



KNIGHT
FOUNDATION

UNDERSTANDING SNAPCHAT

MEDIA, POLITICS AND THE 2016 ELECTION

A Survey of Snapchat Users

June 2017



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OVERVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

Why Snapchat?

Chat apps overtook traditional social networks in global audience size by 2015 but caught on late in the U.S. because of low rates of mobile phone text messaging compared with other countries. By 2016, however, apps such as Snapchat, Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp and Kik took over the U.S. app charts, and many were determined to engage voters in political discourse.

As apps such as Snapchat become increasingly popular, it is vital to understand how they may influence the way in which people engage with one another and their democracy. Candidates, for example, are bypassing the media to give people direct access. Media, in turn, are coming up with creative strategies to reach new audiences using these platforms.

Released in 2011, Snapchat is a mobile messaging app that allows users to send a photo or video (with or without text captions or drawings) to someone or contribute to the Stories section of the app. The content is accessible for only a limited time. This allows users more control over the visual content they share. The app also allows media companies to post content in its Discover section.

Snap Inc., the app's parent company, reported 158 million daily active users at the end of 2016, with an average of 2.5 billion “snaps” created every day. Snap went public on March 2, 2017 and opened with a market valuation of \$33 billion.

Motivating Questions

With the increased presence of Snapchat into the social media sphere, we asked:

- How do Snapchat users use the app, especially for news and politics?
- How do Snapchat users interact with the news media and political figures on the app?
- What do Snapchat users think of the credibility of journalists and politicians using the app?
- What do Snapchat users like and dislike about politics on the app?
- Do Snapchat users believe they gain knowledge about politics from the app?



Study Design and Methodology

- Survey of regular Snapchat users using Survey Sampling International (SSI) online panel¹
- Data collected from Nov. 1 – 7, 2016
- N = 977
- Respondents were:
 - 18 years old and older
 - U.S. residents
 - Regular Snapchat users (SSI asked panelists: “Which of the following mobile apps do you use on a regular basis?” Those responding “Snapchat” were qualified for this survey.)

Overview of Key Findings

Snapchat is primarily seen as a social place for conversing with friends and following celebrities. For most, it is not seen as a place for political conversation, and around a third follow news organizations and politicians in the space.

Despite these reports, many people were engaged in politics on Snapchat during the 2016 campaign. Two-thirds watched political speeches or debates, six in 10 saw their friends use political geofilters, and 38 percent learned something new about the presidential campaign from Snapchat.

Also, there were persistent demographic differences throughout. Male, more educated and younger respondents were more likely to engage with news and politics on Snapchat.

The media continue to face the erosion of the public’s trust. Pew Research Center’s ongoing study on [“The Modern News Consumer”](#) shows that only 22 and 18 percent of U.S. adults, respectively, trust the information they get from local and national news organizations “a lot.” Younger adults (18-29 years old), in particular, seem to be even less likely to trust national news organizations than their counterparts age 50 and older (10 versus 22 percent).

Pew’s data further indicate that adults trust information garnered from social media even less (4 percent). However, the survey of regular Snapchat users helps to add nuance to that finding, suggesting that the specific type of social platform may matter—especially among its younger users.

¹ To be included in the survey, respondents had to indicate that they used Snapchat regularly. Question wording: “Which of the following social networking sites, if any, do you use on a regular basis?” (Respondents had to indicate regular use of Snapchat.) Education was measured across eight items ranging from “Grade 8 or lower” to “Graduate or professional degree.”



Key Findings

(among 977 regular Snapchat users)

- Less than half of respondents reported following news organizations or political figures on Snapchat; most primarily follow friends. Younger, educated and racially diverse males tend to post more.
- In the month before the election, more than two-thirds of users said they watched snaps about political debates and live news. (This is significant, as Nielsen data report that 41 percent of millennials can be reached via Snapchat.)
- With declining levels of trust in institutions, such as independent news media, we explored the extent to which these social platforms heightened or seemed to run counter to the trend. Around half of respondents who followed journalists or politicians on Snapchat indicate that being on the app helps journalists' and politicians' credibility. A quarter said it has no effect.
- Respondents following news organizations and political figures on Snapchat were more likely to be educated and male.
- Those seeing political content on Snapchat like that it is quick and informative but dislike that the information is so short, worry about its political bias and wish for less negativity.

Future Research

Future research exploring social platforms and civic behavior could include the following areas:

- Evaluating which messages are most effective at turning out the vote
- Better understanding how to encourage news use on the app
- Tracking demographic trends in app use over time
- Analyzing how people perceive different apps—for example, how Facebook differs from Twitter and Snapchat.



Survey Demographics

DEMOGRAPHIC CATEGORY	CURRENT SURVEY	PEW DATA*
GENDER		
Male	28%	42%
Female	71	58
AGE		
18 – 29	40	74
30 – 49	48	18
50 – 64	11	7
65+	—	—
EDUCATION		
High School or Less	24	21
Some College	36	47
College Degree	40	33
RACE / ETHNICITY**		
White, Non-Hispanic	57	58
Non-White	43	42

Pew data are for those who use Snapchat; ENP data are for those who use Snapchat “on a regular basis.” Differences could be due to the wording or different sampling methods.

* Pew data: <http://www.journalism.org/2016/05/26/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2016/>;

** Full race breakdown for SSI panel: 5% Asian, non-Hispanic; 15% black / African-American, non-Hispanic; 21% Hispanic; 57% white, non-Hispanic

