

Political journalists' normalization of Twitter: Interaction and new affordances

Social media are by now an established presence in both journalism and politics, setting up the 2016 U.S. presidential election as a fruitful time to test theories of journalistic normalization and professionalization. In studying reporters' use of social media during the U.S. presidential elections of 2012, scholars suggested that journalists are mapping old norms onto new technology while in some ways challenging them (Molyneux, Mourão & Coddington, 2016). Research also demonstrated evidence of tension between journalists, their audiences, their sources, and their employers, as these groups sought attention and control over newly important social media spaces (Lewis, 2012; Tandoc & Vos, 2016).

Since then, however, the technology has proven more flexible than the profession, as social media platforms added new features and forms of interaction. As such, it's important to follow these earlier studies with an understanding of how processes of normalization and professionalization occur over time and how these processes respond to changes in the media ecosystem. Journalists — already under intense economic and cultural stress as the public collectively re-evaluates the importance of their work — must continually adapt to a changing online environment that is becoming a primary platform for presenting their work and also a primary place in which they encounter audience members (Canter, 2015; Belair-Gagnon, 2015). How have journalists adapted to platform-specific changes that are beyond their control? Have these new tools led to different interactions between journalists and their audiences? Perhaps more to the point: Are journalists even interacting with their audiences, or are they living in social media echo chambers as Pope (2016) suggested?

These questions tie into a longer line of inquiry into the ways journalists have adopted online platforms, and how this adoption had transformed their relationship with the people who consume their work. Journalists have historically provided the spaces in which journalist-audience interactions occur, but now are meeting their audiences (sometimes reluctantly) in spaces created and managed by others (Annany, 2014). Silicon Valley perhaps did not build social media platforms with journalists in mind, and journalists are now the ones who must continually adapt to the affordances provided by the platform and its algorithms.

This study seeks answers to these questions by examining journalists' use of Twitter during a 2016 U.S. presidential debate. Content analysis is used to measure journalist-audience interactions and observe how journalists' use of newer affordances (quote tweet, reply threading, embedded multimedia) compares with their use of older, more established forms (normal tweets and retweets). The use of social media in political campaigns has been widely studied from the perspective of campaigns (Kreiss, 2016), the public (Mascaro & Goggins, 2015), and mixes of these groups (Freelon & Karpf, 2015; McGregor et al., 2017). The focus of this study, however, is on journalists' use of Twitter as a vehicle for understanding processes of normalization and professionalization. We expect that normalization takes time, enabling us to observe how professional and organizational norms take hold as new technologies are introduced.

Twitter as a normalized form of interaction

Social media constitute the primary arena in which members of the press and members of their audience mingle and exchange ideas in the 21st century. Twitter in particular has become popular among journalists (Willnat & Weaver, 2014), and journalists use Twitter as a new news wire (Lawrence, 2012), spending time there to take the pulse of the public, seek sources and share updates.

Many scholars argue that it has become normalized (Lasorsa et al., 2011; Lawrence et al., 2013); that is, journalists have adopted Twitter as part of their normal routines, mixing journalistic norms and practices with the norms and practices of social media communities. But as Tandoc and Vos (2016) note, there may be less normalization (mapping traditional journalistic norms onto new social media tools) and more negotiation of journalism's boundaries (reworking norms and routines to better suit the new environment). For instance, journalists on Twitter are often willing to express humor and opinion, rather than remaining strictly objective (Mourão, Diehl & Vasudevan, 2016).

Political journalists are a special case within journalism as a whole. They have long been criticized for their elitism, exclusivity, and pack mentality (Crouse, 1973; Lippmann, 1946). They have also been criticized for their focus on the "horse race" or "game frame," in which the election is portrayed as a strategic struggle for percentage points at the polls (Capella & Jamieson, 1997). The criticism is that this game focus takes away from the policy issues and characteristics of the candidates that might more directly inform an opinion of them. A series of studies outlined in Molyneux, Mourão and Coddington (2016) examined to what extent Twitter was simply business as usual for political journalists, or whether campaign coverage had changed in any way. These studies suggested that political journalists on Twitter hung on to objectivity, offering only a modicum of their own opinions (Lawrence et al., 2013). While transparency may have increased as journalists tweet publicly about their work, they in large part remained in insular communities, using Twitter to build narratives and establish professional boundaries (Mourão, 2015). Journalists interacted primarily with other journalists, rather than members of the public. They spent much more time repeating candidates' claims than fact-checking them (Coddington, Molyneux, & Lawrence, 2014), and employed humor and self-

promotion extensively in their Twitter conversations (Holton & Lewis, 2011; Molyneux, 2015; Mourão, Diehl, & Vasudevan, 2015).

In response to this widespread use, journalists and their news organizations have begun to settle on some best practices. Occasionally these are codified in newsroom policies (BBC, 2010; Opgenhaffen & Scheerlinck, 2014), but more often they spread through the same channels of social control that perpetuate other journalistic norms. For instance, interviews of journalists in various countries and situations found that almost all have a similar conception of personal branding and its role in journalism, though it is often enacted differently (Brems et al., 2016; Bruns, 2012; Hedman, 2016; Molyneux & Holton, 2015).

