

Tweets heard 'round the world: How international news agencies covered the 2016 U.S.
presidential election through Twitter

by

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Abstract

Due to a lack of research with a global perspective on the media's use of Twitter, this mixed methods approach examined how Twitter was used by news agencies to report on the 2016 United States presidential election. Using a theoretical approach of agenda setting theory, framing theory, and diffusion of innovations, a content analysis was used to code for 11 dependent variables that described how three news agencies, the Associated Press, Reuters, and Xinhua, used Twitter during the 3-day period before, during, and after election day. Using a grounded theory approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with social media editors of AP and Reuters and an anonymous Xinhua employee via telephone and email. The results of this research revealed that not all news agencies are making use of Twitter innovations, though the overall reach of their tweets, in terms of retweets, likes, and followers, was not necessarily affected. Research also identified differences in the press freedoms of the media outlets examined in the study.

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Dedication

To Dr. Kasoma: I always said, “I feel more comfortable and excited” about my work after each of our meetings and that still holds true. Thank you for your enthusiasm, your patience, your expertise, and your confidence in me to oversee this thesis from start to finish. There is no one else I would have wanted as my chair and I am eternally grateful for your support.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The use of Twitter as a journalistic tool has continued to become one of the norms in news gathering, reporting, and responding to the general public in recent years. It has been called the top “force of change and innovation in journalistic practice” (Ahmad, 2010, p. 146). Revers (2014) called Twitter “the social medium of choice in journalism” (p. 807). Twitter has a large, global reach, with 313 million monthly active users, and 79% of which are outside of the United States (Twitter, 2017).

The run-up to the 2016 U.S. presidential election, including the primary debates, was arguably the most scrutinized ever (Stewart, Eubanks, & Miller, 2016), thanks in part to high levels of public awareness of the candidacy of Donald Trump. The 2016 election was only the second in which journalists extensively used Twitter, which launched in 2006 (Conway, Kenski, & Wang, 2015). Although previous research has focused on examining the effects of candidates’ posts on social media (Groshek & Al-Rawi, 2013; Kreiss, 2014), research that examines the media’s use of Twitter is still a relatively new phenomenon.

Twitter is a free service, which has many users, is simple to use, and has proven to be quite cost-effective (Lariscy, Avery, Sweetser, & Howes, 2009; Paterson, 2007; Wallsten, 2014). There is no consensus regarding what makes tweets and other social media posts (e.g. retweets, likes, and click-throughs) most effective or if Twitter is the most efficient method of reporting for journalists and other forms of media (Broersma & Graham, 2013; Parmelee, 2013). However, effectiveness has been measured in a number of ways that include soliciting feedback from other professionals with varying goals and objectives (O’Hallarn, Morehead, & Pribesh, 2014), and identifying the types of responses elicited by users in their tweets (Ceron & d’Adda, 2016).

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While newspapers' use of Twitter has been studied (e.g. Stamm, 2016), little has been done on its use by news agencies, which have a more international presence. A news agency is a newspaper cooperative or private service agency that has the resources to feed “maximally accurate, maximally fast, maximally factual information” to newspapers and other types of media (Boyer, 2011, p. 9). According to Paterson (2007), in 2000, only 23% of Americans received their news online, and this number grew to 60% less than five years later. Even then, AP and Reuters were seen as wielding a dominance in news coverage and were the two news sources that originated the most content viewed online.

Twitter (2017) reported that the use of embedded tweets resulted in one billion unique monthly visits to sites, including those of news agencies. Consequently, the reach of news agencies is truly global, as their content is regularly obtained and re-produced throughout the world on various platforms (Griessner, 2012; Paterson, 2007). Twitter allows its users, including news agencies, to use both images and text, as well as hashtags and URL links. The three news agencies examined in this study - Associated Press (U.S.), Reuters (U.K.), and Xinhua (China) - were selected because of their large distribution numbers, Twitter followers, and varying global locations.

Statement of Problem

With the rise of social media and other sources, web publishers and search engines “have replaced media companies as the most important information delivery mechanisms within the space of a decade” (Bell, 2016, p. 27). This situation has created a problem in which the media risk being left behind and becoming irrelevant (Hirst & Treadwell, 2011). According to the Pew Research Center (2015), 65% of American adults use social media, up from just 7% in 2005, and there is a rapidly growing trend of more people relying on social media to obtain information.

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Thus, this study analyzes how news agencies used Twitter to report on the 2016 U.S. presidential election and identifies the responses their tweets received from their readers and members of the general public. In turn, this allows media to connect with their readers and discover what works and what does not. This study addresses the issues of the decline of traditional media, due in part to their difficulty in moving content online (Rosenwald, 2016) and a growing distrust by the general public (Turcotte, York, Irving, Scholl, & Pingree, 2015). Literature discusses the following as being likely to impact the issue: the frame of tweets, what the media gives attention to, and the type of accompanying media used in tweets to enhance presentation of information.

Significance of Study

The contribution that this study will make to the fields of political communication and journalism cannot be over-emphasized. By exploring how Twitter is currently used by news agencies and how it can be best utilized in the field of journalism, the study will set a baseline for journalists to follow. The demands of timeliness, efficiency, and uniqueness are paramount for any organization that uses social media to obtain relevance and grow. Thus, media that apply the recommended approach derived from the results of this study will be able to utilize social media efficiently and drive traffic to their websites. Journalists and social media coordinators for media will be guided on what should be emphasized on Twitter to achieve the best results.

Additionally, findings from this study will allow researchers to uncover critical areas in journalistic usage of Twitter that have not been explored by previous research, especially at the international level, where a void still exists.

Chapter 2: Context

The context of the current study is comprised of the following: (1) Global significance of America's presidential elections; (2) Origin, structure, and reach of news agencies; and (3) Twitter usage by global news agencies.

Global Significance of America's Presidential Elections

As a global super power and country that is generally perceived as the custodian of democracy, the U.S. and its presidential election garners the world's attention. In the 2016 election, this was evident as interest began even before the first primary election, in the Iowa caucuses, which formed the build-up to the general election (Stamm, 2016). It was in these caucuses that 12 candidates vied for the Republican ticket, while three contended for the Democratic vote. The Republican candidates were Donald Trump, Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, Ben Carson, Rand Paul, Jeb Bush, Carly Fiorina, John Kasich, Mike Huckabee, Chris Christie, Rick Santorum, and Jim Gilmore. The Democratic candidates were Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, and Martin O'Malley.

The general election determined the 45th president and the 48th vice president of the United States. The Republican nominee was New York businessman Donald Trump, while the Democratic nominee was former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, also a former New York senator and First Lady of the United States. Third party candidates included New Mexico governor Gary Johnson on the Libertarian ticket, physician Jill Stein for the Green party, attorney Darrell Castle on the Constitution ticket, and former CIA operations officer Evan McMullin, who ran as an independent. In the early morning hours of November 9, Trump was declared the winner after he reached the needed 270 electoral votes from the electoral college. The electoral college, which is made up of 538 electors, is a process in which electors are chosen

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to vote for president and vice president (National Archives and Records Administration, 2017). Each state has an elector for every senator and house of representatives member it has, and when U.S. citizens vote for president, they are actually voting for an elector, who then casts a vote for the presidential candidate who won the popular vote in a winner-take-all system. The popular vote is the actual number of votes cast by citizens in their state. The 2016 election was only the fifth time in U.S. history that a presidential candidate lost the popular vote, but won the election by electoral votes, because in this case, Trump won numerous large states by narrow margins and Clinton won other large states by wide margins (Desilver, 2016).

Origin, Structure, and Reach of News Agencies

In terms of news agencies, their beginnings can be traced back to 1836 in France, with the birth of Agence Havas, the world's first true news agency. News agencies were created because, as UNESCO (1953) states, "It was clear that no publication in any country had the financial and technical means to gather, transmit and ensure the rapid reception of all the news henceforth demanded by its readers, whose curiosity was expanding with their education" (p. 9). News agencies, therefore, filled the void that newspapers individually could not in national and international coverage and at a fraction of the cost, through subscriptions. Six news agencies were originally classified as world agencies (including the Associated Press and Reuters (UNESCO, 1953) because of their reach and staff.

According to The Associated Press Stylebook (2015), the AP is a non-profit newsgathering cooperative of a large number of newspapers that was founded in 1846 and assumed its present form in 1900. It states that its content, from journalists in more than 280 locations in 110 countries, is viewed by half of the world's population. Over 15,000 news outlets

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use the AP's content and its journalists have won 52 Pulitzer Prize awards, of which 31 came in photography (AP, 2017).

Reuters Group was founded in 1850 and acquired by Thomson Corporation in 2008 to form Thomson Reuters (Reuters, 2017). Now a division of that parent company, Reuters News Agency employs more than 2,500 journalists and 600 photo journalists in 200 countries. The news agency states it has 2.2 million "unique news stories" and delivers more than one million news alerts each year. Its website maintains that its journalists adhere to the Reuters handbook of journalism, which consists of standards and values, a guide to operations, general style guide, sports style guide, specialized guidance, and links to other helpful materials.

The Xinhua News Agency is the state and worldwide news agency in China (Xinhua, 2017). The agency has 150 subsidiaries worldwide, including the Beijing head network, 32 channels within China and 10 websites. Originally founded as Hsin Hua in 1944 (UNESCO, 1953), the agency's website also states that it distributes more than 4,500 news items daily in Chinese, English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic and Japanese languages.

Twitter Usage by Global News Agencies

News agencies have been examined previously with other forms of media. Notably, Reuters' Twitter habits in covering the 2011 Egyptian Revolution showed that the news agency had a strong presence as one of the most influential individuals or organizations during that time period (Choudhary, Hendrix, Lee, Palsetia, & Liao, 2012). How Reuters became one of those influencers and what tactics it used, however, was not made clear.

Wasike (2013) explained how news agencies and other media should interact with their readers on Twitter to build trust and to learn more about what readers want. Their journalists are also extensions and should do the same, to show "the agency-client relationship with a human

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touch (p. 18).” Still, news agencies have mostly fallen in line with other media forms, in that they generally tweet as a form of one-way communication, with the dissemination of information in tweets and little to no response (Nee & Fusco, 2015).

Previous research has shown the impact of social media, including reach, in a country or region (Broersma & Graham, 2013; Marland, 2012; Van Noije, Kleinnijenhuis, & Oegema, 2008), but not on a global scale. This was also evident at the 2016 International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) annual conference in Leicester, United Kingdom (Weimann-Saks, Elishar-Malka, Avidar, & Ariel, 2016; Baek, Nha, & Woo, 2016; Eberwein, Kus, Porlezza, & Splendore, 2016; Sehl, Cornia, & Nielsen, 2016), where several manuscripts reported on the use of social media within a country or region, but not internationally. This evidence from IAMCR provided the motivation for this study - to fill the void in international research on media use of Twitter.

Chapter 3: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Social media has become, in the words of Colliander, Dahlén, and Modig (2015), a “cornerstone of the internet” (p. 181). For example, Twitter is ranked No. 16 by Alexa (2017) among the top 500 most popular sites on the internet. Journalists are arguably not doing their jobs if they do not incorporate Twitter into their daily activities. In terms of the theoretical framework and theories that guide the scholarship, the predominant theories have remained the same. In this case, agenda setting, framing theory, and diffusion of innovations have been used to explain the journalistic usage of Twitter.

Broersma and Graham (2013) suggested that journalists primarily use Twitter to find new sources, information, and quotes, as well as verify information from the public. Twitter also gives its everyday users, including journalists, celebrities, and politicians, the ability to reach large audiences and earn recognition through the retweets and likes of their posts.

Barnard (2016) found that Twitter is also used by journalists for information collection, news dissemination, sourcing, public engagement, brief note-taking, field meta-discourse, and other professional and personal actions and interactions. He claimed that Twitter has forced journalists to see the world as a networked makeup that includes interacting and engaging with sources, other journalists and professionals, and readers themselves. Put simply, there has been a convergence of traditional media and digital skills. Barnard also suggested that Twitter serves as an excellent source for building reputation and social capital and an elevated status in the minds of users.

According to Broersma and Graham (2013), Twitter has forced journalism to “redefine its relevance” (p. 461). This is in large part because of the loss of exclusive news, as many times information is tweeted directly from the source. Twitter gives a source power over journalists

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since they can frame a message how they want. However, journalists can still misconstrue that message since the source who created the tweet does not have to be contacted. In this way, there is often a blurred line between journalism professionals and citizen journalists. Twitter can be used as much for citizen journalism as mobilizing protests, crowdsourcing, and filtering information after it is published (Veenstra, Iyer, Park, & Alajmi, 2015). Twitter users continue to still use other primary news sources, such as television and print, to verify and locate additional information they read in the news.