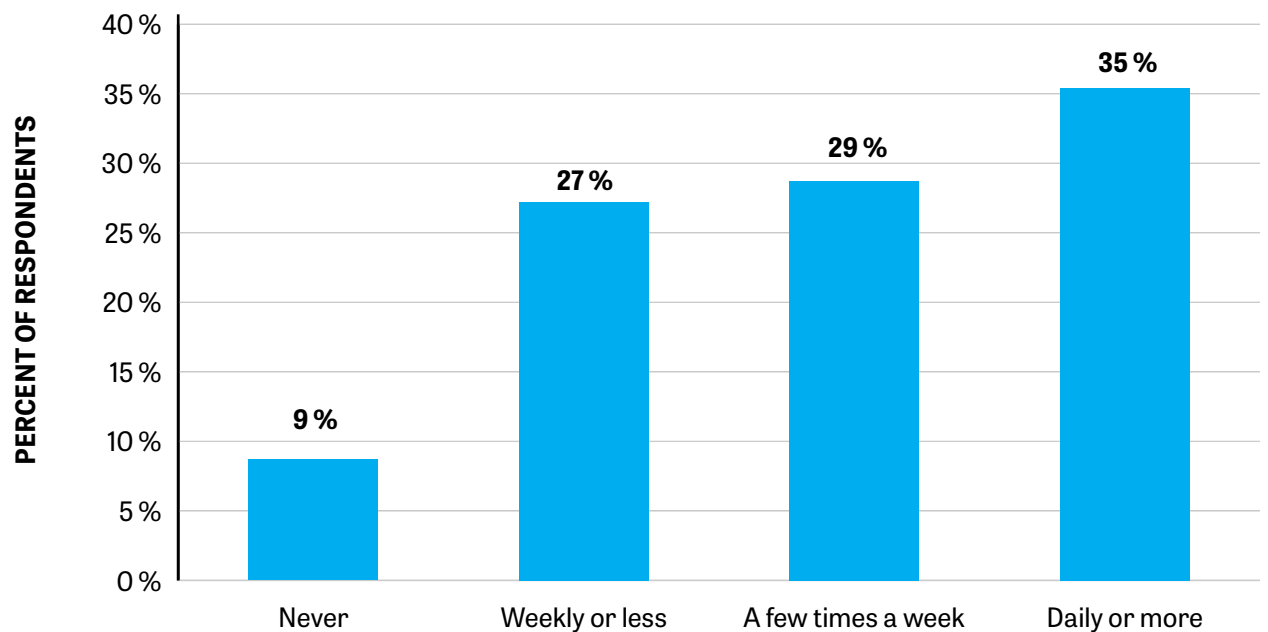


GENERAL SNAPCHAT USE

Regular Snapchat Users Post Often

Frequency of Posting Stories on Snapchat

(among regular users)



Data from the Engaging News Project

QUESTION WORDING:

"How often do you post stories on Snapchat?"

RESPONSE OPTIONS WERE:

Never, weekly or less frequently, a few times a week, once a day, two or three times a day and more than three times a day.



Male, Younger, More Educated and Racially Diverse Respondents Post More

DEMOGRAPHIC CATEGORY (among regular Snapchat users)	% POSTING STORIES ON SNAPCHAT ONCE A DAY OR MORE
GENDER	
Male	49.5 %
Female	29.9
AGE	
18 – 29	38.1
30 – 49	38.6
50 +	9.7
EDUCATION	
High School or Less	26.8
Some College	33.0
College Degree	42.7
RACE / ETHNICITY**	
Asian, non-Hispanic	45.7
Black / African-American, non-Hispanic	44.2
Hispanic	40.3
White, non-Hispanic	31.2



People Use Snapchat for Social Reasons

Survey respondents were asked an open-ended question about why they use Snapchat. We categorized their responses into the following themes:

- To stay connected (53 percent)
 - “To keep up with what my friends and favorite celebrities are doing”
- For entertainment / general enjoyment (27 percent)
 - “Because it’s entertaining”
 - “Because it’s fun”
- User-friendly / for app features (26 percent)
 - “It’s an easy way to communicate through pictures and videos”

QUESTION WORDING:

“Please describe, as best as you are able, why you use Snapchat.”

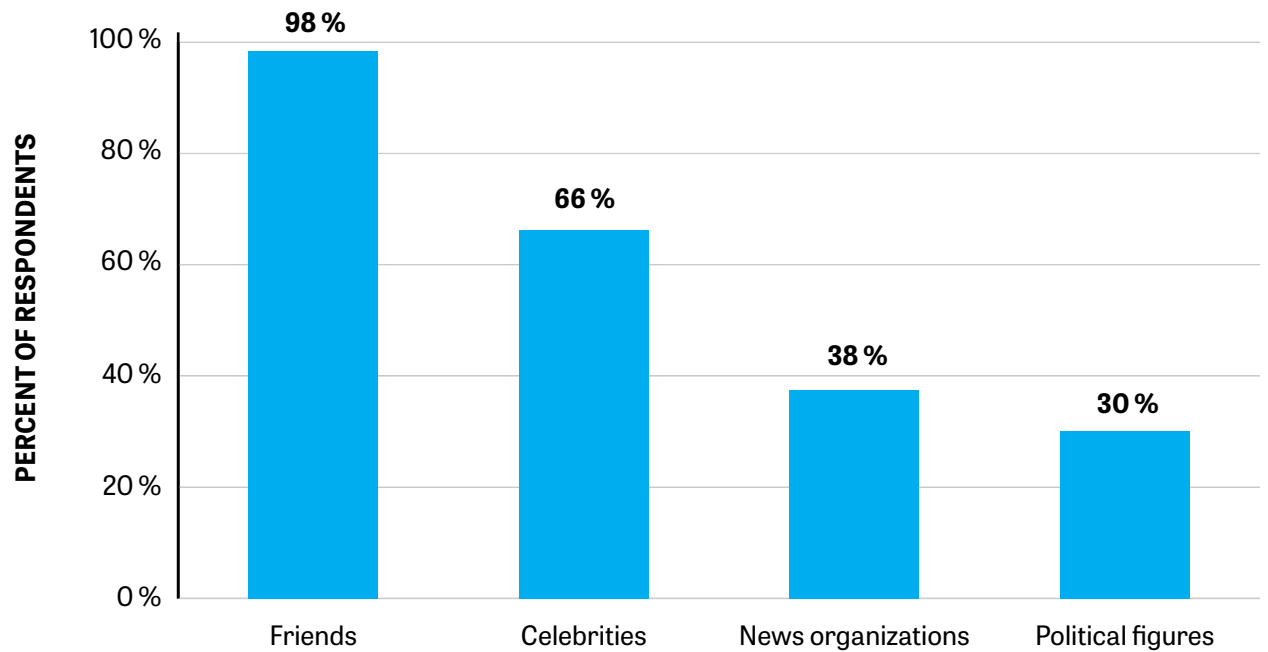
MULTIPLE RESPONSES WERE PERMITTED;

The most common categories are reported above. Two coders evaluated 200 of the open-ended responses for reliability of the coding. Krippendorff’s alpha, which varies between 0 and 1, with scores above 0.67 as acceptable and above 0.80 as strong reliability, was used. The metrics were 0.88 for staying connected, 0.87 for entertainment, and 0.78 for user-friendly / app features.