But Twitter has not remained the same since its creation. In 2016, the company has added the ability to embed photos, .gif images and auto-playing videos into users' timelines (Vranica, 2016). A year earlier, Twitter began to officially support retweets with comments appended, known as quote tweets (Shu, 2015). And a year before that, Twitter began to support direct replies, in which users reply to other tweets in order to associate a string of tweets into a single thread. We reason that it takes time for any technological development to normalize, and so we can expect that, in 2016, journalists had varying levels of comfort with normal tweets, retweets, quote tweets, and replies.

Many previous studies of journalists' use of Twitter have focused exclusively on the content journalists post in their timelines, without taking into consideration how they interact with their followers and how followers react to such content. Scholars have also called for updating this literature by incorporating multimedia elements and new forms of interaction on Twitter into an understanding of campaign coverage online (Molyneux, Mourão, & Coddington, 2016). This study analyzes the adoptions and different uses of these affordances as a reflection of

the normalization process itself. As such, we anticipate that “older” affordances of Twitter - normal tweets and retweets - are further normalized and starting to conform to organizational policies and news norms such as objectivity. For newer forms like quote tweets and replies, this process may be incipient as journalists still freely adventure outside the boundaries of the profession.

Journalist/audience interaction

The rise of online media and the overall redistribution of power in media spaces has led to changes in the ways journalists interact with their audiences. Historically, journalists exerted control over these interactions, by selecting which letters to the editor to publish, or by hiring an ombudsman as an in-house audience representative (Annany, 2014). More recently, journalists have been “allocated” space (to use a distinction made in Murdock, 1977) in which to work online, requiring that they play by someone else’s rules. In general, this has resulted in a shift away from ignoring or avoiding audiences to actively engaging them as never before (Lewis, 2012), though Annany (2014) finds that many news organizations’ social media policies remain defensive and conservative in proscribing how reporters should interact with their public. Part of this tension can be attributed to changes in communication channels that obfuscate the broadcast model of news — sending out updates to a mass audience and expecting nothing but attention in return (Chaffee & Meztger, 2001). But as Lewis and others (Ryfe, 2013) elaborate, another part can be attributed to the dismantling and reassembly of journalism as a profession in the 21st century. Journalists — threatened by economic instability, increasing competition and fragmented audiences — seek to maintain their professional authority and credibility by policing the boundaries of the profession (Coddington, 2012) and engaging audiences directly in bids for loyalty (Molyneux & Holton, 2015). Overall, this shifts the balance between journalists and their

audiences (Belair-Gagnon, 2015) to position audiences as participants who contribute content and comments as well as help distribute the news itself in networked spaces (Canter, 2015; Hermida, 2014).

These developments are expressed in a number of ways in modern journalism. Whereas once journalists were viewed as gatekeepers (White, 1950), they are now viewed as guides or curators (Hermida & Zeller, 2014; Nolan, 2003), pointing out which droplets in the flood of digital information are most valuable. Journalists also have made a push toward transparency, meaning they allow audiences a window into professional practices in an attempt to bolster trust and credibility (Hellmueller, Vos, & Poepsel, 2012; Phillips, 2010; Revers, 2014). As they expose themselves to their audiences, many journalists are making calculations about how best to do so, such that several scholars have observed elements of branding in journalistic practice (Brems, Temmerman, Graham, & Broersma, 2016; Bruns, 2012; Hedman, 2016; Ottovordemgentschenfelde, 2016). In summary, audiences are responsive to journalists, and journalists are responsive to audience members in a feedback loop commonly referred to as “engagement” (Brandel, 2016).

In all this, journalists find themselves struggling between personal and professional identities (Holton & Molyneux, 2017). This struggle becomes evident on Twitter, a microblogging platform designed as a social network but used heavily by professional reporters (Willnat & Weaver, 2014) and political elites for news and insider talk (Lawrence, Molyneux, Coddington, & Holton, 2014). These tensions are heightened when the platform itself and the networked community it supports are constantly in a state of flux beyond the control of journalists and their news organizations. Currently, there are four types of tweets allowed by the

platform.¹ The normal tweet is any message posted to Twitter containing a maximum of 140 characters that appears on the sender's profile page and timelines of those following that user. In a sense, the normal tweet resembles more of the one-way interaction that journalists are accustomed to. A retweet (RT) is a re-posting of a tweet and is distinguishable by an icon added as part of the formal RT feature developed in 2009. Journalists often include a line on their bios assuring followers that RTs are not endorsements, maintaining the idea of objectivity and perhaps treating the RT as the equivalent of a quote in a news story (Molyneux, 2014). In 2015, Twitter formally released its "quote tweet" function, which allows users to retweet another person's tweet adding their own commentary for up to 140 characters. Replies are tweets that begin with another user's username and are in reply to one of that user's tweets. In 2014, Twitter began threading these replies together such that clicking on any one of them revealed the whole conversation. With the exception of the original "normal" tweet, all the new affordances were aimed at improving the interaction between users.

