuous cycle of information consumption and sharing within one's social circle.

Second, we found that perceived news feed valence was negatively correlated with boosting curation but not associated with limiting curation. This result echoes studies showing that negativity may impede engagement behavior (S. Lu et al., 2023; Muddiman et al., 2020). Note that such impediments induce passive avoidance (i.e., reduced boosting curation) instead of active avoidance (i.e., increased limiting curation). It suggests that people tend to retain a certain amount of negative content in their news feeds, rather than getting rid of them entirely. This existing amount of negatively valenced content could help people monitor the environment (Shoemaker, 1996) and enhance their self-esteem through downward social comparison (Ouwerkerk & Johnson, 2016). Of course, there are conditions in which people actively practice limiting curation. As Wu-Ouyang (2024) demonstrates, when people experience high levels of information fatigue, they engage in more limiting curation and less boosting curation. In short, our finding highlights the need to consider information avoidance as a more dynamic phenomenon, ranging from passive (i.e., reduced boosting curation) to active forms (i.e., increased limiting curation) and from partial retention to complete blockage of undesirable content.

Crucially, boosting and limiting curation are not simply two sides of the same coin. As the findings illustrate, people adjusted their boosting curation based on their judgment of the quality and valence of the news feed, but they seemed not to proactively limit their news feeds based on these judgments. The findings can be explained by the distinct social consequences associated with boosting and limiting curation. Boosting curation essentially involves liking and sharing certain content and following similar accounts with the aim of increasing the likelihood of seeing desirable content (Merten, 2021), which is pro-social in nature. If the news feed is undesirable, one may simply forgo boosting behavior. By contrast, some of the actions involved in limiting curation, such as unfriending and unfollowing accounts, could lead to tie dissolution and information filtration (Bode, 2016). For Facebook users, it may not be worth breaking ties due to the poor performance of the news feed.

Moreover, the study revealed illuminating findings about how the associations between perceived news feed performance and consumptive news feed curation at different levels of news feed diversity. On one hand, the associations between perceived news feed quality and boosting curation are statistically stronger when the news feed is more diverse. One plausible reason is that a diverse news feed exposes users to a wider range of viewpoints and topics, enabling them to obtain a comprehensive understanding of issues and be confident to share information with their social contacts. This could enhance the instrumental utility of high-quality news feeds, thus prompting users to boost more. Although the findings run counter to what we expected based on the selective exposure literature (Chen et al., 2022; Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2020), they are not surprising because news diversity has often been included as an indicator of professional quality (Urban & Schweiger, 2014). For social media companies that use recommendation systems, this finding underscores the need for diversity-based recommendations to also prioritize quality. It could be a win-win if algorithms are designed to recommend diverse content with high informational quality.

On the other hand, the results show that news feed diversity plays a diverging role in conditioning the association between perceived news feed valence and curation behavior, which deserves more attention. When the news feed is less diverse, perceived news feed valence (i.e., negativity) is positively related to limiting curation; when the news feed becomes diverse, perceived negativity is negatively related to boosting curation. Our interpretation is that lack of diversity in the news feed can possibly result in the tendency of repeated exposure to similar negative valenced content. This redundancy may increase people's sensitivity to that negativity, thus prompting limiting curation. When the diversity increases, the tendency of proactive limiting curation shifts to a reduction of boosting curation—a passive information avoidance strategy. This is similar to the finding by Chen et al. (2022) that when people encounter counter-attitudinal content online, one type of diverse content, they are inclined to engage in passive scanning behavior. We speculate that the broader perspectives embedded in a diverse news feed can provide a buffer for people to cope with negativity without feeling compelled to proactively limit such content. This finding adds a new layer to our understanding of the mood management theory (Zillmann, 1988) and negativity bias (Kanouse & Reid Hanson, 1987) more broadly. In sum,

people's sensitivity to negativity varies across information environments with different degrees of diversity. Such varying experiences of negativity in different information environments, in turn, shape whether they will proactively or passively regulate their exposure to negative content. A diverse information environment, while still containing negativity, may dilute the adverse impact of negative content, thus leading to passive avoidance of such content.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, given the cross-sectional nature of the study, we cannot claim causality of the key relationships identified here. One may argue that people's consumptive news feed curation can also influence what their news feeds look like because boosting and limiting curation will inform the algorithms of what content they want to see. Therefore, it is necessary to use multi-wave surveys or experiments to tease out the causal relationships between people's perceived performance of the news feed and their curation behavior.

Second, our study measures did not differentiate between news-related content and social updates in the news feed. Some users may encounter more news-related content in the Facebook news feed than others. We encourage researchers to combine self-reported measures and data donation methods to explore how the degree of "news-ness" (see Edgerly & Vraga, 2020) of a given news feed recalibrates the way that users assess and interact with it.

Third, consumptive news feed curation centers on people's deliberate efforts to influence what shows up in their news feeds. However, it should be noted that people may engage with algorithms without consciously thinking about the consequences of their online behavior. User behaviors such as view time, dwell time, and read speed may also indicate users' preferences (Lu, Zhang, Ma, 2018), which are built into the algorithms for content recommendation. How this kind of unconscious user behaviors influences their news feeds deserves more research.

Finally, given that our participants were in the United States, the findings may not apply to people living in countries with different media and political systems. Factors such as Internet penetration and the political environment could shape individuals' social media use (Chan et al., 2021; Lu & Luqiu, 2020). We call for researchers to conduct cross-country studies to understand how the broad contexts shape consumptive news feed curation behavior at the individual level.

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