About a Third Follow News or Political Figures

Who Regular Users Follow on Snapchat



Data from the Engaging News Project

QUESTION WORDING:

"Which of the following people or organizations do you follow on Snapchat?
Check all that apply."



Male, Middle-Aged and More Educated More Likely to Follow News and Politics

DEMOGRAPHIC CATEGORY (among regular Snapchat users)	% FOLLOWING NEWS ORGANIZATIONS ON SNAPCHAT	% FOLLOWING POLITICAL FIGURES ON SNAPCHAT
GENDER		
Male	47.8 %	40.6 %
Female	33.5	26.0
AGE		
18 – 29	29.8	23.4
30 – 49	42.1	36.4
50 +	33.6	28.3
EDUCATION		
High School or Less	24.2	16.5
Some College	36.3	28.5
College Degree	46.4	39.7

Data from the Engaging News Project

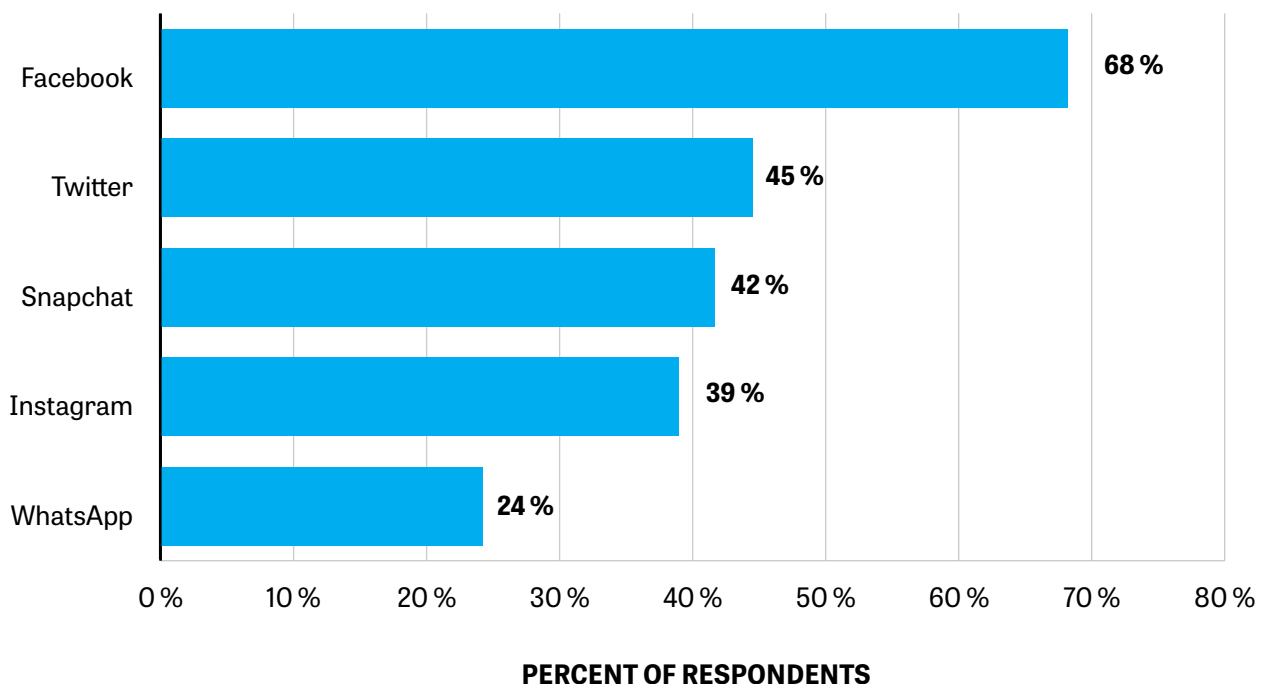


NEWS AND SNAPCHAT

Snapchat Users Get News From
a Variety of Social Media

Got News Once a Day or More by Platform

(among regular Snapchat users)



Data from the Engaging News Project

QUESTION WORDING:

"In the past month, how often have you gotten news from ..."

RESPONSE OPTIONS WERE:

Never, weekly or less frequently, a few times a week, once a day, two or three times a day and more than three times a day. Chart shows those saying once a day or more often.



For Most, Snapchat Not Yet a Main Source for Election News

MAIN SOURCE FOR ELECTION NEWS (among regular Snapchat users)	% OF RESPONDENTS
Television	40 %
Facebook	25
Websites	16
Twitter	7
Newspapers	3
Snapchat	3
Instagram	2
Radio	2
Other	2

Data from the Engaging News Project

QUESTION WORDING:

“What do you consider to be your main source for election news?”

RESPONSE OPTIONS INCLUDED:

Television, radio, newspapers, websites, social media and other.

THOSE SAYING “SOCIAL MEDIA” WERE ASKED,

“Which social media site do you consider your main source for election news?”

RESPONSE OPTIONS INCLUDED:

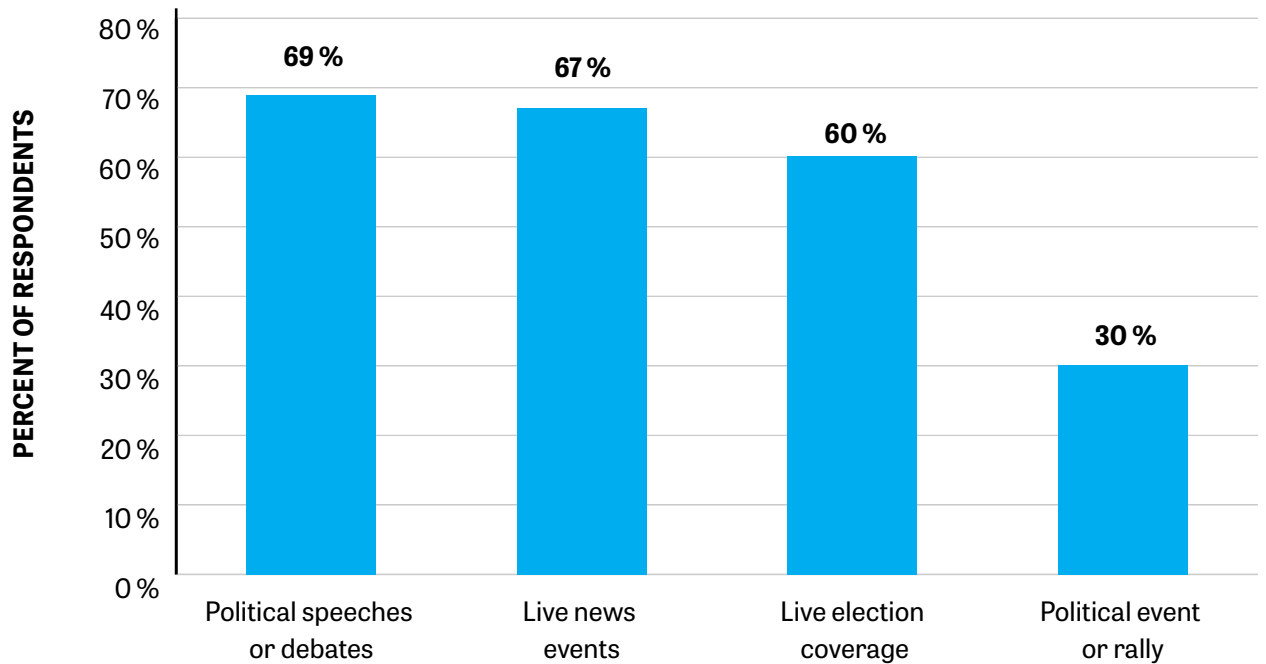
Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, WhatsApp and other.