In the context of political journalists, we understand these affordances as points of tension between older standards of journalist-audience separation — or gatekeeping — and newer standards of journalist-audience interaction. If political journalists are exclusive and elitist, yet active in the melting pot of Twitter, with whom do they interact? Given more means of interacting with other Twitter users, how do political journalists spread their attention? These questions are important not just because of the recently perceived disconnect between journalists and their audiences (Sullivan, 2016; Franklin & Mullin, 2016), but also because both audiences and journalists are adapting to a networked media environment where both are participants in newsmaking. As such, this study poses the following research questions and hypotheses. In these

¹ From: <https://support.twitter.com/articles/119138>

questions, “interaction” refers to the forms afforded on Twitter, namely retweets, quote tweets, and replies. Previous research has established that journalists frequently interact with other journalists on Twitter and frequently employ humor and opinion when tweeting and responding to tweets. Therefore, these are presented as hypotheses. We also ask research questions about how the content of journalists’ tweets varies for the various tweet types and how journalists’ followers reacted to their tweets.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

H1 - Journalists will interact with other journalists and political elites more than anyone else.

H2 - Journalists will interact more in the cases of tweets that contain (a) humor and (b) opinion.

H3 - Newer forms of interaction on Twitter (quote tweets and reply threading) will be less normalized than older forms (normal tweets and retweets)

RQ1 - How did journalists’ normal tweets, retweets, quote tweets and replies differ in content?

RQ2 - How did political journalists’ followers react to journalists’ tweets?

Methods

Research hypotheses were tested and research questions answered via a content analysis of tweets posted during the 2016 debates from a purposive sample of 801 political journalists and news organizations. Tweets were collected and analyzed via a combination of manual and automated techniques following the guidelines proposed by Lewis, Zamith and Hermida (2013) and Lawrence, Molyneux, Coddington and Holton (2014). A custom-built software program was developed to scrape these accounts every six minutes and record tweets in a database. This study uses tweets sent from one hour before the first U.S. presidential debate to three hours after it finished, a timeframe selected based on previous studies (e.g. Mourão, 2015; Freelon & Karpf, 2014) to capture the conversations pre-event, during the airing, and for a few hours after its

completion, while journalists are still online making sense of the debate. The software collected tweets and retweets sent by the journalists, replies made by the journalists to other tweets, and quotes added by the journalists in a quoted tweet, along with tweets they quoted. All tweets also contained metadata including the tweet timestamp, links, other Twitter users mentioned, hashtags used, and how many times each tweet was retweeted or marked as a favorite.

The sample of journalists and news organizations was drawn using CisionPoint, which is the most comprehensive database of North American media contacts available and has been used in several studies of journalists (Willard-Hinsley 2010; Lawrence et al. 2012; Tandoc Jr., 2015). Three separate searches were conducted in order to 1) construct a sample that parallels the one of Lawrence et al. (2012) so as to enable comparisons across election years, 2) include all journalists likely to be covering the 2016 elections, and 3) include several major news outlets' organizational accounts. The first search identified political journalists working at prominent news outlets in the United States. The second search identified political journalists working in 11 battleground states as identified by a Politico (2016) analysis. These two searches were based on the methodology used by Lawrence et al. (2014), Molyneux (2015), Coddington, Molyneux and Lawrence (2014), and Mourão (2015). The final search cast a wider net, identifying any other journalists working in the U.S. who were covering the 2016 presidential campaigns that were not included in the initial round of searches. First, two terms narrowed the field by selecting only those journalists that listed "politics" or "campaign/elections" among the topics they covered. Altogether, these searches identified 770 political journalists. This number includes many journalists who are likely to be focusing exclusively on the 2016 presidential campaigns, but also many who cover politics more generally, or in addition to other topics. As such we suspect this sample is likely over-inclusive rather than under-inclusive, especially since a few prominent

voices tend to stand out, particularly in social media conversations (Lin, Keegan, Margolin, Lazer, & Cook, 2014). Finally, we included the organizational handles of 31 prominent news outlets, including a range of broadcast, cable, digital natives, and regional and national newspapers. Table 1 contains the list of outlets included in the sample.

[Table 1 here]

Sampling strategy, training and intercoder reliability

The data for this study were drawn from tweets posted by these journalists and news organizations during the first presidential debate on Monday, September 26, 2016 from 8 p.m. to 1:30 a.m. The debate started at 9 p.m. and ended at 10:30 p.m. (EDT). A total of 14,365 tweets were retrieved: 7,784 normal, 4,861 retweets, 1,481 quote tweets and 239 replies sent by our journalists. Because this study focuses on the differences between uses across various affordances on Twitter, we opted for a purposive sampling strategy by randomly selecting 150 tweets from each category, ensuring a comparable sample size for each category. Fifty of those were randomly selected to be used for training and intercoder reliability tests. After three training sessions, coding was divided among two coders. Reliability tests were performed on a random sample of 64 tweets, following the recommendation of Riffe, Lacy and Fico (2005). Krippendorff's alpha scores were used to calculate inter-coder reliability (Hayes and Krippendorff, 2007), using ReCal (Freelon, 2013). Alphas ranged from 0.77 to 1.00 and the specific values for each variable are described below.