Twitter has also created a divide in journalism, particularly between younger and older generations. According to Revers (2014), this split is due to what many journalists see as a lack of journalistic norms and behavior in tweeting, including a lack of objectivity, accountability, transparency, and neglecting fact-checking. Revers posited that Twitter is a growing source of participatory journalism and there is a selective reinforcement of journalistic norms. However, as a whole, Twitter has expanded journalistic forms since it “restores the centrality of the written word” (Ahmad, 2010, p. 146). Twitter assists journalists in serving functions that include marketing, collaborative research, and real-time reporting. As pointed out by Parmelee (2013), however, Twitter can be distracting and a waste of journalists’ time. Still, it is a preferred and simple method for journalists in finding and breaking news, crowdsourcing, and keeping tabs on important public figures.

Often, however, it is not journalists who are tweeting from the official accounts of news agencies, newspapers, and media companies. As Wasike (2013) suggested, a “social media editor,” or someone with a comparable title, is often tasked with what is tweeted from these accounts. This editor also chooses what events or news to post, the media forms within the tweet, how much to tweet, and the level of interaction that takes place with other Twitter users. Wasike

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also found that social media editors are officially or unofficially “liaisons” for a media company, and the overwhelming majority of their tweets consist of human interest stories, though each editor frames tweets differently. Social media editors tend to be “young, tech savvy and geared towards the tech world,” and often use TweetDeck, a site that makes tweets easier to find by organizing tweets using certain filters such as user names, hashtags or keywords, and phrases (p. 19).

Like print media, broadcast media also use Twitter for marketing and promotion, which research has found to increase television ratings (Wang, 2016). Television networks have utilized the interaction function and hyperlinks to connect users with live streams or other information, as well as hashtag promotion to organize their material. In many ways, according to Wang, the amount of tweets, retweets, responses, and public messages are better ratings indicators of a television stations’ ratings than television ratings themselves.

Many journalists still use their personal Twitter accounts to participate in social media and Twitter dialogue, however, these efforts create a loss of transparency and accountability (Lasorsa, Lewis, & Holton, 2012). This is in many ways a double standard, as journalists also try to maintain the same objectivity and gatekeeping rules on social media as they would in traditional print form. Lasorsa (2012) found that male and female journalists demonstrated small variations in their Twitter presence, topics of tweets, objectivity, and gatekeeping because both have been trained to carry out the same journalistic norms. However, women were identified as being more open and accountable in their tweets.

Although Twitter has gained popularity in the past decade, news agencies have had superiority in media for the past several decades. According to Paterson (2007), the early dominance of AP and Reuters among news agencies is the result of other news sources scaling

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back their coverage and resources, largely to save money. They have now come to rely on news agencies for their coverage. News agencies have a somewhat difficult business model, which makes it more difficult for them to adapt to social media (Griessner, 2012). This model consists of compiling and reporting on the news, then selling it to other forms of media. Because of this model, social media is a necessity for news agencies to stay relevant and connect with more readers, but if used incorrectly, could be competition against themselves and their clients. They have to walk a tight rope of giving away only bits and pieces of information via social media, while still creating a need for readers and news agencies' customers (other media forms) to pay for the news that keeps the business moving. Social media allows users to share and post information obtained by news agencies, but at the same time, pushes control more towards the user.

Previous research that has compared the dissemination of information via news agencies and Twitter indicates that news via other channels on Twitter is not typically faster. Petrovic et al. (2013) found that Twitter has proven to be a better source for smaller events that are often overlooked by newswire because there are more sources on Twitter. This research also pre-dates the advent of Periscope, which was launched in 2015, to broadcast events via real-time video through Twitter. Facebook also has the ability to do the same through Facebook Live, which also launched in 2015.

Some of the largest distributors of online news (e.g. Google) use the common practice of using aggregate news, or news that largely originates from news agencies and is then re-produced (Paterson, 2005). Aggregate news is defined as “conveying with little editing or original journalism the news stories written by wire services” (Paterson, 2005, p. 4). According to Paterson (1999), by 1999, there was roughly an even amount of this practice along with e-

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journalism, or original content, though the aggregate news industry has become more “mature” in that only one or two original sources provide all of the aggregate news. Often, this is from news agencies, which have the financial ability and manpower to cover live news on-site.

Internet portals, or home pages, which serve as a gateway to the rest of the web for users, began working directly with news agencies (Paterson, 2004). He also stated that Yahoo! was the first to strike a partnership with Reuters, a practice that has widely been copied since.

Agenda Setting Theory

Twitter also provides an outlet for journalists and other media to be selective of what and how events, subjects, and other topics should be covered. According to agenda setting theory, the media build and maintain public interest through selection of coverage, which in turn creates attention to issues addressed and allows the information covered to become part of public agenda over a period of time (McCombs, 1997). According to McCombs (1997), media in democratic societies often unintentionally set the agenda. Van Noije, Kleinnijenhuis, and Oegema (2008) note one primary difference in agenda building and agenda setting as the linking of media and political agendas.

McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver (2014) listed seven key characteristics of agenda setting, including basic agenda setting - the effect media agenda has on public agenda in terms of prominence of objects of attention, attribute agenda setting - attributes of the aforementioned objects, and network agenda setting - how a networked agenda by the media effects a networked public agenda. The other four characteristics are orientation, consequences that impact the aforementioned types of agenda setting, origins of media agenda and agenda melding. The latter is the combination of the media’s civic agenda and a person’s personal beliefs and experiences.

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There are two primary levels of agenda setting, as illustrated by Parmelee (2014). The first occurs when journalists and other media are influenced into covering topics they typically neglect to cover. The second level takes this a step further, as media are not only persuaded to cover topics, but are also enticed to portray them a certain way. Both levels include stories, press releases, photos, and other forms of media. Marland (2012) also claimed that journalists at small news outlets are more likely to be swayed by political leaders than those at larger outlets.

In closer examination of media using the second level of agenda setting, Kiouisis, Bantimaroudis, and Ban (1999) found that public perception of subjects, or in this case candidates, is directly correlated to media portrayal. Their research revealed that people in the general public are most concerned with corruptness or honesty in a candidate. If media portrayed a candidate as corrupt, it was likely the perception of that candidate was negative. Because so many forms of media re-produce information from news agencies, in many ways, news agencies set the agenda for all media. This leads to a need to understand which candidates have received the most attention from news agencies in their coverage, and if not only the U.S. presidential election was covered, what else received attention. The researcher is asking the following question to determine what candidates received the most coverage and what other topics news agencies have chosen to address:

RQ 1: How many times did each news agency tweet about each presidential candidate and about the election as a whole?

According to Wallsten (2014), Twitter can serve as a type of testing ground for media to determine what events to cover, the level of coverage to give them, and possibly, how to frame them based on the number of responses coverage draws. The more interaction a subject has, the more it will be tweeted about and covered. Wallsten (2014) also determined that the main reason

journalists and other media cite tweets is to substantiate their own claims and reports. Using agenda setting (McCombs, 1997) as a guide, this study intends to examine what part of the agenda set by news agencies from tweets leads to interaction from Twitter users. Therefore, the researcher posed the following question, collected from each tweet:

RQ 2: What types of tweets from each news agency garnered more response, by retweets or likes?

Lariscy, Avery, Sweetser, and Howes (2009) examined specifically how journalists use social media for agenda setting and found that at least at the time of publication, few journalists studied (only 7.5%) considered social media “very important” to their work. At this time, websites were viewed by journalists as most important (79%). However, social media, including Twitter, has boomed since the publication of the aforementioned research. Conway, Kenski, and Wang (2015) examined Twitter’s effects on the 2012 U.S. presidential primary elections, the first in which they claim “Twitter was heavily used” by journalists. They found that political candidates were influenced by news media on Twitter and vice versa, what they refer to as a “symbiotic relationship that varies in intensity and duration depending on the issues being analyzed” (p. 374). However, while candidates wield more power to set the public agenda and affect public perception, Conway, Kenski, and Wang (2015) contended that they still depend on media for legitimacy on various issues.

Skogerbø and Krumsvik (2015) argued that Twitter and other social media blend many spheres, such as public, private, and politics, as celebrities, politicians, and everyday people interact with each other, which includes people inciting others to mobilize and take action. They also use the term “mediatization” to refer to how media and politicians are dependent on each

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other. Politicians and their campaigns need media to garner attention, while media need politicians for sources and other content, which causes both to influence the other.

Strömbäck (2008) lists four phases of mediatization. The first occurs when the most important source of information between citizens and politicians is the media, and politics are mediated. The second phase takes place when media are independent from any government or politics and are run based on media logic, or their own judgments of what is right and wrong in many aspects. In the third phase, the media are more independent to the point where political and social actors have adapted to its practices. The fourth and final phase occurs when political and social actors internalize media logic and allow it to be part of the process of governing.

Media agenda has more of an effect on political agenda than political agenda has on the media (Van Noije, Kleinnijenhuis, & Oegema, 2008). People learn of political policies and performance through the media and report through research that the balance of power has tipped towards media agenda, at least in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, two countries observed, though there is also a noted convergence among both agendas. Seethaler and Melischek (2014) also pointed out that media have taken on a more powerful role as media logic has been increasingly adapted.

Bennett and Iyengar (2008), by contrast, contended that it is difficult for researchers to prove persuasion effects, in part “because discrete media audiences will tend to self-select for preference congruence” and “media users will be more attuned to resisting any messages that prove discrepant” (p. 725). They still acknowledged the importance of theories such as agenda setting, priming, and indexing. Later, Bennett and Iyengar (2010) responded to critiques, including that alternative news sources and other programming can shape political agenda, as well as social media and new media forms empower ordinary people to set the agenda. Bennett

and Iyengar (2010) point to the use of digital media, such as Twitter, to personalize aggregate information. They refer to this, however, as a one-step flow of communication, in lieu of the two-step flow method, which states that media messages are disseminated by opinion leaders and as a result, many people receive information second-hand (Katz, 1957).

Agenda setting has proven to be important not only for media, but for members of congress as well (Walker, 1977), in determining the scale of societal power and influence by legislators in “deciding what they will decide about” (p. 423). In addition, “organizations experiencing problems according to their own accepted performance measures may initiate a search for some solution to their difficulties which eventually leads to an alteration of the organizational agenda and perhaps eventually to the adoption of an innovation” (Walker, 1977, p. 444).

Framing Theory

Whether information is original or re-produced, it can be “framed” a certain way, including in how it is presented on social media, such as Twitter. Among the first to examine the concept of framing was Goffman (1974). He defined frames as mental schemas that facilitate the rapid processing of information in everyday life. Cultural contexts can also serve to limit or form a boundary for an individual regarding issues, thus the framing process can reflect dominant norms and values in a society. Entman (1993) also defined framing as a process of selecting “some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (p. 52) for whatever the topic might be. According to Entman (1993), frames define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies.

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As Hallahan (1999) alludes to, there is no concrete definition of framing, and variation stems from the type of research question posed through depth of analysis and interest, though this can also be pointed to as a strength. Hallahan posits seven models of framing: (1) framing of situations (everyday relationships), (2) attributes (emphasis on aspects of objects and people), (3) choices (negative or positive outcomes), and (4) actions (acting towards a goal dictated by positive and negative alternatives). The remaining models of framing are (5) issues (people contend for their situational definition), (6) responsibility (blame on internal and external factors), and (7) news (media use cultural themes in their coverage). For purposes of this study, the last model of framing will be most significant in gauging coverage of news agencies as part of the media.

A component of framing theory, framing analysis, is one method in examining the interaction of journalists, politicians, interest groups, and the general public, all part of the news discourse process (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Framing is “to view news texts as a system of organized signifying elements that both indicate the advocacy of certain ideas and provide devices to encourage certain kinds of audience processing of the texts” (p. 55). Goffman (1974) further explains that people attempt to provide clarity of life experiences by “framing” them or classifying them. The ability of media to frame people, as well as events in a certain light, has led the researcher to pose the following research question, in an attempt to understand one of the primary uses of Twitter by media:

RQ 3: How was each candidate portrayed and did portrayal differ between news agencies?

Chong and Druckman (2007) explained that the major factor in framing is that there are many ways to view a topic, through multiple lenses. Because of this, a topic can be interpreted

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and relayed differently, with varying outcomes for each interpretation. Chong and Druckman (2007) also formulated framing as “an attitude toward an object, in this view, is the weighted sum of a series of evaluative beliefs about that object. Specifically, $Attitude = v_i * w_i$, where v_i is the evaluation of the object on attribute i , and w_i is the salience weight ($w_i = 1$) associated with that attribute” (p. 105).

Because framing construes a topic or subject a certain way, it has an effect on public opinion. According to Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson (1997), there are different types of frames, such as strategic framing, in which information is disseminated based on how it will affect the topic or subject. Episodic frames pertain to a specific case or moment that embolden their audience to internalize the issue of social problems (Iyengar, 1991). The opposite is thematic frames, which look at an issue from a broader context and externalize social or economic problems.