About Two-Thirds Watched Political Speeches, Debates or Live News Events on Snapchat

Watched Political, News Snaps at Least Once by Category

(among regular users)



Data from the Engaging News Project

QUESTION WORDING:

"In the past month, approximately how many times have you watched snaps about ..."

RESPONSE OPTIONS WERE:

None, once, two to three, four to six, and seven or more.

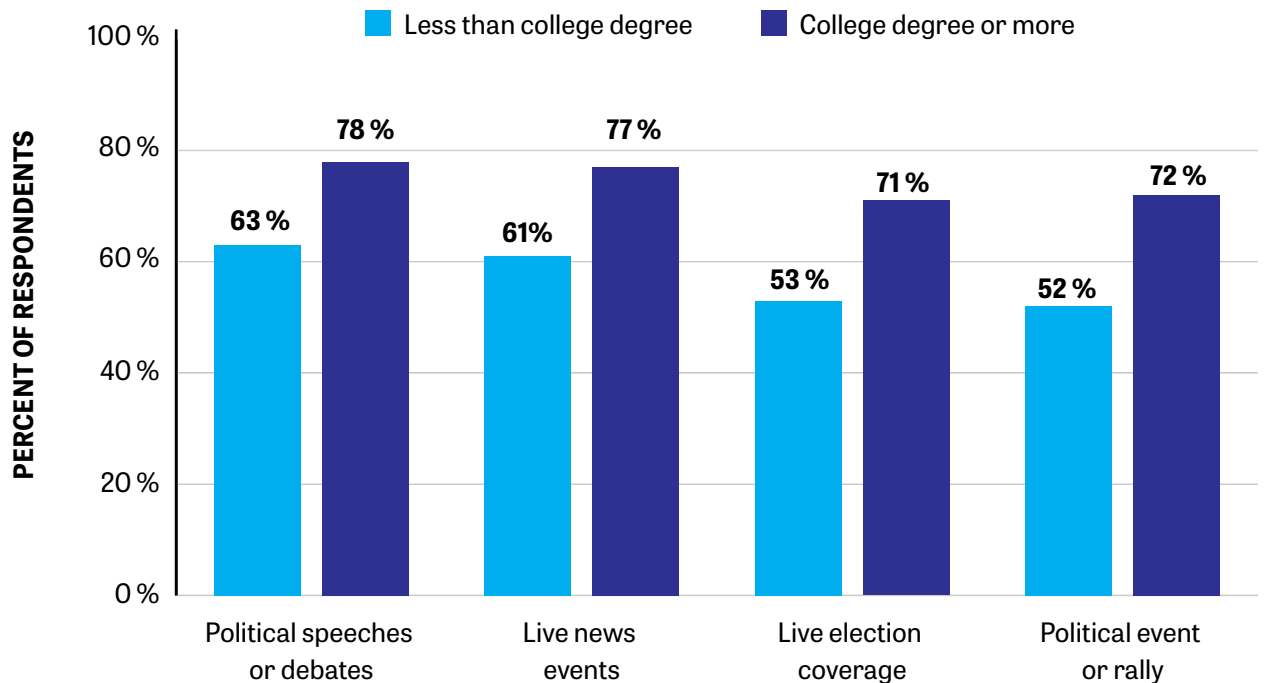
Chart shows those saying once or more.



More Educated Are More Likely to Watch Political and News Snaps

Watched Political, News Snaps at Least Once by Category, Education

(among regular users)



Data from the Engaging News Project

QUESTION WORDING:

"In the past month, approximately how many times have you watched snaps about ..."

RESPONSE OPTIONS WERE:

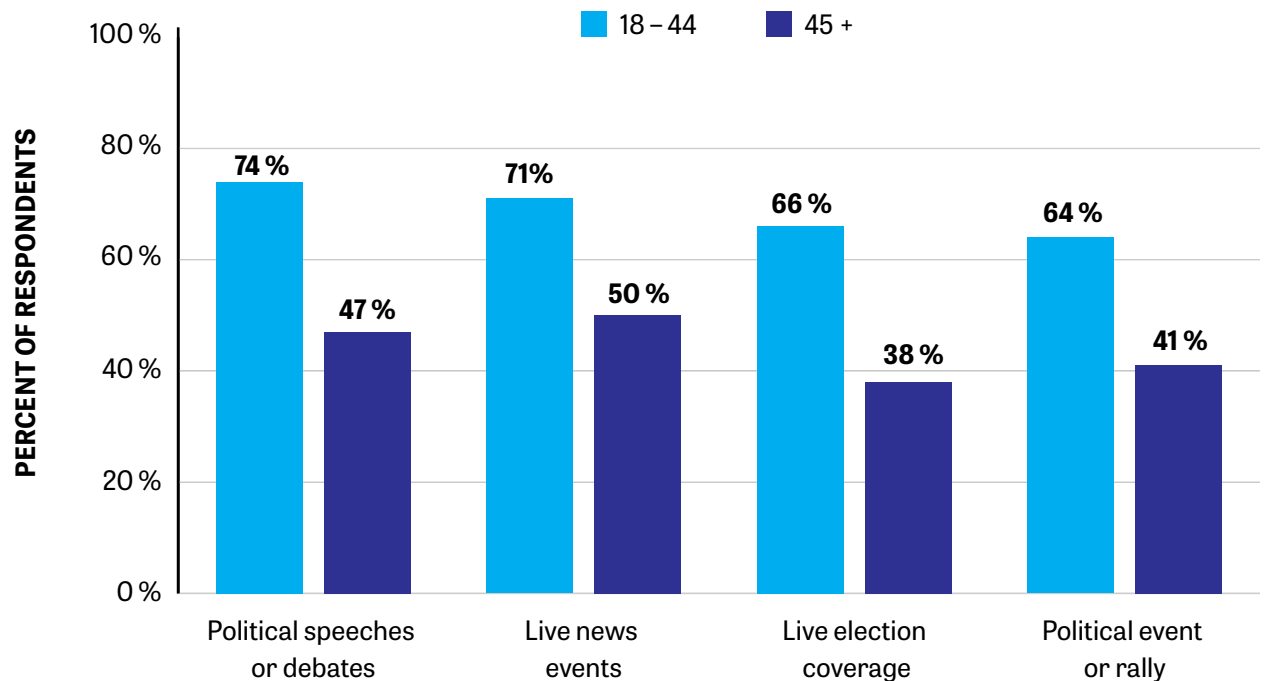
None, once, two to three, four to six and seven or more. Chart shows those saying once or more.