Variables

Tweet types. The software recorded whether Twitter classified the post as *normal*, *retweet*, *reply* or *quoted tweet*. Retweets were posts retweeted *by the journalist* in the sample; replies were responses written *by the journalist*; and quote tweets were commentary added *by the journalist* to another tweet.

General characteristics. About 27.5% of the tweets posted came from journalists working for online outlets, 23% for newspapers, 18% for television, 13.5% for magazines, 11.5% for blogs and 12.7% worked for other types of outlets, including wire services and radio, or were freelancers. Tweets from journalists accounted for 89.5% of all tweets in the sample, but news organizations' accounts were among the most individually active. Coders first identified the focus of the tweets: not about American politics at all (7.5%); about politics, but not the U.S. presidential election (4%); about the election, but not about the first presidential debate (7.8%), or about the debate (80.8%) ($\alpha = .83$). Tweets were also coded for the presence of hyperlinks and where they link to ($\alpha = .92$), with 78.3% of tweets containing no hyperlinks; 5.5% linking to stories written by the journalist himself/herself (self-promotional), 10% linking to stories written by journalists in the same news organization (organizational-promotional), 4.5% linking to stories written by journalists at a different news organization, and .8% linking to a non-journalistic website. One percent of the links were broken. Similarly, coders also identified the presence of multimedia ($\alpha = .85$) such as photo, videos or gifs in the tweets, with 19.8% of tweets including multimedia.

Humor. Based on previous studies on Twitter coverage by political reporters (Holton & Lewis, 2011; Mourão, Diehl & Vasudevan, 2016), coders were instructed to identify whether the tweet contained an attempt at humor ("Regardless of what else is going on, is the reporter trying to be funny?"). About 27.3% of the tweets contained an attempt at humor and Krippendorff's $\alpha = .84$.

Opinion. Following the approach from Lasorsa et al. (2012) and Lawrence et al. (2014), tweets were coded for the presence of evaluations or unattributed commentary. More broadly, "opinion" is any statement that an "objective" journalist working in mainstream media would not

routinely make without attributing to a source. In this sample, 34.5% of the tweets had some opinion expressed by the writer ($\alpha = .82$).

Game frame. Based on the literature on political communication, the “game frame” was identified in tweets that mentioned a candidate’s relative position in public opinion polls or fundraising (horse race), or specific strategies or tactics for appealing to voting blocs. About 23% of tweets in this sample employed the game frame ($\alpha = .80$).

Policy issues. Campaign coverage can also focus on policy issues, such as the economy, education, immigration, foreign policy, health care, etc. In this sample, 17.3% of tweets referenced a policy issue ($\alpha = .93$).

Candidate characteristics. This item refers to tweets that contain references to candidates’ personal appearance, personal and professional background and manner of speaking. Mentions of candidates’ characteristics were present in about 26% of this sample ($\alpha = .92$).

Fact-checking. This item taps into journalists’ efforts to set the record straight on claims made by the candidates and their campaigns, offering any counter-claim or verification with a judgement about the claim (true or false). Fact-checking was present in 13% of the sample ($\alpha = .81$).

Associated tweet origin. In the case of retweets, quote tweets and replies, coders also identified the origin of the associated tweet ($\alpha = .86$); that is, who wrote the tweet that was retweeted, replied to or quoted? In the case of associated tweets *not* coming from the journalists themselves, the associated tweet was further coded for links (18.7%), multimedia (23%), humor (27%), opinion (10.8%), game frame (30.9%), policy issue (10.9%), candidate characteristics (23.6%) and fact-checking (13.6%).

Data analysis

H1 hypothesized that journalists would interact more with other journalists and political elites than anyone else, and this was tested via descriptive statistics and crosstabulations between tweet type and origin of the associated tweet. H2a and b (Journalists will interact more in the cases of tweets that contain (a) humor and (b) opinion) were tested via crosstabulations between tweet type and characteristics of the associated tweet. All crosstabulations for variables with more than two categories were first conducted as a whole, with chi-square and Cramer's-V reported on the tables. Then, all categories were dichotomized to perform more nuanced 2 x 2 chi-square tests, and *p*-values for each test were reported on individual cells of the table. RQ1 (How did journalists' normal tweets, retweets, quote tweets and replies differ in content?) was answered via crosstabulation and chi-square tests comparing tweet type and coverage characteristics beyond humor and opinion based on the literature (multimedia, links, game frame, policy issues, candidate characteristics and fact-checking). Finally, RQ2 asks about how journalists' followers reacted to journalists' tweets. Hierarchical regression models predicting the number of retweets and the number of "favorites" were conducted, with three blocks entered accounting for: (1) tweet type: normal, quote or replies. Because we are interested in the content produced by the journalists in the sample themselves, retweets were not considered (since they originated with another author and contained no new content from the journalist). (2) Content characteristics: links, multimedia, humor, opinion, game frame, policy issues, candidate characteristics and fact-checking. (3) Following: how many users follow the journalist who wrote the tweet. Residuals were inspected for the assumptions of normality, homoscedasticity and independence. Because of the skewed nature of the dependent variable — a few tweets had thousands of retweets and favorites while many others had zero — the distribution of residuals was not normal, and so log-transformations were performed on those variables following the recommendation of Tabachnick

and Fidell (2007). Regarding the independence assumption for RQ2, in this dataset sometimes more than one tweet written by the same user was selected for coding, violating the assumption of independent observations. In this case, we selected only the first tweet to randomly appear by that author in the sample for the final regression models (N=202), conforming to all relevant assumptions.