Framing is practiced at both ends of the Twitter spectrum, by the media and by the subjects the media covers. One such example came from research of the 2012 U.S. presidential election, which was examined from both Facebook and Twitter by Groshek and Al-Rawi (2013). Research was from the perspective of the candidates’ Facebook pages as well as a specific Twitter hashtag, #election2012. This study found that neither candidate, in this case democrat Barack Obama nor republican Mitt Romney, was framed by the other in an inordinately negative light. Timing, however, is very important. As Kreiss (2014) reports, well-timed tweets that were also clever and relayed what a user’s (in this case Obama’s) followers needed to hear, drew the most response. These tweets also drew favorably framed press coverage, including times where tweets “can reshape the narratives of the professional press,” according to Kreiss (2014, p. 14).

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Regardless of the originator of the tweet, frames can have an immediate impact, though not always long-term effects. According to Druckman and Nelson (2003), frames are “conditional” in large part to informal discussions and deliberations people have with those around them. This helps lessen the impact of framing, as people take many opinions into account, conversely affecting their own. The level of effect can be traced in part to the credibility of the source. Druckman (2001) posits that people leave it to what he terms “ostensibly credible elites” to make sense of a subject, topic, or event. With this, people only believe news from sources they deem to be credible and believable.

Journalists and social media editors, coordinators, and the like are susceptible to public relations tactics of candidates, celebrities, and other subjects. According to Marland (2012), many news organizations fall victim to framing of public relations campaigns, due to limited access and resources, which only adds to skepticism from media, candidates, celebrities, and the general public. Marland (2012) also contended that journalists and media outlets use photos and information from public relations teams because of their ease of attainment.

Diffusion of Innovations Theory

This leads into the final theory examined, diffusion of innovations theory, in which Rogers (2003) explained how an innovation, such as Twitter, spreads, including why and the rate in which it spreads. First, he states that diffusion should be described as “the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system,” communication as “a process in which participants create and share information with one another in order to reach a mutual understanding,” and innovation as “an idea, practice, or object perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption” (pp. 5, 11)

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Diffusion of innovations is described by Rogers (2003) as occurring over time via multiple channels through a culture or social system. Acquisition of information lessens uncertainty and according to Rogers (2003), how an innovation is used and the rate it is accepted in a social system are based on relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability. Even when an innovation forms, it still goes through a process in which people and a culture or society determine if it will be used.

Rogers (2003) states that there is a five-step process to decide if an innovation is in or out, beginning with (1) knowledge (first exposure and understanding), (2) persuasion (formation of an opinion or attitude towards the innovation), (3) decision (choice to adopt or reject), (4) implementation (putting innovation to use), and (5) confirmation (reinforcement). Lastly, there is a rate of adoption, which explains the speed of innovation implementation, with other variables that enhance or prohibit the speed of adoption.

Another factor of diffusion of innovations, an s-curve of growth from early adopters, then the majority joining Twitter, was illustrated by Lee and Cho (2011). Twitter is also an example of interactive innovations, in which, because it is mobile, Twitter gains users at a faster rate. Research also found relative advantage, trialability, and observability in high amounts, in part due to Twitter's ease of use and practicality, which formed an overall positive attitude from users. In order to understand the adaptiveness of media (in this case news agencies), it would be helpful to look at previous research (Stamm, 2016) to determine if Twitter techniques have changed. This leads to the following research question:

RQ 4: In the past year, have there been any changes in the types and usage of accompanying media?

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In 2016, accompanying media included video, customizable links, photos, and hashtags (Stamm, 2016), though Twitter has added innovations or additions since, as this study will point out. Hashtags, however, remain a vital tool on Twitter, of which Chang (2010) refers to as “a tagging convention” as users try to associate an event or even specific tweets with a specific word or phrase that makes a tweet more discoverable for other users. Tweets using a hashtag are aggregated into a stream viewed on Twitter or other third-party tweet organizers, such as TweetDeck, and those hashtags used most appear on Twitter as a trending topic. Chang (2010) points out that those who create a hashtag can be labeled as innovators because they attract large audiences, as well as influence them, even if it is something as minor as re-using the hashtag. Convincing others tweeting similarly or on the same topics to use a certain hashtag might be the biggest challenge, however, according to Chang (2010).

Whether it is hashtags or creating something else that catches on with other Twitter users, according to Gulati and Williams (2010), it is important to be an early adopter and regularly and comprehensively use the innovation once it has been adopted and accepted. However, one variable for determining adoption might or might not determine implementation and vice versa. Wamba and Carter (2013) point to characteristics influencing innovation adoption, such as relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, organizational readiness, organizational size, organizational innovativeness, intensity of competition, position in a network, and geographic positioning. Twitter provides real-time information, be it news or information about its users such as likes and dislikes. It also provides a way to engage with other users and follow up on their already posted information.

Shi, Rui, and Winston (2014) used diffusion of innovations, as well as social exchange theory, as a guide for retweets, a content-sharing function of Twitter, in which a large audience

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can be reached. They cited Osama bin Laden's death, when news was first posted via Twitter and reached a growing audience 1 hour and 10 minutes before the news was announced by President Barack Obama. Twitter, however, is unlike many real-life human social systems (Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010). Reciprocity is low, the follower distribution is non-power-law, and it also has a short, yet effective diameter. The spreading of information through retweets also reaches a high number, such as 1,000 according to Kwak et al. (2010), and is an example of quick diffusion of information, as retweets occur even more frequently further away from the original source.

In terms of explaining the rejection of an innovation, Coursaris, Yun, and Sung (2010) posited that diffusion of innovations does not address that notion, but does point to the increased chance for innovativeness from a perceived popular user. It is much easier for word to spread when it comes from a user with millions of Twitter followers than someone with only a couple hundred. Coursaris et al. (2010) also demonstrated diffusion of innovations qualities such as relative advantage (spreading information through those you know), compatibility (catering usage to multiple platforms and third-party applications such as TweetDeck), complexity (Twitter's ease to understand because of clear interface and message length), and trialability (tweets show in a user's newsfeed as a way for users to try a hashtag or other innovation in a tweet).

Much of the decision in the social system of Twitter on whether or not an innovation such as a hashtag or other accompanying media is accepted and spread is determined by what Bakshy, Hofman, Mason, and Watts (2011) called "influencers," or people who effect the spread of information in a disproportionate manner. Regardless of who the person is, an ordinary person or a celebrity, the setup of Twitter forces them to communicate in the same manner: tweeting to

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followers. However, influence is also determined by the type of content posted, such as a video, that might draw more attention, than a link to a blog. Individuals are not necessarily favored or distinguished on Twitter (Tinati, Carr, Hall, & Bentwood, 2012). User classifications include retweets, which also determine a user's influence on others, as well as a user's status.

This influence reaches “a ‘tipping point,’” according to Barnes and Böhringer (2011), “whereby a certain minimum number of users have adopted an innovation, which then feeds into rapid continued adoption of the new technology, at which juncture further adoption is self-sustaining” (p. 3). This is aided by universal access, which Twitter has, as a free medium. The growth of Twitter itself is due to the adoption and acceptance by a still growing communication network that has proven the benefits to past and future users. All five characteristics (relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability) can also point to the growth of social media as a whole, though that growth was not immediately seen in business and education (Peslak, Ceccucci, & Sendall, 2010).

Influence in how an innovation spreads and is adopted also comes from opinion leaders, and according to Van Eck, Jager, and Leeflang (2011), information disseminates quicker, the product itself scatters more, and adoption takes place more frequently when opinion leaders are involved. Their influence, however, stems from their ability to judge quality, and the more innovative an opinion leader is in his or her behavior, the more an innovation will be adopted. As reported by Van Eck et al. (2011), this extends to how popular online applications, such as Twitter, become popular and accepted in a social system. Opinion leaders are also “made” and formed unwittingly, as they find common ground and stand out with their thoughts and opinions (Mak, 2008). Watts and Dodds (2007), however, argue that what they refer to as “influentials” are not as vital in their role of early adopter or innovator. They have a slightly better than

average chance at initiating a horde or mass number of people and are not proportional to those they directly influence.

Diffusion of innovations has also been used to show how journalists themselves have adapted to Twitter use. Swasy (2016) found that journalists who at first rejected Twitter in their professional use have often changed that line of thinking, not common in diffusion of innovations. According to Swasy (2016), journalists see the benefits, such as a growing number of followers that has also been boosted by the still growing number of smart phones that make Twitter mobile. However, like any other organization, senior management needs to adopt the innovation for others to see the benefit and follow suit.

While the relation of diffusion of innovations to journalists and Twitter still appears to be relatively new, judging on the small amount of research found, Singer (2004) used diffusion of innovations to dissect a still ongoing occurrence of convergence, or the merging of multiple forms of media, such as television broadcast and newspapers. She found that complexities in social systems, a key component of the theory, influence how successful a convergence process is. Interpersonal communication is also among the key attributes to success.

Using diffusion of innovations (Rogers, 2003) as a guide for what attracts users on Twitter, how news agencies have adopted to Twitter, and how that influences what they tweet, this study will look to identify the human element of Twitter usage by media using a grounded theory approach. Therefore, this study asks the following research questions:

RQ 5: What motivated the news agencies to take the route that they did in their usage of Twitter?

RQ 6: How does the route taken explain interaction from their Twitter followers and other users?

Chapter 4: Methodology

This study employed a mixed methods approach to examine how news agencies covered the 2016 U.S. presidential election. This approach allows for a more thorough evaluation and understanding of news agencies' use of Twitter that takes the human element into account, as individuals control what is tweeted. Using mixed methods allows for “real-life contextual understandings, multi-level perspectives, and cultural influences,” and “employing rigorous quantitative research assessing magnitude and frequency of constructs and rigorous qualitative research exploring the meaning and understanding of constructs” (Creswell, Klassen, Clark, & Smith, 2011, p. 4).

This study was completed in two phases. The first phase used quantitative content analysis, while the second phase used qualitative in-depth interviews in which interview questions approved by Radford University's Internal Review Board February 17, 2017 (Appendix A) were asked to provide further clarification for the results obtained from the content analysis. Each of the three news agencies examined was contacted by email and phone, and invitations were extended to the individuals responsible for tweeting on each news agency's primary Twitter account. One interview was conducted via phone, while two were conducted through email. The interviews were conducted using a grounded theory approach in which follow-up questions were asked based on participant responses to the initial question. Put simply, this approach was used to provide further clarity on various answers and to probe for more explanation of data obtained through content analysis.

This study analyzed how international news agencies used Twitter to portray presidential candidates and the accompanying media they used to cover the general election of a new United States president, November 7, 2016; the day before the election, November 8, 2016, the day of

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the election; and November 9, 2016, the day following the election. The response each tweet elicited, in terms of retweets and likes, was also considered to determine what approaches were most effective for the news agencies. A total of 1,078 tweets were coded from the three news agencies observed ($n = 439$ by the Associated Press, $n = 403$ from Reuters, and $n = 236$ from Xinhua).

Quantitative: Content Analysis

A content analysis was used in this study due to its ability to serve as a systematic and objective research methodology (Kerlinger, 2000). This method was also preferred due to its reliability and ability to produce conclusive data (Krippendorff, 1980). While Wimmer and Dominick (2006) suggested that studying online content allows the researcher to search and obtain large amounts of information, they cautioned researchers to focus on uniformity and to determine a specific unit of analysis. Thus, the tweets examined in this study were copied and pasted into a Word document within a week of being posted, to record them and avoid their deletion.

The codebook used in this study allowed researchers to code for the number of tweets that mentioned each candidate as the primary subject (RQ 1), how the candidate was framed in the tweet (RQ 2), and how many retweets and likes each tweet received (RQ 3).

In constructing the codebook for this paper (see Appendix B), a dual purpose was to account not only for how the election was covered and the candidates were portrayed via Twitter, but if a news agency did not provide election coverage, to determine what type of news it believed to be more important to cover. The candidates were anticipated to be covered most, because during an election year, they are more scrutinized more than even the U.S. president at that time (Gans, 1979). The tweet itself took form as the independent variable, while the

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dependent variable consisted of 11 items coded for: (1) news agency, (2) if the topic of the tweet was the U.S. presidential election, (3) the topic of the tweet if it was not the election, (4) the candidate who was the subject of the tweet, (5) the portrayal of that candidate, (6) the frame of the tweet, (7) the accompanying media used in the tweet, (8) the type of retweet (if applicable), (9) the number of retweets the tweet received, (10) the number of likes the tweet received, and (11) the day the tweet was posted. Several topics were coded for if the U.S. presidential election was not the tweet topic: sports, national and world news including crime, health, feature/entertainment, U.S. and international politics, agency promotion, education, and other news that did not fall into those categories.