Younger Users More Likely to Watch Political and News Snaps

Watched Political, News Snaps at Least Once by Category, Age

(among regular users)



Data from the Engaging News Project

QUESTION WORDING:

"In the past month, approximately how many times have you watched snaps about ..."

RESPONSE OPTIONS WERE:

None, once, two to three, four to six and seven or more.

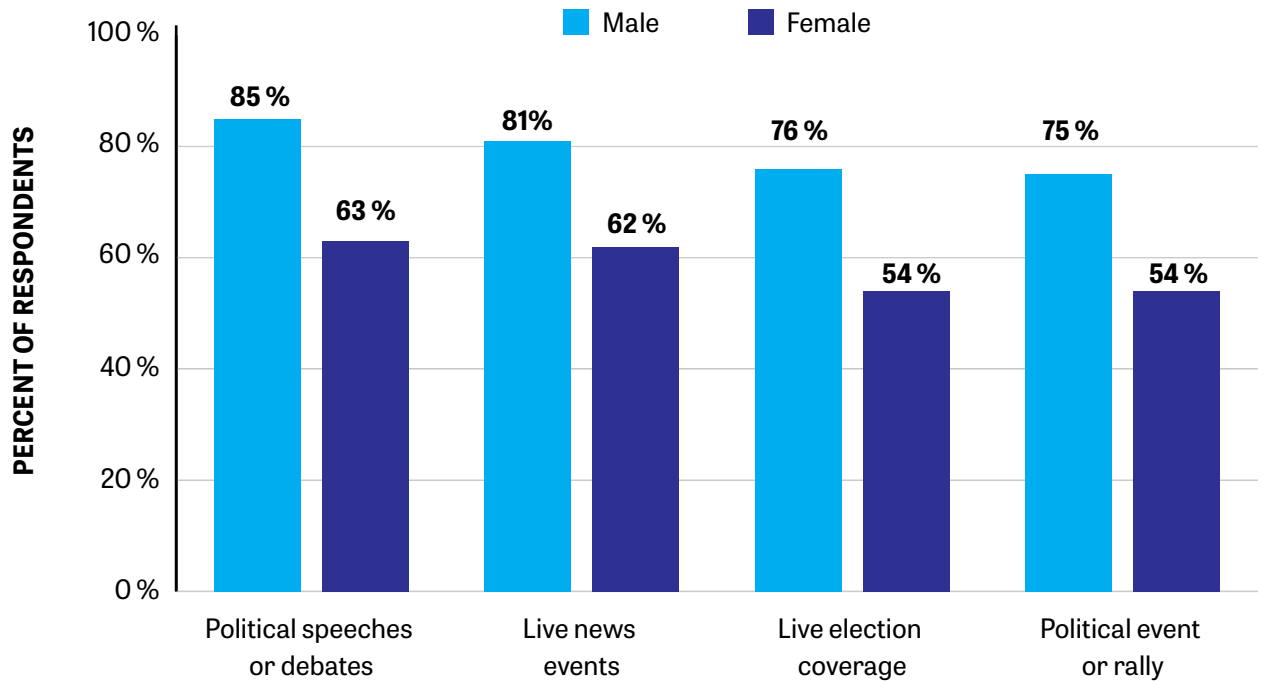
Chart shows those saying once or more.



Males More Likely to Watch Political and News Snaps

Watched Political, News Snaps at Least Once by Category, Gender

(among regular users)



Data from the Engaging News Project

QUESTION WORDING:

"In the past month, approximately how many times have you watched snaps about ..."

RESPONSE OPTIONS WERE:

None, once, two to three, four to six and seven or more.

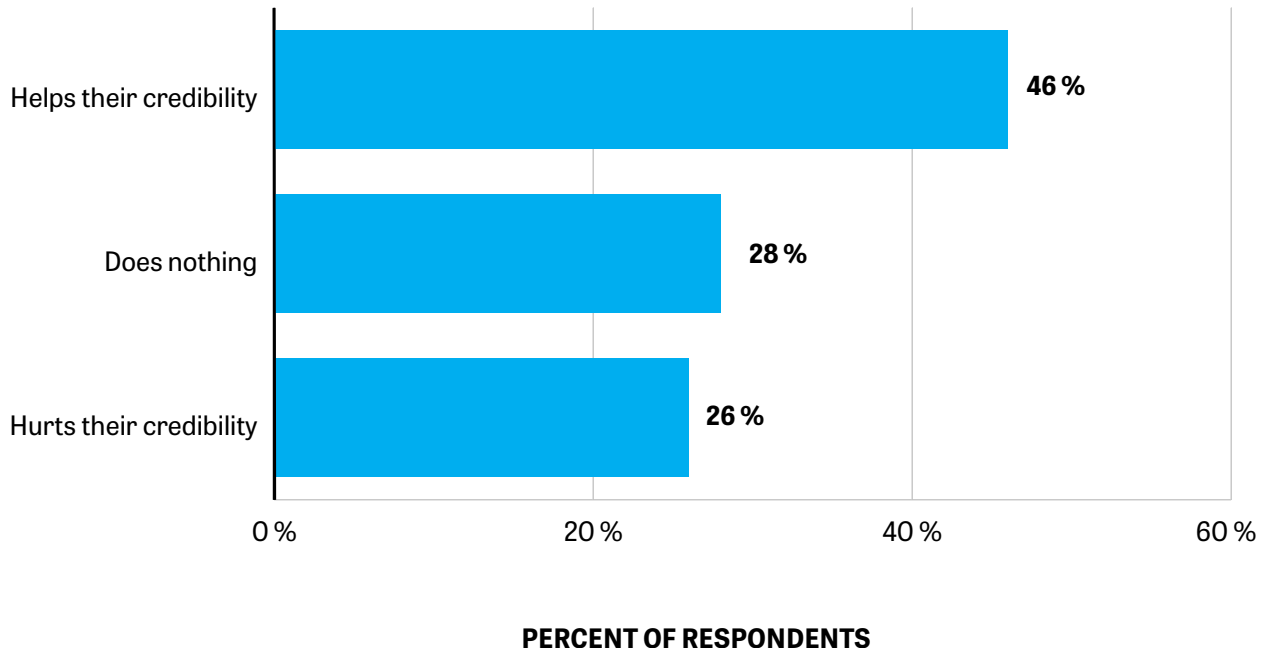
Chart shows those saying once or more.