Results

Interaction targets

The first research hypothesis of this study predicts that journalists interact with other journalists and political elites more than anyone else. Results presented in Table 2 reveal a statistically significant difference when it comes to interaction type by the origin of the associated tweet [$\chi^2(10) = 259.48, p < .001$]. In order to further probe these differences, dummy variables were created for each type of interaction and for each type of origin (e.g. presence or absence for quotes, replies, etc.) and individual 2 x 2 chi-square tests were conducted. Results of those tests are depicted in each row of Table 2.

[Table 2 here]

Quote tweets. The numbers reveal that a plurality of quote tweets (48.5%) were made in reference to content posted by journalists at a different news organization, followed by content posted by political elites, such as the presidential candidates themselves or their campaigns (20.2%). Content by the public was the basis for 16.2% of quote tweets, followed by content posted by journalists in the same organization (10.1%). Journalists rarely quoted themselves (4%). Quotes were most commonly used to add commentary to other journalists' tweets, and share jokes and insights from the press room (Figure 1).

Replies. The overwhelming majority of replies were to tweets posted by the journalists themselves (84.8%). Reporters used the reply function as a way of bypassing Twitter's 140-character limitation, threading tweets together and posting longer commentary. In the case of replies to oneself, we content analyzed the thread as a whole, like a larger idea, and not as separate associated tweets. Journalists also replied to content posted by other news organizations (10.1%) and, to a lesser extent, content by non-journalistic accounts (about 5% combined). All in all, the reply function, although not as common as the other forms, most commonly serves the purpose of allowing journalists to write longer content in the form of a thread of posts (Figure 2).

Retweets. Journalists more commonly used retweets to interact with content from the organization they work for (43.1%), followed by content by journalists from other institutions (32.4%). Less commonly, they retweeted posts from the public (14.7%), political elites (5.9%) and themselves (2.9%). In this sample, journalists often used the RT function to self-promote or to promote content from their host organization. It was common to see retweets of posts in which they were mentioned or that hyperlinked to a story they wrote. In many instances, journalists retweeted their own organization's promotional tweets about the stories they wrote, even when they had previously tweeted the hyperlink themselves as a normal tweet.

As a whole, chi-square tests show that journalists interacted with themselves the most in the forms of replies [$\chi^2(1) = 289.17, p < .001$], to journalists in the same organizations via retweets [$\chi^2(1) = 108.76, p < .001$], and to journalists at a different organization by quote tweets [$\chi^2(1) = 81.12, p < .001$]. When it comes to interactions with non-journalistic actors, which were less common, they engaged with the public in the form of quotes and retweets [$\chi^2(1) = 27.87, p < .001$] and to political elites via quotes [$\chi^2(1) = 41, p < .001$]. Overall, results presented in Table 2 reveal

that journalists more commonly interacted with other journalists (78.60% of the total interactions). Research hypothesis 1 was accepted.

Content differences

H2 hypothesized that interactions would be more likely to contain (a) humor and (b) opinion. . Results in Table 3 show crosstabulations between type of tweet and content characteristics. The chi-square tests depicted in the table are for the nominal category as a whole, but 2 x 2 chi-square tests were conducted by each category and p-values are reported in each cell. Results reveal that links are more likely to appear in normal tweets than other forms (34%) [$\chi^2(1) = 34.15$, $p < .001$]. Multimedia was most often present in retweets (36.7%) and replies (26.3%), while humor was frequently present in quote tweets (37.4%). There were no statistically significant differences when it comes to opinion, game frame and fact-checking. Policy issues are more likely to appear in replies (25.3%) [$\chi^2(1) = 15.76$, $p < .01$], while candidate characteristics appeared less frequently in quotes (14.1%) [$\chi^2(1) = 9.83$, $p < .05$]. As shown above, humor was more common in quote tweets (H2a accepted), but opinion did not differ across the tweet types (H2b rejected).

[Table 3 here]

Taken together, the evidence presented here suggests that journalists more commonly used the newer affordance of quote tweets to interact with journalists from other news organizations, sharing humor, commentary and backstage behaviors. For replies, reporters in the sample used them to expand on their personal messages. If compared to normal tweets and retweets, it is clear that the older forms are used in ways that conform to traditional news norms and routines, being more commonly used for broadcasting content from their host organization or post tweets focusing on candidate's characteristics.