A tweet was coded for by the candidate who was the subject, if the tweet was about the U.S. presidential election. There could be a small number of occasions when more than one candidate was mentioned in a tweet. In this case, if one of the candidates was shown in a photo, tweeted at, shown in multiple instances besides a mention, or the content slanted towards a candidate, that person was coded for as the subject. If a candidate was not mentioned or it was not clear who the subject was, the tweet was coded as “general election.” That was also the case when no candidate was mentioned, but the tweet still pertained to the U.S. presidential election. The candidates from the two major parties (in this case Trump and Clinton) were expected to be tweeted about most (Gans, 1979).

Next, how the candidate was generically portrayed (positive, neutral, negative, or not available if the subject is not the U.S. presidential election) was coded for (Wasike, 2013). This was determined by keywords that are positive (e.g. “win,” “vindication,” and “congratulated”) and negative (e.g. “against,” “protest,” and “reckless”) and accompanying media depictions such as a photo of a candidate giving a thumbs-up in a positive connotation or a video of protestors

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angrily yelling in a negative depiction (see Appendix C). These were all part of issue-specific news frames or frames that were applicable towards specific events and topics (deVreese, 2005). The frame of the tweet was also coded for and was designated as episodic (the tweet focused on a specific event or episode and could be discrete or static with no context provided), thematic (the opposite of episodic in which there was a broader context of issues), or conflict (the tweet focused on the conflict between two or more items or actors). This was compared against previous research by Iyengar (1991), in which daily news coverage showed a preference towards episodic news or events only and not in a broader sense, or thematic context. Conflict was measured to determine, as stated by Neuman (1992), if the media displayed a “game interpretation of the political world as an ongoing series of contests, each with a new set of winners and losers” p. 64).

Taken into account next was whether or not a news agency used any accompanying media within a tweet, such as a URL link, photo, video, map, hashtag, other user mention, a screenshot, poll, GIF, Vine, or any other media not mentioned. More common was a mix of two or more of these media, which were labeled as “combination.” Twitter cards are not transferrable to a Word document, so the appearance of this media was taken note of in the days following the election.

Retweets, or modified tweets in their original form, were also coded for to account for if a news agency used them and if it was “internal” or from a staff member or another account owned/maintained by the news agency, or “external,” meaning it came from an outside source. The response of a tweet by other users was also coded for, in the number of retweets and likes. Previous research has indicated that negative news garners the most feedback, in the form of retweets and likes (Hansen, Arvidsson, Nielsen, Colleoni, & Etter, 2011). The number of

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retweets and likes measured in this study was compared to the “positive” or “negative” connotation associated with each tweet. A variable for the day the tweet was posted was later added, to account for changes within the 3-day observed time frame. Pearson’s chi-squared non-parametric test was used to calculate the results for each quantitative research question.

Reliability is paramount to any content analysis. Wimmer and Dominick (2006) posited that “if a content analysis is to be objective, its measures and procedures must be reliable” (p. 165). That occurs when comparable results are found by others when using the same measures and procedures. Furthermore, these researchers claimed that reliability is achieved when category limits are characterized in detail, coders have adequate training, and a pilot study is undertaken.

A graduate student was recruited to assist in coding for the current study. The student received a copy of the codebook and was trained by telephone and email to go over any instructions and discrepancies in the codebook. As the principal investigator, 100 tweets were coded along with the graduate student, 34 from the Associated Press, 33 from Reuters, and 33 from Xinhua, beginning with the most recent tweets each news agency tweeted within the time frame examined.

Two coders performed the coding for this study because, as Neuendorf (2002) explained, “even if the principal investigator does all of the coding, a reliability check with a second coder is needed” (p. 142). Krippendorff’s alpha was used for inter-coder reliability because other methods are not equally reliable in all situations and Krippendorff’s alpha is an “all-purpose reliability measure” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 168).

Alpha was calculated by the program “R,” to compare the researcher’s data with the graduate student’s data. “R,” however, is only able to calculate Krippendorff’s Alpha for each

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category, not an entire data set. As a result, the 10 variables coded for were divided into categories of full agreement, slight disagreement, and vast disagreement. The researcher trained the graduate student by telephone on Feb. 4, 2017 for approximately 90 minutes to describe what to look for in coding, the differences in the variables, and to clarify any questions the student had. The preliminary Alpha results were poor, partly the result of the student's unfamiliarity with aspects of Twitter and to poor training. Further training between the researcher and student took place on March 12, 2017 for approximately one hour. The variables "agency," "retweet type," "retweets," and "likes" were in full agreement, as anticipated, due to the direct listing of all four within each tweet. Labeled as a slight agreement because of the subjectivity of the variable were if the subject pertained to the U.S. presidential election ($\alpha = .89$), topic ($\alpha = .89$), and candidate ($\alpha = .89$). The variables thought to be in vast disagreement because of the large amount of subjectivity still scored high, including candidate portrayal ($\alpha = .70\%$), tweet frame ($\alpha = .75$), and accompanying media ($\alpha = .84$). The variable for day was added after inter-coder reliability took place, but was thought to be in full agreement, because the date is listed on each tweet.

Qualitative: In-Depth Interviews

Grounded theory, or the discovery of theory through data, allows for the generation of theory through data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), in this case a content analysis. The purpose of grounded theory is to "forestall the opportunistic use of theories that have dubious fit and working capacity" (p. 4) and in "generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research" (p. 6).

In exploration of grounded theory, in-depth interviews help to provide a rounded view of the problems and to explore different ideas (Anstead & O'Loughlin, 2015). Grounded theory

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also helps in constructing a codebook and using that to formulate interview questions as “data are coded into as many categories as possible with continual adjustments as the researchers go through the process” to allow for connections to be made between the coding and interview subjects (Arceneaux & Weiss, 2010, p. 1265).

In-depth interviews were performed for this study, in accordance with Radford University’s Institutional Review Board, obtained Feb. 17, 2017. Interviews are the most common form of qualitative method in the study of social sciences and are needed to put a person’s experiences in context and to discover how these experiences have shaped that person (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000).

Following a request to interview (Appendix IV) and obtained signatures of interviewees via a consent form (Appendix V), a set of pre-determined questions (Appendix VI) provided a baseline (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and the interviews took place via telephone and email. The approaches varied, based on time allotted by the interview subject, as well as a language barrier and one granted condition of anonymity. This anonymity was achieved and maintained due to a mutual contact who acted as the gatekeeper and who brokered the interview each way through email, so as not to reveal the interview subject’s identity. The researcher came up with 12 pre-determined questions, in order to provide more clarity on how each news agency uses Twitter, as well as provide a more accurate reading of the data obtained through the content analysis. These pre-determined questions, as well as the follow-up questions asked, addressed RQ 4, RQ 5, and RQ 6. In both email and phone interviews, a grounded theory approach was used (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This consisted of providing follow-up questions to responses made by the interview subjects, in order to dig deeper into subject matter and obtain more information.

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The interview conducted via telephone, with AP social media editor Eric Carvin, was recorded for clarity and accuracy. It took place at 1:10 p.m. on March 20, 2017 and lasted approximately 20 minutes, due to work obligations of the interview subject. Interviews provide more detail, certainty, and allow for a better connection between the interviewer and subject (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). In this case, interviews are also the only way to shed light on why the news agencies' social media coordinators tweeted in the manner they did. As Wimmer and Dominick (2006) pointed out, however, generalizability, different interpretations, and interviewer bias are also concerns, though pre-determined questions help to alleviate the latter.

Cassandra Garrison, Reuters' social media and live news editor, said an interview via email was the only way she could take part, due to time constraints. The interview with Xinhua was requested to be via email and anonymously due to several concerns of the interviewee for the individual's job because of the nature of the governmental control of the news agency, as well as the icy relationship with the United States government. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the ruling party of China, has allowed its media to act as a "watchdog" against lower-ranking officials, but has been predominantly disallowed to report on misconduct of high-ranking officials in the government, though what is allowed and what is not allowed regularly changes (Lorentzen, 2014). The CCP has made a number of restrictions on freedom of speech, in what has been explained by many as a way to separate itself from western democratic societies (Yang, 2016), including through state-run Xinhua. Compounding restrictions, according to Woodman (2015), are that something said or written by one person, could land the individual in jail, while the same speech said by another person in another context is considered acceptable.

Initial questions for the Xinhua interview subject were emailed to the mutual contact on March 10, 2017. No translation was needed, as a response and initial answers from the interview

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subject were received via email from the mutual contact in English, albeit some broken English, on March 16, 2017. These answers raised a number of other questions, and for more clarity and understanding, follow-up questions were emailed back to the mutual contact, for the interview subject on March 16, 2017. A response to the follow-up questions was received via email from the mutual contact on March 19, 2017.

In preparing for in-depth interviews, the researcher encountered a handful of challenges, including finding the correct people to contact at each news agency. For the AP and Reuters, after making phone calls to call centers located through a Google search, the researcher was passed through the chain of command to the person in charge of social media at both. The researcher was instructed to email the details of the request, including the purpose of the study, what type of questions would be asked, and how answers would be used. Both social media leaders initially declined to be interviewed, which prompted the researcher to track down the leaders through the same chain of calling command, to speak directly to each person. After further explanation of the study, the contact at the AP, Eric Carvin, agreed to a phone interview when he could free time in his schedule, while the contact at Reuters, Cassandra Garrison, agreed to an interview through email, the only method that adhered to her work schedule.

The researcher ran into numerous roadblocks in attempts to reach Xinhua, including dead ends by email, phone, and Skype. The researcher asked a Chinese academic scholar for guidance, and through that person, was pointed to an employee of Xinhua who was willing to participate in the interview on the condition of anonymity. The researcher emailed the list of pre-approved questions to the academic source, who passed them on to the Xinhua employee. There was an apparent language barrier, however, as the employee said in response that the individual did not understand two of the questions asked.

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Using a combination of both the quantitative and qualitative methodology provided a series of results. Those outcomes are listed in chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Quantitative Results

For the quantitative portion of this study, four research questions were posed. The focus of the research questions included how often the news agencies tweeted about the presidential candidates, the response their tweets received, how the candidates were portrayed, and the usage of accompanying media in the tweets. Each question and the accompanying results are presented in the following narrative.

RQ 1: How many times did each news agency tweet about each presidential candidate and about the election as a whole?

Of the total number of tweets from the news agencies ($N = 1,078$), nearly one-third ($n = 326$, 30%) pertained to the U.S. presidential election. Trump ($n = 159$, 15%) garnered the most tweets of the candidates, followed by Clinton ($n = 59$, 5.5%). The only other candidate tweeted about was Evan McMullin ($n = 1$), by the Associated Press. That tweet occurred the day before the election and consisted of the text, “For half a century, Utah has picked a Republican candidate for president. That could change Tuesday,” along with a link to a story written by the AP and a video of McMullin campaigning to a crowd, while a graphic displayed his credentials. The general election, or the election as a whole ($n = 87$, 8.1%), was also included. As noted in Figure 1, the majority of tweets fell under “N/A.” This category comprised tweets that did not pertain to the U.S. presidential election.

Over the 3-day period, the Associated Press ($N = 153$) tweeted more about Trump ($n = 67$, 43.7%) than Clinton ($n = 40$, 26.1%). This was also more than the election as a whole or in which the subject was undeterminable ($n = 45$, 29.4%), in addition to its lone tweet about McMullin. Reuters ($N = 138$) also tweeted far more about Trump ($n = 79$, 57.2%) than Clinton ($n = 35$, 25.4%) and the election as a whole or where the subject was not distinguishable ($n = 24$, 17.4%). Lastly, Xinhua ($N = 35$), tweeted about the election as a whole or where the subject was

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not clearly one of the candidates ($n = 18, 51.4\%$) more than Trump ($n = 13, 37.1\%$) or Clinton ($n = 4, 11.4\%$).

Pearson's chi square showed Trump was disproportionately tweeted about in comparison to Clinton during the observed time frame. The difference was found to be statistically significant ($\chi^2(8) = 49.95 < .001$).