Nearly Half of News Subscribers Through Discover See Snapchat as Helping Media Credibility

Credibility of Media Outlets on Snapchat

(among regular users who subscribed to a news channel through Discover)



Data from the Engaging News Project

QUESTION WORDING:

"How, if at all, do you think that being on Snapchat affects the credibility of the media outlets to which you subscribe?"

RESPONSE OPTIONS INCLUDED:

Hurts their credibility a great deal, hurts their credibility somewhat, hurts their credibility a little, does not affect their credibility, helps their credibility a little, helps their credibility somewhat and helps their credibility a great deal.

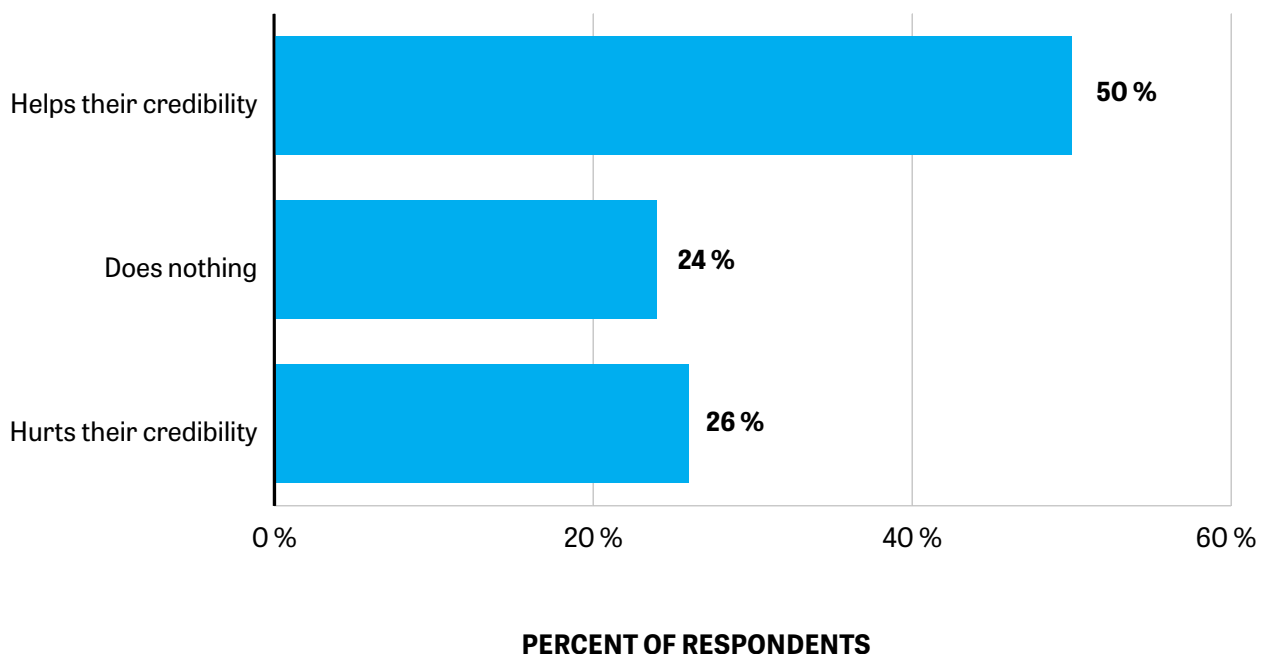
Asked only of regular Snapchat users who subscribed to a news channel through Discover (n=310).



Half of Those Following Journalists See Snapchat as Helping Journalists' Credibility

Credibility of Journalists on Snapchat

(among regular users who followed at least one journalist on Snapchat)



Data from the Engaging News Project

QUESTION WORDING:

"How, if at all, do you think that being on Snapchat affects the credibility of journalists that you follow?"

RESPONSE OPTIONS INCLUDED:

Hurts their credibility a great deal, hurts their credibility somewhat, hurts their credibility a little, does not affect their credibility, helps their credibility a little, helps their credibility somewhat and helps their credibility a great deal.

Asked only of regular Snapchat users who followed at least one journalist on Snapchat (n=285).



Less than Half See Snapchat News as More Interesting and Easier to Get

PERCEPTIONS OF NEWS AND POLITICS ON SNAPCHAT (among regular users)	% AGREEING
News presented on Snapchat is more interesting than news in other places.	43 %
It is easier to get news on Snapchat than in other places.	39

Data from the Engaging News Project

QUESTION WORDING INCLUDED IN TABLE.

RESPONSE OPTIONS INCLUDED:

Strongly disagree, disagree, slightly disagree, neither agree nor disagree, slightly agree, agree and strongly agree.

Chart shows the percentage who slightly agree, agree or strongly agree.



POLITICS AND SNAPCHAT

Majority Have Used Geofilters or Have Seen Political Geofilters

USE OF GEOFILTERS IN PAST MONTH (among regular Snapchat users)	% OF RESPONDENTS
Used geofilters on Snapchat	70 %
Saw friends use political geofilters in their snaps	63
Saw geofilters that were specific to a particular candidate running for office	56
Used political geofilters in their snaps (such as a filter for a specific debate or campaign rally)	40

Data from the Engaging News Project

QUESTION WORDING:

"In the past month, how often have you ..."