Further, when comparing news organizations accounts and journalists' individual handles, important differences emerge (Table 4). About 40.55% of the tweets from news organizations were original tweets versus 23.2% of individual journalists' tweets [$\chi^2(1) = 5.99$, $p < .05$]. Conversely, only 2.4% of tweets from organizations were quote tweets, while 27.4% of the tweets posted by journalists used this affordance [$\chi^2(1) = 12.61$, $p < .001$]. These numbers suggest that individual journalists were more willing to use the new "quote tweet" function as they engaged with reporters working for other news organizations via this affordance. Hypothesis 3, which predicts that older Twitter affordances are further normalized than newer forms, was accepted.

Also concerning content differences, RQ1 asks about the content that journalists interact with and descriptive statistics reveal that about 36.2% of the associated tweets had opinion, 27.6% had humor, 29.3% had the game frame, 25.9% mentioned a candidate's characteristics, 15.5% had fact-checking and only 5.2% mentioned policy issues. There were no statistically significant differences between the associated content from replies and quote tweets.

Retweets and favorites from followers

Finally, the second research question asks about which tweet characteristics gain traction among the journalists' followers. The regression models displayed in Table 5 show the influence of tweet type (block 1) and content characteristics (block 2) on the number of times the tweets have been retweeted and favorited. In the final model, a block was also entered accounting for the number of followers that the journalist who wrote the tweet had at the time of data collection.

Results in Table 5 (number of retweets) show that tweet type (normal, quote or reply) did not impact the number of times a tweet was retweeted at statistically significant levels. When it comes to content characteristics, results reveal that tweets containing multimedia elements (photo, video, gifs) were more likely to be retweeted ($\beta = .16$, $p < .05$). Tweets that mentioned a

policy issue - education, the economy, foreign affairs or health care, for example - were more likely to be retweeted as well ($\beta=.16, p<.05$). The block containing content characteristics explained almost 10% of the variance observed. As expected, tweets posted by journalists with a higher number of followers were more likely to be retweeted ($\beta=.31, p<.001$). The final model explained 21% of the variance observed in the sample.

For the number of favorites, Table 5 reveals that tweet type (normal, quote or reply) did not influence the number of times a tweet was favorited. Similar to retweets, posts that had some form of multimedia, such as photos, videos or gifs, were more likely to be favorited ($\beta=.17, p<.05$). This was the only content characteristic to influence outcomes at statistically significant levels. Tweets posted by those with a higher number of followers were also more likely to be favorited ($\beta=.26, p<.01$). The final model explained 15% of the variance observed.

Discussion

This study conducted a content analysis of tweets sent by political journalists during a 2016 U.S. presidential debate in order to investigate how journalists are normalizing Twitter's latest affordances while interacting with others online. This work updates previous studies conducted during the 2012 U.S. presidential election, building on earlier results and adding new insights. The results suggest two broad storylines shaping journalists' use of Twitter, specifically, and their interaction with audiences generally: First, reporters tend to interact with each other much more than with anyone outside the profession. And second, normalization takes time, in the sense that older functions of Twitter appear to be more normalized than newer functions, conforming to organizational policies and news norms. Journalists have developed particular uses of each form of interaction, frequently using retweets to promote their co-workers, quote tweets to comment on the work of their peers at other news organizations, and

replying mostly to themselves. These uses mirror, respectively, the organizational, institutional and individual levels of journalistic branding identified in other studies (Hedman, 2016; Molyneux, Holton & Lewis, 2017; Sacco & Bossio, 2016).

Results showed that the three forms of interaction studied (retweets, quote tweets and replies) were most commonly used to interact with other journalists. Previous work had suggested that political journalists operate within a bubble to the exclusion of the public (Lawrence et al., 2014), but there was at least a possibility that this was because journalists (and especially political journalists) were among the earliest and most enthusiastic adopters of Twitter. Now that Twitter's user base has stabilized, this study suggests that journalists still use the platform more as a place for water cooler talk among colleagues than a public sphere in which to engage the public. Journalists may be doing this purposefully, banding together in communities (Mourao, 2015) to shore up a profession many of them see as under attack from economic, political and cultural forces all at once. They may also be doing this neglectfully, willfully ignoring an online public too often full of trolls and harassment, or simply feeling uncomfortable engaging their audiences. The latter motivation, if it exists, may be antagonistic toward organizational policies that many journalists say require them to engage their audiences constantly (Holton & Molyneux, 2017). Future work may investigate whether audiences feel marginalized when attempting to interact with journalists online via social media.

In this paper, we also tap into the audience's reception by analyzing how journalists' Twitter followers frequently respond to the content they post through retweets and favorites. The patterns among retweets are especially interesting, with audiences regularly passing along tweets containing policy issues but not regularly retweeting humorous or opinionated tweets. This is in contrast to journalists' relationships with their colleagues, who regularly interact with humorous

content. Thus journalists seeking more audience engagement might consider a shift in focus away from humor as a lowest-common-denominator content form and begin to focus on the policy issues people are interested in, at least during political events such as debates and elections. Multimedia content is also a strong driver of audience engagement.