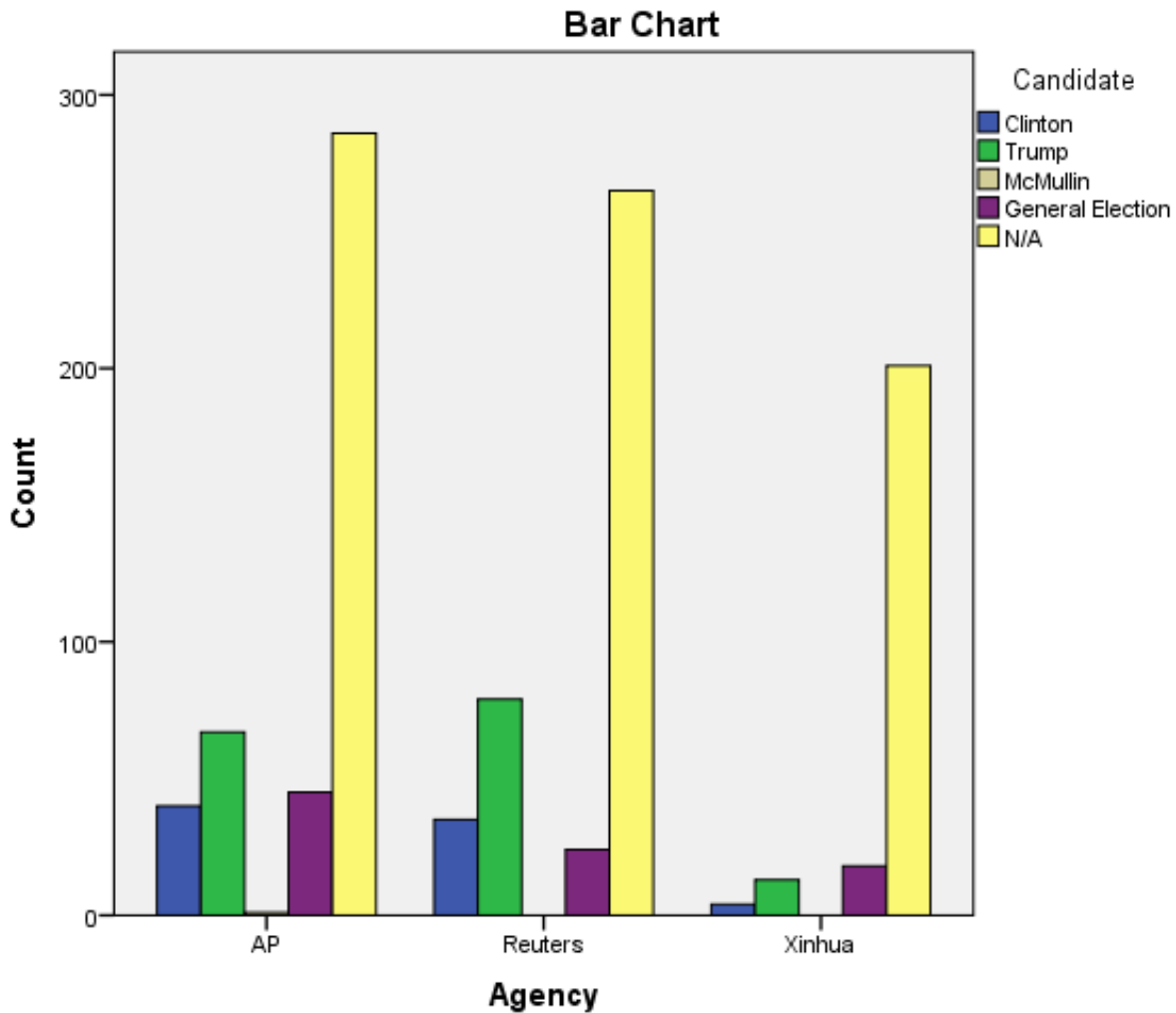


Fig. 1: Number of tweets about each candidate and the general election

RQ 2: What types of tweets from each news agency garnered more response, by retweets or likes?

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Of the total number of tweets ($N = 1,078$), the tweet that garnered the most retweets ($n = 133,330$) and likes ($n = 114,015$), by a landslide, came from the AP, which declared Trump “elected president of the United States.” This tweet featured only a photo and graphic of “president-elect Donald Trump,” along with the text “BREAKING: Donald Trump is elected president of the United States” (Appendix III).

The tweet that received the next highest number of both retweets from the overall total ($N = 1,078$) in terms of retweets ($n = 25,147$) and likes ($n = 30,461$) was the AP’s declaration of Trump as the winner of Pennsylvania’s election. The AP had the five tweets that received the most retweets and the six tweets that received the highest number of likes. In both cases, all had the U.S. presidential election as the topic of the tweets.

The tweet not about the election that received the most number of retweets ($n = 3,214$) and likes ($n = 2,660$) was by Reuters, labeled as “international news.” It contained the text, “JUST IN: Russia’s Putin congratulates Trump on U.S. election victory,” and contained two photos, one of Putin and one of Trump. Of the tweets that received more than one thousand retweets ($N = 45$), all came from AP ($n = 38$, 84.4%) and Reuters ($n = 7$, 15.6%). Of the tweets that obtained more than one thousand likes ($N = 39$), the overwhelming majority came from AP ($n = 37$, 94.9%) in comparison to Reuters ($n = 2$, 5.1%). Xinhua’s most responded-to tweet received much fewer retweets ($n = 394$) and likes ($n = 809$). That tweet was labeled as “other news” and contained a video, along with the text, “This is not a PC game. Chinese prestigious missile maker shows animation featuring how its products function in combat.”

The number of tweets that received more than one thousand retweets ($N = 45$) were labeled with the topics of the U.S. presidential election ($n = 33$, 73.3%), international news ($n = 5$, 11.1%), U.S. politics ($n = 4$, 8.9%), U.S. news ($n = 2$, 4.4%), and nature/weather ($n = 1$,

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2.2%). The number of tweets that received more than one thousand likes ($N = 39$) were labeled with the topics of the U.S. presidential election ($n = 33$, 84.6%), U.S. politics ($n = 3$, 7.7%), education ($n = 1$, 2.6%), U.S. news ($n = 1$, 2.6%), and international news ($n = 1$, 2.6%).

In terms of the tweets that received more than one thousand retweets about a presidential candidate ($N = 33$), there was a slight edge towards Trump ($n = 17$, 51.5%) over Clinton ($n = 15$, 45.4%). For likes ($N = 33$), Trump ($n = 17$, 51.5%) again had a slim advantage over Clinton ($n = 15$, 45.4%). Tweets with a positive portrayal were more well-received, based on retweets and likes, including 16 of those 17 tweets about Trump and 14 of those tweets about Clinton. One tweet about Clinton that received over one thousand retweets and likes was labeled as neutral, which featured only the text by the AP minutes before Trump was declared the election winner: “BREAKING: Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta says her campaign will have nothing to say tonight about state of race” (Appendix III). One about Trump was labeled as negative that received over one thousand retweets and likes, which had the text: “From San Francisco to Austin to New York, thousands protest election of Donald Trump,” along with a link to an AP story and photo of a large gathering of protestors (Appendix III).

Of the total number of tweets coded for framing of the U.S. presidential election that received over one thousand retweets ($N = 33$), nearly all of them were coded as having an episodic frame or focus on a specific event or episode ($n = 30$, 93.7%) as opposed to a thematic frame or opposite of episodic in which there is a broader context of issues ($n = 2$, 6.3%). In terms of likes ($N = 32$), there was again an overwhelming majority with an episodic frame ($n = 29$, 90.6%) over a thematic frame ($n = 3$, 9.4%). There were no tweets that had over one thousand retweets or likes that contained a conflict frame.

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Finally, in terms of accompanying media, the main examples observed were Twitter cards and a combination of other media. Twitter cards are a recent innovation by Twitter, in which a user can have a webpage “whitelisted” free with Twitter. This allows any user to copy and paste that URL when posting a tweet, which Twitter automatically converts to a “card” that includes photos, video, and audio and does not count towards the 140-character limit. The tweet that received the most retweets and likes overall was the only tweet with over one thousand retweets that contained simply a photo (2.2%). Of the tweets with more than one thousand retweets ($N = 45$), there was little use of the Twitter card ($n = 1$, 2.2%), while the majority contained a combination of other media, which included URL links, photos, videos, and GIFs ($n = 31$, 68.9%). There was also a small number that contained only text ($n = 8$, 17.8%) and even fewer that were listed as “N/A” because it was a retweet by one of the news agencies ($n = 3$, 6.7%) or did not contain any form of media aside from text ($n = 1$, 2.2%).

For the tweets that received over one thousand likes ($N = 39$), there was again little use of the Twitter card ($n = 1$, 2.5%), a majority used a combination of other media ($n = 26$, 66.7%), a small amount with text only ($n = 6$, 15.4%), and slightly less than those labeled “N/A” because the tweet was a retweet and did not originate from the news agency ($n = 6$, 15.4%).

RQ 3: How was each candidate portrayed and did portrayal differ between news agencies?

Of the total number of tweets pertaining to the U.S. presidential election ($N = 326$), the most positive tweets were about Trump ($n = 99$, 30.1%), nearly double that of Clinton ($n = 50$, 15.3%). The lone tweet about another candidate, McMullin ($n = 1$, .003%), was also positive. Conversely, the most negative tweets also contained Trump ($n = 23$, 7.1%) as the subject, compared to Clinton ($n = 8$, 2.5%). Pearson’s chi square showed Trump received predominantly

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more positive tweets than Clinton from the three news agencies during the observed time period. The difference was found to be statistically significant ($\chi^2(12) = 1,433.97 < .001$).

Among the tweets about the U.S. presidential election made by the news agencies (N = 326), the AP made more positive tweets ($n = 81, 24.8\%$) than either Reuters ($n = 66, 20.2\%$) or Xinhua ($n = 6, 1.8\%$). Reuters ($n = 20, 6.1\%$) made the most negative tweets between its counterparts, Xinhua ($n = 11, 3.4\%$) and AP ($n = 10, 3.1\%$). Pearson's chi square also illustrated the disproportionate positivity in tweets made by the AP during the observed time period. The difference was found to be statistically significant ($\chi^2(6) = 49.91 < .001$). The portrayal of each candidate and the U.S. presidential election in general are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Portrayal of each candidate in tweets by three observed news agencies November 7, 2016 – November 9, 2016.

<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Negative</u>	<u>Total</u>
Donald Trump	30.1% n = 99	11.3% n = 37	7.1% n = 23	48.8% n = 159
Hillary Clinton	15.3% n = 50	6.4% n = 21	2.5% n = 8	24.2% n = 79
Evan McMullin	.3% n = 1	0% n = 0	0% n = 0	.3% n = 1
General Election	.009% n = 3	22.7% n = 74	3.1% n = 10	26.7% n = 87

Note: (N = 326).

To understand the full portrayal of candidates, the researcher also examined portrayal by news agency. The portrayal of tweets about candidates and the U.S. presidential election in general by each news agency are illustrated in Table 2.

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Table 2

Types of portrayal tweets made by three observed news agencies November 7, 2016 – November 9, 2016.

<u>News Agency</u>	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Negative</u>	<u>Total</u>
AP	24.8% n = 81	19% n = 62	3.1% n = 10	46.9% n =153
Reuters	20.2% n = 66	16% n = 52	6.1% n = 20	42.3% n =138
Xinhua	1.8% n = 6	5.5% n = 18	3.4% n = 11	10.8% n =35

Note: (N = 326).

The researcher also considered the difference in portrayal by day to account for changes during the observation period. Of the tweets about the U.S. presidential election made on November 7, 2016 (N = 47), Clinton received the most tweets ($n = 16$, 34%), the majority of which were positive ($n = 11$, 23.4%) as opposed to neutral ($n = 4$, 8.5%) or negative. Trump ($n = 7$, 14.9%) had slightly more tweets with a positive portrayal ($n = 4$, 8.5%) than neutral ($n = 3$, 6.4%), while the general election itself had all tweets with a neutral ($n = 22$, 42.8%) or positive portrayal ($n = 1$, 2.1%). Pearson's chi square showed Clinton received disproportionately more positive and overall tweets than Trump on November 7. The difference was found to be statistically significant ($\chi^2(12) = 414.57 < .001$).

The researcher took into account the day each tweet was posted, to determine if portrayal changed among the 3 days observed. The portrayal of tweets about candidates and the U.S. presidential election in general on November 7, 2016 from the three news agencies are illustrated in Table 3.

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Table 3

Portrayal of each candidate in tweets by three observed news agencies of U.S. presidential election on November 7, 2016.

<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Negative</u>	<u>Total</u>
Donald Trump	8.5% n = 4	6.4% n = 3	0% n = 0	14.9% n = 7
Hillary Clinton	23.4% n = 11	8.5% n = 4	2.2% n = 1	34% n = 16
Evan McMullin	2.1% n = 1	0% n = 0	0% n = 0	2.1% n = 1
General Election	0% n = 0	46.8% n = 22	2.1% n = 1	48.9% n = 23

Note: (N = 47).

For the tweets about the election made on November 8, 2016 (N = 129), Trump received the most tweets ($n = 51, 39.5\%$), with predominantly positive portrayal ($n = 38, 29.5\%$) and some neutral ($n = 9, 7\%$) and negative ($n = 4, 3.1\%$) portrayal. Clinton ($n = 30, 23.3\%$) still received nearly all positive tweets ($n = 28, 21.7\%$), along with a few neutral ($n = 2, 1.6\%$) and none negative, while the general election collected mostly neutral tweets ($n = 41, 31.8\%$), along with negative ($n = 5, 3.9\%$) and positive ($n = 2, 1.6\%$). Pearson's chi square further showed Trump received disproportionately more positive and overall tweets than Clinton on November 8. The difference was found to be statistically significant ($\chi^2(9) = 704.54 < .001$).