RESPONSE OPTIONS WERE:

Never, weekly or less frequently, a few times a week, once a day, two or three times a day and more than three times a day.

Table shows the percentage of those saying anything other than "never."



A Third Followed Politicians on Snapchat

- 33 percent of users followed a politician

CANDIDATES FOLLOWED (among regular Snapchat users)	% OF RESPONDENTS
Hillary Clinton	25 %
Donald Trump	17
Bernie Sanders	13
Other 2016 candidates	4

Data from the Engaging News Project

QUESTION WORDING:

“Do you follow any politicians on Snapchat?”

RESPONSE OPTIONS INCLUDED:

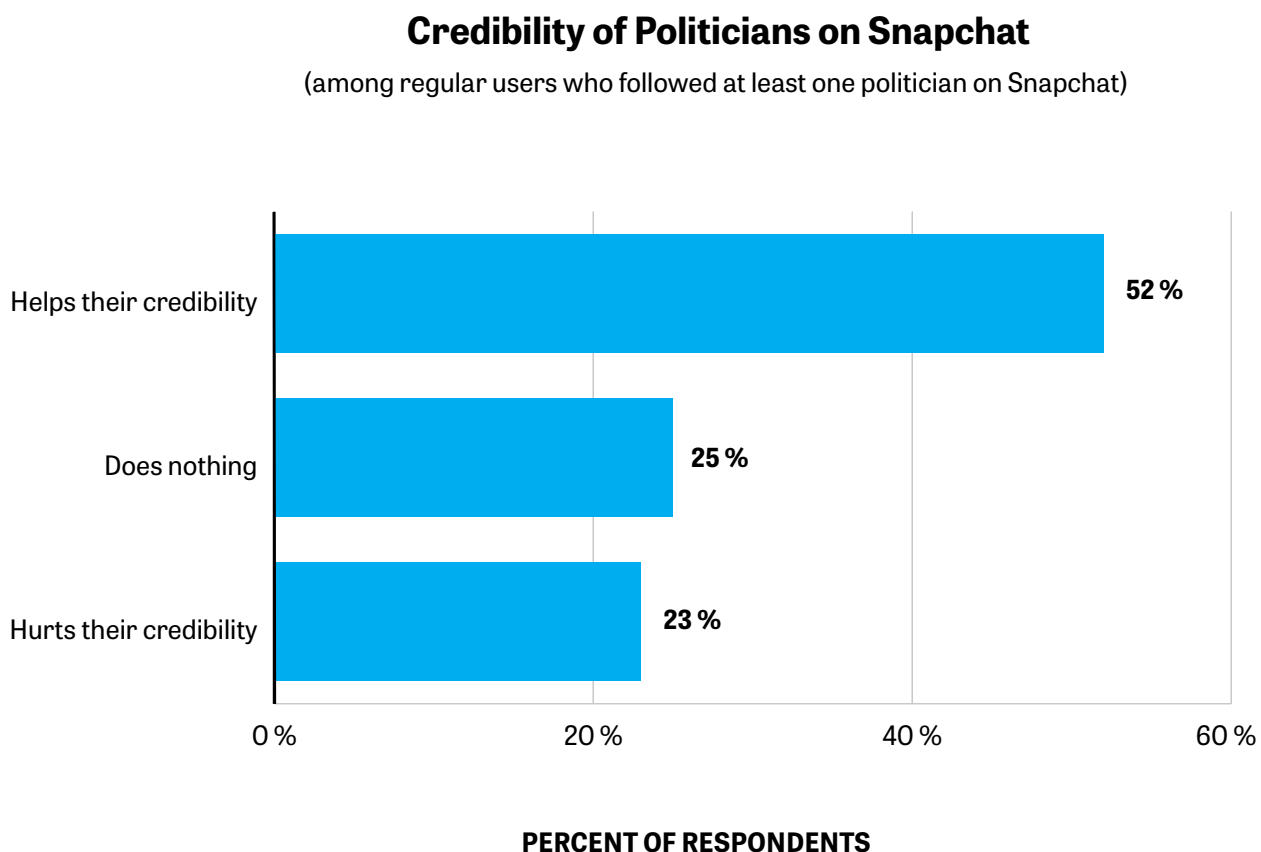
yes and no.

THOSE RESPONDING YES WERE ASKED,

“Which of the following politicians do you follow on Snapchat?
(Check all that apply.)”



Half of Those Following Politicians See Snapchat as Helping Politicians' Credibility



Data from the Engaging News Project

QUESTION WORDING:

"How, if at all, do you think that being on Snapchat affects the credibility of the politicians that you follow?"

RESPONSE OPTIONS INCLUDED:

Hurts their credibility a great deal, hurts their credibility somewhat, hurts their credibility a little, does not affect their credibility, helps their credibility a little, helps their credibility somewhat and helps their credibility a great deal.

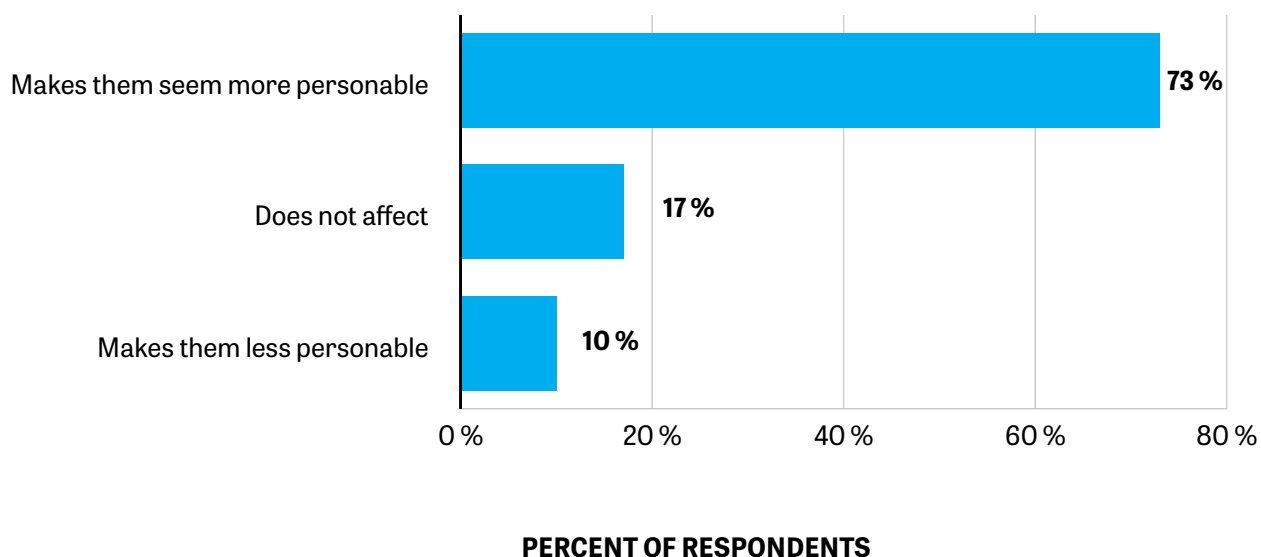
Asked only of regular users who followed at least one politician on Snapchat (n=320).