At a deeper level, these results suggest that journalists may have imagined their audience (Marwick & boyd, 2011) to be the same as their journalistic colleagues. Lacking a more complete understanding of their audience, journalists may have resorted to picturing their public as similar to themselves and the people they work with, an understandable mental shortcut. With this mental image, journalists end up projecting what they and their colleagues enjoy to the public through their social media streams. This thought also ties into Baym's (2010) work separating historical eras in broadcast television. Even if journalists have conceptually moved beyond previous eras of dictating to audiences what they need to know, they may be ill-equipped to fully engage with the audience as equals.

A second key contribution of this study is to provide a snapshot of normalization processes in mid-stream. Older forms on Twitter (normal tweets and retweets) conform to organizational branding policies and traditional journalistic values, following a shift identified in Holton and Molyneux (2017) away from "anything goes" and toward stricter organizational control of public-facing social media. Newer forms on Twitter (quote tweets and replies) had not yet fallen in line, including more humor and less organizational branding. Much of this humor was shared among journalistic peers working for another news organization. In other words, these newer forms in 2016 are used similarly to how the older forms were used in 2012 (Lawrence et al, 2014). The implication is that normalization takes time and is influenced by

elements of organizational policy. Examining how long normalization processes take is a direction for future studies.

Finally, it was interesting to note that replies were associated with references to policy issues, perhaps because reply threading allows journalists to bypass Twitter's length restrictions and incorporate more information. As noted in 2012 by The New York Times reporter Maggie Haberman, "the reality is that 140 characters is not ideal and I don't think that anybody would argue that it is" (Hamby, 2017). Our results suggest that journalists have found a way to circumvent this limitation in the reply function, providing more in-depth information, which resonates with their audiences.

This study is limited by its focus on a moment of heightened political journalistic activity and attention: the first 2016 U.S. presidential debate. Journalists may behave differently at other, more routine times during the campaign season. In fact, there is some evidence that interactions in any network drop off during periods of heightened activity (Lin et al., 2014). This analysis timeframe was chosen so as to be analogous to previous studies and allow for cross-election comparisons, but the behaviors found here may not be representative of all journalistic activity on Twitter.

In the end, it appears as if critics were correct in identifying a lack of interaction between journalists and their audiences in 2016, at least on Twitter during the debate. As Hamby (2017) notes, Twitter is here to stay, and whether that's good or bad depends on who you talk to. To the extent that journalists are living in "echo chambers" on social media (Pope, 2016), they may do well to re-examine their practices so as to be more in tune with audience needs and feedback during elections, a time when the flow of (accurate) information is crucial to decision-making in democracy.

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Table 1. News outlets included in sample of campaign reporters.

National Print	Regional print	B-cast TV	Cable TV	Web-only or primarily	Radio	Wire Service
Los Angeles Times	Detroit Free Press	ABC	CNN	BuzzFeed	NPR	Assoc. Press
The New York Times	Detroit News	CBS	FOX	Politico		Reuters
The Wall Street Journal	Grand Rapids Press	NBC	MSNBC	Slate		
The Washington Post	Philadelphia Inquirer		bloomberg	Huffington Post		
TIME	Pittsburgh Post-Gazette			Talking Pts. Memo		
USA Today	The Oakland Press					
Newsweek	The Morning Call					
Chicago Tribune	Tribune-Review					

Table 2. Crosstabulations between interaction type and origin of the associated tweet.

	Quote(%)	Reply(%)	Retweet(%)	Total(%)	X ² (df=1)	Cramer's V
Journalists						
Self	4.00***	84.80***	2.90***	30.30	289.17***	0.85
Same org.	10.10	0.00***	43.10***	18.00	108.76***	0.52
Different org.	48.50***	10.10***	32.40**	30.30	81.12***	0.45
Non-journalists						
Public	16.20**	2.00**	14.70**	11.00	27.87***	0.26
Political elites	20.20***	1.00**	5.90	9.00	41.00***	0.32
Can't tell	1.00	2.00	1.00%	1.30	2.05	0.07

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 3. Crosstabulations between interaction type and coverage characteristics

	Normal (%)	Quote (%)	Replies (%)	Retweets (%)	X ² (Df=1)	Cramer's V
Links	34***	2***	22.2	28.4	34.15***	0.29
Multimedia	24	N/A	26.3*	36.7**	0.51	0.04
Humor	22	37.4**	28.3	21.6	8.22*	0.14
Opinion	35	33.3	35.4	34.3	0.1	0.02
Game frame	22	28.3	24.2	17.6	3.35	0.09
Policy issues	21	5.1***	25.3*	17.6	15.76**	0.2
Candidate characteristics	31	14.1**	28.3	30.4	9.83*	0.16
Fact-checking	11	10.1	17.2	13.7	2.66	0.08

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. N/A: does not allow for multimedia as quote tweet

Table 4 – Crosstabulation between type of tweet and type of user (journalists vs. news organizations)

	Journalist	Organization	X ² (Df=1)	Cramer's V
Original	23.20%	40.50%	5.99*	.12
Quote	27.40%	2.40%	12.61***	.18
Replies	24.60%	26.20%	0.05	.01
Retweet	24.90%	31.00%	0.73	.04

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 5. Regression models predicting the number of retweets and favorites journalists' tweets received.