To determine if there was variance in portrayal over the 3 days observed, the researcher also took into account day 2, November 8, 2016. The portrayal of tweets about candidates and the U.S. presidential election in general on that day from the three news agencies are illustrated in Table 4.

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Table 4

Portrayal of each candidate in tweets by three observed news agencies of U.S. presidential election on November 8, 2016.

<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Negative</u>	<u>Total</u>
Donald Trump	29.4% n = 38	7% n = 9	3.1% n = 4	39.5% n = 51
Hillary Clinton	21.7% n = 28	1.6% n = 2	0% n = 0	23.3% n = 30
General Election	1.6% n = 2	31.8% n = 41	3.9% n = 5	37.2% n = 48

Note: (N = 129).

For tweets about the election made on November 9, 2016 (N = 150), Trump again received an inordinate number of tweets ($n = 101, 67.3\%$), with a majority positive portrayal ($n = 57, 38\%$) and slightly more neutral ($n = 25, 16.7\%$) than negative ($n = 19, 12.7\%$) portrayal. Clinton ($n = 33, 22\%$) received more neutral tweets ($n = 15, 10\%$), than positive ($n = 11, 7.3\%$) and negative ($n = 7, 4.7\%$), while the general election ($n = 16, 10.7\%$) collected mostly neutral tweets ($n = 11, 7.3\%$), along with negative ($n = 4, 2.7\%$) and positive ($n = 1$). Pearson's chi square again showed Trump received inordinately more positive and overall tweets than Clinton on November 9. The difference was found to be statistically significant ($\chi^2(9) = 414.2 < .001$).

To determine if there was variance in portrayal over the 3 days observed, the researcher also took into account day 3, November 9, 2016. The portrayal of tweets about candidates and the U.S. presidential election in general on that day from the three news agencies are illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5

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Portrayal of each candidate in tweets by three observed news agencies of U.S. presidential election on November 9, 2016.

<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Negative</u>	<u>Total</u>
Donald Trump	38% n = 57	16.7% n = 25	12.7% n = 19	67.3% n = 101
Hillary Clinton	7.3% n = 11	10% n = 15	4.7% n = 7	22% n = 33
General Election	1% n = 1	7.3% n = 11	2.7% n = 4	10.7% n = 16

Note: (N = 150).

RQ 4: In the past year, have there been any changes in the types and usage of accompanying media?

Of the total number of tweets (N = 1,078), the most used type of accompanying media was a combination of media ($n = 578$, 53.6%), followed by the Twitter card ($n = 193$, 17.9%), video only ($n = 31$, 2.9%), no media ($n = 28$, 2.6%), and photo only ($n = 14$, 1.3%). A small number of tweets also contained URL link only ($n = 5$, .005%), hashtag only ($n = 2$, .002%), user mention only ($n = 1$), and poll only ($n = 1$). A large number were also categorized as “N/A” ($n = 215$, 19.9%) because the tweet was retweeted and therefore the new agency did not determine what media was used.

In terms of media use specifically by news agency, the AP (N= 439) used a majority combination of media ($n = 159$, 36.2%), followed by the Twitter card ($n = 106$, 24.1%), and no media ($n = 23$, 5.2%). A limited number of tweets also contained video only ($n = 6$, 1.4%), URL link only ($n = 2$, .005%), photo only ($n = 1$), hashtag only ($n = 1$), and user mention only ($n = 1$). There were also tweets labeled as “N/A” ($n = 140$, 31.9%). Reuters (N = 403) used the

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combination of media ($n = 243$, 60.3%) predominantly, followed by the Twitter card ($n = 87$, 21.6%), no media ($n = 4$, 1%), video only ($n = 3$, .007%), URL link only ($n = 1$), and hashtag only ($n = 1$). Again, there were tweets labeled as “N/A” ($n = 64$, 15.9%). Lastly, Xinhua ($N = 236$) also used primarily the combination of media ($n = 186$, 78.8%), followed by video only ($n = 22$, 9.3%), photo only ($n = 13$, 5.5%), URL link only ($n = 2$, .008%), poll ($n = 1$), and no media ($n = 1$). A small number of tweets were labeled as “N/A” ($n = 11$, 4.7%). Usage of accompanying media by each news agency is illustrated in Figure 2.

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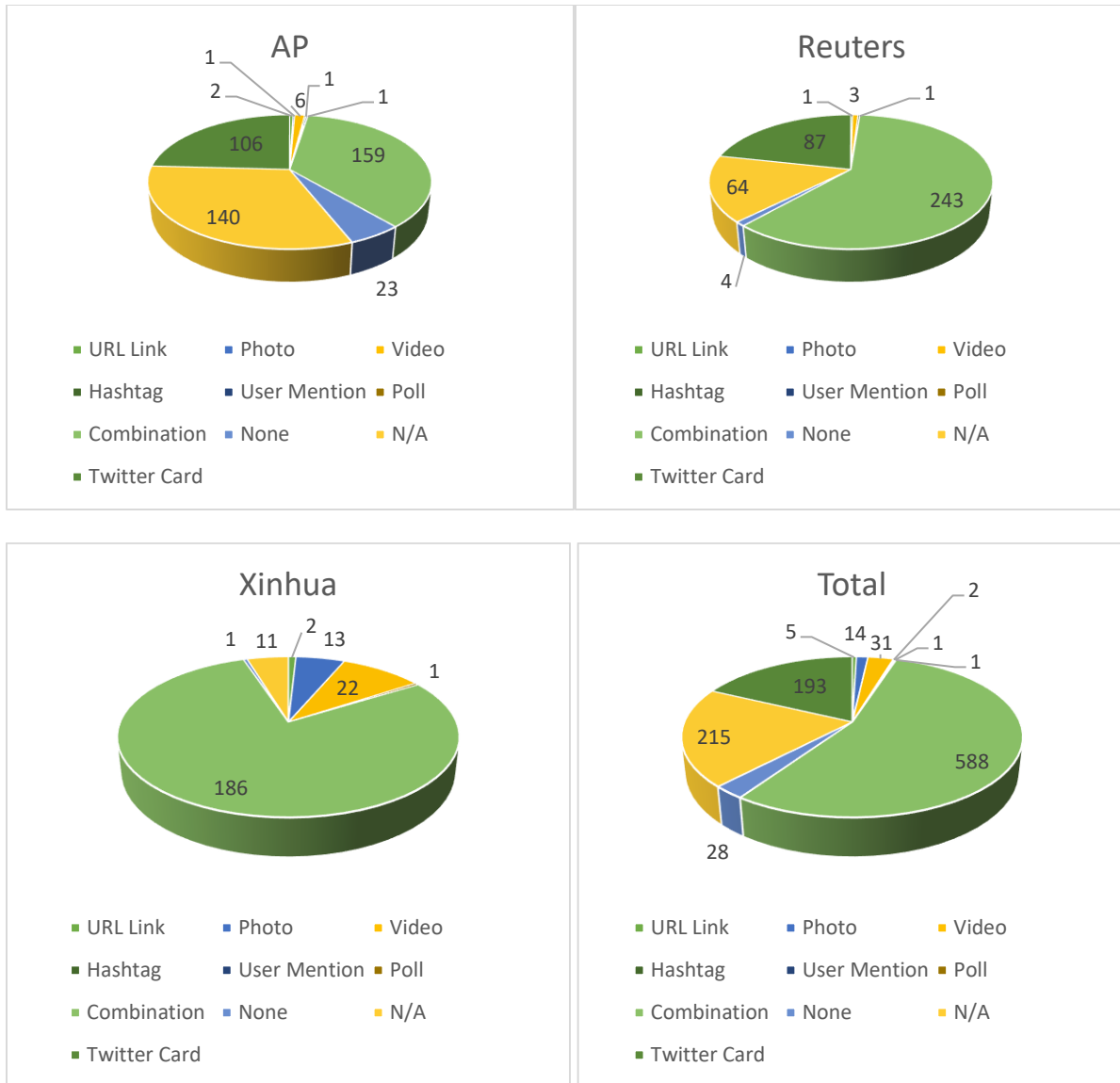


Fig. 2: Use of accompanying media by each news agency

To conclude the quantitative findings, overall, the study found some distinct similarities and differences in journalistic usage of Twitter by the three international news agencies. For example, where similarities are concerned, the study found, as expected for the winner, that Trump was the candidate who received the most overall tweets. The three news agencies still also use the combination of media approach to tweets, as opposed to one type of media alone or Twitter cards, though the latter's use is prevalent. As for differences, the study found statistically

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significant results for the amount of tweets containing only a Twitter card. The card is used by AP and Reuters, but is non-existent with Xinhua. Trump also received far more negative tweets on the third observation day, but more overall tweets on that day as well. These results therefore provided the baseline for the qualitative component of the study that follows.

Chapter 6: Qualitative Results

While a content analysis is useful in examining data from the tweets themselves, it does not reveal the full story. There is a human element also involved in tweets, as people are the ones who decide what a tweet contains, including the subject, the portrayal of that subject, and any accompanying media. Because of that, in-depth interviews were chosen to understand who it is that is tweeting and what they take into account for tweets that they make. The researcher then compared the answers given to results from the quantitative content analysis to discover what proved most effective. Results showed a direct connection with diffusion of innovations theory in that two of the news agencies examined have incorporated a new Twitter innovation into their everyday use.

The researcher also felt it was necessary to use quotes of the respondents at times. Five themes were developed from the interviews to guide the findings. These themes were the basis for a phenomenological analysis, which involved identifying similar words or phrases in the interview responses. The words and phrases were regarded as appropriate indicators of motivation that each news agency had in their Twitter practices. For the qualitative portion of this study, two research questions were posed. The focus of the research questions included the motivation the news agencies had in their use of Twitter and how their usage explains the response each news agency received, in terms of retweets and likes. Each question and the accompanying results are presented in the following narrative.

RQ 5: What motivated the news agencies to take the route that they did in their usage of Twitter?

This research question drew various responses, based on the in-depth interview questions asked. The responses shared multiple similarities, particularly between the AP and Reuters. In

addition, Xinhua had similarities with its two counterparts, but also greatly differed in two areas. These similarities and differences aided the researcher to develop the theme that follows.

Theme 1: *Subscription-first*

One of four interview questions asked of all three respondents was: *Given that news agencies depend on subscriptions of other media, how does that factor into your tweeting habits?* While all three news agencies disseminate information via social media and their websites freely for anyone to see, they also exist primarily due to subscriptions that various other media have to their information. All three news agencies have various methods of delivering information exclusively to their paying customers first, even if that only means by seconds.

The AP uses a private Twitter account, @AP_Alerts, which is available only to paying subscribers to allow them first access to stories, as well as advanced notice of news, in-depth stories, and other content such as video. AP social media editor Eric Carvin said the private Twitter account is mechanized ahead of time to automatically inform subscribers a set amount of time before the news breaks on the AP's public account:

[It's] just to make sure our customers know what's out there. We've occasionally used that (@AP_Alerts) to let our customers know how we're responding to a breaking news situation. We say we'll have a reporter there in 'x' amount of time, using photos from a local AP member, things like that. I think it's also important to note that we put up thousands of content every day and just a drop in that bucket ends up on social (media).

For Reuters, on the other hand, according to Cassandra Garrison, Reuters' social media and live news editor, to streamline information to subscribers, the news agency uses an email subscription service, as well as software named Eikon, to give subscribers real-time access to stock market data, analytics, and messaging. Garrison said the journalists responsible for

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Reuters' social media platforms are also cognizant of the need to space the time between getting information to subscribers and posting for everyone else, even if that time is short:

On the social (media) team, we will not share breaking news or an exclusive story until it has been made available to our clients. However, this simply means a matter of seconds at times, so we are rarely behind the curve when it comes to speed on social media.

By contrast, the respondent from Xinhua was initially not as forthcoming about the news agency's method of dealing with subscribers, other than "Xinhua offers more than what it publishes on Twitter." However, in follow-up questions, the respondent said Xinhua uses WeChat, a Chinese instant messaging platform, to inform clients of news ahead of others on social media and the website. The second theme, which follows, showed a commonality among all three agencies in the tactics they use when tweeting, such as accompanying media to use.

Theme 2: *Twitter tactics*

The three respondents had similarities in their responses, that content in their tweets must be creative and comprehensive -- "not just headlines," as Carvin said. Carvin and the Xinhua interviewee also specifically mentioned tweeting at specific times of day and having an understanding of the best times to reach the audience, including the time zone of an intended audience. Carvin specifically mentioned creativity in the tweets as well:

A lot of our stories are of global interest, so we wanna make sure we make it easy for people to find it, regardless of when people are awake. In some cases, we might launch a story at a certain hour because we know it's of interest to that part of the world... We try to make it where our tweets are not just headlines and not just a copy and paste of the headlines, they're crafted individually. We're trying to give them a little more of a conversational feel, without wandering away from the tone of the story itself.