Nearly Three-Fourths of Those Following Politicians See Snapchat as Making Politicians Seem More Personable

Politicians seen as personable on Snapchat

(among regular users who followed at least one politician on Snapchat)



Data from the Engaging News Project

QUESTION WORDING:

"How, if at all, do you think that being on Snapchat affects how personable you view the politicians that you follow?"

RESPONSE OPTIONS INCLUDED:

Makes them a great deal more personable, makes them somewhat more personable, makes them a little more personable, does not affect how personable they are, makes them a little less personable, makes them somewhat less personable and makes them a great deal less personable.

Asked only of regular Snapchat users who followed at least one politician on Snapchat (n=320).



About 4 in 10 See Snapchat as a Place for Politics

PERCEPTIONS OF POLITICAL TALK ON SNAPCHAT (among regular users)	% AGREEING
Snapchat is an appropriate place to talk about politics.	41 %
I like it when accounts I follow post political snaps.	36
I use Snapchat to share my thoughts about politics.	34
I use Snapchat to share my thoughts about politics.	33

Data from the Engaging News Project

QUESTION WORDING INCLUDED IN TABLE.

RESPONSE OPTIONS INCLUDED:

Strongly disagree, disagree, slightly disagree, neither agree nor disagree, slightly agree, agree and strongly agree.

Chart shows the percentage who slightly agree, agree or strongly agree.



Politics on Snapchat: Likes

Those coming across political content on Snapchat (75 percent of the sample) were asked what they liked about it. Overall, users liked that Snapchat provided readily available political information.

- Informative (30 percent)
 - “I like political content on Snapchat because it gives me information when I cannot see it on TV.”
- Easy to consume / understand (19 percent)
 - “It’s a short burst of info that is not overwhelming, gets straight to the point.”
- Entertaining (7 percent)
 - “I like the humorous approach.”

QUESTION WORDING:

“What do you like about political content on Snapchat? Please give as much detail as possible.”

MULTIPLE RESPONSES WERE PERMITTED;

the most common categories are reported above.

Two coders evaluated 200 of the open-ended responses for reliability of the coding. Krippendorff’s alpha was 0.81 for informative, 0.79 for easy to consume and 0.79 for entertaining.

Asked only of regular Snapchat users who come across political content on Snapchat (n=728 who responded to the question).



Politics on Snapchat: Dislikes

We also asked those coming across political content on Snapchat (75 percent of the sample) what they disliked about it. Although many users said that they didn't have any dislikes, others noted limitations on providing substantive information.

- Not informative / biased content (17 percent)
 - “It seems like a limited space to give a great deal of information.”
- Negative content / not fun (7 percent)
 - “I want Snap to be a fun, silly place, not serious. Politics doesn't belong here.”
- Excessive political content (5 percent)

QUESTION WORDING:

“What do you dislike about political content on Snapchat?
Please give as much detail as possible.”

MULTIPLE RESPONSES WERE PERMITTED;

the most common categories are reported above.

Two coders evaluated 200 of the open-ended responses for reliability of the coding. Krippendorff's alpha was 0.76 for not informative, 0.88 for negative content, and 0.78 for excessive political content.

Asked only of regular users who came across political content on Snapchat (n=726 who responded to the question).



Voting Behavior

Sixty-four percent had seen information encouraging or reminding them to vote. Of these, nearly half (45 percent) thought the information had an effect on their voting behavior. These respondents were asked how Snapchat had affected them:

- Made me want to vote (21 percent)
 - “It made me realize my vote matters.”
 - “Inspired me to vote because I wasn’t going to.”
- Served as a reminder to vote (16 percent)
 - “It reminded me to register on time so I can vote.”
- Informed me (15 percent)
 - “Timely and accurate information.”

QUESTION WORDING:

“Please explain how information on Snapchat encouraging or reminding you to vote affected your voting behavior.”

MULTIPLE RESPONSES WERE PERMITTED;

the most common categories are reported above.

Two coders evaluated 59 of the open-ended responses for reliability. Krippendorff’s alpha was 0.76 for made me want to vote, 0.95 for served as a reminder to vote and 0.77 for informed me.

Asked only of regular Snapchat users who saw information on Snapchat encouraging or reminding them to vote and believing that the information had an effect on their voting behavior (n = 282)



LEARNING AND SNAPCHAT USE

Majorities Perceive Snapchat Information as Timely and Unique

PERCEPTIONS OF INFORMATION ON SNAPCHAT (among regular users)	% AGREEING
I use Snapchat because I get up-to-date information.	56 %
Snapchat offers a unique way to gain political information.	53
I use Snapchat because I get information beyond what I can see on TV or read online.	50

Data from the Engaging News Project

QUESTION WORDING INCLUDED IN TABLE.

RESPONSE OPTIONS INCLUDED:

Strongly disagree, disagree, slightly disagree, neither agree nor disagree, slightly agree, agree and strongly agree.

Chart shows the percentage who slightly agree, agree or strongly agree.



Just Over 4 in 10 Learned About Politics From Snapchat

PERCEPTIONS OF POLITICAL LEARNING ON SNAPCHAT (among regular users)	% AGREEING
I have learned political information from Snapchat.	44 %
I learned something new about the 2016 presidential campaign from Snapchat.	38
I use Snapchat because I get information about political candidates.	36

Data from the Engaging News Project

QUESTION WORDING INCLUDED IN TABLE.

RESPONSE OPTIONS INCLUDED:

Strongly disagree, disagree, slightly disagree, neither agree nor disagree, slightly agree, agree and strongly agree.

Chart shows the percentage who slightly agree, agree or strongly agree.



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