	Retweets	Favorites
Tweet type		
Normal (ref)		
Quote	-0.03	-.07
Reply	-0.07	-.07
ΔR^2 (%)	3%	3%
Content characteristics		
Links	0.07	.01
Multimedia	0.16*	.17*
Humor	-0.08	.01
Opinion	0.00	.03
Game frame	0.01	.01
Policy Issues	0.16*	.15
Candidate Characteristics	0.12	.07
Fact Checking	0.35	.03
ΔR^2 (%)	9%*	6%
User follower count	0.31***	.26**
ΔR^2 (%)	9%***	6%**
Total R^2 (%)	21%	15%**
Note: Cell entries are final model standardized coefficients (betas). *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001		

Figure 1. Examples of how journalists used quote tweets.

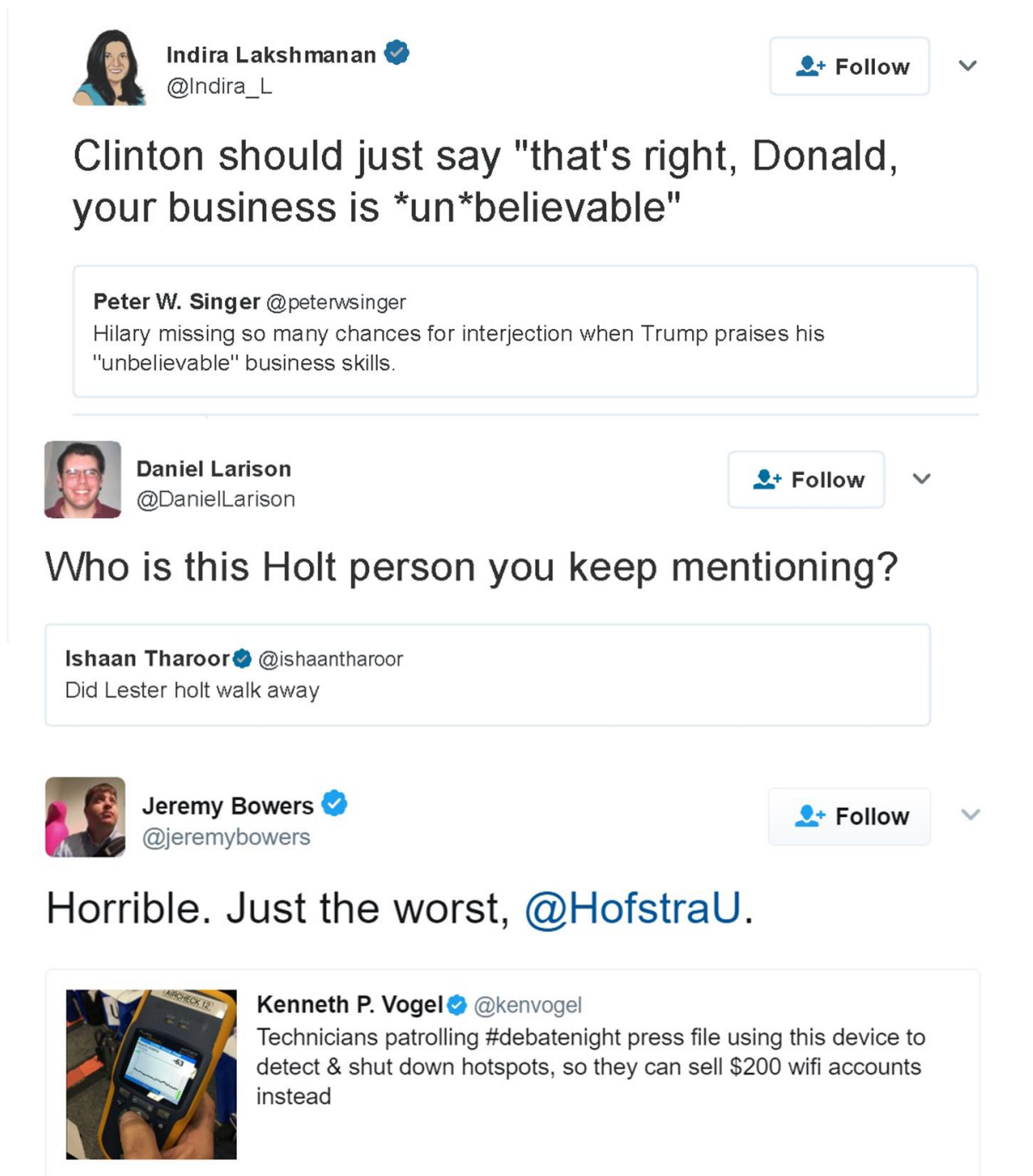


Figure 2. Example of how journalists used replies.