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While Garrison spoke to the importance of technical aspects of a social media poster's job, such as writing speed and video editing, she also mentioned the style and type of writing:

Though speed and accuracy are incredibly important, we must also craft social writing that is engaging and comprehensive for a global audience. That sometimes means breaking new complicated business or financial news so it makes more sense to a general audience which can then understand why it personally might affect them.

For the AP and Reuters, there was also an attempt at uniformity for the U.S. presidential election. Garrison said Reuters taught members of its social media team to use the hashtag #Election2016 and made sure they were versed with Facebook Live (Facebook's live video feature) and Scribble, Reuters' live blog platform. Carvin said the AP had pre-made graphics for each candidate to win each state election and also set tweets to first populate the @AP_Alerts private account, then the news agency's primary account. The AP also compiled graphics for television stations to use on election night, according to Carvin:

There was a ton of preparation involved. Those image files, we already create those kinds of images or something similar to that of broadcasters through our graphics bank product. If you're watching the results on TV and they decide to go to a graphic that has Donald Trump with a check mark and a state, that's the kind of thing we provide already for broadcasters. In many cases, we simply adapted that to what we needed for social (media).

The third theme showed a commonality between AP and Reuters, along with a stark divergence from Xinhua. Those results are as follows.

Theme 3: *Journalism ethics*

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Carvin and Garrison used similar words and phrases to describe the objective for their news agencies' primary Twitter accounts, such as "credibility," "legitimacy," and "reliable," in addition to phrases like "breaking news" and "faster." Carvin said social media also generates revenue in driving traffic to the AP's website from links, but those click-throughs are driven by the news agency's status as a reputable news source:

People need to understand that we are on top of breaking news, because that is core to who we are and our mission. Secondly, having that level of credibility online makes it more likely for sources to come to us for content and tips and we want that to happen. We see a virtuous loop where it feeds our news-gathering efforts to have a strong presence on social platforms.

Garrison also discussed the importance of remaining ethical on Twitter. She spoke of a combination of timeliness and being a credible news source: "Reliable reporting that offers insight into the world's most impactful events without bias, at a speed that is faster than other news organizations."

The response from the Xinhua respondent, however, regarding the primary objective for Twitter, directly contradicts that of Garrison and Carvin, specifically in an apparent lack of objectivity: "To show China's view and opinion on domestic and international issues."

While the answer is short, it is a perfect demonstration of the difference in set-up between the three news agencies. They share commonalities, such as being subscription-first and in their Twitter tactics, but Xinhua, run by the Chinese Communist Party government, is more of a mouthpiece, as opposed to an unbiased source.

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The fourth theme showed more commonality between AP and Reuters, particularly in a recent innovation on Twitter. The question was handled differently by the Xinhua respondent, who had a different take. Those results are as follows.

Theme 4: *Changes in approach to Twitter*

In the past year, Twitter has made a few changes, most notably the addition of the Twitter card. Because this does not use any of the allotted 140 characters, it has also caused a change in how social media professionals use Twitter. Previous research (Stamm, 2016) showed that use of a headline, along with a photo and link to a story was the most efficient way to market stories on Twitter and drive traffic to the user's website. While that method is still practiced, as evidenced by the news agencies' use of a combination of media, the mindset has changed, as Garrison pointed out:

I've watched our Twitter presence evolve from a fire hose of information, to a curated and thoughtful feed which tells the story directly on social media. It's no longer about a headline, link, and photo. It's a way to share our best multimedia assets and it's become a platform for exclusive content that is created just for social media.

Carvin said the AP is constantly adopting to changes and new innovations on Twitter. Twitter cards include the headline and primary photo of the story being linked, negating the need for each in the tweet itself. However, Carvin agreed that the premise of marketing online content on Twitter is no longer the primary function. Now, the AP has many Twitter-specific pieces of content, such as graphics, videos, and interactive maps:

One thing we're adjusting still to this point, is there's always been this sort of truism on Twitter that if you included an image with your tweet, it gets more engagement. We still do that a lot, but now that the cards look so rich and have the lead image so immersively,

we're pulling back a little bit from including images on their own...Now, if we have something special that we can create, like the image with a quote in it or something like that, or a nice GIF, then we might use an image, to drive the tweet. But if it's just the image that's the lead image of the story, then there's not much reason...There are other things that have just made life a little easier, like a lot of stuff doesn't take up characters like it used to, so we have a little more room to work with, which is nice. And the need of video, being on Twitter and all is still a relatively new phenomenon that's widely used. We're working on ramping up how we can take advantage of that.

The Xinhua respondent had a completely different take on the question posed about differences in the last year. The response was more of a personal one: "I began to pay special attention to what foreign media outlets are twitting every day, the differences between our reporting and theirs' and why they are different."

RQ 6: How does the route taken explain interaction from their Twitter followers and other users?

The Twitter card appears not to have been adapted by other Twitter users at this point, based on just one tweet of the 45 that received more than one thousand retweets, which had the Twitter card as the primary accompanying media. The AP still seems to be doing something right, as the author of 38 of those tweets that received more than one thousand retweets. In terms of likes, four of the 39 tweets that received more than one thousand likes contained a Twitter card, while 30 were a combination of other media forms. While Garrison acknowledged that Twitter posts need to be thorough and specific to that platform, the lower number of retweets and likes could be attributed to the lack of prevalent Twitter card use. Xinhua made no use of Twitter

cards, instead giving focus to a combination of other media forms, which could explain the low number of retweets and likes the news agency received.

Theme 5: *Differences in interpreting user response*

The obvious method to gauge response is by the number of retweets and likes a tweet receives. That information is listed on the tweet itself and updates each time either are received. However, Carvin said the AP has learned to look at retweets and likes as more than just numbers. They use those as a learning tool, by categorizing tweets and observing which specific types of stories or even forms of media drew the most response:

We look at the big picture to see how the numbers are changing over time, just to see if what we're doing is working. We'll run a lot of reports where we kinda rank the best of, from the past week or the past month and see which individual tweets did really well and try to understand why. We sometimes learn how to write a good tweet and sometimes we just learn something about our journalism, what people find engaging. For example, some of our best social numbers in recent months are from weekly round-ups we're doing of fact checks. We're fact checking news makers and debunking fake news. We'll do a round-up every week and those do extraordinarily well. That tells us this is good for social (media), but that this is a type of content that has value and we should keep it up.

However, for Reuters, the value of response is not necessarily only from retweets and likes. While that method is still acceptable, there are others that are more advantageous. Garrison said Reuters puts more stock into monitoring the amount of traffic to its website that comes from social media and the number of views videos posted on Twitter receive:

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While retweets, likes, and comments are great and we want them, we want to create content that is engaging enough for readers to come either watch a video to its completion, or come to our website to continuing seeing more of our work.

The respondent from Xinhua was much less precise in his answer. The respondent did concede that Xinhua “attach[es] great importance to retweets, likes, and interaction,” but it is unclear to what extent.

To conclude the qualitative findings, overall, the study found commonalities among the three news agencies, but also two very large differences. In terms of similarities, the study found all three news agencies prioritize their subscribers before releasing information to the general public and agree that the best tactics for Twitter no longer consist of simply a headline and photo, with timing also being a key aspect. Though the depth of the responses varied, all three also said they take user response into account for learning and measurement purposes. As for differences, Xinhua stands alone in using Twitter as a mouthpiece, which is understandable because it is controlled by China’s Communist Party. The AP and Reuters, by contrast, adhere to more strict journalistic standards such as credibility, legitimacy, and reliability. Xinhua also differed in its response to changes in Twitter, as its respondent took a more personal approach. The AP and Reuters, on the other hand, have adapted more to changes, most notably the Twitter card. These results therefore provided the baseline for the discussion component of the study that follows.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

This study shows that while there is not one clear method to effective use of Twitter, what has proven successful for journalists and other media are uniformity, consistency, timeliness, and use of the latest Twitter innovations. The Associated Press, which took clear advantage of all four aspects, saw the largest increase in followers during the 3-day period with 74,799. Xinhua, on the other hand, did not make use of all four aspects during the time period, which could be partly responsible for the lower number that it gained, 56,066.. The successful use of the four aforementioned aspects was also apparent in the number of tweets made by the AP that received more than one thousand retweets and likes. In-depth interviews with Carvin and Garrison also displayed the mindset of their news agencies in how to approach Twitter, as they used more than what has been the standard of a photo, link, and headline, and used the latest innovations, which currently are Twitter cards. As also shown by the low number of Twitter card tweets that received more than one thousand retweets and likes, that innovation might have been embraced by the AP and Reuters, but has yet to gain footing with Twitter users.

It is obvious, however, that the news agencies are doing something right in their Twitter tactics, as both the AP and Reuters have made significant gains in their followers. It appears that while Reuters did not use Twitter cards prevalently, it is especially successful using Twitter. From the start of the observation period of this study, to March 31, 2017, Reuters gained approximately 380,000 more followers than the AP.

All three theories that guided this research also played large roles in the results found. The three news agencies each make use of diffusion of innovations, though some more than others. As mentioned, the Twitter card is the most recent innovation, though this study showed that only two of the three are on board with the innovation, as Xinhua made no use of it.

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However, the theory is also prevalent in illustrating how older methods of Twitter use, including a combination of media, or the use of the standard photo, link, headline, videos, etc. is still the most accepted method in Twitter posts.

Diffusion of innovations is also notable in another standard accompanying media use, hashtags. Only the AP consistently used the same hashtags, #Election2016 ($n = 157$) and #APracecall ($n = 148$ tweets), and did so synonymously on many of its tweets about the election. Garrison said her team was trained to use #Election2016, but interestingly, Reuters used that hashtag only nine times. Xinhua, on the other hand, used 100 different hashtags during the observation period. The most used was #LiVisit, 12 times, in reference to a trip by Chinese premier Li Keqiang to Russia. That is partly explained by Nisbett (2003, p. 45), who stated that Chinese generally are “more likely to detect relationships among events.” Inconsistent hashtag use, however, makes it difficult for readers to find a tweet, counterintuitive to the hashtag’s purpose. On election night, users knew that #APracecall would escort them to all of the AP’s coverage with that tweet. Because of the sporadic use by Reuters and Xinhua, their coverage was less discoverable.

The theory is also recognizable in the news agencies’ use of the retweet function. None of them retweeted any users outside of their news agency’s umbrella. A total of 213 tweets of the 1,078 coded for were retweets among the three news agencies, 140 from the AP. Oddly, all 11 of the retweets made by Xinhua were from its @XHSports account. As Garrison stated, however, “We wouldn’t retweet something unless we have verified it ourselves,” an approach all three news agencies appeared to take.

As mentioned in the literature review, it can be argued that simply because of their set-up, news agencies cannot get away from use of agenda setting theory and framing in their tweets.

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This is because news agencies craft the original presentation of information, which is purchased by newspapers and other media and re-produced there. This information might be edited for time and space purposes, but the heart of the material remains in its original form.

This research, however, showed that both agenda setting and framing are clearly used by Xinhua, because it is in many ways a government puppet. That arguably is one of the more important findings of this study, as it leads to the rationale that news agencies and other forms of media largely differ in many ways based on the laws in the country in which they are located, most notably, freedom of the press. The Associated Press and Reuters are both located in capitalist countries with freedom of press laws. In Xinhua's case, however, it sends government-controlled information to its subscribers, which sets the agenda of those media forms and frames its subjects in whatever light the Chinese Communist Party sees fit. In the case of this research, Xinhua covered the presidential election in only 35 of its 236 total tweets, which is proof that it chose not to set the agenda of its readers with the election. That is in comparison to 150 tweets about the election by the AP and 138 by Reuters.

China as a whole, however, is a very difficult environment for media. History has shown that in socialist countries, there is a track record of impediment of the press. That's no different in Xinhua's case, as Freedom House (2017) also reported that "China is home to one of the world's most restrictive media environments," and that at least 49 journalists were imprisoned as of December 2015, a record number worldwide. However, that number decreased to 38 in December of 2016 according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (2017), behind the 81 imprisoned at that time in Turkey. As reported by Freedom House (2017), the journalists in China were convicted on "trumped-up charges of financial mismanagement, corruption, or illegal business activity, masking the link between their detentions and their reporting or

commentary.” That explains why after many efforts, the only interview the researcher could conduct with a Xinhua employee was if the employee was granted full anonymity, for fear of losing his or her job.

Freedom of press laws technically exist in China, though they are at the discretion of the government, which rarely adheres to them (Freedom House, 2017). There are 688 million internet users in China (Russell, 2016), though because of the vast number of restrictions, Xinhua can only divide its attention between Twitter and Sina Weibo, and even then, is subject to removal of content by the Chinese government. That, in addition to the use of virtual private networks, while illegal in China, makes it extremely difficult to know the full reach of Xinhua via Twitter, and hinders Xinhua’s widest reach in using Twitter.

Because Twitter and other forms of social media are blocked by the CCP, Xinhua has to manage more forms of social media than its counterparts. There are Chinese variations of Twitter and Facebook, known as Sina Weibo and WeChat, which Xinhua also uses. Xinhua is limited in its coverage on any medium, however, as its information is subject to be edited or removed by the CCP. For the AP and Reuters, however, it is apparent that embracing standard methods and new innovations, and doing so consistently and quickly, are vital to future success on Twitter. That should be the model that all forms of media practice in their Twitter usage, in order to grow and draw the maximum number of readers to their content.

Limitations

During this research, the researcher learned that Twitter is completely blocked in China by the communist government. This would explain the modest number of followers (6,384,175 at the end of the observed time frame) for the primary news agency of a country that boasts a world-leading population of 1,373,541,278 as of July 2016 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017).

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Twitter also estimated in 2016 that it had 10 million users in China (Russell, 2016). The precise number of users will never be known under the current circumstances, however, as many online users in China use virtual private networks based in other countries to circumvent the government-controlled firewall that blocks access to Twitter and other sites.

Instead, China's government created and runs what has been known as a clone of Twitter called Sina Weibo that is on track to surpass Twitter in number of users. As of late February of 2017, Twitter had 319 million users, while Weibo had 313 million users, though based on its growth-rate, Weibo is expected to surpass Twitter in 2017 (Fuscaldo, 2017). The set-up of Xinhua, as a state-run news agency, also contributed to a lack of willing participants in in-depth interviews, as did a language barrier and time zone differences.

Finally, the researcher chose these news agencies based on Twitter size and global location, though these are only a sample of the numerous other news agencies located throughout the world. A small time frame was also examined, thus, generalizability is limited and these results should be interpreted with caution. These choices were purposeful, however, and the researcher believes they give an accurate account of how news agencies use Twitter, among the first research to take into account media use of Twitter on a global scale.

Future Research

While news agencies are a large and important part of the journalism industry, there are other forms of media, such as television, magazines, and radio, whose use of social media should be explored. Given that other factors also contributed to the increased followers of the news agencies, surveys and other methods could be employed to Twitter followers of the news agencies to determine what else attributed to their decision to follow that page or respond with a

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retweet or like. More depth should also come from the effects of a lack of press freedoms for media such as Xinhua and how that impacts news coverage, including via social media.

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Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Statement

Radford University's Institutional Review Board
P.O. Box 6926 Radford, VA 24142 | Phone: (540) 831-5290 | Fax: (540) 831-6636 | irb-iacuc@radford.edu



MEMO DATE: 17-Feb-2017
TO: Kasoma, Twange
FROM: Laura Noll lnoll@radford.edu *LN*
Radford University IRB
RE: Approval for FY17-055: Tweets heard 'round the world: How international news agencies covered the 2016 U.S. presidential election through Twitter.
STUDY TITLE: Tweets heard 'round the world: How international news agencies covered the 2016 U.S. presidential election through Twitter.
IRB REFERENCE #: FY17-055
SUBMISSION TYPE: Initial Application
ACTION: Approved
EFFECTIVE DATE: 17-Feb-2017
EXPIRATION DATE: 16-Feb-2018
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

This is to confirm that the above-referenced study submitted for Expedited Review to Radford University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) has been granted approval.

Your IRB-sanctioned approval ends on 16-Feb-2018, by which date a closure report is due. If you wish to continue your research beyond this date, you must request a continuance no later than 10 days prior to the expiration of this approval. Because your study requires documentation of informed consent, you must use the stamped copy of your approved consent document.

If you should need to make changes in your protocol, please submit a request for modification before implementing the changes. Modifications are made via the InfoEd system. Please contact our office for assistance, if needed.

As the principal investigator for this project, you are ultimately responsible for ensuring that your study is conducted in an ethical manner. You are also responsible for filing all reports related to this project.

If you have any questions, please contact Laura Noll at (540) 831-5290 or lnoll@radford.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

Good luck with this project!

Appendix B: Tweet Codebook

Coding instructions:

*Use the following criteria for each tweet, in this order: First, what news agency is the author of the tweet?

(1): Associated Press (2): Reuters (3): Xinhua

*Is subject of tweet about the U.S. presidential election? Code (1) for yes and (2) for no.

*What is the subject of the tweet? Use the following key sheet to code for the corresponding number:

(1): Sports	(8): Crime
(2): U.S. News	(9): U.S. politics
(3): International News	(10): International politics
(4): Health	(11): Education
(5): Feature/entertainment	(12): Other news
(6): Nature/weather	(13): U.S presidential election
(7): Agency promotion	

*Who is the primary subject of the tweet? Use the following code sheet for corresponding candidate:

(1): Hillary Clinton	(5): Evan McMullin
(2): Donald Trump	(6): Darrell Castle
(3) Gary Johnson	(7): General Election
(4): Jill Stein	(8): N/A (Use if U.S. presidential election is not subject)

*How is the candidate who is the subject of the tweet portrayed?

(1): Positive (2): Neutral (3): Negative
(4): N/A (Use if U.S. presidential election is not subject)

*What is the frame of the tweet?

(1): Episodic (2): Thematic (3): Conflict

For understanding of which to use, consult this guide:

Episodic: Tweet focuses on a specific event (episode) discrete/static with no context provided.

Thematic: Opposite of episodic. Tweet focuses on broader context of issues.

Conflict: Tweet focuses on conflict between two (or more) items/actors, etc.

TWITTER USAGE IN 2016 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

*What type of accompanying media is used in the tweet? Use the corresponding number:

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| (1): Link | (8): Poll |
| (2): Photo | (9): GIF or Vine |
| (3): Video | (10): Other media |
| (4): Map | (11): Combination of any of these media types |
| (5): Hashtag | (12): None |
| (6): User mention | (13): N/A (Use if news agency not primary tweet author) |
| (7): Screenshot | (14): Twitter card |

*If tweet is retweeted from another author, use the corresponding number:

- (1): Internal (author of tweet is staff of news agency user account or account run by agency).
- (2): External (author is not associated with news agency user account).
- (3): N/A (tweet is not retweeted).

*How many retweets has the tweet received? Use corresponding number for range:

- | | |
|------------|----------------|
| (1): 0-5 | (7): 41-50 |
| (2): 6-10 | (8): 51-75 |
| (3): 11-15 | (9): 76-100 |
| (4): 16-20 | (10): 101-150 |
| (5): 21-30 | (11): 151-200 |
| (6): 31-40 | (12): 201-plus |

*How many likes has the tweet received? Use corresponding number for range:

- | | |
|------------|----------------|
| (1): 0-5 | (7): 41-50 |
| (2): 6-10 | (8): 51-75 |
| (3): 11-15 | (9): 76-100 |
| (4): 16-20 | (10): 101-150 |
| (5): 21-30 | (11): 151-200 |
| (6): 31-40 | (12): 201-plus |

Appendix C: Tweet portrayal samples

Tweet that garnered most retweets and most likes:

AP
The Associated Press @AP Nov 9

BREAKING: Donald Trump is elected president of the United States.

AP
PRESIDENT-ELECT
DONALD TRUMP

0 replies 133,330 retweets 114,015 likes

Lone neutral portrayal tweet of Clinton that received over one thousand retweets and likes:

AP
The Associated Press @AP Nov 9


BREAKING: Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta says her campaign will have nothing to say tonight about state of race

0 replies 2,205 retweets 2,245 likes

Lone negative portrayal tweet of Trump that received over one thousand retweets and likes:

AP
The Associated Press @AP Nov 9

From San Francisco to Austin to New York, thousands protest election of Donald Trump.
apne.ws/2eMEOML



AP Photo/Jeff Chiu

0 replies 1,591 retweets 1,703 likes

Positive tweet sample:



REUTERS Reuters Top News @Reuters Nov 7

Clinton gets boost from FBI as tight White House race hits final day: reut.rs/2evPIYZ

0 replies 69 retweets 99 likes

Appendix D: Request To Interview

To whom it may concern,

First off, let me formally introduce myself. My name is Jason Stamm and I'm a graduate student at Radford University. I am currently working on my final thesis, for graduation from the corporate and professional communication program in May.

For this final project, I'm examining how international news agencies, including yours, used Twitter to cover the 2016 U.S. presidential election. This includes examining the importance of Twitter to journalistic practice, identifying innovative Twitter strategies and developing new strategies as well. I am also conducting a content analysis to determine what aspects were deemed most important to cover via Twitter, as well as other characteristics. This should help us understand how journalistic entities currently use Twitter and provide clarity on what areas need improvement and what resonates with readers and other Twitter users.

In order to best understand how news agencies use Twitter, I would like to interview at least one, if not two of your social media administrators, or those who oversee the use of your agency's Twitter account. This will help us factor in the human element and provide needed information on how your agency views Twitter, what administrators' background and knowledge with social media is and allow for further explanation of what was tweeted during the time frame studied.

I would like to conduct the interview(s) via phone or Skype, to allow for a more personable interview than simply email or other correspondence. A consent form has been provided, to explain any risks involved and to gain your approval before we move forward. If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact myself, or my thesis chair, Dr. Twange Kasoma (tkasoma@radford.edu).

I look forward to working with you and providing information from my research that you can hopefully use in your agency's Twitter.

Sincerely,

Jason Stamm
Jstamm2@radford.edu
270-766-4044

Appendix E: Interviewee Consent Form

School of Communication



Appendix V: Interview Schedule

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview for this research paper, titled, 'Tweets heard 'round the world: How international news agencies covered the 2016 U.S. presidential election through Twitter.' The purpose of this interview is to determine more information concerning the human element of Twitter, including a more accurate and details portrayal of news agencies' use of Twitter. Follow-up questions may be asked after your answers, in response to certain facts or information you divulge. If at any point you do not wish to answer a question, please inform the interviewer. Your information will be used to help news agencies and other journalists and media forms in their future use of Twitter.

- 1) What is your experience with Twitter?
- 2) After using Twitter, has that changed how you use other forms of social media?
- 3) How has your personal experience with social media affected your use of Twitter for the news agency?
- 4) Do you have any experience in the field as a journalist?
- 5) Are social media coordinators taught any techniques by your news agency?
- 6) What is the primary objective for your news agency's Twitter account?
- 7) How versed do you feel like you are with Twitter and accompanying media?
- 8) Have you observed any changes since you began managing and using your news agency's Twitter?
- 9) Why are bit.ly links used in lieu of direct links and vice versa?
- 10) Did any situation stand out to you as odd or different before you tweeted it?
- 11) How did you respond?
- 12) Given that news agencies depend on subscriptions of other media, does that factor into your tweeting habits?

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(540) 831-5128 TTY
(540) 831-5883 FAX

www.radford.edu/comm

Communication
Communication Studies
Public Relations
Corporate & Professional
Communication (M.S.)

Media Studies
Advertising
Journalism
Production Technology

Appendix F: Interviewee Consent Form

School of Communication



Adult Informed Consent – Nonsurvey Research

Title of Research: Tweets heard 'round the world: How international news agencies covered the 2016 U.S. presidential election through Twitter

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(540) 831-5128 TTY
(540) 831-5883 FAX

Researchers: Mr. Jason Stamm and Dr. Twange Kasoma.

www.radford.edu

We ask you to be in an interview that is part of a research study which seeks to analyze how Twitter is used by international news agencies to cover the general election of a new United States president on November 8, 2016. If you choose to be interviewed, you will be asked a series of prepared questions to explain the human element in the news agencies' tweets, which will take no more than 15 minutes of your time.

Communication
Communication Studies
Public Relations
Corporate & Professional
Communication (M.S.)

This interview has no more risk than you may find in daily life.

Media Studies
Advertising
Journalism
Production Technology

There is no compensation for taking part in this interview.

You can choose not to take part in this interview. If you decide to take part in this interview, you may choose not to answer certain questions. You may also choose to stop being in this interview at any time without any penalty to you.

If you decide to be in this interview, what you tell us can be published along with your name. This will ensure credibility and accountability in the information you provide.

If at any time you want to stop being in this study, you may leave without penalty or loss of benefits by contacting Dr. Twange Kasoma at tkasoma@radford.edu or 540-831-6220.

If you have questions now about this study, please ask before you return this form via email, consenting to the interview and audio recording of the interview.

This study was approved by the Radford University Committee for the Review of Human Subjects Research. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject or have complaints about this study, you should contact Dr. Dennis Grady, Dean, College of Graduate and Professional Studies, Radford University, dgrady4@radford.edu, 540-831-7163.

Being in this study is your choice and choosing whether or not to take part in this study will not affect any current or future relationship with Radford University.

If all of your questions have been answered and you would like to take part in this study, then please sign below.

Signature of interviewee

Printed Name (s)

Date

